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Exploring Mental Well-Being: A Study of Youth Watching Anime Across Gender

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Abstract

This study, "Exploring mental well-being: A study of youth watching anime across gender", investigates the impact of anime consumption on the mental well-being of youth, with a specific focus on gender differences. Anime, a globally influential form of Japanese animation, is particularly popular among adolescents and young adults. Given its rising consumption, this research aims to explore how anime affects the emotional and psychological health of its viewers. Using a mixed-method approach, the study collected data from 180 respondents aged 15-25 through online and offline surveys, utilizing the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) to measure mental health outcomes. The sample comprised 45% males and 55% females, recruited via snowball sampling in Lucknow, India. The results reveal a nuanced picture of anime's impact on mental well-being. While a significant majority (63.3%) reported moderate effects, there were also notable perceptions of both low (25.5%) and high (6.9%) impacts. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference in mental well-being across gender groups. These findings highlight the complex relationship between anime consumption and mental health, suggesting both potential benefits and risks. The study underscores the need for mindful consumption and further research to maximize positive outcomes while mitigating negative effects. This research provides valuable insights for parents, educators, and mental health professionals aiming to understand and navigate the influence of anime on youth mental well-being.

Major Findings: The study revealed that anime has a predominantly positive effect on the mental well-being of youth, contributing to emotional support (71% of respondents), relaxation (64%), and fostering a sense of community (59%). However, it also emphasized 38% of participants reported increased anxiety, and 24% indicated aggression linked to certain themes, underlining the importance of monitoring content consumption.

Keywords: Anime, Gender Differences, Media Consumption, Mental Well-being, Youth

1. Introduction

Anime, a prominent form of Japanese animated entertainment, has become an integral part of the cultural fabric worldwide, particularly influencing youth. Adolescents, who are at a critical juncture in their emotional and psychological development, often turn to anime for its engaging narratives and relatable characters. The rising consumption of anime among young people has sparked substantial interest in understanding its impact on their mental well-being. This research aims to explore the complex relationship between anime consumption and the mental health of youth, using both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis[1].

Japan boasts a rich cultural legacy that includes the colorful and diverse entertainment genre known as anime. Derived from the Japanese term "animeshon," meaning "animation," anime Hanna has transcended national borders to become a global phenomenon in recent decades[1]. Initially emerging as an experimental form of filmmaking in the early 20th century, anime gained traction with the release of Namakura Gatana in

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1917, marking its transition into a professional medium[2]. Throughout its evolution, anime has been shaped by various influences, including the post-World War II impact of Disney and Hollywood animations, and the pioneering works of artists like Osamu Tezuka, whose Astro Boy in 1963 sparked its international popularity[3].

Mental well-being, a complex concept encompassing emotional resilience and psychological health, is a crucial aspect of personal welfare. Anime narratives often explore themes related to mental health, portraying characters grappling with issues such as depression, anxiety, and trauma in nuanced ways. These stories not only entertain but also serve as vehicles for empathy and understanding, resonating with global audiences facing similar challenges[4].

Recent studies underscore anime's growing influence beyond Japan, particularly in regions like India and the Middle East. Dewang highlights the expanding anime market in India and its appeal to diverse age groups, reflecting shifting preferences in animated content consumption[5]. Similarly, research by Marbaniang and Santosh explores how anime shapes youth culture in Bengaluru, illustrating its profound impact on media consumption patterns and cultural identity formation[6]. Furthermore, Abu Backer examines anime's influence on the consciousness of Arab children, highlighting its role in introducing diverse cultural perspectives to young audiences[7].

Research by Zuo highlights that anime can positively influence emotional expression, self-identity, creativity, and social relationships, although it can also promote violence and social isolation[8]. Anime viewers in Saudi Arabia exhibit higher IQ and general knowledge[9], while Yusof *et al.* observed positive effects on secondary school adolescents, with no significant relationship to social problems[10]. Conversely, Liu *et al.* linked anime idol culture to anxiety, aggression, depression, and suicidal tendencies[11]. Reyes and Mohammed discussed the potential harm of anime depictions of self-harm and suicide on young viewers[12]. Mohammed identified a correlation between anime viewership and adolescent mental health characteristics, suggesting the need for further clinical research[13]. Additionally, the increased screen time is associated with higher risks of mental health problems among college students, underscoring the importance of moderated consumption[14]. Study demonstrates a dose-response relationship between electronic screen use and mental well-being in 10-12 year old children[15]. Study found associations between increased screen time, particularly computer use, and a small increased risk of anxiety and depression[16]. Excess sedentary behavior relates higher levels of behavioral or emotional problems and anxiety. These results can inspire the development of interventions that promote well-being and enhance psychological health, by focusing on sedentary behaviour in Japanese children[17]. These studies collectively highlight a spectrum of effects that anime can have on youth, ranging from beneficial impacts on cognitive and emotional development to significant risks of negative psychological outcomes. This research paper seeks to provide a balanced view, emphasizing the need for mindful consumption and further investigation to maximize the positive impacts of anime while mitigating its potential harms.

1.1 Positive Impacts of Anime on Mental Well-being

Several studies have documented the positive effects of anime on the mental well-being of adolescents. According to Zuo, anime can significantly influence emotional expression, self-identity, creativity, and social relationships[8]. These benefits suggest that anime, when consumed mindfully, can serve as a valuable tool for emotional and cognitive development.

Alsahlly found that anime viewers in Saudi Arabia exhibited higher IQ levels and general knowledge compared to non-viewers. The study emphasizes that anime can be an educational resource, enriching viewers' understanding and boosting cultural knowledge[9].

Yusof *et al.* conducted a pilot study on secondary school adolescents and observed that watching anime had positive effects on teenagers, with no significant relationship between anime viewership and social problems. This suggests that anime can provide a positive recreational activity that fosters mental well-being without contributing to social disorders[10].

1.2 Negative Impacts of Anime on Mental Well-being

Despite the noted benefits, there are considerable concerns regarding the negative impacts of anime on adolescent mental health. Zuo also highlighted potential adverse effects, such as the promotion of violence, pornography, and social isolation. These negative outcomes necessitate careful monitoring and guidance from parents and educators[8].

Liu *et al.* explored the association between anime idol culture and adverse psychological outcomes, including anxiety, aggression, depression, and suicidal tendencies. Their study revealed that subcultural identities related to anime and idol culture could significantly contribute to negative mental health outcomes in youth[11].

Reyes and Mohammed discussed the depiction of self-harm and suicide in popular anime series, underscoring the potential for these portrayals to negatively affect young viewers. This finding calls for greater scrutiny of anime content and its potential psychological impact[12].

1.3 Mixed Effects and the Need for Further Research

Mohammed *et al.* posited a correlation between anime viewership and adolescent mental health characteristics, advocating for further clinical investigation to better understand this relationship. Their study suggests that while anime has the potential for both positive and negative impacts, more comprehensive research is needed to draw definitive conclusion[13].

Wu *et al.* examined the broader implications of screen time on mental health, noting that increased screen time was associated with higher risks of mental health problems among college students. Although not specific to anime, these findings highlight the importance of moderating media consumption to safeguard mental well-being[14]. In one research six themes emerged from the data synthesis. Risks and benefits of digital technology, health support, information and self-assessment, iatrogenesis of digital technology, health seeking and support, modes of digital therapeutic support and robotics, resilience and enabling technologies. That research concluded on the base of six theme, There appears to be some benefits for some children and young people who use digital technology and social media to enhance their mental wellbeing, however, similar approaches could have a counter-productive effect[18].

In conclusion, nowadays anime is watched by a lot of various circles, especially teenagers, because there are genres whose stories are very compatible with daily life experienced by teenagers, and anime is also one source of entertainment that is very easy to get the existing literature presents a nuanced picture of the impact of anime on adolescent mental well-being. While there are clear benefits in terms of cognitive and emotional development, significant risks related to negative psychological outcomes cannot be overlooked. This research paper seeks to provide a balanced view, emphasizing the need for mindful consumption and further investigation to maximize the positive impacts of anime while mitigating its potential harms.

1.4 Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of anime on the mental well-being of youth aged 15-25. Specifically, it aims to analyze the socio-demographic profile of respondents who watch anime and examine various aspects of their mental well-being. By identifying correlations between anime consumption and mental health indicators, the study seeks to understand both the positive and negative effects of anime on young viewers. Through this comprehensive analysis, the research aims to provide insights that can inform parents, educators, and mental health professionals about the potential benefits and risks associated with anime consumption. This paper aims to explore the intersection of anime and mental health, analyzing selected anime series and films to examine how these narratives contribute to broader discussions on mental well-being. By investigating the portrayal of mental health issues in anime, this study seeks to elucidate how these narratives reflect and influence societal perceptions and attitudes towards mental health globally.

1.5 Rationale

The growing popularity of anime among adolescents and young adults has raised questions about its impact on their mental health. Anime, with its diverse genres and themes, has become more than just a form of entertainment; it is a cultural phenomenon that resonates deeply with its audience. As young people navigate the complexities of emotional and psychological development, understanding the influence of anime on their mental well-being is crucial.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses a gap in existing research by providing empirical evidence on the mental health effects of anime, an area that has not been extensively explored. Second, it uses a comprehensive approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, to offer a nuanced understanding of how anime influences mental well-being. Third, the findings can have practical applications, helping parents and educators make informed decisions about media consumption. By highlighting both the positive

and negative aspects of anime, the study aims to foster a balanced view that encourages mindful consumption while mitigating potential harms.

In a world where media consumption is a significant part of daily life, particularly for youth, this research is timely and relevant. It seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on media psychology and the role of entertainment in shaping mental health outcomes. Through its findings, the study hopes to provide a foundation for future research and interventions that leverage anime's positive aspects while addressing its potential risks.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

The study's sample consisted of 180 respondents aged 15-25 years, with a fairly even gender distribution (45% male and 55% female). Participants were selected using snowball sampling from different areas of Lucknow city. This non-probability sampling technique involved identifying initial subjects who then recruited further participants from their acquaintances, forming a chain-referral process.

2.2 Study Design

A descriptive research design was employed to explore the impact of anime on the mental well-being of youth. Data were collected through a combination of online and offline methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Online data were gathered via Google Forms and emails, while offline data collection involved in-person interviews and questionnaires. Ensuring accuracy, precision, and relevance, the collected data were subsequently coded, scored, tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate statistical procedures.

2.3 Tools and Techniques

- **Interview Schedule and Questionnaire**: A self-constructed, pretested interview schedule and a standardized 5-point Likert scale questionnaire were utilized to collect data.
- **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)**: The WEMWBS, designed for self-completion, comprises 14 positively worded items covering aspects of subjective and psychological well-being. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 14 to 70, where higher scores indicate greater mental well-being.

2.4 Data Collection

Data collection involved a mixed-method approach. After identifying the sample, respondents were asked for consent to participate in the study. Both online and offline data collection methods were employed to capture a diverse range of responses. The gathered data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using relevant statistical tools.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to examine the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize variable characteristics. Inferential statistics, including Pearson's correlation and t-tests, were employed to explore associations between variables. IBM SPSS statistics version 20 was used for statistical analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 General Information of Respondents

The study sample consisted of 180 respondents.

3.2 Distribution of Respondents on the Basis on the Score of Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) of Respondents

Information on the mental well-being of respondents watching anime was gathered using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) developed in 2006.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents on the basis of gender

Si. No.	Gender	Frequency (Percentage)
1	Male	81(45)
2	Female	99(55)

The results provided in Table 1 outlines the demographic composition of respondents based on gender. In terms of age distribution, the most prominent group falls within the 21-25 range, making up a significant 82.8% of the total respondents, with smaller percentages for those aged 18-20 and 15-17 at 11.1% and 6.1%, respectively. Gender distribution shows a fairly even split, with 55% female and 45% male respondents; notably, no respondents identify as transgender.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents on the basis of the score of Warwick- Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) of respondents, N=180

Si. No.	Criteria	Frequency (%)
1	Low	48 (25.5)
2	Moderate	119 (63.3)
3	High	13 (6.9)

Results in Table 2 indicates a varied distribution of respondents perceptions regarding the influence of anime on youth behaviour. The data shows that 25.5% of respondents perceive the influence of anime to be low, with 48 individuals falling into this category. The majority of respondents, 63.3%, which translates to 119 individuals, believe that anime has a moderate impact on behaviour. Lastly, a smaller portion of the sample, 6.9% or 13 individuals, perceive the influence of anime on behaviour to be high. This distribution suggests that while there is a general consensus towards a moderate impact of anime on youth behaviour, significant proportions of the sample also perceive both low and high levels of influence.

The collected data were summarized using descriptive statistics, specifically in terms of frequency and percentage.

3.3 Hypothesis Testing

H0: There is no significant difference in mental well-being across different gender groups.

3.4 Discussion

The study aimed to explore the impact of anime on the mental well-being of youth aged 15-25. The findings indicate that a significant portion of respondents reported feeling optimistic, useful, and relaxed most of the time, suggesting that anime may have a positive influence on their mental well-being, providing emotional support and a sense of community. This is consistent with Wang, who found that anime can serve as a source of emotional comfort and community for viewers, and Marbaniang and Santosh, who observed the positive cultural impact of anime in India[6].

Conversely, the potential negative effects cannot be ignored. Researcher found that involvement in anime idol culture can lead to increased anxiety, aggression, depression, and suicidal tendencies[11]. Reyes and Mohammed discussed the potential harm of depictions of self-harm and suicide in anime, emphasizing the need for careful content monitoring[12].

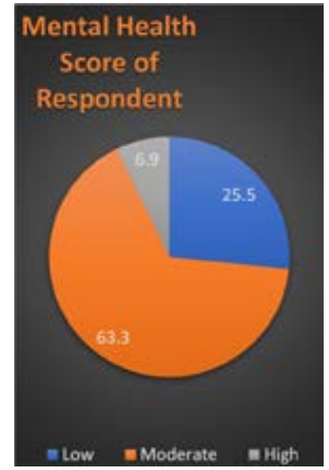


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents based on the score of Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) of respondents.

Table 3. Comparison of mental well-being across gender groups

WEMWBS	Mean ± Standard Deviation	t	P	Conclusion
Male	46.46 ± 8.56	1.28	0.20	NS
Female	44.86 ± 8.13			

The t-test results indicated that $p > 0.05$, showing no significant difference. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating no significant difference in mental well-being across gender groups.

4. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the influence of anime on the mental well-being of youth, revealing predominantly positive trends among viewers. It highlights anime's potential as a supportive medium for mental health, showcasing its capacity to foster emotional resilience and social connectedness. However, the scope of the study is limited by factors such as geographic concentration and self-reported data, underscoring the need for broader research. Future studies should aim to encompass diverse populations and utilize longitudinal approaches to thoroughly examine the sustained impact of anime on mental well-being across different contexts.

5. Implications

- The positive responses regarding mental well-being highlight the potential of anime as a medium for mental health promotion.
- The results can be used to create awareness among viewers regarding the ill-effects of excessive anime viewing.
- Given the growing popularity of anime, it can be used as a tool to address mental health issues among youth, offering relatable content and emotional support.

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