

Research Paper

To Investigate the Relationship Between Self-Concept and Psychological Well-Being Among Secondary School Students

Dr. Swati Shikha¹, Dr. Suman Kumari², Ramawatar Sah^{3*}

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a formative phase in human development where self-concept and psychological well-being play critical roles in shaping identity, resilience, and emotional stability. This study aims to investigate the relationship between self-concept and psychological well-being among secondary school students. A sample of 244 students (110 boys and 134 girls) from various schools in Benipur sub-division was selected using purposive sampling. Standardized tools were employed to assess six dimensions of self-concept (physical, social, temperamental, educational, moral, and intellectual) and six dimensions of psychological well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance). Correlation analysis indicated that moral, intellectual, and overall self-concept were positively associated with various aspects of well-being, particularly autonomy and self-acceptance. Multiple regression results identified the moral and intellectual dimensions of self-concept as significant predictors of psychological well-being. These findings underscore the importance of fostering positive self-concept, particularly in moral and intellectual domains, to enhance adolescents' mental health and life satisfaction. Implications for educational and psychological interventions are discussed.

Keywords: *Adolescence, Self-concept, psychological well-being, personal growth*

Adolescence is a crucial stage of human development, marked by rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. During this time, secondary school students begin to develop a clearer sense of identity, self-worth, and purpose. A central psychological concept that emerges during this period is *self-concept*. It is an individual's perception of themselves in areas such as academic ability, social relationships, and emotional control (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). A healthy self-concept is essential, as it influences how adolescents respond to challenges, interact with peers, and view their potential (Marsh & Craven, 2006).

Self-concept is closely related to psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Students with a strong and positive self-concept tend to have better psychological well-being (Harter, 1999; Ryff, 1989). Conversely, a fragmented or negative self-concept can make individuals more

¹Assistant Professor, Dept. of Psychology, SDGD College, Benipur, Darbhanga

²Assistant Professor, J.M.D.P.L. College, Madhubani

³Research Scholar, Univ. Dept. of Psychology, LNMU, Darbhanga

*Corresponding Author

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vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Mann, Hosman, Schaalma, & de Vries, 2004).

Psychological well-being, on the other hand, encompasses an individual's overall emotional and mental health, including factors such as life satisfaction, self-acceptance, purpose in life, and positive interpersonal relationships. It reflects the extent to which individuals perceive their lives as meaningful, fulfilling, and in harmony with their values and goals.

There are commonly two approaches taken to understand psychological well-being: a. distinguishing positive and negative effects, and defining psychological well-being and happiness as a balance between the two. b. emphasises life satisfaction as the key indicator of psychological well-being.

There are two common approaches to understanding psychological well-being:

1. Affective Balance Model – defines well-being as a balance between positive and negative emotions.
2. Life Satisfaction Approach – emphasizes overall satisfaction with life as the key indicator of well-being.

Ed Diener (1984) proposed the *tripartite model of subjective well-being*, which describes how individuals assess the quality of their lives. It includes three components: frequent positive emotions, infrequent negative emotions, and cognitive judgments such as life satisfaction (Tov & Diener, 2013). Diener argued that these components should be studied independently, even though they are interrelated. Subjective well-being focuses on internal evaluations and emotional experiences, rather than external conditions like wealth or health, although such factors can influence it (Diener, 2000).

Carol Ryff (2006) introduced a *multidimensional model of psychological well-being* that goes beyond the absence of mental illness. It includes emotional, social, and psychological dimensions—such as experiencing positive emotions, having a sense of purpose, and maintaining meaningful relationships (van Dierendonck & Lam, 2023).

Understanding Self-Concept

Self-concept is a broad term commonly used in everyday language. McLeod (2008) defined it as how an individual thinks about, evaluates, or perceives themselves. According to Baumeister (1999), it encompasses beliefs about one's attributes and identity.

Lewis (1992) suggested that self-concept consists of two components:

1. Existential Self – the awareness of being a distinct entity, which begins to emerge around 2–3 months of age (Bee, 1992).
2. Categorical Self – recognition of oneself as an object in the world, categorized by attributes like age, gender, and skills.

Self-concept involves beliefs across multiple domains, including academic ability (Bong & Clark, 1999), gender roles, sexuality, and racial identity (Hoffman et al., 2004). It is also referred to as self-identity, self-construction, or self-perspective (Ziegler-Hill & Myers, 2009).

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It is shaped by *self-schemas*, and develops through interactions with self-esteem, self-knowledge, and social experiences. It includes one's past, present, and possible future selves. These *possible selves*—what a person hopes, fears, or expects to become—act as motivators for behaviour (Zeigler-Hill & Myers, 2009).

According to *temporal self-appraisal theory*, people often maintain a positive self-view by distancing themselves from past negative experiences and emphasizing more favourable future outcomes. They typically view their past selves less positively and their future selves more optimistically (Wilson & Ross, 2001; Ross et al., 2006).

There is no consensus on when self-concept begins to form. Some researchers argue that it starts as early as age three, influenced by parental expectations and gender norms. Others believe it develops around age 7 or 8, when children begin to understand their feelings and abilities and respond to feedback from others. Regardless of the timing, self-concept plays a critical role in shaping behaviour, emotions, academic achievement, and overall life satisfaction (Tiedemann, 2000).

Self-Concept Integration and Well-Being

Several studies suggest that adolescents with a positive self-concept are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological well-being, as they tend to view challenges with greater resilience and maintain healthier social relationships. Conversely, a poor self-concept may contribute to emotional distress, low self-esteem, and increased vulnerability to mental health issues. Given the rising concerns about the mental health of adolescents, especially in educational settings, it becomes imperative to explore the dynamic interplay between self-concept and psychological well-being.

Studies consistently show that a self-concept with desirable content is linked to better mental and physical health (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor et al., 2003). However, opinions differ on the role of consistency in self-concept. Some psychologists argue that excessive consistency can limit flexibility and cause negative experiences to spill over into other areas of life (Gergen, 1976; Linville, 1985, 1987). Others contend that a consistent self-concept promotes well-being by fostering a sense of continuity and enabling more predictable social interactions (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992).

Objectives

This study aims to investigate the relationship between self-concept and psychological well-being among secondary school students, with the goal of providing insights that can inform educational practices, psychological interventions, and policy formulation focused on student mental health and personal development. The main objectives are:

1. To find out the relationships between the dimensions of self-concept and psychological well-being.
2. To measure the predictive effect of dimensions of self-concept on psychological wellbeing

METHODS

Sample

Purposive Sampling technique for this study was adopted. Altogether 244 +2 students participated in this study from different schools of Benipur sub-division. Out of 244

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respondents, 110 were boys and the remaining 124 were girl students. Their mean and median age were 16.70 and 17 years respectively.

Measures:

- **Self -concept Questionnaire:** This scale was developed by Saraswat (1984) consists of 40 items. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale. This inventory measures six separate dimensions of self-concept, viz., physical, social, intellectual, moral, educational and temperamental Self-concept. the inventory contains 48 items. Each item is provided with five alternatives.
- **Psychological Wellbeing Scale:** Carol Ryff (1995) has conceptualised psychological well-being as consisting of 6 dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, self-acceptance. She has designed self-report scales of 42 items to assess an individual's well-being at a particular moment in time within each of these 6 dimensions. Individuals respond to various statements and indicate on a 6-point Likert scale.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To measure the correlation between dimensions of self-concept and the psychological well-being, Pearson's coefficient of correlations was computed. The results are given in Table-1.

Self-Concept and Well-being

To determine the relationship between self-concept and psychological well-being of secondary school students in the present study, Pearson coefficient of correlation between various dimensions of self-concept with all six dimensions of psychological well-being were computed. All correlations are presented in Table-1.

Table-1 Correlation among all dimensions of Self-concept and Psychological Well-being

Self-concept	Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relationship	Purpose in Life	Self-acceptance	Psychological Well-being
Physical	.080	.126*	.111	.244**	-.052	.134*	.119
Social	-.037	.075	.056	.026	.006	.047	.042
Temperamental	.122	-.051	.034	-.010	-.031	.078	.019
Educational	.067	-.097	-.051	.063	-.035	.229**	.016
Moral	.191**	.163*	-.002	.144*	.031	.177**	.175**
Intellectual	.224**	.104	.109	.164*	.048	.244**	.224**
Overall Self-concept	.213**	.093	.093	.198**	-.021	.273**	.180**

*Correlation is significant at .05 level

**Correlation is significant at .01 level

Table-1 indicates that moral, intellectual and overall self-concept of the respondents positively correlated with the autonomy dimension of well-being ($r=.191$, $p<.01$; $r=.224$, $p<.001$; $r=.313$, $p<.01$) respectively. In other words, if respondents are moral and intellectually are strong, they will be psychologically independent to make decision and plan out their career and other future prospects. The physical and moral self-concept were found

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to be positively correlated with environmental mastery $r=.126, p<.05$; $r=.163, p<.05$) respectively. All dimensions of self-concept were found unrelated to personal growth and purpose in life of well-being. Physical, moral, intellectual and overall self-concepts were positively correlated with positive relationship. On the other hand, except social and temperamental self-concept all dimensions were positively correlated with self-acceptance dimension of well-being. The total scores on self-concept were found highly correlated with overall well-being ($r=.180, p<.01$).

Self-concept as predictors of psychological well-being

The linear regression equation revealed that only intellectual ($B=.684, p<.001$) and moral dimension ($B= .492, p<.016$) of self-concept emerged as significant predictors of psychological well-being.

Table-2 Predicting effect of dimensions of self-concept on psychological wellbeing

R	F		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficient	T	Sig.
			B	Std. Error	Beta		
.293	3.699 ($P<.003$)	(Constant)	44.101	5.064		8.708	.000
		Physical	.154	.139	.073	1.110	.268
		Social	.044	.219	.013	.201	.841
		Temperamental	-.049	.108	-.029	-.456	.649
		Educational	-.236	.239	-.066	-.990	.323
		Moral	.491	.203	.153	2.417	.016
		Intellectual	.684	.197	.229	3.471	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-being

The above discussion revealed a general impression that self-concept plays an important role in promoting well-being. The social and temperamental aspects of well-being did not emerge as promoters of well-being. On the other hand, moral and intellectual aspects of well-being emerged significant promoters. These findings are supportive and in consonance with previous researches. Kitani and Okamoto (2016) found that the self-concept variability positively relates to a sense of having a “purpose in life” and “personality growth.” In particular, positive self-concept variability strongly influenced the way a person perceives the future, such as concepts of “personal growth” or “purpose in life.” On the other hand, negative self-concept variability influenced the perceived current state of existence of the self, such as “self-acceptance.”

Du, King, and Chi (2017) conducted four cross-sectional and one longitudinal study on Chinese college students. He found that, when controlling for Personal Self-esteem, Relational Self-esteem was associated with greater life satisfaction, positive affect, meaning in life, happiness, and subjective vitality, but Collective self-esteem was not. Further, Ritche et al (2011) tested the extent to which self-concept clarity mediates the relation between different types of stressful life events and subjective well-being, independently of neuroticism. It was found that self-concept clarity fully mediated the relation between stress from various sources and subjective well-being.

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CONCLUSION

The findings reveal several important insights into the psychological development of adolescents in educational settings. First, the study found significant positive correlations between several dimensions of self-concept—particularly moral and intellectual self-concept—and various aspects of psychological well-being. Students with strong intellectual and moral self-concept were more likely to experience autonomy, self-acceptance, and positive relationships. These results support the view that a well-integrated and positive self-concept enhances emotional and psychological resilience, which in turn promotes mental health and life satisfaction.

Second, regression analysis showed that moral and intellectual self-concept significantly predicted overall psychological well-being. This suggests that these dimensions of self-concept play a central role in shaping how students perceive and manage their mental and emotional lives. Conversely, the social and temperamental dimensions of self-concept were not found to be significant predictors, highlighting the nuanced and multidimensional nature of self-concept in relation to well-being.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of nurturing a healthy and positive self-concept in adolescents to support their psychological well-being. These findings have practical implications for educators, school counsellors, and policymakers. Programs that foster intellectual engagement, moral development, and emotional awareness could serve as effective interventions to enhance students' mental health and overall quality of life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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