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MENTAL WELL-BEING STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS DURING THE LOCKDOWN PERIOD INDUCED BY COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019) outbreak has taken a toll not only on the physical health of the people but also on the mental health due to the two-year long lockdown. Coping with the 'new normal' reality is difficult for all age groups but particularly for the young adults. In this trying time, nurturing positive mental health is very important. The present study seeks to explore mental well-being of students across gender (male and female), academic discipline (arts and science) and level of education (undergraduate, post-graduate and B.Ed.) by using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). The study comprises of 3125 samples within 18 to 25 years of age. Data were collected from October to December in 2021. The findings noted significant differences in mental well-being of students according to their gender and academic discipline.

Keywords: Mental well-being, academic discipline, level of education

Introduction

Mental well-being is a key component of the overall mental health of a person. The role and importance of mental well-being is of immense importance in the overall mental development of a person as it is related to the feeling of self-esteem, empowerment, sense of achievement and resilience **(Zarobe & Bungay, 2017).** Hence, the components of mental well-being are not only intrinsic but also extrinsic, in fact, a combination of both. The feeling of self-esteem, security and belongingness comprise the intrinsic factors of mental well-being while the attachment and relationship with the family, friends and at large, with the community constitute the extrinsic factors of mental wellbeing **(Zarobe & Bungay, 2017).**Though there is no concrete definition for mental wellbeing, but researchers like **Rose *et al.* (2017), Baldwin, Sinclair & Simons (2021)** have strained to add different aspects and indicators like feeling, thinking, functioning etc. to the term mental well-being. According to **Waghmare (2016)**, well-being is related to the positive factors of the

functioning of an individual. In contemporary times, different studies **(Wang *et al.* 2020)** have proved that the pandemic situation induced by COVID -19 has triggered a feeling of insecurity, anxiety and depression among the general mass which is detrimental for the general quality of life as enhanced mental well-being is positively associated with improved quality of life **(Thieme *et al.*, 2015)**. Like the definition, Measurement of mental well-being is also a complex idea as it includes one's self-evaluation about oneself.

The study possesses great relevance even today as some countries are still battling with COVID-19 and have been compelled to impose localised lockdowns, mass testing and other curbs (Times of India, 2022). Hence, a large number of global population is forced to stay locked behind the doors due to zero-Covid policy and their financial and mental well-being is worsening day by day.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows-

i. To find out the status of mental well-being of students due to lockdown according to their gender.
ii. To find out the status of mental well-being of students due to lockdown according to their academic discipline.
iii. To find out the status of mental well-being of students due to lockdown according to their level of education.

Hypotheses:

$H_0$1 -There is no significant difference between male and female students in their mental well-being in lockdown period.

$H_0$2 -There is no significant difference between male and female students in their feelings in lockdown period.

$H_0$3 –There is no significant difference between male and female students in their thinking in lockdown period.

$H_0$4 –There is no significant difference between science and arts students in their mental well-being in lockdown period.

$H_0$5 –There is no significant difference between science and arts students in their thinking in lockdown period.

$H_0$6 –There is no significant difference between science and arts students in their feeling in lockdown period.

$H_0$7–There is no significant difference between undergraduate, post-graduate and B.Ed. students in their mental well-being.

$H_0$8–There is no significant difference between undergraduate, post-graduate and B.Ed. students in their thinking in lockdown period.

$H_0$9–There is no significant difference between undergraduate, post-graduate and B.Ed. students in their feeling in lockdown period.

Review of Related Literature:

For this particular research article, different articles related to the gender difference in mental well-being were studied. Mental well-being is as important as physical well-being for individuals to utilise their full potentials in order to achieve self-dependence and self-actualisation. In this context, to ensure equal opportunities and to empower all individuals gender studies are of immense importance **(Roothman, Kristen & Wissing, 2003)**. Different studies found contradictory results regarding different aspects of well-being. While studies by **Stephens *et al.* (1999)** found marked gender differences in mental health but **Joshi (2010)**, **Kotar (2013**) found no significant gender differences in subjective well-being and psychological well-being respectively. Again, studies established inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between academic disciplines and mental well-being.Different studies like **Pant & Srivastava (2019)** found that academic disciplines like arts/humanities and science do not exert significant influence upon the mental well-being of the students while **Beri & Jain (2016)** found significant difference in the general well-being of students based on their academic streams. On the other hand, **Zarobe & Bungay (2017)** explicitly explained the effects of creative activities and education on mental well-being of children. Positive correlation between individual's educational attainment and mental health has been well documented by **Zhang *et al*. (2011)**.

Sample and Sampling Procedure:

Simple random sampling was employed for data collection. The total number of samples was 3125 comprising students from 18 to 25 years of age, studying arts and science streams in undergraduate and post-graduate sections of different colleges of North 24 Parganas and also the trainee teachers of B.Ed. programme were included. Data were collected from October to December in 2021.

Tools

(a) A General Information Schedule (GIS) was employed to collect demographic (age, gender) and education-related information (arts/science; undergraduate, post-graduate or B.Ed.).

(b) The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was employed to collect data on the mental well-being of the students. It is a 14-item positively-worded scale in which each item can be answered on a 1 to 5 Likert scale. Hence, the scoring can vary from a minimum of 14 to a maximum of 70.The WEMWBS has been categorized into the two dimensions of thinking and feeling.
Though it is standardized, the researchers locally standardized this tool.

Reliability: The reliability of this tool was measured to be 0.89 in Cronbach's Alpha.

Norm:

More Positive Mental Well-being	Highest 27% of the scores
Average Mental Well-being	Middle 46% of the score
Less Positive Mental Well-being	Lowest 27% of the score

Data Analysis

Data were analysed with the help of Microsoft Excel Office 2019 and SPSS software (20.0 version).

Definition of Operational Terms

Mental Well-being– Mental well-being of an individual encompasses his/her thinking, feeling, the act of controlling emotions, actions and overall functioning.

Arts/Humanities- Arts/Humanities include all the branches of knowledge which devote themselves in studying human being. Broadly, it can be said that this group of disciplines study, analyse and evaluate human beings, their creation, culture etc.

Science–Those branches of knowledge which deal with the reality and attempt to reason different phenomena happening over the earth surface and the universe.

Undergraduate– It is related to post-secondary education in a college or university or any other kind of educational institute. After completion of it, the students generally receive a bachelor's degree.

Post-graduate - A part of higher education which is generally attained by the students after completing the bachelor's degree.

B.Ed.–A professional course (Bachelor of Education) to pursue teaching as a profession.

Thinking–It is a cognitive function including a number of activities like remembering, understanding, reasoning, decision making etc.

Feeling–It is a subjective experience related to individual and purely based on individual perception of a situation.

Results and Interpretation

The results focused separately on the mental well-being of undergraduate, post-graduate and B.Ed. students based on three categorical variables of gender (male and female), academic discipline (Arts and Science) and level of education (Undergraduate, Post-graduate and B.Ed.). It has been observed from the study that about 5% students suffer from less positive mental well-being whereas 52% are in moderate condition and 43% students possess more positive mental well-being during the lockdown period.

Testing of Null Hypotheses

Table 1: Mental well-being of students according to gender

Dimensions	Gender	Mean	t-value	p
Dimension of feeling	Male	32.75	-2.20	0.03*
	Female	33.46		
Dimension of thinking	Male	19.29	-1.68	0.09
	Female	19.59		
Mental Well-being	Male	52.04	-2.10	0.04*
	Female	53.05		

*= Significant at 0.05 level

Table 1 represents the mental well-being status of students according to gender. Here, for the dimension of feeling, the p value is 0.03 ($p<0.05$). Hence, it can be said that male and female students differ significantly in their feeling regarding mental well-being. For the dimension of thinking, it can be concluded that male and female students do not differ significantly (p value0.09; $p>0.05$) in their thoughts. As the p value for overall mental well-being status of students is 0.04 ($p<0.05$), hence, it can be concluded that the male and female students differ significantly in their mental well-being.

Table 2: Mental Well-being of students according to academic discipline

Dimensions	Academic Discipline	Mean	t-value	p
Dimension of feeling	Science	30.53	-5.61	0.00*
	Arts	33.46		
Dimension of thinking	Science	18.50	-3.70	0.00*
	Arts	19.57		
Mental Well-being	Science	49.02	-5.13	0.00*
	Arts	53.03		

*= Significant at 0.05 level

Table 2 represents the mental well-being status of students according to their academic disciplines. As the p value for both the dimension of feeling and thinking is 0.00 ($p<0.05$), hence, it can be concluded that the science and arts students significantly differ in their feeling and thinking. The p value for overall mental well-being of students according to their academic discipline is 0.00 ($p<0.05$) which suggests that the science and arts students significantly differ in their mental well-being.

Table 3: Mental well-being of students according to level of education

Dimensions	Level of Education	Mean	F	p
Dimension of feeling	Under graduate	33.26	1.33	0.26
	Post graduate	32.42		
	B.Ed.	32.55		
Dimension of thinking	Undergraduate	19.56	4.89	0.00*
	Post graduate	18.27		
	B.Ed.	19.01		
Mental Well-being	Undergraduate	52.82	2.46	0.08
	Post graduate	50.69		
	B.Ed.	51.56		

Table 3 manifests the mental well-being status of students according to their level of education. Regarding the dimension of feeling, the undergraduate, post-graduate and B.Ed. students do not differ significantly as the p value is 0.26 ($p>0.05$). As the p value for the dimension of thinking is 0.00 ($p<0.05$), therefore, it can be concluded that the undergraduate, post-graduate and B.Ed. students significantly differ in their thinking. The p value for overall mental well-being status is 0.08($p>0.05$) which implies that the students do not differ significantly in their mental well-being status according to their level of education.

Discussion

According to the present study, gender differences can be observed for the dimension of feeling and overall mental well-being of the students. A remarkable finding is that female students have higher mean scores in the dimensions of feeling, thinking and overall mental well-being than the male students and this finding is very much consistent with prior findings **(Perez, 2012).** The probable reason for such a finding may be that due to our societal norms, as girls spend a considerable amount of time at their homes and they generally get used to the situation with ascending ages but generally boys have no restrictions in spending much of the time outside. Therefore, the lockdown and resultant restrictions may have affected the mental well-being of the male students more rigorously.

Regarding academic discipline, the arts students have higher mean scores for the dimensions of feeling, thinking and overall mental well-being status than the science students. Besides, according to academic discipline, the students differ significantly in both the two dimensions and also overall mental well-being and the result is in consistence with other studies **(Suvera, 2013; Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2016)**. This difference may be due to the fact that as arts students study about different aspects of human being and the society, therefore, their understanding about different situations, problem-solving capability, coping ability and capacity of self-evaluation is far better than the science students which are reflected through the mean scores. Besides, science students are generally engaged in laboratory work and learn through the process of

experimentation and due to the prolonged lockdown period, their studies have suffered profusely. Hence, the effects have been reflected through the mean scores and the t-test results.

For level of education, the mean score of undergraduate students is quite higher than that of the post-graduate and B.Ed. students. Descending mean scores (for mental well-being) with higher level of education is a worrisome finding which should not be ignored as studies have proved that undergraduate students' psychological well-being reduces significantly and anxiety and depression increases simultaneously over their course of study **(Bewick *et al.* 2010).** In the present study, according to the level of education, the students differ significantly only for the dimension of thinking. The most probable reason for such a finding may be that mental well-being is a self-reflection technique and with age, individuals generally become mature thinkers as they try to understand a problem or situation differently, attempt to reason it and cope with it more efficiently. Therefore, the students can differ in their thinking according to their level of education. Moreover, the study was conducted at the time of COVID-19 pandemic and the students were affected at emotional, educational, social and at personal levels. With increasing educational attainment, the students' realisation of the situation may have changed which in turn, has been reflected in the dimension of thinking.

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