

Social Well-Being of Undergraduate Students: A Descriptive Study Across Gender, Locality, and Academic Stream

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Abstract: Social well-being, as conceptualized by Keyes and grounded in Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Model, emphasizes meaningful connections and supportive relationships. This study investigates the social well-being of undergraduate students in selected colleges of Nadia, North 24 Parganas, and Kolkata, focusing on differences across gender, locality, and academic stream. Using a descriptive survey design, 256 students were selected through random sampling. Data were collected via a self-constructed, expert-validated questionnaire comprising 26 items (13 positive and 13 negative). Results revealed that 24% of students demonstrated high social well-being, 74% medium, and 2% low, indicating an overall average level of social well-being. Statistical analysis showed no significant differences between male and female students or between rural and urban students. However, a significant difference was observed between science and arts students, with science students reporting higher mean scores. The findings highlight the need for strategies to strengthen students' social well-being through peer support and inclusive educational practices.

Keywords: Social well-being, College Students, Gender, Locality, Stream

1. Introduction

Happiness and life satisfaction—how individuals evaluate themselves and their lives—are strongly correlated with overall well-being. Large-scale studies conducted across more than 150 nations have identified five globally interconnected dimensions of well-being: physical, financial, professional, social, and community well-being (Baker, 2020). The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity,” emphasizing the holistic nature of human flourishing. In this context, Gross National Happiness (GNH) attracted global attention by questioning conventional measures of life quality. Similarly, the United Nations introduced the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990, assessing human well-being through three pillars: healthcare, education, and quality of life. More recently, the World Happiness Report (2012), published by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, advanced the

use of subjective well-being measures to evaluate life quality. By 2017, happiness had become widely recognized as a legitimate indicator of social progress and a central objective of public policy (Handa, 2018).

Among the five dimensions of well-being, social well-being is particularly significant, as it is sustained through meaningful connections and positive relationships. Such relationships enhance self-esteem, foster resilience, and strengthen adaptive social behaviour. As Luck Kisoova observes, “The most significant way I take to look after myself is finding time to spend as much as I can with my friends, even when I am swamped and don’t have much time.” A strong social network not only supports personal growth but also facilitates the development of interpersonal competence. Building on Carol Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Model, Keyes (1995) proposed a theoretical framework for social well-being that integrates six dimensions: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy. Kaya (1998) further refined this framework by identifying five components of social well-being: social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, and social coherence.

To illustrate these five interconnected components, **Fig. 1** presents a conceptual diagram of social well-being. Each element—social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, and social coherence—represents a distinct but interdependent dimension of how individuals engage with society and derive meaning from their social environment.



Fig. 1 Five interconnected components of social well-being: social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, and social coherence.

Social integration refers to the dynamic process by which individuals become embedded in the structures of their communities, thereby fostering stability, justice, and security. Social acceptance, as described by Leary (2010), involves recognition and inclusion within groups, though it may be hindered by stigma and prejudice. Social contribution emphasizes the perception of oneself as a valuable and accountable member of society, closely linked to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Gecas, 1989). Social actualization reflects confidence in the community’s potential for progress and the belief that society can evolve toward greater fulfillment (Jasper, Dan). Finally, social coherence highlights the responsibility of individuals to uphold social harmony, enabling collective cohesion and effective communication (Keyes,

1998). Taken together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how social well-being contributes to broader measures of happiness and life satisfaction.

2. Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to assess the social well-being of undergraduate students. Social well-being is a critical dimension of overall life satisfaction, encompassing the ability to form meaningful relationships, integrate into communities, and contribute positively to society. Despite its importance, variations in social well-being across demographic and academic factors remain underexplored. Therefore, the present study defines the problem as: **the social well-being of college students across gender, locality, and stream of study.**

3. Significance of the Study

Developing and sustaining positive relationships with others represents the ideal state of social well-being. When individuals neglect their social interactions, their ability to adjust and maintain balance in life is compromised. For undergraduate students, who are at a formative stage of personal and professional development, social well-being plays a pivotal role in shaping self-esteem, resilience, and adaptability. By examining students' levels of social well-being, this study seeks to provide insights into how gender, locality, and academic stream influence their social functioning. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of student well-being and may inform interventions aimed at fostering healthier social environments in higher education institutions.

4. Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

- i. To assess the overall social well-being of undergraduate students.
- ii. To examine differences in social well-being among undergraduate students based on gender.
- iii. To examine differences in social well-being among undergraduate students based on locality (rural vs. urban).
- iv. To examine differences in social well-being among undergraduate students based on academic stream (science vs. arts).

5. Null Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following null hypotheses:

- **H₀₁:** Male and female undergraduate students do not differ significantly in terms of their social well-being.
- **H₀₂:** Rural and urban undergraduate students do not differ significantly in terms of their social well-being.
- **H₀₃:** Science and arts undergraduate students do not differ significantly in terms of their social well-being.

6. Methodology

The present study employed a **descriptive survey method** to investigate the social well-being of undergraduate students.

Population

The population under study comprised undergraduate students enrolled in colleges located across three districts of West Bengal: **Nadia, North 24 Parganas, and Kolkata.**

Sample

A total of **256 undergraduate students** were selected using a **random sampling technique.** The distribution of the sample is presented in **Table 1.**

Table 1 Distribution of the sample.

GROUP	SUB-GROUP	NO. OF SAMPLE	TOTAL SAMPLE
Gender	Male	95	256
	Female	161	
Locality	Urban	91	
	Rural	165	
Steam	Science	51	
	Arts	205	

Tool

Data were collected using a **self-constructed questionnaire** consisting of 26 items, of which 13 were positively worded and 13 negatively worded. Each item was rated on a **five-point Likert scale**: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Statistical Procedure

Responses were scored and summed for each participant. Both descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test) were applied. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

7. Analysis and Interpretation

Objective 1: To assess the social well-being (high, medium, or low) of undergraduate students in the selected colleges of West Bengal.

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the social well-being of undergraduate students, categorized as **high, medium, or low.** The distribution of scores is presented in **Table 2.**

Table 2 Social Well-being of Undergraduate Students in the selected colleges.

Total Sample of U.G.	Total Item Score Level	Expected Score	No. of Sample	Percentage	Total Sample Mean	Total Sample S. D
256	High	93-130	62	24.22	84.68	11.98
	Medium	60-92	188	73.44		
	Low	26-59	6	2.34		

The scoring scale consisted of 26 items; each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Thus, the minimum possible score was 26, and the maximum was 130. All participants were required to respond to every item.

Data were initially collected from 270 students; however, 14 responses were excluded due to incomplete questionnaires, resulting in a final sample size of 256. The overall mean score of the sample was 84.68, with a standard deviation of 11.98.

Interpretation:

- Approximately 24% of students demonstrated high levels of social well-being.
- The majority (73%) fell within the medium range.
- A small proportion (2%) exhibited low levels of social well-being.

This distribution indicates that the social well-being of undergraduate students is generally moderate, with most students positioned around the average level.

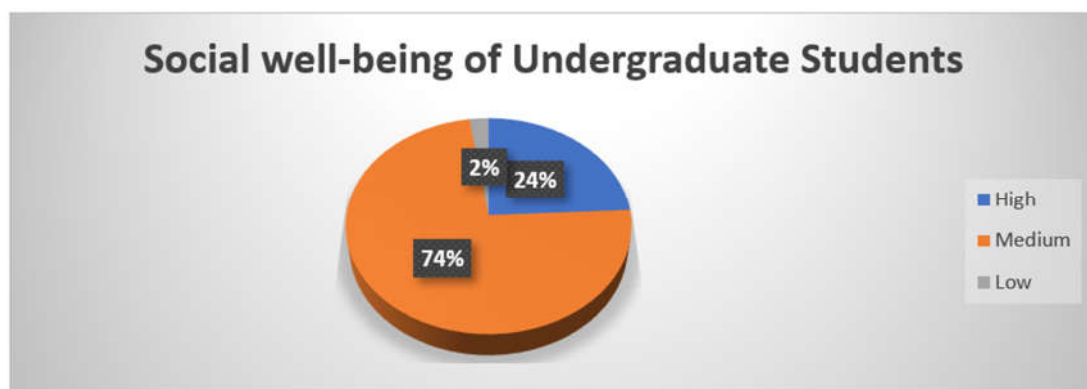


Fig. 2 Distribution of social well-being levels among undergraduate students.

According to the distribution illustrated in **Fig. 2**, the social well-being of undergraduate students shows a clear trend. Out of the total sample of 256 students, 24% fall into the high category, 74% into the medium category, and 2% into the low category. The predominance of the medium category indicates that most students experience a moderate level of social well-being, with relatively fewer students reporting either very high or very low levels. This finding

suggests that, overall, undergraduate students' social well-being is balanced around the average range, reflecting neither extreme vulnerability nor exceptional strength across the population.

Descriptive Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the social well-being levels of undergraduate students. For this analysis, three categorical variables were considered: gender (male and female), locality (rural and urban), and stream (science and arts). Each variable was divided into two subgroups, and participants' responses were analysed accordingly.

Table 3 Descriptive Analysis of Social Well-being Levels of Undergraduate Students by Gender, Locality, and Stream.

GROUP	NUMBER	MEAN	S.D.
Male	95	86.43	12.64
Female	161	83.63	11.48
Rural	165	85.07	11.81
Urban	91	83.97	12.28
Science	51	88.35	15.32
Arts	205	83.76	10.84

Table 3 presents the responses of 256 participants; each rated on a five-point Likert scale. The results indicate that:

- Male students ($M = 86.43$) reported slightly higher social well-being compared to female students ($M = 83.63$).
- Rural students ($M = 85.07$) scored marginally higher than urban students ($M = 83.97$).
- Science students ($M = 88.35$) demonstrated better social well-being than Arts students ($M = 83.76$).

These findings suggest subtle variations in social well-being across gender, locality, and academic stream, though the differences are relatively small.

As illustrated in **Fig. 3**, the descriptive analysis highlights differences in social well-being across gender, locality, and academic stream. Male students reported a mean score of 86.43, slightly higher than female students (83.63). Rural students scored 85.07, compared to 83.97 among urban students, suggesting marginally better social well-being among rural participants. In terms of academic stream, science students achieved the highest mean score (88.35), whereas arts students scored lower (83.76).

This visual comparison reinforces the tabulated results, showing that while variations exist across subgroups, the differences are relatively modest. Overall, the findings suggest that undergraduate students exhibit moderate levels of social well-being, with science students standing out as the group reporting the highest average.

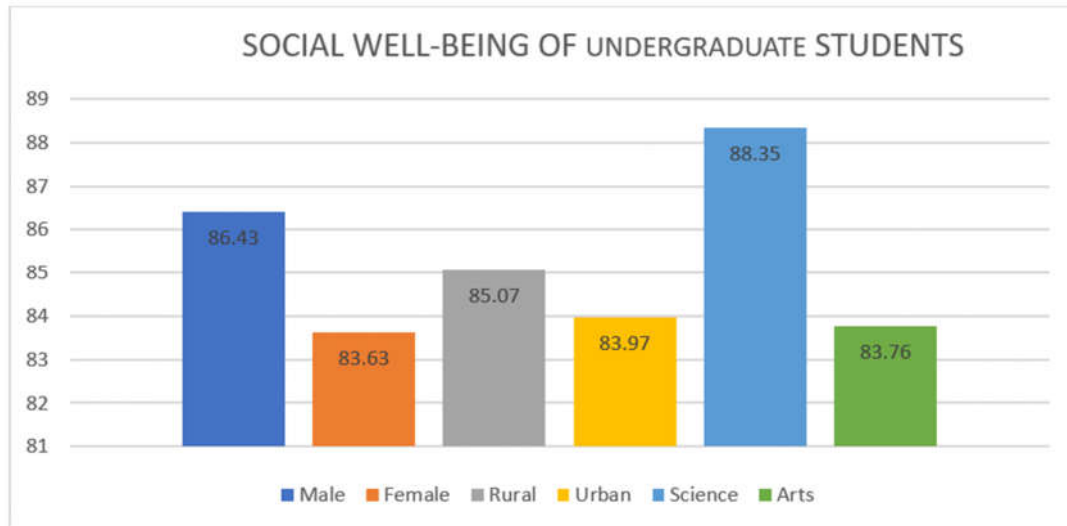


Fig. 4 Comparative social well-being scores of undergraduate students by gender, locality, and academic stream.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Male and female undergraduate students do not differ significantly in terms of social well-being.

Table 4 Difference of the social well-being between Male and female undergraduate students.

Sample Type	No. of Sample	Mean	Sd	df	t value	Level of Significance
Male	95	86.43	12.64	254	1.8094	Not significant at 0.05 Level
Female	161	83.63	11.48			

At the 0.05 level of significance, the computed *t*-value (1.80) was lower than the critical value (1.96). Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that male and female undergraduate students do not differ significantly in their levels of social well-being. Although the mean score for male students ($M = 86.43$) was slightly higher than that of female students ($M = 83.63$), this difference was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2: Rural and urban undergraduate students do not differ significantly in terms of social well-being.

Table 5 Difference of the social well-being between Rural and Urban undergraduate students.

Sample Type	No. of Sample	Mean	Sd	df	t value	Level of Significance
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Urban	91	83.97	12.28	254	0.7034	Not significant at 0.05 Level
Rural	165	85.07	11.81			

At the 0.05 level of significance, the computed t -value (0.70) was lower than the critical value (1.96). Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that no statistically significant difference exists between rural and urban students in terms of social well-being. Although rural students ($M = 85.07$) scored slightly higher than urban students ($M = 83.97$), this difference was **not statistically meaningful**.

Hypothesis 3: Science and arts undergraduate students do not differ significantly in terms of social well-being.

Table 6 Difference of the social well-being between Science and Arts undergraduate students.

Sample Type	No. of Sample	Mean	Sd	df	t value	Level of Significance
Science	51	88.35	15.32	254	2.4741	Significant at 0.05 Level
Arts	205	83.76	10.84			

At the 0.05 level of significance, the computed t -value (2.47) exceeded the critical value (1.96). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a statistically significant difference in social well-being between science and arts students. Science students ($M = 88.35$) reported higher levels of social well-being compared to arts students ($M = 83.76$).

8. Findings

The analysis of the data yielded the following major findings:

- Among the 256 undergraduate students surveyed, **24% demonstrated high social well-being, 74% fell within the medium range, and 2% exhibited low levels of social well-being.**
- **No statistically significant differences** in social well-being were observed between male and female students.
- **No statistically significant differences** in social well-being were observed between rural and urban students.
- A **significant difference** was found between science and arts students. Science students ($M = 88.35$) reported higher levels of social well-being compared to arts students ($M = 83.76$), indicating that academic stream plays a meaningful role in shaping students' social well-being.

9. Discussions

Social well-being is a critical dimension of overall health, as individuals with strong social networks and supportive relationships tend to live longer, cope more effectively with stress, and experience greater life satisfaction. Despite its importance, relatively little research has focused specifically on the social well-being of students. The present study sought to assess the social well-being of undergraduate students and to examine whether it varied across demographic and academic subgroups. The findings revealed that most students demonstrated **average levels of social well-being**: 73.44% fell within the medium range, 24.22% reported high levels, and only 2.34% exhibited low levels. These results are consistent with prior studies, such as Katoor et al. (2023) and Ketkaew et al. (2021), which reported that students' social maturity tends to be at a medium level. Similarly, Alireza et al. (2017) observed that the social well-being status of students was not entirely satisfactory. Gender differences were not statistically significant in this study, indicating that male and female students reported comparable levels of social well-being. This contrasts with findings by Matud et al. (2003), who noted significant gender differences, with women often maintaining larger social networks and support systems. However, such responsibilities may also expose women to greater social pressures, as highlighted by Ghatak (2018) and Anand et al. (2018), who reported differences in social adjustment between male and female youths. No significant differences were found between rural and urban students. This result diverges from Berkman and Kawachi (2000), who argued that urban environments provide greater opportunities for social engagement but may also foster isolation due to anonymity and fast-paced lifestyles. Conversely, rural communities may offer stronger bonds and a sense of belonging, though with fewer opportunities for diverse social interactions. Supporting the present findings, Ghatak (2018) reported no major differences in social adjustment between students from rural and urban areas. In contrast, a significant difference was observed between science and arts students. Science students reported higher levels of social well-being compared to their peers in the arts. While some studies, such as Anand et al. (2018), found no differences in social adjustment between arts and science trainees, the present results suggest that academic stream may influence social well-being. This could be attributed to differences in academic culture, peer networks, or perceived career opportunities. The broader literature underscores the importance of family and social ties in shaping well-being. Umberson, Crosnoe, and Reczek (2010) emphasized that family interactions remain a major source of influence throughout life, while Umberson and Montez (2010) highlighted the enduring impact of social connections on well-being. Stronger social ties not only provide emotional and material support but also foster a sense of meaning and purpose (Hartwell & Benson, 2007; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001).

10. Conclusions

Social well-being among undergraduate students is influenced by multiple factors, including gender, locality, and academic stream, as noted in prior studies (Matud et al., 2003; Berkman & Kawachi, 2000; Ebersole et al., 2004). While this study found no significant differences across gender or locality, it did reveal a meaningful difference between science and arts students, with science students reporting higher levels of social well-being. Undergraduate students, typically aged 18-22, are at a formative stage of life where they begin to assume societal responsibilities. Assessing their social well-being is therefore crucial, as it directly impacts their future effectiveness, career success, and overall life satisfaction. High levels of social well-being are associated with improved mental and physical health, greater resilience, and enhanced capacity to cope with challenges. Previous research has consistently demonstrated the strong correlation between social ties and well-being. Diener et al. (2002) emphasized the role of social life in enhancing happiness, while Ryff et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of social interaction and healthy relationships in psychological well-being.

Berkman et al. (2000) further showed that stronger social cohesion is linked to better health outcomes. The present study concludes that undergraduate students generally exhibit **average levels of social well-being**, which warrants careful attention. To strengthen students' social well-being, it is essential to design and implement effective strategies—such as fostering peer support networks, encouraging community engagement, and promoting inclusive campus environments, that can enhance their social connectedness and overall quality of life.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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