

Relationship between meaning in Life, resilience, and well being among university students

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Abstract:-

The aim of the current research was explore perceived meaning in life as a psychological resource and its relationship with resilience and wellbeing.. A correlational research was carried out to understand the relationship between the three variables and 151 students currently enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs from various different universities participated in the study. Data collection was done using self report standardized questionnaires i.e. meaning in life questionnaire, brief resilience scale and WHO5 well being index. The findings show that Presence of meaning and search for meaning showed a significant positive relationship ($\rho = .520, p < .001$) and also there was a positive correlation between presence of meaning and well being ($\rho = .528, p < .001$). Search of meaning was also positively correlated with well being ($\rho = .436, p < .001$). There was a positive correlation between resilience and well being ($\rho = .202, p = .013$) as well as resilience and presence of meaning ($\rho = .235, p = .004$) and search for meaning ($\rho = .176, p = .031$). Hence, the results highlight the major role of meaning in life in the enhancement of well being and the importance of resilience and meaning in life in improving psychological functions in university students while contributing to the existing literature

Keywords: meaning in life, presence of meaning and search for meaning, resilience, well being, university students, positive psychology, young adults.

Introduction:-

One of the most important developmental stages of a human is young adulthood i.e. 18 to 24 as individuals go through various changes like social, psychological and academic changes in their lives. These changes lead them to face various challenges and stressors including interpersonal challenges, Academic competition, identity exploration, career uncertainty, adjustment to adulthood and other responsibilities that comes with it. Individuals' mental health and overall functioning can be influenced by these experiences and due to this helping student in maintaining positive functioning and identifying psychological strengths is now becoming an important area of research. Recently, positive psychology has not only focused on treating distress but also studied factors that can help individuals to thrive. Meaning in life, resilience and well being are the variables among most widely studied psychological constructs. They play a major role in helping individuals to cope with These constructs are considered important resources that help individuals cope during hard times, experience life satisfaction and maintain emotional equilibrium.

Meaning in life:-

Meaning in life means to have a feeling of self importance and that one matters, to be able to understand the aim or purpose of one's life, to be able to rationalize and have clarity in life in life (American Psychological Association, 2018). Meaning in life helps people in making sense of their various life experiences i.e. their past, present and future and gives them a reason to live (Steger M. F. 2022). This helps individuals in setting life goals, experiences and being motivated during hardships.

Resilience:-

Resilience is a process in which an individual familiarize themselves with difficult experiences of their life through emotional, behavioral and mental flexibility and adapting with internal and external demands. Various factors add in to how well individuals adjust with uncertainties, some of them are:- a. how an individual views the world and engage with it, b. quality and availability of social resources, coping strategies used (American Psychological Association, 2018). It is the ability to cope from difficult and stressful situations and bouncing back to a better emotional state after learning from mistakes (Barnett, 2001). Resilience involves internal strength, coping skills and supportive environmental resources rather than just being a fixed trait (Windle, 2011). Positive mental health outcomes and resilience have been constantly linked together. Studies highlight that people who have high resilience are more capable of maintaining wellbeing and emotional stability during stressful situations (Waugh & Sali, 2023).

Well being:-

Well being is a state of a state of satisfaction and happiness which include less stress, good mental and physical health and high quality of life (American Psychological Association, 2018). It includes subjective experiences of individual's mental state including positive affect, meaning, purpose, self acceptance, pleasure and life satisfaction and to the lengths one is able to function in social and personal realm properly (Dhanabhakym & Sarath, 2023). According to existing literature meaning in life, resilience, and well being are strongly interconnected. Meaning in life can help individuals in strengthening their resilience by facilitating them in remaining goal directed and interpreting their challenges in a positive manner. And so, it is seen that individuals with higher resilience are able to uphold their psychological well being during difficult times. Various such researches are done on adults, community populations, students and professionals which has shown positive relationship between these three variables (Arslan & Yildirim, 2021).

Although there is a rapid research growth, existing literature still has various limitations. Firstly, most of the recent studies were conducted at the time of covid 19 i.e. crisis situations or on clinical populations. There are fewer researches that studied all these three constructs or variables together in academic routine setting or between university students. Also limited studies are conducted on Indian population where students go through intense career and academic pressure and changing social demands. Hence, the present study aims to understand how the three variables relate to each other in context of Indian university students. The current research has been conducted to explore the psychological significance of perceived Meaning in life in relation to resilience and wellbeing among university students between the age range of 18 to 24 years. Studying the relationship between these variables can help in identifying psychological resources that can protect and support mental health of the exploring interventions that can help in enhancing well being in educational settings.

Review of literature:-

Huang,Y. et al. (2026). Examined self compassion as a key protector in university students and its link with suicidal ideation and also how meaning in life and resilience play a moderating role for stress. A sample of 905 participants was selected for the study that completed the standardized questionnaires and results showed that there was a negative association between suicidal ideation and self compassion and that self compassion helps in enhancement of meaning in life also increasing resilience that together reduces suicidal ideation. This shows how resilience and meaning in life plays a major role as protective factors and influences the outcomes of mental health.

Uluturk,B. et al. (2026). Studied the relationship between prosocial behavior, resilience and meaning in life among sports science students. For this 1288 students from 28 different universities were selected as samples that filled standardize questionnaires. Results showed that all three variables were positively correlated with each other and the relationship between meaning in life and resilience was mediated by pro social behavior. Hence, indicating that students are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors when they are highly resilient and this helps in enhancing their meaning in life.

Baykal,E. et al. (2026). Examined if resilience and meaning in life could influence anxiety and life satisfaction post covid. 259 working professional participated in this study. Results show that resilience is positively predicted by meaning and life and that ultimately has a negative influence on anxiety and positive influence of life satisfaction. Also the relationship between psychological outcomes and meaning in life was also mediated by resilience highlighting that other than enhancing well being meaning in life also strengthen resilience..

Jiang, L., et al. (2026). Examined the correlation between resilience, mental health outcomes and meaning in life and 5759 adolescents participated in the study. The findings indicated that there was a strong association between the variables i.e. meaning in life, greater life satisfaction, high resilience and low level of anxiety and depression. On the other hand, mixed associations were shown by search for meaning as relating to high distress sometimes. Resilience partially mediated well being and meaning in life as indicates by mediation analysis. Thus, highlighting that search for meaning might show fundamental psychological challenge even though one has a clear understanding that meaning helps in the enhancement of well being and resilience.

Russo-Netzer, P., et al. (2025). Explore the role of protective factors including meaning in life in promoting resilience in individuals with trauma related to war. It was a mixed method approach and the results revealed that the strongest predictor of resilience was optimism and other than that there were other variable i.e. presence of meaning and distress. Although the influence of meaning in life on resilience was lesser than other psychological factors but it still is a contributor for it. Thus, highlighting that resilience is multifaceted in nature and that there's a need for more psychological resources.

Zhou,S., et al. (2025). Examined the association between meaning in life, social support, resilience and cultural identity in university students. 974 students from university of China participated in this study and filled standardized questionnaires after which the results were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results showed meaning in life and cultural identity was positively correlated with each other and was mediated by social support and resilience. Thus, this shows how social and cultural factors are important in shaping identity while also highlighting the interconnectedness of these variables.

Seon, Y., & Smith-Adcock, S. (2023). Examined the role of meaning in life as a resilient factor in correlation of life satisfaction and bullying victimization in adolescents. A large dataset was used which suggested negative impact of bullying on life satisfaction was buffered by meaning in life. Even after experiencing victimization adolescents with greater meaning in life had better well being than others who did not. This shows that meaning in life plays a major role as a compensatory and protective factor in psychological functioning.

Rasheed, N., et al. (2022). Studied the functions of resilience as a mediator between well being and meaning of life during pandemic in college students. 302 students participated in this study (from Pakistan and Punjab). Results showed that there was an association between both well being and presence and search for meaning and resilience played a role of a mediator between them. Hence, highlighting the importance of resilience as a translator of meaning into a better psychological resource. .

Mohammed, A. & Sebastian, K. (2022). Examined the association between resilience, meaning in life and self control in young adults. 270 individuals between the age range of 18 to 25 years took part in this research. Standardized questionnaires assessing the three variables were filled by the participants. Findings suggested that resilience had a weak but positive association with all the other variables i.e. presence of meaning in life and self control and also self control also had a weak positive correlation with presence of meaning in life whereas search of meaning had no significant correlation with either of the variables i.e. self control or resilience.

Li, J. B., et al. (2021). Examined the association among subjective well being and in meaning in life through various studies using meta analysis. 147 studies were analyzed which reported the effect size of 756. Results revealed that well being and meaning in life had a moderate positive correlation whereas a small negative correlation was reports by search for meaning. Hence, this shows that wellbeing is significantly promoted by meaning while underlying dissatisfaction is reflected by search for meaning.

Arslan, G., & Yıldırım, M. (2021). Conducted a longitudinal study to examine the correlation between resilience, meaning in life and well being in the period of pandemic. Data collection was done two times by young adults. 172 people from university of Turkey between the age range of 18 to 40 years old participated in this study. The findings suggested that resilience was positively predicted by meaning in life and ultimately promoting greater wellbeing. The relationship between meaning in life and well being was mediated by resilience signifying the importance of meaning in life in contributing both directly and indirectly to psychological health.

Ostafin, B. D., & Proulx, T. (2020). Studied how meaning in life enhances resilience to stressors. 273 individuals participated in this study. Participants filled standardized questionnaires and then the results were analyzed. Findings indicated individuals experience low levels of psychological distress and reduction in negative thinking pattern when they have greater meaning in life. Thus, meaning in life play an important role in enhancing coping ability of individuals during hardships and acts as a protective factor.

Krok, D. (2018). Examined the relationship between wellbeing and different types of meaning in life in adolescents. 384 polish participants filled the standardized questionnaires i.e. personal meaning profile scale, meaning in life questionnaire, positive and negative affect schedule, PWB scale, and satisfaction with life scale. The results showed that greater well being was experienced by people with together presence of life meaning and searching for life meaning and the ones who had only one dimension had lower levels of well being. This indicates the function of life meaning in enhancing well being and also promoting psychological development during adolescence.

Du, H., et al. (2017). Examined the correlation among wellbeing and meaning of life and role of resilience in this relationship in children who were affected by parental HIV. 158 vulnerable children participated in the study and helped in providing data which was then analyzed. The results show the correlation between well being and meaning of life is moderated by resilience and also resulted in strengthened positive effects. This also highlights the role of resilience in enhancing protective function of meaning in life.

Aghababaei, H., et al. (2017). Analyzed the association between well being, resilience and meaning in life in students. 212 students participated in this study in which 100 were boys and 112 were girls (selected through stratified random multi staged sampling) and they filled the standardized questionnaires after which analysis was done using Pearson correlation. The results indicate that all the three variables i.e. well being, meaning in life and resilience are positively correlated with each other showing that greater the meaning in life better the levels of resilience and well being also signifying that well being can be determined by meaning in life.

1.2 Rationale

Mental health of university students is usually affected by various stressors in their life including stress regarding future career, academics, emotional challenges and pressure and expectations of society. So, it is important to identify resources that can help them to adjust. Students can acquire purpose and direction through meaning in life, and effective coping through resilience. All of this together can lead to good psychological well being. However, there are limited researches which studied all these variables together in Indian context, the aim of the present research is to have better insights into the relationship of these three variables together and present implications for interventions of positive psychology, student counseling and promote mental health.

Method-:**Aim-:**

This study aimed to explore perceived meaning in life as a psychological resource and its relationship with resilience and wellbeing in university students.

Objectives-:

- To study the relationship between resilience and perceived meaning in life.
- To study the relationship between wellbeing and perceived meaning in life.
- To study the relationship between wellbeing and resilience.
- Examining the levels of perceived meaning in life, wellbeing and resilience in university students.

Hypotheses-:

- H1-: there will be positive correlation between meaning in life and resilience.
- H2-: well being and meaning in life will have a positive correlation.
- H3-: there will be positive correlation between wellbeing and resilience.

Research design-:

Quantitative method of research has been followed in the present study. This design helps in exploring the relationship between the three variables (correlational design) without manipulating them and helps in attaining objective data, analyze it statistically and interpret the findings. Data collection was done using standardized self report measures at once following the cross sectional design.

Variables-:

- **Independent variable-:** perceived meaning in life
- **Dependent variable -:** resilience, well being

Sample and Its Selection-:

The sample size is 151 students currently enrolled in universities between the age group of 18 to 24 years. Sampling method used was purposive sampling so as to select participants who exactly meet the inclusion criteria of the current research and snowball sampling so as to reach out to more participants through referral that too meet the inclusion criteria and to efficiently collect data within time. Data collection was done via social media platforms i.e. whatsapp and instagram through Google forms.

Inclusion Criteria-:

1. Undergraduate and postgraduate university students.
2. Individuals between the age group of 18 to 24 years.
3. Individuals who voluntarily wanted to participate and provided informed consent.
4. Individuals who can read, understand and answer in English language.

Exclusion Criteria-:

1. Individuals not in the age range of 18 to 24 years
2. Individuals who provided incomplete responses.
3. Individuals who are currently not students.
4. Individuals who denied consent.
5. Individuals who do not understand English language.

Tool description:-**Table:- 1**

S no.	Name of the tool	Author and year	Item number	Reliability and validity
1.	Meaning in life questionnaire	Steger, M.F. (2005)	10	Cronbach alpha= .84 to .91, construct and criterion validity
2.	Brief resilience scale	Smith, B.W., et al (2008)	6	Cronbach alpha= 0.80 to 0.91, strong construct validity
3.	WHO 5 well being index	WHO (1998)	5	Cronbach alpha= >0.85 and construct validity

1. Meaning in life questionnaire (developed by Steger et al. in 2005):-

The MLQ has 10 items that helps in measuring two different dimensions i.e. presence of meaning and search for meaning. Likert scale is used to record responses and high score shows higher meaning in life. It has a good reliability (cronbach's alpha 0.84 to 0.91) and also construct and criterion validity due to which it is widely used in various psychological researches.

2. Brief resilience scale (developed by smith et al. in 2008):-

This scale helps to measure the ability of a person to recover from stress and hardships. Likert scale is used to record the responses high score means higher resilience. Cronbach's alpha is 0.80 to 0.91 showing good internal consistency and has good construct validity.

3. WHO5 well being index (developed by world health organization in 1998):-

This scale examines subjective well being which includes vitality, general interest and positive mood consisting of 5 items and good construct validity also cronbach's alpha higher than 0.85 higher the score greater the well being.

Procedure:-

Online survey method was used for data collection. Google form was created compiling all the questionnaires i.e. meaning in life questionnaire, brief resilience scale and WHO5 well bwing index and were shared via online platforms like whatsapp and instagram. Data was collected at a single point of time and 155 students currently enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs from various different universities participated in the study. Confidentiality of the responses provided by the participants was ensured and were only used for the research purpose. Aim of the research was informed to the participants on the first page of the Google form itself and also they were asked to provide informed consent as the participation was voluntary.

Statistical Analyses:-

- Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis.
- Calculation of mean and standard deviation was done.
- To examine the relationship between the variable Spearman rank order correlation was used as the data received was not normally distributed.
- $P < .05$ was the significance level.

Results-:**1. Descriptive Statistics-:****Table-:2**

(N = 151)

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
MLQ presence	22.30	5.61
MLQ search	25.10	5.58
BRS total	19.00	3.23
WHO5 total	16.10	4.69

According to the descriptive statistics the participants lie in moderate level for all the three variables i.e. meaning in life, resilience and well being. However, presence of meaning (m= 22.30) was lower than search of meaning (m= 25.10) according to the mean scores.

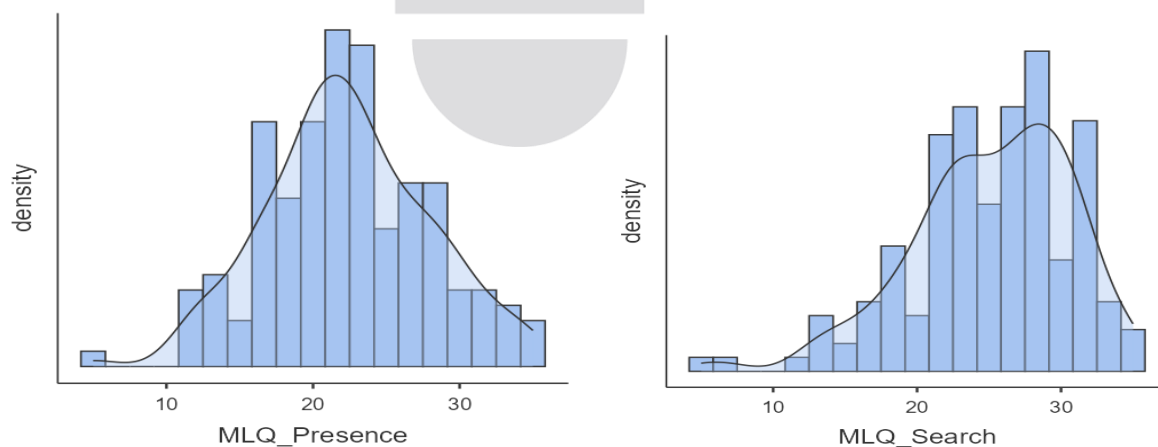
2. Normality Testing-:

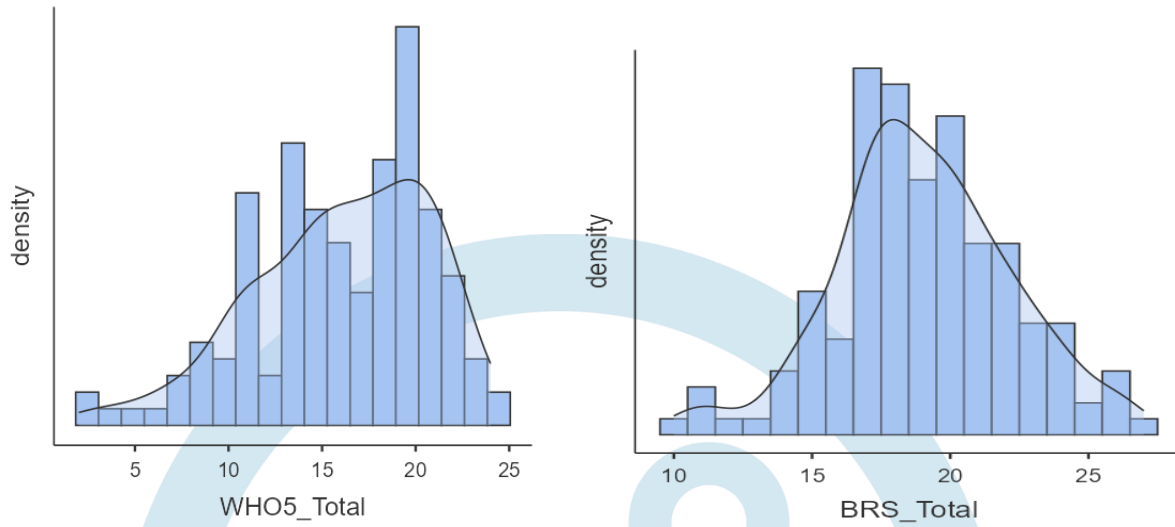
Data normality was examined by histograms (fig. 1) and conducting Shapiro Wilk test (table 3).

Table-:3

MLQ presence	P= .378	Normally distributed
MLQ search	P< .001	Not normal
BRS total	P= .047	Not normal
WHO5 total	P< .001	Not normal

Spearman correlation was used to analyze the data as assumption of normality was violated by most of the variables.

Graphical representation of the findings-:**Figure1-: histograms depicting distribution across variables**



3. Correlation Analysis:-

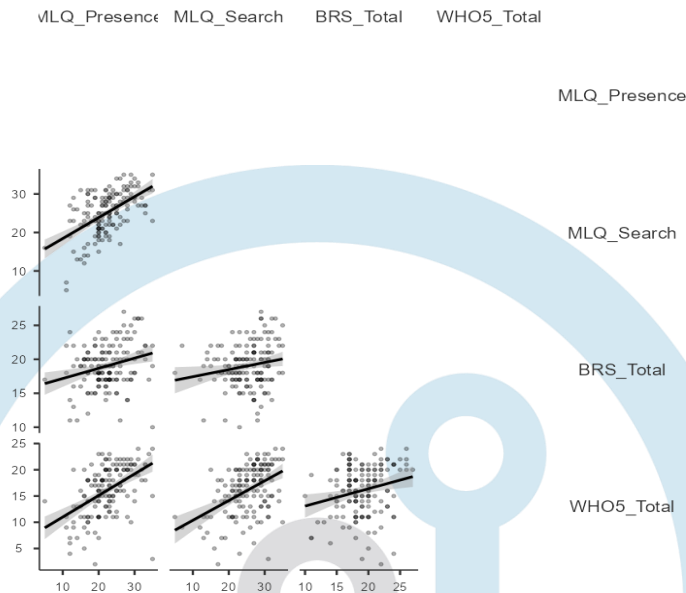
Table:- 4

Spearman's correlation matrix for study variables

(N = 151)

Correlation Matrix

			MLQ Presence	MLQ Search	BRS Total	WHO5 Total
MLQ presence	Spearman's rho	—				
MLQ search	Spearman's rho	0.520***		—		
BRS total	Spearman's rho	0.235**	0.176*		—	
WHO5 total	Spearman's rho	0.528***	0.436***	0.202*		—

Figure 2 -: relationship between variables depicted by Scatterplot matrix-:

- Plots suggesting positive correlation among the three variables.

Interpretation of the result-:

To examine the relationship among the three variables i.e. meaning in life, resilience and well being spearman rank order correlation was used. According to table-: 4 and figure-: 2 there is a positive correlation among the three variables. Presence of meaning and search for meaning showed a significant positive relationship ($\rho = .520, p < .001$). This shows that individuals who are engaged in search for meaning have greater sense of meaning in life also highlighting that presence and search co exist and are not mutually exclusive. Significant moderate positive correlation was seen between meaning in life and well being ($\rho = .528, p < .001$). This suggests that greater well being is associated with higher sense of meaning in life. Also there was a positive correlation between search of meaning and well being as well ($\rho = .436, p < .001$) this demonstrates that although lesser than presence of meaning but greater well being can also be linked with high levels of search for meaning. There was as a weak but statistically positive correlation between resilience and presence of meaning ($\rho = .235, p = .004$), search for meaning ($\rho = .176, p = .031$), and well-being ($\rho = .202, p = .013$). this suggests that greater well being and higher meaning in life is also associated with resilience. However the strength of correlation is low so resilience might have a These findings indicate that individuals with higher resilience tend to report slightly higher levels of meaning in life and well-being; however, the relatively low strength of these correlations suggests that resilience in these correlations may play a limited role. Hence, the findings suggests that well being is more strongly linked with meaning in life than resilience and also resilience and well being also have a weak but meaningful correlation and play an important role with the studies variables.

Discussion-:

Aim of the present research is to explore perceived meaning in life as a psychological resource and its relationship with resilience and wellbeing in university students. The results showed that although all of the three variables i.e. meaning in life, resilience and well being have a positive correlation between each other, there was a difference in their strengths that is well being and meaning in life especially presence of meaning were more strongly correlated with each other than that of resilience as it showed a significant but comparatively weaker correlation. Various available evidences and literatures also signify that there is a positive and stronger correlation between the two variables which are well being and meaning in life and also show meaning in life as a prominent psychological resource. A study found that resilience and well being has a positive correlation with meaning in life and its dimensions (Aghababaei et al. 2017). Another study highlighted the direct and indirect role of resilience in meaning in life as it helped in reducing anxiety and determining life satisfaction (Baykal et al. 2026). Hence, this shows that individuals tend to experience better well being when they greater meaning in life. It was also seen that the correlation of well being was stronger with presence of meaning than that of search for meaning. Similarly, a research showed that life satisfaction has stronger correlation with presence of meaning and showed weak correlation with search for meaning (Sameer et al. 2023). Another research demonstrated that search of meaning was correlated with psychological distress whereas resilience, high life satisfaction and presence of meaning has a strong positive correlation between them (Jiang et al. 2026). This suggests that presence of meaning and satisfaction in life has a strong positive association between them showing how important it is to have direction and purpose in life rather than actively searching for meaning in life and this also helps in enhancing well being. Thus, searching meaning in life rather than having a strong

purpose can also lead to dissatisfaction, confusion and distress in life which can ultimately effect mental health and well being of an individual.

On the other hand, the finding of the present study suggested that there was a weak positive correlation between well being and resilience. Instead of being a sole contributor for well being this weak but significant correlation demonstrates that resilience does determine well being but in a limited way. Various other available evidences also suggest the likewise as one of the study signifies that there are various factors like population that can determine the relationship and it is not always necessary that individual with high resilience will have greater well being or vice versa as the relationship between the two can be low or moderate too (Awan, et al. 2025). Another research conducted on nurses identified positive correlation between well being and resilience (Malini, et al. 2025). Additionally, many researches also demonstrate resilience indirectly contributing to psychological outcomes. A study showed that the association between well being and negative life events was mediated by resilience signifying that it can help buffer the adversities and related stress (Faircloth, 2017). Moreover, several studies highlight the indirect role of resilience in influence psychological outcomes. Moreover another study highlights the correlation between well being and meaning in life is mediated by resilience (Baykel, et al. 2026). Thus, this signifies that resilience can act as an effective coping mechanism during difficulties and help promote well being. Altogether, the results show that well being is determined differently by both meaning in life and resilience which means that resilience plays an important role as coping mechanism while indirectly functioning as a support system for people during hardships and distress. Meaning in life on the other hand plays a more central role especially presence of meaning helps people to have a direction, meaning, purpose and rationality in their lives. These findings can help in developing interventions to help improve mental health and well being of university students and also understand the framework underlying well being. This research can be helpful in encouraging in the development more strategies focused on enhancing well being, interventions and counseling programs that can help improve mental health, promote meaning in life and increase resilience in university students. This study might also be helpful for future researchers in investigating other related variables of positive functioning and mental health.

Summary:-

Current research aimed to assess the relationship between meaning in lie, resilience and well being among university students. The focus of the study was to understand the relationship the two aspects of meaning in life which are presence of meaning and search for meaning with resilience & well being. Standardized self report measures were used to collect data from the sample of 151 participants. To understand the variable distribution and correlation between the variables descriptive statistics and Spearman correlation were used respectively. The distribution of the variables was not normal so, Spearman correlation was used. Several important relationships were seen in the findings. Presence of meaning and search for meaning showed a positive relationship with each other. This shows that individual with better sense of presence of meaning have higher chances of engaging in search for meaning. In addition both well being and resilience are also positively correlated with both the aspects of meaning in life. Thus, this shows meaning in life plays a major role in the promotion of resilience and well being.

Conclusion:-

We can conclude that meaning in life contribute to well being (presence of meaning being the stronger contributor than search for meaning). It was seen individuals tend to have better well being when they perceive their lives as meaningful. Resilience was also found to be positively correlated with both well being and meaning in life. However it showed weaker relation with both variables. This shows the importance of having a meaning in life that can help in fostering psychological health. Thus, the study shows the role of meaning in life in promoting well being and resilience (although resilience plays a contributory role) in psychological functioning.

Limitations:-

There are various limitations in the present study that should be taken in to account. Firstly, cross sectional design was used in the study due to which the ability to draw casual inferences was restricted. Even though, important relationships were seen in meaning in life, it can still not be said if changes in one variable are directly caused by another variable. Secondly, the participants might have responded in socially desirable way leading to biasness in responses as the data was collected through self report measures. Also, participants might not have an accurate self perception and this can also affect the findings and lead to biasness in responses. Third, there can be a possible lack in diversity in the study which can result in limited generalisability for a broader population as there is a similar demographic group of all the participants and so that restricts the representation of different socio economic groups, cultures and age groups. Lastly, brief scale was used to measure the resilience which might not able to take into complete complexity of the construct as it being a multidimensional concept, this scale can only examine small aspect of it and thus, affecting its correlation with the other two variables.

Implications:-

Keeping aside the limitations, there are various implications of this study. The results show how meaning in life plays a major role in fostering well being. This can be relevant for mental health practices and counseling in which professionals can help clients in developing direction and greater sense of purpose in life by including meaning centered approaches. This can also be helpful in improving emotional well being and overall life satisfaction. In addition to the above it is also suggested that incorporating activities

aimed at meaning building in educational settings has a potential value as it can help in enhancing resilience and psychological growth by encouraging reflection on values. Personal goals and life purpose especially for young adults.

Future Suggestions:-

In future researches can add upon the present research in many ways. Firstly, longitudinal designs should be considered by the researchers as to better examine the casual association between meaning in life, resilience and well being and how do these variables influence each other in a long term. Secondly, to increase the generalizability of the findings more diverse and larger samples should be included in the future researches as to get a more comprehensive understanding about these correlations through participants from diverse backgrounds across populations. Third, to gain deeper insights on factors that might effect well being variables like coping strategies. Personality traits and Stress can be added and this will also help in identification of more mediating mechanisms and complex relationships. Lastly, to examine the effectiveness of therapeutic approaches or structured programs and enhance meaning in life more intervention based studies should be done as these interventions will also help in improving resilience and well being.

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