



Goal Engagement, Meaning in Life and Psychological Well Being Among University Students

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ABSTRACT

The current study explores goal engagement, meaning in life, and psychological well-being among university students has been analyzed. University life comprises many academic, career, and social hurdles that might impact students well-being. This paper adopts a quantitative research approach and analyzes data gathered through a survey conducted on a sample of 800 university students aged 18 to 30 years studying at the University of Gujrat, Pakistan. The data was collected through stratified sampling. The goal engagement scale, meaning in life questionnaire, and Ryff's psychological well-being scale were used to measure the study variables. The findings of the study revealed positive correlation between goal engagement and psychological well-being, and meaning in life. The regression analysis results showed that goal engagement positively predicted both psychological well-being, and meaning in life. This study emphasizes the role of goal engagement and meaning in life are important variables to predict psychological well-being among university students. This research will make practical applications for psychologists, counselors, teachers, and educational institutes to implement interventions for improving students' well-being.

Introduction

Psychological well-being is an indicator of good psychological function and healthy psychology. In contrast to the past definitions of mental health in terms of its opposite state, i.e., psychological disorders, psychological well-being is now observed in positive terms involving positive functioning personality development, and life satisfaction. The psychological well-being was defined by Ryff (1989) including following six elements that include 'self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purpose in life, and personal growth'. People with high psychological well-being exhibit positive emotions, have good interpersonal relationships, cope effectively with the demands of life, and seek personal development. The psychological well-being of university students correlates with academic success, resilience, emotional adaptation, and overall life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Psychological distress experienced by university students has made it clear that there is a need to determine psychological factors which improve psychological well-being. According to research findings, a majority of university students experience issues such as anxiety, depression, stress and other emotional problems during university (Auerbach et al., 2016; Stallman, 2010). The current study was intended to evaluate the relationship of goal engagement, meaning in life and psychological well-being among university students. The scientific foundations for this research can be considered the ideas from modern motivational and positive psychology

perspectives. Specifically, recent empirical studies have provided support to the hypothesis that people, who actively pursue and regulate their goals, usually demonstrate high levels of well-being and life satisfaction (Wrosch et al., 2003; Steger et al., 2006).

Moreover, the current research also intends to examine the effect of goal engagement on psychological well-being including emotional stability, life satisfaction, autonomy and personal development as conceptualized by the multidimensional theory developed by Ryff (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 2021).

Method

Research Design

The cross-sectional research design was used to examine the relationship of goal engagement, meaning in life and psychological well-being among university students.

Participants

The sample comprised 800 university students studying various courses in both undergraduate and graduate levels at the University of Gujrat. Students were randomly drawn from different departments and years to provide variance in terms of educational level and experience. The age bracket of participants was 18-30 years, which falls within the period of emerging adulthood, a vital stage of development in establishing one's identity, goal-setting, and meaning-making. Male and female students participated in the research. With such a substantial number of participants, the statistical strength of the research increased.

Sampling Techniques

Stratified proportionate random sampling was used as a means of ensuring that different academic sub-groups were represented in the sample. At first, the population was divided into strata on the basis of their educational level undergraduates and postgraduates were separated as two different groups.

Measures

All measures in the study were self-report questionnaires that were standardized. The questionnaires were provided in English depending on participants' understanding.

- **Demographic Form:** A demographic survey questionnaire was developed to obtain demographic information including age, sex, program of study, term of study, socioeconomic status, place of residence and family system.
- **Goal Adjustment Scale (GAS):** A measurement of Goal Adjustment Scale developed by Wrosch et al. (2003). This measurement tool comprises 10 questions with two dimensions: Goal disengagement (withdrawing effort from unachievable goals) Goal reengagement (striving towards new significant goals).
- **Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ):** The meaning in life was measured using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire which was developed by Steger et al. (2006). This test contains 10 items which have to be answered according to a seven-point Likert scale. These are the two dimensions that are measured with the help of MLQ: Presence of meaning (meaningful life perception) Search for meaning (seeking for a purpose).
- **Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB):** The Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) designed by Ryff (1989) with 18-item version of PWB; following six aspects including autonomy environmental mastery personal growth positive relationships with others purpose in life, self-acceptance was measured.

Procedure

The process of data collection started after gaining the formal approval from the administration of the University of Gujrat. Ethical approval was sought before collecting the data. The participants were approached inside their classrooms. The questionnaires were handed out to the participants and filled by the researchers. Any clarification regarding the questions was given, if needed. All the collected questionnaires were then examined and those which had missing data were discarded. The data were then analyzed using SPSS.

Statistical Analysis

The analysis were completed through IBM SPSS Statistics software package. First, reliability testing was carried out by performing Cronbach's alpha test for all scales to estimate their internal consistency. Also, descriptive statistics such as mean standard deviation frequencies and percentages were calculated in order to describe the demographics and study variables.

For normality testing of the collected data skewness and kurtosis measures were used. As the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric tests had to be employed. To identify relationship of goal engagement meaning in life and psychological well-being Spearman's rank-order correlation test was utilized. The prediction of goal engagement on meaning in life and psychological well-being was done through regression analysis was performed. Moreover, Mann-Whitney U-test was used to evaluate the gender differences among study variables. The research was carried out in accordance with a high standard of ethics. It was voluntary for all the participants to take part in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during the process, and no confidential data was recorded. The participants aware that they could leave the process at any point. The data gathered was strictly used for research purposes and was stored accordingly.

Results

Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the measurement tools was evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha. Reliability refers to the degree to which a scale consistently measures a construct.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	Items	A
Goal Engagement	10	.84
Meaning in life	10	.66
Psychological well being	18	.76

The findings revealed that the reliability of the goal engagement scale was very high ($\alpha = .84$) whereas the psychological well-being scale exhibited satisfactory levels of reliability ($\alpha = .76$). However, the meaning in life questionnaire displayed moderate level of reliability ($\alpha = .66$) that can be considered acceptable for exploratory studies.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis was completed to examine the correlations of goal engagement with meaning in life and psychological well-being. This method is commonly employed for estimating the degree and nature of the linear relationship between two variables. For the current research, the correlation analysis was utilized to check if those who have a high level of goal engagement have more meaning in life and psychological well-being. The correlation coefficient (r) varies from -1 to +1, with positive numbers representing that the variables move in the same direction, negative numbers representing the opposite relationship, and numbers near zero showing no significant link between the variables.

Table 2. Spearman Matrix Among Study Variable (N=800)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
GDS_GAS1	-				
GRS_GAS2	.39**	-			
Presence	.150**	.273**	-		
Search	.0.54	.284**	.415**	-	
Total _PWB	.152	.048	.122**	.123**	-

A correlation analysis using Spearman was done to investigate the relationships between goal disengagement, goal reengagement, presence of meaning, search for meaning, and psychological well-being among college students. Findings revealed that there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between goal disengagement and presence of meaning ($r_s = -.15$, $p < .01$). This implies that students with a high level of goal disengagement will exhibit low levels of meaning in life. On the other hand, goal disengagement was not significantly correlated with search for meaning and psychological well-being.

There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between goal reengagement and goal disengagement ($r_s = -.39, p < .01$). This means that students who can easily engage in new goals are less likely to have goal disengagement problems. There is also a statistically significant positive relationship between goal reengagement and presence of meaning ($r_s = .27, p < .01$) and search for meaning ($r_s = .28, p < .01$). Therefore, students who have the capacity to reengage themselves with their goals will have a meaningful life and search of life.

Further, the presence of meaning correlated significantly with the search for meaning ($r_s = .41, p < .01$) and psychological well-being ($r_s = .12, p < .01$), while search for meaning correlated positively with psychological well-being ($r_s = .12, p < .01$). From the above correlations, it can be seen that there exists a positive relationship between the constructs of meaning in life and goal reengagement and psychological well-being among college students. It is clear from the results above that the correlation coefficients were low to moderate.

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis was used to assess the effect of goal engagement on meaning in life among university students.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Goal Engagement and Meaning in Life

Variable	B	SE	B	T	p	95% CI	95% CI
Constant	15.07	1.60	-	9.44	.000	11.54	18.21
GDS_GAS1	-0.12	0.09	.05	-1.34	.181	-0.31	0.06
GRS_GAS2	0.46	0.05	.30	8.88	.000	0.36	0.57

Multiple regression analysis was accomplished to determine the impact of GDS and GRS on search for meaning among university students. The results indicated that the general model was significant and accounted for considerable variability in search for meaning. As it has been noted, the results demonstrate that goal reengagement was significant positive predictor of search for meaning ($B = 0.46, \beta = .30, t = 8.88, p < .001$). Thus the higher the ability of students to approach their goals, the more they searched for meaning. Goal disengagement did not become a significant predictor of search for meaning ($B = -0.12, \beta = -.05, t = -1.34, p = .181$). Therefore it could be stated that the mere abandoning of one's goals was unable to have an impact on searching for meaning.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Goal Engagement and Psychological Well-being

Variable	B	SE	B	T	P	95%CI	95%CI
Constant	81.952	2.224	-	36.843	.000	77.586	86.319
GDS-GAS1	-0.613	0.129	-0.166	-4.753	.000	-0.867	-0.360
GRS-GAS2	0.116	0.073	0.055	1.584	.114	-0.867	0.259

Regression Analysis showed that goal disengagement (GDS-GAS1) and goal re-engagement (GRS-GAS2) are significant predictors of psychological well-being (Total PWB) among university students. It was found that there was a statistical significance in the overall model, $F(2, 793) = 12.61, p < .001$. It was revealed that the two predictors were able to explain variance in psychological well-being of the respondents by 3.1% (Adjusted $R^2 = .028$). It was determined that goal disengagement (GDS-GAS1) is statistically significant negative predictor of psychological well-being ($B = -0.613, \beta = -0.166, t = -4.753, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.867, -0.360]$). This shows that university students with greater difficulty in disengaging from non-attainable goals experience lower psychological well-being. However, goal re-engagement (GRS-GAS2) is not significant predictor of psychological well-being ($B = 0.116, \beta = 0.055, t = 1.584, p = .114, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.028, 0.259]$) which means that pursuing new goals does not significantly affect psychological well-being of students. Constant was statistically significant ($B = 81.952, p < .001$).

Mann Whitney U Test

In the current research, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate the differences between male and female as university students on psychological well-being and meaning in life dimensions. In particular, it became possible to find out whether there are

any differences between male and female in their levels of goal disengagement, goal re-engagement, autonomy support, environmental mastery, personal growth, and meaning in life dimensions.

Table 5. Group Differences

Variable	Grouping variable	N	M Rank	U	Z	P
GDS-GAS1	Male	273	410.72	688.73.500	-.955	.340
	Female	527	394.44			
GRS-GAS2	Male	273	396.44	108213.000	-.364	.716
	Female	527	402.63			
AS-PWB	Male	273	384.24	104896.500	-1.440	.150
	Female	527	408.93			
EMS-PWB2	Male	273	367.07	100211.000	-2.959	.003
	Female	527	417.82			
PGS-PWB3	Male	273	369.99	101008.500	-2.662	.008
	Female	527	415.57			
PR-PWB4	Male	271	412.64	206976.000	-1.162	.245
	Female	527	392.74			
PLS-PWB5	Male	272	431.38	202265.500	-2.774	.006
	Female	527	383.81			
SAS-PWB6	Male	273	395.81	108056.500	-.415	.678
	Female	527	402.93			
PRESENSE-MLQ1	Male	273	378.85	103425.000	-1.910	.056
	Female	527	411.72			
SEARCH-MLQ2	Male	273	368.92	100714.000	-2.786	.005
	Female	527	416.86			

The statistical significance of differences in the study variables of psychological well-being and meaning in life according to gender was examined using Mann–Whitney U-test. As a result of analysis, it has been established that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents in the following variables: GDS-GAS1 ($U = 0.955$, $p > .05$); GRS-GAS2 ($U = 0.364$, $p > .05$); AS-PWB ($U = 1.440$, $p > .05$); PR-PWB4 ($U = 1.162$, $p > .05$); SAS-PWB6 ($U = 0.415$, $p > .05$); Presence of Meaning in Life ($U = 1.910$, $p > .05$). The obtained results suggest that there were no differences between male and female students concerning such psychological aspects as goal disengagement, goal re-engagement, autonomy support, positive relations, self-acceptance, and presence of meaning in life.

In contrast, there were marked gender differences in EMS-PWB2 ($U = 2.959$, $p < .01$), PGS-PWB3 ($U = 2.662$, $p < .01$), PLS-PWB5 ($U = 2.774$, $p < .01$), and Search for Meaning in Life ($U = 2.786$, $p < .01$). The mean ranks revealed that female students were always scoring higher than male students in terms of environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and search for meaning. This implies that female university students have a stronger perception of their control over the environment, personal development, sense of life purpose, and the propensity to actively seek meaning in life as opposed to male students.

Discussion

The present research was aimed at exploring the influence of goal engagement, meaning in life and psychological well-being on university students. The university age can be considered an extremely significant developmental stage due to the fact that it involves numerous kinds of stresses related to academic studies, socialization, uncertainty regarding career, and identity development. Within the above-mentioned developmental process, some psychological assets such as meaningful goalmouths and purposes are extremely important in order to ensure stable mental health status. The findings obtained within the framework of

the current research reveal the relationship between goal engagement and meaning in life as well as between meaning in life and psychological well-being among university students.

From the analysis, it was established that there exists a significant correlation between goal engagement and meaning in life. People who are involved in goal pursuit and goal striving, tend to be more engaged in their lives; thus, this increases their sense of purpose and meaning. This is supported by Wrosch et al. (2003), who state that adaptive goal pursuit is associated with improved psychological functioning. The Self-Determination Theory also proves the above hypothesis through the fulfillment of psychological needs as a result of goal directedness.

In summary, this study emphasizes the role played by goal involvement and the meaning of life in contributing to the psychological well-being of college students. The findings indicate that goal-oriented activities and meaning-based coping methods such as those used in logo therapy counseling can improve psychological adjustment among students.

Limitations & Implications

There are certain limitations in this study. The cross-sectional research design does not provide any possibility of establishing cause-and-effect relationships between goal pursuit, meaning in life, and psychological well-being. Also, the use of subjective measures might result in certain biases like the ones caused by social desirability. It is also necessary to note that the participants of the study were only university students studying at the University of Gujrat, which limits the generality of its conclusion. Despite such drawbacks, the research has some important significance. Conceptually, the research confirms the tenets of positive psychology through establishing the connection between goal engagement and life meaning and psychological well-being, as stipulated in the Self-Determination Theory and existential theory of Frankl (1946). In terms of practical applications, universities need to instill goal setting and motivation into the lives of their students in order to boost their well-being. Institutionally teachers must nurture realistic and meaningful goals in an enabling learning environment.

Conclusion

This research paper has explored the relation between goal engagement, meaning in life and psychological well-being of university students. It was revealed that goal engagement is a significant predictor of meaning in life because students' efforts to reach their educational and other objectives pay to a higher level of meaning in life. Moreover the analysis proved that meaning in life is correlated with psychological well-being of respondents since people who feel meaning in their lives can achieve psychological satisfaction. Generally, it can be seen that setting meaningful goals is instrumental in promoting meaningfulness in life and psychological well-being among individuals. Even though no significant differences in gender were found for the majority of constructs measured, slight differences were noted in certain aspects of psychological well-being. Finally, the conclusions can be supported by such psychological theories as Self-Determination Theory and existential psychology.

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