

The University of Akron

IdeaExchange@UAkron

Williams Honors College, Honors Research
Projects

The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors
College

Spring 2023

Factors that Affect the Well-Being of College Students

BreAnna Piorkowski
bnp61@uakron.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Recommended Citation

Piorkowski, BreAnna, "Factors that Affect the Well-Being of College Students" (2023). *Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects*. 1712.

https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/1712

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

Factors that Affect the Well-Being of College Students

BreAnna Piorkowski

Honors Project, Dept. of Psychology

PSYC 498-002

April 28, 2023

Factors that Affect the Well-Being of College Students

People often discuss that college is supposed to be the best time of their lives, yet there are a wide variety of factors that might affect this. It is important to investigate what factors affect student well-being for colleges to better help these individuals. Not all factors affect well-being and the level of involvement equally, so it is critical to examine several factors to gain a more accurate and holistic understanding of these relationships.

According to Ludban (2015), well-being is defined as an individual's happiness and quality of life. Essentially, to have good well-being means enjoying life with interests, advantages, and welfare (Ludban, 2015). The literature on college student well-being has often been focused on the impact of involvement on student well-being. Involvement is defined by researchers in various ways. Kilgo et al. (2016) define being involved in activities and roles such as being an orientation leader, resident assistant (RA), peer educator, or participating in intramural sports and student organizations. However, according to Bergen-Cico and Viscomi (2012), involvement is better defined as attending various campus-sponsored events throughout the year. Another group of researchers defined involvement based on the individual's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement in college (Maroco et al., 2016). This discussion will draw upon all three of these definitions of involvement.

There are a wide variety of factors that affect a student's well-being while they are in college. Specifically, factors that will be discussed in this literature review include involvement, living situation, participation in classes, social factors (support from loved ones, financial concerns, sense of community), lifestyle (diets, sleep, internet usage), and the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper is going to take an in-depth dive into the literature regarding these factors while looking at the importance of studying well-being. Finally, the paper will conclude with

suggestions for further research regarding the well-being of college students and the factors that contribute.

Involvement

Colleges often emphasize that getting involved helps a student's well-being during their college career. This message is reinforced by research. For example, Kilgo and colleagues (2016) conducted a study in which they collected data from students about their well-being at the beginning and end of the first year and then, finally, at the end of their fourth year. They operationalized well-being with the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and focused on the following predictor variables: orientation leader, resident assistant, peer educator, and intramural sports/student organizations (Kilgo et al., 2016). The study found that involvement was positively correlated with well-being at the end of their fourth year (Kilgo et al., 2016). Additionally, the results of this study also suggest that involvement in an intramural sport is positively associated with the well-being of the students, which the authors suggest might be due to the participation in physical activity (Kilgo et al., 2016).

Another study used survey measures such as demographic variables, activity intensity, belonging, loneliness, and social anxiety in their research focused on well-being (Knifsend, 2020). Knifsend (2020) found that students participating in more activities may be linked to having a higher sense of belonging. The study's results showed that loneliness and social anxiety were at the lowest when college students were participating in more than ten hours of activities a week. Knifsend (2020) also focused on racial and ethnic minority students and found that their feelings of belongingness were the lowest at low and moderate activity levels and higher at high activity levels. To summarize, minority students had the lowest number of feelings of belongingness when uninvolved but had higher feelings of belongingness when they were highly

involved (Knifsend, 2020). Colleges need to take this into account and make sure they are providing programming for minority students specifically as it greatly affects their well-being.

Additionally, one study investigated behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement in Portuguese college students. The study consisted of a questionnaire that asked about self-perceived academic achievement and intention to drop out. They measured involvement by using the University Student Engagement Inventory (USEI), which focuses on involvement in behavioral, emotional, and cognitive ways (Maroco et al., 2016). Maroco et al. (2016) found that, for each additional point on the involvement scales, the individual's odds of improving their self-perceived academic achievement increased by almost 3 times. The study also showed that, for each extra point on the scale, the student's chances of failing courses or dropping out of school completely decreased 2 times.

It was found that college life of students plays an important role in the overall happiness and well-being of college students (Sirgy et al., 2007). Involvement is an important factor in predicting the well-being of college students and is a predictor of academic achievement. Colleges need to focus on promoting organizations on campus for socialization and academics to promote the well-being of college students. Colleges need to look into and research how they can increase student involvement to better the well-being of their students.

Living Situation

When students attend college, there are a range of possible living situations. These can include living at home, on-campus, in an apartment, in Greek Life houses, and other situations. The student's current living situation might not only affect their well-being, but also their involvement on campus (Graham et al., 2018). One study examined the relationship between student living situations and outcomes such as collaborative learning, discussions with diverse

groups, student-faculty interaction, quality of interactions, supportive environment, time spent preparing for class, and perceived co-curricular gains as their variables (Graham et al., 2018). The study found that students living on campus had statistically significant and positive correlations with all of the outcomes, especially when compared to those who live farther than walking distance from campus. These findings suggest that the students who live on-campus have higher quality interactions with not only their peers but faculty as well.

As previously mentioned, living situations can play a part in a college student's level of involvement on campus. LaNasa et al. (2007) found that students living on campus are more likely to participate in co-curricular activities than commuter students. Additionally, on-campus living had more positive influences including participation in co-curricular activities than living off-campus or commuting, showing that on-campus students are more likely to be involved with co-curricular activities. College residences are also found to significantly influence the intellectual and personal development a student has during their college experience (Pascarella, 1992). It has been found that the frequency of faculty interactions relates to the well-being of students (Bowman, 2010). Living situation plays a factor in the overall well-being of students, but also impacts other areas as well.

Academic performance is also associated with a student's living situation and contributes to the well-being of college students. Throughout the literature regarding well-being, academic performance is defined by the student's grade point average, or GPA (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010). Bergen-Cico and Viscomi (2012) conducted a study that involved following two cohorts of college students over eight consecutive semesters. The study investigated the relationship between involvement and academic performance. They scanned student ID cards at various events on campus and then divided the students into three categories: students attending <4

events (low-level co-curricular participants), students attending 5-14 events (mid-level co-curricular participants), and 15+ events (high-level co-curricular participants). The study suggested that, in both cohorts, mid-level co-curricular participants had a significantly higher GPA than those who were considered low-level co-curricular participants (Bergen-Cico & Viscomi, 2012). These results suggest that a higher level of involvement on campus is associated with better GPA and overall academic performance. It has been found that a college student's academic performance is significantly associated with their well-being (Teka Tesfaye, 2020). It is important to take a look at how minority populations are affected by colleges to help them with the adjustment to college.

Other studies have focused on how living arrangements affect GPA within minority student populations. For example, López Turley and Wodtke (2010) found that Black students might benefit more from living on-campus in terms of GPA, as their GPAs were higher than similar students that were living off-campus. Colleges should be trying their best to market their school individually to each prospective person. Since the research shows that Black students benefit from living on campus, colleges can reach out to these populations and show them the benefits of living on campus. Colleges need to do this because it not only benefits minority students but also diversifies the college campuses.

Participation in Classes

It has been shown that one's well-being influences their involvement in class (Carton & Goodboy, 2015). One study was conducted focusing on well-being and interaction involvement in which 204 college participants were given questionnaires on depression, anxiety, stress, and involvement (Carton & Goodboy, 2015). The study found that depression and stress were negatively related to attentiveness and responsiveness, meaning if a student is high in depression

or stress they will be non-attentive and unresponsive. Anxiety, on the other hand, is only negatively related to attentiveness, meaning the students who have anxiety will not be paying much attention in their classes. This means that people who are struggling with their well-being will also likely struggle in their classes. This is important because, as noted previously, a student's academics do play a role in their overall well-being (Teka Tesfaye, 2020). Meaning, if a student is not performing well, they are more likely to have a low level of well-being.

Social Factors

Social factors, such as support from family/friends and financial concerns, can also be a determining factor of one's well-being (Ludban & Gitimu, 2015). A study conducted by Ludban and Gitimu (2015) gave the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being to students that included six subscales: autonomy, emotional mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). People who have support from their friends and family scored significantly higher in positive relations than those who have less support or none at all (Ludban, 2015). If a student has a support system around them, they will likely have a better well-being than those who do not. The study also found that individuals who had concerns about their finances had less emotional mastery than those who were less concerned financially. It is often stated that college will be the best time of a young adult's life, but to ensure this happens, students need a solid support system. Colleges need to give students a support system if they do not have one in place so that students can lean on someone during tough times.

Another study was conducted giving students across three different universities across the globe a questionnaire using the scales of social participation, sense of community, identification with the community, and the Social Well-Being Scale (Cicognani et al., 2007). Social participation occurs when individuals make the decision to participate in the environment and

programs that surround them (Cicognani et al., 2007). Activities that are considered social participation include extracurriculars, events (political, sporting, cultural, social), and volunteering. Sense of community is said to be made up of four components: membership, influence, integration/fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Membership is feeling like part of a community and influence is based on a reciprocal relationship for individuals to participate in their community (Cicognani et al., 2007). Additionally, Cicognani and colleagues (2007) discussed that integration/fulfillment of needs includes the perks that one receives from being a part of a community and emotional connection consists of the bonds created between members of the community. It was found that being involved socially with the help of having a sense of community during one's time in college positively affects students' social well-being.

Other social factors that have been found to affect one's well-being are being present and social support (Stallman et al., 2017). Researchers sent out a survey to the same group of people annually for five years across various Australian universities (Stallman et al., 2017). The results found that social support and being present were both factors that contributed to predicting one's distress level. As mentioned previously, the research shows that it is important to ensure students have support from others to promote greater well-being.

Lifestyle

Everyone lives different lifestyles, which includes sleeping habits, diets, and hobbies, especially when they move into college. One of the factors of one's lifestyle that can greatly affect an individual's well-being is diet (Hanawi et al., 2020). Undergraduate participants were given a questionnaire that focuses on diets, physical activity, smoking, stress, and alcohol consumption (Hanawi et al. (2020)). The authors measured diets by looking at good eating habits

and seeing how they contribute to well-being. Although most students failed to have a healthy lifestyle, and no students were found to have a severe score on the depression, anxiety, and stress scores, over 20% of these students were found to have moderate scores on these scales (Hanawi et al., 2020). The study finally concluded that a healthy lifestyle and psychological distress have a negative relationship, meaning that if an individual has a healthy lifestyle, they will see low scores for anxiety and depression (Hanawi et al., 2020). Healthy dining options are important to have on campus to ensure that college students can try to live a healthy lifestyle if they so choose.

Another part of one's lifestyle that impacts a college student's well-being is sleep (Pilcher et al., 1997). A study conducted by Pilcher et al. (1997) found that there is a positive, significant correlation between both sleep quantity and sleep quality with well-being. The study also found that poor sleep quality was significantly correlated with health complaints, feelings of tension, and feelings of depression. Specifically, it was found that sleep quality had a stronger correlation with well-being than sleep quantity. This means that the quality of an individual's sleep is more important than the number of hours they are getting each night. If someone is not getting good sleep, they are much more likely to have low well-being. It has been found that disturbances in students' sleep are considered to be a predictor of stress. These disturbances include roommates' habits, bedroom temperatures, dripping water, and creaking floorboards (Sexten-Radak & Hartley, 2013). To ensure students are getting uninterrupted sleep, colleges need to teach them how to be considerate roommates to each other while living in a residence hall. It is also important to upkeep maintenance in the residence halls, as these issues also disrupt sleep and ultimately cause stress.

A last major lifestyle factor that contributes to the level of one's well-being is the usage of the Internet (Gordan et al., 2007). A study conducted using 312 undergraduate students looked at the frequency of Internet usage by surveying how often the participants used it per week and looking into how long they used it in one sitting while also looking at the type of Internet they are using (Gordan et al., 2007). Usage varied from emailing friends and family, Instant Messaging, talking with friends, and getting help with schoolwork. It was found that it is the type of Internet usage the individual is using that correlates to depression, social anxiety, and family cohesion more so than the frequency the individual is using the Internet. Specifically, individuals who were using the Internet to cope reported high levels of depression and social anxiety with less family cohesion. This specific study found that males were using the Internet more often and in longer sittings than female participants. This is an important thing to note when comparing depression and anxiety rates across genders. It has been found that male students are less likely to receive mental health treatment than female students (Pedrelli et al., 2015). Colleges might need to make more of an effort to advertise to male students and give them extra help in obtaining the necessary mental health resources they need.

Individuation from Parents

The transition to college is one of the biggest changes and challenges in an 18-year-old's life. They are learning how to live on their own, pay their bills, cook food for themselves, and maybe have to navigate living with a roommate. Individuation is defined as gaining independent decision-making while also maintaining a close relationship with their parent (Yelle et al., 2009). This process of individuation is an important part of the relationship between parents and adolescents as they become closer to adults (Yelle et al., 2009).

One study focused on the impact that a young adult's individuation from their parents has on the individual's well-being (Yelle et al., 2009). The study separated the participants into four groups of individuations: individuated (high connectedness, high separation), pseudo-autonomous (low connectedness, high separateness), dependent (high connectedness, low separateness), and ambiguous (low connectedness, low separateness). The researchers then measured the level of psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., headache, backache, abdominal pain) each student was experiencing. Students who were in the individuated group reported the smallest level of psychosomatic symptoms in comparison to students who were in both the ambiguous and dependent groups. This means that students who feel close, yet separated in some regards are experiencing less psychosomatic symptoms, which in turn contributes to their well-being. This is a crucial lesson that parents and students are going to have to learn. Colleges need to help parents and students learn this at their visit days and orientations before they move onto campus.

Covid-19

As most people know, the Covid-19 pandemic had a large impact on several groups of people in a variety of ways. Specifically, it is known that many individuals' mental health and well-being were affected by this pandemic. Students in college were dealing with physical, emotional, and mental health-related issues that were caused by the pandemic. The pandemic was also found to have caused academic stresses, including connectivity issues and quality in delivery, as well as non-academic stresses, including job losses and food insecurities (George & Thomas, 2021). Being forced to move to online learning has created fears and challenges that have led to students suffering a loss of subjective well-being (Huang & Zhang, 2022). However, a study conducted by Huang and Zhang (2022) later found that having assistance from loved

ones during the pandemic led the student to be more optimistic, stick to their learning plans, overcome obstacles, build confidence, and be resilient.

In addition to these issues, some students were found to be struggling with financial stress. In a study by Martinez and Nguyen (2020), approximately two-thirds of students were struggling with their financial situation and reported it to be more stressful during the pandemic.

Additionally, around one-third of students reported that, due to the pandemic, their living situation changed in some way. Due to the pandemic, lots of students were looking for resources to help them. However, according to Martinez and Nguyen (2020), 60% of students reported that mental health care was much more difficult for students to get after the pandemic started.

Students should be able to easily access mental health resources, so colleges need to start looking into how they can make these resources more accessible.

Conclusion

The trends found in all the research discussed show that well-being is an important topic of discussion. Everything surrounding an individual is playing a factor in their level of well-being. College is a stressful time for students, as they are possibly living away from home, learning how to live on their own, and making adult decisions. It is important to ensure that these students are thriving and receiving all the care that they need. The pandemic has shown people how important it is to examine well-being and the factors that contribute to it. Although the pandemic is dying down and normalcy is approaching, the importance of well-being will never go away. Universities have a responsibility for the welfare of their students; they need to look after each student and examine the factors that affect the well-being of their students. Colleges need to conduct further research to ensure that they are making the experiences of their students the best possible.

Suggestions for Future Research

Like all research, there is always room for improvement. One of the suggestions for future researchers is to examine various majors and their levels of well-being. For example, it would be interesting to compare the well-being of an Aerospace Engineering major to a Nursing major or a Business major. There is a chance the levels of well-being might be similar, but there is also a chance they could be different. Bergen-Cico and Viscomi (2012) found that there is a relationship between campus involvement and grades, but further research needs to be conducted to see if there is a correlation with other factors including one's major. As psychologists and researchers, it is important to look at these individual differences and compare them.

Another suggestion for research would be to compare the involvement and well-being while comparing several colleges around the country. Studies have said that the limitation of their research includes that it is a single-institution study (LaNasa et al.; 2007; Pascarella, 1992). It is important to look at multiple universities and compare well-being and involvement across all college campuses.

Lastly, it is important to conduct further research into the differences in well-being experienced by gender-diverse and minority populations. Sirgy and colleagues (2007) stated that it is important to make programs and environments attractive which will hopefully lead to helping those who are typically left out. A specific study conducted by Bergen-Cico and Viscomi (2012) even mentioned that one of their limitations is race/ethnicity, which leads their results to be biased. This means they cannot generalize their findings to minority students. It is important to focus future research on this area to ensure their findings can be generalized to all students. Studies currently seem to have participant pools that are skewed to one gender. Specifically, a study done by Ludban (2015) had significantly more females than males in their study. This

means that it is hard to make generalizations related to gender when the population being surveyed is predominantly female.

Although the current literature does do a good job of evaluating factors that affect the well-being of college students, there is always room for improvement. Researching individual majors is essential to personalize and individualize the help that students receive. Focusing on minority/gender populations and studying more than one college is important in ensuring that findings can be generalized to all college students.

References

- Bergen-Cico, D., & Viscomi, J. (2012). Exploring the association between campus co-curricular involvement and academic achievement. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 14(3), 329-343. <http://doi.org/10.2190/CS.14.3.c>
- Bowman, N. A. (2010). The development of psychological well-being among first-year college students. *Journal of college student development*, 51(2), 180-200.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0118>
- Carton, S. T., & Goodboy, A. K. (2015). College students' psychological well-being and interaction involvement in class. *Communication Research Reports*, 32(2), 180–184.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2015.1016145>
- Cicognani, E., Pirini, C., Keyes, C., Joshanloo, M., Rostami, R., & Nosratabadi, M. (2007). Social participation, sense of community and social well being: A study on American, Italian and Iranian university students. *Social Indicators Research*, 89(1), 97–112.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-007-9222-3>
- George, G., & Thomas, M. R. (2021). Quarantined effects and strategies of college students–COVID-19. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 10(4), 565-573.
- Gordon, C. F., Juang, L. P., & Syed, M. (2007). Internet use and well-being among college students: Beyond frequency of use. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(6), 674-688.
- Graham, P. A., Hurtado, S. S., & Gonyea, R. M. (2018). The benefits of living on campus: Do residence halls provide distinctive environments of engagement? *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 55(3), 255-269.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2018.1474752>

- Hanawi, S. A., Saat, N. Z. M., Zulkafly, M., Hazlenah, H., Taibukahn, N. H., Yoganathan, D., Abdul Rahim, N. N., Mohd Bashid, N. A. A., Abdul Aziz, F. A., & Low, F. J. (2020). Impact of a healthy lifestyle on the psychological well-being of university students. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical Research & Allied Sciences*, 9(2), 1–7.
- Huang, L., & Zhang, T. (2022). Perceived social support, psychological capital, and subjective well-being among college students in the context of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 31(5), 563-574.
- Kilgo, C. A., Mollet, A. L., & Pascarella, E. T. (2016). The estimated effects of college student involvement on psychological well-being. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(8), 1043–1049. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0098>
- Knifsend, C. A. (2020). The intensity of activity involvement and psychosocial well-being among students. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 21(2), 116–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787418760324>
- LaNasa, S. M., Olson, E., & Alleman, N. (2007). The impact of on-campus student growth on first-year student engagement and success. *Research in higher education*, 48, 941-966. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-007-9056-5>
- López Turley, R. N., & Wodtke, G. (2010). College residence and academic performance: Who benefits from living on campus? *Urban Education*, 45(4), 506-532. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085910372351>
- Ludban, M. & Gitimu, P. (2015). Psychological well-being of college students. *Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences*, 14(1).

- Maroco, J., Maroco, A. L., Campos, J. A., & Fredricks, J. A. (2016). University student engagement: Development of the university student engagement inventory (USEI). *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica*, 29(21), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41155-016-0042-8>
- Martinez, A., & Nguyen, S. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on college student well-being.
- Pascarella, E., Bohr, L., Nora, A., Zusman, B., Inman, P., & Desler, M. (1992). Cognitive Impacts of Living on Campus versus Commuting to College.
- Pedrelli, P., Nyer, M., Yeung, A., Zulauf, C., & Wilens, T. (2015). College students: mental health problems and treatment considerations. *Academic psychiatry*, 39, 503-511. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-014-0205-9>
- Pilcher, J. J., Ginter, D. R., & Sadowsky, B. (1997). Sleep quality versus sleep quantity: Relationships between sleep and measures of health, well-being and sleepiness in college students. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 42(6), 583–596. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3999\(97\)00004-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3999(97)00004-4)
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and social psychology*, 69(4), 719.
- Sexton-Radek, K., & Hartley, A. (2013). College residential sleep environment. *Psychological Reports*, 113(3), 903-907.
- Stallman, H. M., Ohan, J. L., & Chiera, B. (2017). The role of social support, being present and self-kindness in university student well-being. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 46(4), 365–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2017.1343458>
- Sirgy, M. J., Grzeskowiak, S., & Rahtz, D. (2007). Quality of college life (QCL) of students: Developing and validating a measure of well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 343-360. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-5921-9>

- Teka Tesfaye, W. (2020). Psychological well-being and its relationship with the academic achievement of Dambi Dollo university students. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology Review*, 11(4), 371–373.
- Yelle, D., Kenyon, B., & Koerner, S. S. (2009). College student psychological well-being during the transition to college: Examining individuation from parents. *College Student Journal*, 43(4), 1145–1160.