

## Presence and Search for Meaning in Life in College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The major aim of the study was to find out the meaning in life among college students. A total of 60 students; 30 male and 30 female students were selected using non probability purposive sampling technique. The age range of all the subjects was between 18-23 years. All the subjects were assessed on the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) to analyze the meaning in life of both the groups of students. Descriptive analysis of the data was done to obtain Mean and Standard Deviation. Independent sample t-test was used to find out the significant difference between the performance of boys and girls on different dimensions of meaning in life.

The findings of the study revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female college students on the dimensions of presence and search meaning in life. The study concluded that there is no gender differences on meaning in life.

*Keywords: Meaning in life, College students*

The meaning in life is considered to be an important part to well-being throughout the human life. Over the past forty years, research has attempted to understand and define the concept of meaning in life. A variety of definitions of meaning in life have been proposed but all theories agree that meaning in life is an important factor which contributes to well-being. Studies have endeavored to identify what gives meaning to life, to whether having meaning in life brings positive returns and to what life is like without meaning. Factors such as being in a stable relationship, having experienced a loss or being involved in a religion, have been suggested as possible influences on how individuals experience meaning in life and why they may search for meaning.

Throughout several areas of research and practice, the issue surrounding the meaning of life and meaning within life is essential to fulfilled individuals (Steger, 2009; Wong, 2009). Meaninglessness in life has been proposed to be akin to the existential fear of death. Researchers argue that when one is faced with meaninglessness, one can encounter several negative

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experiences. Thus, researchers would argue that the search for meaning and purpose is more relevant than the search for happiness (Wong, 2009). Researchers also argue that not only should we be measuring meaning in life but the structural properties of personal meaning systems, such as 'differentiation (how diverse the sources of meaning are), elaboration (how people construct their own links and connections between events to give life purpose) and coherence (how well do all the features fit together) measures (Pohlmann et al., 2006). These measures enhance mental and physical health or wellbeing and predict life satisfaction (Pohlmann et al., 2006).

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Singh et al (2014) initiated a study on "Meaning in Life as a correlate of Mental Health". This study investigated the associations between mental health (which was measured in terms of emotional, psychological and social well-being) and meaning in life. A sample of 100 boys and girls in the age range of 18-21years was taken. Two measures namely Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF) and Meaning in Life questionnaire (MLQ) was administered. Results indicate a significant positive correlation between mental health and presence of meaning. However, no significant relationship was found with search for meaning.

Santos et al., (2012) initiated a research study on "Meaning in life and subjective well – being: Is a satisfying life meaningful?". The aim of the study was to determine the relationship of meaning in life and subjective well-being among Filipino college students. The results of the study showed that meaning in life and subjective well-being had a significant positive relationship. A better understanding of the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being has implications relative to developing and achieving a greater sense of happiness and satisfaction in living.

Dogan et al (2012) conducted a research study on "Meaning in Life and Subjective Well-Being among Turkish University Students". The finding of the study revealed that presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life significantly predict subjective wellbeing. According to regression analysis, meaning in life accounts for 34% of the variance within subjective wellbeing.

Steger et al. (2009) reported that in a group of smoking cessation patients, those people with higher Search scores tended to describe greater degrees of anxiety and poorer health, although those with higher Search scores who also had higher Presence scores did not demonstrate this association. Thus, the interaction and systematic study of presence and search for meaning is a worthwhile empirical endeavor (Park et al., 2010; Steger & Kashdan, 2007; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008; Steger, Kawabata, et al., 2008).

Rathi and Rastogi (2007) initiated a study on "Meaning in Life and Psychological Well-Being in Pre-Adolescents and Adolescents". The aim of the study was to examined meaning in life and

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psychological well-being in male and female students of pre- adolescence and adolescence periods. The study found that adolescents did not score significantly higher rather than pre-adolescents on the sub-tests of personal Meaning Production (PMP) and Well Being Manifestation Measure Scale (WBMMS). On the other hand, female students achieved high scored rather than male students on the sub tests of Personal Meaning Production (PMP).

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Aim*

The aim of the study was to find out the meaning in life among college students.

#### *Objectives*

1. To assess the presence for meaning in life among college students.
2. To assess the search for meaning in life among college students.

#### *Hypothesis*

1. There is no significant difference between male and female college students on presence for meaning in life.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female college students on search for meaning in life.
3. There is no significant difference between male and female college students on composite score of meaning in life.

#### *Research Design*

It is a comparative study between two independent groups; male and female college students.

#### *Sample*

A total sample of 60 subjects were taken for this study. The sample comprises of 30 male and 30 female college students. The age range of the subjects were between 18 - 23 years. In this study, non probability purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample from the population. The data was collected from Jaipur city.

#### *Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria Were As Follows:*

##### **Inclusion Criteria:-**

- Healthy subjects in the age range of 18 - 23 years.
- Subjects who were cooperative.

##### **Exclusion criteria:-**

- Subjects who were below or above 18 and 23 years of age.
- Subjects with some major physical, organic and psychiatric illness
- Subjects who were illiterate and had poor understanding of basic English.
- Subjects unwilling to participate in the study.

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### Tools

- **Socio demographic datasheet** was prepared by the investigator for collecting information about Name, Age, Sex, and Education.
- **Informed consent form:** Informed consent was taken from all the subjects included in the study. The subjects were assured about the confidentiality of their responses.
- **Meaning in Life Questionnaire** - The Meaning in Life Questionnaire assesses two dimensions of meaning in life i.e. presence and search for meaning in life. The Presence of Meaning subscale measures the how full respondents feel their lives are of meaning and the Search for Meaning subscale measures how engaged and motivated respondents are in efforts to find meaning or deepen their understanding of meaning in their lives.

### Procedure

All the subjects were selected following the inclusion-exclusion criteria and informed consent was taken to participate in the present study. Meaning in life were administered on all subjects.

### Statistical Analysis

Descriptive analysis of the data was done by using mean and standard deviation. SPSS software 16 (version) was used for analyzing the data.

## RESULTS

*Table 1: Socio-demographic details of male and female college students*

Variable	Male Students (n=30)		Female students (n=30)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Age	19.63	1.35	20.63	1.40
Yrs of Education	13.86	0.81	13.96	0.76

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic details of male and female college students. It shows the Mean and Standard Deviation of male and female college students on general characteristics including age, number of years of education. The descriptive analysis revealed that the Mean age of male students was  $19.63 \pm 1.35$  and female students was  $20.63 \pm 1.40$ . It also shows the Mean and S.D of male and female students of educational years was  $13.86 \pm 0.81$  and  $13.96 \pm 0.76$  respectively.

*Table 2: Comparison of male and female college students on overall Meaning in life*

Variable	Male Students		Female students	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Meaning in Life	50.86	8.92	50.86	7.18

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Table 2 shows the comparison of mean scores of male and female college students on composite score of meaning in life. As can be seen from this table, there is no significant difference between male and female students on overall meaning in life.

**Table 3: Comparison of male and female college students on different dimensions of Meaning in life**

S. No	Meaning in Life Dimension	Male students(n=30)	Female Students(n=30)
		Mean $\pm$ S.D.	Mean $\pm$ S.D.
1	Presence of meaning	25.66(5.43)	26.60(5.71)
2	Search for meaning	25.20(7.42)	24.26(7.40)

Table 3 shows the comparison of mean scores of male and female college students on different dimensions of meaning in life. As can be seen from this table, there is no significant difference between male and female students on presence of meaning and search for meaning.

## DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed that socio demographic details of all the subjects. In the present study, total samples of 60 subjects were taken. The sample consists of two groups. Both the groups were matched according to age and gender. The first group included 30 male and another group included 30 female students. The age range of the present study was kept between 18 -23 years. In the context of education, all the subjects who were studying in colleges taken place. As all the subjects were selected from Jaipur City.

The results obtained by all the subjects on Meaning in Life are summarized in Table 2. Meaning in Life developed by Steger et. al (2006) was used to measure presence of meaning (how much respondents feel their lives have meaning), and Search for Meaning (how much respondents strive to find meaning and understanding in their lives) among adolescents. It was found that in all the dimensions all the subjects had given same number of responses in the test.

Table 3 described the different dimensions of meaning in life of all the subjects. In the presence of meaning as well as search for meaning in life, both the group had equal number of total scores.

Table 4 revealed the comparison between both the groups which showed no significant difference between male and female students on overall meaning in life.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female college students on their presence and search for meaning in life.

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### *Conflict of Interests*

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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