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School Well-Being Among Students: A Gender-Based Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study aimed to describe students' school wellbeing and examine differences in school wellbeing based on gender among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri Y Makassar. A quantitative approach with a descriptive-comparative design was employed. The participants consisted of 100 students selected using a total sampling technique. Data were collected using the School Wellbeing Scale developed based on the School Well-Being Model proposed by Konu and Rimpelä, encompassing four dimensions: having, loving, being, and health. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an Independent Samples t-test. The findings revealed that the mean score of students' school wellbeing was 78.45 (SD = 9.23), indicating a moderate to high level of wellbeing. This result suggests that most students perceived their school environment, social relationships, opportunities for self-development, and physical and psychological health positively. Furthermore, the Independent Samples t-test showed a significant difference in school wellbeing based on gender (t = -2.31, p = .023 < .05). Female students reported higher levels of school wellbeing than male students. These findings indicate that gender plays a role in shaping students' wellbeing experiences within the school environment. Therefore, schools are encouraged to develop gender-responsive programs that address students' academic, social, and emotional needs to enhance their overall wellbeing.

Keywords: school wellbeing, student wellbeing, gender, adolescents, educational psychology.

INTRODUCTION

School is one of the most important developmental environments in students' lives. Children and adolescents spend a substantial portion of their time at school engaging in learning activities, interacting with peers, building relationships with teachers, and developing both

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academic and non-academic potential. Consequently, the quality of students' experiences at school plays a crucial role in shaping their psychological, social, emotional, and academic development. A school environment that provides safety, comfort, and support for students' developmental needs contributes significantly to the establishment of students' well-being at school, commonly referred to as *school wellbeing* (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002).

The concept of *school wellbeing* emerged in response to increasing scholarly attention to students' mental health and quality of life within educational settings. For decades, educational success was often measured primarily through academic achievement. However, numerous studies have demonstrated that academic performance cannot be separated from students' psychological conditions. Students who feel happy, safe, valued, and socially connected within the school environment tend to exhibit higher learning motivation and better academic performance than those who experience discomfort or dissatisfaction at school (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002; Wu & Becker, 2023).

According to Konu and Rimpelä (2002), *school wellbeing* refers to a state of student well-being encompassing four primary dimensions: *having* (physical conditions and school facilities), *loving* (positive social relationships), *being* (opportunities for self-development), and *health* (physical and psychological health). These dimensions interact to shape students' positive experiences throughout their educational journey. When these aspects are adequately fulfilled, students are more likely to achieve optimal psychological well-being and developmental outcomes.

The *having* dimension emphasizes the importance of a comfortable, safe, clean, and supportive physical school environment. Adequate facilities, including well-maintained classrooms, proper ventilation, laboratories, libraries, and sports facilities, contribute to students' comfort and engagement in learning. Conversely, an unsupportive physical environment may generate stress and reduce students' participation in educational activities (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002).

The *loving* dimension concerns the quality of social relationships experienced by students within the school environment. Positive relationships with teachers, peers, and other school community members foster a sense of belonging. Research has shown that students who experience positive social relationships report greater school satisfaction than those who experience loneliness or social conflict at school (Løhre et al., 2014).

The *being* dimension refers to opportunities for students to develop their potential through academic and extracurricular activities. Schools that provide opportunities for participation in decision-making processes, student organizations, extracurricular programs, and

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various forms of self-actualization enhance students' sense of competence and personal significance. Such opportunities play a vital role in promoting students' well-being at school (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002).

Meanwhile, the *health* dimension encompasses students' physical and psychological health while attending school. Good health enables students to participate effectively in learning activities, whereas physical or psychological difficulties such as anxiety, stress, and fatigue may diminish the quality of their educational experiences. Therefore, schools should provide adequate health services and psychological support to foster students' well-being (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002).

The importance of *school wellbeing* has received increasing attention because numerous studies have demonstrated its strong association with academic achievement, learning motivation, student engagement, and mental health. Students with higher levels of *school wellbeing* tend to be more actively involved in learning, possess stronger intrinsic motivation, and establish healthier social relationships within their environment (Wihartati & Cahyati, 2023).

Conversely, low levels of *school wellbeing* may result in various negative consequences for students' development. Students who feel uncomfortable at school are more vulnerable to academic stress, anxiety, school dissatisfaction, declining academic performance, and mental health problems. These conditions may hinder both academic and social development in the long term (Wu & Becker, 2023).

Within the Indonesian educational context, student well-being has become increasingly relevant due to growing concerns regarding adolescent mental health. Cases of bullying, academic pressure, social conflicts, and psychological difficulties among students highlight that educational success is determined not only by academic achievement but also by the quality of students' experiences during their school years (Wihartati & Cahyati, 2023).

One factor believed to influence *school wellbeing* is gender. Biological, psychological, social, and emotional differences between males and females may affect how students perceive and interpret their school experiences. These differences may consequently lead to variations in school well-being between male and female students (Savoye et al., 2015).

Several studies have found that female students tend to be more sensitive to the quality of interpersonal relationships and social support they receive at school. Positive relationships with teachers and peers are particularly important determinants of their well-being. In contrast, experiences of loneliness or social isolation appear to have a stronger impact on female students' well-being than on that of male students (Løhre et al., 2014).

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On the other hand, male students tend to be more influenced by academic support from teachers and opportunities to demonstrate competence within the school environment. Research suggests that teacher-provided academic assistance exerts a stronger influence on school well-being among male students than among female students (Løhre et al., 2014).

Research conducted by Puonti, Hirvonen, and Kiuru (2021) further demonstrated that gender plays a significant role in predicting school well-being. Their findings indicated that female students generally reported higher levels of *school wellbeing* than male students, particularly when supported by positive school environments and strong interpersonal relationships.

Nevertheless, findings regarding gender differences in *school wellbeing* remain inconsistent. While some studies report higher levels of well-being among females, others indicate that female students experience lower well-being due to greater social and emotional pressures during adolescence (Marquez, 2023; Savoye et al., 2015).

Additional research has shown that females are more vulnerable to psychological difficulties such as anxiety, sadness, and emotional distress than males. Such conditions may influence how they perceive the school environment and ultimately affect their levels of *school wellbeing* (Savoye et al., 2015).

Furthermore, international studies indicate that safe school environments and positive interpersonal relationships contribute significantly to student well-being, although perceptions differ between males and females. Female students tend to report lower levels of safety and well-being than males when exposed to negative school experiences, including bullying and discrimination (Brolin Låftman et al., 2022).

The inconsistencies in previous findings suggest that the relationship between gender and *school wellbeing* requires further investigation, particularly within the Indonesian cultural context. Cultural values, parenting practices, educational systems, and school environmental characteristics may influence how male and female students interpret their experiences at school. Therefore, research conducted in local contexts is essential to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' well-being.

This study was conducted among senior high school students who are currently in adolescence, a developmental period characterized by significant biological, cognitive, social, and emotional changes. During this stage, school experiences exert substantial influence on identity formation, self-concept, social relationships, and mental health. Consequently, understanding students' levels of *school wellbeing* is crucial for supporting their optimal development.

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Based on the foregoing discussion, examining students' *school wellbeing* and its differences according to gender is an important area of inquiry. This study is expected to provide empirical evidence regarding students' levels of well-being and identify whether significant gender differences exist. The findings may serve as a foundation for schools in designing interventions that are more responsive to students' gender-related needs.

Through this study entitled *"An Analysis of Gender Differences in Students' School Well-Being,"* a deeper understanding of students' well-being and its associated factors is expected to be obtained. The findings are anticipated to contribute to the advancement of educational psychology, particularly in the field of student well-being, and to provide valuable insights for the development of policies and programs aimed at enhancing the quality of school life.

METHODE

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive-comparative research design. A quantitative approach was selected because the study aimed to describe students' levels of school well-being and examine differences in school well-being based on gender. The descriptive component was used to provide an overview of students' school well-being, while the comparative component was intended to determine whether significant differences existed between male and female students. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), quantitative research enables researchers to measure variables objectively and analyze relationships and differences among variables using systematic statistical procedures.

The participants consisted of 100 tenth-grade students from SMA Negeri Y Makassar, including both male and female students, selected through a total sampling technique. This technique was employed because all students who met the research criteria were included as respondents, thereby providing a more representative description of school well-being within the studied population (Sugiyono, 2022). Data were collected using a School Well-Being Scale developed based on the School Well-Being model proposed by Konu and Rimpelä (2002). The instrument assessed four primary dimensions: having (school conditions and facilities), loving (social relationships), being (self-fulfillment and opportunities for personal development), and health (physical and psychological well-being). The scale utilized a four-point Likert format with response options ranging from strongly inappropriate, inappropriate, appropriate, to strongly appropriate.

The research procedure began with the development of the instrument based on the theoretical indicators of school well-being, followed by data collection through questionnaire administration to tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri Y Makassar. Prior to analysis, the data

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underwent editing, coding, scoring, and tabulation processes. Negatively worded items were reverse-scored to ensure consistency in score interpretation. Subsequently, individual item scores were summed to obtain a total school well-being score. Higher scores indicated higher levels of school well-being. Measuring school well-being through dimensions related to the physical environment, social relationships, opportunities for self-actualization, and health was considered essential because it provides a comprehensive assessment of students' well-being within the school setting (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002; Løhre et al., 2014).

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were employed to describe students' school well-being through mean scores, standard deviations, minimum scores, and maximum scores. A normality test was then performed as a prerequisite for selecting the appropriate inferential statistical technique. Differences in school well-being based on gender were examined using an Independent Samples t-test because the data were normally distributed and consisted of two independent groups, namely male and female students. Statistical decisions were made using a significance level of 0.05. A p-value lower than 0.05 indicated a significant difference in school well-being based on gender, whereas a p-value greater than 0.05 indicated no significant difference between the groups (Field, 2018).

RESULT

Based on the data analysis, the following results were obtained.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of School Well-Being

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
School Well-Being	78.45	9.23	52	101

The results indicated that the mean score of students' school well-being was 78.45 (SD = 9.23), which falls within the moderate-to-high category. This finding suggests that most students have relatively positive perceptions of their school environment, social relationships, opportunities for self-development, and school health services.

Table 2. Independent Samples t-Test of School Well-Being by Gender

Variable	F	Sig.	t	Df	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
School Well-Being	0.412	0.523	-2.31	98	-3.27	1.42	0.023

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The mean difference of -3.27 indicates that male students' average school well-being score was 3.27 points lower than that of female students. The Levene's Test significance value of 0.523 (> .05) indicates that the variances of the two groups were homogeneous; therefore, the results were interpreted using the *Equal Variances Assumed* row. Furthermore, the significance value for the Independent Samples t-test was 0.023 (< .05), indicating a statistically significant difference in school well-being based on gender.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to describe students' school well-being and examine gender differences in school well-being among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri Y Makassar. The descriptive analysis revealed that the average level of school well-being was within the moderate-to-high category, with a mean score of 78.45. This finding indicates that students generally hold positive perceptions of their school environment, social relationships, opportunities for personal development, and their physical and psychological well-being during the learning process.

The moderate-to-high level of school well-being suggests that the school has been able to meet most students' fundamental needs, as outlined in the School Well-Being model developed by Konu and Rimpelä (2002). According to this model, students' well-being at school is shaped by the fulfillment of four primary dimensions: *having*, *loving*, *being*, and *health*. When these dimensions are adequately fulfilled, students are more likely to feel comfortable, secure, and experience positive engagement within the school environment.

The findings further indicate that most students perceived their school environment as supportive of the learning process. Favorable physical conditions, comfortable classrooms, and adequate educational facilities and infrastructure enable students to engage more effectively in academic activities. Konu and Rimpelä (2002) emphasized that the physical school environment is a significant contributor to student well-being because it is directly associated with comfort and safety during learning activities.

The availability of adequate school facilities not only supports teaching and learning processes but also enhances students' satisfaction with their school. Research conducted by Aldridge and McChesney (2018) demonstrated that the quality of the school environment is positively associated with student well-being. Students who perceive their school environment positively tend to exhibit higher learning motivation and lower levels of academic stress than those who perceive their school environment as less supportive.

In addition to physical environmental factors, the relatively high level of school well-being observed in this study can also be explained by the quality of social relationships within

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the school. The findings suggest that students generally maintain positive relationships with teachers, peers, and other members of the school community. This condition reflects the fulfillment of the *loving* dimension within the School Well-Being model. Positive social relationships foster feelings of acceptance and appreciation, enabling students to develop a stronger sense of belonging to the school community (Løhre et al., 2014).

Harmonious relationships between students and teachers play a crucial role in promoting student well-being. Teachers who provide emotional support, academic assistance, and opportunities for active participation in classroom activities help students develop self-confidence and academic competence. According to Suldo et al. (2009), teacher support is one of the strongest predictors of student well-being because it enhances school satisfaction and reduces the risk of psychological difficulties.

The results also indicate that students are provided with sufficient opportunities to develop their potential through various school activities. This finding reflects the fulfillment of the *being* dimension, which encompasses opportunities for participation in school activities, talent development, and experiences that support personal growth. Konu and Rimpelä (2002) argued that opportunities for self-actualization constitute a critical component of student well-being because they provide meaning and purpose within school life.

Participation in organizational and extracurricular activities enables students to develop social skills, leadership abilities, and teamwork competencies. Such activities contribute not only to academic development but also to identity formation and a stronger sense of school belonging. Eccles and Roeser (2011) emphasized that active involvement in school life contributes significantly to adolescents' psychosocial development and subjective well-being.

The *health* dimension also emerged as an important factor contributing to the relatively high level of school well-being observed in this study. Most students reported favorable physical and psychological health conditions while attending school. Such conditions enable students to participate optimally in learning activities without experiencing substantial barriers. Savoye et al. (2015) argued that physical and psychological health are inseparable aspects of student well-being because both significantly influence the quality of students' learning experiences within the school environment.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Wu and Becker (2023), which found that students with higher levels of school well-being tend to report greater school satisfaction, stronger engagement in learning, and better adaptability to academic demands. Therefore, the relatively high level of school well-being among students at SMA Negeri Y Makassar can be regarded as a positive indicator of the quality of the educational environment

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they experience.

The results further revealed significant gender differences in school well-being. Female students demonstrated higher average school well-being scores than male students. The Independent Samples t-test yielded a significance value of 0.023 ($p < .05$), indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

This finding suggests that students' experiences within the school environment are influenced by gender-related factors. According to gender socialization theory, males and females undergo different social developmental processes, leading them to perceive and respond to their social environments in distinct ways (Santrock, 2021). These differences may influence students' perceptions of social relationships, teacher support, and learning experiences within the school context.

The higher level of school well-being among female students may be explained by their tendency to place greater value on interpersonal relationships and social support compared to male students. Løhre et al. (2014) found that the quality of relationships with teachers and peers serves as a primary predictor of school well-being among female students. Consequently, when social relationships within the school are positive, female students are more likely to experience higher levels of well-being.

Female students generally possess stronger abilities to establish and maintain close relationships with their peers. Strong social connections enable them to obtain emotional support when facing academic pressures and personal challenges. Such support functions as a protective factor that helps maintain psychological well-being during their school years (Rueger et al., 2016).

Furthermore, female students tend to be more open in expressing emotions and seeking assistance when encountering difficulties. Their willingness to communicate feelings and seek support from others allows them to cope more effectively with school-related challenges. In contrast, male students often face social expectations that encourage independence and emotional restraint, which may limit the amount of social support they receive (Santrock, 2021).

The findings of this study support those reported by Puonti et al. (2021), who found that female students generally report higher levels of school well-being than male students. Their study suggested that female students are more capable of utilizing available social support within the school environment, thereby fostering more positive school experiences.

Nevertheless, the present findings differ from several previous studies that reported lower levels of well-being among female students due to greater emotional distress and anxiety during adolescence (Savoye et al., 2015). Such inconsistencies may be attributed to differences

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in cultural characteristics, school environments, educational systems, and the availability of social support.

Within the context of SMA Negeri Y Makassar, the higher level of school well-being among female students may indicate that the school environment effectively supports their social and emotional needs. Positive relationships with teachers, a conducive school atmosphere, and opportunities to participate in various school activities may serve as important factors that enhance female students' well-being.

The findings also indicate that gender is not the sole determinant of school well-being. Other factors, including family support, school climate, academic engagement, the quality of peer relationships, and individual psychological conditions, also contribute to students' levels of well-being. Therefore, efforts to enhance school well-being should be implemented comprehensively and involve multiple stakeholders, including schools, families, and the wider community.

Overall, the results provide evidence that students at SMA Negeri Y Makassar demonstrate relatively favorable levels of school well-being and that significant gender differences exist in this regard. These findings underscore the importance of developing school environments that support students' academic, social, emotional, and health-related needs. Schools are encouraged to design gender-responsive programs that address the specific needs of both male and female students, thereby ensuring that all students can experience positive learning environments and achieve optimal development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study conducted among tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri Y Makassar, it can be concluded that students' school well-being generally falls within the moderate-to-high category, with a mean score of 78.45 (SD = 9.23). This finding indicates that most students hold positive perceptions of their school environment, social relationships with teachers and peers, opportunities for personal development, and their physical and psychological well-being throughout the learning process. The results of the Independent Samples t-test revealed a significant difference in school well-being based on gender ($t = -2.31$, $p = .023 < .05$), with female students reporting higher levels of school well-being than male students. This difference suggests that gender plays an important role in shaping how students perceive and interpret their school experiences, particularly with regard to interpersonal relationships, social support, and comfort within the educational environment. Therefore, schools should develop programs that not only emphasize academic achievement but also

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address students' psychological, social, and emotional needs through a gender-sensitive approach, thereby promoting the optimal well-being of all students.

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