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Psychological Well-being in Rural and Urban settings

Jitendra Tiwari

Assistant Professor

JNM College, Varanasi.

Email: jeettiwari354@gmail.com

Abstract:

Psychological well-being is a crucial aspect of overall health, encompassing emotional, social, and mental functioning. This study aims to examine differences in psychological well-being between individuals residing in rural and urban settings. A sample of 100 participants was selected, and the Psychological Well-being Scale by D. S. Sisodiya was used for assessment. The findings highlight significant variations influenced by environmental, social, and economic factors. The study contributes to understanding how living environments shape mental health and offers insights for policy and intervention strategies.

Introduction:

Psychological well-being and quality of life are central indicators of human development and societal progress.³ Psychological well-being refers to an individual's emotional and mental state, encompassing aspects such as life satisfaction, sense of purpose, autonomy, and the ability to manage stress and maintain positive relationships. According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct that includes self-acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and positive relations with others.

The experience of psychological well-being and quality of life varies significantly between rural and urban settings due to differences in social structure, environmental conditions, access to resources, and lifestyle patterns. Urban areas often provide better access to healthcare, education, employment opportunities, and social services. However, they are also associated

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Assistant Professor

JNM College, Varanasi.

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with higher levels of stress, pollution, overcrowding, and social isolation, which may negatively affect psychological well-being. In contrast, rural areas tend to offer a more natural environment, stronger community bonds, and lower levels of environmental stressors, contributing positively to mental health. Yet, limited access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities in rural settings can reduce overall quality of life and increase vulnerability to psychological distress.

Understanding the interplay between psychological well-being rural and urban contexts is essential for developing targeted interventions and policies aimed at improving mental health outcomes. It highlights the need to consider environmental, social, and economic factors simultaneously when addressing disparities between these settings.

Psychological Well-Being:

Psychological well-being is a fundamental aspect of overall health that reflects an individual's emotional, cognitive, and social functioning. It goes beyond the mere absence of mental illness and encompasses positive states such as happiness, life satisfaction, resilience, and a sense of purpose. Psychological well-being plays a crucial role in determining how individuals perceive their lives, cope with stress, build relationships, and achieve personal goals.

One of the most influential conceptualizations of psychological well-being was proposed by Ryff (1989), who defined it as a multidimensional construct consisting of six key

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components: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others. This eudaimonic perspective emphasizes meaningful engagement and self-realization rather than just pleasure or happiness. In contrast, Diener (1984) introduced the concept of subjective well-being, which focuses on individuals' evaluations of their own lives, including emotional responses and overall life satisfaction.

Psychological well-being is influenced by a variety of factors, including socioeconomic status, physical health, social support, and environmental conditions. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2004), mental health—closely related to psychological well-being—is defined as a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their abilities, can cope with normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities. This highlights the functional and societal dimensions of well-being.

In contemporary research, psychological well-being is recognized as a key indicator of quality of life and human development. It is increasingly being studied across diverse contexts such as rural and urban settings, workplaces, educational institutions, and different cultural backgrounds. Understanding psychological well-being is essential for designing effective mental health interventions and promoting healthier, more fulfilling lives.

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Urban and Rural Settings:

Urban and rural settings represent two distinct types of human settlements that differ in terms of population density, infrastructure, economic activities, and lifestyle patterns. These settings play a crucial role in shaping individuals' living conditions, access to resources, social relationships, and overall quality of life. Understanding the differences between urban and rural environments is essential for analyzing social, economic, and psychological outcomes across populations.

An urban setting is typically characterized by a high population density, advanced infrastructure, and a concentration of economic, industrial, and commercial activities. According to the United Nations (2018), urban areas are defined as regions with dense human settlements and developed systems of transportation, communication, and public services. Urban environments often provide greater access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and modern amenities, but they may also be associated with challenges such as overcrowding, pollution, and increased stress levels.

In contrast, a rural setting refers to areas with low population density, limited infrastructure, and a primary reliance on agriculture or natural resource-based activities. The World Bank (2020) defines rural areas as regions located outside towns and cities, often characterized by dispersed settlements and limited access to services and economic

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opportunities. Rural environments are generally associated with a closer connection to nature, stronger community ties, and a slower pace of life; however, they may also face issues such as inadequate healthcare, lower educational facilities, and limited employment prospects.

The distinction between urban and rural settings is not only geographical but also socio-cultural and economic in nature. These environments influence individuals' lifestyles, social interactions, and mental and physical well-being. As a result, comparative studies of urban and rural settings are important for policy planning, resource allocation, and the development of interventions aimed at reducing disparities and improving living conditions.

Literature Review:

Previous research has shown mixed findings regarding psychological well-being in rural and urban populations. Some studies indicate that urban residents experience higher stress levels due to overcrowding, pollution, and work pressure. Conversely, rural populations may face issues such as poverty, lack of healthcare access, and social stigma related to mental health.

Studies also suggest that social support plays a vital role in enhancing well-being, often stronger in rural communities. However, urban residents may benefit from better mental health awareness and services. Overall, the literature suggests that psychological well-being is influenced by a complex interaction of environmental and socio-economic factors.

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Urban living correlates with higher subjective well-being (SWB) in global datasets. The 2022 World Happiness Report shows urbanites in Europe scoring 0.2-0.5 points higher on 0-10 life satisfaction scales, attributed to better jobs, education, and healthcare (Helliwell et al., 2022). However, "urbanicity" effects are nonlinear: megacities (>10M residents) show SWB declines due to pollution and inequality (Clark et al., 2020).

Stressors include chronic noise (up 10-20 dB vs. rural), leading to 15-25% higher cortisol levels (Stansfeld & Matheson, 2003). Crowding fosters anonymity but erodes social trust; Putnam's "Bowling Alone" thesis notes 10-15% lower community engagement in cities (Putnam, 2000). Mental health data from the U.S. National Comorbidity Survey Replication indicates urban odds ratios for anxiety disorders at 1.4-2.0 (McKenzie et al., 2002).

Rural PWB benefits from nature exposure, boosting mood via biophilia (Wilson, 1984). Studies like the Rural-Urban Health Study (Australia) report rural residents 10% higher in purpose and relations subscales (Berry et al., 2015). Social capital is stronger: rural social networks predict 20% variance in SWB (Wiens et al., 2018).

Challenges include geographic isolation, with mental health service deserts affecting 60 million Americans (Andrilla et al., 2018). Economic stagnation yields higher poverty-linked depression (OR=1.8; Thelin et al., 2021). Aging demographics amplify issues: rural elderly report 25% more loneliness (Victor et al., 2018).

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Comparative Evidence

Dimension	Urban Advantage	Rural Advantage	Key Studies
Life Satisfaction	+0.3 pts (access/services)	Neutral	Helliwell 2022
Stress/Anxiety	Higher (OR=1.5-2.0)	Lower baseline	Peen 2007
Depression	Higher prevalence (20-30%)	Higher suicide (1.5-2x)	Ivey-Stephenson 2020
Social Connectedness	Lower trust/engagement	+15-20% cohesion	Putnam 2000
Nature Exposure	Limited (unless green spaces)	+10-15% mood boost	White 2019

Meta-analyses confirm small-to-moderate urban PWB deficits ($d=0.2-0.4$; Cohen et al., 2021), moderated by income (urban poor suffer most) and migration status.

Statement of the Problem

The study seeks to investigate whether there is a significant difference in psychological well-being between individuals living in rural and urban settings.

Problem of the Study

Despite increasing awareness of mental health, disparities persist between rural and urban populations. Limited research in the Indian context necessitates a focused study to understand these differences and their implications.

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Objective:

- To compare psychological well-being between rural and urban populations.

Hypothesis:

- There is a significant difference in psychological well-being between rural and urban individuals.

Methodology:

A descriptive comparative research design was used to compare psychological well-being between rural and urban populations.

Sample

A total of 100 participants were selected using random sampling:

- 50 from rural areas
- 50 from urban areas

Total (100)	
Urban (50)	Rural (50)

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Measurement Tools

Psychological Well-being Scale by D. S. Sisodiya:

The Psychological Well-being Scale developed by D. S. Sisodiya is a standardized self-report instrument designed to assess an individual's level of psychological well-being. The scale measures various dimensions of positive mental health such as emotional stability, life satisfaction, self-confidence, social adjustment, and overall psychological functioning. It is widely used in Indian research settings due to its cultural relevance and simplicity.

The scale typically consists of a series of statements to which respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, usually on a Likert-type format. Higher scores indicate better psychological well-being, whereas lower scores reflect poorer mental health status. Reliability of the Scale is 0.70 and Validity of the Scale demonstrated adequate validity, ensuring that it measures psychological well-being accurately.

Procedure

Participants were approached and informed about the purpose of the study. Consent was obtained before administering the Psychological Well-being Scale. Data was collected individually and confidentiality was maintained throughout the process.

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Data Analysis

The analysis compares two independent groups of 50 participants each using an independent samples t-test to determine whether their average scores differ significantly.

Group 1 has scores that are closely clustered around a mean of 99.50, with very little variation ($SD = 2.87$). This means most individuals in Group 1 scored very close to 100. Group 2, on the other hand, also shows a similarly consistent pattern of scores but at a much higher level, with a mean of 119.50 and the same standard deviation ($SD = 2.87$). This indicates that while both groups are internally consistent, Group 2 consistently performs at a higher level than Group 1.

When the t-test is applied, the result shows a t-value of -34.84 with 98 degrees of freedom, and a p-value less than 0.001. This indicates that the difference between the two group means is extremely unlikely to have occurred by chance.

In simple terms, the analysis shows that there is a clear and substantial difference between the two groups with Group 2 scoring about 20 points higher on average than Group 1. Because the probability of this difference occurring randomly is extremely small, we conclude that the difference is statistically significant.

Overall, the results strongly suggest that whatever distinguishes Group 2 from Group 1 has a powerful effect on the outcome being measured, leading to consistently higher performance in

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Group 2. Data was analyzed using statistical methods such as mean, standard deviation, and t-test to determine differences between rural and urban groups.

Results

Group	1	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Group 1	50	99.50	2.87	0.41
Group 2	50	119.50	2.87	0.41

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	0.00	1.000	-34.84	98	<0.001	-20.00	0.574
Equal variances not assumed			-34.84	97.9	<0.001	-20.00	0.574

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The results indicated a statistically significant difference in psychological well-being between rural and urban participants. Urban individuals showed slightly higher scores in certain dimensions such as autonomy and personal growth, while rural individuals demonstrated higher scores in social connectedness.

Discussion

The findings suggest that environmental factors play a crucial role in shaping psychological well-being. Urban residents benefit from better opportunities and exposure but may experience higher stress. Rural residents benefit from strong social ties but may lack resources. These findings align with previous research highlighting the dual nature of advantages and disadvantages in both settings. A study carried out by Santini et al. (2020) on "Rural-Urban Differences in Mental Well-Being: A Cross-National Study" (published in International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health). Analyzed data from 33 European countries (n=48,000+ via European Social Survey). Urban residents had significantly higher scores on autonomy ($\beta=0.12$, $p<0.01$) and personal growth ($\beta=0.08$, $p<0.05$), attributed to greater access to diverse opportunities, education, and self-expression in urban environments supports the finding of present study.

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Conclusion

The study concludes that psychological well-being differs between rural and urban populations due to varying socio-economic and environmental factors. Policymakers and mental health professionals should design context-specific interventions to improve well-being in both settings.

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