

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO LIFE SATISFACTION AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG OMANI YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

A positive relationship between ethnic identity and psychological well-being has been widely reported in the literature. However, most work has been conducted among minorities in Western multicultural societies such as the US. Little is known about the salience and consequences of ethnic identity in Middle Eastern countries. We conducted a study in Oman where the strong emphasis on a single Arab identity exists in an ethnically heterogenous environment. We addressed the saliency of ethnic identity and its consequences for well-being. Our data comes from 563 university and high school students who completed the Phinney's Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), the Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). Results indicate that the MEIM possesses good psychometric characteristics in this population, implying that the construct is valid in this context. Furthermore, using path analytic procedures and regression analysis we established that ethnic identity, particularly ethnic belonging, was positively associated with psychological well-being (i.e., life satisfaction and mental health), thereby confirming results from other parts of the world. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Key Words: Ethnic Identity, Life Satisfaction, Mental health, Oman.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic identity refers to a person's subjective experience of belonging and sense of attachment to an ethnic group (Phinney, 1990). According to Phinney (1990), ethnic identity has several components including ethnic

self-identification, sense of belonging, and positive or negative attitude towards one's ethnic group. The literature indicates that ethnic identity formation results from an active process of exploration, evaluation, and commitment. Phinney's (1990) developmental model of ethnic identity indicates that ethnic identity formation arises from two processes: exploration and commitment. Ethnic identity exploration as a process entails searching for information and learning more about one's ethnic group, whereas commitment is the state where one derives a sense of membership and positive feelings towards own ethnic group (Syed et al., 2013). It has been suggested that an adequate approach to ethnic identity needs to have a strong developmental perspective, since ethnic identity formation starts in childhood, and then undergoes a major developmental shift during adolescence and young adulthood (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Ethnic identity and its relationship to health and well-being

In their seminal work, Baumeister and Leary (1995) posited a hypothesis on the need to belong; according to this hypothesis, people have a basic drive to develop and maintain relationships that are positive and ongoing. When people lack positive and on-going relations they may feel deprived and distressed. The theory states that not all relationships meet this need; to satisfy this need the relationship must be mutual, positive, and with constant interactions. Baumeister and Leary (1995) present a detailed review linking the need for belonging to 'cognitive process, emotional patterns, behavioural responses, and health and well-being' (p. 522). Various individuals, such as parents and peers, can serve as a source of attachment and therefore meet the need to belong. Beyond individuals, various institutions within one's ecological settings such as schools, community, and religious groups can also provide a sense of relatedness or belonging. The sense of belonging and attachment to key groups and institutions in one's setting has been observed to provide people with a sense of well-being, and to contribute to general life satisfaction and health. Although the pathways between the social institutions and well-being are still not adequately understood, it has been hypothesized that aspects such as provision of support and opportunity for meaningful engagement with others may buffer or moderate the adverse effects of day-to-day stressors and enhance health and well-being. In recent years, the study of ethnic identity has gained a lot of prominence, partially motivated by observations showing an important relationship between ethnic identity and well-being across many cultural contexts (Smith & Silva, 2011).

However, the study of ethnic identity and its relationship to health and well-being has so far been skewed. There has been an overemphasis on studying ethnic identity formation among minority groups, which has led to a significant amount of work on ethnic identity to arise from Western countries where there are clear minority-majority categorizations based on ethnicity. Recently, there has been some effort by researchers to investigate ethnic identity issues in other less studied parts of the world. For instance, Dimitrova, Bender, Chasiotis, and van de Vijver (2013) recently examined ethnic identity, acculturation orientations, and psychological well-being in a sample of Turkish-Bulgarian adolescents, who are members of an ethnic minority that has lived in Bulgaria for centuries. Consistent with earlier published research, ethnic identity was positively associated with psychological adjustment. To what extent would the construct of ethnic identity, its measurement and function work in multicultural context different from the U.S. and Western samples that have been the main group investigated so far, is an interesting question to ask. Recent findings indicate that the association between ethnic identity and well-being can be replicated across many regions of the world. In a study of youth across four countries in Africa, Adams et al. (submitted) replicated the factor structure of the Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), and found a positive relationship between ethnic identity and psychological well-being across these four contexts.

Two factors provide the impetus to carry out further studies in new cultural contexts. The first is generalizability: To what extent can we replicate findings from Western contexts in non-Western contexts? The second reason arises from the saliency of context in identity formation. The importance of expanding the

cultural context has to do with the fact that ethnic identity is strongly influenced by both individual-level and context-level factors. Macro-context such as national policy, school composition (Umaña-Taylor, 2004), family (Umaña-Taylor & Guimond, 2010), and neighbourhood (Likki, 2008) have been observed to moderate ethnic identity formation. Moreover, individual-level factors, such as gender and age, have been observed to influence saliency of ethnic identity (Branch, Tayal, & Triplett, 2000; Phinney, 1990; Warikoo, 2005). Although results are somewhat inconclusive, various studies indicate that women are likely to have higher ethnic identification than men. Additionally, given the developmental nature of ethnic identity, older adolescents have been observed to score higher than younger adolescents. There are almost no data on the influence of familial income on ethnic identity formation. This may be partly due to the fact that most of the studies so far have focused on adolescents from the lower income and the least advantaged groups in the society. In the context of Oman, we would expect that high-income groups would have a stronger sense of ethnic belonging compared to low-income groups, as this would be expected to be closely tied to national identity and pride. Moreover, psychological well-being has been observed to be independently influenced by various socio-demographic characteristics. Women have reported lower psychological well-being compared to men (Bartels, Cacioppo, van Beijsterveldt, & Boomsma, 2013). Additionally, people with higher social economic status have been observed to report fewer mental health problems and higher life satisfaction. These patterns of results are expected to remain consistent in the Omani cultural contexts; since research so far indicates that income and gender effects on psychological well-being may be relatively universal.

Omani Context

The study was carried out in the sultanate of Oman, in the capital city (Muscat) as well as in two other major school districts, South Batinah and Dakhliyah. The sultanate of Oman is an Arab state located at the East Coast of the Arab Peninsula. Oman shares boundaries with several countries including Saudi Arabia, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, and Iran. The population of Oman is estimated at slightly above 3.1 million. The official language of Oman is Arabic. Most Omanis are Muslims although the government does not keep records of the religious affiliations of the population. For centuries, the Sultanate of Oman had overseas regions especially in East Africa and South East Asia. This expansion has contributed to a relatively large heterogeneity of the Omani population compared to the neighbouring gulf countries (Kharusi, 2012). The Ethnic Fractionalization Score of Oman is 0.43, which points to moderate heterogeneity. The ethno-linguistic groups in Oman include the Indigenous Arab speaking populations, Baluchis, Zinjibaris, Mehris, and smaller groups such as Shehris, Bahraains, and Lawatiyas (Kharusi, 2012). Despite this heterogeneity the government promotes an all inclusive Arab identity (Peterson, 2004). Ethnicity and heterogeneity are not topics that are widely discussed in public discourse in Oman as there is an emphasis on the Arab identity. Hardly any studies have addressed the implications of this policy for ethnic identity.

The current study

The current study aimed to contribute to the extant knowledge base by addressing three key research questions:

- a) What is the factorial structure of the Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) in Oman?
- b) Can the factor structure originally observed in a sample from the US be replicated?
- c) Is there evidence for a partial mediation model in which the link between background characteristics (age, gender, and socioeconomic status) and well-being is partly mediated by ethnic identity? The postulated model is given in Figure 1. Given the exploratory nature of our study we refrain from specifying hypotheses or directionality.

[Insert figure 1 around here]

METHOD

Sample

Data were collected among 563 adolescents and university students in Oman. University students were approached from Sultan Qaboos University, the largest governmental university in the capital city, Muscat, while adolescent students were recruited from 12 schools located in three major Omani school districts (Muscat, South Batinah, and Dakhliyah), half of which were rural schools. Inclusion of the school was based on availability of grade 8 and above, having a mix of urban and rural schools, and getting comparable numbers of male and female school students. The school population ranged from 472 to 1140, with a mean of approximately 800 students. Table 1 below summarizes the key characteristics of the sample. Partially due to the sampling frame (i.e., students were recruited from the College of Education) we have more women in the university sample whereas the sample in the adolescent group is somewhat more balanced. Due to logistical reasons we were not able to inquire for the specific ethnicity of the students. However, a majority of our participants were native Omanis or had been living in the country for at least three generations.

Table 1: Sample Descriptive by Age Group

| | Adolescents | | Young adults | | Group comparison |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------|--------------|--------|--|
| Age | | | | | |
| Range | 12-19 | | 18-24 | | |
| Mean (<i>SD</i>) | 15.33 | (1.64) | 20.55 | (1.02) | $t(561) = .001$ |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Male | 148 | 45.7% | 67 | 29.6% | $\chi^2(1, N = 550) = 14.37, p < .001$ |
| Female | 176 | 54.3% | 159 | 70.4% | |
| Familial Income Status | | | | | |
| Always insufficient | 29 | 8.7 | 18 | 7.8 | $\chi^2(3, N = 563) = 3.61, p = .320$ |
| Sometimes sufficient | 61 | 18.4 | 42 | 18.2 | |
| Sufficient no savings | 134 | 40.3 | 110 | 47.6 | |
| Sufficient with savings | 108 | 32.5 | 61 | 26.4 | |

Measures

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999) was administered alongside the Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale and General Health Questionnaire. The measures were translated using a translation -- back translation approach before finally being discussed in a panel and a consensus was reached on the final Arabic version used in the study.

Ethnic Identity. A modified version of the Phinney's Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) was administered (Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999). This is a 12-item measure that investigates the sense of pride in one's ethnic group and the sense of belonging to it. The published scale uses a four point Likert scale as the response option, however in our study we used a five-point Likert scale which included also a neutral option. The scale has a subscale dealing with ethnic exploration (sample items: 'I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs and In order to learn more about my ethnic background', 'I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group') and ethnic belonging

(sample item: 'I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group'). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for these subscales was found to be above the recommended standards for both adolescents and young adults (Ethnic belonging: adolescents = .864 and young adults = .934; Ethnic exploration adolescents = .725 and young adults = .721). Further psychometric evaluations are carried out using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (for details, see the results sections below).

Life Satisfaction. The Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLS; Huebner, Seligson, Valois, & Suldo, 2006) was applied as a measure of positive psychological well-being. The measure includes six items, five of them focusing on specific domains (family, friends, school, self, and living environment), and one item focusing on global well-being. A sample item is 'I would describe my satisfaction with my life as' with answers coded on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 '*terrible*' to 7 '*delighted*'. Items showed a strong single factor with an eigenvalue of 3.03, explaining 55% of the variance. The internal consistency for this measure was adequate (Cronbach's alpha = .828 for adolescents and .853 for young adults).

Poor Mental Health. The General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12) was administered as a measure of poor mental health (Goldberg, 1972). The GHQ-12 assesses changes in affective (e.g., happiness) and somatic (e.g., anxiety based insomnia) symptoms relative to usual levels of health (Mukkaley, Wall, Warr, Clegg, & Stride, 1999). In the current study, a Likert scale scoring procedure of 0-1-2-3 was used for the GHQ-12. Sample items for this scale include 'Felt constantly under strain: 0 '*Not at all*', 1 '*No more than usual*', 2 '*Rather more than usual*', and 3 '*Much more than usual*'. Higher scores indicate poorer mental health. An exploratory factor analysis revealed a strong single factor with an eigenvalue of 3.89, explaining 32.4% of the variance. The internal consistency for this measure was adequate (Cronbach's alpha = .779 for adolescents and .841 for young adults).

Socio-demographic variables. We collected data on student's background including age, gender, and familial financial status. The familial financial status was assessed from a self report measure: the participants declared whether their families had a sufficient income. The answers were coded on a 4-point scale (1 '*always insufficient*', 2 '*sometimes insufficient*', 3 '*sufficient, no savings*', and 4 '*sufficient with savings*').

Analytic strategy

The data analysis was carried out in several steps that are discussed below, with each of the steps indicating its purpose.

1. To evaluate the psychometric properties of each of the measurement scales, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and Cronbach's alpha were employed.
2. In the second step we conducted descriptive (means and standard deviations) and correlational analyses. These steps are considered an important prerequisite for the third step.
3. To test the relationship between ethnic identity and well-being, and examine the hypothesized model in our study, we used a path analysis using AMOS 19 to evaluate the goodness of fit of the hypothesized model. Goodness of fit of models was assessed as per recommended standards (Hu & Benter, 1999). Fit indices that were examined included the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI); values greater than 0.90 for the TLI and CFI are considered to reflect a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model (Hu & Benter, 1999). Other indices examined were the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA values of less than 0.08 are considered indicative of acceptable model fit (Hu & Benter, 1999)).
4. Lastly, to examine the invariance across age groups, a multigroup path analysis was carried out. To evaluate the level of equivalence between the two groups, we used the recommended standards of not

only checking the fit indices as in a single group analysis, but also evaluating the differences between successive models with a special focus on changes in CFI.

RESULTS

Measurement Characteristics of MEIM

Given the fact that MEIM is new in the Omani sample, we started by checking the factorial structure of the MEIM. Using CFA, we first investigated the two factor models of the scale as proposed by the authors. A two-factor model with correlated factors (see Figure 2) showed an excellent fit to the data when we included a single correlated error between item one and three as suggested by the modification indices. The fit indices for this scale were: $\chi^2(52, N = 563) = 219.99$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 4.229$, TLI = .90, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .0768. Additionally, we evaluated the invariance of the scale across groups, to be able to justify its use and comparison among adolescents and young adults. Results indicated that we can attain partial measurement invariance. To attain partial invariance we had to release the intercept invariance of one item (item 2). See Table 2 for the results of the partial invariance. Our results indicate that the MEIM has a good factorial validity both for adolescents and young adults in Oman.

[Insert figure 2 around here]

Table 2: Invariance of the MEIM among Adolescents and University Students

| Model | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | $\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf) | χ^2 / df | RMSEA | TLI | CFI | ΔCFI |
|---|----------|-----------|--------------------------------|---------------|-------|------|------|--------------|
| Unconstrained model | 294.33 | 104 | | 2.830 | .057 | .922 | .939 | |
| Measurement weights (Metric invariance) | 305.03 | 114 | 10.69 (10) | 2.676 | .055 | .929 | .939 | .000 |
| Measurement intercepts (Full scalar invariance) | 339.86 | 125 | 34.50 (11) | 2.719 | .055 | .927 | .931 | .008 |

Mean differences between adolescents and youth

Our results indicate that there were no significant differences between adolescents and young adults on their mean ethnic exploration scores (See Table 3 for the statistics). Similar results were observed for the ethnic belonging scores. This indicates that the younger adolescents did not explore more than the older ones, and that the older group did not show a stronger sense of belonging than the younger group, as would probably be expected based on Western results.

Table 3: Means (and Standard Deviations) per Age Group

| | Adolescents | | Young adults | | Group comparison |
|--------------------|-------------|--------|--------------|--------|----------------------------|
| Ethnic Belonging | 4.20 | (0.76) | 4.31 | (0.72) | $t(561) = .265, p = .790$ |
| Ethnic Exploration | 3.52 | (0.87) | 3.40 | (0.78) | $t(561) = 1.612, p = .110$ |
| Life Satisfaction | 34.48 | (6.33) | 33.60 | (5.60) | $t(561) = 3.548, p = .002$ |
| Poor Mental Health | 10.82 | (5.38) | 12.49 | (5.64) | $t(561) = 1.697, p = .083$ |

Relationship between background characteristics, ethnic identity and well-being

Table 4 presents the correlation matrix among the variables of interest. We postulated a partial mediation model in which background factors (age, gender, and familial income status) had a direct effect on ethnic belonging and well-being; ethnic belonging had a direct effect on psychological well-being (life satisfaction and mental health).

Table 4: Correlations between Study Variables

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--------------------------|----------|---------|---------|----------|----------|---------|---------|
| 1 Gender | 1 | | | | | | |
| 2 Age | 0.056 | 1 | | | | | |
| 3 Familial income status | 0.017 | -0.026 | 1 | | | | |
| 4 Life satisfaction | -0.092* | -0.068 | 0.187** | 1 | | | |
| 5 Poor mental health | 0.078 | 0.154** | -0.068 | -0.379** | 1 | | |
| 6 Ethnic identity | -0.155** | 0.018 | 0.072 | 0.434** | -0.177** | 1 | |
| 7 Ethnic exploration | -0.206** | -0.034 | 0.016 | 0.333** | -0.178** | 0.868** | 1 |
| 8 Ethnic belonging | -0.085* | 0.056 | 0.103* | 0.433** | -0.143** | 0.917** | 0.598** |

Although the hypothesized model showed a good fit to the data, some of the path coefficients were not significant. The model was modified so as to exclude path coefficients that were not significant. A new model excluding all non-significant paths was tested; Figure 3 shows the final model. The modified path analytic model showed a non-significant chi square fit value ($\chi^2(10, N = 563) = 13.398, p = .202, \chi^2/df = 1.340$), which points to an excellent fit. Other fit indices showed similar results, TLI = .986, CFI = .993, and RMSEA = .025. These values suggest a good fit of the data to the hypothesized model (Kline, 2005). The model explained 4.2% of the variance in ethnic exploration, 1.6% in ethnic belonging, 5.2% in mental health and 21.3% in life satisfaction. The links between ethnic identity and the health indicators were significant. More specifically, ethnic identity showed stronger links with life satisfaction than with poor mental health. This could be a consequence of the nature of the items in the instruments, where the GHQ-12 taps more into mental health problems.

[Insert figure 3 around here]

Invariance of the model across age groups

We tested the invariance of this model across groups. The best fitting model was the structural weights model: $\chi^2(29, N = 563) = 42.91, p < .046, \chi^2/df = 1.480, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .036, CFI = .97, \Delta CFI = .001$. This implies that the pattern and relationship between variables was equivalent across groups (see Figure 4). However, when carrying out the multigroup analysis some of the path coefficients were non-significant. Noteworthy here was age, which was non-significant in both groups. We hypothesize that this occurred because of the restricted age range in the two groups.

[Insert figure 4 around here]

DISCUSSION

We aimed at extending the study on ethnic identity and its association with health and well-being into a relatively new and understudied population. To start with, we addressed the construct validity of the MEIM using confirmatory factor analysis. Results indicated that the MEIM retains the same measurement characteristics as those in the published literature. As observed in other populations, it measures two concepts, exploration and belonging, among both adults and young adults. The MEIM is the most widely used measure of ethnic identity and this is partly due to its good psychometric properties (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Smith & Silva, 2011). Our study confirms that it can be used in the Omani context just as it has been used in other contexts worldwide, adding to the literature on its cross-cultural validity. Among the context where its good psychometric properties have been observed include European (Guitart, 2010; Mastrotheodoros, Dimitrova, Motti-Stefanidi, Abubakar, & van de Schoot, 2012), African (Abubakar, van de Vijver, Mazrui, Arasa, & Murugami, 2011), Latin American (Esteban, Nadal, & Vila, 2010), and Australian (Dandy, Durkin, McEvoy, Barber, & Houghton, 2008) populations. However, this pattern of results has not always been reported, with some studies reporting less favourable psychometrics of the MEIM (Gaines Jr et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2012; Sobansky et al., 2010).

The importance of replication of the Western structure should not be underrated. In a highly globalized world we increasingly need to understand contextual factors that contribute to health and well-being across borders and boundaries. One of the main impediments for this is the lack of adequate measures that can be used across different contexts. The replication of the factorial structure of measures in different cultures and regions of the world from those where they were developed not only allows for the extension of the knowledge base, but also allows for the provision of tools that are useful for cross-cultural evaluations.

The second question we were interested in is to what extent socio-demographic variables including familial financial status, gender, and age were related to both identity and well-being. With the exception of gender none of the other variables were related to ethnic identity. Our results indicated that males were likely to explore more and feel more strongly about ethnic belonging. There is some as yet inconsistent evidence that both the rate and patterns of identity development varies across gender. The exact pattern and magnitude of variation has been observed to vary as a function of context and the domain under study. There is hardly any study on gender and ethnic identity formation in the Arab world. This makes it difficult to adequately interpret our findings. However, our findings could provide impetus for further work on understanding the patterns of identity formation in this very traditional context.

Age did not have any influence on ethnic identity. This is inconsistent with much of the theoretical underpinnings of ethnic identity. For instance, Phinney postulates that the younger the children, the more likely they are to want to engage in exploration about their identity, wanting to learn and know about their ethnic background. Why do we fail to see this effect in the current study? We believe this can be explained by context-specific aspects of Oman. Although Oman is a moderately heterogeneous society, the government is generally keen to promote a monocultural identity under the 'Arab' banner with a single language being spoken. Many Arab countries harbor a variety of ethnic groups. In many Arab countries, the preferred way of dealing with diversity is an emphasis on homogeneity and joint citizenship. The "Arab Spring" and tensions in the region due to ethnic and religious cleavages illustrate the limitations of such a policy. Still, such tensions are not present in Oman where the emphasis on homogeneity has been successful. The Arab ethnic identity of all citizens is taken for granted in Oman. There is quite some literature, based on Western studies, which shows that ethnic identity becomes more salient when it is more under threat. For example, the Rejection Identification Model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999) holds that rejection by the majority group will enhance the ethnic minority identity among the immigrants. As another example, Schalk-Soekar, Van de Vijver, and Hoogsteder (2004) found that the ethnic group identity of Dutch immigrant groups was stronger

when they felt more distance to the Dutch society. These models suggest that ethnic identity can be augmented by a negative trigger. Such triggers appear to be absent in Oman. Most of the youth would be expected not to spend significant amounts of time trying to learn more of their cultural background since it is not in any way under threat. In Phinney's developmental theory on identity formation three stages are proposed: achieved, moratorium, and foreclosure. Given the observed pattern of results and our knowledge of the Oman sociocultural context, we hypothesize that the students in our sample portrayed a foreclosed stage since they embraced their ethnic identity with pride with limited searching (Phinney, 1989, 1993). However, only a longitudinal design could firmly answer this question.

Despite the absence of a clear developmental trajectory, we observed that ethnic identity was positively associated with subjective well-being, which is in line with many other studies from different ethno-cultural groups and different regions of the world (Dandy, et al., 2008; Kiang, Witkow, & Champagne, 2013; Lisa Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006). There are two noteworthy points here. First, ethnic belonging was found to have a stronger positive influence on well-being than ethnic exploration. This pattern is likely to arise from the fact that ethnic belonging serves the universal need of belonging. A sense of belonging to different social groups has been observed to contribute positively to psychological well-being. Second, the positive association between ethnic identity and psychological well-being seems to be strongest for life satisfaction (21.7%) and not poor mental health (5.1% explained). This seems to be consistent with earlier research, for instance with the result that among people of color in the US, the impact of ethnic identity on well-being seems to be largely explained by its positive influence on positive personal attributes, while having a limited opportunity for buffering against psychopathology (Smith & Silva, 2011).

Other than ethnic variables, age, and familial income were observed to independently influence well-being. We observed that children from families with higher income reported higher life satisfaction than those from the lower income families. This is consistent with what has been observed elsewhere. In our sample, age was negatively correlated to life satisfaction and positively correlated to GHQ-12 implying that adolescents reported more psychological well-being compared to young adults. This is inconsistent with the general literature showing that older participants report higher well-being. The reasons why our study shows different pattern of results requires further investigations on other samples before any firm conclusions can be made.

Limitations

Our study largely uses self-report measures which are prone to self-presentation biases. Additionally, the study started by looking at the construct of ethnic identity from an etic (culture-comparative) perspective . Though we find meaningful relationship, we cannot exclude the possibility that we miss out important information. Future studies looking at contextual factors (including ethnic identity) using multi-informant and multi-method approaches are needed to warrant our conclusions.

Practical Implications

In very many contexts across the world, ethnicity and tribalism have often been a source of ingroup-outgroup relations, some of which may contribute to conflicts. Consequently, the discussion of ethnic identification has been slightly marred by negativity and even avoidance of the topic. However, what our study and many earlier studies indicate is that ethnic identification serves an important psychological function by giving youth a sense of belonging and affiliation. This belonging in turn is associated with enhanced mental health outcomes and life satisfaction. We would argue that the implications of the link between belonging and well-being may not yet have been fully absorbed in clinical practice. First, it is a challenge for practitioners and counselors to find ways to nurture this sense of belonging to an ethnic group without excluding the positive value arising from a strong sense of belonging to one's nation state. Second, an assessment of the

extent to which adolescents and youth have a sense of belonging and strong attachment could be incorporated in their practices as a potentially important indicator of health and psychological adjustment among the students.

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