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PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF YOUNG PORTUGUESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

BEM-ESTAR PSICOLÓGICO DE JOVENS UNIVERSITÁRIOS PORTUGUESES

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ABSTRACT
The transition to higher education can be perceived as a source of stress, tension or as a challenge, requiring different work and organizational strategies than those of adolescents, whose consequent adaptation may be understood as a multidimensional process which requires the development of adaptive skills to a new reality, which may or may not be developed by the student's academic experiences and which will have an impact on their academic performance. This study was carried out with 1287 students from various levels of education of the Universidade de Lisboa and its aim was to characterize their level of psychological well-being. Were applied the Escalas de Bem-Estar Psicológico. The young university students participating in this study presented high average levels of Psychological Well-being in global terms, but also at the level of the Personal Growth dimension, where the result was higher. It is noteworthy that psychological well-being tends to increase with age. Results showed that psychological well-being tends to increase with age, the personal growth dimension is where participants have higher grades, but women have higher grades in all others dimensions, and that the reported satisfaction may interfere with the process of adaptation to higher education.

KEYWORDS: University education. University students. Higher education. Young adults. Psychological well-being

RESUMO
A transição para o ensino superior pode apresentar-se como uma fonte de stress, tensão ou como um desafio, requerendo diferentes estratégias de trabalho e organizacionais por parte dos adolescentes, cuja consequente adaptação pode ser entendida como um processo multidimensional que exige o desenvolvimento de competências adaptativas a uma nova realidade, que pode ou não ser desenvolvida pelas experiências acadêmicas do aluno e que terá impacto no seu desempenho acadêmico. Este estudo foi realizado com 1287 estudantes que frequentam os vários níveis de ensino da Universidade de Lisboa, tendo como objetivo caracterizar o nível de bem-estar psicológico. Foram aplicadas as Escalas de Bem-Estar Psicológico. Os jovens universitários participantes deste estudo apresentaram níveis médios de Bem-Estar Psicológico elevados em termos globais, mas também ao nível da dimensão Crescimento Pessoal, onde o resultado foi mais elevado. Destaca-se que o bem-estar psicológico tende a aumentar com a idade. A dimensão do crescimento pessoal é onde os participantes têm níveis mais elevados, mas as mulheres têm níveis mais elevados em todas as dimensões. Os resultados sugerem que a satisfação reportada pode interferir com o processo de adaptação ao ensino superior.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação universitária. Estudantes universitários. Ensino superior. Jovens adultos. Bem-estar psicológico

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INTRODUCTION

In the literature, the concern with defining explanatory factors for happiness has given rise to two different philosophical views that underlie current conceptions of well-being (RYAN; DECI, 2001): subjective well-being and psychological well-being. This study pretends to identify the levels of psychological well-being of 1287 students at the University of Lisbon, was carried out with 1287 students from various levels of education of the Universidade de Lisboa and its aim was to characterize their level of psychological well-being. Were applied the Escalas de Bem-Estar Psicológico.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The inclusion of the study of well-being within Psychology came about in the 1960s, driven by major social transformations and the need to develop social indicators of quality of life (DIENER, 1984; GALINHA; RIBEIRO, 2005; KEYES, 2006).

Psychological Well-being is a construct based on psychological theory and aggregates knowledge of developmental psychology, humanistic psychology, and health (MACHADO; BANDEIRA, 2012). In the late 1980s, Carol Ryff (1989) conceived a multidimensional model of well-being from the psychological resources of the individual, namely affective, cognitive, and emotional resources (DIENER, 1994; HEADY, KELLY; WEARING, 1993; RYAN; DECI, 2001; RAMALHO, 2008). These resources broadly translate the dimensions of subjective psychological experience, namely the relationship of the person with him/herself, with current and past life, the definition of the objectives, nature and quality of the relationship he/she establishes with the intersubjective and social environment (GALINHA; RIBEIRO, 2005).

These resources give rise to six dimensions that are considered to be the components of well-being: autonomy, mastery of the environment, personal growth, positive relationships with others, life goals, and self-acceptance (RYFF, 1989A, 1995; KEYS, RYFF; SHMOTKIN, 2002; FERNANDES, 2007).

Considered to be a human characteristic and one of personal fulfilment (NOVO, 2003), Autonomy is related to the process of individualization and progressive departure from current social norms in which the individual builds his/her self-determination, independence and self-regulation of behaviour, having the locus of internal control as an evaluation indicator.

The Mastery of the Environment refers to an ability to create environments (possibly even complex ones) that are positive and favourable to the maintenance of physical and mental health, as well as the control of the internal demands of the individual, and it is this involvement that allows the individual to shape the environment according to his/her needs and, therefore, to play an active role in maintaining and controlling complex environments (KEYES; WATERMAN, 2003; SIQUEIRA; PADOVAM, 2008).

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Personal Growth is a person's ability to develop, grow and achieve fulfilment, maximizing their potential. It is the ability to exploit talents and skills and to seize opportunities for positive personal development, and the willingness to face for new challenges and to cope with obstacles (KEYES; WATERMAN, 2003; SIQUEIRA; PADOVAM, 2008). It marks the perception of continuous development, the openness to new experiences and the interest in personal enrichment (NOVO, 2003).

Positive Relations with Others are linked to the ability to establish intimate social relationships with others (KEYES; WATERMAN, 2003), experiencing feelings such as love, empathy and affection.
Life Goals are linked to the realization of important goals, to the extent that there is a purpose in life (MACHADO, 2008). They have to do with the individual's perception of their individual path, even in the face of adversity, to have a life purpose, a direction (KEYES; WATERMAN, 2003).

Self-acceptance translates into a positive attitude toward oneself, excellent levels of functioning and maturity. It is the ability to accept all parts of the whole and positively remember one's past (KEYES; WATERMAN, 2003).

A young adult undergoing higher education is in a phase of psychological development, with specific tasks and academic challenges, including various experiences of participation in the institution and others of a more personal nature. Human development theories have focused, among other things, on understanding and appreciating structural and functional changes in higher education students (ERIKSON, 1972; KOHLBERG, 1971). The changes that occur over time in university students occur in different areas of cognitive and psychosocial development (FERREIRA; HOOD, 1990). These changes in the mental processes or the behaviour of the individual, resulting from the multiplicative interaction of various factors are progressive, continuous and cumulative, support increasing internal levels of organization and improvement (VEIGA, 2013). University students, therefore, have characteristics of social and economic vulnerability and other stress-enhancing factors inherent in the academic context, which may have an impact on their performance, physical health, and psychosocial well-being (EL ANSARI; STOCK, 2010; FUENTES, et al., 2007). Research on the psychological well-being of university students in Portugal was carried out by Durão (2017), the issue being the study of this construct applied to intergenerational relations, namely between grandparents and grandchildren, having concluded that the average values are satisfactory in the various dimensions of well-being and total well-being.

The transition to higher education can thus be perceived as a source of stress, tension or as a challenge, requiring different work and organizational strategies than those of adolescents (VAZ SERRA, 1999), whose consequent adaptation may be understood as a multidimensional process which requires the development of adaptive skills to a new reality, which may or may not be developed by the student's academic experiences and which will have an impact on their academic performance (FREITAS; RAPOSO; ALMEIDA, 2007).

These tasks presuppose various adaptations and experiences, as the young university student faces a set of challenges that will influence the development of his or her identity, which may

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undermine his or her psychological, physical and social well-being and may have implications for overall development and academic success (CARNEIRO, 1999; ALMEIDA; SOARES; FERREIRA, 2000; NICO, 2000; PEIXOTO, 1999; REGO; SOUSA, 2000; SANTOS; ALMEIDA, 2001).

The main objective of this study was to characterize the psychological well-being of young people from a Portuguese university in Lisbon.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consists of 1287 university students. Of these, 22% (282) are male and 78% (1005) are female. Regarding the age of the participants, they are distributed as follows: 40% (516) are between 18 and 21 years old, 36% are between 22 and 25 years old (466), 8% of the participants are between 26 and 29 years old (102) and 16% are 30 or older (203).

Instrument

All participants were given the Psychological Well-Being Scale (NOVO; DUARTE-SILVA; PERALTA, 1997), which is adapted to the Portuguese population, built on Ryff's and Essex's original Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWBS) (1992), with 14 items per dimension, totaling 84 items. The psychometric qualities of the measurements were analyzed between 1996 and 1997 (NOVO, 2003). In the study carried out by Novo, Silva and Peralta (1997), the language equivalence and statistical study were concluded with 346 participants of both sexes, aged between 18 and 76 years (M = 45.5; SD = 18.7) with qualifications between 4 and 18 years of schooling (Median = 11) and with different marital status (NOVO, 2003).

Procedure

A formal request was made to the directorates/presidencies to send the questionnaire via email to students from all study cycles. Some student associations, as well as the Academic Association, collaborated in the dissemination of the previously submitted online questionnaire. It was ensured that school management was made aware of the procedure and that the students' information remained confidential.

The Methodology used was the Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), after observing the requirements for these parameters and also taking into account the sample size.

The significance of these factors on well-being dimensions was assessed with MANOVA after validating the assumptions of multivariate normality and the homogeneity of variance-covariance. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 24). Since this software does not produce multivariate normality tests, this assumption was evaluated with the univariate normality of each of the dependent variables with Kolmogorov-Smirnov

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tests ($p \geq 0.05$ for all groups). The assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance in each group was assessed with the Box M test.

When MANOVA detected statistically significant effects, ANOVA was performed for each of the dependent variables, followed by Tukey's post-hoc HSD test. A significance level of 0.05 was considered.

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis showed that the defined factor structure is consistent with the theoretical assumptions that underlie the construction of EBEP and has found stability in the literature, prompting the aggregation of the six measures into positive and negative indicators, showing the overall quality of Psychological Well-being. Although the instrument in question is already adapted to the Portuguese population, a confirmatory analysis was carried out which assumes that there is already a theory regarding the variables that measure certain factors but allows one to confirm the degree of adjustment of the observed data to the theory.

RESULTS

For the total 84 items, Cronbach's alpha value is 0.96, which is considered to be very good (PEREIRA; PATRÍCIO, 2013), while for EBEP scales, Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.83 (Personal Growth) to 0.89 (Life Goals), although in all measurements the values reveal strong internal consistency (PEREIRA; PATRÍCIO, 2013), showing that the instrument has satisfactory psychometric qualities, presenting values higher than those obtained in the original validation studies, where Chronbach's alpha values were between 0.74 and 0.86 for the six scales and 0.93 for the set of scales (NOVO, 2003).

Table 1. *Internal Consistency of Psychological Welfare Measurements*

BEP Measures	Cronbach's Alpha
Autonomy	0.85
Mastery of the Environment	0.87
Personal Growth	0.83
Positive Relations with Others	0.88
Life Goals	0.89
Self-acceptance	0.87
Total (84 items)	0.96

Since each subscale of Psychological Well-being used in the instrument has 14 items, and each item is scored on a Likert-type scale with values between 1 and 6, sums with values between 14 and 84 are expected in each measurement.

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Table 2. *Results of EBEP measurements*

BEP measures	Mean	SD
Autonomy	61.33	10.18
Mastery of the Environment	55.75	10.71
Personal Growth	69.27	8.12
Positive Relations with Others	61.06	11.91
Life Goals	62.80	11.81
Self-acceptance	59.10	11.61
Total (84 items)	61.55	8.70

Considering the Mean for each measurement and their standard deviation (SD), and after analyzing Table 2, it appears that the highest value is in Personal Growth (*Mean = 69.27; SD = 8.12*) and that the lowest value is in the Medium Domain measurement (*Mean = 55.75; SD = 10.71*).

Table 3 presents the Mean and Standard Deviation obtained in each of the six Psychological Well-being Measurements, according to sex.

Table 3. *MANOVA- Distribution of mean values of Psychological Wellbeing according to sex*

BEP measurements	Sex	Mean	SD	Sig.
Autonomy	M	60.85	10.00	.364
	F	61.47	10.23	
Mastery of the Environment	M	55.60	11.31	.783
	F	55.80	10.54	
Personal Growth	M	67.21	9.09	**.000**
	F	69.85	7.74	
Positive Relations with Others	M	59.22	11.47	**.004**
	F	61.57	11.98	
Life Goals	M	61.25	12.53	**.013**
	F	63.23	11.57	
Self-acceptance	M	58.48	12.24	**.032**
	F	59.27	11.52	
Total (84 items)	M	60.43	9.15	**.015**
	F	61.87	8.55	

After analyzing Table 3, there is a statistically significant difference between the variable Sex and Psychological Well-being in the Measurements: Personal Growth (*p = 0.00*); Positive Relations with Others (*p = 0.004*); Life Goals (*p = 0.013*) and Self-Acceptance (*p = 0.032*) and also in Total BEP (*p = 0.015*), with female participants generally having higher values of well-being than male participants in all Measurements of Psychological Well-being, although this difference is significant only in the subscales mentioned above.

In order to discuss the results obtained, the delimitation of the dimensions of Psychological Well-being was applied (RYFF, 1989a; RYFF, 2014; RYFF; KEYES, 1997; RYFF; SINGER, 2006). We were able to conclude that young university students are self-determined and independent. They

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can withstand social pressures to think and act, regulate their behaviour from within, and measure themselves according to personal standards.

The average values obtained in the Mastery of the Environment dimension (*Mean = 55.75; SD = 10.71*) allow us to conclude that participants feel that they master and manage their environment, control the complex set of external activities, effectively grasp the opportunities that present themselves and are able to choose or create contexts that are in line with their needs and values.

Regarding the values obtained in the Personal Growth dimension, the average values obtained in this dimension (*Mean=69.27; SD=8.12*) present young university students as having a feeling of continuous development, watching themselves growing, being open to new experiences and having a sense of realizing their potential. They see improvements in themselves and their behaviour over time, reflecting greater self-awareness and effectiveness.

In the Positive Relations with Others dimension, the average value obtained (*Mean = 61.06; SD = 11.91*) allows us to understand, in light of the delimitation of the dimensions of Psychological Well-being (RYFF, 1989a; RYFF, 2014; RYFF; KEYES , 1995; RYFF; SINGER, 2006), that young college students have warm, satisfying and trusting relationships with others, are concerned about the well-being of others and are able to feel strong empathy, affection and intimacy and understand the notion of giving and receiving that is inherent in human relationships.

The values obtained in the Life Goals dimension (*Mean = 62.80; SD = 11.81*) are high, showing that these young people have goals in life and a sense of the path they must follow. They feel that there is meaning in their lives in the present and in the past. They have beliefs that give their lives meaning, as well as goals and objectives.

In turn, the average values obtained in the Self-Acceptance dimension (*Mean = 59.10; SD = 11.61*) show that young university students seem to have a positive attitude towards themselves, recognize and accept the multiplicity of aspects of the self, including good and bad qualities, and have positive feelings about their past.

The lowest value is found in the Mastery of the Environment dimension (*Mean = 55.75; SD = 10.71*) and the highest value is found in the Personal Growth dimension (*Mean = 69.27; SD = 8.12*). The results corroborate the results obtained by Novo (2003) in the 20–29-year age group, since the means in each of the dimensions are similar in Autonomy (61.33), Mastery of the Environment (55.75) and Total Well-being (*Mean = 61.55*). Lower means were obtained in the Life Goals (*Mean = 62.80; SD = 11.81*) and Self-Acceptance (*Mean = 59.10; SD = 11.61*) dimensions, and higher average values in the Personal Growth (*Mean = 69.27; SD = 8.12*) and Positive Relations with Others (*Mean = 61.06; SD = 11.91*) dimensions. These results may have to do with the fact that the young people are university students, which to some extent involves a wider range of contacts, a larger network of colleagues and friends and, on the other hand, their university student status allows them to look forward to a better future and to become ever more aware of their personal growth, notably in academic terms.

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Regarding the variable Sex, the average levels of Psychological Well-being show that female individuals present higher values in all dimensions of Psychological Well-being and there seems to be a statistically significant correlation in the dimensions of Personal Growth, Positive Relationships with Others, Life Goals and Self-Acceptance, as well as in terms of Total Psychological Well-being. However, in relation to sex, Ryff and Keyes (1995) and Ryff (1999) verify in American samples that women have better positive relationships, whereas, in the other dimensions of Psychological Well-being, there are no differences. On the other hand, New (2005) found that Portuguese women have lower levels in the Life Goals and Personal Growth dimensions, which was not found in this study, as women had the highest levels in exactly these two dimensions. The data obtained in this study are also different from those of Bizarro (1999) with adolescents, showing that girls had lower levels of well-being than boys. University students show personal improvement and enrichment, along with their ability to create and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships, and these are the dimensions in which females differ most significantly when compared to males, although some studies do not refer to these results in such detail (NOVO, 2003; RUINI, et al., 2003).

The data obtained do not corroborate the studies by Dias (1996) in which university girls appear globally as less autonomous and less able to project their lives, as it is essential to have Psychological Well-being to establish these abilities, and stress is associated with a higher incidence of psychiatric disorders, particularly depression (LAPATE, et al., 2014). The fact that we are studying young university students may also help explain these results, as life goals and personal motivations tend to be similar between boys and girls, an aspect that may be the focus of future research.

In Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), it is possible to verify a statistically significant difference between the variable Sex and Psychological Well-being in the Measurements: Personal Growth (p = 0.00); Positive Relations with Others (p = 0.004); Life Goals (p = 0.013) and Self-Acceptance (p = 0.032) and also in Total BEP (p = 0.015), with female participants having higher values than male participants in all Measurements of Psychological Well-being, although these differences are significant only in the subscales mentioned.

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Table 4. *MANOVA - Distribution of mean values of Psychological Wellbeing according to age*

BEP Measurements	Age	Mean	SD	Sig.
Autonomy	18 to 21	60.32	9.73	**.000**
	22 to 25	61.03	10.61	
	26 to 29	62.85	9.47	
	30 or +	63.84	10.23	
Mastery of the Environment	18 to 21	54.35	10.30	**.000**
	22 to 25	55.69	10.60	
	26 to 29	54.40	10.73	
	30 or +	60.13	10.84	
Personal Growth	18 to 21	68.79	7.84	**.000**
	22 to 25	68.25	8.31	
	26 to 29	69.60	8.75	
	30 or +	72.67	7.20	
Positive Relations with Others	18 to 21	60.93	11.72	**.000**
	22 to 25	59.85	12.05	
	26 to 29	59.70	12.66	
	30 or +	64.84	10.93	
Life Goals	18 to 21	61.93	11.80	**.000**
	22 to 25	62.38	11.99	
	26 to 29	61.50	12.93	
	30 or +	66.64	10.03	
Self-acceptance	18 to 21	58.22	11.60	**.000**
	22 to 25	58.57	11.71	
	26 to 29	57.26	12.16	
	30 or +	63.46	10.63	
Total (84 items)	18 to 21	60.76	8.38	**.000**
	22 to 25	60.96	8.84	
	26 to 29	60.88	8.98	
	30 or +	65.26	8.12	

The Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) presented in Table 4 shows that age presents significant differences with all Psychological Well-being Measurements, with $p = 0.00$ in all of them, in which the age group of 30 or older always has higher values in the six dimensions of Psychological Well-being.

In the variable Age, the participants were divided into 4 groups (18 to 21 years, 22 to 25 years, 26 to 29 years, and 30 or more years), and each group comprised 4 ages, except for the last group, which included the students who were 30 or older, giving it greater elasticity. 76% of university students are between 18 and 25 years old, the height of youth, which may allow a greater perception of well-being levels in this age group. The last group (30 years or older) represents 16% of the sample and the participants can be considered as young adults and adults, not departing, however, from the intended ages.

This variable is often used to investigate changes in Psychological Well-being throughout life. Young university students aged 30 and over are those with higher mean values in all dimensions of Psychological Well-being and also in Total Psychological Well-being, with a statistically significant

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correlation in all of them. The mean values appear to increase with age, in line with the results obtained by Novo (2005), in which participants aged 30 years and older had higher mean levels than those between 20 and 29 years. These results are also in line with studies by Bizarro (1999), which show a tendency for Psychological Well-being to increase with age. Also, Ryff (1989a) concluded that young people appear to have lower mean values than middle-aged people, making it apparent that individuals have higher levels of well-being as they get older (ARGYLE, 1999; CARSTENSEN, 1995; KEYES; SHMOTKIN; RYFF, 2002; MYERS, 1999). These data contradict other studies, notably those carried out by Ryff (1989b); Ryff and Keyes (1995) and Ryff and Singer (2008), who concluded that Life Goals and Personal Growth decrease with age, contrary to the dimensions Self-Acceptance, Autonomy, and Positive Relations with Others. Still, in relation to age, Ryff (1989a), Ryff and Keyes (1995) and Ryff and Singer (2008) also showed that the Autonomy and Mastery of the Environment dimensions showed a significant increase, while Personal Growth and Life Goals decreased with age. Ryff and Essex (1992) argue that well-being should not be considered as a trait, as it is a dynamic process that oscillates over time, given one's life circumstances and the challenges that arise throughout life.

Studies with university students show positive linear associations between age and some dimensions of Psychological Well-being (KITAMURA, et al., 2004; VLEIORAS, BOSMA, 2005). In the studies by Lopes (2015) with university students, the age variable was significant in the dimensions of Autonomy, Mastery of the Environment, Personal Growth and Positive Relations with Others, with older students being those with higher levels of Psychological Well-being in all PWBS dimensions. When comparing the results of this study with those of previous studies, we found that, in most cases, there is a connection between age and Psychological Well-being, which corroborates the empirical evidence revealed in the different correlates of the research conducted on this construct (VLEIORAS; BOSMA, 2005). However, Kafka and Kozma (2002) do not show any connection between age and Psychological Well-being.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The young university students participating in this study had high average levels of Psychological Well-being overall, but also in the Personal Growth dimension, where the result was highest. However, we have also found that knowing the Psychological Well-being of young adults is important because of the possibility of anticipating situations of psychological distress, both as a cause and/or consequence of academic outcomes, performance as well as its impact on interpersonal relationships. It is important to reflect on the psycho-pedagogical support that higher education institutions provide to students, on the processes that strengthen the individual in adverse situations, and on the factors that, in institutions, trigger positive personal characteristics and psychological strategies that strengthen the individual.

The values obtained in the internal consistency analysis allowed the observation of excellent results, showing that the instrument used presents very satisfactory psychometric characteristics. The

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young university students had high mean levels of Psychological Well-being overall, but also in the Personal Growth dimension, where the result was highest. Psychological Well-being is a domain with much room for research, discussion and reflection. Hence, it is also an aim to make higher education institutions aware of the adaptation issues and psychological tasks of university students, inherent to their passage through this learning experience.

As such, individuals and communities will be able to respond to the challenge of building a better society as they are able to promote higher levels of well-being for all its members. It is suggested that this study be repeated with a larger sample.

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