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Comparative Study

Exploring Happiness and Mental Health Among Undergraduate Students: A Comparative Study of Arts and Science Disciplines

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the differences in happiness and mental health among undergraduate students in arts and science disciplines at colleges in Khopoli, Maharashtra, India. A total of 100 students, 50 from arts colleges and 50 from science colleges, aged 18-23 years, were selected using purposive non-probability sampling. The study utilized the Happiness Scale by Rastogi and Moorjhani (62 items) and the Mental Health Inventory by Jagdish and Srivastav (56 items) to assess the well-being of students. Statistical analysis revealed that arts students reported significantly higher happiness (mean = 260.35, SD = 7.56) and mental health scores (mean = 163.48, SD = 4.16) compared to science students (happiness mean = 249.74, SD = 6.95; mental health mean = 152.60, SD = 3.28), with t-values of 7.30 and 14.52 respectively ($p < .01$). These findings suggest that students in arts colleges experience higher levels of happiness and mental health than their counterparts in science colleges. The study's results highlight the importance of academic stream choice in influencing student well-being, though further research is required to understand the factors driving these differences.

Keywords: *Happiness, Mental Health, Undergraduate Students, Arts, Science, Well-being, Comparative Study, Educational Disciplines*

Happiness and mental health are essential components of an individual's well-being, influencing various aspects of life, including academic performance and social interactions. Among undergraduate students, these factors become particularly significant due to the academic pressures and transitional experiences they undergo. Studies have shown that university students, particularly those in the formative years of their higher education journey, are highly susceptible to mental health challenges (Sullivan et al., 2018). Mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, are prevalent among university students and have been linked to various academic, social, and personal struggles (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Furthermore, students' happiness and mental health may differ across disciplines due to the unique challenges and environments each field presents (Misra & McKean, 2000). For instance, arts and science students face distinct academic pressures, which could influence their overall mental well-being. Thus, it is essential to explore and understand the variations in happiness and mental health between these two groups to develop targeted interventions that foster well-being across disciplines.

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The academic environment in which students are situated plays a crucial role in shaping their mental health outcomes. For example, studies indicate that students in more rigid, time-intensive disciplines, such as science, may experience higher levels of stress due to the demanding nature of their coursework and the pressure to succeed in highly competitive fields (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). In contrast, students in the arts might experience different types of pressures, such as the subjective evaluation of creative works or a higher degree of ambiguity in career prospects (Pritchard et al., 2007). These unique stressors may result in differing levels of happiness and well-being between arts and science students. Understanding these disparities is critical, as students who are unable to cope with academic pressures may experience negative mental health outcomes, which could ultimately affect their academic performance, personal life, and future career prospects (Leppink et al., 2016). The concept of happiness is multi-faceted and may vary depending on individual perceptions and external influences. According to Diener (2009), happiness is generally described as the overall experience of positive emotions, life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose. The pursuit of happiness can be influenced by several factors, including academic success, social relationships, financial stability, and overall life satisfaction. For undergraduate students, happiness often correlates with academic achievements, but it also involves the ability to manage personal and social life stressors (Ryff & Singer, 1996). However, research has shown that students across disciplines may experience different sources of happiness. For example, students in the arts might derive more satisfaction from creative expression and personal autonomy, whereas science students might focus more on intellectual challenges and career-oriented success (Diener, 2000). These different orientations toward happiness could create variance in how students in arts and science disciplines perceive their overall well-being.

Mental health, on the other hand, encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting how students think, feel, and act (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013). While happiness is often considered a positive state of well-being, mental health is more comprehensive, encompassing both positive and negative aspects of one's emotional state. Mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, are commonly experienced by students in both the arts and science disciplines, but the nature and intensity of these challenges can differ. For instance, students in the sciences may face mental health challenges related to high academic demands, such as time pressure and fear of failure, whereas students in the arts may struggle with self-esteem and the subjective nature of their field (Conley et al., 2013). Understanding how mental health issues manifest differently across disciplines can help tailor mental health resources and strategies to better support students in their respective fields.

In recent years, universities have increasingly recognized the importance of addressing student mental health, and many have implemented mental health services and support systems to alleviate stress and promote well-being (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). However, these interventions may not always account for the disciplinary differences in student experience. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the mental health and happiness levels of undergraduate students in arts and science disciplines, examining the factors that contribute to their well-being and how these factors vary across disciplines. By comparing the happiness and mental health of arts and science students, this research aims to identify key areas where support can be focused to improve the overall well-being of students in these fields.

Research in this area is crucial for developing effective strategies to address mental health issues on campus. As universities continue to prioritize student well-being, understanding the specific challenges faced by students in different academic disciplines is essential. By exploring the differences in happiness and mental health between arts and science students, this study will contribute to the growing body of literature on student well-being and provide practical recommendations for universities seeking to enhance the mental health and overall happiness of their student populations.

Objectives of the study:

1. This study aims to explore the levels of happiness among students in arts and science colleges.
2. This study aims to explore the mental health among students in arts and science colleges.

Hypotheses of the study:

1. There will be no significant differences in happiness between arts and science colleges.
2. There will be no significant differences in mental health between arts and science colleges.

Sample

For the current study, a total of 100 participants were carefully selected from Khopoli, located in the Maharashtra State of India. The sample was composed of an equal number of subjects, comprising 50 students enrolled in high-Arts colleges and 50 students attending science colleges. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 23 years, with a mean age of 20.35 years and a standard deviation of 2.84 years, indicating a relatively homogeneous age group. To ensure that the subjects were relevant to the study's objectives, Purposive Non-Probability Sampling was employed. This method allowed for the selection of individuals who met specific criteria deemed necessary for the research, thus enhancing the study's focus and reliability.

Research Tools

- **Happiness Scale:** This scale standardized and developed by Rastogi and Moorjhani. Inventory consisted of 62 items. Highly reliable and valid test.
- **Mental Health Inventory:** The Mental Health Inventory was developed by Dr. Jagdish and Dr. A.K. Srivastav. The questionnaire consists of 56 items, each with four response options: 1. Almost always true, 2. Sometimes true, 3. Rarely true, and 4. Almost never true. The reliability of the inventory was assessed using the split-half method with an odd-even procedure. The overall reliability coefficient for mental health is 0.73. Furthermore, the construct validity of the mental health inventory, in comparison to the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1978), was found to be 0.54.

Variable

- **Independent variable-** Stream a) Arts b) Science
- **Dependent Variable**
  1. Happiness
  2. Mental Health

Research Statistical Analysis

The t-test was utilized.

STATISTICAL INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Mean, standard deviation (S.D.), and t-value of happiness and mental health among arts and science college students.

Table 1

Dimensions	Stream					
	Arts Students		Science Students			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	df	"t"
Happiness	260.35	7.56	249.74	6.95	98	7.30**
Mental Health	163.48	4.16	152.60	3.28	98	14.52**

The table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, and t-value of happiness and mental health scores among arts and science college students. The degrees of freedom (df) are 98 for all comparisons.

Arts students reported significantly higher happiness scores (mean = 260.35, SD = 7.56) compared to science students (mean = 249.74, SD = 6.95). The t-value of 7.30 with a significance level of $p < .01$ indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Arts students also reported significantly higher mental health scores (mean = 163.48, SD = 4.16) compared to science students (mean = 152.60, SD = 3.28). The t-value of 14.52 with a significance level of $p < .01$ further supports a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

The results suggest that arts students experience higher levels of happiness and mental health compared to science students. Further research is needed to explore the underlying reasons for this difference.

CONCLUSION

1. Arts students experience higher levels of happiness and mental health compared to science students.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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