

Gifted students: Analysis among psychological problems, social, and emotional well-being

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Abstract: Gifted and talented learners experienced life's storms and stresses just like their peers. However, because of their unique characteristics, they also dealt with some psychological issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression, which are closely related to their gifted characteristics. This research aims to examine: (a) psychological problems, (b) psycho-social and emotional well-being, and (c) the connection between gifted and talented students' wellbeing and psychological issues. This research design uses descriptive quantitative methods. A series of questions (DASS) were used to gather data from 112 gifted students, who were involved in this research and identified as gifted students. Next, the DASS and Social Well-Being questionnaires were collected and compared, to determine psychological problems and social well-being among gifted students. Descriptive (mean) and inferential analyzes were carried out on quantitative data. Analysis shows that there are psychological problems in gifted students at school, namely depression, stress and anxiety. The findings indicate that stress is one of the most prevalent issues (mean=33.8), followed by anxiety (mean=33.2) and depression (mean=24.9). Apart from that, the research results also show a negative correlation between psychological problems and well-being.

Keywords: *Anxiety, Depression, Gifted and talented, Social welfare, Stress.*

1. Introduction

There are several psychological problems experienced by students at school such as depression, anxiety and stress. Gifted students are very vulnerable to psychological problems and it can affect their well-being [1]; [2]. Depression is identified as a specific mood or emotional condition marked by feelings of guilt or low self-worth, along with a reduced ability to find pleasure in life [3]. Depression is also described as an illness that affects the body, mood, and thoughts, impacting how a person performs daily activities. Depression is not the same as feeling sad. Individuals who are depressed often exhibit a range of symptoms, including sorrow, desperate, low self-worth, diminished interest in daily activities, a lack of appetite, recurring thoughts of death or suicidal behavior, and difficulty sleeping [4].

Anxiety is described as an intense and uncomfortable sense of nervousness or sadness triggered by a situation that is feared [5]. Anxiety is also a response that involves multiple systems [6]. It typically happens when a person is in a fight-or-flight situation and involves a combination of biochemical changes in the body. Signs of anxiety can include nausea, trembling, shortness of breath, sweating, and a rapid heartbeat.

Hans Selye stated that the term "stress" was coined by an endocrinologist [7]. He stated that stress is the body's general reaction to any demands made upon it. He explained that stress can be categorized in two ways: distress, which arises from negative situations, and eustress, which results from positive situations [8]. Stress can also be described as the body's overall reaction to significant physical, emotional, or mental pressures, whether they come from oneself or others. While striving to meet deadlines, managing challenging people, or receiving poor grades are stressful, so too are the

excitement of playing football, falling in love, and being chosen for a special program for gifted students.

Gifted students experience stress from three main sources: situational, self-inflicted, and existential stresses [9]; [10]. Situational stress arises from conflicts between personal values and those of others, interpersonal discord, insufficient intellectual stimulation or challenges, threats to emotional or physical health, inadequate resources for task completion, and time limitations. Gifted students also often experience self-inflicted stress due to setting excessively high expectations for themselves, which can lead to a fear of failure, a fear of success, negative self-talk, emotionally charged beliefs, catastrophizing, and excessive worrying. Meanwhile, existential stress involves a deep sense of worry, idealism, frustration with fate, feelings of isolation, and a strong desire for meaning and purpose.

There are several definitions of gifted children because no single definition is universally accepted, not even by the majority. The phrase "gifted child" was originally coined by Francis Galton [11]. He referred to gifted adults who showed extraordinary talents in several fields as as talented as a talented chemist. Lewis Terman builds upon Galton's perspective on gifted children as those who have a high IQ [12]. Terman's study found that IQ alone cannot predict the success of gifted children in adulthood.

Gifted students are defined as those who have an IQ range between 125-140 on an intelligence test [13]. The majority of people score between 85 and 115, with 100 as the average. This range is viewed as typical, and the further a child deviates from this average, the greater the need for specialized educational support. Apart from high IQ scores, gifted students also have extraordinary talents. Extraordinary talent is an individual's capability to execute a skill at an advanced level that cannot be achieved by others until later years [14]. For instance, a three-year-old might be able to read. In another instance, a third-grader, or a nine-year-old, could play the piano with the proficiency of an 18-year-old with years of study. However, if a child's extraordinary talent lies in a non-academic area like music or art, they might not be recognized as gifted by schools, as most gifted program assessments focus on academic abilities or achievements [15]. Not only are exceptionally gifted, gifted students usually have high achievements. Even if gifted children don't always achieve high grades, they often excel on achievement tests. Their love for learning, combined with their strong memory and rapid learning ability, typically leads to success. However, if a gifted child becomes disengaged, their school performance may suffer, even though they may still perform well on achievement tests.

Gifted students differ from their typical peers in various areas of development, including physical and psychomotor, cognitive, spiritual, emotional, and social aspects [13]. Research in educational environments shows that gifted students often face significant social exclusion in regular classrooms, which can result in prolonged emotional stress [16]; [17]. Additionally, gifted students are often linked to [18], emotional instability, which manifests in behaviors like heightened sensitivity, feelings of exclusion, and fastidiousness, influenced by their distinct personal traits and environmental factors [19]; [20]. In addition to social and emotional difficulties [2], gifted students also face more affective and psychological challenges than their peers. [21]. Some of these problems include anxiety, identity formation and self-esteem [22].

Social well-being refers to the sense of connection with others and the community, serving as a measure of how people perceive their relationships and the power of those connections [23]. Gifted and talented students tend to prefer socializing with older children and adults because they are less interested in peers with a lower mental age and gravitate towards friends who are more similar to themselves [24]. They interact well with adults but may struggle when playing with peers who are less skilled [25]; [26].

Emotional well-being refers to the depth and intensity of emotions, including complex and extreme feelings, heightened sensitivity, empathy towards others, and challenges in adapting to change [18]; [27]. Overall, gifted children typically demonstrate better emotional adjustment compared to their non-gifted peers. However, some studies suggest that this may be more closely related to socioeconomic factors rather than intellectual differences [28]. They possess a lot of energy, which can lead to emotional excitability, heightened sensitivity, rapid and repeated speech, an overflow of imagination,

and emotional responses that may either be intensified or dampened [29]. Psychological well-being is the feeling of how happy or satisfied we feel with life. This closely resembles other terms that describe positive mental states, like enjoyment or contentment.

There are three points of view regarding gifted students [30]. The first is that gifted students demonstrate a greater level of adjustment compared to non-gifted students. Because of their cognitive capacity, gifted students possess a deeper self-awareness, a greater understanding of their surroundings and others, and are adept at managing stress. Based on [31] who has conducted research longitudinally, gifted individuals tend to experience fewer instances of mental health issues and difficulties with adjustment. [32] states that gifted students are happy, popular and healthy students. Compared to non-gifted students, they are less prone to mental health issues. The second point is that gifted students are those who fall at the top of the academic ability curve. At this level, the tail of the bell curve can extend over a considerable length, indicating progressively more extreme variations (Peterson, in [33]. Gifted or high-ability students are those who have no intellectual friends at school, are the butt of jokes in class because they are considered "nerds" and feel socially isolated because of their intellectual abilities [34]. They are always misunderstood, ridiculed by their classmates, hated even by teachers "for being too smart", ostracized for being too precocious, students, living a life full of special challenges and pressures. Too often, they are made to feel like misfits, their brilliance is mistaken for a troublesome and uncontrollable temperament, and their perfectionist behavior is mistaken for procrastination [35]; [11].

A third point of view is that gifted children are more susceptible to mental illness and they are unable to adjust to emotional and social problems, especially during adolescence and adulthood [36]. [37] originally described highly abled people as who are weak, unpopular and disturbed. [38] points out that gifted students (IQ above 180) experience difficulties in educational and social adjustment.

Regarding stress, research indicates that gifted students often face different kinds of stress, including unrealistic expectations from their parents and high demands from their teachers [39]. Because gifted students experience unique stress from their environment due to their label, recognizing the sources of stress and the types of reactions to these stressors can assist counselors in enhancing the psychological well-being of gifted students [21]; [40]. Research on gifted students' self-esteem is still debated, yet examining how stress levels affect their well-being is crucial. This will help educators, parents and counselors to prepare better conditions for gifted students. The objectives of this research are as follows:

- a. To identify the level of psychological problems
- b. To check psycho-social and emotional well-being.
- c. To examine the relationship between psychological problems and well-being

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach, utilizing non-probability sampling with a conditional sampling method (purposive sampling); that is, a sampling method that includes gifted students at SMPN 10 Malang during the 2023-2024 school year. This consideration is that the gifted students referred to in this research are students who have an IQ of 130 or 140 (Kirk & Gallagher in [41]. Based on the criteria that have been set and the documents held by the Guidance and Counseling unit, there were 112 students who met the criteria. The sample characteristics observed by the researcher were gender and class, as in the table below.

Table 1.
Sample distribution by gender and class.

No.	Variable	Categorical	Amount	
			N	(%)
1	Gender	Male	35	31.2
		Female	77	68.8
2	Class	VII	41	36.7
		VIII	36	32.1
		IX	35	31.2

This research involved collecting data by distributing questionnaires to the participants. The data were tabulated using two questionnaires. The first questionnaire, Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS), developed by Lovibon and Lovibond [42] was used to determine each student's stress level, consisting of 42 questions related to a person's stress, anxiety and depression. The second questionnaire is a social welfare questionnaire which is used to determine students' social welfare which consists of seven parts.

Table 2.
DASS 42 questionnaire grid.

Variables measured	Question number in the questionnaire
Stress	1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 18, 22, 27, 29, 32, 33, 35, 39
Anxiety	2, 4, 7, 9, 15, 19, 20, 23, 25, 28, 30, 36, 40, 41
Depression	3, 5, 10, 3, 16, 17, 21, 24, 26, 31, 34, 37, 38, 42

The measurement questionnaire uses an ordinal scale. Each question/statement has 4 scores, namely 0, 1, 2, and 3. Table 2 depicts the DASS 42 measurement scores. After obtaining the measurement results (total score value for each variable), then each variable (stress, anxiety, and depression) will be categorized into several categories, namely normal, mild, moderate, severe and very severe. The DASS 42 questionnaire assessment categories are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
DASS 42 measurement scores.

Score	Description
0	Doesn't suit you at all, or never
1	Conforms to yourself to some degree, or sometimes
2	Conforms to yourself to a reasonable extent, or quite often
3	Suits you very well, or very often

Table 4.
DASS 42 questionnaire categories.

DASS-42 questionnaire categories	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
Normal	0 - 14	0 - 7	0 - 9
Light	15 - 18	8 - 9	10 - 13
Medium	19 - 25	10 - 14	14 - 20
Weight	26 - 33	15 - 19	21 - 27
Very Heavy	34+	20+	28+

Source: Lovibond, S.H.& Lovibond, P.F. (1995, in health focus psychology.com.au)

The measuring instrument employed in this research is a standard one, so initial validity and reliability tests were not conducted. These tests were performed after data collection. The validity test for 3 out of the 14 items in the DASS 42 questionnaire was done using the Pearson product-moment method. After collecting the data, it was found that the Pearson correlation value was positive and valid,

exceeding 0.532 for all items related to stress, anxiety, and depression. The reliability of the measurement tool was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, and the results for 3 of the 14 items on the DASS 42 questionnaire indicated reliability scores of 0.951 for stress, 0.943 for anxiety, and 0.952 for depression. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables are in the reliable category.

Subsequently, the DASS and Social Well-Being questionnaires were administered and analyzed to evaluate psychological issues and social wellness among gifted students based on information coding units and categories relevant to the research. Descriptive (mean) and inferential analyzes were carried out on quantitative data. Questionnaire data were analyzed using SPSS data software.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Findings

A total of one hundred and twelve students identified as gifted learners at SMPN 10 Malang City for the 2023/2024 academic year were the subjects of this research. The percentage of female students is about twice that of male students. The number of female students was seventy-seven people representing 68.8%, while the number of male students was 35 people and was represented by 31.3% and is shown in Table 5.

Table 5.
Student gender.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Male	35	31.2%	31.2%	31.2%
	Female	77	68.8%	68.8%	68.8%
	Total	112	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

There are three psychological problems studied here, namely depression, stress and anxiety. Depression in gifted and talented learners is in the range 0.00 to 76.19 while stress ranges between 2.22 to 88.89 and finally psychological problems, anxiety has a range of 0.00 to 79.49. Stress has the highest mean among the other two issues, namely 33.7526, followed by anxiety at 33.1607 and depression at 24.9118 and is shown in Table 6.

Table 6.
Psychological problems of gifted students.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Depression	108	0.0	76.2	24.9	17.3
Stress	106	2.2	88.9	33.8	16.7
Anxiety	104	0.0	79.5	33.2	15.9
Valid N (Listwise)	99				

To support the well-being of gifted and talented students, three key aspects are examined: psychology, emotion and social. Psychological well-being gives a minimum value of 41.94 and a maximum value of 104.52, while the emotional well-being value ranges from 31.25 to 117.50. Next is social welfare which has a range between 46.50 to 93.50. The average emotional well-being (Mean= 79.8198, SD= 9.9228) was found to be highest compared to psychological well-being (Mean= 77.0669, SD= 8.4747) and social well-being (Mean= 71.9404, SD= 8.7767) respectively and is shown in Table 7.

Table 7.
Components of welfare.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Psychology	108	41.9	104.5	77.1	8.5
Emotions	111	31.3	117.5	79.8	9.9
Social	109	46.5	93.5	71.9	8.8
Valid N (Listwise)	105				

The total for the DASS, the first questionnaire used to measure psychological problems in gifted students had a lower mean (30.7862) with a range of 0.74 to 71.14 compared to the total W-B, a well-being questionnaire which gave a mean of 76.3022 (Minimum= 39.90, Maximum= 94.70, and shown in Table 8.

Table 8.
Psychological problems and well-being of gifted students.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Total DASS	99	0.7	71.1	30.8	14.5
Total W-B	105	39.9	94.7	76.3	8.0
Valid N (Listwise)	93				

Correlations between psychological problems and well-being were also examined among gifted students. From the analysis we found that all psychological problems (depression, stress and anxiety) correlate with all studied aspects of well-being (psychological, emotional and social). All correlations were significant with values less than 0.05 except for emotional well-being and are shown in Table 9.

Table 9.
Correlations.

		Stress	Anxiety	Psychology	Emotions	Social
Depression	Pearson correlation	0.669**	0.561**	-0.221*	-0.147	-0.342**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.000	0.024	0.131	0.000
	N	104	102	104	107	105

4. Discussion

This study uncovered compelling evidence to clarify: (a) psychological problems, (b) psycho-social and emotional well-being, and (c) the correlation between psychological problems and the wellness of gifted and talented students. Exploration of psychological problems using different data collection methods shows that stress is a major issue, closely followed by anxiety and depression.

The findings indicate a negative relationship between psychological issues and well-being. Statistical analysis of the data revealed that this correlation means that reducing the level of psychological problems will increase well-being. With regard to psychological problems, these findings support research conducted by [43] and [22]. It is noted that gifted students face different kinds of stress, including both unrealistic expectations from their parents and excessive demands from their teachers. Due to the stress that gifted students receive from their environment, identifying stress triggers and types of reactions to stress triggers will help counselors to enhance the psychological well-being of gifted students [44]; [45]; [40].

The minority of gifted and talented students who have problems in education and holistic childhood development are often not understood and ignored by related parties. Problems occur due to the distinctive traits of gifted and talented students. The problems faced by these learners are such as concepts self, phobias, development of moral values, inequality of abilities, social skills and potential development. From the findings, gifted and talented learners experience depression, anxiety and stress.

This is caused by unrealistic expectations from parents and teachers. Parents have high expectations for their children when the child is identified in the labeling of gifted children [3]; [1]; [46]. Parents tend to put pressure on their children to achieve the unrealistic expectations they have made. This situation causes children to involve themselves in psychological problems such as depression, stress and anxiety. Moreover, educators hold high expectations for gifted students [47]; [36]; [48] as they are capable of thinking beyond their classmates. Therefore, teachers' pay less attention to their peers. This will indirectly cause the child to experience pressure. Due to the inherent challenges gifted and talented learners face in expressing and sharing their thoughts and issues with peers, they often keep their feelings to themselves, which can lead to depression. Apart from parents and teachers, gifted students also face peer pressure because of their intellectual abilities. Because friends of gifted and talented learners cannot understand their ideas, friends try to avoid environments with gifted and talented learners. Colleagues also don't want to be surrounded by people who are too careful and perfectionists [49]; [50] because they have different levels of standards in ordering things. Feeling abandoned by their peers will encourage them to isolate themselves from other people. To deal with these situations, gifted and talented students often find humor in complex situations and enjoy making jokes.

Meanwhile, for the welfare of gifted and talented students, the results show that students have high psychological, emotional and social welfare. For example, in welfare psychology, gifted learners often undertake an initial evaluation before accepting what they have been told. In emotional well-being, gifted learners have more stable emotions, are more friendly and easily assimilate with their environment [2] and [51]. This will make them have complete control over their emotions. Apart from that, high social welfare is depicted by gifted and talented students through the results they obtain. Gifted and talented students possess strong adaptability skills, allowing them to seamlessly integrate with others. However, these findings contradict those of [52] and [53], where students with higher intelligence than their peers may face challenges when adapting to their environment. Because their thinking is mature, they are more comfortable hanging out with older people than those who have the same level of thinking.

5. Conclusion

Exploration of psychological problems among gifted students at school shows that stress is one of the most prominent problems, followed by anxiety and depression. Additionally, research findings indicate that psychological issues are negatively related to well-being. Statistical analysis of the data revealed that this correlation means that decreasing levels of psychological problems will increase well-being. This requires educational competence regarding a comprehensive perspective regarding paradigms and concepts for gifted students. Educators and counselors do not only rely on measurements based on standardized tests. Apart from that, there is also a need to make adjustments to the curriculum, learning models and assessments in the learning process for gifted students even if these students' study together with other students in the same class.

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