

Commitment And Psychological Wellbeing in Long Distance Relationship and Proximal Relationship – A Comparative Study

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Abstract- *The aim of the current study was to determine the Commitment and Psychological Wellbeing in Long distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR). This study aims to find out how young adults in Long-Distance Relationships and Proximal Relationships differ in their Psychological Wellbeing and Commitment. The data was collected from 62 participants which included 31 participants in Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and 31 participants in Proximal Relationships (PR) from the age group 18 to 26 years through purposive and snowball sampling. The tools used in the study for data collection were Ryff's Psychological Well Being Scale (RPWBS) and Item Commitment Measure. The results showed that there were no differences in Commitment as well as Psychological Wellbeing among Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR). The study also showed that there is no relation between Psychological Wellbeing and Commitment. This study would be helpful for couples seeking marital counseling and also for creating Relationship Enhancement Programs that could be adapted by couples in Long Distance Relationship (LDR).*

Keywords: *Long Distance Relationships (LDR), Proximal Relationships (PR), Psychological Well Being, Commitment*

Introduction

The period of adolescence and emerging adulthood is widely recognized as a critical stage for the formation of romantic relationships within the framework of developmental psychology. Romantic relationships play a pivotal role in enhancing personal well-being by fostering emotional connections that reduce the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010). These relationships further provide essential social (Coombs, 1991) and emotional support (Frech & Williams, 2007), which can significantly impact overall psychological health. However, individuals experiencing poor mental health may face increased challenges in initiating, maintaining, and transitioning to more committed romantic relationships. This research aims to explore the comparative aspects of commitment and psychological well-being in long-distance versus proximal relationships, providing insights into how these different relational contexts affect the mental health and relational outcomes of individuals.

Long Distance Relationships and Proximal Relationships

Romantic relationships can be categorized based on geographic proximity into two types: Proximal Relationships (PRs) and Long-Distance Relationships (LDRs). Long-distance dating relationships are defined as relationships in which individuals, although not married, are currently dating but spend a significant amount of time apart, often residing in different towns, cities, or countries. LDR couples frequently deviate from social expectations or geographic norms regarding how space and time are used in romantic relationships. While couples are typically described as "being together," long-distance couples challenge this notion by spending a considerable portion of their time physically apart. According to Paunovic (2013), LDRs can be viewed as a form of "relationship examination," where individuals who engage in such relationships tend to develop stronger emotional bonds. LDRs have been the subject of research for decades, as they offer insights into how couples navigate and sustain relationships under less-than-ideal circumstances.

In contrast, the term 'proximal' is derived from the Latin word 'proximus,' meaning 'close' or 'near.' Proximal relationships involve individuals who are dating but not married and reside within the same geographical area, such as the same city. These relationships are characterized by frequent face-

to-face interactions, which is a key distinction between LDRs and PRs. Proximal couples have the advantage of physical proximity, allowing for more regular in-person communication. Studies, such as those by Stafford and Merolla (2007), have shown that LDR couples engage in significantly less one-on-one interaction compared to PR couples and often experience challenges in coordinating communication. This difference in communication frequency and coordination is one of the defining characteristics that separates LDRs from PRs.

Psychological Well-Being:

PWB is defined as a person's level of psychological health or happiness, which encompasses sentiments of accomplishments and satisfaction with life. Psychological well-being refers to intra-individual and inter-individual levels of positive functioning, such as one's feeling of connectedness to others and self-referent behaviors, such as one's sense of accomplishment and self-development. Psychological wellbeing refers to a person's whole outlook on life, which includes not just physical health but also self-efficacy, self-esteem, life happiness & interpersonal relationships.

Commitment:

A committed relationship is characterized by an emotional bond in which both individuals mutually agree to invest in and dedicate themselves to one another. Commitment within a relationship involves key elements such as love, trust, honesty, and transparency. It is not solely the outcomes of the relationship that contribute to its value, but also the availability of alternative partners and the level of involvement an individual dedicates to the relationship that determines their commitment. As defined by Rusbult (1980), commitment is "the intent to persist in a relationship, coupled with a long-term orientation toward the involvement and a willingness to make sacrifices to maintain it." This conceptualization emphasizes that commitment is a multifaceted construct shaped by an individual's investment in the relationship, perceived quality of alternatives, and relational satisfaction.

Review of Literature

Though romantic partnerships are still common among young adults, their experiences have evolved considerably over the last 50 years. Often college students prolong their dating experiences, postponing their marriages until they are financially and educationally secure. (Arnett, 2000; Smock & Manning, 2004). Physical, social and emotional advantages can be provided by young adults's romantic relationships. Individuals' sense of belongingness and sense of mattering also boosts in Intimate relationships. (Mak and Marshall, 2004). Furthermore, these romantic relationships can serve as a basis for social integration during the emerging adulthood, can enhance both women and men's mental health, can generate socially valued identity and can enhance one's own value as a human being.

Romantic relationships can be classified into two categories: Proximal Relationships (PRs) and Long-Distance Relationships (LDRs), both of which offer unique advantages and challenges. Previous research suggests that these relationship types differ on various factors, including the quality of interaction, emotional connection, and psychological outcomes. This study seeks to explore the differences between LDRs and PRs with respect to psychological well-being and commitment. Commitment in a romantic relationship is defined as an interpersonal connection based on mutual agreement to maintain trust, honesty, love, and other agreed-upon relational behaviors. Psychological well-being (PWB) refers to an individual's overall state of mental health or happiness, encompassing feelings of accomplishment and life satisfaction. The present study posits that both commitment and psychological well-being may differ between long-distance and proximal relationships, impacting relationship satisfaction and individual mental health outcomes.

Dush and Amato (2005) investigated the connection between status of the relationship, enjoyment, and an untapped measurement of subjective wellbeing. According to the research of Marital uncertainty across the Life Course, married persons disclosed the best degree of subjective well-being, which was accompanied by people in live-in relationships, stable dating, casual hookup & people who were never in romantic relationship. People in satisfied relationships accounted for a greater extent of subjective well-being than people in unpleasant partnerships, regardless of their status of relationship. Furthermore, women and men were ranked in the same order. The results also hinted that being in a romantic relationship, whether with a spouse, a cohabiting partner, or a long-term dating partner – is good for individuals well being and mental health.

Roberts and Pistole (2009) conducted a study on Attachment and nearness as a predictor of Long distance and proximally close distance relationship. LDRRs and PRR were investigated among university students. In the LDRR & PRR the proportions of attachment styles and relationship satisfaction were found to be similar. Studies show that, low attachment avoidance was associated with high satisfaction in LDRR, while lower attachment avoidance, lower anxiousness to attachment and residing away were associated with high PRR satisfaction. Relational proximity was not the only factor that predicted LDRR or PRR satisfaction.

A study conducted by L. Stafford in 2010 to assess how attributes of geographic separation were linked with the type of the relationship partners interaction across courtship. According to the findings, Long Distance Dating Relationship (LDDR) couples interact in a way that emphasizes positive affect while reducing disparities. Although these types of communication patterns may be effective for Long Distance Dating Relationship (LDDR) couples in maintaining healthy relationships, it is possible that they may have detrimental consequences for couples' rational judgements on relational investment.

M. Pistole, A. Roberts, & J. Mosko conducted a study in 2010 on the topic Long-Distance vs. Physically Close Relationships with Commitment as Predictor variables. Results revealed that decreased avoidance and higher cooperative caregiving previously indicated a high level of commitment in Long Distance Relationships (LDR); however, as the IM variables were taken into consideration, only high level of satisfaction and higher investments independently predicted high level of Long Distance Relationship (LDR) commitment. Secure attachment, originally predicted high geographically Close Relationship commitment, but lower avoidance, higher level of satisfaction, have less options & lower cooperative caregiving added to higher commitment levels in Geographically Close Relationships (GCRs) in a distinct way. Both LDR and GCR were connected to more satisfaction with minimal options in GCR and considerable investments in LDR.

G. Kelmer, G. Rhoades, S. Stanley & H. Markman in 2012 did a study to analyze the quality, stability & commitment in LDRs & PCR. outcomes revealed that relationship quality and commitment were higher in LDR individuals as well as lower levels of feeling confined. However, in relation to physical & perceived constraints, LDR couples were similar to the couple in PCR. Although the people on LDR perceived less likelihood of breaking up with their partners at the beginning of their relationships, but by the time the follow-up assessment came around, LDRs were similar to GCRs in breaking their relationship. People in LDR did not vary with people in Proximally close relationships on their levels of Commitment.

In a study done by C. Harris & A. Edwards in 2014 to know the difference between individuals with LDR and PR in terms of, relationship quality, relationship maintenance and romantic conversations through Facebook. Results suggested that there was no difference in the quality of relationship, maintenance & romantic conversations among facebook oriented LDRRs & PDRRs. And also Facebook isn't the most common way for people to contact their romantic partners. But using Facebook, on the other hand, had shown to improve relationship satisfaction.

A study done by K. Peterson in 2014 on the topic of whether long distance relationships have any impact on the level of intimacy in romantic relationships. The results revealed that both the LDRs and PCRs had identical levels of overall satisfaction. There was no association found that long distance relationship individuals would have increased level of commitment or togetherness in their relationship when compared to PCRs. Also it was disproved that LDR peoples have increased levels of intimacy than geographically close distance individuals.

R. Johnson & J. Hall conducted research in 2021. The study looked at how people in long distance romantic relationships (LDRRs) have a sense of network support and how it affected their well-being. In the 1st study, it was discovered there was insufficient peer support and awareness of LDRR, as well as how partners deal with unsupportive dialogue. The second study emphasized on the relational partners' perceptions of network support and relationship, as well as the link between a sense of support and relationship well-being. Long distance people accounted for much less social support for their relationship, than GCR participants, but no significant variations in relational well-being were detected in the findings. Relationship well-being was predicted by perceptions to hold from their network for romantic partners, independent of relationship type.

Methodology

Aim and Objectives:

- To study the nature of Commitment between participants in Long Distance Relationship (LDR) and participants in Proximal Relationship (PR).
- To study the nature of Psychological Well being between participants in Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and participants in Proximal Relationships (PR).

Hypotheses -

- There will be no difference in Commitment among Individuals in Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and Individuals in Proximal Relationships (PR) among Young Adults.
- There is a statistically significant difference in Psychological Wellbeing between Individuals in Long Distance Relationships (LDR) & Individuals in Proximal Relationships (PR) among Young Adults.

Variables –

Independent Variables: Long Distance Relationships (LDR)
Proximal Relationships (PR)

Dependent Variables: Commitment
Psychological Wellbeing

Intervening Variables: Duration of Relationship
Geographic Distance
Type of Communication

Sample -

Purposive sampling and Snowball sampling were used for the study. Sample population for the present study was 62 which included 31 participants from Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and 31 participants from Proximal Relationships (PR) with age groups between 18 to 26 years.

Criteria of inclusion

Each participant must belong to either Long distance or Proximal Relationship criteria within the age range of (18 – 26 years), are in relationship for more than 1 year, are heterosexual and are unmarried.

Criteria of exclusion

Couples who do not belong to the above mentioned age group, are in relationship for less than 1 year, are not heterosexual and are married

Research design

Between group research design was used. It is an experimental design where different participants are used in each condition of the independent variable.

Tools of the Study

1. Ryff's Psychological Well Being Scale (RPWBS)(Ryff et al., 2007)

It is the 18 item version adapted from Psychological wellbeing scale by Ryff is used to assess well-being. On a 7-point Likert scale, participants are asked to rate how each item relates to them. RPWBS has a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.82. The overall alpha coefficient for the 18-item PWBS was 0.88. indicating that criterion validity is acceptable.

2. Item commitment measure (15 item)

This is an elaborated version of commitment measure in Rusbult, C.E., Martz, J.M., & Agnew, C.R.1998), it measured level of commitment, satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment size. It is marked on an 8 point Likert scale and has 15 items.

Procedure

Data was collected using the questionnaires that were sent to the participants using google forms and also some questions relevant to the study were asked through telephonic interview. The data collected was kept confidential throughout the research.

Statistical Tools

Descriptive statistics was used in the research.

Correlational statistics was used in the research.

SPSS software was used for statistical calculations and following Parametric and Non Parametric tests were used to prove or disprove the hypothesis:

- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- ManWhitney test
- T-test
- Correlation

RESULTS

Table 1 Description of Variables (Long Distance Relationship (LDR), Proximal Relationship (PR), Commitment and Psychological Wellbeing) through statistical measurement:

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Commitment	62	32.0	122.0	98.452	18.8651
Psychological Wellbieng	62	66.0	115.0	91.323	11.3192
Valid N (listwise)	62				

Table 2 Normality check of the two dependent variables (Commitment and Psychological Wellbeing) through the Shapiro Wilk Test:

		Shapiro - Wilk		
		Statistics	df	Sig.
Commitment		.863	62	.000
Psychological Well Being		.973	62	.192

In the above table Commitment showed the significance at 0.000 level, that was not significant at 0.05 level which means the scores of Commitment were not normally distributed ($0.000 < 0.05$). However, the data for Psychological Wellbeing showed significance at 0.192 level i.e. significant at 0.05 level which means the scores for Psychological Wellbeing were normally distributed ($0.192 > 0.05$).

Table 3 Commitment in two different types of Relationships (Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR)):

	Relationship	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)
Commitment	LDR	31	29.58	917.00	421.000	917.000	-	0.402
	PR	31	33.42	1036.00			838	
	Total	62						

a. Grouping Variable: Relationship

As the data for variable - Commitment was not normally distributed, non parametric Mann Whitney test was used. The P value was 0.402 which was more than 0.05 level i.e. not significant. The mean rank

on Commitment was also compared for Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR). Proximal Relationships had higher mean values (33.42) than Long Distance Relationships (29.58). The mean of Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships showed that there were marginal differences between the two but no significant differences.

Table 4 Psychological Wellbeing in two different types of relationships (Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR)):

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means				
		Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	
Psychological Wellbieng	Equal variances assumed	.569	-.022	60	.982	-.0645	
	Equal variances not assumes		-.022	59.558	.982	-.0645	

Table 4 showed the Psychological Wellbeing between the two relationship groups (Long Distance Relationship (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR)) which do not differ significantly in their Psychological Wellbeing.

Discussion

Intimate relationships and experiences are key sources of emotional connection and help us to establish a healthy self-concept and social integration. Having a successful romantic connection and maintaining it might have long term repercussions later in life, which is also believed to contribute to individuals' physical and mental health, along with overall well-being. Romantic relationships based on Geographic distance can be of two types: Long distance Relationships and Proximal Relationships. Long-distance relationships are a type of an exam, and those who participate in them develop a stronger bond. Relationships with a proximal distance are those in which two people live close to each other and have more face-to-face encounters. Psychological Well-being is defined as a person's level of psychological health or happiness, which encompasses sentiments of accomplishments and satisfaction with life.

The aim of the present study was to assess the Commitment and Psychological Wellbeing in Long distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR). The sample population of the study was 62 participants, which incorporated 31 participants from Long distance Relationships (LDR) and 31 participants from Proximal Relationships (PR) from the age group 18 to 26 years.

The analysis of results revealed that the first hypothesis which says that there will be no differences in the Commitment among Long distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal relationships (PR) was proved therefore accepting the null hypothesis. When the mean score on Commitment was compared for Long Distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR) through Mann Whitney Test, Proximal Relationships (PR) had higher mean values than Long distance Relationships (LDR). This indicates that there is a marginal difference between Long distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR) but no significant differences. This finding could be explained by the research which suggests that emotional closeness and shared values are key determinants of commitment (Agnew, 2000). LDR couples may prioritize building a strong emotional connection, which can equalize or even surpass the impact of physical proximity, leading to similar levels of commitment in both relationship types. The results were supported by previous research which also had similar findings that commitment

did not vary in Long-Distance Relationship and Close-Proximity Relationship individuals (Kelmer, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2012).

The second hypothesis which stated that there are significant differences in Psychological Wellbeing of Long-distance Relationships (LDR) and Proximal Relationships (PR) was disproved thereby rejecting the hypothesis. The results proved that there is no significant difference in Psychological Wellbeing of Long-Distance Relationship couples and Proximal Relationship couples, however marginal differences do exist. These findings were consistent with a study which examined relationship quality, commitment, and stability in long-distance relationships and found that couples in LDRs reported similar levels of relationship satisfaction and psychological well-being compared to couples in PRs. The research suggested that the quality of communication and emotional support were crucial factors in maintaining well-being, regardless of physical distance (Kelmer et al., 2013). Additionally, another research found that the psychological well-being of individuals in long-distance relationships did not differ significantly from those in geographically close relationships. This study highlighted that couples in both types of relationships experience similar levels of emotional connection and satisfaction, which are central to well-being (Sahlstein, 2006).

Based on the aforementioned findings, no significant differences were observed in psychological well-being and commitment between individuals in Long-Distance Relationships (LDRs) and Proximal Relationships (PRs). The results suggest that both relationship types provide comparable levels of emotional support, relationship satisfaction, and psychological health, indicating that geographic proximity is not a determining factor in these relational outcomes.

Implications:

1. The present study focuses on the relationship commitment and psychological wellbeing and its relation with long distance relationship and proximal relationship. This study will be helpful in revealing how long-distance relationships and proximal relationships vary on their psychological well being and relationship commitment.
2. This study will help in creating Relationship Enhancement Programs that could be adapted by the Long Distance Relationship (LDR) and Proximal Relationship (PR) couples.
3. The findings will be helpful for couples seeking marital counseling if career takes them away for each other for few years.
4. The study will also be helpful in removing the myths and creating awareness that Long Distance Relationships and Proximal Distance Relationships have no differences in Commitment and Psychological Wellbeing.
5. This research can also be further studied and elaborated to understand the other factors affecting Commitment and Psychological Wellbeing of individuals in romantic relationships.

Future Directions:

1. This type of research can also be extended to other age-groups.
2. Further research can be conducted to increase the applicability of the present research and provide useful knowledge and interventions for couple therapy.
3. Increase in the sample size and variability in sample inclusion criteria may be helpful in increasing the generalizability of the research.
4. It could have also included married couples in sample to assess the differences between married and unmarried couples on Psychological Wellbeing and Commitment.

Limitations:

1. The sample being available purposive sample, results cannot be generalized to the entire population.
2. It was not possible to include a very large sample due to time constraints.

3. The tools used for the study were developed by foreign authors and hence can have cultural differences.
4. There were no standardized norms for both the tools so using the formula Mean Standard Deviation (SD), the interpretation was done.

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