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To What Extent Do Interpersonal Trust And Emotional Security Predict Psychological Well-Being Among Young Adults?

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ABSTRACT

Psychological well-being is an important aspect of mental health among university students, who face various academic, social, and personal challenges during young adulthood. This study aimed to examine the predictive role of interpersonal trust and emotional security in psychological well-being among young adults. A quantitative correlational design was used, and data were collected from 50 university students using the General Trust Scale, Emotional Security Assessment, and WHO-5 Well-being Index. Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses were conducted using SPSS. The findings indicated weak and statistically insignificant relationships among interpersonal trust, emotional security, and psychological well-being. Interpersonal trust showed a weak negative correlation with psychological well-being, while emotional security showed a weak positive but non-significant correlation. Regression results revealed that interpersonal trust and emotional security explained only 1.8% of the variance in psychological well-being, and neither variable emerged as a significant predictor. These findings did not support the alternative hypothesis. However, Attachment Theory and Social Support Theory continue to emphasize the importance of secure and trusting relationships for psychological adjustment. Future research with larger samples, longitudinal designs, and comprehensive measures is recommended to better understand factors influencing psychological well-being among university students.

Keywords: Interpersonal Trust, Emotional Security, Psychological Well-Being

Introduction

Psychological well-being is an important part of a person's overall mental health, especially during young adulthood. University students face many challenges such as academic pressure, career concerns, social adjustment, and personal identity development. During this stage, positive mental health is necessary for academic success and emotional stability. Researchers suggest that interpersonal trust and emotional security play a significant role in shaping an individual's psychological well-being.

Interpersonal trust refers to a person's belief that others are reliable, honest, and supportive. Emotional security means feeling safe, valued, and emotionally stable in relationships and life situations. When young adults trust others and feel emotionally secure, they are more likely to experience confidence, positive relationships, and life satisfaction. On the other hand, low trust and emotional insecurity may lead to stress, anxiety, and reduced well-being.

Previous research in positive psychology supports that strong social connections and emotional stability are associated with better psychological health. According to attachment theory and social support theory, secure relationships promote emotional regulation and resilience, which enhance well-being.

The present study aims to examine the extent to which interpersonal trust and emotional security predict psychological well-being among university students. The data were collected from 50 university students to understand how these variables are related. This research may help in understanding the psychological factors that support mental health among young adults and guide future interventions in educational settings.

Background

Young adulthood is a critical developmental stage marked by academic demands, career planning, identity formation, and social role changes. University students often experience stress related to studies, peer relationships, and future uncertainty. These challenges can directly influence their psychological well-being. Psychological well-being refers to positive functioning, including life satisfaction, emotional balance, self-acceptance, and a sense of purpose.

Interpersonal trust is an important social factor that helps individuals build strong and supportive relationships. When students trust others, they feel comfortable sharing concerns and seeking support. This can reduce stress and promote emotional comfort. Emotional security, on the other hand, refers to feeling safe, stable, and confident in relationships and life situations. Students who feel emotionally secure are better able to manage stress and regulate their emotions.

Recent research in mental health highlights that supportive relationships and emotional stability are strongly linked with higher well-being. However, limited research has examined how interpersonal trust and emotional security together predict psychological well-being among university students, particularly in developing contexts. Therefore, studying these relationships is important for understanding youth mental health.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Attachment Theory proposed by John Bowlby and later expanded by Mary Ainsworth. Attachment theory explains that individuals who develop secure emotional bonds are more likely to feel emotionally stable and confident in relationships.

Secure attachment promotes trust, emotional regulation, and positive self-view, which contribute to psychological well-being.

The study is also supported by Social Support Theory, which suggests that trusting relationships provide emotional and psychological resources that protect individuals from stress. When young adults experience interpersonal trust and emotional security, they are more resilient and psychologically healthy.

Together, these theories explain how interpersonal trust and emotional security can significantly predict psychological well-being among university students.

Literature Review

Interpersonal trust has been widely recognized as a crucial psychosocial factor contributing to psychological well-being. Recent research has indicated that interpersonal trust is positively associated with psychological well-being across populations, where higher trust correlates with higher subjective well-being (Zheng & Zhang, 2025). Additionally, studies examining emotional security show it is a significant psychological predictor of mental health outcomes when mediated by interpersonal trust (Li et al., 2026). Furthermore, social trust has been shown to influence mental health indicators among young adult samples, reinforcing trust as an important predictor within well-being frameworks.

Emotional intelligence and interpersonal factors play an important role in psychological well-being among young adults and adolescents. Research has shown that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to have better mental health, and this effect is partly because they are able to form healthier interpersonal relationships, which further improve their well-being (Ganguli et al., 2024). Similarly, empathy, interpersonal trust, and friendship quality have also been found to positively influence mental well-being, both directly and indirectly, with friendship quality acting as a mediator (Niu et al., 2023). These studies indicate that emotional and social skills, along with strong relationships and trust, are key predictors of psychological well-being, and their effects may vary across different cultural contexts.

Empirical research supports the significant role of interpersonal and social trust in shaping young adults' psychological well-being. In a longitudinal study, Mie thing et al. (2017) examined friendship trust and well-being during the transition from late adolescence to early adulthood. Their findings indicated that trust in friendships and psychological well-being were dynamically related over time. Although trust generally increased, lower well-being predicted lower subsequent trust among young women, suggesting a bidirectional relationship between trust and mental health. Similarly, Li et al. (2025) investigated the association between social trust and mental health using data from a large community sample. The results demonstrated that higher levels of social trust were significantly associated with reduced depressive symptoms and greater psychological well-being. Furthermore, trust contributed to mental health both directly and indirectly by enhancing social interaction, reciprocity, and reducing perceived stress. Collectively, these findings suggest that trust whether in close interpersonal relationships or the broader social environment serves as an important psychological resource that promotes resilience and enhances well-being among young adults.

Emotional security plays a crucial role in psychological wellbeing by influencing how individuals regulate their emotions, cope with stress, and experience positive mental health

outcomes. Recent research indicates that individuals with higher emotional security tend to experience lower levels of depressive tendencies, reflecting better psychological health and reduced emotional distress in their daily lives (Li, Chen, Xie, & Zhang, 2025). In addition, studies indicate that greater emotional reassurance contributes to enhanced psychological wellbeing, supporting better adaptive functioning and overall mental health (Sebti, Shihab, & Tariq, 2019).

Methodology

Study Aims and Objectives

- To assess the level of interpersonal trust among young adults.
- To examine the level of emotional security among young adults.
- To investigate the relationship between interpersonal trust, emotional security, and psychological well-being.
- To determine the predictive role of interpersonal trust and emotional security in psychological well-being among young adults.

Research Design

A quantitative, correlational research design was employed to examine the relationships between interpersonal trust, emotional security, and psychological well-being among young adults. This design allows for the assessment of the strength and direction of associations among the study variables.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between interpersonal trust and psychological well-being among young adults?
- What is the relationship between emotional security and psychological well-being among young adults?
- To what extent do interpersonal trust and emotional security predict psychological well-being among young adults?

Hypotheses

- **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There is no relationship between interpersonal trust, emotional security, and psychological well-being among young adults.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** Interpersonal trust and emotional security has a positive relationship with psychological well-being among young adults.

Operational Definitions of Variables

Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal trust refers to an individual's general expectation that others are reliable, honest, and will act in a supportive and non-harmful manner in social interactions. Higher levels of interpersonal trust are associated with feelings of safety, cooperation, and social connectedness (Yamagishi, 1986).

Emotional Security

Emotional security is defined as an individual's sense of emotional safety, stability, and protection within interpersonal relationships and social environments. It reflects the extent to which individuals feel secure, accepted, and free from fear or emotional threat in their interactions with others (Maslow, 1942; Davies & Cummings, 1994).

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being refers to a positive state of mental functioning characterized by emotional balance, life satisfaction, personal growth, and effective coping with daily stressors. It encompasses positive emotions, purpose in life, and healthy interpersonal functioning (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; World Health Organization [WHO], 2004).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**Inclusion Criteria**

- Individuals aged 18–25 years (young adult population).
- Currently enrolled university students.
- Ability to understand and respond to self-report questionnaires.
- Willingness to provide informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals below 18 or above 25 years of age.
- Participants with diagnosed severe psychiatric disorders that may significantly affect emotional security or trust.
- Individuals who do not complete the questionnaire properly or provide incomplete responses.

Sampling Strategy

A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit young adults aged 18–25 years from universities and educational institutions. Participants were selected based on availability and willingness to participate in the study.

Instruments

The following standardized tools were used to collect data for this study

Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal trust was measured using the General Trust Scale (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). This 5-item scale assesses an individual's belief in the benevolence and honesty of others. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). It is important to note that Items 1, 2, 3, and 5 are framed as distrust; therefore, they were reverse-coded during analysis so that higher total scores represent higher levels of trust. This scale is widely used to predict social cooperation and psychological adjustment in young adults (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994).

Emotional Security

Emotional security was assessed using the Emotional Security Assessment (ESA), an 8-item scale adapted from Maslow's Security–Insecurity Inventory (Maslow et al., 1952). The ESA measures the internal sense of safety, self-worth, and belonging. Participants rated items (e.g., "I feel that the world is a generally safe and friendly place") on a 5-point Likert scale. As established in the analysis, total scores ranged from 8 to 40, which were categorized into three levels: Low (8–20), Moderate (21–30), and High (31–40) to facilitate group comparison (Maslow et al., 1952).

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being was measured using the WHO-5 Well-being Index (World Health Organization [WHO], 1998). This 5-item scale is a globally recognized tool for assessing

subjective mental health and positive well-being over the preceding two weeks. Participants responded on a 6-point scale (0 = At no time to 5 = All of the time). Following standard WHO scoring procedures, the raw scores (ranging from 0 to 25) can be multiplied by 4 to generate a final percentage score, where 0 represents the worst possible well-being and 100 represents the best possible well-being (WHO, 1998; 2004).

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among interpersonal trust, emotional security, and psychological well-being. Linear regression analysis was used to assess the predictive role of interpersonal trust and emotional security on psychological well-being among young adults.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.
- Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage of the study.
- Confidentiality and anonymity of participants' data were strictly maintained.
- The data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Results

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of study variable (N=50)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
Interpersonal trust	16.88	2.911
Emotional security	26.8600	3.59711
Psychological wellbeing	14.28	4.477

Table 2 Correlation Analysis of WHO, Trust, ESA (N=50)

Variables	1	2	3
Interpersonal trust	-	-.127	-.105
Emotional security	-	-	.096
Psychological wellbeing	-	-	-

The results show that Interpersonal trust has a weak, insignificant negative correlation with emotional security ($r = -.127$, $p > 0.01$). However, Interpersonal trust has a weak, insignificant negative correlation with psychological wellbeing ($r = -.105$, $p > 0.05$). Additionally, Emotional security has a weak, insignificant positive correlation with Psychological wellbeing ($r = .096$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting no strong relationship between interpersonal trust, emotional security and psychological wellbeing in this sample.

Table 3 Regression analysis of WHO, Trust, ESA (N=50)

Variables	R	R ²	P	B	SE	Confidence level	
						Lower	Upper
Interpersonal trust	.134 ^a	.018	.654 ^b	-.079	.122	-.325	.167
Emotional security	.134 ^a	.018	.654 ^b	.121	.211	-.303	.545
Psychological wellbeing				1.727	.628	.464	2.989

$P > 0.01$

The results show the linear regression analysis between Interpersonal trust, emotional security and psychological wellbeing. The results shows a statistical insignificant relationship ($r = .134$, $p > 0.01$) between the IVs and DV. Moreover, the independent variable creates a change of 1.8% in the dependent variable.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the predictive role of interpersonal trust and emotional security in psychological well-being among young adults. The findings of the study indicated that interpersonal trust had a weak negative relationship with psychological well-being, whereas emotional security showed a weak positive relationship with psychological well-being. However, these relationships were statistically insignificant. The regression analysis further revealed that interpersonal trust and emotional security together explained only a small proportion of variance in psychological well-being ($R^2 = 0.018$), indicating that these variables were not strong predictors of psychological well-being in the current sample. Based on these findings, the alternative hypothesis, which proposed that interpersonal trust and emotional security would significantly predict psychological well-being among young adults, was not supported. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained, suggesting that interpersonal trust and emotional security did not significantly predict psychological well-being in this study. Several possible explanations may account for these findings. One possible reason is the small sample size, which may have reduced the statistical power of the study and limited the ability to detect significant relationships between variables. Another factor may be the use of convenience sampling, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to a wider population. In addition, the study relied on self-report questionnaires, which may introduce response bias as participants may respond according to social desirability rather than their true feelings. Psychological well-being is also a complex and multidimensional construct that can be influenced by a variety of other factors such as academic stress, personality traits, social support, family environment, and life satisfaction, which were not examined in the present study. Similar findings have also been reported in previous research, where psychological well-being was found to be influenced by multiple contextual and personal factors rather than a single predictor.

Although the findings of the present study were statistically insignificant, previous literature suggests that interpersonal trust and emotional security play an important role in mental health and emotional adjustment. According to attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (1969), secure emotional bonds contribute to emotional stability and psychological resilience. Similarly, social support theory suggests that individuals who experience trusting and supportive relationships tend to report higher levels of psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). These theoretical perspectives highlighted that secure and trusting relationships may serve as protective factors for mental health.

Therefore, future research should consider using larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal research designs, and more comprehensive measurement tools to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to psychological well-being among young adults. The findings of the present study are partially consistent with previous literature which suggests that interpersonal relationships and emotional security are important factors in

psychological well-being. However, unlike many previous studies that reported significant relationships between these variables, the current study did not find statistically significant results. This difference may be due to variations in sample characteristics, cultural context, or methodological differences across studies.

Limitations

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged.

- First, the sample size was relatively small ($N = 50$), which may have limited the statistical power of the analyses and affected the detection of significant relationships.
- Second, the use of convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of young adults.
- Third, all variables were measured using self-report instruments, which may be subject to response biases such as social desirability and inaccurate self-perception.
- Fourth, the original 75-item version of Maslow's Security Insecurity Inventory was abbreviated and reduced to an 8-item scale due to time constraints. While this facilitated data collection, the shortened version may have limited the comprehensiveness, reliability, and construct validity of the emotional security measure.
- Finally, the cross-sectional and correlational design of the study prevents any causal conclusions regarding the direction of relationships among interpersonal trust, emotional security and psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The present study examined the predictive role of interpersonal trust and emotional security in psychological well-being among university students. The findings revealed that interpersonal trust and emotional security were not significantly related to psychological well-being in the current sample. Correlation analysis showed weak and non-significant relationships among the variables, and regression results indicated that interpersonal trust and emotional security explained only a small proportion of variance in psychological well-being. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis was not supported, and the null hypothesis was retained.

These findings contrast with previous literature that generally reports positive associations between trust, emotional security, and psychological well-being. The discrepancy may be attributed to the small sample size, convenience sampling, and contextual factors influencing university students' mental health, such as academic stress, financial issues, and personality traits. Additionally, the shortened emotional security scale may have limited the accurate measurement of the construct.

Despite the non-significant findings, theoretical frameworks such as Attachment Theory and Social Support Theory continue to highlight the importance of secure and trusting relationships in psychological functioning. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and comprehensive measurement tools to better understand the role of interpersonal trust and emotional security in promoting psychological well-being among young adults.

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