

Research Paper

Does Where We Live Matter? A Study of Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being in Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

The living environment of emerging adults can shape their daily experiences, independence, and psychological functioning. This study examined differences in self-esteem and psychological well-being between independent-living and family-based living students, and explored the relationship between these two variables in emerging adults aged 18 to 25. A total of 178 participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the World Health Organization-Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5). Results revealed a significant difference in self-esteem and psychological well-being between the two groups, with independent-living students reporting higher levels of self-esteem and psychological well-being compared to family-based living students. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among emerging adult students. With the increasing trend of educational migration and the concentration of higher education institutions in urban centers in India, understanding the impact of living arrangements on student well-being is particularly important.

Keywords: *Well-Being, Psychological Well-Being, Self-Esteem, Education, College Students, Indian Students, Living Arrangements, Emerging Adults, Family-Based Living Students and Independent-Living Students*

Emerging Adulthood is defined as the period of life from about age eighteen through twenty-five, during which young people are exploring the possibilities of their lives and beginning to define themselves as adults rather than teenagers (Munsey, 2006). The term “emerging adulthood” was coined by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett.

Arnett (2000) characterises the period as an age of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between and that of possibilities. From a life events and environmental perspective- these adults experience changes in their - living arrangements, enrolling in colleges, living with new roommates, choosing streams and careers of one's choice, acquiring new age skills, to equip oneself to the ever- evolving technology and changing relationship dynamics. It is a phase of life in which an individual realises their full potential and find their niche.

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Arnett (2004) asserts that emerging adults are ambivalent about taking on responsibilities and calls the balance between striving for self-sufficiency and burden of relinquishing dependency as a “quarterlife crisis”, usually experienced before stepping into the independent adult life.

Mousley et al. (2025) found that brain network efficiency follows a non-linear trajectory and peaks around the late twenties to early thirties, indicating continued neural maturation beyond adolescence. This suggests that brain development extends into early adulthood, thereby supporting the conceptualization of emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental phase.

Arnett (2000) considers emerging adulthood to be volitional years, that offers opportunities for identity exploration in the areas of love, work, and worldviews (Wood D et al., 2017). However, the utilisation of presented opportunities and overcoming challenges posed depend on the economic, social and interpersonal resources available to the individual.

Arnett (2014) states that the path individuals take from dependency in childhood to independence in adulthood has become longer and more complex than at any other point in human history, increasing the relevance of characterizing emerging adulthood as a distinct stage in the life course.

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is defined by the World Health Organization as a person’s subjective perception of positive mental health, including aspects such as positive mood, vitality, optimism, and overall life satisfaction.

Broadly, psychological well-being has been conceptualized with two major perspectives- the hedonic and eudaimonic. The hedonic elements are concerned about satisfying the biological, emotional and social needs of the individual- comprising of pleasure, happiness, comfort, positive affect and life quality. The eudaimonic dimension on the other hand is concerned about higher order emotional and cognitive needs, which includes fostering growth mindset, self-actualisation, personal growth, mastery motivation and autonomy (Park, C.L, et al., 2022).

Theories of Psychological Well-Being

- **Self-Determination Theory.** proposed by Ryan and Deci this theory states that autonomy (need for independence), competence (need to be effective) and relatedness (need to be connected) as three basic psychological needs that is essential for fostering intrinsic motivation, growth and mental health. It assumes that an active individual who has adequate environmental support will be intrinsically motivated to engage in the process learning, growing, and thriving. (Sheldon K. M.,2012).
- **Carol Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-Being.** Carol Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-Being. has examined the theoretical constructs of- fully functioning person (Rogers), maturity (Allport), executive processes of personality (Neugarten), Self-actualisation (Maslow), basic life tendencies (Bühler), personal development (Erikson), individuation (Jung), mental health (Jahoda) and will to meaning (Frankl). The theory identifies psychological well-being as comprising of six dimensions including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth,

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positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self- acceptance, each reflecting a key aspect of optimal psychological functioning. (Ryff C. D.,2014) (see Figure 1).

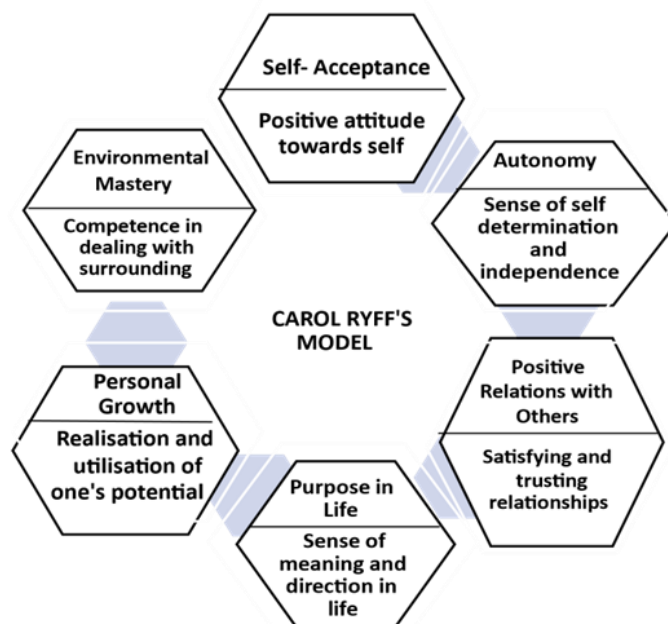


Figure 1. Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being based on Carol Ryff's model

Note. Adapted from Psychological well-being revisited: Advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia, by C. D. Ryff, 2014, *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000353263>

Perma Theory of Well-Being. proposed by Dr. Martin this theory describes five core components that contribute to well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. This theory assumes that each element is pursued for its own inherent value rather than as a means to achieve other outcomes. (Positive Psychology Center, n.d.).

Self-Esteem

The degree to which the qualities and characteristics contained in one's self-concept are perceived to be positive (APA).

Theories Of Self-Esteem

- **Social Identity Theory.** posits that an individual's self-esteem is largely influenced by the groups to which they belong and the extent to which they identify with these groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).
- **Sociometer Theory.** proposes that self-esteem functions as a psychological gauge reflecting how much people perceive themselves to be socially accepted and relationally valued by others (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).
- **Contingencies of Self-Worth Model.** suggests that self-esteem depends on how individuals perceive their performance in domains that are personally significant, such as relationships, academic achievements, or physical appearance (Crocker et al., 2003).
- **Self-Perception Theory.** asserts that self-esteem is shaped by observing one's own behaviors and the reactions of others to those behaviors. Individuals infer their own

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attitudes and emotions by reflecting on their actions and the contexts in which these actions occur (Bem, 1972, as cited in Greenbert & Murphy, 2024).

Mental Health in Emerging Adults in India

In 2017, approximately one in seven individuals in India was affected by mental disorders of varying severity, with a particularly significant impact on the young population. These challenges have been associated with decreased productivity and increased suicide rates among young adults (Gupta et al., 2025). Globally, there is also evidence of a rising prevalence of mental health problems among young people (Mohr et al., 2023), highlighting the urgency of addressing this issue in emerging adults. Depression and suicide are the second and fourth leading causes of death, respectively, among individuals aged 15–29 years (WHO, 2019).

Given these trends, assessing psychological well-being becomes critical. The WHO-5 Well-Being Index, used in the present study, is a widely recognized indicator of subjective well-being, where lower scores may indicate a risk of depression under the ICD-10 classification system of the World Health Organization. Examining self-esteem alongside psychological well-being provides meaningful insights into the broader mental health status of emerging adult students, helping identify those who may require support or interventions.

Moreover, systemic disparities in health, education, and employment can create additional stressors that negatively affect the mental health of emerging adults. Students navigating academic, social, and personal transitions may be particularly vulnerable to these challenges. Interventions that enhance self-efficacy, strengthen social support networks, and promote positive psychological resources are therefore essential to support the adaptive functioning and well-being of emerging adult students.

Need of the Study

The centralized academic infrastructures in India are largely concentrated in metropolitan cities such as Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, and the National Capital Region (Delhi), making migration an implicit norm for students seeking higher education from other regions. Educational migration accounts for approximately 2% of total migrants in India, with the majority of migrants falling within the 15–29 years age group (Sardeshpande, K., 2023).

Secondary data obtained from the India NIRF Rankings database (Ministry of Education, 2025) indicate that over 75% of the top 100 colleges are located in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Delhi, with the national capital alone accounting for 28% of these institutions. The states of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Karnataka collectively host more than 50% of the top NIRF-ranked universities. Intra-state disparities are also evident; for example, in Tamil Nadu, nearly 50% of the top-ranked colleges are concentrated in the metropolitan centers of Chennai and Coimbatore.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data on Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) for the year 2023, 33% of all suicides in India were committed by emerging adults. Family-related issues, illness (physical and mental), and relationship issues are the three major causes of suicides, with Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu collectively accounting for more than one-third of the total suicides among the larger states.

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A recent study in Kota, the most commonly reported place for student suicide cases (Maji et al., 2024), found that the age group of 17 years, followed by 18 years, among competitive exam aspirants was the most susceptible to suicides, with factors such as academic pressure, financial difficulties, romantic failures, and a lack of interest in studies contributing to this issue (Meena et al., 2025).

The significance of this study lies in its implications for education and living arrangements. Understanding student accommodation trends is essential for educational planning and policy, as it highlights the regional disparities in access to quality higher education. Additionally, education has broader implications beyond academic achievement, as each additional year of education is associated with reduced mortality risk (Balaj et al., 2024), comparable to the effects of smoking and alcohol consumption. Therefore, investment in education not only facilitates personal and professional development but also contributes indirectly to health outcomes.

Furthermore, the topic under study aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly inclusive and quality education for all (SDG 4) and the reduction of inequalities within and between regions (SDG 10).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study by **Sonpar and Shrotriya (2025)** examined differences in **self-concept, resilience, and happiness among day scholars and hostellers**, as well as across gender. The findings revealed no significant differences between the groups on these variables. Gender differences were also not significant.

The study by **Maheshwari and Tomar (2025)** examined **perceived stress and academic adjustment among day scholars and hostellers** aged 18–25 years from Greater Noida, India. The findings indicated no significant difference in perceived stress between the two groups ($p = 0.463$). However, day scholars demonstrated significantly higher academic adjustment ($p < .001$).

The study by **Haddad et al. (2024)** explored the relationship between **perceived social support, self-esteem, and psychological well-being among individuals in Saudi Arabia**. The findings revealed significant associations between perceived social support and both self-esteem and well-being. Perceived social support was found to have a strong influence on psychological well-being, while its direct effect on self-esteem was less pronounced. The findings further indicated that females, individuals with higher income and better well-being, reported greater perceived social support, emphasizing its protective role in psychological well-being.

Forster and Reuter (2024) examined **the influence of living arrangements on health behaviors and academic performance among university students**. The findings indicated that while living arrangements were associated with differences in certain health behaviors, they were not significantly related to body mass index or academic performance.

The study by **Venya and Pushparaj (2024)** investigated the **relationship between self-esteem and loneliness among college hostel students**. The findings revealed a significant relationship between self-esteem and loneliness, with self-esteem emerging as a significant predictor of loneliness, accounting for 22.9% of the variance. No significant gender

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differences were observed. The study emphasizes that self-esteem plays an important role in influencing feelings of loneliness among students.

The study conducted by **Kapoor and Sethi (2024)** examined the **relationship between family environment, self-esteem, and resilience among day scholars and hostellers**. The findings showed minor differences between the groups; however, strong positive correlations were found between family environment and both self-esteem and resilience.

The study by **Poorvajaa et al. (2023)** compared **cognitive flexibility and proactive coping among students living at home and those living away from home**. The findings revealed no significant differences between the two groups in either cognitive flexibility or coping abilities.

The study by **PreetKamal and Bhat (2023)** examined **differences in mental health and perceived social support between day scholars and hostellers**. The findings indicated that hostellers experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to day scholars, while day scholars reported greater perceived social support. Additionally, perceived social support was negatively associated with mental health problems.

The study by **Singh and Yadav (2021)** examined **differences in happiness based on gender and residential status among undergraduate students**. The findings revealed that female students reported significantly higher happiness than males ($t = 2.61, p < .05$). Additionally, day scholars showed higher happiness levels than hostellers.

The study by **Sinha, Damodar, and Nachiketh (2021)** explored **emotional competence among day scholars and hostellers**. The results indicated no significant difference between the two groups in emotional competence ($p = .721$). However, a significant gender difference was observed, with males scoring higher than females ($p = .013$).

The study by **Srivastava et al. (2020)** investigated **stress and its associated factors among undergraduate dental students**. The findings showed that academic and psychosocial stressors were significantly associated with higher stress levels. Additionally, accommodation type, particularly staying away from home, emerged as a significant predictor of stress ($p < .001$).

Study by **Shukla and Joshi (2017)** examined **stress among professional and non-professional students**. The result showed there was significant difference on academic, family, financial, hostel and overall stress areas as the mean scores of non-professional students was significantly higher among non-professional students than professional students.

The study by **Suyu-Tattao (2016)** explored the **relationship between living arrangement problems, academic performance, and coping strategies among first-year college students**. The findings indicated significant associations between living arrangement problems and both academic and family-related stress. Students also reported experiences of homesickness and adjustment difficulties.

The study by **Munir, Khalid, and Sadiq (2016)** examined **psychological problems among hostellers and day scholars**. The findings showed that anxiety was the most prevalent issue

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among students, while significant differences were observed only in impulsivity, with hostellers showing higher levels. The study suggests the need for early psychological support and interventions to address students' mental health concerns.

The study by **R. S. Singh (2014)** investigated **stress and resilience among hostellers and day scholars**. The findings revealed no significant difference in stress levels between the groups. However, hostellers demonstrated significantly higher resilience ($t = 5.08, p < 0.01$). The study indicates that while residential status may not influence stress, it plays an important role in developing resilience among students.

The study by **Waddar and Aminabhavi (2010)** examined **self-efficacy and emotional intelligence among students based on their living arrangements**. The findings showed that students living at home had significantly higher self-efficacy and emotional intelligence compared to hostel students ($p < .05$). The study highlights that living arrangements can influence key psychological attributes and emphasizes the importance of supportive environments for students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

Is there a significant difference in self-esteem and psychological well-being between students living away from their families and those living with their families, and is there a significant relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among emerging adult students?

Objectives

- To examine whether there will be a significant difference in self-esteem between family-based living students and independent-living students.
- To examine whether there will be a significant difference in psychological well-being between family-based living students and independent-living students.
- To examine the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among emerging adult students.

Hypotheses

- **H01:** There will be no significant difference in self-esteem between family-based living students and independent-living students.
- **H02:** There will be no significant difference in psychological well-being between family-based living students and independent-living students.
- **H03:** There will be no significant relationship between psychological well-being and self-esteem among emerging adult students.

Operational Definition

- **Emerging Adult Students:** For the purpose of this study, refers to individuals aged 18-25 years engaged in any form of formal or informal learning, including educational institutions, coaching centres, private learning programs or self-study.
- **Family:** For the purpose of this study, refers to an individual's immediate family, of which they are a member.
- **Independent-living Students:** Students who reside away from their family in hostels, PG accommodations, rented rooms, shared apartments, or other independent

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housing arrangements for a continuous period of at least six months during their course of education.

- **Family-based living Students:** Students who reside in the same household as their family members, such as parents or guardians, while pursuing their education.
- **Global Self-Esteem:** Global self-esteem refers to the overall attitude one holds about oneself, ranging from negative to positive. An individual's overall evaluation of their own worth, including feelings of self-respect, self-acceptance, and self-confidence (Rosenberg, 1989). In the present study, self-esteem is assessed as global self-esteem.
- **Psychological Well-Being:** Individual's subjective experience of positive mental well-being during the previous 14 days. (World Health Organization, 1998).

Research Design

A comparative and correlational research design was employed using a quantitative approach to compare self-esteem and psychological well-being among independent-living and family-based living students, and to examine the significance of the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being.

Sample

The sample consisted of 178 emerging adult students aged 18–25 years. Of these, 89 were living independently and 89 were living with their families. A convenience sampling method was used, in which participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study.

Tools Used

Two measures were used in this study,

1. **The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** RSES developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965), is a 10-item self-report instrument designed to measure global self-esteem. Participants respond on a 4-point Likert type scale (4 = strongly disagree; 1 = strongly agree). Positive worded items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10 are reverse coded, meaning that higher score reflects lower self-esteem, while negatively worded items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are scored normally, with higher numbers reflecting higher self-esteem. Participants respond on a 4-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree).
2. **The World Health Organization-Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5):** The WHO-5 well-being index (1998 version) is designed with five positively worded questions to assess subjective psychological well-being over the past 2 weeks. It uses a 6-point Likert scale with responses to the questions recorded from 0 (at no time) to 5 (all of the time). The five items assess mood, vitality/energy, restfulness, and interest/enjoyment in daily life, with higher scores indicating higher psychological well-being. The raw score ranges from 0 to 25, and a score below 13 indicates poor well-being and is an indication for testing for depression under ICD-10. (Topp et al., 2015).

Procedure

Participants aged 18–25 years were contacted for the study, and data were collected using an online survey administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: demographic details (age, area of residence and current living arrangement), the

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Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) to assess global self-esteem, and the WHO-5 Well-Being Index to measure psychological well-being.

Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before they proceeded with the questionnaire, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed for self-esteem and psychological well-being. Participants were categorized based on their living arrangements, defined as either living with family (family-based living) or living independently (independent living), with family-based living coded as 1 and independent living coded as 2. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics.

Independent samples t-tests were used to examine differences in self-esteem and psychological well-being based on living arrangements. Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among emerging adult students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being across Family-Based and Independent-Living Students

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Self-esteem	Family-based living students	89	25.98	4.98
Self-esteem	Independent-living students	89	27.36	4.23
Psychological Well-Being	Family-based living students	89	11.93	4.60
Psychological Well-Being	Independent-living students	89	14.21	4.27

The table mentioned above presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables across family-based and independent-living students. The total sample consisted of 178 participants, with 89 in each group. The mean and standard deviation for global self-esteem among family-based living students were 25.98 and 4.98, respectively, whereas for independent-living students, the mean and standard deviation were 27.36 and 4.23 respectively. Similarly, the mean and standard deviation for psychological well-being among family-based living students were 11.93 and 4.60, respectively, whereas for independent-living students, the mean and standard deviation were 14.21 and 4.27 respectively.

The normality for the data for the sample (N=178) was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The p-values for the variable of global self-esteem and psychological well-being among independent-living students and family-based living students were found to be greater than .05 implying that the variables under study are normally distributed among both the groups.

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Table 2 Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being between Family-Based and Independent-living Students

Variables	T	Df	p
Self-esteem	-1.996	176	.048
Psychological Well-Being	-3.429	176	<.001

An independent sample t-test was conducted to examine difference in self-esteem between family-based and independent living students. Levene's test for equality of variances was non-significant, $F(1, 176) = 1.86, p = 0.299$, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. The results indicate that there is a significant difference in self-esteem between family-based students and independent living students, $t(176) = -1.996, p = 0.048$. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected indicating that there is a significant difference in self-esteem among family-based students and independent living students. These results revealed that independent-living students reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem compared to family-based living students.

Yadav and Srivastava (2021) investigated the correlation between self-esteem and adjustment among hosteller and non-hosteller students in Baran district, Rajasthan, and reported similar findings that hosteller students exhibited significantly higher self-esteem and better adjustment (emotional, social, and educational) compared to non-hosteller students.

Students residing away from home are often required to manage daily responsibilities such as budgeting, time management, decision making, and problem-solving independently. Successfully navigating these responsibilities may enhance their sense of competence and personal efficacy, thereby strengthening their overall self-evaluation.

In contrast, family-based living students may receive consistent emotional and social support from family members, which is undoubtedly beneficial for overall adjustment. However, they may continue to depend on parents for certain daily tasks and decision-making processes, potentially limiting opportunities to develop independent self-efficacy.

Furthermore, living within the family context may expose students to frequent academic comparisons, expectations, or evaluative feedback, which could influence their self-assessment. These contextual differences in lifestyle and daily freedom may influence how students perceive their autonomy.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to examine differences in psychological well-being between family-based and independent living students. Levene's test for equality of variances was non-significant, $F(1, 176) = 1.88, p = 0.665$, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. The results indicate that there is a significant difference in psychological well-being between family-based students and independent living students, $t(176) = -3.429, p < 0.001$. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected, indicating that there is a significant difference in psychological well-being among family-based students and independent living students.

These results indicated that independent-living students demonstrated significantly higher psychological well-being than family-based living students. One possible explanation may relate to differences in living arrangements. The present study was conducted among

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students residing in metropolitan urban centres of Chennai and Bangalore, where greater access to recreational spaces, peer interaction opportunities, and student-oriented social environments is available.

Students living independently may be better positioned to utilise these opportunities due to greater personal autonomy and flexibility in managing their daily routines, social interactions and leisure activities. This increased freedom may allow them to explore social environments, build peer networks, and engage in activities that may contribute to enhanced confidence, social competence, and a stronger sense of individuality, which could probably explain the higher levels of psychological well-being observed among independent-living students in the present study.

In contrast, students residing with their families may experience certain structural or cultural constraints such as parental monitoring, time restrictions, or limitations regarding late night outings and social engagements. These differences in autonomy and freedom may influence opportunities for social exploration and personal development, which could contribute to the relatively higher levels of psychological well-being observed among independent-living students, which is in turn theoretically supported by the PERMA model and Ryff's model of psychological well-being, where autonomy, positive relationships, and engagement are considered core components of overall well-being. While such boundaries are often rooted in care and protection, they may reduce opportunities for independent exploration and peer-based engagement.

Another possible explanation for this finding may be students living independently frequently share accommodation with peers of the same age group and interact with them consistently on a daily basis. Continuous peer engagement may promote mutual support, shared problem-solving, and social comparison within a similar developmental stage, which can positively influence self-perception and social confidence.

These findings can also be understood in relation to the role of belongingness and peer connectedness in shaping psychological well-being, as independent-living students often develop stronger peer networks and a greater sense of social belonging through shared living experiences. This aligns with Worsley, Harrison, and Corcoran (2021), who found that accommodation plays a crucial role in fostering friendships and social communities among first-year students, and that those lacking peer connections or residing in less socially engaging environments are more prone to loneliness and social isolation.

Table 3 Pearson's Correlation Between Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being Among Emerging Adult Students

Variables	Mean	SD	Self -Esteem	Psychological Well-being
Self -Esteem	26.67	3.63	1	.550**
Psychological Well-being	13.07	4.44	.550**	1

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

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being scores among students aged 18-25 years. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being ($r = 0.550$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected stating that — there is a

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significant moderate positive relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among emerging adult students.

The results indicated a moderate positive relationship, suggesting that students with higher self-esteem tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being. The theoretical perspective proposed by Abraham Maslow (1987) further explains this relationship that self-esteem is a fundamental psychological need that contributes positively to an individual's overall well-being, and the fulfillment of esteem needs enhances psychological adjustment and promotes healthy functioning, stands supported by the result.

These findings align with the studies conducted by Sundaram B.S. and Patel N.M (2021), which revealed a statistically significant correlation between self-esteem and general well-being among college-going students and by Hossain, A., Das, P., Panda, B. K., and Sinha, M. (2025) where they investigated higher education students in West Bengal and found a positive relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. Their results showed that students with higher self-esteem exhibited greater emotional stability, stronger social connections, and higher levels of academic engagement, whereas those with lower self-esteem were more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and social withdrawal.

Similar findings have been observed across different developmental stages. For instance, Yang, Tian, Huebner, and Zhu (2019) reported a significant bidirectional relationship between self-esteem and subjective well-being among elementary school students in China.

Extending this evidence to early adolescence, Huang et al. (2024) found that self-esteem played a significant mediating and predictive role in adolescents' subjective well-being over time highlighting the enduring and developmentally consistent role of self-esteem in shaping psychological well-being.

Findings are also consistent with the research conducted by Karmakar and Bhattacharyya (2025), in West Bengal who reported that gratitude and self-esteem were significantly related to different dimensions of psychological well-being among young adults.

However, the strength of association observed in the present study differs from that reported by Farooq and Majeed (2024), who found only a weak positive correlation between self-esteem and mental well-being among students. This variation in the magnitude of relationship may be attributed to differences in sample characteristics, contextual factors, or measurement tools used across studies.

Summary

The present study aimed to examine differences in self-esteem and psychological wellbeing between independent-living and family-based living emerging adults, as well as to explore the relationship between these two variables. A quantitative comparative-correlational research design was employed. The sample consisted of 178 students aged 18–25 years, with 89 residing independently and 89 living with their families. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling method based on accessibility and willingness to participate. The results revealed a significant difference in self-esteem between family-based living students and independent-living students, with independent-living students reporting higher levels of self-esteem.

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Similarly, a significant difference was found in psychological well-being between the two groups, with independent-living students demonstrating higher psychological well-being compared to their family-based living counterparts. Further correlation analysis indicated a significant moderate positive relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among emerging adults, suggesting that higher self-esteem is associated with better psychological well-being. Overall, these findings highlight the potential influence of living arrangements on psychological outcomes of students during the stage of emerging adulthood.

CONCLUSION

There is a significant difference in self-esteem and psychological well-being between family based-living students and independent-living students. There is a significant relationship between psychological well-being and self-esteem among emerging adult students.

Implications

Understanding the influence of living arrangements on self-esteem and psychological well-being can help institutions design better developmental support systems within higher education. At the institutional level, colleges can create structured residential environments, peer mentorship programs, and meaningful student engagement opportunities that encourage independence and responsibility.

Counselling centers may also include assertiveness training and autonomy-building exercises in preventive mental health programs, particularly for students adjusting to independent living. Additionally, encouraging students to take up leadership roles in team-based activities, student organizations, and sports can help develop decision-making skills, problem-solving abilities, and personal responsibility, which may further enhance self-esteem and psychological well-being.

In the Indian context, psychoeducational workshops for parents can emphasize the importance of providing balanced emotional support while allowing psychological independence, thereby helping families avoid overprotective patterns that may unintentionally affect students' self-esteem.

At the same time, when family environments are supportive and autonomy-encouraging, family-based living students may also benefit from strong perceived social support, emotional security, and stability, which can positively contribute to their psychological well-being.

Strengths

- Within the context of rising awareness of mental health issues among young adults in India, the concentration of reputed educational institutions in metropolitan regions, and the growing trend of educational migration among students, the present study uniquely examines psychological well-being and self-esteem across different living arrangements, specifically family-based living and independent living, among emerging adult students.
- This study specifically examined emerging adults aged 18 to 25 years, a critical developmental period characterized by identity exploration, increasing autonomy, and transitional life decisions. Investigating psychological well-being and self-

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esteem during this stage is particularly meaningful, as individuals are negotiating independence, academic pressures, and evolving social roles.

- The study employed well-established and psychometrically validated instruments, including the WHO-5 Well-Being Index developed by the World Health Organization and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The use of standardized tools strengthens the reliability, validity, and overall credibility of the findings.
- The study offers meaningful implications for academic institutions and policymakers. Colleges and universities can enhance peer-support systems, encourage student engagement initiatives, and develop supportive residential environments such as structured hostel or community-based living arrangements. Policymakers can support these efforts by creating guidelines and funding programs that promote student mental health, facilitate access to counselling services, and ensure equitable living and learning conditions. Such contextual and environmental considerations may foster autonomy, strengthen social connectedness, and promote psychological well-being among students.

Limitations

- Like all empirical studies, the present research is subject to certain limitations.
- The study employed convenience sampling, which may reduce the representativeness of the sample in relation to the broader population.
- As the study focused exclusively on emerging adults aged 18 to 25 years, the findings may not be applicable to other age groups such as middle-aged or older adults.
- Additionally, the sample was drawn solely from the Indian population, and participants from other countries were not included. Therefore, it cannot be determined whether cultural or national differences might influence the results.
- The study utilised self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias or participants' personal interpretations of the items.
- The sample consisted predominantly of urban respondents, which may influence the contextual representation of the findings.
- Participants in the present study were predominantly from private educational institutions. Prior research has indicated that the nature of the institution (private versus government) can significantly influence certain components of psychological well-being among college students (Chetan & Acharya, 2015), which may influence the contextual interpretation of the findings.

Scope of Future Studies

While the present study provides valuable insights into the relationship between living arrangements, self-esteem, and psychological well-being among emerging adult students, certain directions remain for further investigation. Future studies may benefit from employing larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings and to capture a wider range of student experiences across different contexts.

Studies may also explore gender-based differences in self-esteem and psychological well-being across living arrangements to examine whether male and female students benefit differently from independent or family-based living or compare undergraduate and postgraduate students to understand whether academic level influences the relationship between living status and psychological outcomes.

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Additionally, examining rural–urban differences, patterns of internal migration (such as rural-to-urban or urban-to-urban migration), and the distance from home or frequency of returning home may provide deeper insight into how relocation experiences affect students' well-being and self-esteem. Further research can investigate whether perceived social support from peers contributes to the higher psychological well-being observed among independent-living students, and whether emotional security within family settings buffers stress among family-based living students. Socioeconomic status and family background may also be important variables to consider, as financial capacity can influence the choice or necessity of independent living. Moreover, factors such as daily commuting stress, long travel hours, and reliance on crowded public transportation among family-based living students could be examined to understand their potential impact on psychological well-being and self-esteem.

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Conflict of Interest

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