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Psychological Wellbeing Among Post Compulsory Students in London (U.K)

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ABSTRACT: *The post-compulsory education sector in the U.K. has faced challenges recently in terms of issues related to a pandemic and reviews of teachers' professional standards. It is inevitable that post-compulsory students' wellbeing in London is a much-talked-about issue. However, research is required to identify factors that contribute to their wellbeing. The investigation uses a purposive sampling procedure and the case study approach. Post compulsory students at universities and colleges completed Ryff's (2014) psychological wellbeing scale and demographic questions. All students were asked to complete an ethical consent form. Analysis revealed that females were more self-accepting with a purpose in life. They tended to plan their workloads and spent less time in flexible paid employment and so had more time to spend with family and friends. This supportive network enhanced their psychological wellbeing. Further research will investigate the differences between male and female reasons for differences in self-acceptance, purpose in life and stress arising from courses they take. Moreover, students' use of emotions with respect to individual differences in personality may elucidate the reasons why male students find writing assignments demanding. This may be related to time management skills and requires research.*

KEY WORDS: Ryff's wellbeing scale, stress, individual differences, students

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have examined post-compulsory student stress and the NHS (National Health Service, U.K.). In 2022 online information examined students' stress in the U.K by citing anxiety, worry, and difficulty in concentration as consequences of stress. A list of recommendations was made such as having a healthy lifestyle, ways of maintaining mental wellbeing, and time planning. The NHS suggested students should speak to tutors or a General Practitioner if experiencing stress. Barbayannis *et al* (2022) also reported that stress is a noteworthy influence on the wellbeing of college students in the United States. Students' academic expectations, the quantity of work to be completed, and grading of assignments were found to be as important as psychological wellbeing. It is apparent that students in the U.K. may be able to manage their wellbeing when it is defined in terms of the factors leading to stress. These factors also require elucidation and definition.

Definition of Wellbeing

'Wellbeing is a dynamic state of mind, characterised by reasonable harmony between a worker's ability, needs, expectations, environmental demands, and opportunities' (Levi, 1987).

Cited in Lawrence (2017), p.20. A major feature of the 21st century is that the workplace should consider the psychosocial aspects of wellbeing which may, if not supported, lead to illness and time off work (Day, Kelloway & Hurrell, 2014). Sonnentag (2015) identified job-related wellbeing as positive features such as enjoyment of work, job satisfaction, and a sufficient level of morale. Wellbeing, according to Fredrickson and Joiner (2002), engenders positive emotions which help to develop intellectual and socio-emotional skills. However, poor wellbeing includes feelings of depression, burnout, and alienation (Sonnentag, 2015).

Researchers advocate a hedonic viewpoint (Kahneman, 1999) and others a eudemonic perspective. However, researchers such as Keyes (2002) and Seligman (2011) propose that both are required to achieve a complete life. While hedonic experiences are associated with emotional wellbeing (Keyes, 2002), and enjoyment (Waterman, 1993); eudemonic experiences are associated with how individuals feel with respect to meanings and purposes in life (Steger et al. 2006). Others such as Ryff (20141995) acknowledged the eudaimonia view in terms of psychological wellbeing. The following encompasses his model:

-Self-acceptance (positive attitude about self - 'I like most aspects of my personality)
-Environmental mastery (making effective use of opportunities and having a sense of mastery in managing own affairs, environmental factors, and activities - 'In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live').
-Positive relationships (engagement in meaningful relationships with others including empathy, intimacy, and affection - 'People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others').
-Personal growth (welcomes new experiences and recognises behaviour improvement over time - 'I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world').
-Purpose in life (strong goal orientation and belief that life is meaningful - 'Some people wander through life, but I am not one of them').

Autonomy (manages own behaviour independently of the pressures experienced in society -'I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the consensus). Nevertheless, Dodge *et al*. (2012) and Christopher (1999) proposed there is a need to define wellbeing for universal application, as previous definitions are focused on dimensions and do not make links with defining the term.

According to the World Health Organisation, (WHO, 2020) wellbeing for students meant that they are healthy mentally, can take care of themselves physically, feel that they belong to their institution and, are engaged with their college activities. Wellbeing is also associated with students having control over their studies which means that they study effectively within periods set for their assignments and tasks supporting the objectives of the course. They should also feel satisfied with the environments in which they learn. Stanton *et al*. (2016) also pointed out that students should feel sufficiently challenged, and that positive feelings such as happiness can enrich learning experiences.

Definition of Stress

Research has proposed various theories to explain the link between stress and performance, and these include arousal and resource models. The Yerkes-Dodson Curve (Robert Yerkes & John D. Dodson,1908) provides a graphical illustration of the circumstances in which wellbeing and productivity may be influenced by arousal levels. The Curve refers to an inverted U which is synonymous with a model of arousal and consequent levels of stress during human performance (Wickens & Holland, 2000). They propose that the optimal level of performance during task completion occurs when there is an intermediate level of arousal. However, when there are lower and higher levels of arousal, poorer task performance is expected. Stokes and Kite (1994) argued that when levels of arousal do not match preferred levels, stress will ensue. Stress in turn will exacerbate arousal levels by causing them to rise (Teigen, 1994).

Allostatic load arises when chronic stress impacts physiology in a negative way (Guidi *et al*, 2021). This definition has implications for students and the stress levels they experience. This is because when students are overloaded with stress, the physiological systems which support stress reactivity become deregulated to the extent that eventually an individual is not able to produce a stress response. Thom (1997) used the Yerkes-Dodson curve to introduce the effect of arousal of the central nervous system (CNS) and its effect on task completion. A higher level of arousal implies that stress levels are also at a higher level. Figure 1 shows that when individuals complete complex tasks, arousal levels must be within a range which enable their completion.

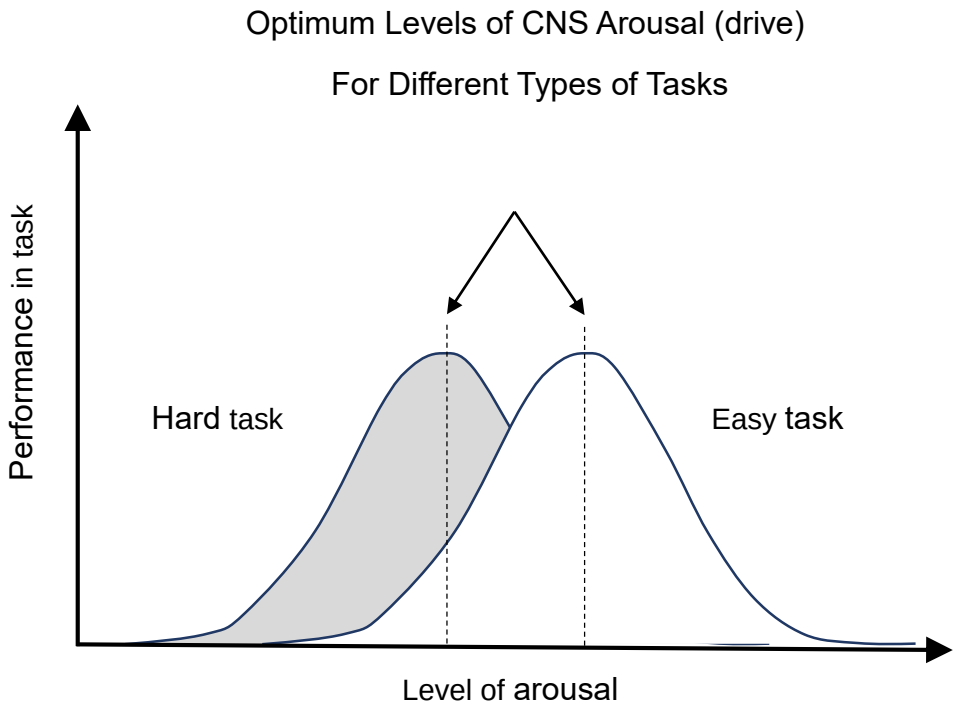


Figure 1: Task Complexity and Stress

Students' Stress

Academics research students' stress globally and types of research are conducted based on how researchers view the topic. Earlier studies have examined factors leading to academic distress (Deasy *et al*, 2016) and it is commonly reported by researchers that university students experience distress arising from their academic work such as psychological and emotional distress (Deasy *et al*, 2016; Baik *et al*, 2017) and burnout (De Broer, 2017). Eustress has been linked to engagement, motivation, belonging, and competence (Mesurado, Cristina Richaud & José Mateo, 2016).

Rudland *et al.* (2020) pointed out that stress results from the interpretation of a situation as challenging and a 'stressor' is a challenge such as a learning task to complete by a student. An example is that the student has an examination and stress arises due to the understanding that a stressor exists. The student may react with stress which has a negative impact (distress) or a positive effect (eustress). Stress can be useful in enabling the accomplishment of challenging tasks. However, personality traits such as 'perfectionism' (Kung & Chan, 2014) and the ability to cope also influence how students respond to stressors. Nevertheless, support allows learners to set themselves even more difficult tasks whilst combatting higher stressors (Dornan, Scherpbier & Boshuizen, 2009; Wass and Goldig, 2014).

The way in which students dealt with stress in terms of gender was examined by Graves *et al* (2021). They asserted that females used strategies of emotional support such as acting as a confidant or instrumental support, for example offering help by providing monetary funds. Females also found things to distract themselves from their studies. That is, female students were found to be more successful in using coping mechanisms to manage stress levels. Kumari's (2017) focus was different, and the author investigated students' reactions to stressors in terms of their gender. The author reported that students based in rural areas experienced less stress because they problem-solved in supporting each other. They also had lower aspiration levels and were less competitive than urban-based students.

The types of courses students' study may be a factor contributing to stress. Harutyunyan, Musheghyan and Hayrumyan (2020) conducted research with students studying the Basics for Healthy Lifestyle' course among undergraduate students at the American University of Armenia. The authors reported that male students experienced higher stress levels, but their perceived stress levels were lower than females.

It is envisaged that student's wellbeing in London is stress related and this may be due to individual differences. It is evident that this is not investigated concerning age range, working patterns outside of study as well as support from relationships. Furthermore, the Ryff's items measuring wellbeing has not been used widely as an approach to measuring wellbeing.

Research Questions

- To what extent do age, gender, marital status, hours of study, and paid work hours explain Rhyff's items for post-compulsory students in London (U.K.)?
- In what ways can sources of stress explain students' wellbeing in terms of Ryff's model?

METHODOLOGY

Justification for Case Study Research

The research is a London-based examination of students, stress. It is therefore a case study. The case study investigates a real-life phenomenon (experience of student stress) for a group studying at London Universities and colleges. It is non-random (Ridder, 2017) and is chosen because of its interest (Stake, 2005), which is gaining an understanding of 'why and how' students experience stress.

Participants

The participants were fifteen male and fifteen female students. All male students were studying at universities in London. Thirteen female students studied at universities, one at a further education college, and another at sixth form. Age ranged between 16 and 50.

Sampling Procedure

Selecting participants was achieved by making credible judgments by the researcher. The researcher deliberately chose participants due to their qualities, for example, a student at a college or university. The researcher used non-random sampling and found students who could provide information about being stressed. A typical case sampling procedure was used as the researcher chose conventional universities or colleges based on the likelihood that students had similar experiences, for example, mode of study.

Ethical Consent

The researcher approached students outside of lecture theatres and smaller classrooms. The researcher introduced herself and asked if they would be interested in taking part in survey research which was by hard copies. Those who were interested in taking part were given an information sheet to read. This provided details of the research and included its importance to students' wellbeing and ethics in taking part in the investigation.

"I am a chartered psychologist who requests your participation in this research. The purpose of this research is to investigate the psychological wellbeing among post-16 student populations in London. This is because it is envisaged that wellbeing is a fundamental antecedent to performance.

You are asked to read and sign an ethical consent form. In participating, you will provide some biographical details and will be asked some questions about your studies and work. In particular, the things you find stressful and how you manage these.

You have the right to withdraw from this study and data received from you will be destroyed immediately. Data that is complete will be kept by the researcher in a safe place and entered on data sheet for analysis. Only when the data is used in an article for publication will the findings be available to be seen by others. You are not asked to provide the name of the institution/organisation where you work or study and the name(s) you use in your everyday life. Please complete the ethical consent form given to you".

RESULTS

Age of Students

Most students were between 16-20 years of age.

Table 1: Age Categories

Age Categories	N=15 Male %	N=15 Female %
16-20	33	53
21-30	60	27
31-40	6	13
41-50	0	6

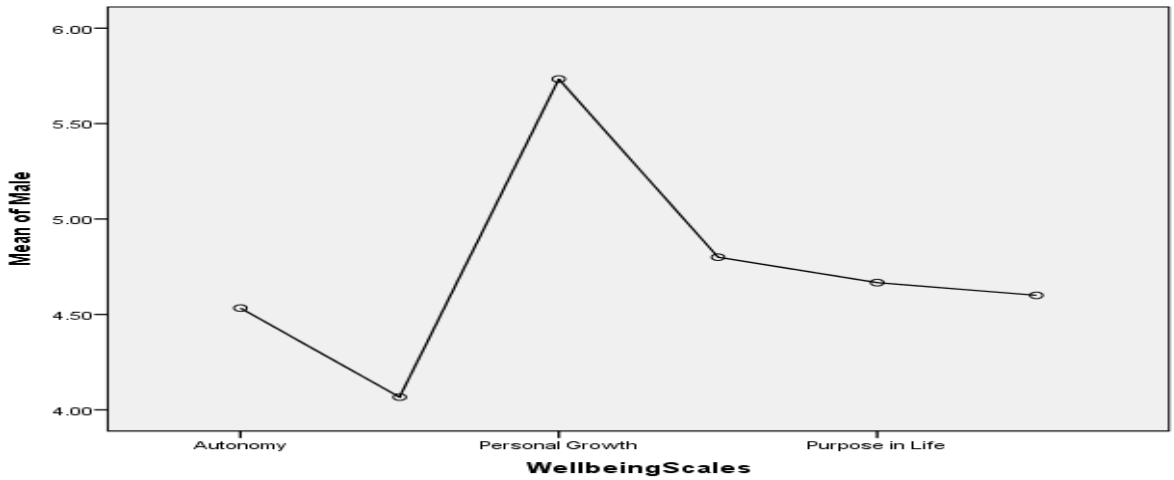
Psychological Wellbeing

Table 2: RYFF's Psychological Wellbeing Scale

Males	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Autonomy	15	4.5333	1.76743
Environmental Mastery	15	4.0667	1.57963
Personal Growth	15	5.7333	1.27988
Positive Relations	15	4.8000	1.37321
Purpose in Life	15	4.6667	2.49762
Self-acceptance	15	4.6000	2.50143
Females			
Autonomy	15	4.8000	1.69874
Environmental Mastery	15	4.6000	1.50238
Personal Growth	15	5.9333	1.22280
Positive Relations	15	4.8667	2.13363
Purpose in Life	15	5.5333	1.45733
Self-acceptance	15	5.2667	2.12020
Total	90	5.1667	1.73691

These results are partially represented in graphs.

Graph 1: Rhyff's Wellbeing Results for Males



Graph 2: Rhyff's Wellbeing Results for Females

For males, personal growth was important as well as maintaining positive relations. However, for females, personal growth, having a purpose in life, as well as self-acceptance, was important.

Table 3: One Way Analysis of Variance for Male /Female and Wellbeing Scales

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Male	Between Groups	22.667	5	4.533	1.257	.290
	Within Groups	302.933	84	3.606		
	Total	325.600	89			
Female	Between Groups	19.167	5	3.833	1.291	.275
	Within Groups	249.333	84	2.968		
	Total	268.500	89			

The null hypothesis states that the mean values obtained from Rhyff's Wellbeing Scale are equal for males and females. The significance value for males was higher (p = .290) than the significance level of 0.05 so the null hypothesis was accepted. For females, the significance value was 0.275 and is higher than 0.05 so the null hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, there was little variation within the means for males are females. T-test for independent samples corroborate these findings.

Psychological Wellbeing and Individual Differences

The t-test was conducted on SPSS to find out if there was a significant difference present between male and female age, Full-Time (FT)/Part -Time (PT) study, study hours per week, FT/PT work outside study, flexible working outside study, marital status, and responses to the Psychological Wellbeing Scale. The male and female responses to the following six aspects of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale namely; autonomy, emotional mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance were compared. The summarised results of the Independent Sample t-test are given in the following table.

Table 4: Independent Sample t-test

	Gender	N	Mean	t-test for Equality of Means (Sig. 2-tailed)
Age category	Male	15	1.7333	1.000
	Female	15	1.7333	1.000
FT/PT study	Male	15	1.0000	Sig. value cannot be computed because the standard deviations of both groups are 0
	Female	15	1.7333	
Study hours per week	Male	15	13.9333	.041
	Female	15	22.1333	.049
FT/PT work outside study	Male	15	1.4000	.069
	Female	15	1.7333	.069
Flexible work outside study	Male	15	2.1333	.046
	Female	15	7.2000	.050
Marital status	Male	15	1.2667	.379
	Female	15	1.1333	.379
Autonomy	Male	15	4.5333	.677
	Female	15	4.8000	.677
Emotional mastery	Male	15	4.0667	.351
	Female	15	4.6000	.352
Personal growth	Male	15	5.7333	.665
	Female	15	5.9333	.665
Positive relations	Male	15	4.8000	.920
	Female	15	4.8667	.920
Purpose in life	Male	15	4.6667	.256
	Female	15	5.5333	.258
Self-acceptance	Male	15	4.6000	.438
	Female	15	5.2667	.438

Average values of the mean for male and female responses to the questionnaire were compared. This was carried out by using the t-test for equality of means. When significant value of the t-test for equality of means is less than or equal to 0.05 then the difference between the mean (average) values of the male and the female responses was statistically significant. However, when the significant value of the t-test for equality of means is greater than 0.05 then the difference between the mean (average) values of the male and the female responses was statistically insignificant.

The results of the t-test given in the above table shows that there was insignificant difference present between the male and female age, FT/PT work outside study, marital status, and responses to the six aspects of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (autonomy, emotional mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance). This is because the significant value of the t-test for equality of means were found to be greater than 0.05 at 95% confidence level. Whereas the t-test for FT/PT study between male and female students could not be calculated as the mean value of the males and females FT/PT study was same.

However, there was significant difference present between the male and female study hours per week and flexible working outside study as their significant values were found to be less than 0.05 at 95% confidence level. The mean study hours per week of males were 13.93, while the mean study hours per week of females was 22.13, which shows that the females had more study hours per week than males. Similarly, the mean flexible work outside study of males were 2.13, while the mean flexible work outside study of females was 7.20, which shows that the females had more flexible work outside study than males.

Stress Experienced by Students

Table 5: Sources of Stress

Stress Items	N= 15 Male (%)	N=15 Female (%)
Too much work	53	33
Too many assignments	53	40
Not enough time for study	53	47
Writing assignments	53	60
Studying for exams	80	53
Other	A medical problem	

While sources of stress for males are mostly studying for examinations; for females, it is writing assignments. Males managed stress by taking time away from their studies. For females planning work schedules and spending time with family and friends is of equal importance.

Table 6: Dealing with Stress

Relieving Stress Items		Percentage for Males (N=15)	Percentage for Females (N=15)
Take time away from studies		73	47
Plan work schedule		27	60
Spend time with family and friends		47	60

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Stressors experienced by students did not produce stress as defined by French and Caplan (1972) but the results showed that female students experienced self-acceptance and purpose in life. There would be motivating as they complete their courses. Hours of work per week influenced the extent to which students experienced psychological wellbeing. Males were more likely to experience stress due to the commitment required from their studies and not having sufficient time for assignment writing. This may be because males were less likely to plan their working schedule and gain supportive connections with friends and family.

The research has implications for students as they could be guided by staff at educational institutions how to manage their time effectively when there are commitments to flexible paid work and challenge stressful events (Guidi *et al.*, 2021). That is, by examining individual differences of students, it is envisaged that identification of types of stressors and related stress would decide types of intervention strategies. It is pertinent that staff found at educational institutions are trained to address negative wellbeing of students in terms of their age, levels of support available to them and life commitments. In this way students would be able to deal with a variety of complex tasks during their studies and negate emotional distress and burnout (De Broer, 2017). Hence engagement and motivation may ensue (Mesurado, Cristina Richaud & José Mateo, 2016).

A larger sample would be appropriate to investigate gender differences in wellbeing among students. The effect of emotional distress (Baik et al. 2017) on students' wellbeing in terms of the Rhyff's scale might be an area for further research. Further research could also investigate age differences on psychological wellbeing as it may be that older students can cope with the demands of challenging student environments and study due to their life experiences.

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Appendix : T-Test Results

Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Age category	Male	15	1.7333	.59362	.15327
	Female	15	1.7333	.96115	.24817
FT/PT study	Male	15	1.0000	.00000[a]	.00000
	Female	15	1.0000	.00000[a]	.00000
Study hours per week	Male	15	13.9333	9.04328	2.33497
	Female	15	22.1333	15.60616	4.02949
FT/PT work outside study	Male	15	1.4000	.50709	.13093
	Female	15	1.7333	.45774	.11819
Flexible work outside study	Male	15	2.1333	4.12080	1.06398
	Female	15	7.2000	8.44478	2.18043
Marital status	Male	15	1.2667	.45774	.11819
	Female	15	1.1333	.35187	.09085
Autonomy	Male	15	4.5333	1.76743	.45635
	Female	15	4.8000	1.69874	.43861
Emotional mastery	Male	15	4.0667	1.57963	.40786
	Female	15	4.6000	1.50238	.38791
Personal growth	Male	15	5.7333	1.27988	.33046
	Female	15	5.9333	1.22280	.31573
Positive relations	Male	15	4.8000	1.37321	.35456
	Female	15	4.8667	2.13363	.55090
Purpose in life	Male	15	4.6667	2.49762	.64488
	Female	15	5.5333	1.45733	.37628
Self-acceptance	Male	15	4.6000	2.50143	.64587
	Female	15	5.2667	2.12020	.54743

A. t cannot be computed because the standard deviations of both groups are 0.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Age category	Equal variances assumed	3.541	.070	.000	28	1.000	.00000	.29168	-.59749	.59749
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	23.324	1.000	.00000	.29168	-.60293	.60293
Study hours per week	Equal variances assumed	2.803	.105	-1.761	28	.089	-8.20000	4.65713	-17.73970	1.33970
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.761	22.449	.092	-8.20000	4.65713	-17.84711	1.44711
FT/PT work outside study	Equal variances assumed	2.120	.157	-1.890	28	.041	-.33333	.17638	-.69464	.02797
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.890	27.711	.049	-.33333	.17638	-.69481	.02814
Flexible work outside study	Equal variances assumed	21.265	.000	-2.088	28	.046	-5.06667	2.42618	-10.03647	-.09686
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.088	20.309	.050	-5.06667	2.42618	-10.12265	-.01068
Marital status	Equal variances assumed	3.422	.075	.894	28	.379	.13333	.14907	-.17203	.43869
	Equal variances not assumed			.894	26.263	.379	.13333	.14907	-.17294	.43960
Autonomy	Equal variances assumed	.019	.890	-.421	28	.677	-.26667	.63296	-1.56322	1.02989
	Equal variances not assumed			-.421	27.956	.677	-.26667	.63296	-1.56331	1.02998
Emotional mastery	Equal variances assumed	.021	.886	-.948	28	.351	-.53333	.56287	-1.68633	.61966

	Equal variances not assumed			-.948	27.930	.352	-.53333	.56287	-1.68646	.61979
Personal growth	Equal variances assumed	.202	.657	-.438	28	.665	-.20000	.45704	-1.13621	.73621
	Equal variances not assumed			-.438	27.942	.665	-.20000	.45704	-1.13630	.73630
Positive relations	Equal variances assumed	1.743	.197	-.102	28	.920	-.06667	.65514	-1.40866	1.27532
	Equal variances not assumed			-.102	23.900	.920	-.06667	.65514	-1.41911	1.28577
Purpose in life	Equal variances assumed	10.372	.003	-1.161	28	.256	-.86667	.74663	-2.39607	.66274
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.161	22.543	.258	-.86667	.74663	-2.41293	.67960
Self-acceptance	Equal variances assumed	.672	.419	-.787	28	.438	-.66667	.84666	-2.40096	1.06763
	Equal variances not assumed			-.787	27.268	.438	-.66667	.84666	-2.40306	1.06973