ABSTRACT

Sense of well-being is one of the most important goals which individuals strive for. It affects our perceptions of the external world such that we are able to view it with greater positivity and deal with day-to-day problems effectively. With an increasingly competitive existence, the pressures and challenges confronting the individual are extremely high, therefore it is difficult to maintain this sense of well-being at all stages of life. Adolescence and early adulthood are particularly demanding, because conflicts relating to quest for identity, concerns for academic success, career and uncertainty about the future all magnify the problems manifold. It is important that researches to identify factors which contribute to psychological well-being should continue to be conducted in different contexts and with better methodologies.

The present research aims to study the predictors of psychological well-being amongst university students. Psychological well-being has been defined as a dynamic state characterized by a reasonable amount of harmony between an individual's abilities, needs and expectations, and environmental demands and opportunities (Levi, 1987). It is connotative as a harmonious satisfaction of one's desires and goals (Chekola, 1975). Amongst the factors which influence well-being, personality, causal attributions and perceived social support are factors which are likely to be important. Therefore, the problem selected by the investigator for study is “Personality Factors, Causal Attributions and Perceived Social Support among University Students Experiencing Psychological Well-being.”

Personality refers to the enduring styles of thinking and behaving when interacting with the world. It relates to unique and relatively stable qualities that characterize behaviour and thought. Since personality is a core factor which
determines our reactions and adjustments, psychological-well-being during such a stressed phase as adolescence should be studied within its perspective. In the present investigation, the operational definition of personality was in accordance with the Big Five Model given by Costa and Mc Crae (1992). They have explained personality in terms of five traits namely, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness.

The perception and outlook of the individual is affected by the meaning he attaches that is, the causal attributions which he / she makes. These attributions are on one hand his explanations of causation, on the other hand they gradually constitute his perspective and framework through which he views life. The term ‘attribution’ is used to refer to the individual’s perception of causations that is his explanation as to why the events have taken place. It is a process through which a person seeks to identify the causes of his own as well as of others’ behaviour. The approaches of Heider (1944, 1958), Jones and Davis (1965), Weiner (1986) and Kelly (1972) have helped to evolve and clarify the concept. Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale (1978) and Abramson, Garber and Seligman (1980) explained attributional styles in terms of three dimensions, namely, internal – external, stable – unstable and global – specific. Eight attributional styles emerge from this model, namely positive external/internal, positive stable/unstable, positive global/specific, composite positive, negative external/internal, negative stable/unstable, negative global/specific and composite negative. This operational definition of attributional styles was taken into consideration by the researcher in the present study.

Social support has been extensively studied and is thought to influence well-being by modifying and buffering the impact of life events and other stressors [Pugliesi and Shook (1998), Turner and Noh (1983)]. According to Pugliesi and
Shook (1998), it directly influences well-being and health. Research has also indicated that perceived support is a better predictor of psychological well-being than the actual support received (Vander Zee, Buunk & Sanderman, 1997). Perceived social support refers to how much the individuals perceive that they are supported by family or peer groups. According to Zimet et al. (1988), perceived social support emanates from three sources namely, family, friends and significant other. This concept was taken as the operational definition of perceived social support in the present investigation.

The main objective of this research was to study how personality factors, causal attributions and perceived social support predict the experience of psychological well-being amongst university students. Three major variables were studied by the researcher in relation to psychological well-being i.e. personality factors (in terms of five dimensions, viz. neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness), causal attributions (positive external/internal, positive stable/unstable, positive global/specific, composite positive, negative external/internal, negative stable/unstable, negative global/specific, composite negative) and perceived social support relating to – family, friends and significant other. Thus, a total number of 16 variables were studied in relation to psychological well-being.

A sample of 312 university students was taken from the different departments of Aligarh Muslim University out of which 157 were males and 155 were females. The sample was drawn objectively and systematically from available students who consented to participate, care was taken to be as objective as possible.

Psychological Well-Being Scale constructed by Carol Ryff (1989) was used to assess the experience of psychological well-being. Six dimensions of psychological well-being were studied.
well-being have been conceptualised by Ryff. She suggested a multidimensional model of psychological well-being that comprised six distinct dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self acceptance (Ryff, 1989a; Ryff, 1989b). Personality was assessed through Personality Inventory (NEO – FFI) by Paul T. Costa and Robert McCrae (1992). This personality inventory assesses five dimensions of personality namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. The attributional style of the subject was assessed with the help of Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by Peterson, Semmel, Von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky and Seligman (1982) and revised by Peterson and Seligman in 1984. The scale consists of internal-external, stable-unstable and specific-global dimensions. Eight type of attribution styles emerge - composite positive, internal-external positive, stable-unstable positive, specific-global positive, composite negative, internal-external negative, stable-unstable negative and global-specific negative dimensions. Perceived social support was assessed through Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by Zimet, Dahlam, Zimet and Farley (1988). It has three different subscales: (a) Family, (b) Friends and (c) Significant Other.

For prediction of well-being by the 16 variables, correlational design was used by the researcher. Factorial design (2 x 2 x 2) was used for the assessment of the interaction effects among the predictor/independent variables.

Eleven broad hypotheses were framed.

1. The first set of hypotheses was concerned with the prediction of psychological well-being by the 16 predictor variables i.e. five personality factors, eight attributional styles and three sources of perceived social support in the total sample.
2. The second set of hypotheses was concerned with the prediction of psychological well-being by the 16 predictor variables in the male and female sample separately.

3. The third set of hypotheses was concerned with the prediction of psychological well-being by the 16 predictor variables in nuclear and joint family system sample separately.

4. Hypotheses number four to nine were concerned with the prediction of each of the components of psychological well-being by the 16 predictor variables i.e. five personality factors, eight attributional styles and three sources of perceived social support in the total sample.

5. Hypothesis number ten was framed to test whether there was any significant difference among males and females in the experience of psychological well-being.

6. Hypothesis number eleven was framed to find out whether there was any significant difference among students coming from joint family system and those coming from the nuclear family system in the experience of psychological well-being.

Intercorrelations among all the variables were calculated. Since the major purpose of the study was to find out the predictor variables for psychological well-being, multiple regression was applied. Q-Q plot was plotted for the dependent variable to fulfil the assumption of normality for ANOVA. Three way ANOVA (2 x 2 x 2) was used to find out whether the interaction of certain predictor variables exercised their effect on psychological well-being. t-test was applied to compare males and females on their mean scores of psychological well-being and its components to find significant differences. Students coming from nuclear and joint families were also
compared in their terms of their experience of psychological well-being and its components using t test.

Neuroticism, conscientiousness, openness and perceived social support from family emerged as significant predictors of psychological well-being in the total sample.

Psychological well-being was predicted by different factors in male and female sample. Neuroticism emerged as a common predictor of well-being in both males and females. Conscientiousness and perceived social support from friends were predictors of well-being in males whereas in females, openness and perceived social support from family emerged as predictors of well-being.

Psychological well-being in individuals coming from nuclear families was predicted by different factors as compared to individuals coming from joint families. In the sample of students coming from nuclear families, it was predicted by neuroticism and openness, the direction being negative between neuroticism and psychological well-being. Psychological well-being of individuals coming from joint families was predicted by conscientiousness and perceived social support from family. It was not predicted by neuroticism.

Different predictors emerged for different components of psychological well-being in the total sample. Neuroticism, negative global / specific attributional style and composite negative attributional style were found to be predictors of autonomy. Environmental mastery was found to be predicted by neuroticism (direction of predictive relationship being negative), conscientiousness and perceived social support from family. Openness, conscientiousness and perceived social support from family were found to predict personal growth. Purpose in life among individuals was found to be predicted by largely the same factors as personal growth, neuroticism.
being the only additional factor. Neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness emerged as predictors of self acceptance among individuals. 'Positive relations with others' was predicted by neuroticism, extraversion and perceived social support from friends.

Three-way analysis of variance was also conducted to obtain information whether any of the independent variables were exercising their effect in terms of interaction with other independent variables. It was found that although composite negative, composite positive and agreeableness did not emerge as predictors of psychological well-being in the regression analysis, they were found to have significant interaction effects on psychological well-being along with other variables, viz. neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness and perceived social support.

The researcher also computed mean scores on psychological well-being and its components amongst males and females and among students coming from joint and nuclear families for finding out significant differences, if any. Females were found to have higher psychological well-being than males. They were found to be higher than males on the dimensions of personal growth, self acceptance and positive relations with others. No significant difference was found between the two groups on well-being as a whole. The two groups also did not have any significant difference on the components of well-being except environmental mastery where students coming from joint families were higher than students coming from nuclear families.

Thus, amongst the factors brought out as significant predictors of well-being, neuroticism, conscientiousness, openness and perceived social support from family are foremost. In other words, individuals who are not high on neuroticism, but are high on conscientiousness, openness and perceived social support from family are likely to experience psychological well-being.