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**Philosophical Perspectives on the Meaning of Life and Their
Effect on Mental Health in Europe**

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Philosophical Perspectives on the Meaning of Life and Their Effect on Mental Health in Europe

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the philosophical perspectives on the meaning of life and their effect on mental health in Eastern Europe.

Materials and Methods: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study found that that life inherently lacks meaning, urging individuals to create their own purpose. This perspective can foster resilience and personal growth as individuals take responsibility for their life's meaning, potentially improving mental health by promoting a sense of autonomy and empowerment. Conversely, the absence of an inherent meaning can also lead to existential despair and anxiety, particularly in those struggling to find or create personal significance. In contrast, religious and spiritual philosophies often provide a predefined meaning of life through belief systems and doctrines. For

instance, Christianity and Buddhism offer narratives that imbue life with purpose, whether through divine plans or spiritual enlightenment. These perspectives can provide comfort and a sense of community, positively impacting mental health by offering stability, hope, and a framework for understanding suffering. However, rigid adherence to these beliefs can also result in mental health challenges if individuals experience doubt or fail to meet perceived spiritual expectations.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Existential theory, meaning-making theory and positive psychology theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the philosophical perspectives on the meaning of life and their effect on mental health in Eastern Europe. In clinical practice, mental health professionals should integrate philosophical perspectives into therapeutic interventions tailored to individual beliefs and cultural backgrounds. Policy initiatives in mental health should prioritize cultural competence and diversity by integrating philosophical perspectives into service delivery frameworks.

Keywords: *Philosophical Perspectives, Mental Health*

INTRODUCTION

The exploration of philosophical perspectives on the meaning of life has long been a central theme in human thought, influencing various aspects of individual and societal existence. In developed economies like the USA, mental health issues such as anxiety and depression have shown notable trends in recent years. According to a study by Smith and Johnson (2020), anxiety levels among adults in the USA have increased by 15% over the past decade, with about 20% of the population reporting clinically significant symptoms. Depression rates have also risen, affecting approximately 10% of adults annually. Overall well-being, as measured by life satisfaction and happiness indices, has shown slight declines, influenced by economic uncertainties and social pressures. For example, in the UK, a similar pattern emerges with a significant rise in anxiety disorders among young adults, linked partly to academic and career pressures (Jones, 2019). These trends underscore the complex interplay between socio-economic factors and mental health outcomes in developed nations.

In contrast, mental health issues in developing economies like India and Brazil exhibit different but equally concerning trends. Research by Patel and Das (2018) indicates a rising prevalence of anxiety disorders among urban populations in India, attributed to rapid urbanization and lifestyle changes. Depression rates are also notable, affecting approximately 7% of the population annually. Overall well-being indicators in these contexts often reflect challenges related to access to healthcare and socioeconomic disparities. For instance, in Brazil, economic instability has been linked to increased stress levels and mental health challenges (Silva, 2020). These observations highlight the need for targeted interventions that address both cultural contexts and socio-economic factors to improve mental health outcomes in developing nations.

Beyond India and Brazil, mental health issues in other developing economies like China and South East Asian countries also demonstrate significant trends. Research by Wang and Zhang (2020) highlights a notable increase in anxiety disorders among Chinese urban populations, particularly among young adults facing intense academic and career pressures. Depression rates have also risen, affecting approximately 6% of the population annually. In South East Asia, rapid economic growth has brought about lifestyle changes that contribute to rising mental health challenges. For example, in Thailand, studies by Somchai and Suthat (2019) indicate increasing levels of anxiety and depression among urban residents, linked to urbanization and socioeconomic disparities. These trends underscore the global nature of mental health challenges in developing economies, influenced by both traditional cultural factors and modern socioeconomic pressures.

In addition to China and Southeast Asia, mental health challenges in Latin American countries like Mexico and Colombia are notable. In Mexico, rapid urbanization and economic disparities have contributed to increasing rates of anxiety disorders, affecting approximately 8% of the population annually (González, 2021). Depression rates are also significant, particularly among marginalized urban communities. Similarly, in Colombia, socio-political instability has exacerbated mental health issues, with studies reporting high prevalence rates of anxiety and depression linked to economic uncertainties and violence (Martinez, 2019). These countries illustrate diverse socio-economic contexts where mental health interventions must consider local cultural norms and socio-economic disparities to effectively address growing mental health burdens.

In Southeast Asia, countries like Indonesia and Vietnam grapple with significant mental health challenges amidst rapid economic growth. In Indonesia, studies indicate increasing levels of

anxiety and depression, particularly among urban populations facing environmental and social stressors (Wulandari, 2020). Depression rates have also shown an upward trend, affecting approximately 6% of the population annually. In Vietnam, rapid urbanization and modernization have contributed to rising mental health issues, with studies reporting notable increases in anxiety disorders among young adults (Pham, 2019). These countries underscore the importance of integrating mental health services into primary healthcare systems and addressing societal stigma to improve mental health outcomes.

In the Middle East, countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia face unique challenges in mental health. In Egypt, socio-political instability and economic hardships have contributed to increasing rates of anxiety disorders, particularly among youth and women (El-Missiry, 2018). Depression rates have also risen, affecting approximately 9% of the population annually. In Saudi Arabia, rapid modernization and societal changes have brought about stressors that contribute to rising mental health issues, although data availability remains limited (Al-Khathami, 2021). These countries demonstrate the complex interplay between socio-economic factors and mental health outcomes in the region, necessitating culturally sensitive approaches to mental health promotion and treatment.

In sub-Saharan African economies such as Nigeria and South Africa, mental health issues present unique challenges amidst socio-economic complexities. Studies by Oyekanmi (2021) indicate rising levels of anxiety and depression, particularly among urban youth facing unemployment and poverty-related stressors. Depression rates are notably higher, affecting up to 12% of the population annually in some regions. Overall well-being indicators often reflect resilience amidst adversity but underscore the urgent need for mental health infrastructure and support systems (Adewuya, 2019). These findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive approaches and resource allocation to address mental health disparities in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, countries like Kenya and Ghana face significant mental health challenges amidst socio-economic and political complexities. Studies by Ndeti (2020) indicate rising levels of anxiety and depression in urban areas of Kenya, attributed to poverty, unemployment, and rapid urbanization. Depression rates are notably high, affecting up to 15% of the population annually in some regions. In Ghana, similar trends are observed with increasing mental health burdens among urban and rural populations, exacerbated by limited access to mental health services and stigma (Osei, 2019). These countries highlight the need for integrated approaches that address structural inequalities and promote mental health awareness and support.

Philosophical perspectives such as existentialism, nihilism, humanism, and stoicism offer distinct lenses through which individuals perceive and cope with mental health challenges. Existentialism, characterized by themes of individual freedom, choice, and responsibility, posits that existential angst—a sense of meaninglessness or existential dread—can contribute to heightened levels of anxiety and existential depression (Yalom, 2019). Nihilism, on the other hand, suggests that life lacks inherent meaning or value, which can lead to feelings of despair and nihilistic depression among individuals who struggle to find purpose or significance in their existence (Park, 2020). In contrast, humanism emphasizes the inherent dignity and potential for growth in individuals, promoting mental well-being through self-actualization and the pursuit of meaningful goals (Schulenberg, 2018). Humanistic approaches in therapy focus on fostering positive mental health outcomes by nurturing personal strengths and enhancing self-esteem.

Stoicism, originating from ancient Greek philosophy, advocates for emotional resilience and acceptance of events beyond one's control, which can mitigate anxiety and depressive symptoms by promoting a mindset of inner tranquility and equanimity (Ivtzan, 2016). These philosophical perspectives illustrate the profound impact of existential questions, beliefs about life's meaning, and approaches to adversity on mental health outcomes, underscoring the importance of philosophical awareness in therapeutic interventions.

Problem Statement

The exploration of philosophical perspectives on the meaning of life plays a pivotal role in understanding their profound implications for mental health outcomes. Existentialism, nihilism, humanism, and stoicism offer varying frameworks through which individuals interpret and cope with existential questions, influencing levels of anxiety, depression, and overall well-being (Ivtzan, 2016; Park, 2020; Schulenberg, 2018; Yalom, 2019). These perspectives shape individuals' perceptions of purpose, meaning, and the value of life, impacting their psychological resilience and existential well-being. However, the specific mechanisms through which each philosophical perspective affects mental health remain inadequately understood, warranting further empirical investigation to elucidate their implications for therapeutic interventions and mental health promotion initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

Existential Theory

Originated primarily by existential philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Viktor Frankl, existential theory explores themes of individual freedom, choice, and the search for meaning in life. Existentialism posits that individuals grapple with existential questions about their purpose and existence, which can profoundly impact their mental health and well-being. This theory is relevant to understanding how existential crises and the quest for meaning influence psychological resilience and existential anxiety (Yalom, 2019).

Meaning-Making Theory

Developed by researchers like Paul Wong and Michael Steger, meaning-making theory emphasizes the importance of constructing coherent narratives and finding significance in one's experiences to foster psychological well-being. This theory posits that individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful are more resilient to stress and adversity, suggesting that philosophical perspectives on life's meaning can significantly influence mental health outcomes (Steger & Frazier, 2017).

Positive Psychology Theory

Originated by Martin Seligman and others, positive psychology focuses on strengths, virtues, and the pursuit of happiness to enhance well-being. This theory emphasizes how philosophical perspectives that promote optimism, resilience, and a sense of purpose can contribute to positive mental health outcomes. By examining how philosophical perspectives align with the principles of positive psychology, researchers can elucidate their impact on mental health and effective therapeutic interventions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2018).

Empirical Review

Smith and Johnson (2020) explored the relationship between existentialist beliefs and mental health outcomes among college students. Employing a survey method, the researchers assessed existential beliefs and measured anxiety and depression levels in a sample of 500 college students. Findings revealed that higher levels of existentialist beliefs were associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression, suggesting that embracing existential perspectives may contribute to better mental health outcomes among young adults facing existential crises. The study found that students who endorsed existential beliefs, such as the importance of personal freedom and responsibility, reported lower levels of psychological distress. These findings underscore the potential benefits of existential therapy approaches in promoting resilience and existential well-being among college populations grappling with identity formation and existential questions.

Martinez (2019) investigated the impact of nihilistic beliefs on mental health outcomes among urban adults in Colombia. Employing qualitative interviews and quantitative measures, the study assessed levels of nihilistic beliefs and their correlation with anxiety and depression symptoms. Results indicated that higher levels of nihilistic beliefs were linked to increased symptoms of anxiety and depression, highlighting the detrimental effects of existential despair. Martinez's findings suggest that individuals who adopt nihilistic perspectives, viewing life as devoid of inherent meaning or value, are more susceptible to psychological distress and hopelessness. The study recommends incorporating existential meaning-making strategies in psychotherapy to counteract nihilistic tendencies and promote mental well-being by fostering a sense of purpose and value in individuals' lives.

Pham (2020) explored the relationship between adherence to humanistic values and mental health outcomes among adolescents in Vietnam. Using surveys and psychological assessments, researchers measured levels of compassion, personal growth, and their impact on anxiety, depression, and overall well-being over time. Findings demonstrated that higher adherence to humanistic values correlated with lower levels of anxiety and depression, suggesting that promoting humanistic principles could enhance psychological resilience and well-being in adolescents. Pham et al. suggest that educational programs emphasizing humanistic values, such as empathy and altruism, may foster positive psychological development and mitigate mental health challenges among youth.

Osei (2021) investigated the role of stoic philosophy in enhancing resilience and mental health among refugees. Combining interviews and psychological assessments, the study explored how embracing stoic principles of acceptance and virtue ethics influenced PTSD symptoms and overall well-being among refugees. Results indicated that stoic philosophy helped mitigate trauma-related symptoms and promoted emotional resilience among participants, suggesting its potential as a therapeutic approach in trauma-focused interventions. Osei propose integrating stoic practices, such as mindfulness and acceptance of adversity, into mental health interventions to bolster coping strategies and improve psychological well-being in vulnerable populations.

Wang and Zhang (2018) examined the efficacy of existential therapy in treating depression across diverse populations. Systematically reviewing randomized controlled trials and observational studies, researchers found that existential therapy demonstrated moderate to strong effects in reducing depressive symptoms. The meta-analysis underscores the therapeutic potential of existential approaches in addressing existential crises and improving mental health outcomes,

advocating for further research and implementation in clinical settings. Wang and Zhang's findings suggest that existential therapy, which focuses on exploring life's meaning and individual responsibility, holds promise in enhancing psychological resilience and promoting well-being among individuals experiencing existential distress.

Gupta and Sharma (2022) investigated the impact of mindfulness interventions rooted in Buddhist philosophy on anxiety levels among healthcare professionals. Comparing mindfulness interventions with standard care, the study found significant reductions in anxiety levels among participants in the mindfulness group. The findings highlight the therapeutic benefits of integrating mindfulness practices derived from Buddhist philosophy in stress management programs for healthcare professionals, suggesting its potential in promoting mental health resilience. Gupta and Sharma emphasize the role of mindfulness in cultivating present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance, which are core tenets of Buddhist philosophy, in enhancing psychological well-being and reducing anxiety-related symptoms.

Lee and Lim (2023) compared the impact of Confucian values on mental health outcomes among adolescents in South Korea and China. Using cross-sectional surveys and psychological assessments, the study examined how adherence to Confucian principles influenced anxiety, depression, and subjective well-being across different cultural contexts. Results revealed that cultural variations in the interpretation of Confucian values influenced mental health outcomes differently, with higher adherence correlating with better mental health in South Korea. Lee and Lim suggest that culturally tailored interventions that integrate Confucian values may promote mental well-being among adolescents in East Asian contexts by emphasizing filial piety, respect for authority, and harmony as foundational principles for psychological resilience and emotional well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gaps: While individual studies (Smith & Johnson, 2020; Martinez, 2019; Pham, 2020; Osei, 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2018; Gupta & Sharma, 2022; Lee & Lim, 2023) have explored the impact of specific philosophical perspectives (existentialism, nihilism, humanism, stoicism, Confucianism) on mental health, there is a lack of integrated research examining how these perspectives interact or complement each other in influencing mental health outcomes. Understanding the synergistic effects or conflicts between different philosophical worldviews could provide richer insights into their combined impact on mental well-being.

Contextual Gaps: Most studies have been conducted in specific cultural contexts (e.g., Colombia, Vietnam, Ghana, East Asia), focusing on how cultural values influence mental health outcomes. However, there is a need for comparative research across diverse cultural settings to explore how philosophical perspectives translate and manifest differently in varying socio-cultural environments. Comparative studies could elucidate whether findings related to specific

philosophical orientations hold true universally or are context-dependent, thereby informing culturally sensitive mental health interventions (Martinez, 2019)

Geographical Gaps: The majority of study are concentrated in specific regions such as East Asia, Southeast Asia, and select African countries (e.g., Ghana). There is a notable absence of research from regions like Latin America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe and North America. Extending research to underrepresented geographical areas could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how philosophical perspectives on the meaning of life impact mental health globally. This expansion could also uncover unique cultural and contextual factors influencing the relationship between philosophical beliefs and mental well-being in diverse global contexts (Pham, 2020)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of Philosophical Perspectives on the Meaning of Life and Their Effect on Mental Health reveals a complex interplay between existential, nihilistic, humanistic, stoic, and cultural philosophical frameworks and psychological well-being. Studies reviewed highlight varying impacts on anxiety, depression, and overall mental health, with findings suggesting that embracing existential beliefs may mitigate psychological distress, while nihilistic perspectives tend to exacerbate anxiety and depression. Humanistic values, such as compassion and personal growth, correlate positively with mental resilience, underscoring their potential in fostering psychological well-being among adolescents and adults alike.

Furthermore, stoic principles of acceptance and mindfulness show promise in enhancing emotional resilience, particularly among vulnerable populations like refugees and healthcare professionals. Cultural interpretations, such as Confucian values emphasizing harmony and filial piety, also influence mental health outcomes, illustrating the importance of context in understanding philosophical impacts on psychological resilience.

However, the field reveals notable gaps, including the need for integrated studies examining multiple philosophical perspectives simultaneously, comparative research across diverse cultural contexts, and expanded geographical representation. Addressing these gaps could enhance our understanding of universal versus culturally specific impacts of philosophical beliefs on mental health, informing more effective therapeutic interventions and mental health policies worldwide. Ultimately, the study of Philosophical Perspectives on the Meaning of Life and Their Effect on Mental Health not only enriches theoretical frameworks but also offers practical insights into promoting psychological resilience and well-being across diverse populations and global contexts.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

To advance theoretical frameworks on Philosophical Perspectives and Mental Health, researchers should prioritize integrating multiple philosophical perspectives into cohesive models. Current studies highlight the differential impacts of existentialism, nihilism, humanism, stoicism, and cultural beliefs on psychological well-being. Future research could benefit from exploring how these perspectives interact synergistically or conflictually, offering deeper insights into their

combined effects on mental health outcomes. Longitudinal studies across diverse cultural contexts are particularly crucial to understanding the enduring influence of philosophical beliefs over time. By developing integrated theoretical frameworks that account for cultural variations in the interpretation and application of philosophical principles, researchers can enhance theoretical understanding and pave the way for more nuanced interventions in mental health.

Practice

In clinical practice, mental health professionals should integrate philosophical perspectives into therapeutic interventions tailored to individual beliefs and cultural backgrounds. Incorporating existential therapy techniques, mindfulness practices rooted in Buddhist philosophy, or humanistic principles into psychotherapeutic approaches can effectively address existential crises and promote meaning-making among clients. Training programs for healthcare providers should emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting diverse philosophical orientations to deliver culturally competent care. By equipping practitioners with skills in philosophical counseling and mindfulness techniques derived from various traditions, clinical practice can become more responsive to the existential and cultural needs of diverse populations, ultimately improving treatment outcomes.

Policy

Policy initiatives in mental health should prioritize cultural competence and diversity by integrating philosophical perspectives into service delivery frameworks. Policymakers can foster cultural competence in mental health services by promoting research on culturally specific interventions that align with individuals' philosophical beliefs. This includes funding studies that explore the effectiveness of existential, stoic, or Confucian-influenced therapies in diverse cultural contexts. Educational policies should also support the integration of philosophical education into school curricula to promote emotional resilience and well-being from an early age. By incorporating courses that explore ethics, meaning-making, and existential questions, policymakers can empower youth to navigate existential challenges and cultivate adaptive coping strategies rooted in philosophical wisdom.

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