

Meaning in Life and Psychological Well-Being in Pre-Adolescents and Adolescents

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This study examined meaning in life and psychological well-being in male and female students of pre- adolescence and adolescence periods. A total of 104 students were randomly selected from various schools. Of these, 54 students were from class 12 and 50 students from class 9. Two questionnaires, one Personal Meaning Profile (PMP) by Wong and another Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale (WBMMS) by Masse et al. were administered on the subjects. It was hypothesized that there will be significant differences in the perception of life as meaningful and psychological well-being of different groups of students. t-test was applied to analyze the data. Besides discussing the results, applied aspects of a meaningful life and psychological well-being are also discussed.

Keywords: Meaning in Life, Psychological Well-Being, and Adolescents

Adolescence is a very critical and important stage in the development of human being. Most of the physiological, psychological, and social changes within the person take place during this period of life. The period of adolescence can be looked upon as a time of more struggle and turmoil than childhood. Adolescents have long been regarded as a group of people who are searching for themselves to find some form of identity and meaning in their lives (Erikson, 1968). They struggle to find a meaning of self. Having meaning or purpose in life can solve the identity crisis that a person normally faces during this period.

Meaning in life typically involves having a goal or a sense of unified purpose (Baumeister, 1991; Ryff, 1989). Recker, Peacock and Wong (1987), defined meaning as it "refers to making sense, order, or coherence out of one's existence and having a purpose and striving toward a goal or goals".

More recently Wong (1998) defined meaning as "an individually constructed, culturally based cognitive system that influences an individual's choice of activities and goals, and endows life with a sense of purpose, personal worth, and fulfillment". Thus the role of meaning in an adolescent's life can be a central point for a successful transition into adulthood. And an adolescent may derive meaning from a variety of sources. According to Wong's (1998) Personal Meaning Profile, these sources may be achievement, relationship, religion, self-transcendence, self-acceptance, intimacy, and fair treatment.

Psychological well-being is a relatively complex notion with a variety of components that may contribute to it. Ryff (1989) extensively explored the meaning of psychological well-being and the definition closely paralleled with the Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale (Masse, Poulin, Dassa, Lambert, Belair & Battaglini, 1998b) that was used in this study.

The dimensions of well-being those were focused and operationalized are: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. All of these factors can be considered as key components that make up the definition of psychological well-being. Therefore, adolescents who exhibit strength in each and every of these areas will be in a state of good psychological well-being, while adolescents who struggle in these areas will be in a state of low psychological well-being.

There are various factors that affect adolescents' level of psychological well-being. Several studies have shown that the quality of relationship within families, especially with parents is a major determining factor of psychological well-being in adolescents (Shek, 1997; Sastre & Ferriere 2000; Van Wel, Linssen & Abma 2000). Some other key factors that may contribute to a higher or lower level of psychological well-being in adolescents are stress (Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984) physical health (Mechanic & Hansell, 1987) and both popularity and intimacy in peer relationships (Townsend, McCracken & Wilton, 1988).

The importance of meaning in life and commitment to personal life satisfaction and psychological health has been well established (Erikson, 1982; Ledbetter, Smith & Vosler-Hunter 1991; Ryff, 1989; Stephen, Fraser & Marcia, 1992). Studies have shown that seeking meaning and fulfillment acts as a significant protector against emotional instability, and as a warrantor of psychological health and well-being (Lukas, 1991). Meaning in life has been found to be a strong and consistent predictor of psychological well-being (Zika & Chamberlain, 1987). Shek (1992) conducted a study on Chinese secondary students and found that students who scored highest in terms of quality of existence as well as purpose of existence also scored highest in psychological well-being.

Hypotheses

Based on the review of literature and past studies, the following hypotheses have been formulated for verification of this study through empirical investigation:

1. There is a significant difference between male and female students on the subscales of Personal Meaning Profile (PMP).
2. There is a significant difference between male and female students on the subscales of Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale (WBMMS).
3. There is a significant difference between students of pre-adolescence and adolescence periods on the subscales of PMP.
4. There is a significant difference between students of pre-adolescence and adolescence periods on the subscales of WBMMS.
5. There is a significant difference between male and female students of adolescence period on the subscales of PMP.
6. There is a significant difference between male and female students of adolescence period on the subscales of WBMMS.
7. There is a significant difference between male and female students of pre-adolescence period on the subscales of PMP.
8. There is a significant difference between male and female students of pre-adolescence period on the subscales of WBMMS.

Method

Sample

The sample consists of total 104 students from various public schools. Out of these students, 34 boys and 20 girls were from adolescence period (class 12th) and 31 boys and 19 girls were from pre-adolescence (class 9th) period. Finally questionnaires were distributed to students and they were asked to give responses according to the instructions provided in the questionnaire. Mean age of pre-adolescents and adolescents was 13.9yrs

and 17yrs respectively. Age range was 12-15yrs for pre-adolescents and 16-18yrs for adolescents.

Instruments

Following instruments have been used in this study:

Personal Meaning Profile (PMP): This scale was developed by Wong (1998) for the purpose of measuring meaning in life. This is a 57-item scale consisting of seven sub-scales; these are achievement, relationship, religion, self-transcendence, self-acceptance, intimacy, and fair treatment. The validity and reliability of the scale is quite high, with an overall Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.93 and 0.94 respectively.

Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale (WBMMS): For measuring psychological well-being, WBMMS developed by Masse et al. (1998b) was used. The scale consists of 25-items with six factors. The six factors or subscales of the WBMMS are: control Meaning in Life and Psychological Well-Being of self and events, happiness, social involvement, self-esteem, mental balance, and sociability. Masse, Poulin, Dassa, Lambert, Belair, & Battaglini (1998a) found an overall Cronbach’s alpha of 0.93 for the questionnaire, and a range of 0.71 to 0.85 on the subscales.

Results and Discussion

In order to test the postulated hypotheses, t-test was applied and t-values for different groups were obtained:

Hypothesis 1

While testing the hypothesis 1 it was found that males and females differ significantly on the subscales of relationship (t-value 4.05-significant at .01 level), self-acceptance (t-value 3.00-significant at .01 level), intimacy (t-value 2.63-significant at .01 level), and fair treatment (t-value 2.89-significant at .01 level). Results showed (table 1) higher mean scores by females than males on all of the subscales of PMP. Results showed that females have

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviation, and t-values of Males and Females On the Subscales of PMP and WBMMS. N = Male 65; Female 39

Subscales of PMP		Mean	SD	t-value
Achievement	M	85.815	12.511	1.87
	F	90.128	9.119	
Relationship	M	46.569	7.875	4.05**
	F	52.41	5.575	
Religion	M	46.83	7.612	1.67
	F	49.564	8.786	
Self-Transcendence	M	41.646	6.692	1.52
	F	43.743	6.946	
Self-Acceptance	M	29.932	5.5	3.00**
	F	32.948	3.946	
Intimacy	M	24.969	5.536	2.63**
	F	27.743	4.586	
Fair Treatment	M	18.8	3.067	2.89**
	F	20.794	3.894	
Subscales of WBMMS				
Control of Self and Events	M	13.6	3.086	0.67
	F	14	2.675	
Happiness	M	19.784	3.038	1.71
	F	20.769	2.432	
Social Involvement	M	16.123	2.348	0.5
	F	16.384	2.843	
Self-Esteem	M	14.2	2.469	2.65**
	F	15.461	2.113	
Mental Balance	M	14.507	2.845	2.24*
	F	15.743	2.499	
Sociability	M	16.169	2.211	0.51
	F	16.41	2.424	

**p< 0.01; * p< 0.05

PMP - Personal Meaning Profile,

WBMMS - Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale

higher tendency towards relationship, self-acceptance, fair treatment, and intimacy than that of males. No significant difference was found on the subscales of achievement, religion, and self-transcendence between males and females.

Hypothesis 2

In the second hypothesis results showed that female and male students differ significantly on self-esteem (t-value 2.65-

significant at .01 level) and mental balance (t-value 2.24-significant at .05 level) subscales of WBMMS. On the other hand no significant difference was found between males and females on other subscales of WBMMS. From the results (see table 1) it is apparent that mean score of females (though very little in some cases) are higher than that of males. Females showed a little higher score than male on subscales of mental health and self-esteem.

Table-2: Means, Standard Deviation, and t-values of Students of Pre-Adolescence and Adolescence Periods on the Subscales of PMP and WBMMS. N = Adolescence 54; Pre-Adolescence 50

Subscales of PMP		Mean	SD	t-value
Achievement	A	86.463	13.307	0.89
	PA	88.48	9.192	
Relationship	A	47.888	8.522	1.21
	PA	49.7	6.465	
Religion	A	47.388	8.666	0.6
	PA	48.36	7.585	
Self-Transcendence	A	42.666	7.633	0.36
	PA	42.18	5.913	
Self-Acceptance	A	30.222	5.193	1.7
	PA	31.96	5.038	
Intimacy	A	25.092	5.889	1.83
	PA	27	4.553	
Fair Treatment	A	19.074	3.874	1.43
	PA	20.06	3.046	
Subscales of WBMMS				
Control of Self and Events	A	13.925	3.318	0.63
	PA	13.56	2.467	
Happiness	A	19.814	2.965	1.26
	PA	20.52	2.712	
Social Involvement	A	16.148	2.558	0.3
	PA	16.3	2.533	
Self-Esteem	A	14.574	2.559	0.43
	PA	14.78	2.261	
Mental Balance	A	14.518	3.094	1.74
	PA	15.46	2.314	
Sociability	A	16.444	2.682	0.85
	PA	16.06	1.766	

**p < 0.01; * p < 0.05

A = Adolescence, P.A. = Pre-Adolescence

Hypothesis 3

At the time of testing hypothesis 3, some differences were observed between students of pre-adolescence and adolescence periods on subscales of PMP (see table 2). Though differences were there in the mean score of male and female students, but these differences were not found to be significant at any level of significance.

Hypothesis 4

Here also no significant difference was found between students of pre-adolescence and adolescence periods on any subscale of WBMMS (see table 2). Analysis of mean scores showed higher mean score (though very small in number) by adolescents than those of pre-adolescents on the subscales of control of self and events, mental balance and sociability. While on the subscales of happiness, social involvement, and self-esteem pre-adolescents score higher on means than adolescents.

Hypothesis 5

By analyzing the results of males and females of adolescence period, we found that mean scores of females are higher than that of males on all subscales of PMP (see table 3). Difference is significant on the subscales of relationship (t-value 2.54- significant at .05 level), self-acceptance (t-value 2.22-significant at .05 level), intimacy (t-value 2.13-significant at .05 level) and fair treatment (t-value 3.00-significant at .01 level). While on other subscales no significant difference was found at all.

Hypothesis 6

In testing sixth hypothesis we found that male and female students of adolescence period do not differ significantly in their mean scores on any of the subscales of WBMMS (see table 3). Between females and males no significant difference was found at all. On this scale the mean scores of females were higher than that of males on all subscales except the social involvement subscale.

Table 3: Means, Standard Deviation and t-values of Males and Females of Adolescence Period on Subscales of PMP and WBMMS.
N = Males 34; Females 20

Subscales of PMP	Mean	SD	t-value
Achievement M	85.205	14.735	0.9
F	88.6	10.449	
Relationship M	45.735	9.209	2.54*
F	51.55	5.735	
Religion M	46.794	8.689	0.65
F	48.4	8.756	
Self-Transcendence M	42.176	8.269	0.61
F	43.5	6.525	
Self-Acceptance M	29.058	5.365	2.22*
F	32.2	4.323	
Intimacy M	23.823	5.859	2.13*
F	27.25	5.418	
Fair Treatment M	17.941	3.567	3.00**
F	21	3.684	
Subscales of WBMMS			
Control of Self and Events M	13.735	3.629	0.54
F	14.25	2.769	
Happiness M	19.47	3.202	1.11
F	20.4	2.479	
Social Involvement M	16.294	2.316	0.54
F	15.9	2.971	
Self-Esteem M	14.117	2.567	1.74
F	15.35	2.412	
Mental Balance M	14	3.265	1.63
F	15.4	2.623	
Sociability M	16.294	2.668	0.53
F	16.7	2.754	

**p< 0.01; * p< 0.05

Hypothesis 7

Between males and females of pre-adolescence period a significant difference was found on the subscales of achievement (t-value 2.02-significant at .05 level), relationship (t-value 3.41-significant at .01 level) and self-acceptance (t-value 2.01-significant at .05 level) of PMP scale (see table 4). On rest of the subscales no significant difference at any level was found. Mean scores on all subscales of PMP are higher among female students than that of male students.

Table 4: Means, Standard Deviation, and t-values of Males and Females of Pre-Adolescence Period on the Subscales of PMP and WBMMS. N = Male 31; Female 19

Subscales of PMP	Mean	SD	t-value
Achievement M	86.483	9.705	2.02*
F	91.736	7.415	
Relationship M	47.483	6.114	3.41**
F	53.315	5.406	
Religion M	46.871	6.37	1.81
F	50.789	8.885	
Self-Transcendence M	41.064	4.434	1.73
F	44	7.535	
Self-Acceptance M	30.871	5.578	2.01*
F	33.736	3.445	
Intimacy M	26.225	4.951	1.55
F	28.263	3.587	
Fair Treatment M	19.741	2.081	0.94
F	20.578	4.194	
Subscales of WBMMS			
Control of Self and Events M	13.451	2.406	0.39
F	13.736	2.621	
Happiness M	20.129	2.86	1.31
F	21.157	2.386	
Social Involvement M	15.935	2.407	1.3
F	16.894	2.685	
Self-Esteem M	14.29	2.397	2.01*
F	15.578	1.804	
Mental Balance M	15.064	2.22	1.56
F	16.105	2.378	
Sociability M	16.032	1.601	0.14
F	16.105	2.051	

**p< 0.01; * p< 0.05

Hypothesis 8

Finally, results of males and females of pre-adolescence period were analyzed on WBMM scale. Results of both groups showed that on self-esteem (t-value 2.01-significant at .05 level) subscale of WBMMS males and females differ significantly (see table 4). While on other subscales no significant difference was found with reference to these two sexes. By having a look on mean scores of males and females on subscales of WBMMS it was found that the mean scores of females were higher than that of males on all subscales.

Table 5: Correlation among the Subscales of Main Scales: Subscales of Well-Being Manifestation Measure Scale

Subscales of Personal Meaning Profile	Control of Self and Events	Happiness	Social Involvement	Self-Esteem	Mental Balance	Sociability
Achievement	.499**	.368**	.232**	.599**	.328**	.182
Relationship	.426**	.547**	.284**	.583**	.412**	.467**
Religion	.229*	.413**	.177	.166	.068	.178
Self-Transcendence	.423**	.357**	.244*	.438**	.336**	.124
Self-Acceptance	.282**	.368**	.163	.287**	.351**	.304**
Intimacy	.210*	.382**	.110	.290**	.271**	.263**
Fair Treatment	.254**	.244**	.187	.438**	.205*	.096

**p< 0.01; * p< 0.05

The aim of the present study was to have a look on meaning in life and psychological well-being of different groups of students especially with reference to gender and grade of students. In our study it was found that meaning in life is highly correlated with psychological well-being (see table 5). This shows that if a person perceives his or her life to be meaningful then he or she will feel more psychologically well off than those who do not perceive their life to be meaningful. Some studies also show the similar results while evaluating the relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being (Debats, Drost & Prartho, 1995; Shek, 1992; Zika & Chamberlain, 1987; Recker, Peacock & Wong 1987). In the present study it was found that adolescents did not score significantly higher than pre-adolescents on subscales of PMP and WBMMS. Similar results were also found by Weber (1996). In his study scores of grade twelve students were not significantly higher than grade nine students on psychological well-being. A reason for the good psychological well-being of pre-adolescents may be that they have not started to take things very seriously

and also that they do not have high pressure for their career formation.

On the subscales of PMP females scored higher than that of males. In some other studies similar findings were observed. For example, Anderson (1999) found that the quality of salient parent-child and peer relationships significantly predicted adolescent relationship identity for girls but not for boys. Also, Beutel and Marini (1995) found that adolescent females were more likely than males to indicate that finding purpose and meaning in life is extremely important.

Thus it can be said that there can be various factors such as developmental level of person, family and social environment and relationships, schooling, career orientation, grade and gender that influences meaning in life and psychological well-being of persons.

Limitations

It is felt that there are two main limitations of the study. First limitation is concerned with the sample size of the study. A sample of 104 students is not sufficient for any generalization on all students of similar age groups. Further

the sample was drawn from a particular locality, it would be more acceptable and representative if the samples are taken from diverse localities with students of diverse backgrounds.

Second limitation is related with the age group of students taken in the study. Age difference between two groups is not large enough to show a clear difference on the dimensions studied. Results are expected to be more diverse if the intake of boys and girls is of wider age range, from 11-12 years to 20-21 years.

Conclusion

This study has provided an insight of the meaning in life and psychological well-being of students of early and late adolescence period. It has been well established by prior studies in this field, that a meaningful and purposeful life enhances the psychological well-being of persons. With a better understanding of meaning and psychological well-being within adolescents, various counseling or educational implications can be derived for assisting adolescents to develop holistically in terms of body, mind, and spirit as they venture into the world of adulthood.

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