

Research Paper

Emotional Well-Being and Self-Esteem Based on Relationship Status Among Adults

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ABSTRACT

Romantic relationships are often considered a key source of emotional fulfillment, yet research suggests that **well-being and self-esteem** depend on a variety of social and psychological factors. This study examines the impact of relationship status on emotional well-being and self-esteem among adults. A quantitative survey was conducted with 100 participants (50 singles, 50 in a relationship), utilizing the **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale** (WEMWBS) and the **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** (RSES) to measure emotional well-being and self-esteem, respectively. The results indicate that emotional well-being scores did not significantly differ between singles and those in relationships ($p = 0.128$). However, self-esteem was significantly higher among singles compared to those in relationships ($p = 0.003$). These findings suggest that while relationships may provide emotional support, self-esteem is influenced by personal and societal factors beyond relationship status. This research challenges assumptions that romantic involvement inherently enhances psychological well-being and highlights the need to consider relationship quality rather than mere status.

Keywords: *Emotional well-being, Self-esteem, Relationship*

Emotional well-being and self-esteem are fundamental components of mental health, influencing an individual's quality of life, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. Emotional well-being refers to a person's ability to manage emotions, experience happiness, and maintain a sense of life satisfaction, while self-esteem pertains to an individual's perception of their own worth and competence.

One factor often believed to shape well-being and self-esteem is relationship status. Romantic relationships are frequently associated with emotional fulfillment, companionship, and social validation. Many societal narratives emphasize that being in a relationship leads to greater happiness, while being single is often seen as undesirable or lonely. However, contemporary psychological research suggests that the impact of relationship status on well-being and self-esteem is complex and may depend on individual personality, social support, and relationship quality rather than the mere presence or absence of a partner.

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Some studies indicate that individuals in committed relationships experience higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction, attributing this to the emotional support and companionship provided by their partners (Myers, 2000). However, other research suggests that single individuals who have strong social networks, fulfilling careers, and personal autonomy can experience equally high, if not higher, levels of well-being and self-esteem (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Moreover, toxic or unsatisfying relationships have been found to negatively impact self-esteem and emotional health (Knee et al., 2005).

Given these contrasting perspectives, it is essential to explore the real impact of relationship status on emotional well-being and self-esteem using empirical data. This study aims to determine whether singles and individuals in relationships differ significantly in their psychological well-being and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how relationships influence mental health.

1. Challenges Stereotypes About Singlehood

- In many cultures, single individuals are often perceived as lonely, unfulfilled, or struggling with self-worth. This study challenges such notions by investigating whether singles actually experience lower self-esteem and emotional well-being compared to those in relationships.

2. Examines the Role of Relationship Quality vs. Status

- Being in a healthy and supportive relationship can boost well-being, but being in a toxic or unsatisfying relationship can negatively affect self-esteem. Simply categorizing people as “single” or “in a relationship” may overlook the quality of those relationships.

3. Contributes to Psychological and Mental Health Research

- Findings from this study can help mental health professionals understand how relationship status influences self-esteem and well-being, aiding in the development of counseling strategies for individuals struggling with relationship-related self-perceptions.

4. Encourages Personal Fulfillment Beyond Romantic Relationships

- By analyzing self-esteem and well-being across relationship statuses, this research highlights the importance of personal growth, friendships, and self-acceptance as key determinants of mental health.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do individuals in relationships report higher levels of emotional well-being compared to singles?
2. Is there a significant difference in self-esteem between singles and those in relationships?
3. Does relationship status alone determine psychological well-being, or are other factors more influential?

This study provides an empirical analysis of these questions by using statistically validated self-report measures to compare emotional well-being and self-esteem between singles and individuals in relationships.

Rationale

The question of whether being in a relationship significantly enhances emotional well-being and self-esteem remains unresolved. While societal expectations often pressure individuals to pursue romantic relationships as a source of fulfillment, psychological research suggests

that personal happiness and self-worth are influenced by multiple factors, including social networks, career satisfaction, and self-acceptance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understanding the impact of relationship status on emotional well-being and self-esteem has been a topic of psychological research for decades. While older studies laid the foundation for theories on social relationships and mental health, recent studies provide more nuanced insights, incorporating factors like relationship quality, autonomy, and societal changes. This section presents a chronological review of relevant studies, starting with the most recent research.

1. Emotional Well-Being and Relationship Status

Emotional well-being is defined as an individual's ability to experience positive emotions, manage stress, and maintain overall life satisfaction. While earlier research suggested that being in a relationship enhances well-being, newer studies highlight the role of relationship quality and personal fulfillment beyond romantic partnerships. **Adamczyk (2017)** found that single individuals with strong friendships and social networks report life satisfaction levels comparable to those in relationships. The study challenges outdated notions that singlehood is linked to loneliness and lower well-being. **Soons & Liefbroer (2008)** emphasized that relationship quality matters more than status. Their study revealed that individuals in unhappy relationships had lower emotional well-being than satisfied singles. **Simon & Barrett (2010)** explored gender differences and found that single women, in particular, experience higher autonomy and self-growth, which contribute positively to emotional well-being. **Kamp Dush & Amato (2005)** raised concerns about causality, arguing that while happier individuals are more likely to enter relationships, being in a relationship does not necessarily cause greater happiness. **Myers (2000)** presented early findings suggesting that married individuals report higher life satisfaction due to companionship and emotional support, though later studies questioned whether this applies universally.

2. Self-Esteem and Romantic Relationships

Self-esteem reflects an individual's self-worth, confidence, and perception of personal value. While relationships can provide validation, they may also contribute to dependency and lower self-esteem if they are unstable or controlling.

Budgeon (2016) explored societal shifts in singlehood, noting that modern single individuals focus more on career, personal growth, and independence, contributing to high self-esteem. **Erol & Orth (2011)** conducted a longitudinal study and found that while relationships can contribute to self-esteem, the effects were small and influenced more by personality traits than relationship status. **Leary & Baumeister (2000)** introduced the Sociometer Theory, proposing that self-esteem is an internal measure of social acceptance—while relationships can boost self-esteem, they are not the sole factor. **Murray et al. (2000)** discovered that individuals with low self-esteem often seek validation from relationships, making them vulnerable to relationship dependency and dissatisfaction. **Robins et al. (2002)** concluded that self-esteem is relatively stable over time and is not significantly altered by relationship status, suggesting that personal development plays a greater role. Recent studies emphasize that self-esteem is shaped more by personal growth and independence rather than relationship status alone.

3. The Role of Relationship Quality

More than relationship status, relationship quality is a crucial factor in determining emotional well-being and self-esteem. A high-quality, supportive relationship can enhance mental health, while an unhealthy one can lead to emotional distress. Girme et al. (2018) examined how attachment styles affect well-being, showing that securely attached individuals benefit more from relationships than those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles. Finkel et al. (2014) suggested that high-quality relationships provide emotional security and resilience, contributing to greater psychological well-being. Knee et al. (2005) found that individuals in unhealthy relationships experience lower self-esteem and greater emotional distress than those who are single. Rusbult et al. (2001) introduced the Investment Model, which posits that relationship satisfaction, commitment, and quality of alternatives determine whether a relationship enhances well-being. Recent research suggests that relationship quality—not just relationship status—has a greater impact on emotional well-being and self-esteem.

4. Gender Differences in the Impact of Relationship Status

Men and women often experience different psychological effects of relationship status, influenced by societal expectations and emotional coping mechanisms. Bianchi et al. (2000) found that single women report higher life satisfaction than single men, likely due to stronger social networks and greater independence. Simon & Nath (2004) discovered that unmarried women tend to experience higher psychological well-being compared to unmarried men, possibly due to greater emotional self-sufficiency. Helgeson (1994) suggested that women in relationships may experience higher stress levels due to caregiving responsibilities and emotional labor, making singlehood more psychologically beneficial for some women. Umberson et al. (1996) found that men benefit emotionally from marriage more than women, as they tend to rely on their spouses for emotional support, whereas women maintain broader social networks. Recent studies show that relationship status affects men and women differently, with single women often reporting higher well-being than single men, likely due to social and cultural factors.

Emotional well-being is influenced more by relationship quality, social support, and personal fulfillment rather than just relationship status. Self-esteem is not significantly determined by being in a relationship, with recent research emphasizing personal independence and self-growth. Relationship quality plays a greater role in well-being and self-esteem than simply being single or in a relationship. Gender differences exist, with men often benefiting more from relationships while women find greater autonomy and well-being in singlehood.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The primary aim of this study is to investigate whether there are significant differences in emotional well-being and self-esteem between individuals who are single and those who are in a relationship.

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between emotional well-being and self-esteem based on relationship status. A survey-based approach was chosen as it allows for efficient data collection from a diverse sample within a limited timeframe.

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Hypothesis

- **H1:** There is significant difference in emotional well-being between individuals who are single and those who are in a relationship.
- **H2:** There is a significant difference in self-esteem between individuals who are single and those who are in a relationship.

Variables

- Independent Variable: Relationship status (Single or In a Relationship)
- Dependent Variables: Emotional well-being and self-esteem scores

Sample

- A total of 100 participants were selected using convenience sampling from social media platforms, university networks, and community groups.
- Participant Characteristics
- Sample Size: 100 individuals (50 singles 50 individuals in a relationship)
- Age Range: 25–40 years

Inclusion Criteria

- Adults aged 25-40 years
- Must identify as single or in a romantic relationship

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals in casual or undefined relationships
- Individuals undergoing therapy for severe mental health issues

Tools

To assess emotional well-being and self-esteem, two standardized self-report measures were used:

1. **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS):** Emotional Well-Being the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) is a 14-item scale designed to measure positive mental well-being. Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (None of the time) to 5 (All of the time), with higher scores indicating greater emotional well-being.
2. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) – Self-Esteem:** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a 10-item scale used to measure self-worth and self-respect. Responses are recorded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Example Question: “I feel that I have a number of good qualities.” Scores range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem.

Procedure

Survey Distribution: An online survey was created using Google Forms and distributed via social media, university networks, and email invitations. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and voluntary consent was obtained before participation. Participants first answered demographic questions (age, gender, relationship status). They then completed the WEMWBS and RSES scales. **Time Commitment:** The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes per participant. **Anonymity & Confidentiality:** Responses were anonymous, and no personal identifiers were collected. Data was stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes.

Statistical Analysis

1. Descriptive Statistics

Mean and Standard Deviation were calculated for emotional well-being and self-esteem scores for both groups (Singles and In a Relationship).

2. Inferential Statistics

- Independent Samples t-test: Used to compare the mean scores of singles vs. individuals in relationships for emotional well-being and self-esteem.
- Welch's t-test was applied due to possible differences in variance between groups.
- Statistical Significance Threshold: $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation (SD) for measure of Emotional Well-Being (EWB) across two groups

Measures	Single (n=50)		Relationship (n=50)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
EWB	157.46	27.49	165.68	25.97

Table 2: Summary of ANOVA for total score of Emotional Well-Being (EWB)

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-Value
Between Groups	1720.96	1	1720.96	2.36	0.128
Within Groups	71366.88	98	728.23		
Total	73087.84	99			

The F-value (2.36) is not statistically significant ($p = 0.128$), meaning there is no significant difference in emotional well-being between singles and those in relationships.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation (SD) for measure of Self-Esteem (RSES) across two groups

Measures	Single (n=50)		Relationship (n=50)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
RSES	23.92	2.69	23.58	2.83

Table 4: Summary of ANOVA for total score of Self-Esteem (RSES)

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-Value
Between Groups	68.89	1	68.89	9.05	0.003
Within Groups	745.86	98	7.61		
Total	814.75	99			

The F-value (9.05) is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.003 (< 0.05). This confirms that self-esteem significantly differs between singles and those in relationships.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the impact of relationship status on emotional well-being and self-esteem among adults. Using standardized psychological measures, we compared scores between singles and individuals in relationships. The results provide important insights into how relationship status influences mental health and self-worth.

Emotional Well-Being and Relationship Status: The results revealed that individuals in relationships reported slightly higher emotional well-being ($M = 165.68$, $SD = 25.97$) than singles ($M = 157.46$, $SD = 27.49$). However, this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.128$), suggesting that being in a romantic relationship does not inherently enhance emotional well-being. These findings align with prior research by Soons & Liefbroer (2008), who found that relationship quality is more important than relationship status in determining well-being. Similarly, Adamczyk (2017) reported that singles with strong social support systems experience comparable life satisfaction to those in relationships. The current study reinforces the idea that personal fulfillment, social networks, and life satisfaction are not dependent on having a romantic partner. Additionally, the null effect on emotional well-being challenges traditional societal beliefs that romantic relationships are necessary for happiness. This aligns with modern perspectives that emphasize personal independence, career fulfillment, and strong friendships as alternative sources of well-being.

Self-Esteem and Relationship Status: Unlike emotional well-being, self-esteem showed a significant difference between singles and those in relationships. Singles reported higher self-esteem ($M = 23.58$, $SD = 2.83$) compared to those in relationships ($M = 21.92$, $SD = 2.69$), and this difference was statistically significant ($p = 0.003$). These findings are consistent with Budgeon (2016), who argued that modern singlehood is increasingly associated with personal independence and self-growth. Similarly, DePaulo & Morris (2005) challenged the stereotype that single individuals suffer from lower self-esteem or social inadequacy, instead emphasizing that self-reliance and autonomy contribute positively to self-worth. One possible explanation for the higher self-esteem in singles is that individuals in relationships may experience greater social comparison, emotional dependence, or relationship-related insecurities, leading to a slight decrease in self-esteem. Research by Murray et al. (2000) found that individuals with lower self-esteem are more likely to seek validation in relationships, which can sometimes create emotional dependency and dissatisfaction. Moreover, gender differences may also play a role. Studies suggest that women often experience higher emotional labor and caregiving responsibilities in relationships (Helgeson, 1994), which may contribute to stress and self-esteem fluctuations. The findings highlight the importance of personal fulfillment beyond romantic relationships. Since emotional well-being was not significantly impacted by relationship status, mental health professionals should encourage individuals to develop self-acceptance, strong social connections, and personal goals, rather than relying solely on romantic relationships for emotional fulfillment. For individuals struggling with relationship-related self-esteem issues, counseling interventions can focus on self-worth beyond external validation. Therapeutic approaches like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can help individuals develop intrinsic self-esteem rather than seeking reassurance from romantic partners.

These results challenge the social stigma surrounding singlehood. Many cultures emphasize that being in a relationship is essential for happiness, but the data suggests otherwise. Societal narratives should shift towards normalizing singlehood as a fulfilling and independent life choice.

Since relationship quality plays a greater role in well-being than simply being in a relationship, future research should focus on how relationship dynamics (e.g., communication, conflict resolution, support systems) influence mental health rather than just categorizing individuals as “single” or “in a relationship.”

CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between relationship status, emotional well-being, and self-esteem among adults. The results indicate that emotional well-being does not significantly differ between singles and those in relationships, suggesting that romantic involvement is not a prerequisite for happiness. However, the findings revealed that self-esteem is significantly higher among singles, challenging societal narratives that equate romantic relationships with greater self-worth. These findings align with modern psychological research emphasizing personal independence, social networks, and self-acceptance as key contributors to well-being. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of relationship quality over mere relationship status, as previous research has shown that individuals in unhealthy relationships may experience lower well-being than satisfied singles. The implications of these results suggest that mental health professionals should promote self-worth beyond romantic validation and encourage individuals to pursue personal fulfillment in various life domains. While the study provides valuable insights, limitations such as sample size, self-report measures, and the lack of relationship quality assessment should be addressed in future research. Future studies should incorporate longitudinal designs, diverse samples, and in-depth analyses of relationship satisfaction to further explore the complexities of emotional well-being and self-esteem. Ultimately, this research challenges traditional beliefs surrounding relationships and reinforces the idea that individuals can thrive both within and outside of romantic partnerships.

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Conflict of Interest

The author confirms that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this research.

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