

Research Paper

Online Survey Based Study on Romantic Relationship Quality and Psychological Well-Being in Adults

Sharada Sen¹, Shraddhesh Kumar Tiwari^{2*}, Aparna Sharma³

ABSTRACT

The present study examined gender differences in romantic relationship quality and its association with psychological well-being among young adults aged 18 to 30 years. Using a snowball sampling across digital platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram), responses from 101 participants (61 males and 40 females) currently or previously engaged in romantic relationships were analyzed. Positive and negative dimensions of romantic relationship quality were assessed alongside multiple components of psychological well-being, including autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and self-acceptance. Results revealed no significant gender differences in either positive or negative romantic relationship quality, suggesting that men and women perceive relationship satisfaction and relational challenges similarly in contemporary young adult populations. However, significant gender variations were observed in psychological well-being: females reported greater personal growth and a stronger sense of purpose in life compared to males. Correlational analyses indicated limited associations between positive romantic relationship qualities and well-being. Specifically, perceiving the relationship as “strong” was positively associated with autonomy, whereas viewing the relationship as “pleasant” showed a slight negative association with environmental mastery. Interestingly, the perception of the relationship as “energizing” was negatively linked to personal growth, suggesting nuanced emotional interpretations of positive relational states. In contrast, negative romantic relationship qualities demonstrated stronger and more consistent associations with well-being. Experiences of the relationship as “bad,” “lifeless,” “unpleasant,” or “empty” were significantly associated with reduced purpose in life, indicating that negative relational dynamics may disproportionately undermine psychological functioning. Overall, the findings underscore the heightened impact of negative romantic experiences on young adults’ psychological well-being and highlight the need for preventive mental health interventions focused on relational distress.

Keywords: *romantic relationship quality, psychological well-being, adolescent, adulthood*

¹Master student, Department of Psychology, School of Liberal Arts Noida International University Greater Noida

²Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, School of Liberal Arts Noida International University Greater Noida

³Dean/Director, School of Liberal Arts Noida International University Greater Noida

*Corresponding Author

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Romantic relationship quality is widely recognized as a major determinant of emotional and psychological adjustment in adulthood. High-quality romantic relationships marked by trust, intimacy, effective communication, and low conflict have been consistently linked to improved mental health outcomes, higher life satisfaction, and greater overall psychological well-being (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2010). However, many adults continue to experience relationship dissatisfaction, emotional instability, and interpersonal conflict, which can negatively affect psychological functioning, leading to stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced subjective well-being (Whisman & Baucom, 2012). Despite the growing evidence base, gaps remain in understanding the precise relationship between specific components of relationship quality (e.g., emotional closeness, conflict management, commitment) and different dimensions of psychological well-being in adult populations. Moreover, relationship dynamics vary widely based on developmental, cultural, and social factors, making it crucial to examine how romantic relationship quality impacts psychological well-being in diverse adult groups.

Relationship scientists argued that the quality of romantic relationships is a significant predictor of overall psychological functioning and life satisfaction (Reis & Gable, 2015). Romantic relationship quality refers to subjective assessments of one's relationship, encompassing trust, intimacy, communication, emotional support, commitment, and the ability to manage conflict effectively (Fletcher et al., 2000). High relationship quality is associated with increased positive affect, reduced psychological distress, and better physical and mental health outcomes (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Robles et al., 2014). Psychological well-being, a multidimensional construct, includes emotional stability, autonomy, positive interpersonal relations, self-acceptance, and life satisfaction (Ryff, 1989). Research indicates that adults in satisfying romantic relationships tend to exhibit higher self-esteem, greater subjective well-being, and lower levels of depression and anxiety (Dush & Amato, 2005). Conversely, low-quality relationships characterized by persistent conflict, poor communication, and lack of emotional support may heighten stress levels, reduce happiness, and impair psychological functioning (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2009). Intimate partnerships among young adults do not only repeat friendships or serve exclusively as status symbols, they offer both opportunities and risks that influence psychological functioning (Gómez-López, Viejo, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019). Evidence suggests a romantic connection has positive and negative aspects that affects individual well-being (Collibee & Furman, 2015). A systematic review of 112 empirical studies on adolescence and emerging adulthood determined that high-quality romantic relationships can act as developmental assets, whereas those lacking supportive characteristics or marked by negativity may pose risks (Gómez-López et al., 2019). This review highlighted that the language, measurement, and operational definitions of well-being differ significantly between studies. However, the prevailing trend of relationship quality is found significant. Considering the dual nature of romantic relationships as both sources of fulfilment and stress, it is essential to distinguish between good relationship quality (warmth, support, closeness) and bad relationship quality (conflict, criticism, neglect). The Positive–Negative Relationship Quality scale (Rogge, Fincham, Crasta, & Maniaci, 2017) provides a bidimensional framework that captures this complexity. Research utilizing bidimensional metrics demonstrates that both positive and negative aspects of relationships can coexist and each can independently forecast psychological outcomes (Rogge et al., 2017). A relationship may exhibit high intimacy while simultaneously experiencing frequent conflict, a phenomenon referred to as ambivalent relationship quality, which has specific implications for well-being. A longitudinal study conducted by Collibee and Furman (2015) corroborates this

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developmental perspective. Research indicated that for adolescents and young adults, superior romantic relationships marked by reduced negative interactions and increased helpful exchanges correlated with diminished psychological issues throughout time, underscoring the importance of quality. The study's primary consequence is that it is not merely the presence of a relationship that matters, but rather the nature of the relationship (supporting versus problematic) that predicts adjustment. This concept is especially significant for groups in transitional civilizations or experiencing rapid social change, when norms regarding dating, cohabitation, and marriage are shifting.

Despite considerable international research connecting relationship quality to well-being, there is a notable scarcity of empirical studies concentrating on young Indian adults, particularly utilizing multidimensional frameworks like Ryff's PWB and Rogge's PN-RQ. This signifies a significant deficiency, considering the sociocultural intricacies of modern Indian relationships and their possible effects on mental health. Furthermore, current research seldom examines gendered patterns in the intensity or direction of these connections within non-Western contexts. Addressing these gaps, this study seeks to examine the relationship between the quality of romantic relationships both positive and negative and psychological well-being in Indian young adults aged 18 to 30 years. This study investigates the existence of gender differences in relationship quality and well-being, as well as the strong correlation between measures of relationship quality (both positive and negative) and total psychological well-being. The study has three objectives, 1) to examine effect of gender on relationship quality among adults, 2) to study the gender differences in psychological well-being among adults, 3) to investigate the association between relationship quality and psychological well-being among adults.

Hypotheses

- There will be significant effect of gender on relationship quality and psychological wellbeing among adults.
- There would be significant association between relationship quality and psychological wellbeing among adults.

METHOD

Design:

The present study was employed a between group design to examine the effect of gender on romantic relationship quality and psychological well-being of adults. Correlational research design used to examine the relationship between relationship quality and psychological wellbeing.

Sample Size

The snowball sampling technique used to recruit male and female participants aged 18 to 30 years through various online platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram. Total 101 adults were approached. The inclusion criteria were: 1) participants to be between 18 and 30 years of age, 2) currently involved in a romantic relationship, 3) representing both genders, and 4) belonging to diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Based on these criteria, 61 male and 40 female adults were participated with mean age of 24.64 years.

Tools

- **Positive and Negative Relationship Quality Scale (PN-RQ):** It is developed by Rogge, Fincham, Crasta, and Maniaci (2017). This scale is a bidimensional measure

designed to assess both the favourable and unfavourable aspects of intimate relationship quality. The scale consists of items divided into two domains: Positive Relationship Quality and Negative Relationship Quality, each capturing distinct components of relational functioning. All items are rated on a 0–6 Likert scale, where 0 indicates “Not at all true” and 6 indicates “Completely true.” Scores on the positive subscale are summed to provide a total score representing overall positive relationship quality, with higher scores reflecting greater positivity; similarly, items on the negative subscale are summed to yield a score representing negative relationship quality, with higher scores indicating greater relational strain or negativity. The scale was developed through a series of extensive studies that ensured strong psychometric robustness, demonstrating high internal consistency, excellent test–retest reliability, and evidence of construct validity across multiple samples. The authors established that the PN-RQ offers more precise and differentiated assessment than traditional unidimensional relationship quality measures, thereby advancing both fundamental and applied research in marital and intimate relationship contexts.

- **Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB):** The Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB), developed by Carol D. Ryff, is a 42-item self-report instrument designed to assess six core dimensions of psychological well-being: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance. Each dimension reflects a theoretically grounded component of eudaimonia well-being, and respondents rate the extent to which each statement applies to them using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. Higher scores on the respective subscales indicate greater well-being in that domain. The scale demonstrates strong psychometric properties. Ryff’s original validation (1989a) reported high internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from .86 to .93 across the six subscales. Test–retest reliability over a six-week interval ranged from .81 to .88, indicating stability of the measure over time in the absence of intervention. Construct validity has been well established, with significant and meaningful correlations with established measures of positive and negative functioning; notably, the strongest correlation observed was .73 between Self-Acceptance and the Life Satisfaction Index, underscoring its convergent validity. Scoring involves two steps. First, all negatively worded items are reverse-scored (e.g., on a 6-point scale, responses of 1 are converted to 6, 2 to 5, etc.). Second, the responses for each dimension—Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance—are summed to yield six separate subscale scores, each representing the participant’s level of psychological well-being in that domain.

Procedure:

The study employed two standardized instruments: the Positive and Negative Relationship Quality Scale and the Psychological Well-Being Scale. Participants, including both males and females, were recruited through various online platforms using snowball sampling techniques. Prior to participation, individuals received an informed consent form along with a brief description of the study’s purpose and procedures. Data collection commenced only after participants provided their informed consent and was conducted at a time convenient for both the researchers and the respondents. Upon completion of the data collection process, participants were thanked for their involvement, and any questions or concerns they raised were addressed appropriately.

RESULTS

The findings in Table 1 indicate that males ($M = 29.36$, $SD = 7.73$) and females ($M = 29.85$, $SD = 8.64$) reported almost identical levels of positive relationship quality, as reflected in a non-significant t -value of -0.297 . Similarly, negative relationship quality did not differ significantly between genders, with males scoring $M = 6.90$ ($SD = 8.82$) and females scoring slightly lower at $M = 5.43$ ($SD = 6.57$), $t = 0.905$. For psychological well-being, no significant gender differences were found for autonomy (males: $M = 26.62$, $SD = 4.21$; females: $M = 25.33$, $SD = 3.90$), environmental mastery (males: $M = 25.43$, $SD = 3.75$; females: $M = 25.13$, $SD = 4.15$), positive relations (males: $M = 26.10$, $SD = 5.20$; females: $M = 27.35$, $SD = 5.29$), or self-acceptance (males: $M = 25.33$, $SD = 4.16$; females: $M = 26.00$, $SD = 5.88$). However, significant gender differences emerged for personal growth, where females ($M = 27.75$, $SD = 6.17$) scored higher than males ($M = 25.11$, $SD = 5.75$), $t = -2.187$, $p < .05$, and for purpose in life, where females ($M = 28.03$, $SD = 5.40$) again exceeded males ($M = 25.80$, $SD = 4.66$), $t = -2.198$, $p < .05$.

Table-1: Mean, SD and t-value of positive and negative romantic relationship and domains of psychological wellbeing scale scores

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value
Positive Relationship	Male	61	29.36	7.733	-.297
	Female	40	29.85	8.646	
Negative Relationship	Male	61	6.90	8.827	.905
	Female	40	5.43	6.578	
Autonomy	Male	61	26.62	4.216	1.557
	Female	40	25.33	3.905	
Environmental Mastery	Male	61	25.43	3.757	.378
	Female	40	25.13	4.152	
Personal Growth	Male	61	25.11	5.754	-2.187*
	Female	40	27.75	6.176	
Positive Relation	Male	61	26.10	5.202	-1.174
	Female	40	27.35	5.294	
Purpose in Life	Male	61	25.80	4.661	-2.198*
	Female	40	28.03	5.409	
Self-Acceptance	Male	61	25.33	4.166	-.672
	Female	40	26.00	5.883	

Note: * $p < .05$

Correlation results in Table 2 show that among the positive relationship domains, the item “strong” demonstrated a significant positive correlation with autonomy ($r = .227$, $p < .05$). The item “pleasant” revealed a small but significant negative correlation with environmental mastery ($r = -.238$, $p < .05$), and “energizing” was significantly and negatively associated with personal growth ($r = -.225$, $p < .05$). The overall positive romantic relationship score showed no significant association with any well-being domain, with correlations ranging from $r = -.135$ to $r = .127$.

In contrast, Table 3 highlights stronger and more consistent associations between negative relationship quality and psychological well-being. Several negative relational experiences—including “bad” ($r = -.274$, $p < .01$), “lifeless” ($r = -.310$, $p < .01$), “unpleasant” ($r = -.286$, $p < .01$), “dull” ($r = -.270$, $p < .01$), and “empty” ($r = -.202$, $p < .05$) showed significant negative correlations specifically with purpose in life, indicating that participants who perceived their relationships as more negative also reported a lower sense of direction and meaning in life. The overall negative romantic relationship score correlated negatively with

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purpose in life ($r = -.304$), indicating a clear trend toward reduced psychological wellbeing as negative relationship quality increases.

Table-2: Relationship between domains of positive relationship and psychological well being scale scores

	Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relation	Purpose in Life	Self-Acceptance
Enjoyable	.126	-.085	-.093	.043	.082	.081
Pleasant	.159	-.238*	-.104	.007	.054	-.115
Strong	.227*	-.054	-.013	.054	.115	-.123
Alive	.028	-.024	-.158	-.090	-.046	-.137
Fun	.048	-.087	-.031	.060	.096	.089
Full	.005	-.013	-.114	.015	.067	-.152
Energizing	.090	-.061	-.225*	-.140	-.020	-.066
Exciting	.090	-.031	-.088	.001	.063	-.076
Positive Romantic Relationship	.127	-.097	-.135	-.009	.067	-.087

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Table-3: Relationship between domains of positive relationship and psychological wellbeing scale scores

	Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relation	Purpose in Life	Self-Acceptance
Miserable	-.044	-.040	-.003	-.055	-.182	.094
Bad	-.056	-.068	-.106	-.172	-.274**	-.021
Empty	-.036	-.102	-.126	-.182	-.202*	-.090
Lifeless	-.098	-.032	-.191	-.174	-.310**	-.090
Unpleasant	-.053	-.082	-.127	-.152	-.286**	-.022
Dull	-.058	-.135	-.083	-.153	-.270**	-.057
Weak	-.123	-.030	.016	-.013	-.263**	.036
Discouraging	-.043	.046	-.090	-.025	-.184	.030
Negative Romantic Relationship	-.079	-.071	-.107	-.143	-.304	-.018

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Overall, the results show that positive relationship qualities were only weakly associated with psychological well-being, whereas negative relationship qualities were strongly and consistently linked to reduced purpose in life, suggesting a greater psychological impact of negative relational experiences compared to positive ones.

Major Findings

- There was no significant gender difference in positive romantic relationship quality, as both males and females reported similar levels.
- Negative romantic relationship quality also did not differ significantly between males and females.
- Females demonstrated higher levels of personal growth compared to males.
- Females also reported a stronger sense of purpose in life than their male counterparts.
- Positive relationship dimensions showed only limited associations with psychological well-being.

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- The perception of having a “strong” romantic relationship was positively associated with greater autonomy.
- The “pleasant” aspect of romantic relationships showed a slight negative association with environmental mastery.
- Viewing the relationship as “energizing” was negatively associated with personal growth.
- Negative relationship qualities showed stronger and more consistent negative associations with psychological well-being.
- Negative relational experiences such as feeling the relationship is “bad,” “lifeless,” “unpleasant,” “dull,” or “empty” were associated with lower levels of purpose in life.
- Overall negative romantic relationship quality was linked to reduced sense of life purpose.
- Overall, negative romantic experiences exerted a more substantial impact on psychological well-being than positive experiences, especially in diminishing life purpose.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined gender differences in romantic relationship quality and psychological well-being, along with the associations between positive and negative relationship dimensions and six domains of psychological well-being. The findings revealed no significant gender differences in either positive or negative romantic relationship quality, indicating that males and females experience relational positivity and conflict at comparable levels. These results align with earlier studies suggesting that gender differences in relationship quality have narrowed over time due to changing relational expectations among young adults (Whitton & Whisman, 2010). Significant gender differences were observed in two domains of psychological well-being, where females reported higher personal growth and purpose in life. This is consistent with previous research showing that young adult females often exhibit stronger reflective capacities, relational awareness, and goal-oriented thinking, which contribute to enhanced psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Such patterns may also reflect cultural and developmental factors that encourage greater emotional engagement and life planning among young women (Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik, 1991).

Correlation analyses demonstrated that positive relationship dimensions showed weak associations with psychological well-being. Only perceiving the relationship as “strong” was linked to greater autonomy, suggesting that supportive relationships may foster a sense of personal agency. This is consistent with Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory (2000), which emphasizes that autonomy-supportive relationships facilitate psychological flourishing. Nevertheless, other positive domains such as “pleasant,” “fun,” or “exciting” did not strongly predict well-being, supporting existing evidence that positive affect in relationships, though beneficial, does not always translate directly into long-term well-being outcomes (Gable & Reis, 2010). In contrast, negative romantic experiences showed stronger and more consistent associations with psychological well-being, particularly purpose in life. Experiences such as feeling the relationship is “bad,” “lifeless,” “unpleasant,” or “empty” were linked to diminished life purpose. This finding is supported by the well-documented *negativity bias*, whereby negative relational interactions exert a stronger psychological impact than positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001). Research by Fincham and Beach (2010) also indicates that relational conflict and dissatisfaction significantly undermine mental health, leading to decreased motivation, meaning, and emotional stability. These findings

highlight the greater psychological weight of negative relationship experiences, as also observed in studies on romantic stress and well-being among young adults (Knee, Canevello, & Bush, 2008).

Overall, the results suggest that while positive relational qualities may enhance well-being modestly, negative relational qualities are more potent predictors of psychological distress, especially in domains involving meaning and personal direction. This underscores the importance of understanding relational strain as a major factor affecting young adults' psychological functioning.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that gender differences in romantic relationship quality are minimal, but females report higher personal growth and purpose in life compared to males. Positive aspects of romantic relationships show limited associations with psychological well-being, whereas negative relational experiences exert a much stronger detrimental effect, particularly on one's sense of purpose in life. These findings indicate that negative relational experiences carry greater psychological consequences than positive ones, emphasizing the critical role of relational stress in influencing well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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