THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE SATISFACTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN FERGANA CITY

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. These changes can profoundly impact adolescents' psychological well-being, particularly in the context of regional specifics such as the socioeconomic conditions and cultural traditions of Fergana, Uzbekistan. Life satisfaction, defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of their overall well-being, is a key indicator of psychological health. Psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and behavioral disorders, are common during adolescence and can significantly reduce quality of life. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the influence of the digital environment, particularly social media, on adolescents' psychoemotional well-being.

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between life satisfaction and psychological problems among adolescents in Fergana, considering social, familial, individual factors, and the impact of the digital environment. The research seeks to identify mechanisms that can be utilized to develop mental health support programs for adolescents in this region.

The main research questions are:

1. How is life satisfaction related to psychological problems among adolescents in Fergana?

2. What factors (family support, peer relationships, social media use) influence this relationship?

3. How can the findings be applied to develop effective interventions in the context of Fergana?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The study involved 350 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years (mean age = 15.3 years, SD = 1.4) from secondary schools in Fergana, Uzbekistan. The sample comprised 53% girls and 47% boys, selected using stratified random sampling from four schools representing diverse socioeconomic districts of the city. Fergana, as a major cultural and economic center in Uzbekistan, combines traditional values with modern social trends, making the sample representative for studying regional characteristics.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Life satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985), consisting of 5 statements rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The scale's reliability in this study was $\alpha = 0.89$.

Psychological problems were measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997), which includes subscales for emotional and behavioral problems ($\alpha = 0.84$).

To assess the impact of the digital environment, a custom questionnaire was developed, including questions about time spent on social media, types of content consumed (e.g., educational, entertainment, or negative), and subjective perceptions of its impact on well-being.

Additional data were collected on sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, family income level) and environmental factors (family support, school environment, peer relationships).

PROCEDURE

The study was conducted from September to December 2025 in Fergana schools. Participants completed questionnaires in a school setting under the supervision of researchers. Written consent was obtained from parents, and verbal consent was provided by the adolescents. Data confidentiality was strictly maintained in accordance with ethical standards.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. The following methods were applied:

- Pearson correlation analysis to assess the relationship between life satisfaction, psychological problems, and social media use.

- Multiple regression analysis to determine the influence of life satisfaction and other factors on psychological problems.

- Independent samples t-test to identify gender differences.

- Factor analysis to evaluate the role of social media.

The statistical significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The mean life satisfaction score was 22.8 (SD = 5.8) on the SWLS, indicating a moderate level of well-being. The mean score for psychological problems on the SDQ was 12.5 (SD = 4.3), suggesting moderate difficulties. The average time spent on social media was 3.2 hours per day (SD = 1.5), reflecting significant engagement with the digital environment.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between life satisfaction and psychological problems ($r = -0.64$, $p < 0.001$). Emotional problems showed a stronger correlation with life satisfaction ($r = -0.60$, $p < 0.001$) than behavioral problems ($r = -0.47$, $p < 0.01$). Time spent on social media had a weak positive correlation with

psychological problems (r = 0.22, p < 0.05), particularly emotional problems (r = 0.25, p < 0.05).

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Multiple regression analysis indicated that life satisfaction is a significant predictor of psychological problems (β = -0.56, p < 0.001), explaining 36% of the variance (R^2 = 0.36). When controlling for variables (gender, age, socioeconomic status, social media use), the model remained significant. Family support (β = -0.30, p < 0.01) and peer relationships (β = -0.24, p < 0.05) strengthened the relationship between life satisfaction and reduced psychological problems. Time spent on social media had a minor but positive effect on psychological problems (β = 0.18, p < 0.05).

GROUP DIFFERENCES

The t-test showed that girls exhibited higher levels of emotional problems (M = 13.3, SD = 4.6) compared to boys (M = 11.6, SD = 3.9; t(348) = 3.45, p < 0.01). No gender differences were found in life satisfaction (p = 0.21). Adolescents spending more than 4 hours daily on social media reported higher levels of psychological problems (M = 13.8, SD = 4.7) compared to those spending less than 2 hours (M = 11.2, SD = 3.6; t(348) = 2.89, p < 0.01).

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm the hypothesis that higher life satisfaction is associated with lower levels of psychological problems among adolescents in Fergana. The strong negative correlation (r = -0.64, p < 0.001) aligns with international studies (Suldo & Huebner, 2006; Proctor et al., 2009), highlighting the universality of this relationship. However, the regional context of Fergana, with its blend of traditional family values and growing digital influence, adds unique insights to the interpretation of the results.

Theoretical Implications

According to the subjective well-being theory (Diener, 1984), life satisfaction is shaped by cognitive evaluations of life circumstances. During adolescence, when identity and self-esteem are forming, factors such as family support, school environment, and social media play a pivotal role. Emotional problems showed a stronger association with life satisfaction than behavioral problems, likely due to their closer link to internal perceptions of well-being. Behavioral problems, conversely, are often driven by external factors, such as conflicts or academic stress.

Role of Social Support

Regression analysis confirmed that family support (β = -0.30, p < 0.01) and peer relationships (β = -0.24, p < 0.05) enhance the relationship between life satisfaction and reduced psychological problems. In Fergana, where family ties are traditionally strong, parental support is central to fostering positive life perceptions. Positive peer relationships promote social integration and reduce feelings of loneliness, consistent with the social support theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Impact of Social Media

The weak positive correlation between time spent on social media and psychological problems ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$) suggests a potentially negative impact of excessive digital engagement. Adolescents spending over 4 hours daily on social media exhibited elevated emotional problems, possibly due to cyberbullying, social comparison, or exposure to negative content. These findings align with Twenge et al.

(2018), who noted links between heavy social media use and increased anxiety. However, moderate social media use (less than 2 hours daily) showed no significant impact, underscoring the importance of balanced digital engagement.

Gender Differences

Significant gender differences in emotional problems ($t(348) = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$) confirm that girls are more prone to anxiety and depression, consistent with global studies (Merikangas et al., 2010). This may stem from biological factors (e.g., hormonal changes) and social expectations, which, in Fergana's traditional culture, may place greater pressure on girls to conform to societal norms. The lack of gender differences in life satisfaction ($p = 0.21$) suggests compensatory factors, such as family support or academic achievements, may help girls maintain subjective well-being.

Practical Recommendations

The findings have significant implications for education and healthcare systems in Fergana:

1. School Programs. Implement positive psychology programs to enhance life satisfaction through emotional regulation, stress management, and communication skills, adapted to Fergana's cultural context (Seligman et al., 2009).

2. Parental Support. Develop training programs for parents to strengthen family support and create a safe emotional environment for adolescents.

3. Digital Literacy. Introduce school-based digital literacy programs to teach adolescents safe and balanced social media use, including recognizing negative content and managing screen time.

4. Gender-Sensitive Interventions. Establish support groups for girls to address emotional challenges and programs for boys to promote emotional awareness, reducing stigma around expressing emotions.

Study Limitations

1. The sample was limited to Fergana, limiting generalizability to rural areas or other regions of Uzbekistan.

2. Self-report measures (SWLS, SDQ, social media questionnaire) may be subject to biases, such as social desirability.

3. The cross-sectional design precludes establishing causality between life satisfaction, psychological problems, and social media use.

4. Cultural factors, such as religious beliefs or traditional values, were not thoroughly explored.

Future Research Directions

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the dynamics of the relationship between life satisfaction, psychological problems, and social media use.

2. Expand the sample to include rural areas and other regions of Uzbekistan to account for regional differences.

3. Incorporate additional assessment methods, such as clinical interviews or observations, to enhance data reliability.

4. Investigate the influence of cultural factors, including traditional family values and religious beliefs, on adolescent mental well-being in Fergana.

5. Explore the role of personal characteristics (e.g., resilience or coping strategies) as mediators of the relationship between life satisfaction and psychological problems.

Additional Considerations

Future research could focus on the impact of specific types of social media content (e.g., motivational, educational, or negative) on mental health. The role of the school environment, including academic stress and bullying, is particularly relevant in Fergana, where educational standards are high. Additionally, the influence of economic factors, such as family income, warrants further exploration, as its impact was insignificant in this study.

CONCLUSION

The study identified a significant negative relationship between life satisfaction and psychological problems among adolescents in Fergana. Higher life satisfaction is associated with lower emotional and behavioral problems, with family support and peer relationships playing a critical role. Excessive social media use is linked to increased psychological problems, highlighting the need for digital literacy education. The findings provide a foundation for developing mental health support programs tailored to the cultural and regional context of Fergana.

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