

Students' Mindset and Subjective Well-being during the Period of “Emerging Adulthood”

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In the current paper the interrelation between students' mindset and subjective well-being during the period of “emerging adulthood” is investigated. The relevance of the research is determined by high intellectual and psycho-emotional loads to the referent group, especially in the context of distance learning, which threatens the students' well-being. A sample of the study includes college students, bachelors, masters, and postgraduates. We assumed that a growth in mindset is correlated with a high level of students' well-being. We also tested the hypothesis about age differences in the level of students' well-being in the period of emerging adulthood. The sample consisted of 317 respondents aged from 16 to 30 years ($M=22.6$, $SD=4.97$), 232 are female and 85 are male. We used “The Satisfaction with Life Scale”, “The Personal Well-being Index-Adult”, “The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale”, and “The Mindset Questionnaire”. The results of the study demonstrate significant correlations between mindset and all types of well-being. At the same time, the lowest indicators of the well-being are in the bachelors' group, and the highest are in the college students' group. The results of the study may be used in training programs to improve the level of students' subjective well-being.

Keywords: subjective well-being, mindset, emerging adulthood, students.

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Образ мышления и субъективное благополучие обучающихся в период «становящейся взрослости»

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Представлены материалы исследования вопроса о связи образа мышления и субъективного благополучия обучающихся в период «становящейся взрослости». Отмечается, что высокие интеллектуальные и психоэмоциональные нагрузки, особенно в условиях перехода на дистанционный формат обучения, заключают в себе угрозу благополучию обучающейся молодежи, что обуславливает актуальность темы. В эмпирическом исследовании, полученном на выборке студентов колледжа, бакалавриата, магистратуры и аспирантуры, проверялись следующие гипотезы: 1) мышление, ориентированное на рост, связано с высоким уровнем благополучия обучающихся; 2) существуют возрастные различия в уровне благополучия обучающихся в период становящейся взрослости. Выборку составили 317 респондентов в возрасте от 16 до 30 лет ($M=22,6$, $SD=4,97$), из которых 85 мужчин и 232 женщины. Использовались методики: «Шкала удовлетворенности жизнью» Э. Динера, опросник «Индекс личного благополучия взрослых», «Спектр психического здоровья», «Шкала психологического благополучия Варвик-Эдинбург» и опросник «Образ мышления». Полученные результаты показали значимые связи между образом мышления и всеми видами благополучия. При этом наиболее низкие показатели благополучия приходятся на уровень студентов бакалавриата, а самые высокие — на группу студентов колледжа. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы в тренингах и программах по повышению уровня субъективного благополучия обучающихся.

Ключевые слова: субъективное благополучие, образ мышления, «становящаяся взрослость», обучающиеся.

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Introduction

The problem of students' subjective well-being has a high relevance for psychologists. Physical, intellectual, and psycho-emotional stress, high learning rate, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the transition to distance learning, can threaten young students' well-being [1]. The issue of subjective well-being in relation to several stages of education in youth has received little attention although, recent studies and theories keep on the idea of schoolchildren and students' subjective well-being [2; 3; 5; 7; 22; 26; 33]. Considering the students' well-being within the framework of age periodization, it is worth studying it during the period of "emerging adulthood".

Learning in the Period of "Emerging Adulthood" as a Challenge for Students' Subjective Well-being

"Emerging adulthood" is the period between adolescence and youth, during which the process of identity formation continues [10]. At this time young people learn to take on responsibility, choose a profession, start a family and take on new social roles [26]. Education is one of the reasons why the period of "emerging adulthood" has appeared. Young people marry and have children later, study in colleges and universities longer. The changes usually occur at the age of 18 and end by the age of 30 [11].

The way young people live the stage of "emerging adulthood" influences the next stages of their lives. Studying at a university is positively correlated with life satisfaction, emotional well-being, hope, physical health, income, and is negatively associated with regret in the following periods of life [11; 26]. However, despite the opportunities, subjective well-being is significantly reduced dur-

ing the learning period. Students change their place of residence, are separated from their families, feel an increasing personal responsibility, look for friends and adapt to new requirements in colleges and universities [15; 21].

At the same time, the question of whether the students' subjective well-being is correlated with age characteristics and the period of "emerging adulthood", or whether the socio-psychological features of various levels of education make a greater contribution is rather controversial. This issue led us to the first hypothesis.

In addition, a high level of subjective well-being is one of the factors that help cope with emerging difficulties in the learning process [22].

Approaches to Well-being of a Personality in Psychology

The first major review of research on subjective well-being is E.Diener's article, which outlines three criteria for determining well-being. The first criterion is the standard or ideal that a person should strive for, the second one is a person's subjective assessment of their life, satisfaction with it, and the third one is the predominance of positive emotions over negative ones. For measuring hedonistic well-being "The Positive and Negative Affect Scale" (PANAS) and "The Satisfaction with Life Scale" (SWLS) were created [17].

The eudaemonic orientation arose in opposition to the hedonistic approach. C.Ryff singled out six personal characteristics of a prosperous person who is satisfied with life — personal growth, autonomy, goals in life, self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, and the person's ability to create an environment for themselves. Based

on this theory, the “Psychological Well-being Scale” was created [30].

C. Keyes developed Ryff’s ideas and introduced the concept of “social well-being”, which means the person’s ability to fully live and function in society. This concept consists of five factors — social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualization, and social recognition [24]. Later he created a short form of “The Mental Health Continuum” measuring positive feelings and positive functioning [24; 34].

Another approach in studying subjective well-being is the research of quality of life. One of the scales in the quality of life is “The Australian Adult Personal Well-being Index”, which includes questions about subjective satisfaction with the standard of living, health, achievements, relationships, connections with society, confidence in future and security, spirituality, and one’s life in general [16].

Subjective well-being is also studied within the framework of a mixed approach, in which it is synonymous with “mental health”. This approach originated in the United Kingdom. “The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale” measures positive psychological functioning [31].

In foreign psychology, the connections between personality traits and indicators of well-being have received much attention. The largest number of works is associated with the study of temperamental characteristics and personality factors included in the “Big Five”. In addition, research results demonstrate a positive correlation between psychological well-being and positive relationships with friends and parents [2], a “friendly home environment” [7], and a negative correlation with various forms of deviant and addictive behavior [1; 30].

Learning during the period of “emerging adulthood” is associated with a high risk of mental instabilities due to the emergence of new requirements. Students do not feel like adults and cannot cope with new difficulties

[10; 25]. One of the personality traits that help solve occurring problems and increase the level of well-being is “mindset” [18].

Mindset and Students’ Subjective Well-being in the Period of “Emerging Adulthood”

The concept of mindset was suggested by C. Dweck after observing the people’s reaction to failures: some perceived them as a challenge, while others gave up and abandoned the chosen goal. C. Dweck concluded that the reason was in the way of thinking and people’s ideas about the nature of their personal human qualities and intelligence. She singled out fixed and growth mindsets.

People with a fixed mindset are sure that their intelligence and personality traits are simply “given” and do not change, they are more focused on their external activities and feel helpless in the face of failure. People with a growth mindset believe that their intelligence and personality traits are malleable and due to effort, perseverance, practice, and education, they can achieve higher results [33].

Several studies have demonstrated the correlation between a growth mindset with constructive behavior, academic achievements, and students’ well-being [18; 23]. B. Huffman and colleagues showed that students with a fixed mindset reacted to criticism defensively, while students with a growth mindset are oriented to eliminate the cause of their poor performance [20].

A fixed mindset is associated with the perception of problems as a risk situation and possibility to be negatively affected [33]. In contrast, a growth mindset allows a person to see problems and failures as opportunities for learning. A growth mindset is associated with more adaptive coping strategies, which help a person live a less stressful and more successful life, which can gradually affect academic success and well-being [14; 18].

However, some authors believe that the importance of a growth mindset for academic achievement and students' well-being can be overestimated. For instance, the effect of a growth mindset may be insignificant in improving the students' performance who are already high achievers. Moreover, although a growth mindset can improve academic performance in the short future, these effects are eliminated for bachelors and postgraduates [11]. The second hypothesis is based on this contradiction.

Our study is aimed at investigating the connection between students' mindset and well-being in the period of "emerging adulthood". Achieving this aim involved solving the following research problems: 1) identifying differences in mindset among students of four levels of education; 2) establishing differences in their level of well-being.

Thus, based on the results of the theoretical review, we hypothesize:

A growth mindset is correlated with a high level of students' well-being in the period of "emerging adulthood".

The level of students' well-being in the period of "emerging adulthood" has age differences: college students have the highest level of well-being, which is gradually decreasing to higher levels of education.

Research Participants, Material, and Procedure

To achieve the aim of the research and test these hypotheses, we have conducted an empirical study using five questionnaires.

Participants

The sample included 317 participants (232 females and 85 males). The participants were students of four levels of education — college students, bachelors, masters, and postgraduates. Thus, the respondents were divided into four groups. They were aged between 16 and 30 (the median age was 22.6, SD = 4.97).

According to J. Arnett, the age criteria for the period of "emerging adulthood" are flexible. This is the time that is characterized by the search for identity, as well as instability, self-centeredness, "feeling in-between" and opportunities. J. Arnett noted that many participants aged 12—17 in his research did not feel like adults yet, but already felt their transition to another age stage. Thus, though the period of "emerging adulthood" refers to the age from 18 to 30 years old, participants aged 16—17 years old were also included in the sample of our study.

The first level of education considered in our study was represented by international college students (N=82). The other part of the sample consisted of 235 respondents studying at Russian universities as bachelors, masters, and postgraduates. The students included in the sample are equalized in terms of learning conditions. They study in a competitive environment at international and prestigious colleges and universities that place high demands on their students. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Age and Gender of Participants (N=317)

Level of Education	Total Number of Participants	Men	Women	Mean Age
College Students	82	29	53	17.5
Bachelors	43	7	36	21.1
Masters	126	32	94	23.7
Postgraduates	66	17	49	27.9

Procedure

Participants of the study got a battery of questionnaires in the official mailing list from the organization in which the respondents study. International college students completed the original questionnaires in the language of learning, in this case — English. The other part of the sample filled out the Russian-language versions of the questionnaires. The survey was conducted in an online form, the link was posted on the “1ka.si” platform. All respondents or their representatives gave informed consent to participate in the study, which was anonymous and confidential. Participation was not rewarded, but respondents were allowed to receive feedback with brief recommendations.

Materials

To study the main variables and collect data we have used the following questionnaires:

1. E. Diener’s “The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)”, adapted by E. Osin and D. Leontiev [9]. The questionnaire consists of five statements about life satisfaction. Responses on these scales were scored on a seven-point scale Likert scale (Cronbach’s α is 0.83).

2. Questionnaire “The Personal Well-being Index-Adult (PWI-A)”, which was adapted by E. Uglanova [9]. The questionnaire consists of nine statements that require a response on a ten-point scale Likert scale (Cronbach’s α is 0.94).

3. A short version of “The Mental Health Continuum (MHC)” Questionnaire in the adaptation by E. Osin [9; 34]. The questionnaire is based on C.Keyes’s model of the psychological health continuum and includes 14 statements grouped into three scales: emotional (MHC — Emotional Well-being) and social eudaimonic well-being (MHC — Social Well-being), as well as psychological eudaimonic well-being (MHC — Psychological Well-being). Cronbach’s α is 0.94.

4. “The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)” in the adaptation by S. Nartova-Bochaver. The questionnaire consists of 14 statements. Responses on this scale were scored on a five-point scale Likert scale [8]. Cronbach’s α is 0.96.

5. “The Mindset Questionnaire” is based on C. Dweck’s model of motivation [18]. The questionnaire included 10 statements that require a response on a five-point scale Likert scale. The questionnaire has not previously been adapted in Russian. Before data analysis, we have estimated the internal consistency of statements. The internal correlation of points demonstrated the average strength of the correlation ($r_{\text{avg}}=0.26$ (-0.08; 0.64)). Cronbach’s α is 0.78. Thus, the obtained results indicate a good consistency between the statements of the questionnaire in Russian and the possibility of its further use for diagnostic purposes.

Results

We used SPSS Statistics 26.0 for statistical data processing and testing our hypothesis. An analysis of normality of distribution using the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a high probability of the type II error. Thus, non-parametric methods of statistical analysis were chosen. We used Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient. To analyze differences between groups, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was used. The G*Power 3.1 calculator was used to calculate the effect size and statistical power.

The correlations between the well-being indicators and a mindset in the research sample are presented in Table 2.

According to our results, the mindset is negatively correlated with all indicators of psychological well-being. The mindset demonstrates the closest correlation with the scales “The mental health continuum”, and “The personal well-being index” with its subscales. The negative direction of the

Table 2

**Correlations between Well-being Indicators and Mindset
 (Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient)**

Indicators	Mindset	Statistical Power (1-b)*
The Mental Well-being (WEMWBS)	-.267*	.989
The Satisfaction with Life (SWLS)	-.196*	.828
The Personal Well-being Index (PWI)	-.278*	.994
The Mental Health Continuum (MHC)	-.341*	.999
The Mental Health Continuum (MHC), emotional well-being	-.310*	.999
The Mental Health Continuum (MHC), social well-being	-.306*	.999
The Mental Health Continuum (MHC), psychological well-being	-.305*	.999

Note: * $p \leq 0.01$.

correlation may indicate that the high scores on well-being scales correlate with a growth mindset, while the low scores correlate with a fixed mindset. Thus, the first hypothesis of the study was confirmed.

To test the second hypothesis of our study, we conducted the analysis of the differences between groups in mindset and well-being depending on the level of education. Table 3 contains the results of the analysis.

Statistically significant differences in groups were obtained for all indicators of subjective well-being, and a mindset. The post-hoc analysis also demonstrated high statistical power and moderate effect size. We received the only exception in the indicators of "The Mental Well-being" with a small effect size and moderate statistical power.

It is worth visually comparing the median of the indicators of well-being and mindset depending on the level of education (Figure 1). The results show that a fixed mindset is most common among college students, while masters and post-graduates, and especially bachelors are more likely to have a growth mindset. At the same time, all indicators of psychological well-being are at their lowest in the bachelor group, and their highest in the college students' group.

Thus, all indicators of psychological well-being and mindset have statistically significant differences depending on the levels of education. However, we can assume that these differences may be associated not with the level of education, but with the age criterion. An additional correlation analysis was carried out to test age differences (Table 4).

The analysis showed weak correlations of age with a mindset and "The Mental Health Continuum". At the same time, it should be noted that both indicators have multidirectional correlations: "The mental health continuum" has an inverse correlation with age, while the indicator of mindset has a direct correlation. In addition, all obtained values have a moderate statistical power.

Thus, the second hypothesis of our study was partially confirmed.

Discussion

We found significant correlations between mindset and all indicators of well-being. The correlation between mindset and well-being has been confirmed in previous studies. Students with a growth mindset perform better and have a higher level of well-being than students with a fixed mindset [19; 27].

At the same time, our results demonstrated that a fixed mindset is most

Table 3

**Students' Mindset and Well-being Depending on the Level of Education
 (the Kruskal-Wallis H Test)**

Indicators	Level of Education	Mean	Kruskal-Wallis H Test	Statistical Power (1-b)*	Effect Size f-Cohen
Mindset	College Students	7.0	18.590*	.863	.33
	Bachelors	10.1			
	Masters	8.8			
	Postgraduates	8.5			
Mental Well-being (WEMWBS)	College Students	50.6	12.499*	.642	.19
	Bachelors	45.8			
	Masters	49.8			
	Postgraduates	51.4			
Satisfaction with Life (SWLS)	College Students	24.4	28.952*	.996	.31
	Bachelors	17.8			
	Masters	20.8			
	Postgraduates	22.1			
Personal Well-being Index (PWI)	College Students	76.8	27.556*	.989	.31
	Bachelors	62.4			
	Masters	72.5			
	Postgraduates	70.7			
Mental Health Continuum (MHC)	College Students	45.7	29.612*	.995	.32
	Bachelors	31.5			
	Masters	37.9			
	Postgraduates	39.4			
Mental Health Continuum (MHC), emotional well-being	College Students	10.8	25.449*	.987	.30
	Bachelors	7.4			
	Masters	9.2			
	Postgraduates	9.2			
Mental Health Continuum (MHC), social well-being	College Students	14.1	20.311*	.936	.26
	Bachelors	9.5			
	Masters	11.3			
	Postgraduates	11.7			
Mental Health Continuum (MHC), psychological well-being	College Students	20.7	28.427*	.983	.30
	Bachelors	14.6			
	Masters	17.5			
	Postgraduates	18.5			

Note: * $p \leq 0.01$

typical for college students, while masters and postgraduates, and especially bachelors are more likely to have a growth mindset. Our results for college

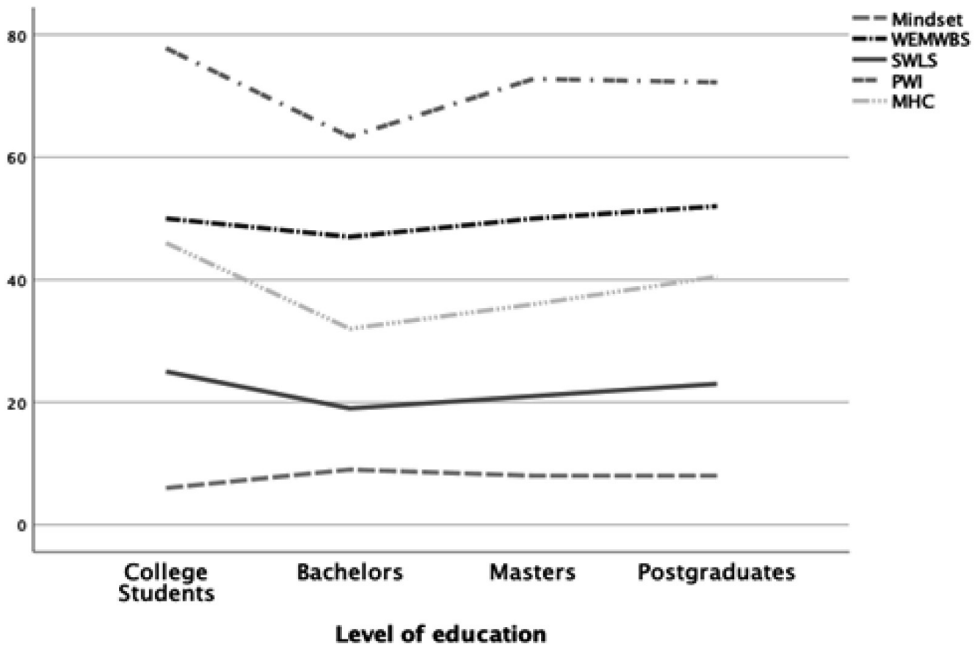


Fig. 1. Indicators of Students' Well-being and Mindset Depending on the Level of Education (Median)

Table 4

**Correlation of Well-being and Mindset with Age
 (Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient)**

Indicators	Age	Level of Significance (p)	Statistical Power (1-b)*
Mindset	.11	.03≤0.01	.416
Mental Well-being (WEMWBS)	.06	.263	.493
Satisfaction with Life (SWLS)	-.10	.076	.503
Personal Well-being Index (PWI)	-.05	.335	.502
Mental Health Continuum (MHC)	.12	.028≤.01	.477

students are consistent with several prior studies. N. Ortiz Alvarado and her colleagues showed that a growth mindset is more typical for school children than for college students. They note that when students move to the next level of education, academic stress forces them to adapt to a new academic environment and take greater responsibility for their

learning, without mentoring from teachers and parents [27].

It is particularly worth mentioning our result regarding the bachelors' growth mindset. We assumed that bachelors, as well as college students, due to the high level of academic stress associated with changing the level of education, may have a fixed mindset. Indeed, many students

perceive moving to a new level of education as an acute stressor, associated with negative events, such as a low level of social support and a decline in physical and mental well-being [28]. However, the results of some research showed that the same objective stressor may not be perceived in the same way by different people. Perception of stressors depends on their personal and social identity [29]. Compared to students with a fixed mindset, students with a growth mindset are more resilient when moving to the next level of education and, therefore, are more academically successful [30; 15]. This fact means that a growth mindset can be a protective factor that allows students to deal with moving to a new level of education and adapt to a highly competitive and stressful learning environment [35]. However, this conclusion needs further verification.

Postgraduates in our study also have a growth mindset. We would like to underline that postgraduates' relationships with their supervisor, whose support and feedback they can receive, play a key role in the postgraduate training program. The results of some studies also indicate that constructive criticism and feedback, a collaborative relationship between students and teachers, positively influences the development of a growth mindset, resilience, and psychological well-being [20; 32].

According to our results, mindset is mostly correlated with well-being defined as "The Personal Well-being index" and as a part of "The Mental Health Continuum". We explain this result by the fact that mindset in the period of "emerging adulthood" plays a special role for students in overcoming educational stress, adapting to new environments, and striving for high academic achievements. Academic success, in turn, can lead to satisfaction with one's social relations and status, as well

as hedonistic and eudaimonic well-being. A person's satisfaction with their social relations and status are common for these two approaches of well-being in the period of "emerging adulthood" [11].

After testing the second hypothesis, we found that the lowest levels of well-being were at the level of bachelors and the highest — at the level of college students.

Our results are consistent with the results of research studying the period of "emerging adulthood". According to them, at first, students are optimistic about their future, thinking little about failures, because they usually have high expectations. But if they are not justified, young people are very disappointed in life [11]. Situations of failure and the fear of not realizing the plans after graduation reduce the level of well-being [4; 13].

V.Vodyakha notes that the most academically successful students study in the senior classes, so the level of their subjective well-being is quite high [2]. Thus, we can explain the highest level of well-being in the group of college students which we have obtained in the research.

We revealed that the level of well-being, being the lowest in the bachelors' and masters' groups, increases in the postgraduates. We explain this result by the means of the fact that young people make a balanced decision about studying at the postgraduate training program as the third stage of education and often deliberately postponing marriage, starting a family, and moving up the career ladder, which is especially important in the period of "emerging adulthood". The results of the study by E. Matyushkina also showed that students choosing a new level of education have less emotional burnout and have a higher level of well-being since their professional choice is more conscious compared to the first-year students [6].

Thus, differences in the level of education were found for all indicators of well-be-

ing, but it is disputable whether the level of education is a separate criterion, or whether these differences are explained by age. Several studies have shown that the level of happiness decreases with age, including considering gender and level of education [3; 5; 11; 33]. In addition, it is obvious that in the vast majority of cases, age and level of education are related, since there are certain age and institutional restrictions for admission, for instance, to the postgraduate training program. Thus, this issue is quite debatable and requires conducting further research.

Conclusion

Our research was devoted to the correlation between mindset and subjective well-being of students during the period of "emerging adulthood". The obtained results allow us to make the following conclusions.

1. High scores on well-being scales correlate with a growth mindset, while low scores correlate with a fixed mindset.

2. A fixed mindset is most typical for college students, while masters, postgraduates, and especially bachelors are more likely to have a growth mindset.

3. All indicators of psychological well-being are the lowest in the postgraduate group and the highest in the college students' group.

The present study had several limitations. Firstly, we used the "The Mindset Questionnaire" which has not been adapted to the Russian sample. Although the results of our psychometric analysis mentioned previously are very encouraging, replication should be a prospect for future research. Secondly, international college students who participated in the study were surveyed in English. Thus, cultural factors may have influenced the obtained results. In addition, it seems relevant to study the relationship between mindset and other psychological constructs, for instance, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy in future research.

The results of the study can be helpful in training and programs to improve the level of students' subjective well-being. The correlation between mindset with the students' well-being can help parents, mentors, and teachers develop a growth mindset in students from an early age, encouraging their desire to learn and the ability to perceive failure as an opportunity for growth.

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