

Research Paper

## Gender and Educational Level Differences in Subjective Well-Being among Secondary School Students

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### ABSTRACT

This research explores the variation in subjective well-being (SWB) among secondary school students based on gender (male and female) and educational level (Matriculation and Intermediate/+2). The study employed standard measures of SWB, including Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and Negative Affect, to analyse responses from a purposive sample of 300 students (140 males, 160 females; 178 Matriculation, 122 Intermediate). Results highlighted statistically significant gender differences, with females scoring higher in both Life Satisfaction and Negative Affect. Educational level also influenced Life Satisfaction, with Matriculation students demonstrating greater satisfaction than Intermediate students. These findings suggest targeted well-being interventions are necessary, particularly for male and senior secondary students.

**Keywords:** *Subjective well-being, gender differences, educational level, life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, secondary students*

The post-pandemic era has witnessed a profound shift in adolescents' lifestyles, with significant implications for their mental health and well-being. The sudden transition to online education, increased dependence on digital devices, and the dual burden of online and offline classes have collectively disrupted students' emotional and psychological well-being. Adolescence stage is said to be a pivotal stage of personal and cognitive development. At this stage, therefore, understanding and nurturing subjective well-being (SWB) is vital for fostering healthy academic and life outcomes.

Subjective well-being refers to individuals' evaluations of their lives, comprising both affective (emotions) and cognitive (life satisfaction) components (Diener, 1984). High SWB is indicative of not only individual contentment but also of a more resilient and socially functional student body. Creating school environments that prioritise emotional and mental well-being can enhance educational outcomes and social integration.

Prior studies provide mixed insights into how gender and educational experiences shape SWB. For example, Nemcek et al. (2019) reported that male students engaged in sedentary leisure activities displayed higher positive and lower negative well-being compared to

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females. Meanwhile, theoretical perspectives such as the congruence hypothesis, androgyny hypothesis, and masculinity hypothesis (Whitley, 1984) attempt to explain gender disparities in SWB, though empirical support remains inconclusive (Wang, 2016; Pauletti et al., 2017; Wolfram et al., 2009).

In terms of educational impact, research shows that non-monetary benefits of schooling like enhanced decision-making, social connectivity, and emotional development, play a crucial role in increasing SWB (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2009; Dickson & Harmon, 2011). Moreover, education contributes to societal well-being by fostering civic engagement and reducing criminal behaviour (Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Zhao et al., 2021).

Despite the growing global focus on student mental health, research in the Indian context, particularly concerning secondary school students, remains sparse. This study attempts to bridge that gap by examining how gender and educational stage influence key SWB components.

### *Objectives of the Study*

1. To analyse gender-based differences in subjective well-being among secondary school students.
2. To compare subjective well-being between Matriculation (10th grade) and Intermediate (+2 level) students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

The study involved 300 secondary school students selected through purposive sampling. Among them, 140 were male and 160 were female students. Educationally, 178 students were at the Matriculation level, while 122 were pursuing Intermediate education.

### *Measures:*

Subjective well-being was measured using validated scales:

1. **Life Satisfaction Scale-** This scale was constructed by Diener et al. (1985). It is 5-item instrument measuring comprehensive cognitive judgments of one's life.
2. **Positive and Negative Affect Scale (SPANES)-** This scale was developed by Diener et al. (2010). It is a 12-item scale. Six items of this scale measures positive and six items assess negative emotional experiences.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

To measure the significant mean differences in the subjective well-being between male and female students, as well as between matriculation and intermediate students, independent samples t-tests were applied using SPSS software.

### *Gender Differences in Subjective Well-Being*

In order to ascertain the difference between male and female students on subjective well-being, the t-ratio was computed. Table 1 states that females reported higher life satisfaction ( $M = 16.81$ ) than males ( $M = 15.86$ ). The obtained t-ratio is 2.819 which is significant at .005 level ( $p < .005$ ). Findings reflect gender differences in emotional expressiveness and social support systems (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012).

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**Table-1 t-ratio showing gender difference in subjective well-being**

Component of SWB	Sex	N	Mean	SD	t-ratio	df	Sig.
Life Satisfaction	Male	140	15.86	2.54	2.819	298	.005**
	Female	160	16.81	3.23			
Positive Affect	Male	140	23.19	4.17	1.068	298	.286
	Female	160	23.71	4.34			
Negative Affect	Male	140	15.36	3.58	2.368	298	.019*
	Female	160	16.33	3.49			

Interestingly, females also reported significantly higher levels of negative affect ( $p < .05$ ), which is indicative of heightened emotional sensitivity and a greater vulnerability to stressors, as suggested by Matud (2004). In contrast, the difference in positive affect between males and females was not statistically significant, implying that both genders experience similar degrees of joy and enthusiasm. Supporting these findings, Kumari and Kumar (2023) observed a comparable mean difference in subjective well-being among elderly male and female respondents. Female participants consistently scored higher than their male counterparts across various dimensions of subjective well-being, including life satisfaction. This trend may be attributed to women's greater adaptability within family contexts and their tendency to openly share and discuss personal problems with family members, thereby enhancing their emotional adjustment and overall well-being.

### ***Educational Level Differences in Subjective Well-Being***

To measure the differences in subjective well-being between matriculation and intermediate class students, a t-test was computed, and the results are presented in Table 2. Matric students scored ( $M=178$ ) higher in life satisfaction than Intermediate students (15.89). The obtained mean difference was found significant ( $t=2.348$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This finding reflects lower academic and career-related pressures at the Matric level compared to Intermediate Class level. However, no significant differences were observed on positive and negative affect between Matric and Intermediate students. It suggests emotional experiences remain relatively stable across academic levels.

**Table-2 Showing mean differences between matric and intermediate students in subjective well-being**

Component of SWB	Class	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-ratio	Df	Sig.
Life Satisfaction	Matric	178	16.70	2.39	2.348	298	.020*
	Intermediate	122	15.89	3.60			
Positive Affect	Matric	178	23.78	3.67	1.518	298	.130
	Intermediate	122	23.02	4.99			
Negative Affect	Matric	178	16.07	3.55	1.141	298	.255
	Intermediate	122	15.59	3.57			

The present study examined whether subjective well-being (SWB) varied significantly between Matriculation (10th grade) and Intermediate (+2 level) students. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in life satisfaction, with Matric students reporting higher mean scores ( $M = 16.70$ ) than their Intermediate counterparts ( $M = 15.89$ ),  $t(298) = 2.348$ ,  $p < .05$ . This suggests that students at the Matric level may experience a relatively greater sense of contentment and satisfaction with their lives.

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One possible explanation for this finding lies in the academic and career-related pressures typically associated with the Intermediate level. Students in the +2 stage often face the dual challenge of preparing for competitive entrance exams and making decisions about higher education and career paths, which may diminish their subjective evaluation of life satisfaction. In contrast, Matric students, while certainly not free from academic demands, generally encounter fewer external expectations and may benefit from more structured support from parents and schools, allowing for a more balanced and less stressful academic environment (Kumari & Srivastava, 2025).

Interestingly, no statistically significant differences were observed in the domains of positive affect and negative affect, indicating that emotional experiences such as feelings of joy, enthusiasm, distress, or sadness remain relatively stable across educational levels. These findings align with the perspective that affective components of SWB are more influenced by personality traits, temperament, and socio-emotional competencies than by academic grade level alone (Diener et al., 1999). Thus, while cognitive appraisals of life satisfaction may fluctuate in response to educational pressures, emotional reactivity and mood states may be less sensitive to such situational changes.

To sum up, present study reveals that female students possess higher levels of both life satisfaction and negative affect. This duality may reflect deeper emotional engagement with life circumstances (Fujita, 1991). The findings also indicate that younger students (Matric) feel more satisfied with their lives, possibly due to fewer responsibilities and stress. The lack of significant differences in positive affect across groups suggests that students maintain comparable levels of enthusiasm and joy, regardless of gender or academic level (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Garcia et al., 2014).

### CONCLUSION

The present study explored gender and educational level differences in subjective well-being (SWB) among secondary school students, focusing on three core components: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. The findings contribute important insights into how demographic and educational variables shape adolescent well-being in the Indian context. Results revealed that female students reported higher levels of life satisfaction and negative affect compared to males. It is because girls may possess a greater sense of life contentment, they also exhibit higher emotional sensitivity and vulnerability to stress. It highlights the dual nature of their emotional experiences. Further, Matriculation (10th grade) students demonstrated significantly higher life satisfaction than Intermediate (+2 level) students. This finding reflects the increased academic pressures, decision-making burdens, and career-related stress that characterize the senior secondary stage. However, no significant differences were found between the two groups in terms of positive and negative affect, suggesting that emotional states are less influenced by academic level and more by stable psychological or social factors.

The study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to support students' subjective well-being. For Intermediate students, stress-reduction strategies, career counselling, and time management programs may be effective in enhancing life satisfaction. For both genders, particularly females, emotional literacy, resilience training, and peer support systems could help manage negative affect and foster emotional balance.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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