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## **Purpose, Development, Coping and Psychological Capital: The Role of Gender, Education and Socioeconomic Status**

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### **Abstract**

University represents a significant time for goal formation and alterations in life aspirations during these crucial years can have enduring, long-lasting effects. Understanding students' subjective and interior life, especially in higher education, is essential. The present study aims to determine the role demographics play in purpose, development, proactive coping and psychological capital of higher education students. A cross-sectional quantitative design was used, and purposive sampling was used to collect data from higher education students using surveys. The variables were measured using Purpose in Life Scale (Porges & Kolacz, 2018), Personal Growth and Development Scale (Anderson et al., 2020), Proactive Coping Scale (Greenglass et al., 1999) and Compound Psychological Capital Scale (Lorenz et al., 2016). The findings of the study show significant differences in purpose, development, proactive coping and psychological capital for gender, education system and socioeconomic status.

**Keywords:** *Purpose, Development, Proactive Coping, Psychological Capital, Higher Education, Gender Differences*



## Introduction

The positive psychology movement stimulated new research and applications beyond the discipline of traditional psychology. It offered a way to understand and enhance the welfare and growth of university communities, and as well as improving academic performance (Hall et al., 2024). The pursuit of purpose is one of the important aspects of positive psychology.

Purpose is a cognitive process that explains your goals in life and gives them a personalized meaning (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Purpose is the main aspect of happiness and mental wellbeing and a diminished sense of purpose can cause inadequate wellbeing and fatigue at work (Crea & Francis, 2022). A higher sense of purpose saves people from drug abuse (Kim et al., 2020). A deeper sense of purpose, development and growth on a personal level, and overall well-being contribute to an enhanced quality of life (González-Celis et al., 2016).

Personal development pertains to a specific aspect of personality growth connected to the journey of improving in a way that holds personal significance (Vittersø, 2014). Research has highlighted how important development, social interaction and well being are for independence and empowerment (King et. al., 2020). Additionally, it is also related to psychological wellbeing and dedication to one's career (Weigold et al., 2021).

Proactive coping or "future-oriented coping," is the anticipation of a stressor and an effort to manage it "ahead of time" by developing a strategic pathway for life events and gathering suitable psychological (subjective) resources (Bekhter et al., 2021). Bakracheva, (2019) found that wellbeing, competence, independence, satisfaction with life and relatedness are all results of proactive coping. Wu et. al. (2020) also found positive correlation between coping, psychological capital, and anxiety levels among Chinese university students.

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a core psychological factor of positivity of an individual as characterized by high self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency (Lorenz et al., 2016). Xue et al. (2023) found a negative correlation between psychological capital and moral distress and burnout. Meanwhile, Alat et al. (2021) found psycap to mediate the relationship social support and wellbeing during corona.

University represents a significant time for the formation of goals, alterations in life aspirations during these crucial years can have enduring, long-lasting effects (Pfund et al., 2020). Research has shown that the kind of goals students supported while in university were typically comparable to those, they embraced later in their lives (Hill et al., 2011). Although less studied, research shows the value of understanding university students' subjective and interior life (Ribeiro et al., 2023). While positive psychology in education is a growing global movement, most of the academic literature to date represents output from research conducted in western and rich societies (Hall et al., 2024).



## Materials and Methods

Using a cross-sectional research design data was collected from higher education students through surveys using purposive sampling. The questionnaire comprised of demographic information and purpose in life scale (Stephen & Kolacz, 2018), personal growth and development scale (Anderson et al., 2020), proactive coping scale (Greenglass et al., 1999) and compound psychological capital scale (Lorenz et al., 2016). Data was analyzed using SPSS V.26.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N= 330)*

	<i>f</i>	%	M	SD	Range
<b>Age</b>			30.18	6.04	23 - 58
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	174	52.7			
Female	156	47.3			
<b>Education System</b>					
Segregated	144	43.6			
Co-ed	186	56.4			
<b>Family System</b>					
Nuclear	179	54.2			
Joint	151	45.8			
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>					
Low	74	22.4			
Middle	137	41.5			
High	119	36.1			

Table 1 illustrates the summarized demographic variables of the present study reporting their frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and ranges. The age of participants ranged from 23 to 58 including 174 (52.7%) males and 156 (47.3%) females. From the sample of 330, 50% (N=165) of the participants were graduate students, and other half were postgraduate students from both co-ed (56.4%) and segregated (43.6%) education system. 179 (54.2%) participants belonged to nuclear families while 145 (45.8%) belonged to joint families of which



74 (22.4%) belonged to lower socioeconomic class, 137 (41.5%) to middle class and 119 (36.1%) to upper class.

**Table 2**

*T-test comparison of gender for Study Variables (N= 330)*

	Male n= 174		Female n= 156		t(df)	p	95% CI		Cohens' d
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			LL	UL	
<b>Purpose</b>	22.80	4.14	23.96	4.90	-2.3(305)	.02	-2.15	-0.17	.26
<b>Development</b>	50.25	12.22	53.49	10.41	-2.61( 327)	.01	-5.70	-0.79	.29
<b>Proactive Coping</b>	37.44	6.75	39.87	5.94	-3.45(328)	.00	-3.81	-1.05	.38
<b>Psycap</b>	45.24	8.71	47.69	8.21	-2.62(328)	.01	-4.28	-0.61	.29

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant difference in purpose, development, proactive coping and psycap among males and females. The mean purpose in females is greater than in males meaning that women have greater sense of purpose. Likewise, the mean development, proactive coping and psycap is greater in female than male signifying a higher level of development, proactive coping and psycap among women as compared to men. These results are in line with previous research that claims women have higher purpose in life (Xi et al., 2018) and purpose leads to higher development, proactive coping and psycap it explains women having more development, proactive coping and psycap.

**Table 3**

*T-test comparison of education system for Study Variables (N= 330)*

	Segregated n=144		Co-ed n=186		t(df)	p	95% CI		Cohens' d
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			LL	UL	
<b>Purpose</b>	22.56	4.76	23.96	4.28	-2.81(328)	.01	-2.38	-.42	.31
<b>Development</b>	49.33	12.22	53.68	10.56	-3.46(328)	.00	-6.82	-1.87	.38
<b>Proactive Coping</b>	36.91	6.76	39.89	5.96	-4.25(328)	.00	-4.36	-1.60	.47
<b>Psycap</b>	44.69	8.64	47.72	8.27	-3.25(328)	.00	-4.88	-1.18	.36

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference in purpose, development, proactive coping and psycap among students from different education systems. The mean purpose in coed students is greater than in students from segregated education systems meaning that students in

coed educational system have greater sense of purpose in life. Likewise, the mean development, proactive coping and psycap in coed students is greater than in students from segregated education systems. Both genders interact with same and opposite gender in different ways (Boundless, 2020) and a co-ed system provides a setting that is like the real world where both genders interact and work together. By providing a well-rounded education co-ed systems promote purpose, growth and personality development, proactive coping and psycap.

**Table 3**

*ANOVA comparison of socioeconomic status for Study Variables (N= 330)*

	Low n= 74		Middle n=137		High n=119		F	p	$\eta^2$
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
<b>Purpose</b>	22.64	4.33	22.90	4.50	24.32	4.59	4.40	.01	.03
<b>Development</b>	50.34	11.60	50.60	11.39	54.04	11.31	3.66	.03	.02
<b>Proactive Coping</b>	37.23	6.04	38.07	6.54	40.04	6.47	5.19	.01	.03
<b>Psycap</b>	44.46	7.29	45.99	8.57	48.08	9.01	4.44	.01	.03

Table 3 shows that there is a significant mean difference for socioeconomic status in purpose, development, proactive coping and psycap. Students from high class have higher mean purpose compared to both low and medium socioeconomic status. Similarly, for development, proactive coping and psycap, the mean value increases from low to middle to high socioeconomic status meaning students from high socioeconomic status have higher development, proactive coping and psycap.

**Table 4**

*Post Hoc analysis of socioeconomic status for Study Variables (N= 330)*

			Mean Difference	S.D	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
						LL	LL
<b>Purpose</b>	Low	Middle	-.26	.65	.69	-1.54	1.01
		High	-1.68*	.67	.01	-2.99	-.38
	Middle	High	-1.42*	.56	.01	-2.53	-.31
<b>Development</b>	Low	Middle	-.26	1.65	.87	-3.50	.98
		High	-3.70*	1.69	.03	-7.03	-.38
	Middle	High	-3.44*	1.43	.02	-6.26	-.63
<b>Proactive Coping</b>	Low	Middle	-.84	.92	.37	-2.65	.98
		High	-2.81*	.95	.00	-4.68	-.95
	Middle	High	-1.98*	.80	.01	-3.55	-.40
<b>PsyCap</b>	Low	Middle	-1.53	1.22	.21	-3.93	.88



	High	-3.62*	1.25	.00	-6.08	-1.15
Middle	High	-2.09*	1.06	.05	-4.18	.00

Note: The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 4 shows the mean differences between different socioeconomic status for purpose, development, proactive coping and psycap. For all the variables, there is no significant difference between lower and middle class meaning level of purpose, development, proactive coping and psycap is similar for lower and middle-class. Lower and middle class both struggle for resources and facilities and face vulnerabilities, meanwhile upper class lives an easy life (Neo et al., 2022). Lower and middle class share many similarities with each other including values and lifestyle and live equally difficult lives. These similar situations and values account for their similar personal development, proactive coping and psycap. However, there is significant difference between purpose, development, proactive coping and psycap of low class compared to high class and middle class compared high-class students. Literature has shown a positive relation of socioeconomic status with wellbeing (Huang et al., 2017) include purpose and development, it explains how people from higher socioeconomic status have higher purpose which leads to higher proactive coping, psycap and development.

### Conclusion

Purpose and development among higher education students is an essential but less explored construct that the current study aimed to explore. The main objective was to explore the role of demographics on purpose, development, proactive coping and psycap. The study found significant differences for purpose, development, proactive coping and psycap for gender, education system and socioeconomic status. Further research is needed to explore cultural specific reasons for differences.

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