



Psychosocial Factors Predicting Well-Being of Private Higher Education Students in Relationships



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Nhasi ndezveduwo, wedu adadisa (It is our turn to celebrate, our own has done us proud).

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of hopelessness, self-esteem, age and gender on the psychological well-being of higher education students within a private university context that are in romantic relationships or have information about these relationships. Using a cross-sectional design, the research gathered data from 330 students through an online survey, examining how these psychosocial factors impact various dimensions of well-being as conceptualised by Ryff's psychological well-being scales. The goal of the study is to determine and examine the connections between a range of psychosocial factors, including age, gender, hopelessness, and self-esteem, and the general well-being of students in this educational setting.

Empirical findings from the study indicate that hopelessness significantly predicts lower levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and positive relations, supporting the Hopelessness Theory of Depression. This suggests that pervasive feelings of pessimism and despair are detrimental to students' psychological health across multiple facets. Conversely, self-esteem was a significant positive predictor of better psychological outcomes in areas such as autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth, aligning with the Sociometer Theory's proposition that self-esteem reflects perceived social value and influences emotional and psychological states. Interestingly, the study also uncovered that while high self-esteem enhances certain aspects of well-being, it negatively correlates with positive relations, indicating a complex relationship between self-confidence and social interactions.

The study highlights the necessity for university administrators and mental health professionals to actively address hopelessness and self-esteem in their mental health strategies to enhance student outcomes. Future research directions include longitudinal studies to further explore the causality and dynamics of these relationships and expand the study across diverse cultural contexts to validate the findings universally. This research contributes to the understanding of student mental health by delineating the significant effects of hopelessness and self-esteem, providing a theoretical and empirical basis for targeted interventions within university settings.

List of Abbreviations

BHS	Beck Hopelessness Scale
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
PWB	Psychological Well-Being
RSES	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT	3
Table of Contents	5
List of Appendices	10
CHAPTER ONE	11
INTRODUCTION	11
1.1 Introduction	11
1.2 Background	11
1.3 Research Problem	15
1.4 Aim of the study	19
1.5 Research Objectives	19
1.6 Scope of the study	20
1.7 Relevance of the study	20
1.8 Conclusion	21
CHAPTER TWO	23
THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	23
2.1 Introduction	23
2.2 Sociometer Theory	23
2.3 The Hopelessness Theory Of Depression	26
2.4 Conceptual Framework	29
2.5 Conclusion	30
CHAPTER THREE	32
LITERATURE REVIEW	32
3.1 Introduction	32
3.2 Conceptual Definitions	32

3.2.1 Psychological Well-being	32
3.2.2 Psychosocial factors	33
3.2.3 Romantic Relationship	33
3.2.4 Higher education student	33
3.2.5 Hopelessness	33
3.2.6 Self-esteem	34
3.3 Operational Definition	34
3.3.1 Psychological Well-being	34
3.3.2 Psychosocial factors	34
3.3.3 Romantic Relationship	34
3.3.4 Hopelessness	35
The Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS), developed by Beck, Weissman, Lester, and Trexler, was used to quantify hopelessness. The BHS consists of twenty true-false questions that assess the three primary elements of hopelessness: expectations, motivation loss, and future-focused thinking.	35
3.3.5 Self-esteem	35
3.4 The link between romantic relationships and well-being in higher education students	35
3.5 Sex differences and psychological well-being	40
3.6 Self-esteem and psychological well-being	43
3.7 Hopelessness in students	45
3.8 Age and well-being	47
3.9 Conclusion	50
3.10 Hypotheses	50
Hypothesis 1: Null Hypothesis –Hopelessness will not significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.	50

Alternate Hypothesis: Hopelessness will significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.	50
Hypothesis 3: Null Hypothesis – Gender differences will not significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.	50
CHAPTER FOUR	51
METHODOLOGY	51
4.1 Introduction	51
4.2 Research Paradigm	51
4.3 Research Design	53
4.4 Sampling Method	54
4.5 Sample Size	55
4.6 Research Participants	56
4.7 Data Collection Method	56
4.8 Research Instruments	57
4.8.1 Demographic questionnaire	57
4.8.2 Shortened 18-item version Psychological Well-being scale (PWB)	57
4.8.3 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)	58
4.8.4 The Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS)	60
4.9 Data Analysis	61
4.10 Conclusion	62
CHAPTER 5	64
DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION	64
5.1 Introduction	64
5.2 Results and Interpretation	64
Section A	64
Table 1. Demographic Characteristics	64

Table 2. Reliability and validity	65
Table 3: Descriptive and correlation matrix of study constructs	66
Table 4: Path coefficient of the independent and dependent variables	67
CHAPTER 6	72
DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS	72
6.1 Discussion	72
6.1.1 Practical Implications	74
6.1.2 Theoretical Implications	74
6.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions	75
Conclusion	76
REFERENCES	77
APPENDICES	103

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics	64
Table 2. Reliability and validity	65
Table 3: Descriptive and correlation matrix of study constructs	66
Table 4: Path coefficient of the independent and dependent variables	67

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Letter	104
Appendix 2: Participant or respondent consent form	104
Appendix 3: Research Questionnaire	108
Appendix 4: Editor Certificate	115

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The well-being of students is a crucial factor that has a considerable impact on academic success, personal growth, and general life satisfaction in the ever-changing landscape of higher education (Hartman et al., 2020). It is critical to comprehend the psychological elements that support these students' well-being as they negotiate the intricate problems of relationships, social interactions, and the pursuit of personal objectives (Knifsend, 2020). Relationships are crucial to students' lives in this day and age of tensions and transformations that characterise the higher education experience. Relationships, be they romantic, platonic, or family, have a profound effect on an individual's mental and emotional health, depending on their type and quality (Anglim et al., 2020). It has been well-documented that hopelessness, a psychological condition marked by a pervasive sense of pessimism and despair, has serious consequences for mental health (Hartman et al., 2020). In addition, age and gender bring distinct aspects to the higher education experience, impacting social dynamics, identity formation, and coping strategies. Self-esteem, which is an essential part of one's self-concept, is crucial in determining how people view themselves and interact with others (Knifsend, 2020). This thesis aims to provide a thorough understanding of the predictors of well-being among higher education students in relationships by closely examining these psychosocial aspects. The research is introduced in chapter one, chapter two includes an outline of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, supported by a review of the literature in chapter three. The methodology used is covered in chapter four. Data presentation and interpretation are covered in chapter five, and a discussion of the findings and limitations are revealed in chapter six. The summary, conclusion and recommendations are covered in chapter seven.

1.2 Background

The eudaimonic viewpoint of well-being has described well-being as the realization of one's full potential, and the subjective view of well-being is in opposition to this (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Psychological well-being, which is considered

the result of a life well-lived, is a vital component in helping students successfully transition to college or higher education life (Hanawi et al., 2020). According to Gómez-López et al. (2019), romantic partnerships have a significant role in providing an important environment of support, companionship and closeness. According to certain studies, romantic relationships have a great potential to encourage good adaptation and high levels of well-being (Kansky & Allen, 2018). High levels of well-being are also linked to the capacity to uphold healthy interpersonal connections, have more friends, or engage in more social activities (Davila et al., 2017). The fact that the institutions offer novel environments for which university students have no prior experience, and who may not have the skills necessary to manage them successfully, makes them a challenge, which must also be acknowledged (Liu et al., 2019). According to research, the knowledge and skills that these PHEI students currently have, in addition to how their educational experience evolves, or how students' performance on a task gets better over time, have an important effect on the impact of romantic relationships on well-being (Davila et al., 2017).

According to Singhal and Prakash (2021), being a student is a time where a variety of psychological elements predominantly influence well-being, which ultimately shapes or has a long-lasting effect on the person. This is frequently a result of the variety of difficulties that students frequently experience during this time, difficulties that have an impact on their psychosocial development. In addition, according to Li et al. (2019), private higher education students who are growing up run the danger of experiencing a variety of negative outcomes as a result of subpar academic success, substance misuse, and failing relationships. Often, the shift from youth to adulthood is made more dramatic by the unexpected events of high school and university life. Therefore, understanding the psychological determinants of some of the wellness components can give an outline for developing more effective strategies to enhance the elements that make up wellness (Singhal & Prakash, 2021). According to research, this study is important because it will aid young couples attending private higher education institutions in preventing breakups and divorce, which is among the most common in youth in South Africa, a country with one of the most frequent divorces worldwide (Bezuidenhout, 2017). The study also has a practical significance, as it might urge the government to enact laws through parliamentary channels that will

ensure that couples getting married for the first time must attend premarital counselling (Mohlatlole et al., 2018). Hanawi et al. (2020) found that this will reduce the number of young couples divorcing. Relationship therapists may also work with private higher education students who are contemplating breaking up, or having issues with self-esteem and even hopelessness which affects their relationships, as well as students in relationships going through a separation itself, or who have already divorced (Hanawi et al., 2020). Addressing the psychological distance and getting over feelings of pain, rage, and resentment should be the main goals of counselling during the breakup and divorce process. Moreover, research by Mohlatlole et al. (2018) found that the results of the study may show which gender and age group's psychological well-being is mainly affected and this can help the PHEIs by putting in place measures to help those students who are facing these challenges. Other scholars who may wish to conduct research may utilise the study on the psychosocial factors that can impact people. Furthermore, more accurate conclusions concerning hopelessness, self-esteem, gender, and age relating to psychological wellness, specifically in the South African context, will be drawn, thanks to the construct validity of the psychosocial components in a population of South African private higher education students (Li et al., 2019).

Kansky (2018) states that the romantic context is unquestionably critical, but family, school, and peers are also crucial contexts for optimal development. Although romantic relationships add a new dimension to the private higher education student's social life, their significance for well-being has received little attention thus far (Gómez-López et al., 2019). According to studies by Kansky, (2018), relationships with others are one of the most important components of well-being. Partnerships specifically may have a particularly large influence on well-being because to the profound feelings and concepts that occur in these intimate talks. Despite the importance of marriage, there are instances in every community where it fails, and the partners are unable to accept living together (Davila et al., 2017). Moreover, according to studies by Bezuidenhout (2008), young people in South Africa are experiencing a sharp rise in divorce cases, which are among the highest in the world. The majority of divorces occur in marriages where couples are aged between 18 and 35. With that said, divorce rates among those aged 25 to 29 are more than twice as high as those of people in older age groups,

according to studies carried out by Bezuidenhout (2008). According to Mohlatlole et al. (2018), adultery, which is another term for infidelity and is more frequently known as "cheating" on a partner, is one of the leading causes of divorce among young couples in South Africa; another of the primary causes of marriage breakdown is abuse. It impacts people of all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds and can take a variety of forms, such as spoken, psychological, mental, physical, or even monetary abuse (domestic violence) (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020). With that said, it is important to look at relationships before marriage, in light of the high number of divorce cases and yet no studies have been done to look at the factors that predict the well-being of PHEI students in relationships.

The importance of intimate relationships and their status for psychological adjustment and well-being has been highlighted in earlier research, but few have examined the particular factors that contribute to this correlation in PHEI students (Kansky, 2018). Although studies on hopelessness have mainly focused on depression, there is evidence that it is linked to relationship degradation (Murtagh, 2020). The possibility of resolving a conflict in a relationship has also been linked to a sense of pessimism. While other studies have found a connection between relationship satisfaction and hopelessness, none have specifically looked at the direct connection between hopelessness and psychological health, notably not in the literature on clinical therapy (Liu et al., 2019). Male suicidal behaviours are directly impacted by depression and hopelessness, while female suicidal behaviours are directly impacted by hopelessness but not depression (Yusuf et al., 2020). Hopelessness usually results in a depressed attitude and negatively affects how one views themselves, other people, and their environment (Ali & Soomar, 2019). In order to establish and sustain a fulfilling romantic relationship and marriage, self-esteem may be beneficial. According to research, self-esteem not only correlates with relationship happiness but also predicts increases in relationship satisfaction over time (Erol & Orth, 2013). Yet, because relationships are dyadic in nature, it is crucial to determine whether a person's self-esteem influences both his or her partner's and the individual's contentment with the relationship (Hanawi et al., 2020). Interestingly, little is known regarding the relationship between self-esteem and well-being of PHEI students in relationships. A person's self-esteem greatly influences their sense of

relationship commitment and fulfilment (Erol & Orth, 2013). In relationships, women are two to three times more likely than men to have mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, which negatively impact their wellness (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). This is partly due to harmful misconceptions about sexuality and body image. Research on the well-being differences between males and females, particularly in higher education, have not produced consistent results (Matud et al., 2019). So far, there has not been much research comparing the subjective well-being of private higher education students, particularly amongst spouses. Even though there have been numerous research examining the link between relationship satisfaction and depression, very few of them featured students in relationships, and very little is known about the impacts of partners in younger populations, particularly university youth (Moore & Diener, 2019). As a result, less is known about the well-being-related elements that influence private higher education students in relationships.

1.3 Research Problem

Both the health and human development domains commonly utilise the broad phrase "well-being." One's total well-being is influenced by both the individual and the environment; the latter can have a major influence, particularly in early childhood and higher education (Gómez-López et al., 2019). Romantic context is unquestionably critical, but family, school, and peers are also crucial contexts for optimal development (Kansky, 2018). While romantic relationships give students a new social dimension, there has not been much discussion of how important they are for their overall wellbeing up until now (Gómez-López et al., 2019). Social relationships, which have a high correlation with both physical and mental health, are one of the most important components of well-being (Gómez-López et al., 2019). Romantic connections may have an especially large influence on wellbeing because of the intense emotions and thoughts that occur in these intimate exchanges (Kansky, 2018). A smaller number of investigations have looked specifically at the components that contribute to this link, but prior research has highlighted the importance of romantic connections and intimate partner status for mental adjustment and well-being (Kansky, 2018).

Although studies on hopelessness have mainly focused on depression, there is evidence that it is linked to relationship degradation (Murtagh, 2020). The

possibility of resolving a conflict in a relationship has also been linked to a sense of pessimism (Murtagh, 2020). While other studies have found a connection between relationship satisfaction and hopelessness, none have specifically looked at the direct connection between hopelessness and psychological health, notably not in the literature on clinical therapy (Ali & Soomar, 2019). Furthermore, a number of behavioural and mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and suicidal ideation, are described as having hopelessness as a symptom (Hanawi et al., 2020). Numerous individuals who feel hopeless could also be impacted by mental health conditions like depression. Furthermore, while hopelessness may not always be related to a specific illness, it can nonetheless be extremely damaging (Ali & Soomar, 2019). The emotion not only jeopardizes one's sense of security and well-being, but it may also deprive one of the drive necessary to make use of the resources at hand or seek assistance (Kansky, 2018). Male suicidal behaviours are directly impacted by depression and hopelessness, while female suicidal behaviours are directly impacted by hopelessness but not depression (Ali & Soomar, 2019). Hopelessness frequently causes low mood and has a negative impact on one's ability to perceive oneself, other people, and surroundings (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020). Additionally, drug use had both direct and indirect effects on suicidal behaviour, and anxiety was directly associated with sadness and hopelessness in both males and females, in a study by Ali and Soomar (2019). Relationships between hopelessness and intimate partner and interpersonal violence point to a bigger role for some groups' low affective functioning.

In order to establish and sustain a fulfilling romantic relationship and marriage, self-esteem may be beneficial. According to research, self-esteem not only correlates with relationship happiness but also predicts increases in relationship satisfaction over time (Erol & Orth, 2013). Yet, because relationships are dyadic in nature, it is crucial to determine whether a person's self-esteem influences both his or her partner's and the individual's contentment with the relationship (Allen et al., 2022). Interestingly, little is known regarding the relationship between self-esteem and relationship happiness in private higher education students (Erol & Orth, 2013). Students who are in

relationships must work at maintaining their connection as well as their own well-being in order for their union to succeed (Lucktong et al., 2018). A person's self-esteem greatly influences their sense of relationship commitment and fulfilment (Lucktong et al., 2018). These factors also have an impact on how their spouse treats them. It has been demonstrated that healthy relationships are strengthened when partners share high self-esteem (Asselmann & Specht, 2020). So, improving one's self-esteem should not be done separately from a committed relationship, but rather it is a necessary component of effective communication and emotional intimacy (Lucktong et al., 2018). Couples with poor self-esteem may feel exposed in their relationship, including being uncertain of their partner's love and support (Erol & Orth, 2013). A number of researches by social psychologists have revealed that private higher education students with poor self-esteem ultimately regret the sacrifices they make in relationships, because they do not feel their spouse is supportive or appreciative of them (Lucktong et al., 2018).

Although studies on the disparities in psychological well-being between females and males specifically in higher education have not produced definitive results, research has repeatedly revealed gender differences in mental health (Matud et al., 2019). In relationships, females are two to three times more likely than men to have mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, which negatively impacts their wellness (Matud et al., 2019). This is partly due to harmful misconceptions about sexuality and body image (Gómez-Baya et al., 2018). Research on the well-being differences between males and females, particularly in higher education, have not produced consistent results (Matud et al., 2019). Furthermore, the results indicate that there are minimal gender differences in psychological well-being, even though women reported experiencing both positive and negative emotions more frequently and intensely than men (Matud et al., 2019). While studies have revealed disparities between men and women in a number of psychological well-being domains, these variations are usually contingent upon other factors such as age, cultural background, or roles performed (Gómez-Baya et al., 2018). It has been consistently observed that women score higher than men when they are in favourable connections with others (Gómez-Baya et al., 2018). Also, it has been discovered that women in various cultures

scored worse than men in terms of self-acceptance and autonomy, which has an impact on relationships (Gómez-Baya et al., 2018).

So far, there has not been much research comparing the subjective well-being of private higher education students, particularly amongst those in relationships (Knifsend, 2020). Even though there have been numerous research examining the link between relationship satisfaction and depression, very few of them featured couples in higher education, and very little is known about the impacts of partners in younger populations, particularly higher education students (Moore & Diener, 2019). As a result, less is known about the well-being-related elements that influence private higher education student's relationships satisfaction. When there is a big mental maturity difference in a relationship, the more mature spouse may end up carrying more of the emotional load, which can lead to exhaustion and perhaps a breakup (Anglim et al., 2020). Being the older spouse does not ensure emotional maturity, just as being younger does not automatically entail being less mature (Hajdu & Hajdu, 2018). People may mistake age for emotional maturity since years can provide more exposure to diverse events and more time to form complex beliefs. Age differences in committed relationships may affect the propensity for depression in each partner (Asselmann & Specht, 2020). It was discovered, for example, that couples with an age gap of at least three years had somewhat greater incidences of depression than couples who were the same age (Hajdu & Hajdu, 2018).

In summary, studies have found a distinct link between romantic relationships and subjective well-being. One of the main sources of adult support and stress has been identified as marriage (Kansky, 2018). Particularly, marriage has also been associated with greater youth well-being and decreased psychological discomfort. Even before getting married, being in a romantic relationship is associated with a person's overall subjective well-being. This association may also be attributed to the quality of the relationship, rather than just being involved in one (Asselmann & Specht, 2020). When compared to their friends or parents, private higher education students report feeling the most support and experiencing the most conflict from their love partners in late adolescence (Kansky, 2018). While social connections are vital for well-being throughout one's lifespan, romantic connections become more significant and salient as a significant component of identity during the course of late

adolescence, young adulthood, and eventually adulthood. It will be essential to discuss how romantic experiences affect well-being and vice versa because people's needs, goals, and values in a relationship change throughout time (Asselmann & Specht, 2020). Over the course of a person's lifetime, romantic connections can undergo developmental changes that can affect the strength of the association between intimate relationships and well-being.

Despite substantial study on the connection between different relationship statuses and mental health, it is still unclear what psychosocial traits predict psychological well-being in private higher education students (Hsu & Barrett, 2020). Most studies have examined two or more age groups or have just used age as a control variable (Hsu & Barrett, 2020). Other factors, such as hopelessness, self-esteem, gender, and relationship goals at different ages and stages of life, also have an impact on the relationship and its importance for psychological well-being.

1.4 Aim of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between a wide variety of psychosocial factors and psychological wellness among private higher education students in relationships. These psychosocial variables include age, gender, self-esteem, and hopelessness.

1.5 Research Objectives

To investigate if hopelessness will predict well-being in relationships among private higher education students.

To examine whether self-esteem is a predictor of psychological well-being.

To examine whether gender will predict psychological well-being among private higher education students.

1.6 Scope of the study

The study focuses on psychosocial factors predicting well-being of higher education students in relationships. In order to quantify this study, students from any private higher education institution in the province of Gauteng will be used. This study aims to investigate the association between psychological wellness and a wide range of psychosocial characteristics among students enrolled in private higher education programmes who are in relationships. These psychosocial factors include hopelessness, self-esteem, age, and gender. The data collection for this study from the respondents took roughly five months.

The online survey served as the source of the data. SurveyMonkey, an online survey platform, was used to create the online questionnaire, which is confidential, and self-reported. A link to the online questionnaire was created as soon as it was prepared for usage. The primary platforms where the link was distributed were well-known social media sites like Facebook or social media messaging apps such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger. Any student who clicked on the provided link was taken to the online survey. The questionnaire took between five and ten minutes to complete. The data was collected using four instruments: a demographic questionnaire, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS).

1.7 Relevance of the study

A range of psychological factors primarily affect students' well-being during their time in higher education, which eventually mould or have a long-lasting impact on the individual (Singhal & Prakash, 2021). This is usually a result of the range of challenges that students face currently, challenges that affect their psychosocial development. Growing up, students face the risk of a range of adverse consequences from poor academic performance, substance abuse, and unhealthy relationships (Mohlatlole et al., 2018). Unexpected experiences in high school and college life can heighten the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Thus, understanding the psychological determinants of some of the well-being components can offer a framework for developing more effective interventions to enhance the components of wellness (Singhal & Prakash, 2021).

This study is significant because it will help young couples pursuing higher education avoid separation and divorce by offering recommendations based on the findings. This is because these psychosocial factors are some of the leading causes of young people's divorces in South Africa, a country with one of the highest divorce rates in the world (Bezuidenhout, 2017). Additionally, the study recommends that the government use legislative channels to pass legislation requiring premarital therapy for newlyweds (Mohlatlole et al., 2018). As a result, fewer young couples will file for divorce. Relationship therapists can also assist couples who are divorcing or thinking about divorcing, as well as those who are going through the separation process. In addition, therapists or school counsellors can assist those students dealing with low self-esteem, or hopelessness, which in turn affects their psychological well-being and relationships (Singhal & Prakash, 2021). Counselling should focus on resolving emotional separation and overcoming feelings of hurt, anger, remorse, hopelessness, and shame (Mohlatlole et al., 2018).

The study has practical value since it will help parents, individuals, and various higher education institutions comprehend the study's variables of hopelessness, self-esteem, age, and gender, and whether these will predict students' psychological well-being. The study's findings may indicate which ages or gender have high levels of hopelessness and low self-esteem among the students. Additionally, the findings can assist educational institutions as well as educators in implementing strategies and treatments to deal with students who exhibit low levels of hopefulness and self-esteem. The study will serve as a resource for future researchers who wish to delve deeper into the psychological elements that influence well-being. Since some theories were used in the study to explain the variables under investigation, the study's theoretical relevance is also significant, for instance, the nature and function of self-esteem will be explained by the Sociometer Theory.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided a thoroughly summarized outline of the research on psychosocial factors predicting well-being of higher education students in relationships. The precise goals of the research study are outlined in the research

questions and objectives. The study problem, the methodology, the results and discussion, the conclusion, and recommendations will all be covered in detail in the chapters that followed.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Students face a wide range of difficulties in the vibrant tapestry of higher education, and psychosocial variables are crucial in determining how well they manage (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). In the framework of higher education relationships, this chapter sets out to investigate the complex interactions between Sociometer Theory and The Hopelessness Theory of Depression. Understanding the intersections between these theoretical frameworks may provide valuable insights into the psychosocial issues affecting higher education students' well-being and ability to navigate connections in the academic setting (Perinelliet al., 2022). Together, the Sociometer Theory – which emphasizes social acceptance – and the Hopelessness Theory of Depression – which dissects cognitive processes in the face of difficulty – help illuminate the emotional terrain that students encounter in relationships (Fulmer, 2023). These frameworks provide fresh insights into the complex interactions between social dynamics and personal cognitive processes, which are helpful in comprehending the emergence of depressive symptoms, interpersonal relationships, and self-esteem (Pössel & Smith, 2020). Moreover, these two theories are deemed adequate for this study's purpose, and this is because the variables of the study cannot be described using only one theory.

2.2 Sociometer Theory

The sociometer theory holds that a person's subjective sense of their interpersonal worth, or how much other people think their contacts with them are significant, meaningful, or intimate, can be gauged by their level of self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Stated differently, the self-esteem system evaluates a person's suitability for interactions that are sought over the long term, including being a part of important small groups. According to Leary and Downs (1995), the self-esteem system functions as a kind of sociometer that assesses how well a person interacts with others and encourages actions that help them maintain a minimal level of acceptance from

others. Subjectively, having high self-esteem conveys the idea that one is a highly desirable person in intimate relationships and groups, whereas having low self-esteem conveys the idea that one's ability to integrate into society is restricted (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). The notion that one's self-esteem reflects their perceptions of how others see and evaluate them—a concept referred to as "reflected appraisals"—is, in fact, not new (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). A number of contemporary social, developmental, and personality psychologists (e.g. Harter, 1993; Rosenberg, 1979, 1981; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979) as well as several neo-Freudians (Horney, 1937), sociologists (Felson, 1993), humanistic and phenomenological psychologists (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1959), and James (1890) have all written on this idea. The sociometer theory asserts that the self-esteem system is organised to monitor and respond to others' responses, particularly in reference to social inclusion and exclusion, going beyond earlier findings that self-esteem is just affected by other people's perceptions (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Unlike previous theories (like Cooley's 1902 "looking glass self"), which saw self-esteem as only a reflection of what other people thought of oneself, sociometer theory views self-esteem as a tool that, like fuel measurements and thermostats, is used to monitor and maintain the standard of people's interpersonal relationships.

The basic tenet of sociometer theory is that an individual's self-esteem system monitors the calibre of their present and future relationships, especially the degree to which their interactions are valued by others (Liu & Zhang, 2016). Instead of total approval, people frequently strive for relational appreciation the sense that other people see them as important, concerned, and linked to them. According to Leary and Baumeister (2000), the sociometer triggers emotional distress as a warning indication when low relationship assessment more especially, relational devaluation occurs and encourages actions to gain, preserve, and mend relational appreciation.

Kirkpatrick and Ellis (2001, 2006) extended the sociometer theory by proposing that multiple sociometers were linked to functionally distinct social-psychological systems, and that these sociometers served multiple purposes (e.g. directing daily decision-making and behavioural strategies). Guiding adaptive relationship decisions was one of these suggested roles. In the process of forming social connections across

several social domains (such as the mating, friendship, and job domains), people had to adjust how ambitious they were (Liu & Zhang, 2016). Natural selection should work against those who either wasted their investment by pursuing relationships that were worth more than they could successfully obtain and protect, or invested excessively in relationships that were much less valuable than what they could command on the social market and failed to receive a sufficient return on the value they brought to the relationships (Liu & Zhang, 2016). Thus, Kirkpatrick and Ellis (2001) postulated that encouraging people to pursue social contacts that are reasonably high quality but justified in light of their own social value is a crucial function of self-esteem. Zhang et al. (2015) indicate that the framework they developed suggested social experiences of acceptance and rejection were integrated into domain-specific sociometers, resulting in changes in state self-esteem within the pertinent social domain. These modifications consequently impacted aspiration levels when pursuing new connections within the same domain (Liu & Zhang, 2016).

A decrease in self-esteem, according to sociometer theory, should spur an individual to act in a way that will help them regain acceptance or otherwise lessen the harm to their sense of belonging. In general, research backs up the idea that when social acceptance is threatened, students do change their social motivations and behaviours (Leary & Downs, 1995). However, how they act will depend on whether they are reacting to the person who rejected them or to a possible new social partner. For instance, the fear of not belonging pushes students to generate more favourable perceptions of unfamiliar interaction partners and increases their desire to interact with new people by creating new friends (Maner et al., 2007). It is important to note that this increased prosocial incentive is not aimed at the social partners who first caused the harm to one's belongingness, but rather at new social partners who may be able to alleviate that threat (Maner et al., 2007). So how do individuals respond to social partners who reject or shun them? People typically respond aggressively. Such a response might be an effort to break free from a dangerous social relationship and prevent more distress (Twenge et al., 2001). Therefore, when faced with a threat to their sense of belonging, people seem to self-protectively refocus their affiliation goals away from harmful relationships and towards brand-new bonds (Twenge et al., 2001). People who have been rejected romantically, for instance, experience a decline in

state self-esteem, which in turn dampens their desire to mate. Such impacts, however, did not extend to their other self-evaluations or their desire for friendship, indicating that the self-esteem system's regulatory function is selective and well-tuned (Kavanagh et al., 2010).

The notion that relationship satisfaction influences self-esteem makes intuitive sense, since intimate relationships are thought to be a primary source of self-esteem (Rubin et al., 2006). Furthermore, the sociometer theory—a well-known theory on self-esteem argues that one's subjectively perceived own relationship value is reflected in their level of self-esteem (Leary, 2012; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Sociometer theory states that people naturally seek out connections because they desire a sense of acceptance and belonging (Allen et al., 2022). This idea holds that a person's sense of self-worth serves as a gauge of how well they interact with others and how much of their behaviour is accepted by society (Erol & Orth, 2017). Thus, the sociometer hypothesis suggests that a person's degree of self-esteem is influenced by how they perceive and understand how others see them (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Accordingly, this point of view maintains that when an individual finds out that their partner is not happy in their partnership, their self-esteem is negatively affected, and when they think their partner is pleased in their union, it is positively affected. However, the evidence that is currently available supports the notion that relationship happiness is influenced by self-esteem (Erol & Orth, 2017). Furthermore, longitudinal studies show that self-esteem prospectively predicts other relationship outcomes, but not social support or the size of one's social network (Erol & Orth, 2017).

2.3 The Hopelessness Theory Of Depression

Humans are inherently future-focused (Seligman et al., 2013), and they have remarkably optimistic hopes for the future, despite the ups and downs that come with life (Fischer & Chalmers, 2008; Gallagher et al., 2013). A wide range of positive outcomes, from increased social resources and higher socioeconomic standing to psychological and physical well-being, have been linked to such an optimistic outlook (for a review, see Carver et al., 2010). However, a sizable proportion of people believe that their future is bleak and that there is nothing they can do to improve the situation. To put it another way, they feel helpless (Marchetti et al., 2023). Since hopelessness

is linked to a variety of negative thoughts and feelings, such as despair, a lack of positive emotions, low self-esteem, demoralisation, and suicidal thoughts, it is a phenomenon that is very important to researchers and clinicians alike (Abramson et al., 1989; Klonsky et al., 2016; Ratcliffe, 2015). First, hopelessness affects 9–12% of the global general population at a clinically significant level (Greene, 1981; Haatainen et al., 2003, 2004; Mair et al., 2012), with nearly similar rates of men and women suffering it (Greene, 1981; Poch et al., 2004). Second, there is substantial proof that hopelessness is a significant predictor of important future outcomes, such as depressive symptoms and episodes (Abramson et al., 1989; Alford et al., 1995; Hamilton et al., 2013; Joiner, 2005; Joiner et al., 2005; Mac Giollabhui et al., 2018), ideas of committing suicide or dying by suicide (Beck et al., 1989; Franklin et al., 2017), poor health (Roane et al., 2017), and increased mortality (Everson et al., 1996; Stern et al., 2001). Third, hopelessness is a crucial indication to consider in treatment contexts because of its link with reduced help-seeking behaviour (i.e., help-negation) amongst students with high levels of suicide ideation (Wilson & Deane, 2010, but see Deane et al., 2001). Furthermore, Kuyken (2004) observed that treatment-unresponsive hopelessness predicted unfavourable outcomes in cognitive therapy, while Westra et al. (2002) discovered that greater levels of pre-treatment hopelessness were associated with dropout in cognitive-behavioural group therapy.

A hallmark of hopelessness is having pessimistic expectations for the future, since it is portrayed as unattainable, dark, and essentially devoid of any good things (Marchetti, 2019). Research really shows that those who are pessimistic have far less optimistic views on the future (MacLeod & Cropley, 1995; MacLeod et al., 1997, 1993, 2005; O'Connor et al., 2000; Roepke & Seligman, 2016). In addition, positive scenarios are harder to generate, less plausible, less detailed, and less prevalent (Marchetti et al., 2023). Moreover, it seems that the lack of positive future-focused thinking is particularly noteworthy only when the idea's content is self-relevant rather than other-focused (Alloy & Ahrens, 1987; MacLeod & Conway, 2005, 2007). Interestingly, research on the relationship between pessimism and pessimistic outlooks shows mixed results (Roepke & Seligman, 2016). To explain this pattern of data, Beck et al. (2001) argued that hopelessness is a mental predictor of low positive impact, rather than strong negative affect.

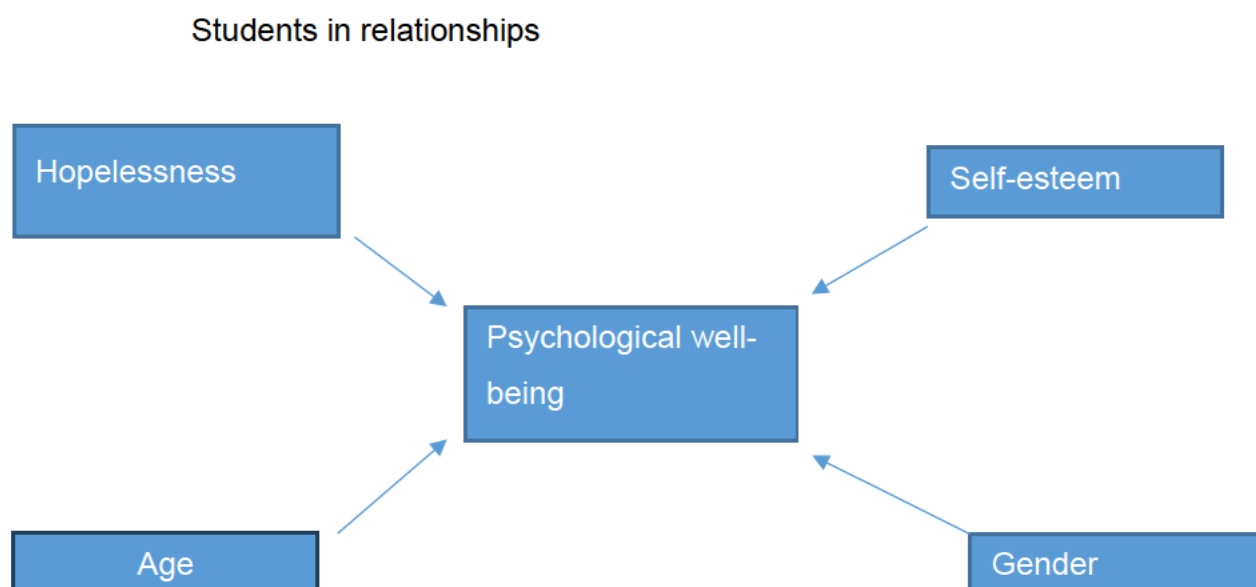
According to the hopelessness theory of depression, certain persons are more prone to depression than others because of a cognitive vulnerability that interacts with stressful life events (Abramson et al., 1989). Hopelessness theory defines cognitive vulnerability as the inclination for an individual to make specific judgements about the causes, consequences, and implications for one's own value of stressful life situations (Haefel et al., 2017). Specifically, an individual exhibiting cognitive vulnerability is more prone to: (a) ascribe a stressful life event to consistent, universal causes; (b) anticipate additional unfavourable consequences from the event; and (c) understand the event as implying that they are undeserving or insufficient (Haefel et al., 2017). Negative conclusions are believed to put people at risk for hopelessness, which is recognised as a major and immediate cause of depression (Haefel et al., 2017).

The hopelessness theory of depression was created in reaction to the drawbacks of the learned helplessness theory (Abramson et al., 1978). Since then, it has been broadened to include the consideration of childhood experiences as contributing factors to various levels of hopelessness. Ultimately, hopelessness is defined as the state in which two individuals have goals or ideals for their relationship, but neither believes that these aspirations will materialise (Hadley & MacLeod, 2010). Both couples begin to believe that the past has vanished and will never be retrieved again (Murtagh, 2020). The relationship is broken and has irreversibly deteriorated. Within the topic of depression research, the history of the despair theory may be found. The hopelessness hypothesis essentially anticipates the relationship between negative cognitive/thinking patterns and unpleasant events, as well as how this interaction may either exacerbate or lessen a general sense of hopelessness (Liu et al., 2015). Panzarella et al. (2006) also incorporated a subsystem of the despair theory that focuses on the direct influence of social support networks on the interactions that either induce or counteract pessimism. When faced with marital difficulties, many couples often lose hope that a solution can be found (Deutsch, 2000). Thus, it seems reasonable to draw the conclusion that relationship hopelessness may be fueled by negative beliefs about the relationship (i.e., negative attributions), as well as negative lived experiences and interactions (i.e., fruitless arguments and traumatic childhood experiences) with one's partner (Murtagh, 2020). Furthermore, it was found that the best indicator of women's emotional pain was hopelessness, and that patients with

greater relationship statuses had lower levels of hopelessness (Northouse et al., 2001). The hope hypothesis states that hope is a representation of people's beliefs about their ability to set goals, come up with particular strategies to reach those goals, and start and keep the motivation to put those strategies into practice (Snyder et al., 2003). In order to provide clients hope and agency, it provides a framework that both individuals and therapists can utilise to empower clients to set and achieve their own goals while staying motivated to do so (Snyder et al., 2003). The research suggests that those who are hopeless generally use their traumatic past to forecast the future (Ghaemi, 2007; Hamilton et al., 2013). This decreases their hopes for the future and finally renders them despondent. (Ratcliffe, 2015).

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Statistical model



The model proposes that the four psychosocial factors will significantly predict the psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.

Well-Being of Students: This is the result variable, which is shown in the diagram's centre. It stands for the students' general well-being, which the study attempts to forecast using the other variables.

Hopelessness: With its arrow going straight to the "Well-Being of Students" box, this variable is positioned on the left side of the diagram. This implies that it is expected that hopelessness will have a detrimental effect on students' wellbeing.

Self-Esteem: Additionally, self-esteem has an arrow pointing to the well-being box on the left, directly below hopelessness, suggesting that a higher sense of self-worth is likely to have a beneficial impact on well-being.

Age: Another predictor variable on the right side of the figure, with an arrow pointing to wellbeing, is age. This shows that age may have an effect on students' wellbeing; nevertheless, the study will examine the nature and direction of this association.

Gender: With an arrow pointing to well-being, gender is another predictive variable that comes after age. This suggests that gender may have an impact on students' wellbeing, perhaps as a result of the disparities in experiences and obstacles that exist between the sexes.

The graphic illustrates the theory that predicts pupils' well-being in relation to age, gender, hopelessness, and self-esteem. It establishes the framework for further investigation to verify these associations and ascertain the degree and direction of each predictor's impact on well-being.

2.5 Conclusion

To conclude this exploration into the psychosocial variables influencing students' relational well-being, the combination of the Hopelessness Theory of Depression and the Sociometer Theory offers a sophisticated perspective on the struggles and successes in this ever-changing environment. When one considers the significant influence that social validation and approval have on the well-being of higher education students who form connections, the relevance of the Sociometer Theory becomes clear (Bishop, 2021). These people's emotional experiences as they navigate the difficulties of connection are shaped by the fluctuations in their self-

esteem, which are closely linked to their views of social standing (Mahadevan et al., 2019). In addition, the Hopelessness Theory of Depression provides a framework for understanding the mental processes involved in overcoming relationship difficulties. Students who believe that bad relationship experiences are persistent and widespread are more susceptible to symptoms of depression (Nalipay & Ku, 2019). Understanding these cognitive foundations can help identify possible areas of intervention, highlighting the significance of correcting cognitive distortions, and building resilience in the face of relationship difficulties.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

Understanding the intricacies of the higher education experience requires an investigation into the psychosocial aspects influencing the well-being of students in higher education who are involved in relationships (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). This chapter on the literature review offers a thorough synthesis of the body of knowledge regarding the predictive power of age, gender, hopelessness, and self-esteem on students' well-being in the setting of relationships. It also includes theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. The first section of the chapter outlines the theoretical foundations of each psychosocial element and clarifies how they relate to students' well-being in relational circumstances (Li & Hasson, 2020). The theoretical background of the impact of psychosocial factors on students' relationship well-being is provided by the existing literature used in this chapter. It is important to define key terms, such as self-esteem, hopelessness, romantic relationships, psychological well-being, higher education students, and psychosocial factors, before beginning this literature review.

3.2 Conceptual Definitions

3.2.1 Psychological Well-being

Living a happy, fulfilling life for an extended period of time is a common definition of psychological well-being (Foo et al., 2022). Feeling good encompasses not just happiness but also motivation, endearment, and the capacity to function well in day-to-day living. It is a highly subjective area of existence. According to some academics like Matteucci and Soncini (2021), psychological well-being reveals how an individual's life is made up of their choices for freedom, fulfilment in life, finding their purpose in life, forming wholesome connections with others, and maintaining their sense of self-worth and acceptance. Mental health, which is considered as the result

of a life that is well-lived, is a critical component in helping higher education students successfully adapt (Morales-Rodriguez, 2020).

3.2.2 Psychosocial factors

Psychosocial factors, as defined by Thomas et al. (2020), are characteristics or features that have an impact on an individual's psychological well-being and/or interactions with others and may be utilised to explain how their social setting influences their mental and physical well-being.

3.2.3 Romantic Relationship

A pair of people are said to be in an intimate relationship when they regularly communicate, voluntarily, with one another and are differentiated by specific shows of affection and love (Campbell & Stanton, 2019). A passionate interpersonal relationship that incorporates closeness on an emotional and/or physical level is referred to as a romantic relationship (Campbell & Stanton, 2019).

3.2.4 Higher education student

A student is anyone who participates at all times in a degree-granting programme (undergraduate or post-graduate) at an institution of higher learning and who cannot be a full-time worker. In this study, the students are from any institution of higher education in the Gauteng Province (Gao et al., 2018).

3.2.5 Hopelessness

A pessimistic outlook on the future and the belief that one cannot influence what the future holds are the components of hopelessness (Hernandez & Overholser, 2021). It is the belief in unfavourable outcomes and the impossibility of modifying the future, and this pessimistic perspective is seen as a component of the cognitive triad, a characteristic of depression (Hernandez & Overholser, 2021).

3.2.6 Self-esteem

The subjective evaluation of one's own self-worth is a popular definition of self-esteem (Foo et al., 2022). Cast and Burke (2002) suggest that self-esteem is composed of two distinct metrics: competence and worth. These metrics are evaluated differently when it comes to self-esteem. First and foremost, competence characterises an individual's efficacy, or their confidence in their own accomplishments and talents (Cast & Burke, 2002). On the other hand, the worth dimension gauges an individual's sense of self-worth and their level of appreciation for their existence (Foo et al., 2022).

3.3 Operational Definition

3.3.1 Psychological Well-being

The 18-item Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB) was used to measure the variable psychological well-being. The psychological well-being of the participants was measured using this 18-item test. The sum of each person's individual scores was used to calculate the score. A higher score denotes a higher degree of psychological health.

3.3.2 Psychosocial factors

According to a number of models, there may be psychosocial elements that affect psychological well-being (Morales-Rodriguez, 2020). In this study, psychosocial factors refer to hopelessness, self-esteem, age, and sex differences.

3.3.3 Romantic Relationship

This definition is current with regards to students who are in romantic relationships, and this includes LGBTQIA+. This definition, however, emphasizes interactions (for example, reciprocal, continuous and voluntary) and expressions (for instance, affection and intimacy) (Campbell & Stanton, 2019).

3.3.4 Hopelessness

The Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS), developed by Beck, Weissman, Lester, and Trexler, was used to quantify hopelessness. The BHS consists of twenty true-false questions that assess the three primary elements of hopelessness: expectations, motivation loss, and future-focused thinking.

3.3.5 Self-esteem

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to measure the variable self-esteem. Ten components make up this scale, which was used to gauge self-esteem. The sum of each person's individual scores was used to calculate the score. A higher score denotes a higher degree of self-worth.

3.4 The link between romantic relationships and well-being in higher education students

A person's journey towards higher education is a life-changing experience that is characterised by intellectual challenges, personal development, and the creation of social bonds (Beckmeyer & Cromwell, 2019). Romantic connections are among the many types of relationships that students in higher education encounter, and they have a big impact on how they feel about themselves overall. Studies repeatedly indicate that romantic relationship quality has a substantial impact on people's well-being, especially in the early years of higher education (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). One key to comprehending the nature of romantic relationships among college students is the complex relationship that exists between academic performance and relationship fulfilment. According to a study by Kuo et al. (2020), there is a favourable association between academic achievement and relationship satisfaction, which suggests that having a good romantic relationship might help students deal with stress and academic obstacles. A significant time for identity formation and self-discovery is during higher education (Kuo et al., 2020). In this process, romantic connections are essential because they give people a platform to explore and express who they are (Páez-Gallego et al., 2020). Nonetheless, there are difficulties in the link between romantic commitment and well-being. Relationship problems and pressures can impact a student's academic performance and mental health in a number of ways (Bailey et al., 2020). The fine balance between relationship demands and academic obligations can

make people more stressed, which could have a bad effect on their well-being. One regular aspect of romantic relationships is breakups, which can have an especially negative effect on a person during their early college years (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). A breakup's emotional toll and the difficulties of adjusting to being single can exacerbate feelings of melancholy and loneliness as well as lower general well-being (Beckmeyer & Cromwell, 2019).

One of the most crucial aspects of well-being and the strongest correlates of both physical and mental health are social ties (Gates et al., 2022). Because close connections involve heightened emotions and thoughts, romantic relationships in particular may have a particularly strong effect on well-being (Gates et al., 2022). Generally speaking, studies have shown that romantic connections in particular are notably associated with subjective well-being (Smith et al., 2021). One of the main sources of adult support and stress has been identified as marriage. In particular, marriage has been associated with both increased adult well-being and decreased psychological discomfort (Karris Bachik et al., 2021). Romantic relationships are associated with a person's total subjective well-being even before marriage. The quality of the romantic connection is just as important as the presence of a romantic relationship in explaining the association with well-being (Gómez-López et al., 2019). Compared to their friends or parents, students in higher education report experiencing the most support from their romantic partners, but they also perceive the most disagreement from them (Morales-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Romantic relationships gradually become more significant and salient as a significant part of a person's identity throughout late adolescence, early adulthood, and ultimately adulthood, even if interactions with others are crucial for well-being throughout one's lifespan (Beckmeyer & Cromwell, 2019). It is crucial to evaluate not just the contentment of an individual with their partner but also the quality of their love relationship. Subjective well-being includes affect and overall life satisfaction assessments, but it can also include subjective assessments of particular life domains, such as civic engagement, professional performance, or social interactions (Wortham et al., 2020).

Previous research indicates a considerable correlation between domain-specific relationship satisfaction and global subjective well-being, which makes sense

considering the close connection between relationships and well-being (Oravecz et al., 2020). It has been discovered that there is a positive correlation between relationship quality and well-being, with happier and more content people reporting higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect and lower levels of negative affect (Oravecz et al., 2020). Moreover, many people start dating seriously when they are what has been called emerging adults. The unique developmental stage of emerging adulthood is characterised by instability and the construction of identity (Smith et al., 2021). Additionally, many premarital relationships are still in their infancy during this time, leaving them vulnerable to the stresses of this formative stage (Lebuda & Csikszentmihalyi, 2020). This time of transition from adolescent to adulthood is something that many people go through while attending higher education. The personal and environmental shifts that take place during higher education bring to light a number of behaviours that raise the possibility of unfavourable results for one's physical and mental health (Karris Bachik et al., 2021).

Romantic connections and experiences are important sources of emotional bonding that enhance the development of positive self-concept and increased social integration (Gómez-López et al., 2019). It has been demonstrated that forming and maintaining romantic relationships successfully enhances people's mental and physical health and, as a result, their well-being. These relationships can have a substantial impact later in life (Debrot et al., 2021). This perspective holds that long-term romantic relationships cause the attachment link to alter. A couple's well-being has been found to be influenced by several aspects, including as the type of relationship they have, how long they have shared experiences, how attached they feel to each other, and the beliefs that emerge from their combined experiences (Hudson et al., 2020). The literature generally agrees that love is one of the qualities most strongly associated with one's own happiness. It is also associated with higher degrees of self-worth, security, life fulfilment, positive affect, and achieving individual and interpersonal goals (Cao et al., 2022). This is the case despite the fact that it is challenging to ascertain the precise impact that these linkages have on wellbeing due to the wide range of topics covered in the research (Righetti et al., 2022). However, romantic relationships have also been connected to negative outcomes, especially for students. Accordingly, research has indicated that romantic involvement could be

linked to various types of violence, internalising symptoms like anxiety or depression, lower psychosocial functioning, or criminality (Cao et al., 2022).

The benefit of confiding in a love partner and communicating good news can assist as well to explain the connection between a relationship and well-being, in addition to the romantic partner's function as a social support system during times of conflict, distress, or other unfavourable events (Reuven-Krispin et al., 2021). While friends can also serve as social outlets platforms for the sharing of positive news, romantic partners are frequently more important, intimate, trustworthy, and emotionally connected (Hudson et al., 2020). Therefore, it may be especially advantageous for love partners to respond and share good news. Higher education, which encompass the second and third decades of life, has been defined as being crucial for the growth of romantic relationships from an evolutionary perspective (Gómez-López et al., 2019). According to Schutte et al. (2022), these relationships, which are defined as mutually-accepted ongoing voluntary interactions, are distinguished from others like friendships by a special intensity, particular expressions of affection, and the beginning of erotic sexual encounters. Moreover, Li and Hasson (2020) discovered that romantic connections and experiences, which are important psychological connection systems for students, enhance the development of a good self-image and enhanced integration into society. Effectively forming and keeping romantic connections has been empirically proved to enhance the well-being of individuals by enhancing their mental and physical health (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). These collaborations may have a big impact on education in the future. The aforementioned point of view claims that, over time, romantic relationships signify an alteration in the emotional bond between people. It is known that the type of connection, the nature of the interactions between them, the feeling of connection, and the beliefs formed as a consequence of the whole process all have an impact on the general health of both individuals (Blanca et al., 2018).

The study is overwhelmingly in agreement that love is one of the qualities most strongly connected to happiness, and that it is linked to better levels of safety, self-worth, life satisfaction, positive affect, and achieving individual and interpersonal goals (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). This is accurate, despite the fact that the variety of

variables discussed in the study makes it challenging to assess the precise impact that these associations have on wellbeing (Blanca et al., 2018). But romantic connections have also been linked to detrimental effects, particularly in students (Blanca et al., 2018). The prevalence of various forms of violence, suffering internalizing symptoms like sadness or anxiety, worse psychosocial functioning, or delinquency, according to studies, may all be linked to romantic involvement (De Coninck et al., 2019). For numerous reasons, romantic connections may be particularly beneficial to well-being. The first developmental goal of emerging adulthood is recognized as skilfully negotiating love relationships. Success across a variety of life domains, particularly those that are most relevant to the right developmental period, has been linked to happiness (Kansky, 2018). Therefore, failing to maintain intimacy with a romantic partner during early adulthood may be associated with lower levels of happiness, self-esteem and psychological well-being. In fact, delaying dating until early adulthood has been associated with a number of detrimental effects, such as poor psychological functioning (Kansky, 2018).

Maintaining a romantic relationship is viewed as a socially desirable marker of success during early adulthood, which could be one mechanism explaining the association between relationship status and well-being (De Coninck et al., 2019). According to Gomez-López et al. (2019), those who are unable to establish committed, monogamous close relationships with others may be more likely to have lower well-being and higher levels of mental discomfort. Cultural studies on the relationship between marriage and well-being offer evidence for this mechanism. According to Gómez-López et al. (2019), the advantage of marriage was lower in collectivist countries and in countries with a greater tolerance for divorce. They contend that unmarried people's well-being may be affected more severely in societies where divorce is taboo than in those where it is more prevalent and acceptable (Kansky, 2018). Therefore, failing to achieve this objective may result in poor psychological health and well-being in communities where committed love partnerships are regarded as a cultural norm (Lebuda & Csikszentmihalyi, 2020). In terms of developmental goals, failing to achieve the intimacy goal throughout young adulthood as opposed to earlier in adolescence may have a greater negative influence on one's well-being (Taniguchi & Kato, 2019). As a result, the environment and cultural norms surrounding

romantic relationships are probably significant determinants of the association between intimate relationships and well-being (Kansky, 2018). While sad people find it difficult to locate a compatible mate or to sustain a long-term relationship, cheerful people may be more likely to attract and maintain a good romantic connection (Goldberg et al., 2021). Additionally, according to mate selection theorists, people choose partners who have pleasant personality traits, which suggests that happy people may make better partners (Gómez-López et al., 2019).

The value of confiding in a romantic partner and communicating good news can also assist to explain the connection between relationship status and well-being, in addition to the support that a romantic partner can offer when conflict, distress, or other bad events happen (Kansky, 2018). While love partners are frequently people of higher trust, intimacy, emotional connection, and importance, friends can also serve as social channels to convey happy news and because of this, discussing and reacting to good news might be especially beneficial for love relationships (Smith et al., 2021). Moreover, relationship stability and well-being are more strongly correlated with how partners react to good news than to bad news (Gómez-López et al., 2019). It is crucial for the contentment and well-being of both individuals and their relationships to respond actively constructively as opposed to passively, or actively destructively (Kansky, 2018). Utilizing the pleasant experiences and occasions that a romantic companion shares can therefore improve the functioning and well-being of the partnership (Stevenson et al., 2019).

3.5 Sex differences and psychological well-being

The notion of well-being is incredibly fluid and has been broken down into a number of categories, including social, psychological, physical, economic, and spiritual well-being (Sharma et al., 2021). Broadly speaking, well-being relates to the sensation of having optimal psychological function, and can be defined as being satisfied, happy, healthy, and prosperous (Sharma et al., 2021). PWB is known to be influenced by a variety of factors, including culture, gender, financial level, personality, life experiences, and physical health (Matud et al., 2019). Gender-based analysis is also required to address issues with men's and women's health and healthcare, because gender is a significant social determinant of health. It highlights the persistent

disparities between males and females in terms of mental health. It was generally observed that women were more likely to have internalising illnesses such as psychological discomfort and depression, whilst men were more often linked to externalising diseases like substance abuse and antisocial behaviour (Matud & García, 2019). Numerous researches from many countries claim that some health indicators have revealed gender disparities (Matud et al., 2019). The life expectancy of women is higher than that of men worldwide. Similarly, there are persistent inequalities between males and females in terms of mental health (Matud & García, 2019). Additionally, men commit suicide at a higher rate than women do globally. In many areas related to psychological studies, including logical and numerical reasoning, cognitive approaches, general intelligence, personality traits, ethical thinking, compassion, and positive social behaviour, the study of gender differences is a significant and recurring topic. However, this field of study can be challenging and contentious (Sharma et al., 2021). Furthermore, in terms of PWB, gender differences have become increasingly significant in psychological well-being due to the numerous efforts being made in modern society to enable everyone to reach self-actualization and realise their full potential (Sharma et al., 2021).

Positive findings on the differences in well-being between men and women have not always been found in research on this topic (Matud et al., 2019). Research has shown that psychological well-being does not differ significantly between the sexes, however women do report experiencing both good and negative emotions more frequently and more intensely than men (Matud & García, 2019). Although studies have shown differences between men and women in a number of psychological well-being factors, these differences are usually influenced by other factors such as roles played, age, or culture. One distinction between women and men is the higher score that they regularly have in positive relationships with others (Matud et al., 2019). In many societies, women have additionally been reported to score worse than men when it pertains to autonomy and self-acceptance.

For male and female students the consequences of relationship traits very well could be different. In comparison to males, females typically gain more from intimate relationships (Kansky & Allen, 2018). However, as opposed to females, males are

more distressed after difficult circumstances in intimate relationships (such as a breakup) (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019). According to Kansky and Allen (2018), in contrast to female students, male students in higher education generally prefer to see their romantic interactions as less passionate, which is in line with research showing that women are more cognizant of the significance of close connections. When in relationships, men, on the other hand, frequently have less self-worth, greater emotional suffering, and a greater likelihood of sadness. While some studies have found no gender differences in the psychological well-being of private higher education students, others have found higher levels of psychological discomfort among females than males (Jiang, 2020), given that both males and females showed similar levels of depression and life satisfaction (To et al., 2017). A good psychological triad (i.e. favourable opinions regarding oneself, society, and what lies ahead) strengthens the resilience of students and improves their overall happiness and health (Pumpuang et al., 2021). Studies conducted in Thailand revealed that students had a modest degree of PWB, and that PWB was influenced by gender (Thavorn et al., 2018). In particular, male students' contentment and PWB were lower than those of female students (Calderon et al., 2019). In contrast to male student, female students had a higher score of PWB, according to Tangmunkongvorakul et al. (2019) findings.

Many psychological factors have been examined in relation to gender, including mental health, social habits, psychopathology, suicidal ideation, personality, psychological complaints, and psychological well-being (Matud et al., 2019). Prior research on psychological well-being, however, has not produced conclusive results (Gómez-López et al., 2019; Hasan, 2019). A previous study (Klainin-Yobas et al., 2020) found that psychological well-being (PWB) is comprised of two components: autonomy and personal advancement, and negative triads. People who report higher degrees of autonomy are also prone to report higher levels of personal growth, a sense of purpose in life, and overall PWB, citing Melendro et al. (2020). Positive perspectives about oneself, the world, and the future, or a positive cognitive triad, increase life satisfaction and well-being and bolster students' resilience in higher education (Pumpuang et al., 2021). Research carried out in Thailand showed that PWB was influenced by gender and that students' levels of PWB were moderate (Thavorn et al., 2018). Specifically, PWB and student satisfaction were lower among male students

than female students (Calderon et al., 2019). Tangmunkongvorakul et al. (2019) found that, in comparison to male pupils, female students exhibited greater levels of PWB. However, another study (Lucktong et al., 2017) found that men had higher life satisfaction than women. Findings from other countries revealed similar ambiguous results about gender differences in PWB (Pumpuang et al., 2021). A study carried out in India found that PWB scores were higher for female students than for male students (Pumpuang et al., 2021). However, a different study (Hasan, 2019) did not find any gender differences in PWB.

3.6 Self-esteem and psychological well-being

Throughout the last 15 years, scientific studies have shown a connection between esteem for oneself – an emotional factor – and satisfaction with and enjoyment of existence (Jerrin & Bhuvaneswari, 2022). According to the latest findings by Farhangpour et al. (2019), there is a significant association among self-worth and both psychological and emotional health, and there is a correlation between personal happiness and elevated self-worth. Self-worth has been shown to be the strongest predictor of happiness (Nurunnabi et al., 2020). Contrary to the belief that poor feelings of self-worth results in maladjustment, it seems that having high expectations for oneself and having goals that one is working towards directly fosters happiness (Nurunnabi et al., 2020). Based on studies by Pandey et al. (2021), self-esteem can affect a student's contentment in a relationship just as much as it can their partner's, and when someone is insecure about themselves, it may begin to influence the way they communicate with their spouse, which could be detrimental to both of them. Low self-esteem not only affects how one views their partner, but it can also increase anxiety about their relationship. A person could be anxious about other issues to which other people would not give a second thought, or they might be frightened that their partner will leave them (Rao et al., 2020). Self-esteem influences risky behaviour as well as physical health. Youth in private higher education who are resilient compared to their unaffected friends, have a greater sense of self-worth, and they are also less likely to start engaging in a range of risky activities (Farhangpour et al., 2019). The clinical research reveals a connection between low self-esteem and depressive disorders, hopelessness, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Schmuck et al.,

2019). Correlation studies have consistently shown a strong negative relationship between depression and self-esteem (Rao et al., 2020).

One of the most important aspects of health is psychological well-being (Guo et al., 2022). However, because psychological problems are becoming more common and significantly burden families as well as society at large, they have emerged as a significant global public health concern (Shao et al., 2020). The majority of psychological disorders start in early adulthood. Nevertheless, professional treatment or assistance is barely provided to young people (Guo et al., 2022). Due to strong expectations from families and society, it has been observed that higher education students have more mental health issues than the overall population (Ramón-Arbués et al., 2020). Globally, it is approximated that between 12% and 50% of higher education students meet at least one diagnostic standard for one or more psychological conditions (Bruffaerts et al., 2018). Research has indicated that psychological well-being and self-esteem are closely related (van der Crujsen & Boyer, 2021). Self-esteem is a person's whole assessment of their own value and potential, which is greatly influenced by social input from peers, parents, and teachers (Guo et al., 2022). It affects how one interacts with others and how one feels about oneself. There is substantial evidence that poor self-esteem is a general risk factor for psychological conditions like stress, anxiety, depression, and violence (van Tuijl et al., 2020). According to Choi et al. (2019), there may be a correlation between the onset of depression and varying degrees of self-esteem as well as social support. In the meantime, substance misuse, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and other mental health issues are linked to low self-esteem (Lannoy et al., 2020). Consequently, raising self-esteem levels helps support young adults' mental health (Guo et al., 2022).

Self-esteem is defined as a person's total thoughts and feelings about themselves, as well as how they respond to their own assessments of themselves (Moltafet & Sharifi, 2021). What a person achieves and how he lives his life is determined by his level of self-esteem. Numerous scholars have emphasised that one's self-concept determines one's behaviour and is an aim of self-awareness (Han, 2018). Empirical research indicates that self-worth has a crucial psychological role in one's overall health, and increasing one's sense of self-worth and empowerment is facilitated by improving one's self-esteem (Moltafet & Sharifi, 2021). It has also been

proven that self-esteem plays a role in psychological empowerment (Moltafet & Sharifi, 2021). Positive outcomes including academic success, good self-esteem, and psychological well-being are also brought about by self-esteem (Ali Mohammadi, 2019). Furthermore, because it can act as a buffer against adverse consequences, self-esteem is not only a crucial component of mental health but also a predictor of improved mental health and positive social behaviour (Moltafet & Sharifi, 2021). Stated differently, those with high self-esteem appear to be better able to cope with stress, maintain their physical health, and prevent anxiety (Han, 2018). Numerous scholarly investigations have discussed the connection between well-being and self-esteem (Ali Mohammadi, 2019). Moreover, earlier studies found that interpersonal relationships and self-esteem were positively correlated with and predicted well-being.

3.7 Hopelessness in students

Every moment of life can be filled with hopelessness if one thinks that nothing will go well, that issues will not be solved, that the future is bleak, that a person should not anticipate anything from life, or that of one's goals will not be achieved (Çutuk, 2021). According to Lew et al. (2019), lack of optimism or a lack of a purpose, direction, or motivation is known as hopelessness, and higher education students in need exhibit several cognitive traits in common. These students believe that bad things cannot be stopped and are beyond their power to influence. Studies by Ulas and Yildirim (2019) found out that higher education students develop bad thoughts about themselves as a result of their unhappy lives, and when they do not pass a test, they can believe they are useless; students also think that one negative thing will lead to another. For instance, they could believe that their lack of extroversion will prevent them from ever making friends. The psychological and mental growth of students depends heavily on their ability to moderate swings between sentiments of hope and despondency (Zhang et al., 2022). Students can be hopeful when they control their personalities, but if they fail, they lose hope. To add to this, students in a state of desperation begin to focus on the present without regard for the future; they feel helpless, alone, and without a sense of community (Çutuk, 2021). According to Zhou et al. (2020), violence, sadness, difficulties in school, substance addiction, hazardous sexual activity, and unintentional harm have all been linked to a lack of hope. Cross-sectional research, on the other hand, has found a connection between high levels of

hope during adolescence and academic success, social acceptance, emotions of self-worth, and general psychological health (Zhou et al., 2020). One psychological power that is thought to attenuate the link between stressful life events and risky behaviours is hope.

A pessimistic outlook on the future and the belief that one cannot influence what the future holds are the components of hopelessness. It is the belief in unfavourable outcomes and the impossibility of modifying the future, and this pessimistic perspective is seen as a component of the cognitive triad, a characteristic of depression (Buzzai et al., 2020). Hopeless and depressed people, according to Pretorius (2021), attach illogical ideas to their experiences without realising they are constructing these from an impartial and logical foundation. They have poor self-judgments because of their bad experiences. People who are hopeless anticipate bad things happening to them, thus they are likely to care very little about the things that may affect their future since they do not think positive things will occur (Dat et al., 2021). People who are hopeless feel that they have little influence over their life's events and think that good things will never come to them; this is because they lack confidence, are self-deprecating, and are unable to look past their obstacles (Pretorius, 2021). Compared to those who have great hope, they have lower life reasons and motivation to achieve their goals. A person who is hopeless will have a negative perception of self and environment, which will have an adverse effect on their well-being (Buzzai et al., 2020). Low hopelessness is also linked to a feeling of flourishing, happy feelings, life satisfaction, and subjective well-being, according to a recent study. In addition, hopelessness is linked to suicidal thoughts and actions, depression, lower subjective well-being, and stronger negative feelings in relation to one's own life goals (Sadeghian et al., 2021). A person's social surroundings greatly influence how hope and hopelessness manifest. Studies have shown that during childhood and adolescence, hope grows in a supportive network of friends and parents, and in a loving atmosphere where psychological needs are satisfied (Sadeghian et al., 2021). Additionally, they imply that a lack of appropriate support and interpersonal stress factors related to peers and family foster hopelessness (Hirsch et al., 2021). During youth and the early adult years, social connections and social support contribute to both hope and hopelessness. According to a study done on

college students, despair and hopelessness were linked to a friend's lack of support (Sadeghian et al., 2021). People who do not get encouraging support from their friends experience loneliness and lose hope for other people and their own destiny (Sadeghian et al., 2021). It is clear that a person's social surroundings greatly influences how they view themselves, other people, and their future, which has an effect on their psychological well-being (Dat et al., 2021).

3.8 Age and well-being

It is critical to comprehend how psychological wellness manifests itself in all dimensions of lifestyles in order to ascertain if higher education students perceive happiness in their lives and whether mental health can be related to various psychosocial factors as they develop (De-Juanas et al., 2020). In addition, it was also discovered that a person's age and other demographic variables relate to psychological wellness in a number of different ways (De-Juanas et al., 2020). De-Juanas et al. (2020) found a favourable correlation amongst age and degree of mental well-being as a consequence of positive social setting adaptation. As a person ages, his perspective of himself shifts, becoming less based on interpersonal comparisons and more on momentary distinctions. It is important to realize that, depending on whether they are assessing or characterizing the present, the past, or the future, university students have various viewpoints of themselves (Yıldırım et al., 2022). All of these perspectives are crucial for comprehending psychological well-being in its whole. Students in PHEI score better on self-assessments for the aspects of one's identity and improvement of life's meaning because they believe they have made substantial progress since puberty and have high aspirations for the future (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019). Studying the variables that affect psychological well-being is one method to be advanced in comprehending the concept. Age and psychological health are strongly correlated. According to certain scholars, such as Ryff and Keyes (1995), older adults really do not experience as much personal development. They also proposed that as people mature, their capacity for environmental mastery and independence grows. While environment mastery tends to be greater in older and more experienced individuals than in university students, it is constant through middle age to older ages (Drane et al., 2021).

PWB has swiftly risen to prominence in health studies and has been extensively investigated in a variety of settings, including ageing. Studies have demonstrated that it significantly lowers the risk of chronic diseases and increases longevity, both of which have a positive impact on the health of older persons (Boccardi & Boccardi, 2019). The developmental trajectories of the many PWB subcomponents across the lifespan, particularly in the later phases of life, are not always consistent with the available data, though. For instance, Ryff and Keyes (1995) showed a decrease with age in the subscales measuring personal growth and purpose in life, while environmental mastery and autonomy showed increases in scores. However, a number of long-term investigations revealed that the PWB dimensions have a U-shaped trajectory (Fusi et al., 2022). However, other research revealed that PWB does not always show clear age profiles or decline, with remarkably tiny longitudinal age variations, and much larger differences within individual age groups (Boccardi & Boccardi, 2019). Consequently, it seems that there are many moving parts and that people's understanding of the correlations between age and other PWB dimensions is still incomplete. In line with this complexity, a number of factors, including biological, psychological (such as personality traits) and cognitive ones, can also have an impact on the association between PWB and age (Fusi et al., 2022). More specifically, concentrating on cognitive processes, several researches (e.g. Kaufman et al., 2021) discovered that PWB in samples of older persons was favourably correlated with markers of global cognitive state. Nevertheless, the majority of research has primarily examined the connections with general cognition or functional intelligence, ignoring the potential significance of particular cognitive talents (Fusi et al., 2022). Accordingly, certain models have previously shown that higher cognitive functions may be involved in perceived PWB (Fusi et al., 2022), while other recent research has suggested that executive functions (EFs) may play a specific role in PWB (Toh et al., 2020). When people are working on a task where instinctive answers are neither permitted nor feasible, a set of adaptive, top-down cognitive control processes known as EFs come into play (Fusi et al., 2022). Furthermore, working memory, cognitive flexibility, quantitative reasoning, and planning were found to be connected with all measures of PWB by Shamsabadi et al. (2022), with the exception that preparation and quantitative thinking were not correlated with beneficial relationships or meaning in life, respectively. Furthermore, some studies revealed that a decrease in PWB as

assessed by the Ryff's scale was linked to a drop in executive decision-making techniques, such as memory retention or perceptual speed. This relationship was especially evident for aspects of well-being related to autonomy, self-acceptance, and purpose in life and particularly for eudaimonic aspects of PWB in older individuals. This is not unexpected, considering the critical role that cognitive control plays in emotion regulation, despite the fact that age has a significant impact as well (Yagi et al., 2020).

Psychological well-being is shaped by a combination of personal, interpersonal, and environmental factors and tends to fluctuate throughout different life stages and developmental milestones (Eloff & Graham, 2020). Studies have shown that psychological well-being evolves through a mix of emotional regulation, personality traits, identity formation, and life experiences (Eloff & Graham, 2020). It generally improves with age, education, extraversion, and conscientiousness, while it tends to decline with higher levels of neuroticism. Evaluating psychological well-being in South Africa is particularly relevant at this moment. As the country approaches the tenth anniversary of its democracy, following years of oppression, its population faces considerable challenges, including high rates of crime, violence, and unemployment (Eloff & Graham, 2020). The psychological well-being of young people, especially students, is especially important due to the specific concerns they are likely to have in this context. Research from developing countries presents a troubling scenario, with estimates suggesting that "12 to 46 percent of university students experience mental health issues" (Harrer et al., 2019). In Brazil, a study revealed that students faced elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression during the pandemic (Bezerra et al., 2021). Similarly, a study in South Africa found a significant rise in symptoms of depression and anxiety among university students during the pandemic (Naidoo et al., 2021). Results from a comprehensive student mental health survey, which included 26 publicly funded universities in South Africa and involved 29,000 students, indicate that 20% of students in higher education institutions in the country require mental health support (Walker, 2022). However, over 70% of those students are not receiving the necessary assistance (Walker, 2022).

3.9 Conclusion

The research review concludes by emphasising the role of psychosocial elements in determining the well-being of higher education students in relationships and the intricate interactions between hopelessness, age, gender, and self-esteem. This chapter has shed light on the complex nature of these psychosocial dimensions and their implications for mental health outcomes among university populations by synthesising empirical results and theoretical viewpoints.

3.10 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: *Null Hypothesis* –Hopelessness will not significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.

Alternate Hypothesis: Hopelessness will significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.

Hypothesis 2: *Null Hypothesis* –Self-esteem will not significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.

Alternate Hypothesis: Self-esteem will significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.

Hypothesis 3: *Null Hypothesis* – Gender differences will not significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.

Alternate Hypothesis: Gender differences will significantly predict psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Knowledge is an invaluable resource in any field of study, but how is it acquired? The answer to this question can be found in research techniques and research methodology, which is the methodical process of carrying out research (Snyder, 2019). While various study types employ different approaches, the word generally refers to data collection, data analysis, and research design. Research methods might be quantitative (counting the number of times someone performs an action under specified conditions) or qualitative (asking people about their feelings about a given scenario) (Mishra & Alok, 2022). A research technique can be used to tackle an issue in an organised manner (Eisenhardt, 2021). This chapter's main objective is to investigate the methodological framework, the study approach, and validity and reliability issues pertaining to psychosocial factors that are predictive of students' relationship well-being in private higher education institutions.

The methods used to carry out this research are outlined in this chapter. The ideal research strategy for the particular study at hand is first presented in order to establish these methodologies. After that, a detailed assessment of the study demographic, sample size, participant selection procedure, and data collection methodology is provided. Clear explanations of each measurement scale and the significance of the metrics employed are included with the measurement scales. An explanation of the design and procedure that clarifies the data processing and analysis comes next.

4.2 Research Paradigm

According to du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2018), a paradigm is a set of presumptions and guidelines that specify what should be examined, how research should be carried out, and how conclusions should be interpreted by scientists working in any given subject. Although there are many distinct paradigms, the positivist paradigm will be

used as the basis for this study. Scientific discoveries are guided by research paradigms, which are predicated on presumptions and concepts. Recognising paradigm-specific presumptions makes it easier to spot holes in the production of reliable evidence and clarifies the grade of results that back up scientific study (Park et al., 2020). According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), the hypothetico-deductive paradigm of science, which uses measurements and factors as well as a priori and empirical hypothesis verification to guide and enhance research, is compatible with positivism. Empirically-based findings from large sample sizes are preferred in positivist studies, which typically concentrate on determining explanatory correlations or causal linkages using quantitative approaches (Park et al., 2020). According to this perspective, the main principles of positivist science have been replication of results, controlled experimentation, and generalizable conclusions. The positivist paradigm and methodology will enable the researcher to adequately quantify data for the proposed study, given the goal of the current investigation. (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018).

Due to its emphasis on empirical data and scientific investigation, positivism would be a suitable paradigm within the setting of this research to examine the effects of psychosocial factors on the well-being of students in relationships, such as self-esteem, age, gender, and hopelessness (Park et al., 2020). By applying positivism, these elements may be objectively measured and analysed, allowing the researcher to collect quantitative data through surveys (Hughes, 2020). A fuller comprehension of the underlying mechanisms at work is made possible by the researcher's comprehensive examination of the links between age, gender, hopelessness, self-esteem, and well-being, through the use of positivism. Furthermore, the positivist method encourages findings to be repeatable and broadly applicable, which advances knowledge in both scholarly and real-world contexts (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). As a result, using positivism as the paradigm for this study topic provides a strict and organised framework for investigating the complex dynamics of psychosocial elements in the relationships of students in higher education and their influence on general well-being (Park et al., 2020). Additionally, the positivist paradigm will allow the researcher to collect data in the form of percentages in order to ascertain the relationship between psychological wellbeing and psychosocial variables in higher

education students' interpersonal relationships. In performing the current study, the researcher will also employ a deductive strategy, also referred to as the top-down strategy (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2018). To support or refute a hypothesis, a deductive researcher, according to Soiferman (2010), works from the top-down, starting with a theory, hypotheses, and facts.

4.3 Research Design

A research design is a plan that offers the overall structure for obtaining information for a study (Rahman, 2020). In academic research, quantitative and qualitative methodologies are sometimes depicted as being in opposition to one another. Each strategy aims to address a different research subject with a distinct set of guiding principles, and as such, each has its own positives and negatives (Kazdin, 2021).

The quantitative research approach is being used in the current research design. Furthermore, the study's quantitative approach was selected in order to test ideas, ascertain facts, illustrate connections between the study's variables psychosocial factors and well-being, and forecast results (Foo et al., 2022). Additionally, every measurement employed in this study, including the Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS), is calculated and analysed as part of quantitative research. Unlike the qualitative paradigm, which views the researcher as an outstanding academic instrument due to their participation in the process of research, quantitative research views the researcher as external to the study and expects its findings to be replicable irrespective of the researcher (Rahman, 2020).

Furthermore, the current study employed a cross-sectional research approach. An example of an observational study design is a cross-sectional study, which looks at the population's exposure and results (Foo et al., 2022). Analytical and descriptive research are the two categories of research that cross-sectional studies fall under (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Descriptive research has been given priority as the primary emphasis of this study. A cross-sectional study can gather data from a large number of respondents and can be completed more quickly and easily than other research

methodologies (Foo et al., 2022). It also increases the dependability of the results because participants are less likely to choose false answers or lie (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

4.4 Sampling Method

The convenience sample approach has been employed in this study to meet the requirements of the present study. One kind of non-probability sampling technique, called convenience sampling, is able to obtain data directly from a selected sample, such the sample of students attending private higher education institutions (Noor et al., 2022). This sampling method was chosen for the current study because it will enable the researcher to recruit enough respondents to increase the generalizability of the study's findings. The study also discovered that the convenience sampling approach is thought to be a less expensive and time-consuming way of selecting participants (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The benefits of convenience sampling are numerous. The researchers may choose participants more quickly and easily than with previous non-random selection techniques (Noor et al., 2022). Second, convenience sampling requires the researcher to choose participants at a very low cost (Noor et al., 2022). Third, the study takes less time for the researchers since the sample taken from the target group is readily available.

In this study, students at any private higher institution in the Gauteng province are the respondents because they are easily accessible to the researcher. The inclusion criteria for the participants is (a) being a full-time student, (b) enrolled in any year of his/her course, (c) providing informed consent to take part in the study and lastly, (d) being in a relationship or have knowledge about a relationship. The exclusion criteria will include: a) not completing each and every one of the questions on the questionnaires provided; b) not being a full-time student.

Research sample and population

The entire group about whom one wish to make inferences is referred to as the population. However, the particular group from whom one will gather data is called a

sample. The sample size is consistently smaller than the population's total size. The sample size in this study is 323 and the population is private higher education students.

4.5 Sample Size

If the finite population correction cannot be disregarded, in order to obtain a statistically representative sample of a study population, Daniel (1999) suggests the use of the following equation:

$$n = \frac{Np(1 - p)Z^2}{e^2(N - 1) + pZ^2(1 - p)}$$

where

n = sample size with finite population correction

N = available population size

p = the proportion in the population possessing the characteristic of interest
(Expected prevalence or proportion)

e = Precision (percentage maximum error required) e.g. 5% precision

Z = value corresponding to level of confidence required (e.g. 1.96 corresponding to 95% confidence level).

Sincich et al. (2002) suggest that if we know nothing about p, we set the value of p = 0.50 to obtain a considerable sample size. Using the sampling error (e = 0.05), Z = 1.96 and the population size N= 2042 gives the expected sample size = 323.

$$n = \frac{Np(1 - p)Z^2}{e^2(N - 1) + pZ^2(1 - p)}$$

$$n = \frac{2042 (0.50)(1 - 0.50)1.96^2}{0.05^2(2042 - 1) + 0.50(1.96)^2(1 - 0.50)}$$

$$n = \frac{1021(1.9208)}{5.1025 + 0.9604}$$

$$n = \frac{1961.1368}{6.0629}$$

$$n = 323.4651404$$

$$n = 323$$

The sample size of this study is 323, achieved by using the formula by Daniel (1999) and Sincich et al. (2002).

4.6 Research Participants/ Population

The current research targets higher education students in Gauteng. The National Youth Policy 2000 (1996) defines a young person in South Africa as any individual between the ages of 14 and 35. Thus, the study's participants is composed of students between the ages of 18 and 30 and above, who are either recent postgraduates or undergraduates from private higher education institutions in Gauteng. The respondents must be enrolled full-time in school, give informed consent to participate in the study, and either be in a relationship or be aware of one. The participant's data will not be included in this study if they do not meet the requirements stated above.

4.7 Data Collection Method

This study has a number of inclusion and exclusion requirements that must be met. The first requirement is that participants have to be private higher education students and be between 18 and 30 years old. The second set of requirements is that respondents must be enrolled full-time in school, give informed consent to participate in the study, and either be in a relationship or be aware of one. The participant's data will not be included in this study if they do not meet the requirements stated above. The following will be the exclusion criteria: a) not finishing all of the offered questionnaires; and b) not being enrolled full-time in school.

Additionally, a decision to consent to participate in the study was offered to respondents by the researcher through a question on a questionnaire. This fulfils the requirement for informed consent, and the form is provided as Annexure H (a) for the participants to review before deciding whether to move on to the questionnaire. Important information including the study's objectives, participants' rights to voluntary

participation, possible risks, and confidentiality are all intended to be disclosed in the informed consent. Participants received information stating that all of their personal information will be kept private and used exclusively for the purpose of the study. Throughout the data analysis, individuals who requested to remain anonymous had their information not analysed.

The online survey served as the source of the data. SurveyMonkey, an online survey platform, was used to create the online questionnaire, which is confidential, and self-reported. A link to the online questionnaire was created as soon as it was prepared for usage. The primary platforms where the link was distributed were well-known social media sites like Facebook or social media messaging apps such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger. Any student who clicked on the provided link was taken to the online survey. The questionnaire took between five and ten minutes to complete. After receiving Ethics Clearance on the 20th of October 2023, the entire data gathering process lasted four months, from November 14, 2023, to March 6, 2024. Participants in the research project volunteered their time voluntarily, and respondents received no money in advance for their participation.

4.8 Research Instruments

The data will be collected using four instruments: a demographic questionnaire, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS).

4.8.1 Demographic questionnaire

Data was gathered using a demographic questionnaire. Questions eliciting demographic data, such as gender, marital status, age, experience, educational background, department, and level make up the questionnaire.

4.8.2 Shortened 18-item version Psychological Well-being scale (PWB)

Author or developer: Psychologists Carol D. Ryff and Keyes (1995) developed the 18-item Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) Scale, which measures happiness in six domains: self-acceptance, positive interactions with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relationships (Ryff et al., 2007). This

variation is the shortest as opposed to the initial scale, which has 42 components. Adults' psychological well-being is assessed using it.

Scoring format: The Likert scale was used, which takes approximately five minutes to complete, where 1 indicates strongly agree, 2 indicates somewhat agree, 3 indicates a little agree, 4 indicates neither agree nor disagree, 5 indicates a little disagree, 6 indicates somewhat disagree and lastly 7 indicates strongly disagree. A higher score means that the person shows higher levels of well-being.

Psychometric properties: A study by Prasad et al. (2020) revealed an internal consistency of .92 using Cronbach's alpha. Furthermore, Lee et al. (2019) discovered that all subscales — environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, personal progress, purpose in life, and self-acceptance — showed high Cronbach alpha coefficient scores, with scores of .72, .75, .81, .77, and .75, respectively. Subscale autonomy, however, was only .57, but compared to other subscales, it demonstrated excellent construct validity.

Context in South Africa: In the setting of urban Soweto, the study's goals were to evaluate the psychometric qualities of psychological well-being (PWB) measures (Mpondo et al., 2021). According to Mpondo et al. (2021) the measures of PWB were generally described as having excellent internal consistency, good model fit indices, unidimensional factor structures, and reliability. According to Mpondo et al. (2021) this study proved that the PWB measures examined here are appropriate for application in the South African setting and sound psychometrically. Numerous peer-reviewed research studies in South Africa have regularly employed the PWB as a means of measuring well-being.

4.8.3 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Author or developer: One of the most popular self-esteem tests in social science research is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Morris Rosenberg created it in 1965, and psychiatry, mental health, and psychology all make extensive use of it (Rosenberg, 1965). A popular tool for evaluating one's self-esteem is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which measures both positive and negative thoughts about oneself (Rosenberg, 1965).

Scoring format: Ten items make up this self-report style tool, which is used to assess self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). A 4-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 agree, and 4 strongly agree, is used to measure RSES. Positively scored items show positive self-esteem, whereas negatively scored items show negative self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). A higher score denotes a better degree of self-esteem in the individual (Foo et al., 2022). The scoring technique computes the total of all the elements in the scale.

Psychometric properties: The internal consistency of RSES has a value of Cronbach's alpha ranging from .85 to .88 (Martín-Albo et al., 2007). The positive and negative self-esteem subscales have Cronbach's alpha values of .879 and .848 correspondingly, while the overall consistency value of the ten-item Cronbach's self-esteem scale is .915, indicating strong internal consistency (Foo et al., 2022). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which is a superior choice for assessing an instrument's validity and reliability in terms of two distinct components, is used to test the validity of the RSES (Fromont et al., 2017). The validity of RSES for each item has a range of values from .45 to .75, according to McMullen and Resnick (2013).

Context in South Africa: This study looked into the construct validity of the RSES among college students in South Africa (Ndima, 2017). Students from two distinct South African universities situated in various locations were given the RSES (N = 304) (Ndima, 2017). The factor structure of the RSES was examined using principal component analysis (PCA), and correlations between the RSES and the General Self-Efficacy Scale (SGSES) were examined to look at the relationship between self-efficacy and self-esteem (Ndima, 2017). The South African university student sample's RSES single factor structure was produced using the PCA results, and a strong positive association between self-efficacy and self-esteem was found. Thus, in the setting of South African universities, the results validated the construct validity of the RSES (Ndima, 2017). Moreover, Five groups of adult inhabitants of Greater Pretoria who were Black, White, Indian, or Mixed Race were given the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) by interviewers (Westaway et al., 2015). The findings showed that, for each of the five groups, the RSES had sound psychometric properties. The RSES and its two dimensions are appropriate for use in this context, as evidenced by the negligible effects of sociodemographic factors on global self-

esteem, self-competence (SC), and self-liking (SL) (Westaway et al., 2015). It appears that generally good self-evaluations are universal, since all five groups scored above the theoretical midpoint of the RSES (Westaway et al., 2015).

4.8.4 The Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS)

Author or developer: The 20-item Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS), a self-report questionnaire, was developed by Dr. Aaron T. Beck to measure the three primary components of hopelessness: expectations, motivational decline, and future-focused thinking (Balsamo et al., 2020).

Scoring format: Sueki (2022) has categorised the twenty true-false items into three groups: sentiments about the future, motivation decline, and expectations for the future. The total of the item replies determines the BHS score, which ranges from 0 to 20. Higher scores are correlated with greater pessimism. According to Ma et al. (2020), scores within the normal range are interpreted as being between 0 and 3; scores between 4 and 8 indicate mild pessimism; scores between 9 and 14 indicate considerable hopelessness; and scores beyond 14 indicate severe hopelessness.

Psychometric properties: Numerous researches have suggested that the BHS has strong predictive validity (David Klonsky et al., 2012). The hopelessness scale is valid, and differentiates depressive patients from control subjects. The scale has a good reliability (test-retest, $r = .81$) and a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .97$) for depressive subjects (David Klonsky et al., 2012).

Context in South Africa: The psychometric qualities of the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS), such as its validity, reliability, and cultural relevance, have been the subject of numerous studies aimed at validating the scale in the South African setting. One study looked at the BHS's psychometric qualities in adolescent South Africans. It was discovered that within this population, the BHS showed good validity and reliability. The study also stressed how crucial it is to take cultural considerations into account when interpreting the findings (Pretorius, 1993). Furthermore, a different study looked at the connection between hopelessness and social support among black South African diabetes patients (Westaway et al., 2005). The BHS was utilised to gauge hopelessness, and the research concluded that it was a trustworthy instrument in this situation (Westaway et al., 2005).

4.9 Data Analysis

After being downloaded and cleaned into a Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet, the collected data was ready for analysis. In virtually all studies, there is a problem with missing data, inconsistent data, or the presence of outliers. These issues can significantly impact the conclusions that can be made based on the data (Kang, 2013). Descriptive and inferential statistics are both included in quantitative data analysis. Using summary statistics like the mean and standard are examples of descriptive statistics. Statistical data was analysed using the SmartPLS 4.1.

4.9.1 Analytical strategy

This study employed various analytical techniques to explore the relationships between psychosocial factors, such as hopelessness, self-esteem, and gender, and the psychological well-being of higher education students in relationships. The choice of these techniques was carefully considered based on the nature of the variables, the distribution of the data, and the specific research questions guiding the study.

Descriptive statistics were first used to summarise and describe the basic features of the collected data. Measures such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages provided an overview of the sample characteristics and the distribution of key variables. This initial step was crucial in understanding the data clearly before proceeding with more complex analyses.

The reliability and validity of the scales used to measure hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being were then assessed. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each scale to determine internal consistency. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable, indicating that the items within each scale reliably measured the intended construct.

Correlational analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Pearson's correlation coefficient assessed the relationships between continuous variables, such as hopelessness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Pearson's correlation was chosen because the data for these variables were approximately normally distributed,

making this technique appropriate for identifying the strength and direction of the linear relationships between them.

Since gender is a nominal variable, its relationship with psychological well-being requires different analytical approaches. The point-biserial correlation technique was employed to analyse the relationship between gender and continuous variables such as psychological well-being. This technique, a particular case of Pearson's correlation, is appropriate when one variable is continuous, and the other is dichotomous, as in the case of gender. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean psychological well-being scores between male and female students. This test was selected because it is well-suited for comparing the means of a continuous dependent variable across two independent groups. Before conducting the t-test, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were tested to ensure the validity of the results.

To further understand the predictive power of hopelessness, self-esteem, and gender on psychological well-being, multiple regression analysis was employed. This technique allowed for the simultaneous examination of the impact of multiple independent variables on psychological well-being. The regression model provided insights into the extent to which each psychosocial factor uniquely contributed to predicting psychological well-being while controlling for the influence of other factors. Multiple regression was particularly valuable in this study as it allowed for the control of confounding variables and offered a nuanced understanding of the relationships between the variables, highlighting the relative importance of each predictor in explaining variance in psychological well-being.

4.10 Conclusion

The method covered in this chapter supported the research study's goals. A clear comprehension of the study's goals and significance was made possible by the researcher's careful explanation of the precise methods utilised to collect and analyse the data for the study. The methodology enables other researchers interested in the same subject to evaluate the researcher's choices of methods and their suitability for the study. The researcher made it possible to follow a clear and simple pattern to

identify the psychosocial aspects predicting the well-being of higher education students in relationships by outlining the techniques employed. Although this study collected a large number of data points, employing a quantitative methods approach was time-consuming and expensive. Although this was advantageous for testing, the research did not come without cost; it collected all the data required to attain the study's objectives critically. This approach was ideal concerning the cross-sectional research design chosen for the investigation.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

The study's findings are presented in this chapter. Results and statistical outputs are given simultaneously with data interpretation to enable a concise presentation of findings. The reliability and validity test, correlation and regression path analysis results are shown in this chapter, along with an explanation of the results. The theoretical and conceptual framework, the academic setting, and the research's contribution to the corpus of existing knowledge are next explored in relation to these findings. The hypotheses of the study serve as a guide for the interpretations and discussions of the results.

5.2 Results and Interpretation

Data was collected using an online survey utilizing SurveyMonkey, with a total of 425 responses. Data cleaning was done by removing incomplete responses, leaving a sample of 330.

Section A

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	90	27.3
	Female	240	72.7
Relationship status	Dating	130	39.4
	Single	192	58.2
	Married	8	2.4
Age group	18-20	102	30.9
	21-23	119	36.1
	24-26	75	22.7
	27-29	23	7.0
	30+	11	3.3
Educational qualification	Bachelor's degree	255	77.3

Honour's Degree	53	16.1
Master's Degree	22	6.7

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study population, detailing the distribution of gender, relationship status, age group, and educational qualifications among the participants. Notably, females constitute a significant majority, making up 72.7% of the sample. Most of the study participants are single (58.2%) and predominantly between the ages of 21 and 23 (36.1%). The educational background is largely skewed towards those with a Bachelor's degree, representing 77.3% of the participants.

Table 2. Reliability and validity

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Autonomy	0.71	0.79	0.55
Environmental mastery	0.78	0.72	0.57
Hopelessness	0.78	0.80	0.51
Personal growth	0.77	0.78	0.56
Positive relations	0.71	0.88	0.53
Purpose in life	0.83	0.84	0.66
Sel-acceptance	0.73	0.81	0.68
Self-esteem	0.77	0.84	0.52

The reliability and validity of the study variables (see Table 2) were examined to ensure the integrity of the measurement instruments utilised. The dimensions of psychological well-being (Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, Purpose in Life, and Self-acceptance), Hopelessness, and Self-esteem.

Two reliability coefficients, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, were calculated. The generally accepted threshold for Cronbach's alpha is 0.7, indicating adequate internal consistency (Okada, 2015). Composite reliability scores also provide a comprehensive measure of the reliability of latent constructs, with values exceeding 0.7 indicating good reliability (Akin, 2008).

The construct validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures the amount of variance a construct captures from its indicators relative to the amount due to measurement error. AVE values greater than 0.5 indicate adequate construct validity (Uçar, 2023).

The reliability and validity measures indicate that the constructs assessed within this study possess good internal consistency and substantial validity across the various domains.

Table 3: Descriptive and correlation matrix of study constructs

Construct			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Gender			--								
2 Self-esteem	13.08	3.33	-.04	--							
3 Hopelessness	6.41	1.39	-.06	.62**	--						
4 Self-acceptance	11.00	2.27	-.03	.53**	-.44**	--					
5 Purpose in life	8.58	1.73	.03	-.14*	-.17**	-.14*	--				
6 Positive relations	6.16	2.47	.03	-.48**	-.38**	-.46**	.09	--			
7 Personal growth	10.50	2.38	.07	.41**	-.36**	.48**	-.17**	-.32**	--		
8 Environmental mastery	7.97	2.58	-.07	.54**	-.53**	.39**	-.19**	-.37**	.41**	--	
9 Autonomy	10.50	2.29	-.01	.35**	-.37**	.24**	-.08	-.45**	.27**	.43**	--

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, Gender (dummy coded: '0' - Male, '1' - Female)

In the study, the correlation analysis (see Table 3) explored the relationships between various independent variables—gender, self-esteem, and hopelessness—and the dimensions of psychological well-being as conceptualised by Ryff's scales. Gender did not show any significant relationship with all dimensions of psychological well-being, indicating a minimal influence of gender differences.

Self-esteem was strongly positively correlated with self-acceptance ($r = .53$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher self-esteem leads to greater self-acceptance. Conversely, it was negatively correlated with positive relations ($r = -.48$, $p < .001$), implying that individuals with higher self-esteem might experience fewer positive social interactions. Additionally, self-esteem positively influenced personal growth ($r = .41$, $p < .001$) and environmental mastery ($r = .54$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher self-esteem enhances one's sense of personal development and control over their

environment. There was also a positive relationship with autonomy ($r = .35, p < .001$), which supports the idea that higher self-esteem promotes greater independence and self-determination.

Hopelessness presented a set of relationships. It was negatively related to purpose in life ($r = -.17, p < .01$), showing that higher levels of hopelessness are associated with a reduced sense of direction and purpose. Similarly, it negatively impacted positive relations ($r = -.38, p < .001$), linking higher hopelessness to fewer positive social interactions. also, hopelessness was negatively correlated with personal growth ($r = -.36, p < .001$) and environmental mastery ($r = -.53, p < .001$). This indicates that feeling hopeless, individuals may perceive personal growth and a sense of mastery over their environment, potentially as a non-compensatory mechanism. Hopelessness also correlated negatively with autonomy ($r = -.37, p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of hopelessness might coincide with a decreased perception of independence.

Table 4: Path coefficient of the independent and dependent variables

Path	Coefficient	T statistics	P values
Gender -> Autonomy	0.00	0.03	0.488
Gender -> Environmental mastery	-0.041	0.93	0.176
Gender -> Personal growth	0.07	1.408	0.08
Gender -> Positive relations	0.011	0.224	0.411
Gender -> Purpose in life	0.084	1.708	0.044
Gender -> Sel-acceptance	0.003	0.059	0.477
Hopelessness -> Autonomy	-0.479	3.463	0.001
Hopelessness -> Environmental mastery	-0.657	5.823	0.001
Hopelessness -> Personal growth	-0.647	5.032	0.001
Hopelessness -> Positive relations	-0.26	1.861	0.031
Hopelessness -> Purpose in life	-0.366	2.826	0.002
Hopelessness -> Sel-acceptance	-0.332	2.797	0.003
Self-esteem -> Autonomy	0.208	3.211	0.001
Self-esteem -> Environmental mastery	0.356	5.761	0.001
Self-esteem -> Personal growth	0.294	4.297	0.001
Self-esteem -> Positive relations	-0.411	6.263	0.001
Self-esteem -> Purpose in life	-0.363	4.766	0.001
Self-esteem -> Sel-acceptance	0.437	7.99	0.001

The study's analysis of path coefficients (see Table 4) revealed various significant relationships between the constructs of gender, hopelessness, self-esteem, and dimensions of psychological well-being. Gender had minimal influence on most dimensions, except for a slight but significant impact on purpose in life ($\beta = 0.084$, $t = 1.708$, $p = 0.044$). Other paths from gender to autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, and self-acceptance were not statistically significant, indicating limited effects of gender difference on these aspects of well-being.

On the other hand, hopelessness had a pronounced effect on several dimensions of well-being. It negatively influenced autonomy ($\beta = -0.479$, $t = 3.463$, $p = 0.001$), environmental mastery ($\beta = -0.657$, $t = 5.823$, $p = 0.001$), and personal growth ($\beta = -0.647$, $t = 5.032$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that feelings of hopelessness are associated with lower perceived autonomy, mastery, and growth. Also, it negatively affected positive relations ($\beta = -0.260$, $t = 1.861$, $p = 0.031$) and purpose in life ($\beta = -0.366$, $t = 2.826$, $p = 0.002$) and had a positive effect on self-acceptance ($\beta = 0.332$, $t = 2.797$, $p = 0.003$).

Self-esteem showed significant positive effects across multiple well-being dimensions, enhancing autonomy ($\beta = 0.208$, $t = 3.211$, $p = 0.001$), environmental mastery ($\beta = 0.356$, $t = 5.761$, $p = 0.001$), personal growth ($\beta = 0.294$, $t = 4.297$, $p = 0.001$), and self-acceptance ($\beta = 0.437$, $t = 7.99$, $p = 0.001$). It was also associated with a decrease in positive relations ($\beta = -0.411$, $t = 6.263$, $p = 0.001$) and purpose in life ($\beta = -0.363$, $t = 4.766$, $p = 0.001$), illustrating a complex relationship where higher self-esteem contributes to both enhancing and diminishing certain aspects of psychological well-being.

Pearson's Correlation (r) between the factors

Table 5. Pearson's correlation coefficients between PWB, RSES and BHS factors

		PWBFactor1	PWBFactor2	BHSFactor1	BHSFactor2	RSESFactor1	RSESFactor2
PWB Facto	r	1	-,314**	-,501**	-,238**	-,506**	,674**
	Sig.		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

	N	330	330	330	330	330	330
PWB Factor 2	r	-,314**	1	,608**	,388**	,596**	-,308**
	Sig.	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	330	330	330	330	330	330
BHS Factor 1	r	-,501**	,608**	1	,484**	,666**	-,436**
	Sig.	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	330	330	330	330	330	330
BHS Factor 2	r	-,238**	,388**	,484**	1	,449**	-,258**
	Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	330	330	330	330	330	330
RSES Factor 1	r	-,506**	,596**	,666**	,449**	1	-,496**
	Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	330	330	330	330	330	330
RSES Factor 2	r	,674**	-,308**	-,436**	-,258**	-,496**	1
	Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	330	330	330	330	330	330
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							

The table shows the Pearson's correlation coefficients between PWB, RSES and BHS factors. The results show that both PWB factors are highly correlated with RSES and BHS factors (with $r > 0.3$), and significant at level of significance $\alpha = 0.01$. PWB factor 1 is strongly negatively correlated to self-esteem (RSES) factor 1 ($r = -0.506$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) and strong positively correlated to RSES factor 2 ($r = 0.674$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$). It is negatively correlated to both hopelessness (BHS) factors.

Similarly, PWB factor 2 is strongly positively correlated to self-esteem (RSES) factor 1 ($r = 0.596$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) and moderately negatively correlated to RSES factor 2 ($r = -0.308$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$). It is positively correlated to both hopelessness (BHS) factors. This is indicating that psychological well-being has a significant linear relationship between RSES and BHS.

The results above indicate that there is a linear relationship between hopelessness and psychological well-being, meaning that the former is a significant predictor of the latter. This refers to research objective 1, and supports the alternative Hypothesis 1 in particular. The results also show a linear relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being, rejecting the null hypothesis 2.

5.3 Conclusion

Chapter 5 detailed the study's findings, integrating statistical results with their interpretation to align with the study's goals and theoretical framework. The chapter begins by outlining the demographic characteristics of the 330 participants retained after data cleaning. Notably, most of the sample were females, most were single, and the predominant age group was 21-23.

The chapter detailed the reliability and validity of the study's constructs using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). These metrics confirmed the internal consistency and construct validity of the psychological well-being dimensions, hopelessness, and self-esteem.

A correlation analysis then explores the relationships between these constructs, revealing significant interactions. For instance, self-esteem was found to

positively correlate with self-acceptance and negatively with positive relations, among other findings.

Lastly, the path analysis indicates the influence of gender, hopelessness, and self-esteem on various well-being dimensions. Gender showed minimal influence except for a slight impact on the purpose in life. At the same time, hopelessness and self-esteem were significant predictors of psychological well-being outcomes, depicting a complex interplay of these factors with psychological well-being.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

6.1 Discussion

This study examined psychosocial factors affecting the psychological well-being of higher education students, particularly in the context of their relationships. It evaluated the roles of hopelessness, self-esteem, and gender. The results yielded significant insights, supporting some hypotheses while offering broader interpretations of others, aligned with both empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks.

Hopelessness was hypothesised to impact psychological well-being negatively, and the findings strongly supported this claim (alternative hypothesis). Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that hopelessness is a critical predictor of negative mental health outcomes, including depression and reduced life satisfaction (Çutuk, 2021; Lew et al., 2019, Zhang et al., 2022).

Theoretically, the Hopelessness Theory of Depression posits that a pessimistic outlook significantly contributes to depressive states by promoting negative expectations about the future (Abramson et al., 1989). This study echoes this sentiment, noting that higher hopelessness correlates with lower autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relational interactions. These findings underscore the pervasive impact of hopelessness on various facets of psychological well-being, suggesting that interventions aimed at reducing hopelessness could play a crucial role in enhancing mental health among students.

Self-esteem's positive influence on psychological well-being was also confirmed (alternative hypothesis), aligning with Rosenberg's (1965) assertions that

self-esteem is a foundational component of healthy psychological development. The Sociometer Theory further supports this, proposing that self-esteem functions as a gauge of social value, impacting one's emotional and psychological state (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). The significant associations between higher self-esteem and increased autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth validate the theory's relevance. Interestingly, the negative correlation between self-esteem and positive relations found in this study presents a complex picture, potentially indicating that higher self-esteem might sometimes lead to perceptions of decreased need for social support. This aspect suggests an area for further exploration, perhaps indicating a more intricate relationship between self-confidence and social dynamics than traditionally understood.

The role of gender in influencing psychological well-being was less pronounced, with only a minor impact noted on the sense of purpose in life (null hypothesis). This finding challenges traditional views that often highlight significant gender differences in psychological well-being. The minimal influence observed could reflect evolving societal norms around gender roles, especially in educational settings promoting gender equality. This result is particularly interesting as it suggests that gender may not be as robust a determinant of psychological well-being in younger, educated populations, potentially indicating shifts in cultural dynamics that merit further research.

Collectively, these results not only reinforce the necessity of addressing psychological factors like hopelessness and self-esteem in student populations but also highlight the nuanced ways in which these elements interact with individual well-being. They advocate for targeted mental health interventions that consider these

dynamics, suggesting that university support systems should be adaptable to the complex interplay of self-esteem, hopelessness, and the changing influence of gender norms. Further longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into these relationships over time, offering a clearer path towards effective psychological support and interventions for students navigating the challenges of higher education.

6.1.1 Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer significant practical implications for higher education institutions administrators, counsellors, and mental health practitioners working within higher education institutions. Firstly, the strong negative correlation between hopelessness and psychological well-being underlines the need for comprehensive mental health services that can identify and address feelings of despair and pessimism among students. Implementing programs that focus on cognitive-behavioural strategies to combat hopelessness could significantly enhance student mental health outcomes.

Secondly, given the positive impact of self-esteem on several aspects of well-being, universities and higher education institutions should consider developing workshops and programs that aim to build and maintain self-esteem among students. These could include peer mentorship programs, self-esteem building workshops, and more extensive orientation programs that help students adjust to university life while fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth.

6.1.2 Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of psychological well-being by integrating elements of the Hopelessness Theory of Depression and Sociometer Theory within the context of higher education. The findings suggest that

these theories are applicable in explaining the dynamics of student psychological states, particularly in relation to hopelessness and self-esteem. Future theoretical work could explore the intersection of these theories, examining how perceived social value (as per Sociometer Theory) interacts with pessimistic outlooks (as per Hopelessness Theory) to influence well-being.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Even though the study offers useful information, there are a number of issues that need to be resolved in more research. Firstly, the study's cross-sectional design restricts the capacity to deduce a causal relationship between the psychosocial variables under investigation and psychological well-being. It would be helpful to do longitudinal research to ascertain the directionality of these associations.

Furthermore, because the study relies solely on self-reported data, bias may be introduced because participants may give answers that are socially acceptable. Subsequent research endeavours may adopt a mixed-methods strategy, employing qualitative interviews to enhance comprehension of students' perceptions of the influence of hopelessness and self-esteem on their overall welfare.

Furthermore, the research was carried out in a solitary educational and cultural setting, thus restricting the applicability of the results. To improve the external validity of the findings, future research should try to duplicate the study in various cultural contexts and kinds of educational institutions.

The study could also be better and bring more results if it could have been a mixed method study as the breadth of quantitative data and the depth of qualitative data are combined in mixed methods research. This combination captures the specific,

individual viewpoints as well as the more generic, wide tendencies, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the study problem. Through the integration of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, mixed methods research enhances the level of rigour in a study. It enables researchers to combine the advantages of one approach with the shortcomings of another.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of psychosocial factors, particularly hopelessness and self-esteem, in influencing the psychological well-being of higher education students. The findings affirm the importance of targeted mental health interventions that address these factors to improve the well-being of students. By integrating theoretical perspectives and providing empirical evidence on the impacts of these psychosocial factors, the study not only contributes to academic literature but also offers practical guidelines for enhancing student support services in universities. Overall, the study emphasises the complexity of student well-being and the need for continued research and intervention in this area.

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APPENDICES



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Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Letter

Appendix 2: Participant or respondent consent form



Annexure H (a) – PARTICIPANT OR RESEPDENT CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Polite Thobekhile Goka and I am a student at The IIE's IIE MSA. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Professor Erhabor Idemudia and Lebogang Ramalepe, the aim of the study is to examine the relationship between a wide variety of psychosocial factors and psychological wellbeing among young people in university that are in relationships or have knowledge on relationships. These psychosocial variables include age, gender, self-esteem and hopelessness]. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the impact of psychosocial factors on the psychological wellbeing of youth in university and their relationships. Moreover, this study will aid young couples attending higher education in preventing breakups and divorce, which are among the most common problems in young people in South Africa, where divorce rates are among the highest in the world. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because I would like to find out your views and perceptions about age, gender, self-esteem and hopelessness and their relationship with psychological wellbeing among young people in university that are in relationships or have knowledge on relationships and these psychosocial variables include age, gender, self-esteem and hopelessness. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to let you know that the information that you will provide will be kept confidential and will only be utilized for the purpose of completing this study on psychosocial factors predicting well-being of university students in relationships).

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your psychosocial factors predicting well-being of university students in relationships. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Detail the potential risks and how it will be managed by the researcher. Indicate how the ethical considerations will be applied in the context of the study. The researcher will apply for ethics from the Higher Degrees Research Ethics and permission to conduct the study on the students of IIE MSA. There will be no public sharing of the data, and the data for this study will be gathered in such a manner that no student will be adversely affected by the release of personal information like name or location as they will complete the surveys anonymously online. The study's respondents will be given the reassurance that opting out of the study or withdrawing at any time will not result in any pressure, shame, or loss of self-esteem.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at IIE MSA, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Master of Philosophy in Arts (Psychology). You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Polite Thobekhile Goka

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor (s) are as follows:

Professor Erhabor Idemudia

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Ms Lebogang Ramalepe

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Participant or respondent consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Polite Thobekhile Goka about psychosocial factors predicting well-being of university students in relationships, despite extensive research on the relationship between various relationship statuses and mental health. The majority of research have either compared different age groups or used age solely as a control variable. Therefore, the current study's objective is to examine the relationship between a wide variety of psychosocial factors and psychological wellness among university students in relationships. These psychosocial variables include age, gender, self-esteem and hopelessness.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.

- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature	Date

Appendix 3: Research Questionnaire

Dear Sir/Madame,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey.

This research is being done as part of a master's degree program at IIE MSA in South Africa. This means that I will be writing a thesis the size of a small book. The study's goal is to look at the psychosocial elements that predict psychological well-being among university students who are in a relationship. This questionnaire is designed to measure your responses to a series of questions about self-esteem, hopelessness, and psychological well-being. There is no correct or incorrect answer.

Eligibility Criteria: The following requirements must be met by participants in order to be included in the study: (a) full-time enrolment in an institution; (b) enrolment in any year of their program; (c) informed permission to participate in the study and (d) being in a committed relationship.

Demographic information

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

Gender	Man ☐
	Woman ☐
Relationship status	Dating ☐
	Single ☐
	Married ☐
Age	18-20 ☐
	21-23 ☐
	24-26 ☐
	27-29 ☐
	Above 30 ☐
Current qualification of study	Bachelor's Degree ☐
	Honour's Degree ☐
	Master's Degree ☐

SECTION B: The Beck Hopelessness Scale

The self-report inventory below is intended to assess levels of hopelessness. Please tick true or false for each question based on how you have feeling in the last few weeks, including today.

	True	False
1. Since I cannot make things better for myself, I may as well give up.		
2. I have lost interest in everything that was previously essential to me.		
3. When things are going terribly, knowing that they will not last forever helps.		
4. I have had the impression that everything I have done has been a failure.		
5. I cannot picture how my life will be in ten years.		
6. I'm experiencing trust issues with everyone in my life.		
7. In the future, I expect to be successful in the areas that are most important to me.		
8. All of my relationships are causing me problems.		
9. I believe I am deserving of the ideal companion.		
10. I really do not need anyone.		
11. Because of me, my relationships do not last.		
12. All I see ahead of me is unpleasantness, not pleasantness.		
13. Things are not going the way I want them to.		
14. It is pointless attempting to obtain what I desire because I'm likely to fail.		
15. I am emotionally apathetic, uncaring, sad, unhappy, or wretched.		
16. I have been more pessimistic or negative than normal.		

17. I have been less interested in socializing or conversing with others than normal.		
18. It is extremely improbable that I will ever feel truly satisfied.		
19. To me, the future appears hazy and unpredictable.		
20. I have been less confident than normal.		

SECTION C: Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

Instructions

The statements that follow are all related to how you generally feel about yourself. Please rate each statement according to how strongly you agree or disagree with it.

KEY: 1= Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly Disagree

STATEMENT	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Overall, I'm happy with who I am.				
2. Typically, I have anxiety in unfamiliar social settings when I may not be sure what is expected of me.				
3. I have a hard time taking myself seriously				
4. I often overestimate my flaws and undervalue my accomplishments.				

5. I occasionally experience despair and/or depression.				
6. I believe I must have done something to deserve someone to treat me badly.				
7. I believe that I am a valuable person, at the very least on an equal footing with others.				
8. I generally have the impression that I have failed.				
9. I believe I possess a variety of positive traits.				
10. I have a constructive outlook about myself.				

SECTION D: Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale questionnaire

Instructions: Circle one response under each statement to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement.

Select the number that most accurately reflects how much you agree or disagree with each statement.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Most aspects of my personality appeal to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. When I look back on my life, I'm happy with how things have worked out so far.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Some individuals go through life aimlessly, but I am not one of them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. The stresses of ordinary life frequently depress me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. It's been challenging and irritating for me to maintain intimate ties.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I'm proficient at managing day-to-day obligations.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I have been handling difficulties nicely.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I have been feeling particularly close to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I have been thinking about other individuals.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I have been able to form my own	1	2	3	4	5	6

opinions on several issues.						
11.I have been feeling good about myself recently.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12.People describe me as a generous person who is prepared to spend my time with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13.I gave up trying to make major changes or improvements in my life a long time ago.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14.I am influenced by those who have strong opinions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15.I have not had many warm and trusting interactions with other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16.I judge myself based on what I believe is significant, not on the values of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17.I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18.I am not afraid to voice my opinion,	1	2	3	4	5	6

even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.						
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Appendix 4: Editor Certificate

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Rustenburg 0299

24/04/2024

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

**PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS PREDICTING WELL-BEING OF PRIVATE
HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Submitted by

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ST10015841

For the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN ARTS

At

THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, IIEMSA

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