

Research Paper

Psychological Well-being among Students: A Comparative study of Examination Type and Gender

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ABSTRACT

Competitive entrance examinations like National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) are among the most demanding academic challenges for students in India. The rigorous preparation schedules, and the performance-driven environment, significantly influence students' psychological well-being. The research aimed to compare the psychological well-being of NEET and JEE aspirants. A total of 400 participants (200 NEET aspirants and 200 JEE aspirants), aged 17–20 years, were selected from reputed coaching institutes using a purposive sampling technique. Standardized psychometric tool “Ryff Psychological well-being scale” developed by Carol Ryff (1989) was employed to assess psychological well-being. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics, including t-Test were used to compare psychological well-being between two groups. The results indicated that significant differences in psychological well-being between NEET and JEE aspirants were found, and no difference was found in relation to gender. The outcomes of this research aim to guide the development of preventive strategies, mental health interventions, and resilience-building programs for students preparing for high-stakes competitive examinations.

Keywords: *Students, Academic Stress, Competitive Examination, Psychological Well-Being, Mental Health Intervention*

In recent years, growing academic pressure and competitive environments have significantly influenced the mental health of students, particularly those preparing for competitive examinations (Gupta & Pandit, 2024). The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is a medical entrance exam for candidates aspiring to get admitted into medical institutions to study courses such as MBBS, BDS, BHMS and BUMS in government and private medical institutes of the nation. Similarly, the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) is an engineering entrance test taken for admission in Indian engineering colleges. It consists of two different exams the JEE main and the JEE advanced (National Testing Agency [NTA], 2024). These examinations are very demanding with much anticipation from students, their families, and society at large (Biswas & Maji, 2026). To clear the exam intense preparation is required and that may affect students' psychological

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well-being. Psychological well-being is about a person's mental functioning and satisfaction towards life.

One of the widely accepted models of psychological well-being by Carol D. Ryff, researcher and psychologist that is "Six-factor model of psychological well-Being." This model comprises autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Autonomy is about the degree of freedom and ability to make independent decisions and having a positive attitude towards oneself and can manage social pressure. Environmental Mastery refers to managing environment efficiently and can handle the social pressure. This includes managing challenges and maintaining control over one's environment. Personal growth depicts individual ongoing commitment to development and improvement. Openness to experiences, desire for growth and, self-realization are the three key elements. Positive Relations with Others focuses on how well a person can maintain and sustain relation with other individuals. The relationships depend on a different factors, including empathy and compassion as well as a growing feeling of social connection. Purpose in life indicates the one who is having goals, sense of direction and meaning in life. Self-acceptance is defined by being aware about characteristics of an individual such as self-image, self-esteem and have a strong feeling of self-worth. Also being aware about the personal strength and weakness. Although several studies have been done on psychological well-being, limited literature has been found regarding NEET and JEE aspirants. Additionally, gender differences in this context remain underexplored. In context of competitive examination, academic stress has affected students' mental health. A comparative study by Gupta et al. (2025) on suicide related pattern within Indian institutes of technology joint entrance examination and national eligibility cum entrance test aspirants and results concluded that most suicides associated with students aged 15-20 years, preparing for NEET exam. Furthermore Sharma (2025) examined the psychological impact of highly competitive exam, focusing pressure of NEET/JEE affects student's mental health and overall well-being and it was revealed that academic stress directly influences mental health as stress explaining 31.1% of the variation. It was also concluded that the 18–19-year-olds males and younger age group face more stress and showed poorer mental health comparatively. Another study on psychological well-being in the context of gender done by Borah and PM (2024) among secondary students and findings of the study indicated there was difference in psychological Well-being as girls reported better psychological wellbeing similarly a study by Kumari & Singh (2022) on the undergraduate and findings of the study showed that there was gender based difference were observed across 5 dimensions such as environmental Mastery, autonomy, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life, and no meaningful difference was identified in self - acceptance. In contrast another study by Moghe & Misra (2024) has done on students of university and results showed that no difference was found in psychological well-being across gender. Although previous studies explored psychological wellbeing but in context of competitive examination compared NEET and JEE aspirants limited research has been found. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap.

Objective

- To compare the psychological well-being of NEET and JEE aspirants.
- To assess the psychological well-being between male and female students.

Hypotheses

- **H₀₁:** There is no difference in psychological well-being between NEET and JEE aspirants.

- **H₀₂:** There is no difference in psychological well-being between male and female students.

METHOD

Sample

The research included a sample of 400 students aged 17 to 20 years. The sample comprised 200 NEET aspirants and 200 JEE aspirants, studying in coaching institutes. Among the respondents 220 were male and 180 were female. To select the participants, purposive sampling technique was used.

Criteria for inclusion:

- Students preparing for NEET and JEE examination and attending classes regularly.
- Working knowledge of English.

Criteria of exclusion:

- Incomplete and invalid questionnaire responses.

Measure:

- **Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff, 2014)** The scale consists of 42 items, seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree which has 6 dimensions autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Responses are recorded and reverse scoring applied for negative worded items. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale which is the measure of internal consistency is 0.817, indicating good internal consistency.

Procedure

Firstly, informed consent was obtained from the coaching institution and students to collect the data. The sample was selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The psychological well-being scale was administered individually in a random order and confidentiality was ensured. After that the responses were collected and scored accordingly.

- **Statistical Analysis:** Statistical method, including mean, standard deviation, and t-test were used to analyse the data.

RESULTS

Table 1 Differences in Psychological Well-Being Between NEET and JEE Aspirants

Exam-Type	M	SD	t	p
JEE	173	25.07	2.42	.02
NEET	167.26	24.2		

The result in table 1 indicated that JEE aspirants scored higher in overall psychological well-being (M=173) compared to NEET aspirants (M=167.26) and this difference was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) thus the null hypothesis (H₁) was rejected. This indicated that JEE aspirants have better overall psychological wellbeing than NEET aspirants.

Table 2 Comparison of the Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being Between NEET and JEE Aspirants

Dimensions	JEE		NEET		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Autonomy	28.94	6.14	27.47	6.1	2.53	.01
Environmental Mastery	26.39	5.1	25.28	5.18	2.26	.02
Personal Growth	31.06	5.21	30	5.52	2.06	.04
Positive Relations with Others	28.4	6.3	27.72	5.91	1.15	.25
Purpose in Life	30.54	5.62	30.22	5.81	0.58	.56
Self- Acceptance	27.68	6.69	26.56	7.04	1.72	.09

The comparison of psychological well-being between IIT-JEE and NEET aspirants showed differences across the dimensions. In Autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth significant difference was found. JEE aspirants scored higher than NEET aspirants in autonomy ($M=28.94$, $SD=6.14 > M=27.47$, $SD=6.10$), environmental mastery ($M=26.39$, $SD=5.10 > M=25.28$, $SD=5.18$) and personal growth ($M=31.06$, $SD=5.21 > M=30.00$, $SD=5.52$). In contrast, dimension of positive relation with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance did not show a significant difference between NEET and JEE aspirants.

Table 3 Differences in Psychological Well-Being Between Male and Female Aspirants

Gender	M	SD	t	p
Male	171.43	26.1	1.47	.14
Female	167.94	23.35		

The result of the study showed that male aspirants ($M=171.43$, $SD=26.10$) scored slightly higher in overall psychological well-being compared to female aspirants ($M=167.94$, $SD=23.35$). However, this difference was found to be statistically non-significant ($p > 0.05$); hence, the null hypothesis (H_2) was accepted. This indicated that both groups have same levels of psychological well-being.

Table 4 Comparison of the Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being Between Male and Female Aspirants

Dimensions	Male		Female		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Autonomy	28.7	6.12	27.41	6.15	2.18	.03
Environmental Mastery	26.49	5.2	24.83	4.98	3.4	< .001
Personal Growth	30.87	5.34	29.99	5.44	1.69	.09
Positive Relations with Others	27.49	6.43	28.83	5.51	2.35	.02
Purpose in Life	30.2	6.08	30.61	5.17	0.73	.45
Self- Acceptance	27.68	6.85	26.27	6.88	2.12	.03

The results showed that males reported significantly higher than females in autonomy, ($M = 28.70$, $SD = 6.12 > M = 27.41$, $SD = 6.15$), environmental mastery ($M=26.49$, $SD = 5.20 > M = 24.83$, $SD = 4.98$) and self-acceptance ($M=27.68$, $SD=6.85 > M=26.27$, $SD=6.88$). For Positive Relations with Others, females ($M = 28.83$, $SD = 5.51$) scored significantly higher

than males ($M = 27.49$, $SD = 6.43$). In contrast, no significant gender difference was found in Personal Growth and Purpose in Life.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study examines the psychological wellbeing among NEET and JEE aspirants and to assess gender differences. Results indicated that JEE aspirants scored significantly higher in psychological wellbeing in comparison to NEET aspirants. One possible explanation for the findings could be that there are more career pathways for JEE aspirants including IITs, NITs, BITS and other private and state engineering colleges whereas NEET aspirants have only one exam to pursue MBBS. In NEET exam there is more competition than JEE exam as number of students appear more in NEET exams. JEE aspirants scored higher in autonomy, environmental mastery and personal growth in comparison to NEET aspirants, this suggests that JEE aspirants may have comparatively good ability to make independent decision and also have good ability to manage daily tasks, solve difficulties, take charge of their surroundings and gives better commitment to continuous improvement. The difference could be due to nature of the exam as preparation for JEE exam based on more problem-solving subject including maths and more conceptual and less rote compared to NEET examination. NEET preparation requires memory-based learning including biology. However, no significant differences were found in purpose of life, self-acceptance and positive relation with others this suggests that both the group have particular goals and purpose in life. Students maintain positive relation with others and no difference in terms of self-image and self-esteem across exam type. NEET and JEE aspirants' lower psychological wellbeing indicates psychological distress and these findings are consistent with previous research. For instance, a comparative study was done on NEET and JEE aspirants in terms of mental health concern and result showed that depressive symptoms, suicidal tendencies occurred in 15 to 20 age group preparing for NEET exam (Gupta et al., 2025). Another study was done on medical and engineering students to assess psychological distress and study showed medical student were more prone to stress (Imaan et al., 2024).

Lastly, the study compared psychological wellbeing across gender and no difference was found in overall psychological wellbeing, which implies both the group including male and female student experience comparable level of psychological wellbeing in context of competitive exam preparation. Both groups attributes similar level of exam demands, performance pressure and environmental expectation. These findings align with previous research where no difference was found in psychological wellbeing across gender (Moghe and Misra, 2024; Vainio and Daukantaite, 2016). Although significant difference was found in relation to some of the psychological dimensions as autonomy, environmental mastery and self-acceptance reported higher in male students compared to female students. These findings could be because of different social and environmental differences, as males experience relatively more independence and environmental exposure this result is consistent with previous study in which difference were found in dimension. (Kumari and Singh, 2022). No difference was found in purpose in life and personal growth as both groups are open to experiences and have goals and purpose in their life.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is subject to certain limitations. It was conducted on NEET and JEE aspirants from a specific geographical area which may reduce the applicability of the findings. Moreover, self-report measures may reflect response bias and also different social background may have influenced the psychological well-being of students. Despite this

limitation the study provides productive insight about psychological well-being of competitive exam aspirants.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the study suggest that NEET and JEE aspirants indicate need for mental health support but NEET aspirants showed comparatively lower psychological wellbeing so intervention programme can be designed accordingly. Since no gender difference were found, so mental health support could be gender- neutral manner. The findings can also assist educators and parents in better way to understand psychological wellbeing of the student.

CONCLUSION

The present study found that JEE aspirants significantly reported higher psychological well-being as compared to NEET aspirants whereas no difference was found in relation to gender. These findings highlight the influence of competitive academic environment on students' wellbeing. This study highlighted the significance of providing psychological support to students.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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