



Unshaken: Investigating Stoicism, Social Comparison, And Mental Well-Being Among Indian College Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationships between stoicism, social comparison, and mental well-being among North Indian college students, while also considering differences across gender, education level, and spiritual or religious beliefs. Contrary to expectations, stoicism did not significantly predict mental well-being or social comparison, and no mediation effect was observed. However, non-binary participants reported significantly higher stoicism scores than their male and female counterparts, suggesting that stoicism may function as a coping response to minority stress in this population. These findings highlight the need to critically evaluate the cultural validity of Western psychological measures and underscore the importance of intersectional and context-sensitive approaches to mental health research in non-Western populations.

Keywords: Stoicism, Social Comparison Theory, Mental Well-Being, Psychological Resilience, Emotional Regulation

CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of mental well-being has long intrigued philosophers, psychologists, and scholars. As society becomes increasingly complex, individuals face rising emotional and social challenges that demand effective coping strategies. Among the various frameworks available, **stoicism**—a philosophy originating over two millennia ago—offers a timeless approach to navigating uncertainty. Rooted in rationality, emotional restraint, and inner resilience, stoicism provides a unique lens through which modern psychological experiences can be interpreted. In today's hyperconnected, performance-driven world, individuals are increasingly vulnerable to emotional and social stressors. Stoicism offers a stabilizing counterbalance by promoting self-mastery, acceptance, and value-driven living. Its relevance in addressing modern psychological challenges supports its empirical investigation.

Despite its philosophical roots, stoicism has gained traction in psychological contexts as a potential contributor to mental health. While often misunderstood as emotional suppression, modern interpretations present stoicism as a tool for fostering emotional flexibility and adaptive coping (Pigliucci & Lopez, 2017). By encouraging individuals to focus on what they can control and accept what they cannot, stoic attitudes may enhance psychological well-being by promoting equanimity and composure under pressure.

This study explores the interplay between stoicism, social comparison behaviors, and mental well-being, aiming to generate meaningful insights into human thought and behavior. While each of these constructs has been independently studied, their combined effects remain under-investigated. This triadic

focus addresses a clear research gap, offering a deeper understanding of how ancient philosophical principles might serve as psychological resources in the modern world.

Stoicism, which originated in ancient Greece around 300 BCE under the guidance of Zeno of Citium, emphasizes that while external events lie beyond our control, individuals possess the power to govern their own thoughts, emotions, and actions (Robertson, 2019). This focus on internal mastery provides a sense of tranquility and resilience in the face of life's unpredictability. Later philosophers—Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius—expanded these ideas, shaping stoicism into a philosophy of virtue and ethical living. Over time, its core principles have transcended their classical roots, finding relevance in fields such as psychology, leadership, and self-development.

A significant aspect of this research is understanding how stoicism relates to **social comparison behaviors**. Social Comparison Theory, introduced by Festinger (1954), suggests that individuals assess themselves by comparing their abilities, opinions, and achievements with others. While sometimes helpful, frequent social comparisons often lead to envy, self-doubt, and lowered self-esteem (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). The ubiquity of social media further amplifies these comparisons, exposing individuals to idealized portrayals of others' lives (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011). In this context, stoicism may serve as a psychological buffer, reducing the impact of comparison-based distress by encouraging internal validation over external appraisal.

Stoic individuals, guided by values of autonomy and self-regulation, may be less inclined to evaluate their worth based on others' achievements or appearances. Instead, they may prioritize intrinsic goals and personal development. This aligns with findings that intrinsic motivation and self-reflection foster greater emotional resilience (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Investigating how stoicism interacts with social comparison tendencies may thus uncover valuable pathways to promoting psychological health in a comparison-saturated culture.

This study also centers on **mental well-being**—commonly defined as a state of flourishing across emotional, psychological, and social domains (Dodge et al., 2012). Mental well-being involves life satisfaction, healthy relationships, and effective stress management. Prior research suggests that stoic attitudes may promote emotional regulation, reduce maladaptive cognitive patterns, and support coping strategies that contribute to greater well-being (Hulsman et al., 2020). However, the mechanisms through which stoicism influences well-being, particularly through its interaction with social comparison behaviors, are still underexplored.

Additionally, this research considers the moderating roles of demographic variables such as gender, educational background, and spiritual beliefs, which may influence the adoption of stoic attitudes and their psychological outcomes. Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding stoicism as a psychological construct. Practically, it offers insights for developing interventions to support mental well-being. Stoic principles may be integrated into therapeutic approaches to reduce stress, enhance emotional strength, and manage comparison-based distress—especially in high-pressure environments such as academia, the workplace, or online communities.

Ultimately, this study aims to advance understanding of how stoicism relates to social comparison and mental well-being in a contemporary context. By bridging philosophical tradition and psychological science, the findings may inform both academic discourse and practical strategies for fostering emotional resilience. In an age marked by uncertainty and comparison, stoicism remains a powerful tool for cultivating inner strength and psychological flourishing.

CHAPTER II : LITERATURE REVIEW

Dickinson (2024) meticulously traced the significant influence of ancient stoic philosophy on the development of contemporary cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and the broader field of positive psychology. His insightful work identifies core stoic principles, such as the emphasis on reason, acceptance of what cannot be controlled, and the cultivation of inner virtue, as foundational elements that underpin modern therapeutic approaches aimed at enhancing emotional resilience, promoting psychological well-being, and fostering a more balanced and adaptive response to life's inevitable challenges.

Karl, Verhaeghen, and Aikman (2022) conducted a nuanced examination of the cultural dimensions inherent in the understanding and practice of stoicism, uncovering the potentially varying effects of this philosophy on individuals' psychological well-being across different cultural contexts. While their study largely demonstrated the positive impact of stoicism in fostering emotional regulation and inner strength, the researchers also issued a crucial warning against potential misinterpretations or overly rigid applications of stoic principles, which could inadvertently lead to emotional detachment, suppression of healthy emotional expression, or a lack of empathy in interpersonal relationships.

Hulsman (2020) undertook a comprehensive and systematic review of the existing body of research concerning the application of stoicism within the realm of mental health. Their analysis strongly emphasized the considerable potential of stoic principles and practices to significantly reduce levels of perceived stress and substantially enhance individuals' overall emotional resilience when facing adversity. The consistent findings across various studies suggest that the intentional cultivation of stoic attitudes and coping mechanisms can serve as remarkably effective strategies for navigating challenging life circumstances and promoting psychological well-being.

MacLellan (2020) specifically explored the tangible influence of embracing stoic principles and attitudes on measurable mental health outcomes in individuals. His research yielded compelling findings indicating that the adoption of stoic perspectives and practices is associated with a notable reduction in the reported symptoms of both anxiety and depression. This underscores the promising potential for thoughtfully integrating key tenets of stoicism into various mental health interventions and therapeutic modalities aimed at alleviating common psychological distress and fostering greater emotional stability.

Robertson (2019) conducted an in-depth exploration of the intricate psychological dimensions that underpin stoic philosophy, meticulously illustrating the ways in which its core principles of self-control, rational thought, and the acceptance of external events can significantly enhance an individual's emotional resilience and capacity to cope with life's difficulties. His work effectively bridges the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary therapeutic practices, providing a robust foundation for understanding the valuable role that stoicism can play within modern mental health frameworks and interventions.

Wood (2019)'s overview of social comparison theory traces its evolution and highlights its continued relevance in understanding self-evaluation. The review discusses various individual difference factors that can influence social comparison tendencies. Stoicism, as a philosophical orientation emphasizing internal standards and acceptance of external outcomes, could be considered such an individual difference factor that might buffer against the inclination to compare oneself to others.

Pigliucci and Lopez (2017) focused on elucidating the practical applications of stoic philosophy in everyday life, placing particular emphasis on its remarkable ability to foster enhanced emotional stability and promote more rational and deliberate decision-making processes, even amidst uncertainty. Their insightful findings strongly underline the enduring relevance of stoicism as a potent coping strategy that individuals can actively employ to effectively navigate the inherent ambiguities and challenges that inevitably arise throughout the course of life.

Pathak, Solem, and Lassen (2017) delved into the significant implications of cultivating emotional non-reactivity, a key aspect of stoic ideology, for overall psychological well-being. Their research findings suggest that a mindful adoption of stoic principles has the potential to significantly enhance mental health by effectively reducing emotional volatility, fostering a greater sense of inner calm and composure, and ultimately promoting increased psychological resilience in the face of life's inevitable stressors and setbacks.

Watts, MacLeod, and Morris (2015) specifically examined the potential therapeutic role of stoicism in the treatment of prevalent mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. Their research findings provided empirical evidence demonstrating the significant potential of incorporating stoic principles and practices into therapeutic approaches aimed at enhancing individuals' emotional resilience, improving their capacity to manage distressing emotions, and fostering a greater sense of psychological well-being.

Neff and Germer (2013) studied the Mindful Self-Compassion program and demonstrated its effectiveness in improving well-being. Since self-compassion involves non-judgment and self-acceptance, principles that resonate with Stoicism, this research suggests that a less self-critical and more accepting stance towards oneself can enhance mental well-being, potentially by mitigating negative social comparison.

Dodge (2012) put forth a comprehensive and multidimensional framework for conceptualizing and defining overall well-being. This framework thoughtfully integrates key aspects of emotional health, psychological functioning, and social well-being into a holistic model. Their work provides valuable theoretical insights into how the principles and practices of stoicism might contribute to individuals' overall life satisfaction, sense of purpose, and the experience of genuine mental flourishing by fostering inner resilience and a balanced perspective.

Seligman (2011) introduced the influential concept of "flourishing" within the field of positive psychology. This comprehensive model integrates various crucial dimensions of well-being, including emotional well-being, psychological well-being (encompassing aspects like purpose and autonomy), and social well-being (emphasizing positive relationships and community engagement). His work provides a robust framework for further exploring the specific ways in which the adoption of stoic principles and practices can actively contribute to individuals' overall mental health, personal growth, and the attainment of a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

Sedikides and Gregg (2008) worked on self-enhancement which delved into the psychological motivations that drive individuals to seek positive self-regard, often through social comparison. Stoic philosophy, with its emphasis on realistic self-assessment and finding value in inner virtue rather than external achievements or status, might counteract these self-enhancement motives, leading to a reduced need for social comparison.

Buunk and Gibbons (2007) provided a comprehensive review of the evolving landscape of social comparison research within psychology. Their study placed significant emphasis on the critical distinction between upward social comparisons (comparing oneself to those perceived as superior) and downward social comparisons (comparing oneself to those perceived as inferior). Their research effectively demonstrated the distinct ways in which these different types of social comparisons can profoundly influence an individual's self-perception, overall self-esteem, and mental health, particularly within competitive or evaluative environments.

Diener, Lucas, and Scollon (2006) revisited and refined the established adaptation theory within the context of subjective well-being. Their revised model placed a greater emphasis on the crucial role that positive emotions play in fostering psychological resilience and promoting long-term happiness. Their findings offer valuable insights that align with stoic practices, which often emphasize the cultivation of inner peace, acceptance, and a focus on what can be controlled as key strategies for enhancing emotional stability and developing more effective coping mechanisms in the face of life's inevitable ups and downs.

Gilbert (2005) conducted a detailed examination of the complex biopsychosocial aspects of compassion, emphasizing its vital role in promoting overall mental well-being and fostering positive interpersonal relationships. His research findings complement core stoic principles by highlighting the importance of cultivating empathy, understanding, and self-regulation as integral components of a balanced and resilient psychological state.

Neff (2005) introduced the significant concept of self-compassion to the field of psychology, drawing clear parallels and aligning it with fundamental stoic ideals of self-acceptance, kindness towards oneself in the face of imperfections, and the ability to regulate one's emotional responses with greater understanding and equanimity. Her research provides a valuable framework for thoughtfully integrating stoic principles into therapeutic practices and self-care strategies aimed at enhancing overall mental health and fostering a more positive and accepting relationship with oneself.

Inwood (2003) provided a comprehensive and insightful overview of the rich history and core tenets of stoic philosophy, meticulously tracing its historical evolution from its ancient origins to its enduring practical applications in contemporary life. His study effectively highlights the timeless significance of stoicism as a valuable guide for cultivating ethical conduct, developing inner resilience, and effectively addressing the myriad psychological challenges that individuals continue to face in the modern world.

Diener and Seligman (2002) conducted a significant study aimed at identifying the key characteristics that are commonly observed in individuals who report being "very happy." Their research findings revealed that consistent emotional stability, a general sense of life satisfaction, and the presence of strong and positive interpersonal relationships are crucial factors that contribute to sustained happiness. These findings offer empirical support for the idea that adopting stoic attitudes, which often emphasize inner peace and a reduced reliance on external validation, can indeed contribute to enhanced well-being.

Fredrickson (2001) introduced the influential "broaden-and-build theory" of positive emotions within psychology. This theory posits that experiencing positive emotions not only feels good in the present moment but also broadens an individual's thought-action repertoire and helps to build enduring personal resources, ultimately contributing to greater psychological flourishing over time. Her work strongly supports the integration of stoic principles, which often encourage the cultivation of positive states of mind and a focus on inner resources, into interventions designed to promote overall well-being and resilience.

Festinger (1954) introduced his groundbreaking Social Comparison Theory, which established the fundamental psychological mechanism by which individuals evaluate their own opinions, abilities, and overall standing by comparing themselves to others. His seminal work laid the crucial groundwork for subsequent research exploring the profound impact of various types of social comparisons on individuals' self-esteem, emotional well-being, and a wide range of other psychological outcomes.

CHAPTER III : METHODOLOGY

1. Aim

To investigate the interrelations between social comparison, stoicism, and mental well-being, while examining differences in stoic tendencies across binary (men and women) and non-binary populations.

2. Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between stoicism and mental well-being, focusing on whether higher stoic attitudes are associated with better psychological outcomes.
2. To analyze the relationship between stoicism and social comparison behaviors to determine whether higher stoicism influences levels of social comparison.
3. To investigate the relationship between social comparison behaviors and mental well-being to understand their interdependence.
4. To explore the significantly elevated stoicism scores reported by non-binary participants, using Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003) as a framework to interpret these findings.

3. Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant correlation between the tendency to social comparison and mental well-being levels.

H2: There will be a significant correlation between the levels of stoicism and the tendency to social comparison.

H3: There will be a significant correlation between levels of stoicism and the mental well-being levels.

H4: There will be a significant difference in stoicism amongst the binary population (men and women) and the non-binary population.

4. Variables

The key variables in this study include stoicism, social comparison behaviors, and mental well-being. Stoicism, measured through the Liverpool Stoicism Scale (LSS), functions as the independent variable in the study. Social comparison, assessed via the Social Comparison Scale–Well-being (SCS-W), is both a dependent variable in secondary analyses and a mediating variable in the mediation model. Mental well-being, as measured by the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), is the primary dependent variable. Additionally, demographic variables including gender (woman, man, non-binary), educational level (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral), and spiritual or religious belief (yes or no) are included as categorical moderators or grouping variables in t-tests and ANOVA.

5. Research Design

The study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational research design. Data were collected through an online survey comprising validated self-report instruments. Statistical analyses included

descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, ANOVA, Pearson correlations, linear regression, and mediation analysis to explore the relationships among stoicism, social comparison, and well-being, and assess demographic variations.

6. Sample Design

- **Target Population:** College students in North India pursuing undergraduate (UG), postgraduate (PG), or doctoral degrees.
- **Sample Size:** 220 participants.
- **Sampling Technique:** Convenience sampling, leveraging online academic networks and social media platforms.
- **Inclusion Criteria:**
 - Age 18 years or older
 - Enrolled in a university-level UG, PG, or Doctoral program
- **Demographic Variables Assessed:**
 - Gender: Woman, Man, Non-binary
 - Spiritual/Religious Beliefs: Yes, No
 - Education Level: Undergraduate, Postgraduate, Doctoral

7. Instruments

- Psychological Well-Being: Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) is a 14-item, 5-point Likert scale measuring mental well-being. Responses range from 1 (None of the time) to 5 (All of the time). The total score ranges from 14 to 70, with higher scores indicating greater mental well-being. No reverse-scored items. The WEMWBS has high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ~0.89–0.91) and strong construct validity. It has been validated across multiple populations.

Norms: Mean scores vary across demographics, with population norms available for different age groups and countries.

- Stoicism: Liverpool Stoicism Scale (LSS)

The Liverpool Stoicism Scale (LSS) is a 20-item self-report measure designed to assess stoic attitudes and tendencies. It uses a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Total scores range from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency towards stoic beliefs and emotional regulation. Some items are reverse-scored to reduce response bias.

The LSS captures key aspects of stoicism such as emotional restraint, self-sufficiency, and control over emotional expression. It demonstrates good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging between 0.80–0.85, and has been used in studies examining emotional regulation, coping, and psychological resilience.

Norms: While normative data varies across samples, the LSS has shown consistent psychometric reliability across different populations.

- Social Comparison Behaviors: Social Comparison Scale (SCS)

The Social Comparison Scale (SCS) is an 11-item instrument developed by Allan and Gilbert (1995) to assess how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others. It uses a bipolar adjective scale format (e.g., *inferior–superior*, *unattractive–attractive*), with each item rated on a 10-point scale. Respondents rate themselves based on how they feel in comparison to others generally.

Total scores are calculated by summing across all items, with higher scores indicating more favorable social self-perception and lower levels of negative social comparison. There are no reverse-scored items. The SCS has demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha typically >0.90) and has been used widely in studies exploring self-esteem, depression, and interpersonal functioning.

Norms: Normative data varies depending on population context; scores tend to be lower among clinical or socially anxious populations. The SCS has been validated across different cultural backgrounds, including non-Western context

CHAPTER IV : RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

The study involved 220 participants (N = 220) who were categorized into subgroups based on their spiritual or religious beliefs (yes vs. no), gender identity (women [WM], men [M], non-binary [NB]), and educational attainment (undergraduate [UG], postgraduate [PG], doctoral [D]). Table 1 presents the **means** and (**standard deviations**) for the Liverpool Stoicism Scale (LSS), the Social Comparison Scale (SCS), and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) for each of these subgroups.

Table 1:

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables by Subgroup

Variable	Spiritual 'Yes'	Spiritual 'No'	(WM)	(M)	(NB)	(UG)	(PG)	(D)
LSS	72.32 (36.53)	76.23 (26.20)	47.76 (4.98)	56.68 (6.33)	127.09 (13.64)	75.74 (36.23)	71.13 (34.97)	79.99 (37.41)
SCS	58.51 (11.85)	59.85 (9.26)	55.62 (12.36)	60.30 (8.86)	61.79 (9.34)	61.79 (9.34)	59.36 (8.39)	57.40 (13.43)
WEMWBS	41.61 (5.73)	42.86 (5.97)	42.82 (6.70)	41.06 (5.62)	42.64 (5.55)	42.64 (5.55)	42.77 (6.81)	41.66 (5.46)

Note. LSS = Liverpool Stoicism Scale; SCS = Social Comparison Scale; WEMWBS = Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale. WM = women; M = men; NB = non-binary; UG = undergraduate; PG = postgraduate; D = doctoral

Hypothesis Testing

- H1: Correlation Between Stoicism and Mental Well-being

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between stoicism (LSS) and mental well-being (WEMWBS). The results indicated a weak and statistically non-significant correlation, $r(219) = .0826$, $p > .05$. This suggests that in this sample, higher levels of stoicism were not meaningfully associated with greater mental well-being.

Table 2:

Correlation Between Stoicism (LSS) and Mental Well-being (WEMWBS)

Scales	N	r	p-value
LSS & WEMWBS	220	0.0826	> .05

- H2: Correlation Between Stoicism and Social Comparison

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a small but statistically significant positive correlation between stoicism and social comparison tendencies, $r(219) = .2119$, $p < .01$. Contrary to the assumption that stoicism might buffer against comparison-based behaviors, these results suggest that individuals with higher stoicism scores were somewhat more likely to engage in social comparison.

Table 3:

Correlation Between Stoicism (LSS) and Social Comparison (SCS)

Scales	N	r	p-value
LSS & SCS	220	0.2119	< .01

- H3: Correlation Between Social Comparison and Mental Well-being

The correlation between social comparison tendencies (SCS) and mental well-being (WEMWBS) was also analyzed. Results showed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship, $r(219) = .1799$, $p < .05$. This unexpected finding suggests that individuals with greater social comparison tendencies may experience slightly better mental well-being in certain contexts.

Table 4:

Correlation Between Social Comparison (SCS) and Mental Well-being (WEMWBS)

Scales	N	r	p-value
WEMWBS & SCS	220	0.1799	< .05

- H4: Gender Differences in Stoicis

A one-way ANOVA tested for differences in LSS scores across gender identities. The analysis revealed a statistically significant effect, $F(2, 195) = 1490.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .94$. Post-hoc Tukey's HSD tests showed that non-binary participants ($N = 65$, $M = 127.09$, $SD = 13.64$) scored significantly higher than both men ($N = 69$, $M = 56.68$, $SD = 6.33$) and women ($N = 85$, $M = 47.76$, $SD = 4.98$), supporting the idea that stoicism may serve as a coping mechanism linked to minority stress (Meyer, 2003).

Table 5:

One-Way ANOVA Results for Differences in Social Comparison, Stoicism, and Mental Well-being Across Gender Identities

Variables	SS Between Groups	SS Within Groups	df Between	df Within	MS Between	MS Within	F	p-value	F crit
SCS	1367.34	20712.5	2	195	683.67	106.22	6.44	0.00196	3.04
LSS	249278.92	16309.89	2	195	124639.46	83.64	1490.18	7.13E-119	3.04
WEMWBS	123.31	6976.85	2	195	61.66	35.78	1.72	0.181	3.04

Additional Analyses

- Education Level and Mental Well-being

A one-way ANOVA was performed to evaluate differences in mental well-being scores across education levels (undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral). The analysis yielded no significant differences, $F(2, 207) = 0.64$, $p = .530$, $\eta^2 = .01$, indicating that educational attainment was not associated with variation in mental well-being in this sample.

Table 6:

One-Way ANOVA Results for Stoicism (LSS), Social Comparison (SCS), and Mental Well-being (WEMWBS) Across Educational Qualification Groups

Measure	SS (Between)	df (Between)	MS (Between)	SS (Within)	df (Within)	MS (Within)	F	p-value	F crit
LSS	2747.32	2	1373.66	271488.2	207	1311.54	1.05	0.353	3.04
SCS	472.47	2	236.23	23431.51	207	113.2	2.09	0.127	3.04
WEMWBS	45.07	2	22.53	7314.06	207	35.33	0.64	0.53	3.04

- Spiritual/Religious Beliefs

To explore potential differences in stoicism and mental well-being based on spiritual or religious beliefs, independent sample t-tests were conducted. Results indicated no significant differences between participants who identified as spiritual/religious and those who did not in LSS scores, $t(218) = -0.80$, $p = .422$, or WEMWBS scores, $t(218) = -1.58$, $p = .115$.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationships between stoicism, social comparison, and mental well-being among North Indian college students, with a particular focus on demographic variations across gender, education level, and spiritual/religious beliefs. Contrary to our initial hypotheses, stoicism as measured by the Liverpool Stoicism Scale (LSS) did not significantly predict mental well-being, and only a weak positive correlation was found between stoicism and social comparison. However, a striking finding emerged regarding gender, with non-binary participants reporting significantly higher stoicism scores compared to men and women. This section contextualizes these findings within existing literature, proposes potential explanations, outlines directions for future research, and offers implications for practice and policy.

Key Findings and Interpretations

Stoicism and Well-being (H1)

The absence of a significant positive association between stoicism and mental well-being ($r = .0826$, $p > .05$) diverges from findings in Western literature that suggest stoicism enhances psychological resilience (e.g., MacLellan, 2020; Hulsman et al., 2020). This result highlights the cultural specificity of psychological constructs. In collectivist societies such as India, stoicism may manifest as emotional suppression or compliance with social expectations rather than as an empowering inner orientation. Moreover, the LSS—designed in Western contexts—may fail to capture culturally embedded expressions of stoic thought, such as spiritual detachment (vairagya) or selfless duty (dharma), which hold different emotional connotations and motivations.

Stoicism and Social Comparison (H2)

Interestingly, the study found a small but significant positive correlation between stoicism and social comparison ($r = .2119$, $p < .01$), contradicting theories that posit stoicism as a buffer against external validation (Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997). This suggests that individuals scoring high in stoicism in this sample may still engage in comparative behaviors, possibly reflecting academic pressures or internalized expectations. The Indian higher education landscape is marked by intense competition and performance benchmarking, which could override individual philosophical inclinations and foster a persistent need for social evaluation.

Social Comparison and Well-being (H3)

A weak yet significant positive relationship was observed between social comparison and well-being ($r = .1799$, $p < .05$), challenging traditional assumptions that social comparison invariably harms well-being (Taylor & Lobel, 1989). This paradoxical finding may indicate that in collectivist cultures, social comparison is not solely ego-threatening but can also serve communal or motivational purposes, such as striving for collective success or familial pride, which may positively influence mental well-being.

Gender as a Critical Moderator (H4)

The most prominent and statistically significant finding was the substantially higher stoicism scores among non-binary participants ($M = 127.09$) compared to men ($M = 56.68$) and women ($M = 47.76$), $F(2,195) = 1490.18$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .94$. This aligns with minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), which posits that marginalized individuals develop coping mechanisms such as emotional endurance in response to chronic discrimination. In North India, where gender non-conformity often lacks societal validation, stoicism might function as a psychological shield. However, the extremely large effect size raises concerns about the LSS's measurement precision across gender identities. It is plausible that high stoicism scores reflect strategies like emotional masking or social withdrawal, not necessarily philosophical endorsement. Further qualitative work is essential to unpack how stoicism is experienced by non-binary individuals in these cultural and social conditions.

Null Findings for Education and Spirituality

Neither education level nor spiritual/religious beliefs were significantly associated with differences in stoicism or well-being, as evidenced by ANOVA and t-test results (e.g., $F = 0.64$, $p = .530$; $t = -0.80$, $p = .422$). This suggests that stoicism and well-being may be more strongly shaped by psychological and social

identity factors (e.g., gender, minority status) than by broad socio demographic categories. It is also possible that internal beliefs and academic status are less influential in the expression of stoicism than the lived experience of structural marginalization.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Cultural Re-examination of Stoicism

This study highlights the cultural limitations of applying Western psychological scales in non-Western contexts. Stoicism in India may reflect culturally sanctioned forms of restraint that are linked less to resilience and more to obligation or social conformity. To address this, future research should:

- Develop indigenous stoicism scales that incorporate Indian philosophical tenets such as *santosha* (contentment), *karma yoga* (action without attachment), and *titiksha* (forbearance).
- Explore the interplay between collectivism and stoicism to better understand how these dynamics influence psychological outcomes.

Gender and Minority Stress

The gender-based findings emphasize the importance of intersectional frameworks in psychological research. High stoicism among non-binary participants may reflect coping responses to stigma rather than a freely chosen worldview. Mental health professionals working with gender-diverse youth should be cautious in interpreting stoicism scores as signs of emotional strength. Instead, such expressions might signal unspoken distress or internalized pressure to appear emotionally unaffected.

Methodological Considerations

The magnitude of gender differences suggests potential limitations in the LSS's cultural and identity sensitivity. Some items may resonate differently—or be misinterpreted—by marginalized groups. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of this study restricts causal interpretations, and the reliance on self-report measures may have introduced social desirability bias, particularly around emotionally charged constructs like stoicism and well-being.

Strengths

- **Sample Size and Representation:** The study includes a robust sample from an underrepresented region and population in psychological research.
- **Demographic Focus:** By analyzing data across gender, education, and spirituality, it offers a granular understanding of stoicism's psychosocial contours.
- **Multivariate Approach:** The inclusion of both bivariate and group-level analyses enhances the depth of interpretations.
- **Exploratory Gender Insight:** The findings concerning non-binary participants open new avenues for theorizing stoicism in marginalized populations.

Limitations

- **Regional Scope:** The sample was confined to North India, potentially limiting cultural generalizability.
- **Measurement Constraints:** Use of Western-developed tools without cultural adaptation may affect validity.
- **Cross-sectional Design:** Longitudinal dynamics between stoicism and well-being could not be assessed.
- **Self-Report Bias:** Responses may reflect social norms rather than authentic psychological states, especially in sensitive groups.

Future Directions

Building on these findings, future research should:

- **Adapt and Validate Measures:** Tailor stoicism measures to Indian sociocultural and philosophical traditions.
- **Use Intersectional Analysis:** Examine how caste, class, and gender interact to influence psychological resilience.
- **Adopt Mixed-Methods Designs:** Combine surveys with qualitative interviews to understand lived experiences, especially of marginalized genders.
- **Test Interventions:** Develop programs that promote adaptive stoic traits like self-control and value-based action without reinforcing emotional suppression.

CHAPTER V : CONCLUSION

This study examined the links between stoicism, social comparison, and mental well-being among North Indian college students, considering gender, education, and spiritual/religious beliefs. While no significant associations were found between stoicism and either well-being or social comparison, non-binary participants reported markedly higher stoicism scores than their male and female peers.

These findings suggest that stoicism may function differently across cultural and gender contexts. In particular, elevated stoicism among non-binary individuals may reflect coping mechanisms shaped by minority stress rather than philosophical endorsement. The lack of mediation by social comparison challenges Western models of stoicism's role in psychological well-being, underscoring the need for culturally adapted measures and interpretations.

Despite limitations such as the study's regional focus and cross-sectional design, the results highlight the importance of cultural nuance in psychological research. Future studies should explore these constructs longitudinally, across diverse populations, and with tools sensitive to local and marginalized experiences. Overall, this research calls for more inclusive frameworks that reflect the complexity of mental health in non-Western contexts.

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