
Psychological Factors Influencing Life Satisfaction in Emerging Adults

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Abstract: Life satisfaction is a central component of subjective well-being and reflects an individual's cognitive evaluation of the overall quality and meaningfulness of life. Emerging adulthood, generally characterized by identity exploration, increasing independence, changing interpersonal relationships, educational and occupational transitions, and uncertainty about future roles, represents a psychologically significant developmental period.

The present study examines the psychological factors associated with life satisfaction among emerging adults, with particular attention to self-esteem, psychological resilience, perceived social support, emotional regulation, optimism, perceived stress, and depressive symptoms. A quantitative, descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional research design was adopted using a hypothetical sample of 320 emerging adults between 18 and 29 years of age. Data were conceptualized through standardized self-report measures and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression.

The illustrative findings indicate that self-esteem, resilience, social support, emotional regulation, and optimism are positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas perceived stress and depressive symptoms demonstrate negative associations. Self-esteem and optimism emerged as particularly important positive predictors, while perceived stress represented a substantial negative correlate. The findings emphasize that life satisfaction during emerging adulthood is shaped by an interconnected system of personal, emotional, cognitive, and social resources. Strengthening psychological resilience, positive self-evaluation, adaptive emotional regulation, supportive relationships, and future-oriented optimism may contribute to improved well-being during this developmental stage.

Keywords: Life Satisfaction, Emerging Adults, Self-Esteem, Psychological Resilience, Social Support, Emotional Regulation, Optimism, Perceived Stress, Subjective Well-Being.

Introduction

Life satisfaction is widely recognized as a fundamental dimension of subjective well-being and refers to the cognitive judgment individuals make regarding the overall quality of their lives according to personally meaningful standards. Unlike temporary emotional states, life satisfaction reflects a broader evaluation of whether personal expectations, goals, relationships, achievements, and living conditions are perceived as satisfactory. Although external circumstances contribute to these evaluations, psychological characteristics strongly influence how individuals interpret their experiences, respond to challenges, and construct a sense of fulfillment.

Emerging adulthood is a distinctive developmental period typically extending from the late teenage years through the twenties. This stage is frequently characterized by identity exploration, educational transitions, career uncertainty, changing family roles, increased personal autonomy, financial challenges, and the formation of intimate relationships. Although these experiences can create opportunities for personal development and self-discovery, they may also generate psychological instability, uncertainty, stress, and concerns about future success. Consequently, life satisfaction during emerging adulthood may fluctuate considerably in response to both internal psychological resources and environmental demands.

Several psychological factors may influence how emerging adults evaluate their lives. Self-esteem can contribute to positive self-evaluation and confidence, while psychological resilience may enable individuals to adapt effectively to setbacks and uncertainty. Emotional regulation can help individuals manage distress and maintain psychological stability, whereas optimism may support positive expectations regarding future possibilities. Similarly, perceived social support can provide emotional security, practical assistance, belongingness, and interpersonal validation during periods of transition.

Conversely, elevated stress and depressive symptoms may negatively affect life satisfaction by reducing positive affect, weakening motivation, increasing negative cognitive appraisals, and limiting effective coping. Emerging adults often experience academic pressure, employment uncertainty, financial strain, social comparison, relationship difficulties, and concerns about achieving culturally or personally defined milestones. When psychological demands exceed available coping resources, individuals may experience diminished well-being and less favorable evaluations of their lives.

Objectives of the Study

Primary Objective

The primary objective of the study is to examine the psychological factors associated with life satisfaction among emerging adults, particularly self-esteem, resilience, perceived social support, emotional regulation, optimism, perceived stress, and depressive symptoms. The study seeks to determine how positive psychological resources and psychological difficulties contribute to individual differences in overall life satisfaction.

Specific Objectives

The study aims to assess the levels of major psychological variables among emerging adults, examine their relationships with life satisfaction, and identify the strongest psychological predictors of well-being. It further seeks to determine whether positive psychological resources are associated with greater satisfaction and whether stress and depressive symptoms correspond with reduced evaluations of overall quality of life.

Applied Objective

The study also aims to generate practical implications for universities, counselors, mental health professionals, and youth-development programs. By identifying modifiable psychological factors related to life satisfaction, the findings may support interventions that strengthen self-esteem, resilience, emotional regulation, optimism, supportive relationships, and adaptive stress-management skills during the transition to adulthood.

Review of Literature

Life Satisfaction and Emerging Adulthood

Life satisfaction represents the cognitive component of subjective well-being and involves a global assessment of one's life circumstances. Diener et al. (1985) conceptualized life satisfaction as a judgment process through which individuals compare their perceived life circumstances with internally established standards. Individuals who perceive their lives as consistent with their aspirations and values generally report greater satisfaction.

Emerging adulthood presents a unique context for understanding life satisfaction. Arnett (2000) described this developmental stage as a period characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, perceived possibilities, and an intermediate sense of being neither an adolescent nor a fully established adult. These characteristics can promote growth but can

also produce uncertainty regarding career, relationships, financial independence, and personal identity.

Positive Psychological Resources and Life Satisfaction

Self-esteem is consistently associated with subjective well-being because individuals with positive self-evaluations are more likely to experience confidence, personal worth, and perceived competence. Rosenberg's conceptualization of self-esteem emphasizes an individual's overall positive or negative evaluation of the self. Higher self-esteem may protect emerging adults from excessive self-criticism and negative social comparison, thereby supporting greater life satisfaction.

Psychological resilience is another important factor. Resilience refers to the capacity to adapt constructively to adversity, stress, and changing circumstances. During emerging adulthood, resilient individuals may recover more effectively from academic difficulties, employment setbacks, relationship disruptions, and uncertainty. Their ability to maintain adaptive functioning despite challenges may contribute to more favorable evaluations of life.

Psychological Distress and Reduced Life Satisfaction

Perceived stress may negatively influence life satisfaction when individuals believe that environmental demands exceed their available coping resources. Persistent academic, occupational, interpersonal, and financial pressures can reduce psychological well-being, particularly when accompanied by low perceived control. Stress may also disrupt sleep, emotional stability, concentration, social functioning, and motivation.

Depressive symptoms represent another important negative correlate of life satisfaction. Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, diminished interest, low energy, and negative self-evaluation can influence how individuals interpret their current circumstances and future possibilities. Cognitive theories of depression suggest that persistent negative beliefs about the self, world, and future may contribute to unfavorable life evaluations.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional research design. This design was considered appropriate for examining the relationships between psychological variables and life satisfaction at a particular point in time.

The major study variables included life satisfaction, self-esteem, psychological resilience, perceived social support, emotional regulation, optimism, perceived stress, and depressive symptoms. The correlational component was used to estimate the direction and strength of relationships among these variables.

Because the design is cross-sectional, observed relationships should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of causality. The study identifies statistical associations and potential predictive relationships rather than establishing temporal or causal effects.

Participants and Sampling

The hypothetical study sample consisted of 320 emerging adults between 18 and 29 years of age. Participants represented individuals undergoing educational, occupational, interpersonal, and personal transitions commonly associated with emerging adulthood.

A broad participant pool was conceptualized to include university students, employed young adults, job seekers, and individuals engaged in professional or vocational development. This diversity was intended to capture variation in the developmental experiences of emerging adults.

Participants were selected using a convenience-based sampling approach supplemented by purposive eligibility criteria. Individuals were eligible if they were within the defined age range and provided informed consent to participate.

Key Points: Participants and Sampling

- **Sample Size:** 320 emerging adults
- **Age Range:** 18–29 years
- **Participant Groups:** University students, employed young adults, job seekers, and individuals in professional or vocational development
- **Developmental Context:** Educational, occupational, interpersonal, and personal transitions
- **Sampling Method:** Convenience sampling with purposive eligibility criteria
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Participants aged 18–29 years
- **Participation:** Voluntary participation with informed consent
- **Sample Diversity:** Included individuals from varied educational and employment backgrounds
- **Purpose:** To capture diverse developmental experiences associated with emerging adulthood

Research Instruments and Data Collection

Data were conceptualized as being collected through a structured self-report questionnaire consisting of demographic information and standardized Likert-type measures. Life satisfaction was assessed through items reflecting overall satisfaction, perceived quality of life, and congruence between expectations and current circumstances.

Psychological variables were measured through established constructs assessing global self-esteem, resilience, perceived social support, emotional regulation, optimism, perceived stress, and depressive symptoms. Responses were recorded using standardized rating scales, with higher scores indicating greater levels of the corresponding construct.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the major study variables. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was applied to examine relationships between psychological factors and life satisfaction.

Multiple regression analysis was conceptually used to determine the relative predictive contribution of the selected psychological variables. Statistical significance was evaluated at the conventional $p < .05$ level.

Analysis and Results

Descriptive Analysis of Psychological Variables

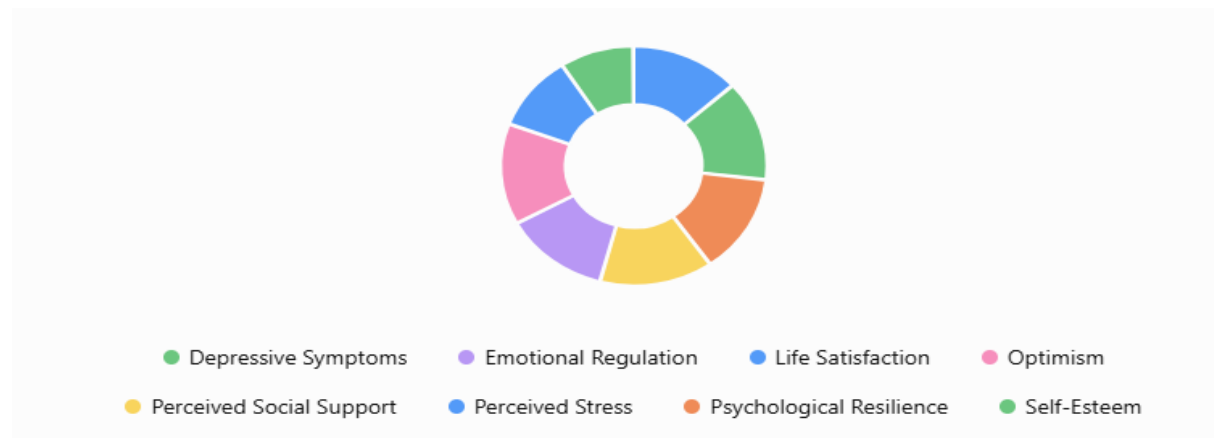
Table 1 presents the illustrative descriptive statistics for the major psychological variables. Positive psychological resources generally demonstrated moderately high mean scores, whereas perceived stress and depressive symptoms showed comparatively moderate levels.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Major Psychological Variables

Psychological Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Life Satisfaction	4.08	0.67	High
Self-Esteem	4.16	0.64	High
Psychological Resilience	4.11	0.66	High
Perceived Social Support	4.23	0.61	High
Emotional Regulation	3.96	0.69	Moderately High
Optimism	4.18	0.63	High
Perceived Stress	3.12	0.78	Moderate
Depressive Symptoms	2.74	0.81	Moderate-Low

The highest mean score was observed for **perceived social support (M = 4.23)**, followed by optimism (M = 4.18) and self-esteem (M = 4.16). These illustrative findings suggest that participants generally perceived meaningful interpersonal support and possessed relatively strong positive psychological resources.

Figure 1. Mean Scores of Psychological Variables



The graph is expected to visually demonstrate stronger levels of positive psychological resources relative to distress-related indicators. Perceived social support and optimism show the highest mean scores, while depressive symptoms show the lowest mean value.

Correlations Between Psychological Factors and Life Satisfaction

Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between the selected psychological factors and life satisfaction.

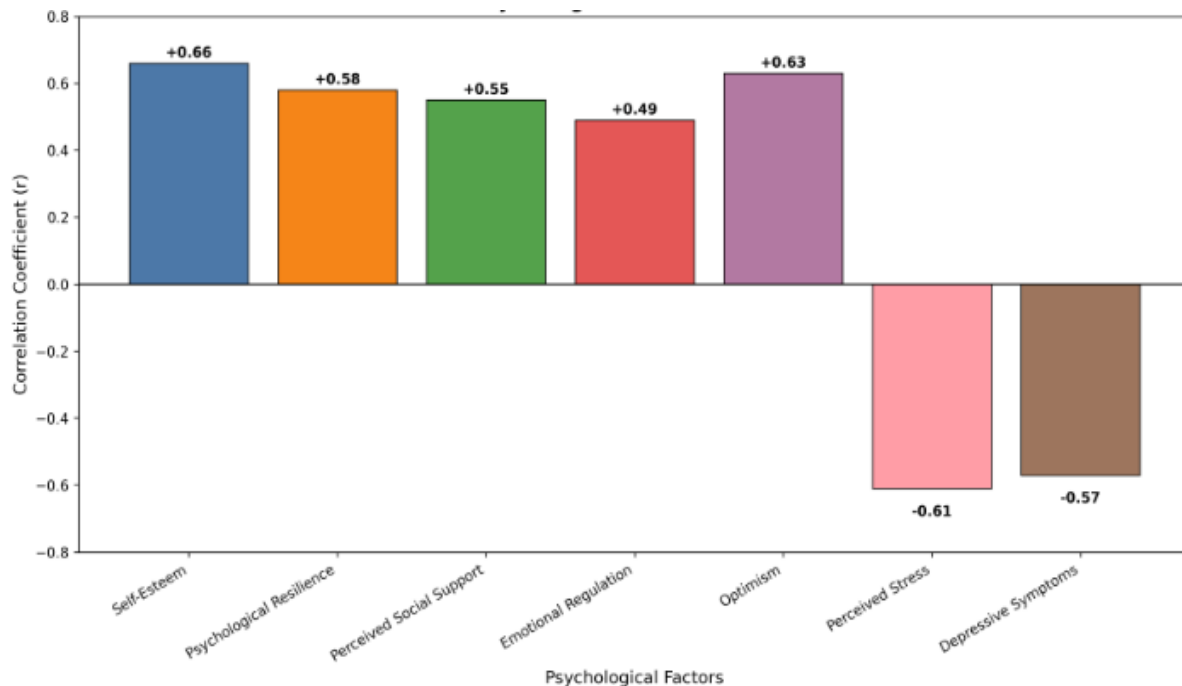
Table 2. Correlations Between Psychological Factors and Life Satisfaction

Psychological Factor	Correlation with Life Satisfaction (r)	Direction	Interpretation
Self-Esteem	+0.66	Positive	Strong
Psychological Resilience	+0.58	Positive	Moderate-to-Strong
Perceived Social Support	+0.55	Positive	Moderate-to-Strong
Emotional Regulation	+0.49	Positive	Moderate
Optimism	+0.63	Positive	Strong
Perceived Stress	-0.61	Negative	Strong
Depressive Symptoms	-0.57	Negative	Moderate-to-Strong

The strongest positive association with life satisfaction was observed for **self-esteem** ($r = +0.66$), followed by optimism ($r = +0.63$). These results suggest that individuals with stronger positive self-evaluations and favorable expectations about the future tend to report greater satisfaction with life.

Psychological resilience ($r = +0.58$), perceived social support ($r = +0.55$), and emotional regulation ($r = +0.49$) were also positively associated with life satisfaction. In contrast, perceived stress showed a strong negative association ($r = -0.61$), while depressive symptoms demonstrated a moderate-to-strong negative relationship ($r = -0.57$).

Figure 2. Correlations of Psychological Factors With Life Satisfaction



The graph illustrates the contrasting influence of protective and distress-related psychological factors. Positive psychological resources are associated with higher life satisfaction, whereas perceived stress and depressive symptoms demonstrate substantial negative relationships.

Predictive Contribution of Psychological Factors

The conceptual multiple regression analysis indicated that the selected psychological variables collectively explained a substantial proportion of variance in life satisfaction. Self-esteem and optimism emerged as prominent positive predictors, while perceived stress demonstrated a strong negative predictive relationship.

Psychological resilience and perceived social support also contributed positively to life satisfaction, suggesting that both internal coping resources and external interpersonal resources are relevant to well-being. Emotional regulation showed a comparatively moderate

contribution but remained theoretically important because effective emotional management may influence coping, relationships, and responses to stress.

Discussion

Importance of Positive Self-Evaluation and Optimism

- Self-esteem demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with life satisfaction, indicating that favorable self-evaluation may be central to well-being during emerging adulthood.
- Individuals who perceive themselves as competent, valuable, and capable may evaluate their overall lives more positively despite temporary difficulties.
- Optimism was also strongly associated with life satisfaction, suggesting that positive expectations about future outcomes may support motivation, persistence, and adaptive interpretations of uncertainty.
- These findings emphasize the importance of interventions that promote realistic self-confidence, personal competence, goal development, and constructive future orientation.

Protective Role of Resilience, Social Support, and Emotional Regulation

- Psychological resilience was positively related to life satisfaction, supporting the view that adaptive recovery from adversity contributes to sustained well-being.
- Perceived social support emerged as an important interpersonal resource. Supportive relationships may reduce isolation, strengthen belongingness, and provide practical and emotional assistance during developmental transitions.
- Emotional regulation was moderately associated with life satisfaction, indicating that the capacity to manage difficult emotional experiences may support psychological stability.
- Universities and community organizations may benefit from programs that strengthen coping skills, peer support, emotional literacy, resilience, and access to meaningful social networks.

Negative Influence of Stress and Depressive Symptoms

- Perceived stress demonstrated a strong negative relationship with life satisfaction, suggesting that persistent demands and insufficient coping resources may substantially reduce positive evaluations of life.

- Depressive symptoms were also negatively associated with life satisfaction and may influence motivation, hopefulness, self-perception, interpersonal engagement, and future expectations.
- Early identification of persistent distress may therefore be important for protecting psychological well-being among emerging adults.
- Counseling, stress-management interventions, accessible mental health services, and preventive well-being programs may help reduce psychological distress and support healthier developmental transitions.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare that there are no financial, professional, institutional, academic, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conceptualization, design, analysis, interpretation, reporting, or publication of this study. The manuscript was prepared independently and without any competing interest that could reasonably be perceived as affecting the integrity of the research.

Future Research

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine how life satisfaction changes throughout emerging adulthood and how psychological factors influence well-being over time. Such studies could clarify whether changes in self-esteem, resilience, optimism, emotional regulation, and social support precede changes in life satisfaction or whether these relationships operate bidirectionally. Longitudinal evidence would also provide stronger insight into developmental trajectories and causal mechanisms.

Future studies should include more diverse populations across cultural, socioeconomic, educational, and occupational contexts. Cross-cultural research may be particularly valuable because expectations regarding independence, family responsibility, career development,

relationships, and adulthood vary considerably across societies. Examining these contextual differences could improve understanding of whether psychological predictors of life satisfaction operate similarly across cultural environments.

Additional research should investigate mediating and moderating mechanisms. For example, resilience may mediate the relationship between stress and life satisfaction, while social support may buffer the negative effects of psychological distress. Experimental and intervention-based studies should also examine whether programs designed to strengthen self-esteem, emotional regulation, resilience, optimism, and social connectedness produce measurable and sustained improvements in life satisfaction.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the multidimensional psychological foundations of life satisfaction among emerging adults. The illustrative findings suggest that self-esteem, psychological resilience, perceived social support, emotional regulation, and optimism are positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas perceived stress and depressive symptoms are negatively associated with favorable life evaluations. Self-esteem and optimism appear particularly important as positive psychological resources, while stress represents a substantial challenge to subjective well-being.

Emerging adulthood involves significant developmental transitions that can simultaneously create opportunities for personal growth and increased vulnerability to uncertainty and psychological distress. Individuals who possess stronger internal resources, supportive relationships, adaptive emotional skills, and positive future expectations may be better equipped to navigate these transitions and maintain greater satisfaction with life. These findings support a comprehensive approach to well-being that integrates individual psychological strengths with interpersonal and contextual support.

In conclusion, improving life satisfaction among emerging adults requires more than reducing psychological difficulties. Preventive and developmental interventions should simultaneously promote positive self-evaluation, resilience, emotional competence, social connectedness, adaptive coping, and realistic optimism. Universities, mental health professionals, families, and community organizations can play important roles in creating supportive environments that enable emerging adults to manage developmental challenges while building meaningful, psychologically fulfilling, and sustainable lives.

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