

Perceived Acceptance and Psychological Well-Being Among Young Adults: Exploring Family and Social Influences

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Abstract

Young adulthood is a phase when individuals begin to shape their identities, form new relationships, and navigate the complexities of adult responsibilities. For many, this period of self-discovery and independence also comes with challenges, which can impact their psychological well-being. Perceived acceptance, the subjective feeling of being valued, supported, and understood by others, plays a crucial role in shaping young adults' mental and emotional health. This study investigates the relationship between perceived acceptance from significant figures—mothers, fathers, family, and friends and psychological well-being among young adults aged 18-22 years in Bangalore, India. Using a purposive sampling method, data were collected from 287 participants through the Perceived Acceptance Scale (Douglas et al.) and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes). Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between all the dimensions of perceived acceptance and psychological well-being. Gender differences emerged, with females reporting higher perceived acceptance from fathers and greater psychological well-being. These findings underscore the importance of nurturing acceptance to promote mental health in young adults and provide insights for future interventions and policy-making.

Keywords: Perceived Acceptance; Psychological well-being; Young Adults; Relationships.

Date of Submission: 29-11-2024

Date of Acceptance: 09-12-2024

I. Introduction

Young adulthood, typically between the ages of 18 and 25, is a pivotal time marked by significant changes in identity, relationships, and life goals. It is during this period that individuals move from adolescence to greater independence, making key decisions about their careers, values, and social connections. The quality of relationships with important people in their lives, such as parents, family, and friends, plays a crucial role in shaping their psychological well-being. Among these relational factors, perceived acceptance, or the feeling of being valued, loved, and supported by others, is a vital contributor to mental health during this stage.

Perceived acceptance is key to building a sense of belonging and emotional security. It nurtures trust, empathy, and cooperation in relationships, allowing individuals to engage positively with their social environment. Studies have shown that young adults who feel accepted by their parents, family, and peers tend to have higher self-esteem, greater resilience, and more satisfaction with life. On the other hand, feelings of rejection can lead to isolation, hinder social connections, and negatively affect psychological well-being (Liu, 2012).

Psychological well-being, as defined by Ryff (1989), includes elements like self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, a sense of purpose, mastery over one's environment, and positive relationships. It reflects an individual's ability to live a fulfilling, balanced life, effectively manage challenges, and maintain emotional stability. Achieving psychological well-being is closely linked to the support and validation an individual receives from their social network.

In the context of Indian culture, family and social acceptance hold particular importance. Strong family bonds and collectivist values shape how individuals perceive support and acceptance from others. However, despite the central role relationships play in Indian society, there has been limited research on how perceived acceptance impacts the psychological well-being of young adults in India.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between perceived acceptance from mothers, fathers, family, and friends, and the psychological well-being of young adults. It also examines

potential gender differences in perceived acceptance and well-being, considering how cultural norms around gender roles and expectations may influence these factors. By exploring these dynamics, the study hopes to shed light on the importance of relational acceptance in supporting mental health and personal growth during young adulthood.

II. Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between perceived acceptance and psychological well-being among young adults aged 18-22 years in Bangalore urban. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who met the inclusion criteria. A total of 287 participants (141 males and 146 females) were recruited. The data was gathered using both offline and online methods, with the online data collection conducted through Google Forms. Google Forms were made available between February 4, 2024, and June 28, 2024. For data collection in colleges, prior approval was obtained from the Deans and Principals of various institutions in Bangalore city. Researcher provided a brief description of the study and its objectives to ensure participants were well-informed. A consent form was used to obtain voluntary participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the process, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences.

III. Measures

Perceived Acceptance Scale (PAS)

Created by Douglas and colleagues, this 44-item self-report questionnaire evaluates how accepted individuals feel in four key areas of their relationships: friendships (12 items), family (12 items), mother (10 items), and father (10 items). Participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means "Strongly Disagree" and 5 means "Strongly Agree." The scale demonstrates strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of .94 for mother, .93 for father, .92 for family, .80 for friends, and .96 for the overall scale.

Ryff's Psychological well-being Scale (18- item version)

Created by Ryff and Keyes (1995), this scale evaluates six key aspects of psychological well-being: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relationships with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance. The scale consists of 18 items, with 10 items scored in reverse (e.g., Q1, Q2, Q3). Participants respond on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means "Strongly Agree" and 7 means "Strongly Disagree." To calculate the subscale scores, the responses to the relevant items are added together, with higher scores reflecting better psychological well-being.

IV. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Post-Graduate Department of Psychology, Bishop Cotton College, Bangalore. Informed consent was sought from all participants, and they were provided with clear instructions regarding their participation rights. Measures were taken to maintain confidentiality and ensure no identifying information was collected. Participants were also given the option to contact the investigator for any clarifications or concerns.

V. Results And Discussion

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p = 0.41$) confirmed that the data was normally distributed, allowing for the use of parametric tests in analyzing the relationships between perceived acceptance and psychological well-being among young adults. The alpha level was set at 0.05. To explore gender differences in perceived acceptance and the relationship between perceived acceptance and psychological well-being, parametric tests including the Independent T-Test and Pearson Correlation Test were utilized.

The socio-demographic variables revealed that the sample of 287 young adults was predominantly aged 20-22 years, with 5.2% of participants being 18 years old, 18.5% being 19 years old, 29.3% being 20 years old, 18.8% being 21 years old, and 28.2% being 22 years old. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 49.1% of the sample identifying as male and 50.9% identifying as female.

The study first assessed gender differences in perceived acceptance from mother, father, friends, and family among young adults using the Independent T-Test. The results indicated that only perceived acceptance from the father demonstrated a significant gender difference ($p = 0.026$). Females (mean score = 34.3) reported higher levels of perceived acceptance from their fathers than males (mean score = 32.3).

Table 1 showing the Independent T- test results for gender difference in Perceived acceptance among young adults.

Dimensions	F	T	df	Sig (2 tailed)
Perceived acceptance Friend	6.818	1.154	285	.250
Perceived acceptance Mother	2.879	1.322	285	.187
Perceived acceptance Father	9.978	2.234	285	.026*
Perceived acceptance Family	8.731	1.463	285	.145

*significant at 0.05 level

This finding suggests that fathers may express and convey their acceptance differently toward daughters and sons, which has important implications for understanding the dynamics of parental relationships and their impact on psychological well-being during young adulthood.

Parenting styles have undergone significant changes over the past few decades, with traditional gender roles becoming less defined. In the past, fathers were largely viewed as providers and disciplinarians, while mothers were associated with emotional care and nurturing. However, today's fathers are much more involved in their children's emotional and psychological growth, leading to a more open and nuanced expression of paternal love and acceptance (Jessee, V., & Adamsons, K., 2018). This shift has been particularly impactful for daughters, who now experience greater paternal involvement. Fathers are increasingly supportive of their daughters' personal goals and ambitions, moving away from the rigid gender stereotypes of past generations. This has fostered stronger emotional connections, with many females feeling a greater sense of acceptance from their fathers (Michael Malek, 2023, July 6).

In contrast, the traditional expectations of masculinity for boys, such as emotional restraint, toughness, and independence, can create barriers to emotional intimacy with their fathers. These societal pressures discourage boys from showing vulnerability or seeking emotional support, which can hinder the development of close, supportive relationships with their fathers (McKenzie et al., 2018). The societal expectation for boys to "toughen up" may make it harder for them to experience the emotional validation and acceptance they need. On the other hand, girls are typically encouraged to express their emotions more freely, making it easier for them to form emotionally open and supportive bonds with their fathers (Chaplin, 2015). This difference in how boys and girls are socialized likely contributes to the stronger perceived acceptance among females in the study.

In the current study Independent T-Test results also showed significant gender difference in psychological well-being ($p=.001$) among young adults with females ($\mu= 83.15$) showing better psychological well-being than males ($\mu= 78.54$). A key factor that contributes to the higher psychological well-being seen in females is their greater ability to openly express their emotions. From an early age, girls are typically encouraged to be more in touch with their feelings and seek support when needed. This emotional openness helps them process and manage their emotions in a healthier way, which leads to better mental health (Chaplin T. M., 2015).

Studies (Kelly et al., 2008) have shown that women are more likely to use helpful coping strategies, like seeking support from others, solving problems, and sharing their emotions. These approaches are linked to lower levels of stress and anxiety, compared to men, who might cope by avoiding problems or turning to substances. The ability to talk about their feelings and ask for help plays a significant role in improving women's overall mental health.

Women often build and maintain close connections with family, friends, and peers, providing them with emotional, practical, and informational support. These strong support networks serve as a buffer against stress and mental health challenges, boosting their resilience (Ozbay et al., 2007). In contrast, men might have fewer close relationships and tend to rely more on their partners for emotional support. The societal expectation that men should be self-sufficient and emotionally reserved can make it harder for them to build strong support networks, which could negatively affect their psychological well-being (Gough B, Novikova I, 2020).

The primary objective of this study was to examine whether perceived acceptance from mothers, fathers, friends, and family was significantly related to psychological well-being among young adults. The results of Pearson's correlation analysis as seen in table 2 indicated that all four dimensions of perceived acceptance—mother, father, friends, and family were positively and significantly correlated with psychological well-being. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the critical role of social acceptance in promoting mental health and well-being.

Table 2 showing the Pearson Correlation result for relationship between dimensions of perceived acceptance and psychological well-being among young adults.

Psychological well-being (N=287)	Perceived support mother	Perceived support father	Perceived support friends	Perceived support family
Pearson Correlation	.465*	.344**	.417**	.415**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000

**significant at the 0.05 level*

Maternal acceptance has long been associated with positive mental health outcomes. Research, (Henriksen, 2017) shows that young adults who feel accepted by their mothers are less likely to experience mental health challenges like depression and anxiety. This protective effect comes from the emotional security, self-esteem, and resilience that maternal support provides, helping young adults better handle life stressors, such as academic pressures and relationship conflicts (Schneiderman et al., 2005).

Similarly, paternal acceptance also plays a crucial role in psychological well-being. The current study supports the interpersonal acceptance–rejection theory, which suggests that perceived paternal acceptance can sometimes have a greater or equally significant impact on psychological health as maternal acceptance (Rohner, 2021). Research by Khaleque and Rohner (2012) further underscores the importance of paternal acceptance across cultures. When young adults feel understood and accepted by their fathers, they develop positive self-perceptions, which are essential for confidence and self-efficacy—both key contributors to overall mental well-being.

Family acceptance, which involves warmth, unconditional love, and positive reinforcement from parents, siblings, and extended family, also emerged as an important factor. Emotional availability and validation from family members create a safe space for young adults to express themselves and manage stress more effectively. This support not only strengthens resilience but also encourages the development of healthy coping strategies, which are vital for mental health (Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Additionally, family members model problem-solving and coping mechanisms that young adults can adopt during challenging times.

The study also found that perceived acceptance from friends is strongly linked to psychological well-being. Friends provide emotional support, validation, and a sense of belonging, all of which are essential for good mental health (Manchanda et al., 2023). High levels of acceptance from peers are associated with lower rates of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, as the emotional support from friends acts as a buffer against external stressors. Feeling connected to a social group boosts self-worth and enhances overall psychological well-being (Umberson & Montez, 2010). Peer acceptance also helps young adults build emotional resilience to cope with difficulties like academic pressures and relationship conflicts (Collado-Soler et al., 2023).

These findings highlight the critical role of social support and validation in maintaining mental health. Young adults who feel accepted and valued by their families and friends are better equipped to face life's challenges and maintain emotional resilience. These insights can guide interventions aimed at strengthening familial and social connections, which are key to promoting well-being among young adults.

VI. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the vital role that perceived acceptance from mothers, fathers, family, and friends plays in shaping the psychological well-being of young adults. The findings show that higher levels of perceived acceptance from these important relationships are strongly linked to better mental health outcomes. Notably, perceived acceptance from mothers had the strongest correlation with all aspects of psychological well-being, highlighting the significant impact of maternal support. Additionally, gender differences emerged, with females reporting higher levels of perceived acceptance from their fathers and showing better psychological well-being, particularly in areas like personal growth and self-acceptance. This finding underscores the evolving nature of father-daughter relationships in light of changing gender norms and parenting practices. While fathers may be providing more emotional support and validation to their daughters, it is important to recognize that gender differences in emotional expression and acceptance still exist. These differences can significantly impact young adults' psychological well-being, as the quality of relationships with parents, especially fathers, plays a vital role in fostering emotional resilience and overall mental health. The study suggests that addressing gendered expectations within parental relationships is crucial to creating healthier, more supportive environments for all young adults, regardless of gender. These results stress the importance of nurturing supportive and accepting relationships within families and social networks to promote the mental health of young adults. Understanding perceived acceptance in young adulthood, thus, is crucial for supporting developmental transitions, recognizing social support mechanisms, addressing gender differences, and informing interventions that can improve long-term well-being. Future research should continue to explore

the factors that contribute to these connections and investigate strategies to enhance perceived acceptance, ultimately improving psychological outcomes.

Limitations

The limitations of the study were, firstly, the sample was limited to young adults aged 18-22 years, which restricts the findings to a specific age group and may not be applicable to other stages of adulthood. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported measures for both perceived acceptance and psychological well-being, which can introduce bias, as participants might provide socially desirable responses or have difficulty accurately recalling or assessing their experiences. Perceived acceptance is inherently subjective and can be influenced by individual personality traits, past experiences, and current mood, which may affect the consistency and accuracy of the reported perceptions. Cultural norms and values regarding family dynamics and friendships can also significantly influence perceptions of acceptance, and the study may not have sufficiently addressed these cultural differences, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings across diverse populations. Additionally, the data was collected only in Bengaluru urban city, limiting the geographical scope, and the sample size was relatively small, which affects the generalizability of the results. The purposive sampling technique further limits the ability to generalize the findings to the broader population. Finally, as the study utilized correlational statistics, no definitive conclusions can be made about causality between perceived acceptance and psychological well-being.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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