



## Original Article

# Comparison of psychological well-being and life satisfaction between extended and nuclear family systems among students

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## Abstract

**Background:** The family system affects the mental health and well-being of an individual and significantly alters the satisfaction level. The current study intended to explore the differences in psychological well-being and life satisfaction between the students belong to extended and nuclear family systems.

**Methodology:** For this comparative study, a sample size of 467 participants (204 male & 263 female) was selected, including 314 participants from the nuclear family system and 153 from the extended family system. The Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale (PWB) and the Diener Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were used as outcome measuring tools.

**Results:** The mean PWB scores were  $343.45 \pm 2.745$  for the extended family system and  $339.67 \pm 1.90$  for the nuclear family system. The mean score of satisfaction with life was  $1.05 \pm 5.64$  for the extended family system, and the mean score for the nuclear family system was  $1.05 \pm 5.60$  while ( $t=1.907$ ). Moreover, women's PWB means the score was  $343.71 \pm 29.57$ , and men's PWB mean score was  $333.80 \pm 37.35$ . While the score of satisfaction with women's life was  $22 \pm 5.75$ , and the men's score was  $22.58 \pm 5.46$ .

**Conclusion:** Results show no significant mean difference in the psychological well-being of participants of nuclear and extended family systems. Similarly, no significant difference was found in satisfaction with life between both family systems. Gender difference in PWB was found as women scored higher than men, while there was no gender difference among students in satisfaction with life.

## Keywords

Psychological Well-being (PWB), Satisfaction with Life (SWL), Extended and Nuclear Family Structure, Gender.



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## Introduction

Family is the fundamental entity of any culture. Living criteria, flourishing, and conducive upbringing is crucial not only for children but for all the members who constitute the family to make a healthy society. So we consider the family structure important for mental health at all ages. Studies on the population's family structure and function and their mental well-being have important practical significance. First, the conception of a family system is operationalized<sup>1</sup>. Based on the current living arrangement and comprised categories: alone, couple, nuclear family, and extended/joint family<sup>2</sup>. The extended family system is defined as the close blood relations such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc., who live together in one home and share their necessities of life there. While the nuclear family system consists of minimum members and contains parents and children<sup>3</sup>.

In all family structure categories, we consider nuclear and extended family systems regarding psychological well-being of individuals and the satisfaction with life. The nuclear and extended family system has been adopted as world-renowned family programs. Urban migration, rapid industrialization, and the expansion of education have shifted the type of family from extended to nuclear families. While in Pakistan, there is mainly extended family system exist.

There are various advantages and disadvantages associated with both types of family systems. There is mutual sharing of responsibilities in the extended family system, from house chores to economic benefits and bread earning. The extended family system has more facilities and has considerable assets. There is sharing of happiness in events and jointly get together,

which brings positivity among relationships. While in nuclear family systems, individuals are independent and free from the duties of other family members such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc. The psychological well-being and level of satisfaction are a matter of concern in nuclear and extended families. It is a broad aspect and can be measured by different parameters. Some of which can be a better economic condition, a better agreement between the family members, peace of mind, and better understanding.

Psychological well-being is about lives going well, feeling good, and functioning effectively. Psychological well-being refers to positive mental health<sup>3</sup>. Research has shown that psychological well-being is a multidimensional concept<sup>4-6</sup>. It develops through emotional regulation, personality traits, identity, and life experiences<sup>7</sup>. Family structure has a direct effect on the well-being of individuals<sup>6</sup>.

In the words of Helson & Srivastava, psychological well-being developed through life experiences, so, researchers drew consideration that family structure experiences may also be accountable for it. The differences in family processes and other variables across family structures cause the different levels of children's well-being<sup>7-9</sup>. Diener<sup>10</sup> suggested the formation of subjective well-being (SWB) based on a person's assessment of affective and psychological understanding of life. They argue that happiness and satisfaction in life may differ in all societies and cultures, even bringing joy and contentment. Satisfaction with life (LS) is how people express their feelings, emotions, and select future opportunities<sup>11</sup>. Life satisfaction is an integral part of life. Many internal and external factors affect a person's moral and health satisfaction<sup>10</sup>. Satisfaction with life includes a positive attitude toward one's health rather than examining current feelings. Satisfaction



with life is measured in economic status, education, knowledge, accommodation, and many other domains<sup>10</sup>.

Differences in experiences can significantly shape the way we view and interact with the world around us. These experiences shape the way we think about the world around us affect our satisfaction in life. A person who has a habit of seeing the world in poor light can have a completely different level of satisfaction compared to the one who always admits the beauty of their place. People who suffer from moderate stress are more likely to have high levels of satisfaction<sup>12</sup>.

A study conducted in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and WahCantt, Pakistan, showed similar findings where people living in an extended/joint family system have significantly higher social support and quality of life ( $p < 0.001$ ) compared to people living in a nuclear family<sup>13</sup>. Differing family structures appear to exert disparate effects for life satisfaction on adolescents due to race and/or gender<sup>14</sup>. Researchers found approximately consistent findings previously regarding the link between feeling good and functioning effectively in any family system. This paper intended to better admiration in Pakistani culture the importance of family structure impact on psychological well-being and life satisfaction of individuals. Therefore, research into adult family structure and function and mental health has significant implications, especially in developing countries. A significant relationship was found between the family system and the psychological well-being of individuals in later life<sup>7</sup>.

The effect of family structure and function on mental health has multivariate analysis showed that better family performance is associated with better mood. And previous studies on specialized people such as children, adolescents, and immigrants have

shown that family functioning has a protective effect on mental health<sup>15</sup>. It is noteworthy that the impact of family formation on mental health, whether urban or rural, was not statistically significant. When looking at the combined effects of structural and family function, the external form of the family (family structure) may be insignificant. In contrast, the internal suitability of the role (family function) may be essential<sup>16</sup>.

Ryff (1989) believes that the best subjective social indicators of quality of life are: the feeling of belonging to a community, safety, happiness, life satisfaction, family bond, working place, justice distribution, identification with a social class, and hobbies<sup>6</sup>. And there, in the words of Eitzen (2008), the family is a lift-up of meaningful relationships, so the feeling of belonging, family, and its system seems too high contributor to quality of life and well-being<sup>17</sup>.

The extended/joint family is one such thing that can ensure the sustainability of life and natural recourses<sup>18</sup>. Correspondingly, in African Americans, frequent contact with family was associated with using informal support as the sole source of help<sup>19</sup>. In the same manner, Thoits suggested that family social support anticipates the need for care because it benefits mental health, so frequent contact was also associated with care and the need for help which uplift psychological well-being<sup>20</sup>.

The level of satisfaction is a concern for nuclear families and extended families. It is a broad feature and can be measured by different parameters. They are better economic conditions, better health for a young married woman, better family relationships, better peace of mind, and better understanding. In a close-knit family environment, children often grow up under



the attentive supervision of parents, grandparents, and other adult relatives. There is a connection between groups of different ages. This creates a better understanding of each other. This makes a better mutual understanding, so the adjustment problems are fewer<sup>21</sup>. Some disadvantages are associated with extended/joint family type, but it also has many advantages. Extended/Joint families usually have considerable assets. They also have better living conditions, including electricity, sanitation facilities, piped water, and higher-quality housing materials<sup>22</sup>.

A study sought to assess the quality of life of young people in the family environment, using data from the 2006 HBSC: Study-in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) in Scotland (N = 5,126). The study found that there was a correlation between family structure and health satisfaction for males and females. For males and females of all ages, life satisfaction was more closely linked to parental contact with the child than family formation or family wealth. After adjusting for risky behaviors/health and attitudes toward peers and school, family formation remained important for males only 13 years old. While difficult parent-child communication is a risk factor for lower satisfaction for males and females, simple communication has been protected only for females<sup>23</sup>.

The individuals who live in extended/joint families have to deal with different expectations than individuals who live in nuclear families. It was generally believed that those individuals who live in an extended/joint family situation would have to face more significant restrictions and fewer independent choices. As a result, they would have lesser satisfaction levels. The experience of autonomy would be higher in a nuclear family since the members would be acting out of their own volition without

regard to specific family dynamics and would be enjoying more satisfaction levels<sup>24</sup>.

This study attempted to compare psychological well-being and the level of satisfaction of nuclear and extended families. Gender differences and demographics variables also affects the impact of family system on individual's psychological and social well-being. In this regard, the hypothesis of this study is the psychological well-being of individuals in extended family system would be differing from the nuclear family system. Life satisfaction would be higher in the extended family system as compared to the nuclear family system.

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## Methodology

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### Participants

The current study used a sample of 467 college students, a randomly selected sample size at registered colleges located in Karachi, Pakistan. There were 204 males, and 263 were females (153 from the extended family system while 314 from the nuclear family system). Participants' age ranged from 16 to 24 years.

### Measures

#### *Demographic Information*

It was used for this study to acquire applicable information about the participants. The measures includes personal and demographic information such as gender, age, number of siblings, residential area, and family systems.

#### *Family System*

The family system was assessed with one closed-ended item, which asked students to indicate with whom they lived. A possible response includes the extended family system and Nuclear family system. A total of (n = 153) from the extended/joint family system, while (n= 314) from the nuclear family system.



### ***Psychological Wellbeing (PWB)***

Inventory is 84 items and consists of a series of statements reflecting the six areas of the PWB: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement (Ryff, 1989).

### ***Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)***

Diener et al. (1985) developed five items that can measure an individual's global judgment of life satisfaction as a whole. The SWLS measures the cognitive component of SWB and provides an integrated assessment of how a person's life as a whole is going. In completing the SWLS, participants rated five statements on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (4) "neither agree nor disagree" to (7) "strongly agree." The SWLS has been used in numerous studies and has demonstrated good psychometric properties.

### **Procedure**

A list of colleges in Karachi was compiled. After getting permission from the college authorities, participants asked for help from their classroom teacher and were given a separate room. Initially, students were assured that information collected during the study would be kept confidential and only be used for research purposes. After inquiry of the participants as per predetermine research criteria were required to fill the demographic form and provide the

research questionnaires. Participants rated each item of the PWB scale by using 6 points scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree. And the satisfaction with life scale in completing the SWLS, participants rated five statements on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

In the last step, completion of the questionnaire followed by a thankful note for the participant for his/her contribution. The same procedure was used with all research participants in an individual setting as well.

### **Statistical Analysis**

After data collection, the answer sheets were scored according to standardized procedures. T-test was used to see the difference in psychological well-being between extended/ joint and nuclear family systems and gender differences. Furthermore, Descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean, percentages, standard deviations, variance, and standard error of mean) were used for getting a deep statistical analysis of characteristics of the sample in a summarized way. All statistical computations were completed through SPSS version 16.0.

### **Result**

Out of the total 467 subjects, the majority were females (56.3%) and were living in a joint family system (67.2%).

**Table 1: Summary of demographics variables (N = 467).**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>n(%)</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	204(43.7)
	Female	263(56.3)
<b>Family System</b>	Nuclear	314(32.8)
	Joint	153(67.2)



<b>Academic Year</b>	Intermediate	104(22.3)
	Graduate	122(26.1)
	BS	241(51.1)

There was no significant difference among family systems, i.e., Nuclear and joint, in psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

**Table 2: Effect of family system on psychological well-being and life satisfaction.**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Joint</b>	<b>Nuclear</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>95% CI</b>	
	<b>(n=153)</b>	<b>(n= 314)</b>				
	<b>Mean ± SD</b>					
<b>PWB</b>	343.45±2.74	339.67±1.90	1.062	0.289	-3.005	10.079
<b>SWL</b>	1.056±5.64	1.05±5.60	1.907	0.998	-0.32	2.145

There was no significant gender difference in satisfaction with life ( $p=0.268$ ) while females had higher PWB scores than males, i.e.,  $346.71 \pm 29.57$  vs.  $333.80 \pm 37.35$  ( $p=0.000$ ).

**Table 3: Gender differences in satisfaction with life and psychological well-being.**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>95% CI</b>	
	<b>(n=204)</b>	<b>(n= 263)</b>				
	<b>Mean ± SD</b>					
<b>SWL</b>	22.58(5.46)	22(5.75)	1.108	.268	-.450	1.165
<b>PWB</b>	333.80(37.35)	346.71(29.57)	-4.048	.000	-19.176	-6.638

## Discussion

The present study was conducted to find psychological well-being and satisfaction with life between extended and nuclear family systems. The results show that there are no significant means differences in the psychological well-being of participants of the nuclear and extended family system.

Similarly, no significant difference was found in satisfaction with life between both family systems. While differences in the results found on the basis of gender only in psychological well-being. In another study, the level of satisfaction was higher among people living in the extended/ joint family group, i.e., 87.5% v/s 81% in the nuclear family. It was observed that the satisfaction

level was overall high in both types of family systems. Similar results were found in a study conducted in Karachi, Pakistan, by Itrat et al., which concluded that almost 96% of people were satisfied in extended/joint families and 85% in the nuclear family system<sup>25</sup>.

Gender differences are present for the majority of health-related quality of life of children and adolescents<sup>26</sup>. Prior research on gender differences in psychological well-being has not yielded conclusive results, but few studies have shown lower psychological well-being for young females compared to males<sup>27</sup>.



There might be many contributing factors in which some of them are family background, variables as parent's profound mental health, education, and emotional stabilities that enable them to give a sound healthy environment to their children. Whatever the family system is, a child's healthy development is most associated with the quality of parenting, which is itself enhanced by the availability to the family of strong community and social support<sup>28</sup>. A parent's higher marital happiness and lower parental conflicts may also contribute the psychological well-being. Similarly, parents' education is important because they can understand the physical and psychological needs of their children. Parent-child relation is a key factor there, and theorist believes that the effect of family structure on children can be mediated by the family processes occurring within families such as the quality of the parent-child relationship. In addition, the degree of closeness to mother and father appeared to be the most influential predictors of children's psychological well-being<sup>7</sup>.

The differences in children's well-being were small across the family structure. These differences support other researchers finding that most children grow up fine in all family structure<sup>27</sup>. However, the difference in psychological well-being across the family structure is not completely clear, and several factors have been seen to reduce the effects of family structure on psychological well-being. With long-term changes in the family, the structure can affect family functioning, thus affecting the mental health of family members. Research analysis related to family structure on other cultures as Chinese families provide not only productivity, education, childbirth, and pensions, but also psychological comfort and support, which includes the health of all family members, and the stability and development of society as a whole<sup>14</sup>. Researches provide more

support for family process perspectives rather than a family structure for psychological well-being. We conclude that the external form of the family, which is the family structure, may not be important. Still, the internal quality of role family function might be key for psychological well-being<sup>29</sup>. When faced with social change and health problems, individuals and families may become less powerful. Therefore, all sectors of society must work together.

This study has few limitations, such as the factor of the family system could not be explored in-depth due to the quantitative design of the study; therefore, the in-depth study is recommended to find the impact of extended/nuclear family systems on the psychological well-being of the students. Pakistani culture mostly contains these two kinds of extended and nuclear family systems, so the participants of this study were from these two kinds of family systems. Furthermore, the forms and functions of the family have varied around the world over countries<sup>30</sup>. So, the other diverse groups of family systems could be studied. Larger sample size is recommended to increase the generalizability.

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## Conclusion

Results show no significant mean difference in the psychological well-being of participants of nuclear and extended family systems. Similarly, no significant difference was found in satisfaction with life between both family systems. Gender difference in PWB was found as women scored higher than men, while there was no gender difference among students in satisfaction with life.

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