

Research Paper

Exploring the Relationship between Emotional Self-Disclosure and Psychological Well-Being among Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted over a period of twelve months during the 2023-2024 academic year, with data collected exclusively from undergraduate students in the Ludhiana district of Punjab, India. The primary objective was to examine emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being with respect to gender and locale-based differences among undergraduate students. The sample comprised 380 undergraduate students, including 190 rural and 190 urban setting, randomly selected from five representative rural and urban colleges of the district. The sample was further equally distributed across gender, with 95 boys and 95 girls participants from each locale. Data was collected by using a Self-Structured Information Sheet, the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale by Snell *et al* (2013), and the Psychological Well-Being Scale by Sisodia and Choudhary (2012). Findings indicated a significant negative relationship between emotional self-disclosure and the domains of life satisfaction and efficiency among boys. In contrast, girls demonstrated a significant positive relationship between emotional self-disclosure and the domains of sociability and interpersonal relations. Additionally, a significant positive relationship was observed between overall emotional self-disclosure and overall psychological well-being among girls, suggesting that greater emotional disclosure was associated with enhanced psychological well-being. Locale-wise analysis revealed that overall emotional self-disclosure was significantly and negatively associated with life satisfaction and efficiency among rural students. Contrary, among urban students, overall emotional self-disclosure was significantly and positively associated with interpersonal relations. However, no significant differences were observed between overall emotional self-disclosure and overall psychological well-being across locales.

Keywords: Gender, Locale, Life Satisfaction, Efficiency, Sociability, Interpersonal Relation

The process of self-disclosure is cyclical. When someone self-discloses, the recipient reacts, and the original discloser takes the response into consideration. The recipient's understanding and response to the disclosure are important aspects of the process. A portion of the response is based on the recipient's explanation for the disclosure, which may include situational, interpersonal, and dispositional explanations (Jiang *et al* 2011). Sharing personal information, according to Crowley (2019), is essential for building and maintaining

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relationships because it allows the development of intimacy, trust, and proximity. According to West and Turner (2010), self-disclosure is an indication of the degree of love and trust in a relationship as well as the sincerity of the expression. The recipient feels appreciated and socially rewarded when someone opens up. Additionally, when it comes to self-disclosure, sincerity is defined as a profound level of communication in which the sender shares his intimate details.

Emotions are strong human reactions to a range of circumstances that affect our thoughts, actions, and experiences. Emotions as defined by the American Psychological Association (APA 2022) are a complex reaction that includes behavioural, psychological, and experiential components. Emotions play a part in treating mental illness in adults and children, according to Pollak (2009).

Furthermore, according to Aldahadha (2023), self-disclosure is a characteristic that separates happy people from sad ones and is also a characteristic of healthy and bad relationships. Baumeister and Leary (1995) looked upon the fact that people might listen to emotional self-disclosure since it helps both the speaker and listener to feel closer. They are inclined to listen to emotional self-disclosure to satisfy the need of psychological belongingness which is otherwise threatened.

In examining psychological well-being, Sisodia and Choudhary (2012) conceptualize it as a subjective state encompassing happiness, life satisfaction, and contentment with one's experiences, alongside a sense of accomplishment, belongingness, meaningful work, and absence of distress. Likewise, Diener (2000) highlighted the significance of subjective well-being, defining it as a state marked by feelings of contentment, predominance of positive emotions, and a relative absence of negative emotions.

Psychological well-being may be understood as both feeling good and functioning effectively. It reflects an individual's level of happiness, life satisfaction, and sense of accomplishment, as described by Huppert (2009). Broadly, it encompasses overall happiness, life satisfaction, and mental as well as emotional wellness, making it a complex and multidimensional construct. Its essential elements include positive emotions, autonomy, fulfilling relationships, low levels of negative emotions, a sense of purpose, contentment with one's circumstances, and opportunities for personal growth, as highlighted by Dhanabhakyaam and Sarath (2022).

Thus, openness to emotional self-disclosure plays a vital role in fostering trust and strengthening interpersonal bonds. It goes beyond simply revealing secrets or vulnerabilities, it also involves expressing fears and addressing psychological struggles that often weigh individuals down. Over the past three decades, research has shown that sharing life experiences, whether through conversation or writing, can significantly enhance mental health and reduce negative emotions, as noted by Aldahadha (2023).

The connection between self-disclosure and psychological resilience has also been emphasized, with findings suggesting that disclosure not only reshapes one's thoughts but can also influence personal attributes such as self-esteem and self-compassion, thereby promoting overall psychological health (Harvey and Boynton 2021). Similarly, Chu *et al* (2022) observed that while the amount of self-disclosure did not strongly predict psychological well-being, the honesty and emotional tone of disclosure were moderately and

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positively associated with it. Beyond individual benefits such as reduced stress and improved mental and physical health, self-disclosure has also been linked to attraction and relationship satisfaction in both emerging and established relationships (Derlega *et al* 2009). The above discussion points to the importance of examining the relationship between emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being, yet research on this area among undergraduate students remains limited. Therefore, the present study was undertaken with the objective to explore the relationship between emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being among undergraduate students across their gender and locale.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was designed to examine emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being among undergraduate students. The sample was drawn from both rural and urban colleges of the Ludhiana district. From a compiled list of all 13 blocks in the district, five colleges were randomly selected, resulting in a rural sample of 190 students (Sanmati Government College of Science Education and Research, Jagraon; A.S. College, Khanna; Govind National College, Narangwal; Government College, Karamsar, Rara Sahib; and GHG Khalsa College of Education, Sudhar). Likewise, a list of colleges across the four zones of Ludhiana city was prepared, from which five urban colleges were randomly chosen, yielding a sample of 190 urban students (Government College for Girls, Ludhiana; College of Basic Science, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana; Khalsa College for Women, Ludhiana; S.C.D. Government College, Ludhiana; and GGN Khalsa College, Ludhiana). The final sample thus comprised 380 undergraduate students, with an equal gender distribution of 95 boys and 95 girls in both rural and urban categories. Permission to interact with students was obtained by contacting the principals of the respective colleges.

Socio-personal characteristics of the students were gathered using a self-structured information sheet, emotional self-disclosure was assessed using the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale by Snell *et al* (2013) and psychological well-being was assessed by using Psychological Well-Being Scale developed by Sisodia and Choudhary (2012). The tools were pre-tested on a group of 20 non-sampled respondents. The data were analyzed using statistical methods, specifically Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Relationship of Emotional Self-Disclosure and Psychological Well-Being among Undergraduate Students

1. Relationship between emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being among undergraduate students across their gender

Analysed data presented in table 1 discloses the correlation between emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being among girls and boys. The data revealed that in girls, depression disclosure had negative and significant correlation with overall psychological well-being ($r=-0.23$ $p<0.01$). Further, domain of sociability ($r=-0.16$, $p<0.05$) and interpersonal relations ($r=-0.28$, $p<0.05$) also depicted negative and significant relation with depression emotion disclosure. Whereas, among boys the depression disclosure had negative and significant relation with efficiency ($r=-0.23$, $p<0.01$) only. However, non-significant difference was found between happiness disclosure and under all the domains of psychological well-being among girls but among boys positive and significant relation was found with life satisfaction ($r=0.17$, $p<0.01$) and with efficiency ($r=0.19$, $p<0.01$).

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Furthermore, in case of jealousy disclosure, girls had positive and significant correlation with interpersonal relations ($r=0.17$, $p<0.05$) and with overall psychological well-being ($r=0.15$, $p<0.05$). But among boys, jealousy disclosure had negative and significant relation with life satisfaction ($r=-0.15$, $p<0.05$) and with efficiency ($r=-0.16$, $p<0.05$). Likewise, in anxiety disclosure, girls had positive and significant relation with sociability ($r=0.14$, $p<0.05$), interpersonal relations ($r=0.28$, $p<0.05$) and with overall psychological well-being ($r=0.15$, $p<0.05$). Whereas, negative and significant relation was found with life satisfaction ($r=-0.17$, $p<0.05$), with efficiency ($r=-0.23$, $p<0.01$) and with overall psychological well-being ($r=-0.15$, $p<0.05$) of boys. In case of anger disclosure domain among girls, negative and significant relation was found only with the domain of life satisfaction ($r=-0.14$, $p<0.05$) while other domains had non-significant relation. Whereas, among boys negative and significant relation was found between anger disclosure and efficiency ($r=-0.26$, $p<0.01$). However, in the calmness disclosure, girls had positive and significant relation with efficiency ($r=0.15$, $p<0.05$) and interpersonal relations ($r=0.17$, $p<0.05$). Calmness disclosure also had positive and significant relation with overall psychological well-being ($r=0.19$, $p<0.01$). However, among boys calmness disclosure had negative relation with efficiency ($r=-0.18$, $p<0.05$). Further, apathy disclosure of girls had positive and significant relation with the domain of sociability ($r=0.20$, $p<0.05$) and interpersonal relation ($r=0.19$, $p<0.01$). However, with overall psychological well-being, apathy had positive and significant relation ($r=0.21$, $p<0.01$). In the apathy disclosure of boys, negative and significant relation was found with efficiency ($r=-0.20$, $p<0.01$) only. In the domain of fear disclosure of girls, positive and significant relations were found with sociability ($r=0.15$, $p<0.05$) and with interpersonal relations ($r=0.22$, $p<0.01$) but among boys, fear disclosure had negative and significant relation with efficiency ($r=-0.28$, $p<0.01$) and life satisfaction ($r=-0.15$, $p<0.05$). For the overall emotional self-disclosure of undergraduate girls' data depicted positive and significant correlation with sociability ($r=0.18$, $p<0.01$) and with interpersonal relations ($r=0.29$, $p<0.01$), with overall psychological well-being ($r=0.22$, $p<0.01$). But among boys, overall emotional self-disclosure had negative and significant relation with life satisfaction ($r=-0.16$, $p<0.05$) and with efficiency ($r=-0.27$, $p<0.01$).

In similar way, Kovan (2023) also added that jealousy disclosure on social media has a negative correlation with life satisfaction. Finkel *et al* (2006) further added that boys who typically showed impairments in other goal-directed acts when they concentrated on hiding their fear or managing their impressions which decreases their capacity to maintain self-control over time. Thus, reducing their life-satisfaction.

In the line of the findings, Oswald and Proto (2009), discovered in their findings a favourable correlation between productivity and happiness in people. Muris (2002) demonstrated that high levels of trait anxiety/neuroticism, symptoms of anxiety disorders, and depressive symptoms and lack of their expression were typically associated with low levels of self-efficacy. Siep *et al* (2018) found that disclosing anger can have a negative impact on boys performance, provoking anger in male decreases their emotional control and decision-making. This disrupted connection can impair cognitive skills and decrease efficiency in tasks requiring emotional regulation and focus. Jia and Yue (2023), also stated that student's self-efficacy was a direct and negative predictor of fear of earning a low grade. As a result, fear was impacted by self-efficacy as negative feedback leads to decrease in self-efficiency. The findings are further justified by Djundeva and Keizer (2021), who discovered that self-disclosure is vital for relationship fulfilment, but men frequently feel

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more guarded and less motivated to reveal their true emotions, which can lead to dissatisfaction if they regard their openness as misaligned with the standards of society.

Table 1: Relationship between emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being among students across their gender

Domains of psychological well-being Domains of emotional self-disclosure	Life Satisfaction		Efficiency		Sociability		Mental Health		Interpersonal relations		Overall psychological well-being	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Disclosure of depression	0.13	-0.10	0.11	-0.23**	-0.16*	-0.003	-0.06	-0.06	-0.28**	0.06	-0.23**	-0.08
Disclosure of happiness	0.06	0.17**	0.08	0.19**	0.10	0.05	-0.003	0.03	0.26	0.09	0.14	-0.04
Disclosure of jealousy	0.06	-0.15*	0.08	-0.16*	0.12	0.02	0.11	-0.03	0.17*	-0.05	0.15*	-0.09
Disclosure of anxiety	0.03	-0.17*	0.01	-0.23**	0.14*	-0.04	0.07	-0.06	0.28**	-0.09	0.15*	-0.15*
Disclosure of anger	-0.14*	-0.14	0.08	-0.26**	0.03	-0.13	0.03	-0.09	0.04	-0.12	0.01	-0.20
Disclosure of calmness	0.11	-0.02	0.15*	-0.18*	0.11	0.14	0.14	0.05	0.17*	0.08	0.19**	0.02
Disclosure of apathy	0.12	-0.10	0.05	-0.20**	0.20**	0.06	0.11	0.006	0.19**	0.03	0.21**	-0.04
Disclosure of fear	0.03	-0.15*	0.07	-0.28**	0.15*	0.03	0.003	-0.05	0.22**	-0.05	0.13	-0.13
Overall emotional self-disclosure	0.07	-0.16*	0.11	-0.27**	0.18**	0.02	0.12	-0.032	0.29**	-0.005	0.22**	-0.11

** Significant at 1% level of significance

*Significant at 5% level of significance

2. Relationship between emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being among students across their locale

The data in table 2 elucidates the relationship of emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being of rural and urban undergraduate students. It was reported that among rural and urban students depression disclosure had negative and significant relation only with interpersonal relations ($r=-0.14$, $p<0.05$ and $r=-0.21$, $p<0.01$) respectively. Further, positive and significant relation was found between happiness disclosure of rural students with life satisfaction ($r=0.15$, $p<0.05$) and with efficiency ($r=0.176$, $p<0.05$). Among urban students alike relation with interpersonal relations ($r=0.28$, $p<0.01$) was reported. Furthermore, jealousy disclosure had negative and significant relation with life satisfaction ($r=-0.15$, $p<0.05$) among rural students but urban students had non-significant relation with jealousy disclosure domain. Along with this, among rural students anxiety disclosure had negative and significant relation with efficiency ($r=-0.15$, $p<0.05$). But among urban students, anxiety disclosure had positive and significant relation with interpersonal relation ($r=0.17$, $p<0.05$). In the domain of anger disclosure among rural students, negative and significant relation was found with life satisfaction ($r=-0.21$, $p<0.01$), with efficiency ($r=-0.27$, $p<0.01$) and with the overall psychological well-being ($r=-0.19$, $p<0.05$). In case of urban students, non-significant relation was found in the domain of anger disclosure. However, calmness and apathy disclosure had non-significant relation among rural students across all the

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domains of psychological well-being. In urban students, calmness disclosure had positive and significant relation with sociability ($r=0.16$, $p<0.05$) and with interpersonal relations ($r=0.21$, $p<0.01$). Further, apathy disclosure had positive and significant relation with sociability ($r=0.14$, $p<0.05$). In the domain of fear disclosure, among rural students, negative and significant relation was found with efficiency ($r=-0.19$, $p<0.01$). Moreover, in fear disclosure of urban students positive and significant relation was found with interpersonal relations ($r=0.24$, $p<0.01$). While, in the overall emotional self-disclosure of rural students, negative and significant relation with life satisfaction ($r=-0.14$, $p<0.05$) and efficiency ($r=-0.19$, $p<0.01$) was found and urban students had positive and significant relation with interpersonal relations ($r=0.23$, $p<0.01$) only.

The findings are in line with Camacho *et al* (2020) who stated that while non-disclosing depression can shield one from prejudice, it can also make it harder to get support from others or seek treatment, which can be a hardship for individuals who choose to stay in the closet. Further, Prizeman *et al* (2024) added that young people can be very particular about whom they are discussing their emotions as they employ secrecy to create a sense of routine, security, and safety. Additionally, no significant relationship with the urban students was found. Additionally, Ojhae and Yadav (2018) also stated that self-disclosure has positive and higher impact on urban students as compared to rural students. Moreover, no significant difference was found between emotional disclosure and sociability among rural students.

Table 2 Relationship between emotional self-disclosure and psychological well-being among students across their locale

Domains of psychological well-being	Life satisfaction		Efficiency		Sociability		Mental health		Interpersonal relations		Overall psychological well-being	
	Rural Students	Urban Students	Rural Students	Urban Students	Rural Students	Urban Students	Rural Students	Urban Students	Rural Students	Urban Students	Rural Students	Urban Students
Disclosure of depression	-0.06	0.05	-0.08	-0.04	0.03	0.11	0.01	0.07	-0.14*	-0.21**	0.01	0.11
Disclosure of happiness	0.15*	0.006	0.17*	-0.06	-0.02	0.12	-0.11	-0.03	0.07	0.28**	-0.10	0.08
Disclosure of jealousy	-0.15*	0.03	-0.13	0.01	0.02	0.09	-0.04	0.06	0.08	0.07	-0.05	0.07
Disclosure of anxiety	-0.13	-0.03	-0.15*	-0.06	0.01	0.07	-0.04	0.04	0.05	0.17*	-0.06	0.05
Disclosure of anger	-0.21**	-0.08	-0.27**	0.03	-0.05	-0.06	-0.12	0.01	-0.08	0.01	-0.19**	-0.02
Disclosure of calmness	0.002	0.05	-0.03	-0.003	0.08	0.16*	0.06	0.07	0.09	0.21**	0.05	0.13

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Disclosure of apathy	-0.006	-0.006	-0.13	-0.02	0.12	0.14*	0.07	0.13	0.10	0.13	0.05	0.10
Disclosure of fear	-0.12	-0.01	-0.19**	-0.05	0.04	0.13	-0.10	-0.01	-0.03	0.24**	-0.11	0.07
Overall emotional self-disclosure	-0.14*	0.001	-0.19**	-0.04	0.03	0.13	-0.05	0.05	0.07	0.23**	-0.07	0.10

** Significant at 1% level of significance

*Significant at 5% level of significance

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the vital role of emotional self-disclosure in shaping psychological well-being among undergraduate students. The findings point to the complexity of this relationship, influenced by individual and contextual factors such as gender and locale. Overall, the research highlights the importance of fostering healthy emotional expression in young adults, as it can contribute to stronger interpersonal connections, improved coping, and better mental health outcomes. These insights carry practical implications for educators, counselors, and policymakers in creating supportive environments that encourage constructive emotional sharing among students. Promoting awareness and acceptance of self-disclosure as a positive practice may further help young adults navigate developmental challenges and build resilience for future life experiences.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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