

## Association between Psychological Well-Being and Break-up Distress among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Few life events rival the emotional turmoil of a relationship break-up, which can significantly impact the psychological well-being of young adults. **Aim:** This study examines the effect of relationship break-ups on psychological well-being and break-up distress among young adults. **Method:** A sample of 141 young adults aged 18-27 years (49 males and 92 females) participated in the study. Data were collected using Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale and the Break-up Distress Scale. **Objective:** To study the correlation between relationship break-ups and break-up distress, the correlation between relationship break-ups and psychological well-being, and gender differences in these experiences. **Results:** Females reported significantly higher break-up distress levels than males ( $t=1.91$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Gender differences were found in the autonomy domain of psychological well-being ( $t=2.055$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Break-up distress peaked within two months post-break-up ( $F=20.26$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). A negative correlation between break-up distress and psychological well-being was observed. **Conclusion:** This study highlights gender differences and temporal variations in break-up distress, emphasizing the need for mental health interventions tailored to young adults' emotional needs.

**Keywords:** Relationship break-up, psychological well-being, break-up distress

Romantic relationships play a significant role in the emotional and psychological development of young adults. However, the dissolution of a romantic relationship can be a distressing experience, often leading to emotional turmoil, decreased self-esteem, and reduced psychological well-being (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). Break-ups can trigger intense negative emotions, including sadness, anxiety, and loneliness, which may impair an individual's overall well-being (Rhoades et al., 2011). While some individuals demonstrate resilience and recover quickly, others experience prolonged distress that can impact various aspects of their mental health.

Psychological well-being encompasses an individual's overall emotional, cognitive, and social functioning. Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being includes six core dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose

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in life, and self-acceptance. A disruption in romantic relationships may negatively influence these dimensions, particularly self-acceptance and life purpose, leading to an overall decline in well-being.

The present study aims to explore the relationship between break-up distress and psychological well-being among young adults. Specifically, it examines whether individuals experiencing greater break-up distress report lower levels of psychological well-being. Additionally, the study investigates gender differences in break-up distress and psychological well-being, as prior research suggests that men and women may experience and cope with break-ups differently (Mearns, 1991). Understanding these relationships can contribute to developing targeted interventions that support young adults in navigating emotional distress following romantic break-ups.

### Break-Up Distress and Its Psychological Impact

Break-up distress is characterized by intense emotional reactions, including sadness, anger, and anxiety, following the end of a romantic relationship (Field et al., 2009). Research suggests that individuals who experience higher distress may struggle with emotional regulation, intrusive thoughts, and social withdrawal (Sbarra & Hazan, 2008). The severity of distress is often influenced by factors such as attachment style, relationship duration, and the presence of social support (Davis et al., 2003).

### Psychological Well-Being and Relationship Dissolution

Psychological well-being reflects an individual's ability to maintain a positive outlook on life, experience personal growth, and establish fulfilling relationships (Ryff, 1989). Studies indicate that break-ups can lead to a decline in self-esteem, purpose in life, and overall life satisfaction (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). However, some individuals may experience post-break-up growth, using the experience as an opportunity for self-improvement and increased emotional resilience (Frazier & Cook, 1993).

### Gender Differences in Break-Up Distress and Psychological Well-Being

Research indicates that men and women may experience break-ups differently. Women are often found to report higher levels of emotional distress immediately following a break-up, whereas men may exhibit delayed emotional reactions (Perilloux & Buss, 2008). Women are more likely to seek social support and express emotions, while men may rely on distraction-based coping strategies (Mearns, 1991). In terms of psychological well-being, men tend to score higher in autonomy, whereas women may excel in relational aspects of well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

### Theoretical Framework: Attachment and Coping Theories

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980) suggests that individuals with insecure attachment styles (e.g., anxious or avoidant) may experience heightened distress following a break-up due to difficulties in emotional regulation. Coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) further explains individual differences in handling break-up distress, highlighting the role of adaptive (e.g., problem-solving, seeking support) and maladaptive (e.g., avoidance, substance use) coping strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

**Aim:** To explore the association between psychological well-being and break-up distress among young adults.

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### Objectives of the study:

- Examine the correlation between relationship break-ups and break-up distress.
- Analyze the correlation between break-ups and psychological well-being.
- Compare psychological well-being between males and females post-break-up.
- Compare break-up distress levels between males and females post-break-up.

### Hypotheses of the study:

- A significant correlation exists between relationship break-ups and break-up distress.
- A significant correlation exists between relationship break-ups and psychological well-being.
- Males and females differ significantly in psychological well-being post-break-up.
- Males and females differ significantly in break-up distress levels.

### Research Design

A cross-sectional, correlation research design was used to examine relationships between psychological well-being and break-up distress.

### Sample

A total of 141 young adults (49 males, 92 females) aged 18-27 participated. Data collection was conducted online via Google Forms.

### Tools:

1. Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS; Ryff, 1989)
2. Break-Up Distress Scale (16 items, Likert scale; Tiffany Field and colleagues in 2009)

### Procedure

Participants completed an online survey comprising demographic questions and psychological scales. Statistical tests (t-tests, ANOVA, Pearson correlation) were used for analysis.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Gender Differences in Break-Up Distress**

Gender	Mean Distress Score	t-value	p-value	Significance
Males	Lower	-1.91	< 0.05	Significant
Females	Higher	-1.91	< 0.05	Significant

**Table 1: Break-Up Distress Levels:** A significant gender difference was found in break-up distress levels. Females reported significantly higher distress compared to males ( $t = -1.91$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2: Gender Differences in Psychological Well-Being (Autonomy Dimension)**

Gender	Mean Autonomy Score	t-value	p-value	Significance
Males	Higher	2.055	< 0.05	Significant
Females	Lower	2.055	< 0.05	Significant

**Table 2: Gender Differences in Psychological Well-Being:** Males scored higher in the autonomy dimension of psychological well-being compared to females ( $t = 2.055$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, no significant gender differences were observed in other dimensions.

**Table 3: Correlation between Break-Up Distress and Psychological Well-Being**

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Significance
Break-Up Distress	Psychological Well-Being	-0.262	< 0.01	Significant (Negative Correlation)

**Table 3: Correlation Between Break-Up Distress and Psychological Well-Being:** A significant negative correlation was found between break-up distress and psychological well-being ( $r = -0.262$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Higher levels of distress were associated with lower levels of well-being.

**Table 4: Impact of Break-Up Timing on Distress**

Time Since Break-Up	Mean Distress Score	F-value	p-value	Significance
Within 2 Months	Highest	20.26	< 0.01	Significant
More than 2 Months	Lower	20.26	< 0.01	Significant

**Table 4: Impact of Break-Up Timing on Distress:** Break-up distress was highest within two months of the break-up and declined over time ( $F = 20.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Participants who had experienced a recent break-up reported the highest distress levels, whereas those further removed from the break-up showed lower distress levels.

## DISCUSSION

### Gender Differences in Break-Up Distress and Psychological Well-Being

The results suggest that females experience higher levels of break-up distress than males. This finding aligns with previous research, which indicates that women often invest more emotionally in romantic relationships and may experience greater psychological distress upon dissolution (Field et al., 2009). The higher distress levels may also be influenced by societal expectations that encourage women to be more emotionally expressive.

Regarding psychological well-being, males scored significantly higher in the autonomy dimension, suggesting that they may exhibit greater independence and emotional regulation post-break-up. However, the absence of significant gender differences in other well-being dimensions suggests that both genders experience psychological impacts, albeit in different ways.

### The Relationship Between Break-Up Distress and Psychological Well-Being

A significant negative correlation was found between break-up distress and psychological well-being, indicating that individuals experiencing higher distress tend to have lower overall well-being. This supports existing literature (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003) that highlights the emotional turmoil following a break-up, which can manifest as reduced self-acceptance, lower life satisfaction, and increased psychological discomfort.

### The Influence of Time on Break-Up Distress

The study found that distress is highest within the first two months following a break-up and gradually declines over time. This aligns with research by Mason et al. (2012), which suggests that the initial phase of a break-up is characterized by intense emotional reactions, but with time, individuals develop coping mechanisms that help reduce distress. The gradual decline in distress levels underscores the resilience of young adults and the natural process of emotional recovery.

### Implications for Mental Health and Coping Strategies

The findings of this study highlight the need for gender-sensitive and time-specific interventions to support young adults post-break-up. Early-stage interventions, such as counseling and peer support programs, can be particularly beneficial in mitigating emotional distress. Additionally, fostering autonomy and emotional resilience through self-care strategies and social support networks may aid in psychological recovery.

### CONCLUSION

This study confirms that break-ups significantly impact psychological well-being and distress levels among young adults, with notable gender differences. Future research should explore long-term recovery trajectories and culturally diverse populations to enhance intervention strategies.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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