The Psychological Well-Being of Male and Female Students in Tunisia Using the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract

The paper aimed to identify the nature and most important psychological problems suffered by young university students and to identify gender differences in psychological problems. The objective of this study was to investigate the difference in the psychological well-being of male and female Tunisian undergraduate students. In this research, 300 students (150 male and 150 female students) from three Tunisian universities were included as the study sample. Data was collected using the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being. T-test was used to find the difference in psychological well-being between male and female students. The results of the study showed that there is a significant difference between males and females in all measures of the multiple facets of psychological well-being.

Keywords: *Psychological Well-Being; Personal Development; Self-Acceptance; Autonomy; Tunisia*

1. Introduction

Young people represent a high percentage of the population, and the youth stage is one of the most important stages of human life, in which the gift is embodied. To caring for them is to caring for the future, because the development of nations is based on their youth, as they represent the living forces and renewable energies that can be counted upon to lead the process of change and development of society. The university youth stage is an important phase in the final achievement of individual growth and it is a period in which young people are exposed to radical physical, mental and emotional changes. University life is diverse and different from previous school life. It is characterised by large meetings, free discussion, conferences and seminars, and the ease of information flow through the communications and information revolution, puts in the hands of university youth the keys to a wide cultural supply and imposes on the student a new lifestyle.

Young people may suffer from certain psychological problems in their daily lives, and before these problems develop and prevent them from achieving mental health, they need to be resolved and treated. Paying attention to monitoring the life problems that young people face is the way to identify their psychological needs and thus try to satisfy them. This interest reflects an awareness and a positive perception on the part of researchers in the field of psychological counseling, especially towards this segment of society, given the status it represents.

The university years are characterised by being a period full of fatigue and exhaustion in the life of the university student, and in addition to facing academic and study pressure for consecutive years, it includes feelings of anxiety as a result of being away from the family, separation from the social environment, and the start of an independent life. While another group of students suffers from pressure and double exhaustion when trying to balance between study on the one hand and work pressure on the other hand in order to support themselves and their families at times .Many students at the beginning of their university career are confronted with numerous psychological disorders that can negatively affect their academic success and their ability to comprehend and understand.

Mooney (1950) indicates that university youth need counseling services and the necessary guidance programs so that they can face and solve the problems of their developmental stage, and thus adapt to their new society inside and outside the university campus. University enrolment is an important transitional stage in the lives of adolescents, as the university years represent an important period of psychological and social development. The prevailing university climate plays an important role in the life of an adolescent. There can be numerous factors why students have psychological problems like high stress, loneliness, physical inactivity, drinking, discrimination, poor body image, etc.

A survey of the mental health problems of medical students in the USA revealed that 23% suffered from clinical depression and 57% suffered from psychological stress (Mosely et al 1994). One study revealed that anxiety was present in only 27.5% of adolescents, while 42.4% were identified as having psychological health problems. (Olsson & Kennedy 2010). The differences between the sexes are due to biological and psychological reasons. Life satisfaction is also different for men and women because of their social situation. Gender is an important factor in health (Manandhar et al., 2018), and to improve the health of men and women, it is very important to do gender-based studies. Some researchers have investigated the facts related to the health of women and men. Research has revealed that men have a lower life expectancy than women (Baum et al., 2021) Men have fewer internal disorders than women (Eaton et.al 2012). While men are more prone to external disorders than women and they have a higher suicide rate than women all over the world. (Baum et al., 2021)).

Considering that young people are at the centre of the educational process and the essence of university life, within which a number of scientific, cultural, social and psychological interactions take place, it becomes important to know the psychological problems from which young universities suffer and to know everything related to their vast aspirations and hopes for a better life. The objective of this paper is to study the psychological well-being of male and female university students.The current study derives its importance from the growing importance of young people and the roles they play, the nature of the stage they are going through, the pressures they are exposed to in their relationships with others and the need for the psychological and sociological sciences to analyze the difference in the psychological well-being of male and female students in the Tunisian universities.

The rest of the paper is as follows. The next section. Section 3 introduces the sample, sampling technique and mainly explains the methodology. Section 4 presents and discusses the empirical findings. Lastly, Section 5 provides conclusions and policy implications.

2. Theoretical Context

For many years, authors have defined psychological well-being as the absence of psychological problems (anxiety, depression, etc.). However, following Bradburn's (1969) classic work on the structure of psychological well-being, most researchers have come to consider that the absence of psychological distress does not necessarily correspond to the presence of psychological well-being (Labelle et al., 2000). Thus, a person with a low score on a depression scale does not necessarily feel a state of well-being. Similarly, Jahoda (1958) states that mental health cannot be defined solely by the absence of mental illness. She proposes six criteria that describe psychological health: a positive attitude towards oneself, self-growth and self-actualisation, personality integration, autonomy, an adequate or positive perception of reality and control of one's environment.

According to Bouffard and Lapierre (1997), Diener (1984) and Emmons (1986), psychological well-being is defined as a positive and personal evaluation of one's situation, including a certain amount of life satisfaction, positive affects and a relative absence of negative affects. This multidimensional concept, adopted by a large number of authors (Diener et al., 1999; Feist et al., 1995), is expressed in several indices commonly used in research, namely life satisfaction, self-esteem, meaning in life, self-actualisation, positive affect, morale and vitality, plus the absence of anxiety and depression. Thus, authors who study psychological well-being use a variety of indices to measure it.

In order to define the concept of psychological well-being, Ryff (1989a) carried out a review of the literature on developmental theories (Erickson, Neugarten, Loevinger, etc.), on personal growth (Maslow, Roger, Allport, Jung, etc.) and on mental health (Jahoda, Birren, Renner, etc.). She has developed a theoretical model with six indicators of psychological well-being: autonomy, personal growth, positive relationships with others, meaning in life, self-acceptance and competence. Ryff and Keyes (1995) tested this model with a representative sample of the US population (N=1108) divided into three age groups (young, mature and old). Structural analysis (LISREL) confirmed the convergence of this six-factor model.

In addition, much research has examined the variables that influence psychological well-being. The most consistently found components are age, gender, employment status, ethnicity, income and personality traits. However, Myers and Diener (1997) consider that gender, age and income give little indication of psychological well-being, as it is not so much the fact of being young or older or of being male or female that influences psychological well-being, but rather personality traits, meaning in life, intimate relationships and hope. Researchers are therefore increasingly interested in the impact of culture, work, leisure and personal goals in understanding psychological well-being.

Nevertheless, as Buhler (1968) and Erickson (1959) suggest, some aspects of well-being, such as self-acceptance or autonomy, correspond to developmental tasks that are more frequently performed at an advanced age, whereas other dimensions, such as competence, are more important in the perception of self in maturity (Neugarten, 1973). Sheldon and Kasser (2001) find that chronological age is not associated with positive affect and is weakly related to life satisfaction. However, Ryff and Keyes (1995) comparing 1108 participants in three age groups (young adults aged 25-29, n=133; adults aged 30-64, n=805; and people aged 65 and over, n=160) on six dimensions of psychological well-being, found significant differences between the groups. The older respondents' scores were significantly lower than the other two groups on meaning in life and personal growth. On the other hand, older respondents have significantly higher scores than younger adults on competence. Autonomy is higher for adults than for students. Finally, women have significantly higher scores than men on positive relationships with others. Ryff and Keyes (1995) explain this last result by Gilliant's (1982) developmental theory, which states that women are less attracted to autonomy and individualism and more interested in interpersonal relationships, unlike men.

There are many models to explain psychological well-being. Some appeal to biological or genetic factors, others to external or environmental factors (Diener & Fujita, 1995). However, psychological factors (personality traits, hope, etc.) seem to be more important (Myers & Diener, 1997). Among these, the ability to develop and pursue personal goals seems to be essential for psychological well-being. Indeed, Emmons (1999) mentions that various components of well-being tend to be associated with different aspects of the goal process. Baumeister (1991) also reports that the ability to make sense of one's life and the achievement of intermediate steps towards a goal have been linked to a high level of life satisfaction, while Nuttin (1985) considers that the ability to set and pursue important goals is a guarantee of good psychological health at any age.

3. Methodology

3.1 Attendees and Tools

The three cities Jendouba, Tunis and Mannouba were selected for sample selection in this study. The universities were selected using purposive sampling techniques and the students were selected using the random sampling method. 300 students were selected, 100 from Faculty of law, Economics and Management Sciences of Jendouba, 100 from Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities of Manouba and 100 from Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences of Tunis.

First, participants complete a questionnaire to collect the usual socio-demographic data: age, gender, education level etc. They then complete a questionnaire assessing the variables under study related to psychological well-being. They then complete a questionnaire assessing the study variables related to psychological well-being.

In this study, psychological well-being is measured by the psychological well-being scales developed by Ryff (1989b). Ryff's model has components derived from different theories of positive psychological functioning developed in the currents of humanistic, existential and developmental psychology. The psychological well-being is a distinct construct, defined as comprising six basic dimensions (adapted from Ryff & Keyes (1995)): autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The autonomy scale assesses self-determination, independence of mind, and the participant's ability to resist social pressures and to evaluate him/herself by personal standards. The competence scale focuses on the participant's sense of mastery in his or her environment, measuring the participant's sense of control over his or her daily affairs and the ability to use opportunities that arise. The personal growth scale refers to the participant's sense of continuous development, self-improvement, actualization of one's potential and openness to new experiences. The positive relationships with others scale indicates whether the respondent has satisfying and trusting relationships with others. It also assesses whether he is capable of empathy, affection and intimacy. The Meaning of Life scale indicates whether the respondent has goals and a future orientation and whether he/she gives meaning to his/her present and past. Finally, the self-acceptance scale assesses the individual's attitude towards himself/herself and his/her ability to recognise his/her qualities and defects.

3.2 Measuring Instruments

The Ryff is a simple and relatively short questionnaire that evaluates the psychological component of well-being. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 7 :

- ✓ 1 = strongly agree
- ✓ 2 = somewhat agree
- ✓ 3 = a little agree

✓4 = neither agree or disagree
✓5 = a little disagree
✓6 = somewhat disagree
✓7 = strongly disagree.

3.3 Survey Questions and Procedure

The Ryff Inventory is composed of 42 questions (Instructions: Circle one response below each statement to indicate how much you agree or disagree). The respondent must indicate on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree) his or her way of being or acting in the situation

1. "I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people."
2. "For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth."
3. "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live."
4. "People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others."
5. "I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons."
6. "I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality."
7. "Most people see me as loving and affectionate."
8. "In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life."
9. "I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future."
10. "I tend to worry about what other people think of me."
11. "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out."
12. "I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me."
13. "My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing."
14. "I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago."
15. "The demands of everyday life often get me down."
16. "I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others."
17. "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world."
18. "Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me."
19. "My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves."
20. "I have a sense of direction and purpose in life."
21. "I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important."
22. "In general, I feel confident and positive about myself."
23. "I have been able to build a living environment and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking."
24. "I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions."
25. "I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things."
26. "I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me."
27. "I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me."
28. "When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years."
29. "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them."
30. "I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns."
31. "When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am."
32. "I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life."
33. "I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life."
34. "I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have."
35. "I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus."

36. "I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life."
37. "I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time."
38. "I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members and friends."
39. "My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me."
40. "I like most parts of my personality."
41. "It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters."
42. "I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities."

The study participants completed the questionnaires on a voluntary basis. All participants were also informed that confidentiality and anonymity would be respected. Each participant had the same instructions written on the questionnaire. This questionnaire contains statements that can be applied to your situation. There are no right or wrong answers. The aim is to answer honestly and spontaneously. We ask you to read each statement carefully and say whether it describes the way you are or the way you act. Use the scales to indicate whether the descriptions in the statements relate to you. The majority of students completed the questionnaires during the course, either in groups or individually in a place such as the library.

4. Results And Discussion

Table 2 synthesizes averages, standard deviations, as well as the T-value which measures the size of the difference relative to the variation in the sample data.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and T-Test of the sample on PWB scale (N=300)

Variable	Male Students		Female students		T-value
	Mean	Standard deviations	Mean	Standard deviations	
Autonomy	47.16	3.87	36.12	3.22	8.27*
Self- Acceptance	44.52	4.06	33.27	4.76	6.22*
Personal Growth	46.88	3.55	34.56	4.01	5.66*
Purpose in life	45.23	3.22	32.33	4.82	4.21*
Environmental Mastery	47.43	3.46	36.55	4.09	4.72*
Positive Relation	35.26	4.26	41.29	3.91	3.98*

The results presented in Table 1 show a significant difference between male and female students in 5 out of 6 dimensions of Psychological Well Being. The main effects analysis shows a significant difference between the sexes in terms of autonomy. Autonomy has a T-value equal to 8.27 with mean value of 47.16 for male students and 36.12 for female students. Male students have a higher level of autonomy (ability to resist social pressures and self-determination) than female students. Male students have been found to have better psychological well-being than female students in Self- Acceptance with a T-value of 6.22, male student's mean score of 44.2 and female student's mean score of 33.27. In Personal Growth, Purpose in Life and Environmental Mastery, a Male's mean score is found to be more than the Female's Mean score, with a T-values of 5.66, 4.21, and 4.72 respectively, with average scores for women being lower than for men. Therefore, Male's Psychological well-being is found to be higher than a Female student's. The results also show a significant gender difference (T-value = 3.98) in positive relationships with others; women (mean = 41.29) score higher on this dimension than men (mean = 35.26).

The aim of this research was to investigate the psychological well-being of students in relation to gender. In this study, the age and education level of male and female students were similar. The results show that 5 out of 6 dimensions of Psychological Well Being of male students was found to be higher

than the score of female students. The results found in this study are in opposition to those obtained by Ryff et al. (1995), who found that in Japan and the USA, females have received more scores than males in positive relationships with others and women have got higher scores in personal growth than men.

Conclusion

According to this research, it can be deduced that there exists a statistically significant difference in psychological well-being between male and female students. Male and female students experience the same situation at university although male students have better psychological well-being. The results showed that there are differences between males and females in the dimensions of psychological well-being in favor of female students

The outcome of this study has many implications for behavioural living in the current context. This work will contribute significantly to the promotion of psychological well-being of women and gender equality. Thus, it can be suggested that appropriate environments and tasks can be given to improve the psychological well-being of the female student so that the woman is equal to the man.

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