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Impact of Family Structure and Gender on Psychological Well-Being Among College Students: A Comparative Study of Nuclear and Extended Families

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ABSTRACT

Well-being is described as the state of being healthy and happy. It requires harmony with mind and body. It can become subjective in nature as different people have different life experiences. It can be used as an umbrella term to define different aspects of our life, such as physical, mental, social, psychological, emotional, digital, economical, and spiritual. These can sometimes be interlinked, such as good physical well-being being associated with good psychological well-being. Psychological well-being can be associated with a feeling of happiness and satisfaction in one's life, a feeling of self-control and a good state of mind. Being in a good psychological well-being state can be defined as being able to accept and be quite satisfied with what we have in life, having a healthy and positive state of mind, being able to handle our emotions well in difficult situations, and not acting drastically. Psychological well-being (PWB; Ryff, 1989) comprises six dimensions that support positive mental health: autonomy, positive relations, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. It is typically understood as a blend of positive emotional states, such as happiness, and optimal functioning in both personal and social life. The purpose of this research paper is to determine the overall level of psychological well-being among undergraduate students and to assess the impact of demographic factors such as gender and family structure on psychological well-being among college students. For this study, primary data was collected from a total sample of 140 college students using the non-probability sampling method, which included 70 students living in nuclear family and 70 students living in extended family. Students residing in Haldwani city of Nainital district were selected for the study. Psychological well-being scale developed and standardized by Dr. Devendra Singh Sisodia and Miss. Pooja Choudhary was used to measure the overall level of psychological well-being of students. For statistical analysis, Mean, S.D. and t-test were applied. Results revealed that there is a significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between students living in nuclear and extended families and concluded that whether an individual lives in nuclear or extended families, it does impact the level of psychological well-being among individuals. The results also revealed no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between boys and girls.

Keywords: psychological well-being, gender, nuclear and extended families

INTRODUCTION

Well-being is among the most essential goals that both individuals and societies aim to achieve. It is not limited to just being healthy physically but rather comprises all the other areas of health, such as the mental and emotional health of an individual, and also includes his social and interpersonal relations. In order to live a fulfilled life for an individual, community or society as a whole, achieving well-being is fundamental. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), well-being can be defined as an essential asset for a healthy lifestyle, "a positive condition of health," and not just the mere absence of sickness. It involves an optimal level of performance throughout an individual's whole life, ranging from physical, mental, emotional, and social activities. Thus, it can be said that general well-being may positively correlate with quality of life, satisfaction levels, and a sense of achievement and negatively correlate with neuroticism and psychoticism.

From the perspective of Indian psychology, four fundamental aspects are recognized: the five elements of nature called panch mahabhutas, the individual self or person known as jeeva, the life force or vitality referred to as ayu, and a state of health and holistic well-being, meaning aarogya. The Indian perspective views well-being as a holistic concept encompassing the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of human existence. The Indian approach to well-being emphasizes maitri, karuna, mudita, and upeksha, meaning the cultivation of friendliness or relatedness, compassion, a joyful or pleasant disposition, and non-attachment. These four attitudes are considered essential for fostering emotional balance and interpersonal harmony and avoiding conflicts. In essence, well-being involves the integration of the self with the higher self through the transcendence of ego. This perspective suggests that well-being is a dynamic interaction of survival, personal flourishing, freedom, and a coherent sense of identity.

Psychological well-being is the personal sense of contentment, happiness, and satisfaction with life experiences, including one's role in work, sense of accomplishment, purpose, belonging, and the absence of distress, dissatisfaction, or worry.

The term psychological well-being generally refers to various aspects typically associated with the mental and emotional health of an individual. It is characterized by a sense of purpose in life, absence of somatic complaints, high self-esteem, experiencing positive emotions, active participation in daily routines, overall life satisfaction, absence of suicidal thoughts, a sense of personal control, strong social support, minimal psychological tension, and general functional capability (Bhogle and Prakash, 1995).

According to Diener and Smith (1999), subjective or psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct encompassing four different yet interrelated components: (a) positive emotions, reflecting experiences of joy, excitement, happiness, and overall mental health; (b) negative affect or psychological distress, including emotions such as guilt, shame, sadness, anxiety, worry, anger, stress, and depression; (c) global life satisfaction, referring to an individual's overall cognitive evaluation of their life; and (d) domain-specific satisfaction, which denotes happiness within specific areas of life such as work, family, leisure, health, financial stability, and self-perception.

Carol D. Ryff, a renowned psychologist and researcher, is known for developing a six-dimensional model of psychological well-being. The interplay of these factors collectively influences an individual's overall psychological health. The theory developed by Ryff's is popularly known as the 'Six-Factor Model of Psychological Well-Being. According to Ryff (1989), Psychological well-being can be defined

as a multidimensional construct comprising six core components: self-acceptance (having positive self-image, high self-esteem and a strong feeling of self worth), the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships (trusting others and having a stable relationship with people around us), autonomy (ability to be able to make independent decisions and work efficiently), environmental mastery (ability to adjust, change or shape one's surroundings to meet personal needs through physical and mental actions), a sense of purpose in life (having certain goals in life, engaging in goal-directed behavior and believing that life has some meaning), and ongoing personal growth (consistently evolving and improving as an individual).Psychological well-being pertains to the degree to which individuals perceive a sense of meaningful control over their lives and daily activities. Higher levels of psychological well-being are positively correlated with improved physical and mental health outcomes, as well as more effective and desirable job performance. Lower levels of psychological well-being and mental health can negatively impact students' ability to learn effectively and perform tasks efficiently.

Psychological well-being plays a crucial role in the holistic development of adolescents, influencing their emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance. However, issues related to psychological well-being have become increasingly prevalent among college students in recent times (Yang, 2010). Elevated levels of mental distress have been reported among undergraduate students, similar to those observed in students across various departments within higher education institutions (Gallagher, 2009; Mackenzie et al., 2011). Some of the many factors contributing to distress among students include uncertainty regarding future employment and success, academic pressure, and separation from their primary support systems (Ibrahim et al., 2013; Sarokhani et al., 2013). Other most common stressors encountered by students in college life include increased demands of performing well in academics, shifts in family dynamics, changes in social relationships, and exposure to new individuals, variety of ideas, and temptations. College students often face several prominent challenges, including time constraints, fear of failure, identity formation struggles, pressure to achieve academic excellence, and intense competition. Additionally, they may experience emotional difficulties such as feelings of inferiority, difficulty concentrating, excessive worry, a sense of hopelessness, and unexplained anxiety (Kumarasamy, 2013). Academic pressures—such as meeting grade expectations, managing extensive coursework, test-taking, and effective time management—have been identified as significant sources of stress among students (Crocker and Luhtanen, 2003; Kumaraswamy, 2013; Misra and McKean, 2000). In college populations, depression is often linked to a range of unhealthy behaviors, including binge drinking, physical inactivity, poor dietary habits, elevated stress levels, anxiety, loneliness, negative body image, interpersonal difficulties, experiences of discrimination, and other mental health concerns.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies conducted on university students have shown a decreased level of psychological well-being among boys and girls in Malaysia.

Yusoff et al. (2010) found that academic-related stressors affected students the most.

No difference was found in psychological well-being across all age groups by **Creed et al. (2003).**

However, **Ludban et al. (2015)** in their study found age differences between students aged from 18 to 23 years and students above 24 years of age.

Panahi et al. (2013) in their study conducted among postgraduate students at the UPM revealed that there is a significant relationship between psychological well-being and age. According to them, the lev-

el of student's psychological well-being keeps on increasing as they age.

Dadhania (2015) conducted a study to examine the psychological and emotional health of teenagers. He used random sampling method in his study and took a total sample of 80 adolescents out of which 40 were boys and 40 were girls studying in 10th standard. The sample was taken randomly from Junagadh city. T-test was done and potential correlations were explored using Karl Pearson 'r' method, to find out whether there were disparities in mental health and psychological well-being. The results of the study revealed significant distinctions in the psychological well-being and mental health of both teenage girls and boys. Further, a positive correlation of 0.82 was found between psychological well-being and mental health.

Honmore and Jadhav (2015) aimed to explore optimistic attitudes, gender and psychological well-being among college students. They took a total sample of 200 1st year students from different colleges in Islampur and Sangli, located in Maharashtra. Out of them 100 were male and 100 were female participants. They were given Optimistic Pessimistic Attitude Scale by Parashar (1998) and Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) which included 5 subscales. ANOVA was used for the analysis of the results. It revealed a significant gender differences overall although the effect size was small (Cohen's d = 0.38). The results of the study concluded that male participants had a higher level of psychological well-being in Mental Health dimension compared to female participants. However, it has to be noted that most female participants included in this study were from rural or semi-urban backgrounds, thus coming from deep-rooted traditional norms and constraints on women within a primarily male-dominated culture.

Sana Akhter (2015) conducted a study titled "Gender Differences in Psychological Well being." Random sampling method was used in the study to select a total sample of 100 participants with 50 male and 50 female participants studying in 10th standard of a school in Jamshedpur city. To measure the level of psychological well-being of the participants, the Psychological well-being scale developed by Carol Ryff in 1980 was used. T-test was used to analyze the results. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant difference in the level of psychological well-being between boys and girls with respect to their emotional health.

Rehman et al. (2016) conducted a study on a total sample of 100 individuals residing in Ganderbal and Srinagar. 50 men and 50 women were selected to participate in the research. Gender and residential status were taken as two variables to evaluate if unnecessary internet use has any effect on the mental health of young people of Kashmir. The results of the study revealed that excessive internet use can negatively impact an individual's overall psychological health. The findings also revealed significant differences in psychological well-being among individuals. These differences were apparent in terms of gender and residential areas. There was a clear difference in the level of psychological well-being between boys and girls, with girls reporting higher levels of psychological well-being than boys. Similarly, individuals residing in urban areas showed greater levels of psychological well-being than individuals residing in rural areas.

Hasan (2016) in his study titled "Psychological well-being and Gender differences among Science and Social Science students" concluded that there is no significant difference in the level of psychological well-being among the undergraduate boys and girls of science and social science stream.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives:

This study aims at studying the following objectives:

- To find the overall level of psychological well-being of students living in nuclear and extended families.
- To examine the difference in the overall level of psychological well-being among students living in nuclear and extended families.
- To assess the overall level of psychological well-being of boys and girls.
- To find out the difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between boys and girls.

Hypothesis:

On the basis of above mentioned objectives, the following non-directional hypothesis has been formulated for this study:

1. **Null (H_0):** There is no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between students living in nuclear and extended families.
   Alternate (H_1): There is a significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between students living in nuclear and extended families.
2. **Null (H_0):** There is no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between boys and girls
   Alternative (H_1): There is a significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between boys and girls.

Research Design:

The current study utilizes a quantitative, cross-sectional and comparative research design. It uses a standardized scale for computing the overall psychological well-being level of students. The aim of the study was to compare the psychological well-being of students based on the family type they live in and their gender. This design assured the researcher to investigate group differences at a single point in time.

Inclusion Criterion:

- Students aged 18-21 years
- Living with family (nuclear or extended) for at least the past 5 years
- Currently enrolled in undergraduate courses
- Willing to participate with informed consent

Exclusion Criterion:

- Participants below or above the age limit mentioned above
- Students from single parent
- Students other than graduation level

Sample and Sampling Technique:

The total sample for this study consists of 140 students of graduation level residing in Haldwani city of Nainital district, Uttarakhand (India).The participants were between 18-21 years of age. For equal representation across the subgroups based on two independent variables: family structure (nuclear and extended families) and gender (boys and girls), quota sampling technique was used. Equal quotas were set for each subgroup and participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. Thus, the final sample included:

70 students from nuclear families and 70 students from extended families from which 35 were boys from nuclear families and 35 were girls from nuclear families similarly there were 35 boys from extended

families and 35 girls from extended families. Therefore, there were a total of 70 boys (50%) and 70 girls (50%).

Variables:

The study involves both dependent and independent variables:

- **Dependent Variable:** Psychological well-being
- **Independent Variable:** Family Structure and Gender

Demographic details:

Certain demographic details were also collected from the participants for this study like gender and family structure (nuclear or extended).

Tools used in the study:

- **Psychological well-Being Scale:**

Psychological well-being scale constructed by Dr. Devendra Singh Sisodia and Miss. Pooja Chaudhary was used to measure the level of psychological well-being among students living in nuclear and extended families. This scale was developed using likert technique and in its final form comprised of 50 statements with a view to measure several aspects of well-being like satisfaction (items 1 to 10), efficiency (items 11 to 20), sociability (items 21 to 30), mental health (items 31 to 40) and interpersonal relations (items 41 to 50).

Reliability of the scale:

The reliability of the scale was determined by test-retest method and internal consistency method. The test-retest reliability was 0.87 and the consistency value for the scale is 0.90. Both coefficients of correlations are significant at 0.01 level of significance.

Validity of the scale:

The scale has high content validity. The scale was validated against the external criteria and coefficient obtained was 0.94.

Scoring:

It is a 5 point likert scale from strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree to strongly disagree. 5 points were given to anyone who marked strongly agree, 4 points were given who marked agree, 3 points were given for the undecided option, 2 points were given for disagree option and 1 point was given to anyone who marked strongly disagree.

Administration of the scale:

After acquiring necessary permissions from college authorities, participants were approached in classroom settings. They were made comfortable and were briefed about the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of their responses were assured. Informed consent was obtained from the students and proper rapport was established. They were told that the result of the scale would help in self-knowledge. It was emphasized that there are no right or wrong answers and none of the statements are to be left unanswered. Psychological well-being scale was administered collectively. Although there was no time limit for completing the scale, but the participants were told to finish it in 15-20 minutes.

Statistical Analysis:

Data was collected at a single point in time and analyzed using SPSS software. To summarize the data, descriptive statistics, mean (measure of central tendency) and standard deviation (measure of variability) were computed for each subgroup. To examine group differences, independent sample t-test (parametric test) was applied. P value of less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) was taken as the significance level for the study.

RESULT AND DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive Statistics

To have a better understanding of the data we obtained, measures of central tendency like mean and measures of variability like standard deviation (S.D.) of different groups was calculated. Below are the tables showing mean and S.D. of different groups-

Table 1

Mean and S.D. of students living in nuclear and extended family

Groups	Mean	S.D.
Students living in nuclear family	175.31	22.26
Students living in extended family	183.15	24.45

Mean and S.D. of students living in nuclear family was found to be 175.31 and 22.26 respectively. Mean and S.D. of students living in extended family was found to be 183.15 and 24.45 respectively.

There is a clear difference between mean scores of students living in nuclear family and mean scores of students living in extended family.

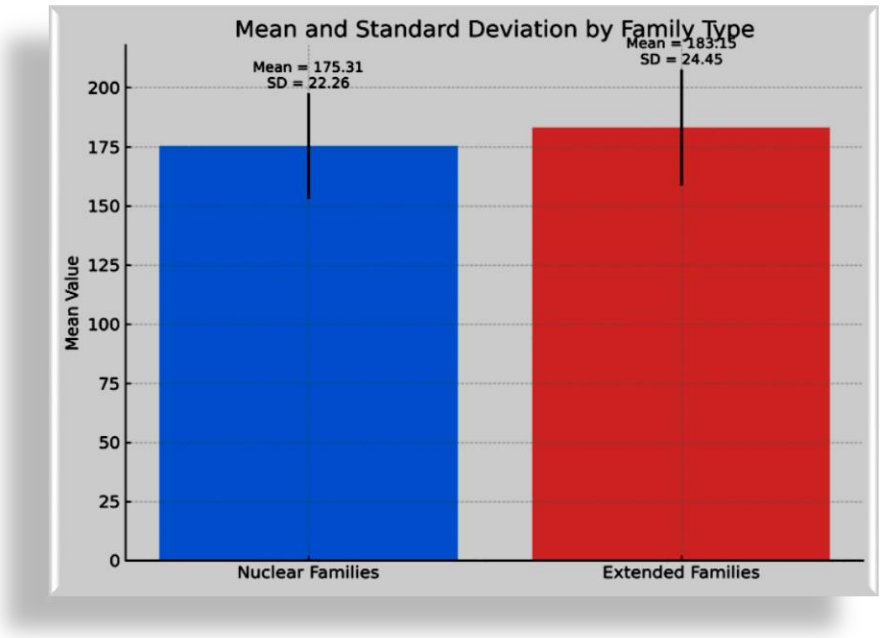


Figure 1

Table 2

Mean and S.D. of boys and girls

Groups	Mean	S.D.
Boys	180.5	25.82
Girls	177.97	18.99

Mean and S.D. of boys was found to be 180.5 and 25.82 respectively. Mean and S.D. of girls was found to be 177.97 and 18.99 respectively.

No clear difference in the mean scores of boys and girls can be seen.

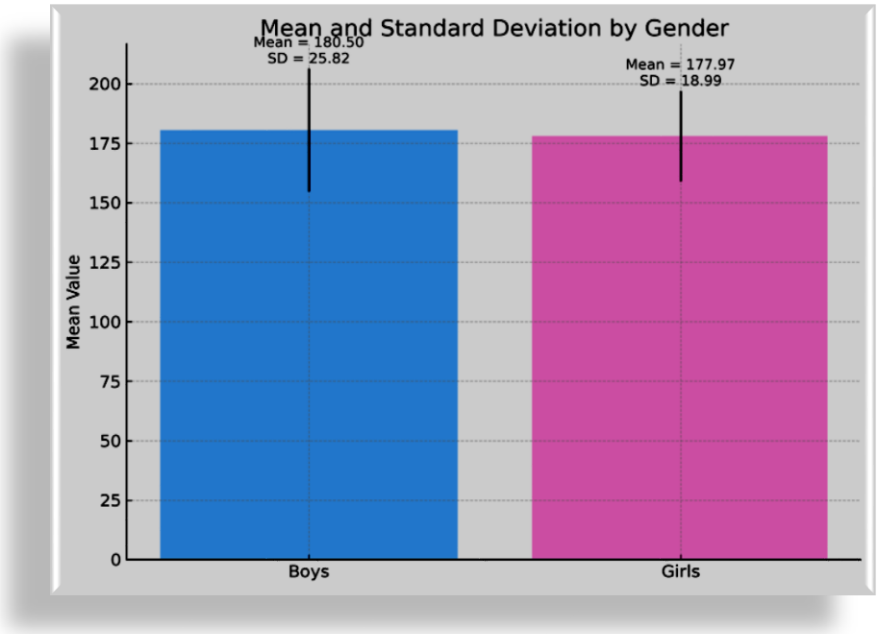


Figure 2

Inferential Statistics

In order to compare the overall level of psychological well-being among boys and girls and students living in nuclear and extended families, t test was used. Below are the tables showing t values and whether the groups are significantly different or not-

Table 3

Groups	Mean	S.D.	F value	P value
Students living in nuclear family	175.31	22.26	0.2015	0.6542
Students living in extended family	183.15	24.45		

*Equal variances between the groups, ($p>0.05$)

Since, it showed equal variances between the two groups; student's t-test was used.

Table 4

Groups	N	Mean	S.D.	t value	P value
Students living in nuclear family	70	175.31	22.26	-2.08	0.039
Students living in extended family	70	183.15	24.45		

***significant difference between the two groups**

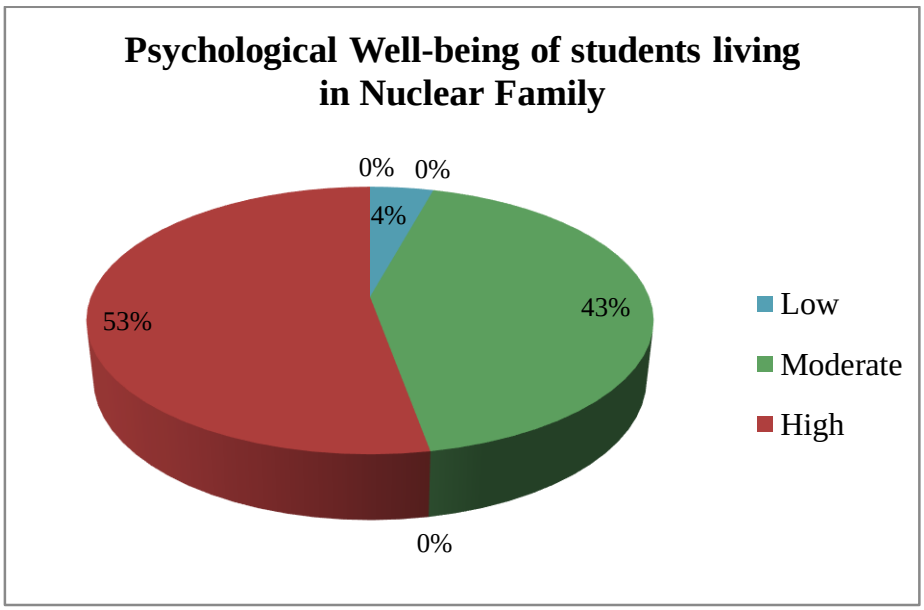
Mean and S.D. of students living in nuclear family was found to be 175.31 and 22.26 respectively. Mean and S.D. of students living in extended family was found to be 183.15 and 24.45 respectively.

Since, p is less than 0.05, ($p<0.05$), there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups, df= 138 with a mean of 175.31 for and a mean of 183.15 for students living in extended family.

An independent samples t-test assuming equal variances showed a significant difference in psychological well-being scores between students from nuclear and extended families, $t(138) = -2.08, p = 0.039$.

Students from extended families (M = 183.16) scored significantly higher on psychological well-being than students from nuclear families (M = 175.31).

Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between students living in nuclear and extended families is hence rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted.



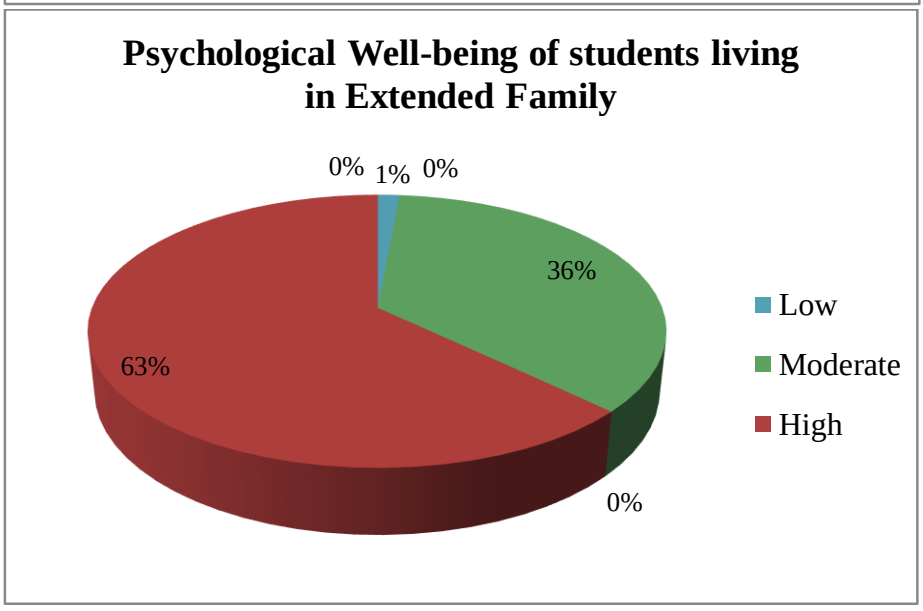


Table 5

Groups	Mean	S.D.	F value	P value
Boys	180.5	25.82	4.6142	0.0335
Girls	177.97	18.99		

*Unequal variances between the groups, ($p<0.05$)

Since, there were unequal variances between the two groups; Welch's t-test was computed.

Table 6

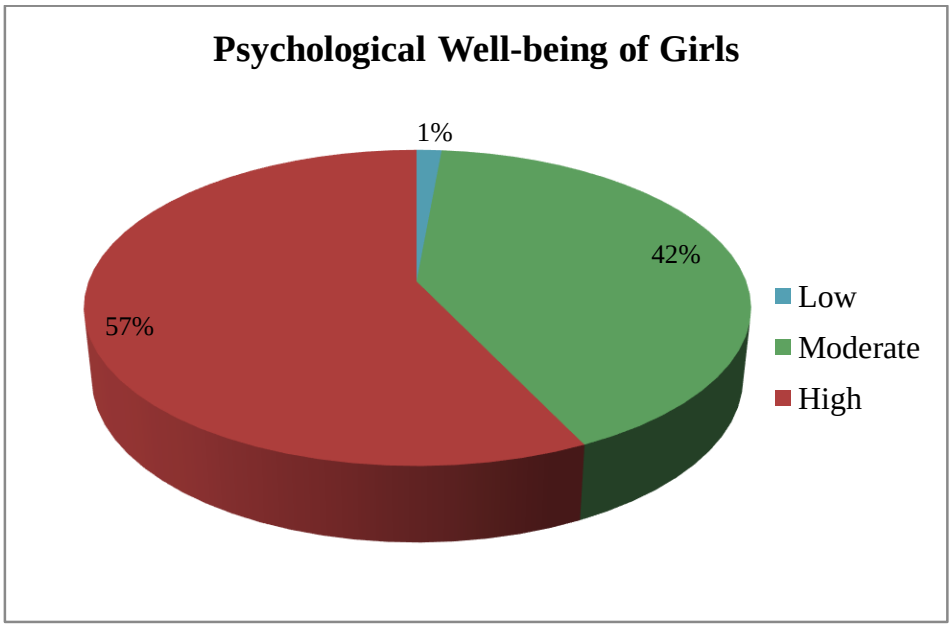
Groups	N	Mean	S.D.	t value	p value
Boys	70	180.5	25.82	-0.66	0.51
Girls	70	177.97	18.99		

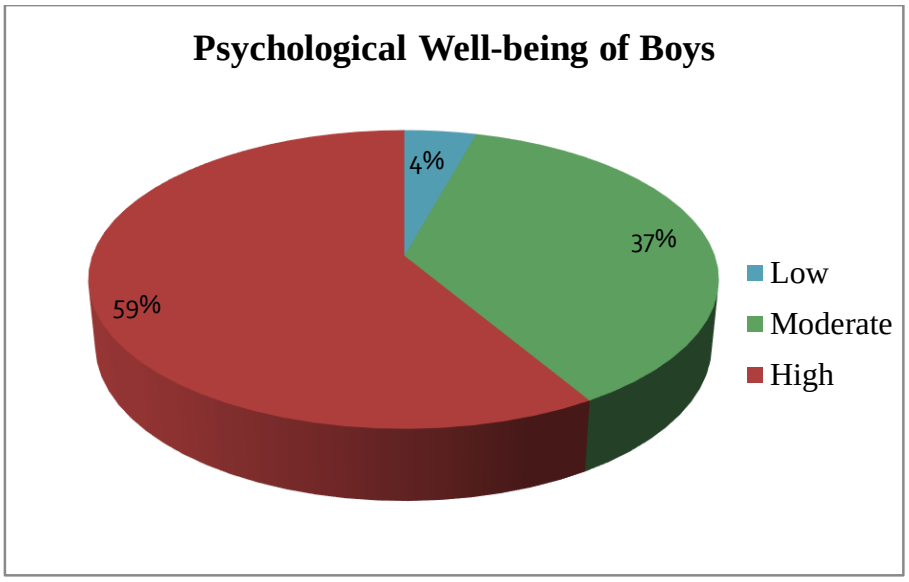
***no significant difference between the two groups**

Since, p is more than 0.05, ($p>0.05$), there is no significant difference between the two groups, df= 137(approx).

The results indicated no significant difference in psychological well-being scores between girls (M = 177.97) and boys (M = 180.50), t(137) = -0.66, p = 0.51.

Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between boys and girls is hence accepted.





DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to check if there is any difference in the overall level of psychological well-being among students in living in nuclear families and students living in extended families. For this, a quantitative and comparative research design was used. A total sample of 140 students of graduation level from Haldwani city was selected based on quota sampling technique. Mean, standard deviation (S.D.) and t-test were computed using SPSS software.

Mean scores and S.D. of students living in nuclear and extended families were computed. The mean scores of students living in nuclear and extended families were 175.31 and 183.15 respectively with 22.26 and 24.45 as their respective standard deviations. t-value for the same was -2.08 and p value was 0.039. Since, p came to be less than 0.05 ($p<0.05$), there exist a significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being among students living in nuclear and extended families. Evident from the results obtained, students from extended families scored significantly higher on psychological well-being than those from nuclear families. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between students living in nuclear and extended families was rejected and alternate hypothesis was accepted.

The findings of the present study are in accordance with the results obtained by Mohammad Haroon Khan and Dr. Pankaj Singh (2023) from their study. They have done a comparative study on Resilience and Psychological Well-being of Indian College Student among Joint and Nuclear Families. The results of their study concluded that students living in extended families have significantly higher level of psychological well-being than students living in nuclear families. These findings suggest that family structure does play a significant role in an individual's life and impact their psychological well-being. The reason behind this can be several factors like joint or extended families may have better social support and provide additional social resources that one need which may contribute to their enhanced psychological well-being. They have better family cohesion and many people that one can look up to. Individual's living in extended families also has high resilience according to the study. In contrast, nuclear family may have fewer social resources to give which may put an individual at high risk for many psychological problems.

Similarly, mean scores and S.D. of boys and girls was also calculated. The mean scores of boys and girls were 180.5 and 177.97 respectively with 25.82 and 18.99 as their respective S.D. t and p values were -

0.66 and 0.51 respectively. Since, p value was greater than 0.05 (p>0.05), there was no significant difference found in the overall level of psychological well-being among boys and girls. This concluded that both boys and girls on an average may have similar overall level of psychological well-being. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between boys and girls was accepted.

The finding of the present study aligns with the previous studies done by Shaheen and Shazeen(2016) and Mohammad Hasan (2019). They concluded that there exist no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being among boys and girls. This indicates that boys and girls on an average do not differ in psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of the paper were to determine the overall level of psychological well-being of boys and girls and to check whether there exists any difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between students living in nuclear family and students living in extended family. The results revealed that there exists a significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being between students living in nuclear family and students living in extended family. Students living in extended families showed higher levels of psychological well-being than students living in nuclear families. This finding highlights the potential benefits of extended family systems and may help policy makers and mental health professionals in the future. Interventions intended to enhance psychological well-being among students should take family structure and family dynamics into consideration. Another finding of this study was that there was no significant difference in the overall level of psychological well-being among boys and girls which concluded that boys and girls on an average may have similar levels of psychological well-being.

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