

**A Comparative Study of Emerging Adulthood and Social Connectedness Among Local
and Relocated College Students**

Dissertation submitted to Kerala University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

Master of Science in Counselling Psychology

Submitted by

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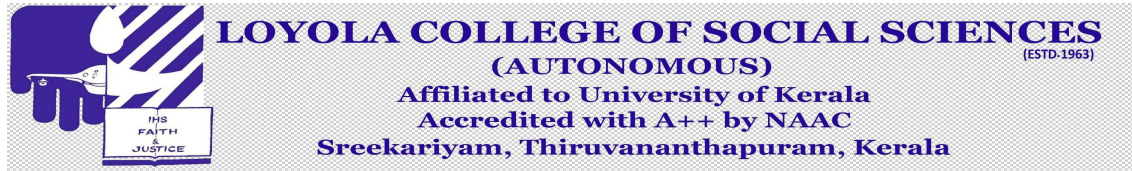
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Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram

2024 - 2026



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **“A Comparative Study of Emerging Adulthood Characteristics and Social Connectedness among Local and Relocated College Students”** is an authentic and original work carried out by **Vinaya P** under the Supervision of Ms. Athmaja Panickar during the fourth semester of M.Sc. Counselling Psychology programme in the academic year 2024- 2026.

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Submitted for the examination held on: 14/07/2026

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DECLARATION

I, Vinaya P, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “A Comparative Study of Emerging Adulthood Characteristics and Social Connectedness among Local and Relocated College Students”, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Science in Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Sreekariyam, under the supervision of Ms.Athmaja Panickar, Assistant Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology, for the award of the degree of Master of Science in Counselling Psychology, is a bona fide work carried out by me, and no part of this work has been submitted for the award of any other degree in my University.

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Place: Sreekariyam

Date: 10/07/2026

Submitted for the examination held on: 14/07/2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my sincere gratitude to my guide, Ms. Atmaja Panicker, Assistant Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Sreekariyam, for her guidance, constant encouragement, constructive suggestions, and continuous support throughout the course of this research. Her insightful feedback and motivation played a significant role in the successful completion of this study.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Suresh K., Principal, College of Engineering, Trivandrum (CET), for granting permission to conduct this study. I also express my sincere thanks to the NSS Unit of the College of Engineering, Trivandrum, especially the NSS volunteers, for their wholehearted cooperation and support in facilitating the data collection process.

I am equally grateful to all the students who participated in this research.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to the Department Heads, faculty members and students of the Departments of Economics, Hindi, and Engineering, University of Kerala, Karyavattom Campus, for their valuable cooperation and participation, which greatly contributed to the successful completion of this study.

I am Thankful to the faculty members of the Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Sreekariyam, namely Dr.Ammu Lukose, Dr.Jesline Maria Mammen, and Dr .Pramod S. K I would like to make a special mention of Dr. Pramod S. K. for his expert guidance in statistical analysis using SPSS. His valuable support and timely assistance greatly contributed to the accurate analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

Table of Content

List of Tables

List of Appendices

Abstract

Sl. No.	Chapters	Page No
I	Introduction	9 – 26
II	Literature Review	27 – 34
III	Methodology	35 – 43
IV	Result and Discussion	44 – 49
V	Summary and Conclusion	50 – 56
	References	57 – 59

List of Tables

Sl. No	Title of the tables	Page. No
1.	Shapiro -Wilk Test of Normality for the Study Variables	45
2.	Mann-Whitney U Comparison of Emerging Adulthood Scores of local and relocated college students	46
3.	Spearman's Rank Correlation Between Emerging adulthood and Social Connectedness Among local and relocated college students	47

List of Appendices

Appendix No.	Appendix Name	Page No.
Appendix A	Socio-demographic Data Sheet	60 – 61
Appendix B	Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA)	62 – 63
Appendix C	Social Connectedness Scale–Revised (SCS-R)	64 – 65

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to compare emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram. The total sample consisted of 157 undergraduate and postgraduate college students from various colleges and universities in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, including 82 local students and 75 relocated students. The study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative research design with a cross-sectional survey approach, and purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) developed by Reifman, Arnett, and Colwell (2007) was used to assess emerging adulthood characteristics, and the Social Connectedness Scale–Revised (SCS-R) developed by Lee, Draper, and Lee (2001) was used to assess social connectedness. The data were analysed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, Mann–Whitney U test, and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation. The results indicated that there was no significant difference in emerging adulthood characteristics between local and relocated college students. There was also no significant difference in social connectedness between local and relocated college students. Further, no significant relationship was found between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among local college students, and no significant relationship was found between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among relocated college students. Thus, all the null hypotheses were accepted. The findings suggest that residential status does not significantly influence emerging adulthood characteristics or social connectedness among college students in Thiruvananthapuram. Furthermore, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: - *emerging adulthood, social connectedness, local college students, relocated college students*

Chapter I

Introduction

The transition from being a teenager to an adult is a period of self-exploration and experimentation, as individuals begin to find their place in the world. Exploring one's identity is a way to discover the beliefs, passions, and goals that define a person, as well as his or her role in relation to others in the world. This process usually entails engaging in some form of introspection or questioning as young people search for their identity or direction in life (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1959).

Transition from adolescence to adulthood

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is characterized by psychological development and the ability to think abstractly. As individuals reach late adolescence and enter their twenties, they begin using higher levels of cognitive ability to achieve their goals and think through difficult situations. This transition enables them to make informed decisions and think critically. However, this psychological change can also contribute to confusion and questioning of one's meaning in life. Emotionally, young people may feel excitement and optimism as they embrace their autonomy and the opportunities that lie ahead. They may also experience uncertainty as they face the responsibilities and expectations of their age group. As adults, young people are pressured to meet societal expectations while pursuing their individual aspirations and dreams, which can be a challenging experience (Arnett, 2000).

In addition, the relationship between societal and cultural expectations and the experiences of young people is also integral to their transition from adolescence to adulthood. Social and cultural norms, such as the need to pursue further studies, build a career, get married, and have children, can motivate them or challenge their individual wants and needs (Tanner & Arnett, 2009). Similarly, the ease with which technology has facilitated human interaction and

socialization online presents young people with the complexities of navigating traditional and virtual social landscapes to find their voice and identity (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). As an emerging adult, one must strive to achieve key milestones while also taking on more responsibilities. Becoming economically independent, pursuing further studies or engaging in training to enhance one's skills, and asserting autonomy are some of the critical aspects of this stage of life (Arnett, 2000).

Furthermore, coming of age can be challenging as young people face and overcome various barriers and setbacks in their lives. These experiences compel them to become more resilient and adaptable as they negotiate their social and professional environments. For instance, academic or career-related problems as well as familial issues can challenge their resilience and test their response to adversity (Arnett, 2004). In negotiating these challenges and many other social, familial, and economic difficulties, emerging adults demonstrate a high degree of perseverance and resilience in their pursuit of their aspirations and goals in life (Arnett, 2004). Transitioning from adolescence to adulthood is an enlightening experience for young people as they engage in self-exploration to better understand their strengths, weaknesses, desires, and beliefs in the context of their evolving responsibilities (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1959).

Importance of peer relationships and support systems

In addition to the self-exploration process, young people also learn to become more empathetic and develop social skills as they interact with a wide range of individuals and build peer networks. Peer relationships and interactions enable them to hone their communicative abilities, cooperation tactics, and conflict-resolution strategies to engage with more complex social interactions as adults (Rubin et al., 2006). Adulthood is therefore characterized by more intricate social interactions and responsibilities in the domains of friendships, romantic

relationships, and work. The relationships that young people develop during adolescence tend to indicate their social status and reflect their levels of popularity and acceptance within a social network, as well as the likelihood of facing bullying and rejection (Rubin et al., 2006).

Prior literature provides considerable evidence concerning the role of peer relationships in young people's lives and their impact on their mental health, social behavior, and overall well-being. However, there is limited information on the mechanisms by which specific peer-related factors might contribute to young people's social outcomes in adulthood. According to social competence theories, positive peer associations during adolescence could promote better social skills and competence, which in turn lead to increased social support in emerging adulthood, resulting in better health and well-being (Rubin et al. 2009). Furthermore, social support functions as a buffer against negative health outcomes and depressive symptoms (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009).

Independence, Adjustment and Challenges

The coming-of-age process from adolescence to adulthood is a critical developmental period that entails self-exploration, becoming more independent, making decisions about careers, and navigating complex social relationships. Although young people in India are currently more empowered than ever before, a significant proportion of them still encounter a wide range of social, familial, and economic barriers, including dropout from educational institutions, early marriage, and parenthood. These issues significantly affect their mental well-being and adjustment in society (Arnett, 2000; UNICEF, 2021). Transition in education is a critical milestone for young people as it shapes their future career prospects and overall well-being. According to the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) statistics for 2021-22, the rate of transition from secondary to higher secondary levels declined compared to the previous year. In addition, research studies such as UDAYA reveal that dropout, fear of

failure, and examination stress are strongly associated with depressive symptoms among adolescents. Furthermore, transitioning to higher education levels reduces the likelihood of experiencing depression (Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2022; International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS] & Population Council, 2017).

Similarly, engaging in employment at a young age and shouldering greater responsibilities during adolescence are strongly associated with heightened psychological distress and depression. Studies indicate that adolescents who are employed are more likely to experience depression than those who do not engage in employment. Likewise, early marriage and parenthood increase the likelihood of poor mental health outcomes, particularly among female adolescents (International Labour Organization, 2020; UNICEF, 2021).

Understanding the challenges experienced by emerging adults, such as college-going, exploring their identity, and managing social relationships, is critical, given the numerous developmental issues that they face. Social connectedness is especially important for students who relocate away from their families, as they may experience social isolation, loneliness, and lack of support. Therefore, it is essential to understand the social connectedness and emerging adulthood of relocated and local college-going students (Arnett, 2000; Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009).

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is the period of transition from adolescence to adulthood, occurring between the ages of 18 and 25. It is a developmental period characterized by exploration of one's identity, increased instability in many areas of life, and a feeling of being in-between adolescence and adulthood, although there is often more independence from familial obligations and social norms than there was during adolescence. Emerging adulthood, as defined by Arnett, is a stage of life that occurs between late adolescence and young adulthood

and usually encompasses the age bracket of 18 years to the late 20s. It is the period of life wherein young people experience the autonomy of being on their own without the direct guidance of parents or other authority figures but are yet to take on full responsibility for their lives due to the challenges associated with sustaining a living and building a family independently. Arnett refers to this as a “roleless role.” While the idea of emerging adulthood has existed in sociological literature for some time, it has been gaining greater attention and recognition in recent years (Arnett, 2000).

During emerging adulthood, individuals get the opportunity to explore their identities extensively, which is more intense compared to other stages of life because their roles are not yet formally defined (Arnett, 2000). Exploration characterizes this stage of life, primarily centered around beliefs and career, which has been facilitated by the shift from an industrial to an information-based society, wherein higher education has become increasingly valuable, and the onset of employment has been delayed. Furthermore, individuals who are in the age bracket of emerging adulthood are navigating through the domain of relationships and sex while considering the various economic and social opportunities available to them. Since there has been a significant shift in gender roles, especially with respect to opportunities in education and employment, the pressure to get married and have children at a young age has also decreased for both men and women (Tanner & Arnett, 2009).

According to Arnett (2004), emerging adulthood is a period of transition, also referred to as the “age of being in-between.” Most young people between the ages of 18 and 25 report feeling caught between adolescence and adulthood without identifying clearly as either. Compared to their parents’ generation, who quickly transitioned from being adolescents to taking on greater levels of responsibility in their careers, marriage, and parenthood, young people today are more likely to make this shift gradually and explore their options to a greater degree before committing to long-term decisions in their lives. Arnett argues that this is similar

to the moratorium that Erikson (1959) proposed as a period in emerging adulthood wherein individuals experiment with various roles before settling on a specific vocation or lifestyle. If this trend in delaying major life decisions continues to gain momentum in future generations, emerging adulthood will continue to be a prevalent social phenomenon (Arnett, 2007; Erikson, 1959).

One of the most compelling aspects of Arnett's theoretical orientation to the coming-of-age process is his identification of the unique set of circumstances that characterize emerging adulthood, which he initially outlined in his book titled "Emerging Adulthood: The Period of Life Between Adolescence and Adulthood" (2000). Among these distinct characteristics are instability, the exploration of multiple options in one's identity, increased self-concern as opposed to prosocial tendencies during adolescence, the feeling of being in between adolescence and adulthood, and the perception that there are several possible ways one can navigate life (Arnett, 2004). One of the main reasons why these characteristics have been identified as typical of emerging adulthood is the fact that less is expected of individuals in terms of assuming serious social roles such as spouse, parent, or career professional unless they choose to do so deliberately. Therefore, young people have the opportunity to make deliberate decisions about their lives without being obligated to conform to societal expectations until they are at least in their late 20s (Arnett, 2004; Reifman et al., 2007).

These characteristics have been identified by Arnett because he views emerging adulthood as a period when the need for autonomy is at the highest level among all other stages of life (Arnett, 2004; Arnett, 2000). Individuals who are in this age bracket can choose to leave their parental homes and start living independently if they have the financial means to do so. They can also decide to pursue further studies or career training to enhance their qualifications while simultaneously experimenting with different aspects of their romantic relationships. Contrary to the expectations that society places on adults to take on greater responsibilities in

their careers, families, and other domains while they have full autonomy to make decisions about their lives, emerging adults are in the process of exploring various domains of life that interest them but have not yet committed to any profession, lifestyle, or relationship. Therefore, they are willing to embrace the process of learning new things, such as acquiring the skills and strategies required for sustaining employment while also being open-minded regarding the various lifestyle options that suit their preferences and desires.

While adolescents are heavily reliant on their parents to guide them in their decision-making process, emerging adults are more independent and can therefore freely choose whether to continue their studies, get employed, or remain in their parents' house. They can also choose to get married or co-habit with their partners, switch between jobs, and return to school if they decide that their current endeavor is not worth their time and effort. On the other hand, adults who have already gotten married or employed are less likely to experience such flexibility because they have committed to these aspects of life and have to consider their partners' and parents' expectations when making future decisions (Arnett, 2004). Despite the fact that many people tend to describe emerging adulthood as a time of challenges and uncertainties, its characteristics suggest that it is generally a positive period in young people's lives since it enables them to pursue the goals of their hearts and minds.

Arnett's proposal that emerging adulthood is a developmental period has received overwhelming support from psychology, sociology, and related fields because it highlights a population that has historically been overlooked by developmental scientists. Nevertheless, this theory has faced numerous criticisms from various scholars who have challenged his perspective in several ways. First of all, Arnett assumes that emerging adulthood refers to a period in life when all individuals are expected to transition to adulthood. Contemporary developmental psychologists do not support this notion because they argue that developmental processes do not follow a linear path and that life involves multiple domains, each of which

can be negotiated individually instead of following a standardized sequence. For instance, an emerging adult who has completed college and is highly skilled in his profession may have to move back with his parents after experiencing a breakup with his fiancée. Although he has fulfilled the expectations of being economically independent and successful in his career, he is willing to accept the option of being dependent again because he is devastated by the breakup. On the other hand, it is also important to acknowledge that the phenomenon of emerging adulthood may only be applicable to young people in industrialized societies, especially those that belong to the middle and upper classes. This is because individuals who reside in developing countries and do not have access to clean water, adequate food, and clothing are less likely to be able to explore their options in life before choosing a path because their survival depends on limited resources and opportunities. In the same way, residents of the Global South are less likely to pursue higher education or engage in employment because they do not have the financial resources or the social safety nets that emerging adults in the developed world take for granted.

Theory of Emerging Adulthood

The theory of emerging adulthood was introduced by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett in 2000 to explain the period of life between adolescence and adulthood. According to Arnett, this stage of life is characterized by a variety of experiences that are different from those that are experienced during adolescence and young adulthood because individuals have greater autonomy from societal constraints but must also navigate life as independent entities (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) highlights the fact that changing social and demographic trends in industrialized societies, such as the increase in the age at which individuals get married and have children and the importance of obtaining tertiary education, have created emerging adulthood as a period of life that allows people to explore different aspects of life before assuming greater social roles and responsibilities.

According to the theory, the key features of emerging adulthood are as follows:

1. Exploratory nature of the period in domains of work, relationships, and worldview.
2. Greater instability of employment, relationships, and living situations.
3. Higher levels of self-focus than prosocial orientation.
4. Feeling between adolescence and adulthood.
5. The availability of numerous possibilities for the future.

The first of these features suggests that individuals in emerging adulthood spend more time exploring various aspects of their identities, primarily their careers, relationships, and religion. This is because their social roles have not been formally defined as they transition from being adolescents to adults (Arnett, 2000). Exploratory behaviours are therefore extremely common among emerging adults as they engage in various activities to determine what they truly want or prefer in life. For instance, they may try out several job options before identifying the one that suits them. Similarly, they can also pursue various types of romantic relationships before settling down or choosing to remain single for the majority if not all of their lives.

In addition to this, individuals in the age bracket of emerging adulthood have the opportunity to explore different cultural and religious beliefs to discover their worldview (Arnett, 2004). Furthermore, instability is the second key characteristic of this period in life, which is evident in the frequency with which people change jobs, residences, and friends. This suggests that the transition from adolescence to adulthood has become more difficult than it was in the past because individuals must consider numerous options before making their decisions, which can be stressful and challenging (Arnett, 2004).

The third characteristic is self-focus, which is apparent in the fact that many emerging adults choose to prolong their education or transition into the labor force because they do not have ongoing social obligations such as parenthood or spousal duties (Arnett, 2004). This allows them to focus on their personal lives and invest more time and effort in ensuring that they have achieved their personal best in terms of financial status and professional skills. This implies that the period of emerging adulthood is extremely instrumental in facilitating individuals' self-discovery in terms of their career and other aspects of their lives and, subsequently, enhancing their self-esteem.

The fourth characteristic entails the fact that individuals in emerging adulthood feel as though they are in-between adolescence and adulthood, although they are not yet completely prepared to assume total autonomy and independence because of the various responsibilities associated with sustaining a household (Arnett, 2004). Contrary to the common perception that most people in this age bracket of are already considered adults, studies by Arnett (2000) indicate that most individuals in emerging adulthood do not identify themselves as either adolescents or adults because, unlike the former, they have acquired a certain degree of independence while, on the other hand, experiencing instability in terms of their overall identity. Nonetheless, many of these individuals also indicate that they feel like adults in some specific areas of life. Lastly, the final characteristic entails the fact that individuals in emerging adulthood feel that there are numerous possibilities for their lives. Although they may be facing a wide range of socioeconomic and personal challenges, most of them have hope for the future and believe that they have the ability to create a prosperous life for themselves (Arnett, 2004).

Arnett (2000) asserts that the age bracket of emerging adulthood is not universal because the transition from adolescence to adulthood entails significantly different experiences depending on the societal context. Specifically, emerging adulthood is more likely to occur in industrialized and urbanized societies wherein individuals have the opportunity to make

deliberate decisions about their lives without being constrained by adverse environmental conditions. Therefore, this phenomenon is more prevalent in the developed world, especially in the middle and upper classes.

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is defined as belonging to a social group or network. It refers to how people in a group link together into networks to meet community, school, or organizational goals and operate as a unit. Family, friends, schools, and communities are extremely important since the support received from them promotes mental wellness, resiliency, and the power to cope with daily challenges and crises. Social connectedness is linked to a global connectedness as well as the number and variety of roles played by an individual. In addition, it also entails the purposes served by the connections and the positive and negative attributes associated with them. Social connectedness, therefore, refers to the range of fulfilling social connection needs and the extent to which an individual has desirable, diverse connections and feels linked by those connections. It also occurs when a person feels like they belong and are supported with compassion and care (Lee & Robbins, 1995).

Having strong social relationships promotes people's wellbeing, longevity, and ability to cope with disease and distress. Specifically, social connections can reduce the likelihood of chronic conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, stroke, dementia, depression, and anxiety and promote overall health and wellbeing. Some of the social connection benefits on health include enhancing stress management, supporting mental health, encouraging healthy diets, exercising regularly, and sleeping well in order to live a longer and healthier life (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

Social Support Among College Students

College years can be extremely overwhelming for students, and for some of them, the experience of having to be in such a big place full of talented and competitive individuals can be a real shock. The main sources of stress for students are often related to the lifestyle changes, independence, language, food, and diversity (Misra & Castillo, 2004).

Adapting to and surviving in college can be highly stressful for students. In such cases, social connectedness and support are critically important, as they allow individuals to feel cared for and loved by other people. Social support is a concept involving a network of contacts, friendships, and relationships, starting from familiar people such as friends and family. Students can receive social support from faculty, staff, and other students at their universities, as well as from other sources in the outside world. There are a number of studies dedicated to the phenomenon of social support among college students, as it has proven to be highly important in students' lives. For instance, Hefner et al. (2009) note that individuals with a lower level of perceived social support are much more prone to mental health issues, such as depression, than those with higher levels of social support. The idea of increasing social support among college students has proven to be highly beneficial for students' lives (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009).

There is a vast amount of literature and research showing the importance of perceived social support to people's emotional well-being and overall wellness (Turner 2010). In addition, it has been revealed that there is an incredibly long waiting list to consult with a mental health professional on campuses (Jeftic 2023), suggesting the importance of alternative ways of enhancing wellness. Therefore, if the campus can provide students with more opportunities for involvement, it could greatly increase students' social support and overall wellness. Belonging is a concept that has proven to be incredibly important for almost all areas of people's lives.

The positive effects of social connection can be seen in just about every aspect, and some of the most important ones are listed below:

1. Professional or Academic Wellness: Individuals who feel included and supported are much more likely to succeed in their professional or academic aspirations. A strong feeling of belonging promotes motivation and focus on achieving one's goals.
2. Emotional Wellness: Being a part of a community provides people with the opportunity to cope with stress and anxiety effectively. The feeling of having someone to rely on, even in the saddest or happiest moments of life, is what makes people emotionally stable.
3. Social Well-being: An important characteristic of social connectedness is that it makes people more open-minded and aware of their place in society. Interaction with others allows individuals to develop empathy, expand their knowledge and experience, and create long-lasting relationships. Moreover, making others feel welcome in day-to-day interactions, such as during communal dinners or walks, can enable them to experience a strong sense of belonging to the Hopkins community, in this case.

Local and Relocated College Students

The period of emerging adulthood is a distinct life stage in humans that spans roughly from the age of 18 to 25. During this time, individuals experience a variety of transformations, becoming more autonomous and taking responsibility for major life events. People at this stage begin to explore their options in life and become more goal-oriented. Emerging adulthood is strongly associated with self-discovery and experimentation, and people at this stage experience instability, as well as a feeling of being in between adolescence and adulthood. Universities play an absolutely crucial role in this period, as college is where young people begin to lead more independent lives and become more socially and professionally active. In other words, college can enable individuals to find their place in society (Arnett, 2000).

When transitioning to college, students experience a number of challenges associated with academic, social, and professional adaptation. Attending college requires young people to be much more independent, responsible, and emotionally stable, as they have to handle a variety of responsibilities, including academic, social, professional, and personal ones. All of these areas have a substantial effect on college students, contributing to their psychological, social, and identity-related challenges in emerging adulthood (Booker et al., 2022).

It is important to note that there is a certain degree of diversity within the collective of college students in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors. An important characteristic that distinguishes students from each other is their status in relation to the place of their attendance. Two main groups of college students are local and relocated students. Local students are those who attend college either nearby their hometown or choose to reside with their family throughout their studies. In turn, relocated students are those who move away from their place of residence to another city or state in order to pursue higher education. This differentiation between college students is extremely important, as the differences in their environments may have a considerable effect on their social adaptation and emerging adulthood (Lozano et al., 2024).

For the most part, students who reside close to their families experience benefits from this lifestyle, as they are able to rely on their parents' support and have more opportunities to interact with familiar people and be exposed to their culture. Parental support, along with the comfort of being at home, can be crucial in terms of emotional stability and overall mental health as young people continue to explore their identities. At the same time, staying close to one's family might prevent a student from developing important qualities, such as responsibility, independence (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009), and social awareness (Arnett, 2004).

Relocated college students on the other hand experience dramatic changes as they have to adapt to their new social and cultural environments and adjust to independent living after having lived with their parents. Such students have to get used to their dorms, manage their own lives, and make new friends. Some students may feel lonely and miss their families and previous friendships. In addition, relocated students may struggle with culture shock, financial and economic hardships, and a number of other challenges. At the same time, being relocated can help students develop crucial soft skills and promote their independence, adaptability, self-confidence, and social competencies (Kegel, 2015; Lozano et al., 2024).

The social connectedness and emerging adulthood traits among local and relocated students can be perceived quite differently. On the one hand, local college students are more likely to receive social support from their relatives. On the other hand, relocated students are more likely to rely on friendships and their relationships with a new community. Moreover, although relocated students are much more likely to experience challenges with adaptation and feelings of loneliness at first, they will eventually be able to develop extensive social connections and experience a stronger sense of belonging to their new community. In contrast, local students will have a lesser degree of independence and a smaller social circle throughout their college years.

In recent years, a growing number of people choose to relocate in order to pursue higher education, as well as for other economic, social, and personal reasons. As a result, colleges and universities experience an influx of relocated students, most of whom face social and psychological challenges due to their new living conditions and lifestyles. Thus, it is vitally important to recognize the differences between local and relocated students in order to reveal the key aspects affecting both their social adaptation and wellness as emerging adults (Lozano et al., 2024; Kegel, 2015).

Need and significance of the study

Emerging adulthood is a significant developmental stage during which individuals explore their identity, develop greater independence, and gradually assume adult roles and responsibilities. As college education occupies a major part of this period, students' academic experiences, social relationships, and living environments play an important role in shaping their psychological development and overall well-being. Local and relocated college students experience different social and environmental contexts, which may influence their experiences of emerging adulthood and their sense of social connectedness.

Local students often benefit from familiar surroundings, family support, and established social networks, whereas relocated students may experience challenges such as homesickness, loneliness, and adjustment difficulties while adapting to a new environment. At the same time, relocation may also encourage greater independence, resilience, and personal growth. Examining these differences can provide a better understanding of how diverse living contexts shape the developmental experiences of emerging adults. Social connectedness is an important psychological resource that contributes to emotional well-being, resilience, academic adjustment, and a stronger sense of belonging. In contrast, limited social connectedness may increase the risk of loneliness, psychological distress, and adjustment difficulties. Therefore, comparing the social connectedness of local and relocated college students can help identify their unique psychosocial needs during the transition to adulthood. The findings of this study may provide valuable insights for educational institutions, counsellors, and mental health professionals in designing effective orientation programmes, peer support initiatives, counselling services, and community-based interventions that promote students' adjustment and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the study contributes to the limited literature on emerging adulthood and social connectedness in the Indian, particularly Kerala, context, and

offers context-specific evidence to support future research and student mental health initiatives in higher education.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of study:

1. To compare the emerging adulthood characteristics between local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram.
2. To compare the social connectedness between local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram.
3. To examine the relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among local college students in Thiruvananthapuram.
4. To examine the relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram.

Hypothesis of the Study

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. H01: There is no significant difference in emerging adulthood characteristics between local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram.
2. H02: There is no significant difference in social connectedness between local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram.
3. H03: There is no significant relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among local college students in Thiruvananthapuram.
4. H04: There is no significant relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram.

Statement of the Problem

Emerging adulthood is a distinct developmental period characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and increased social interactions. Although previous studies have examined emerging adulthood and social connectedness separately, limited research has explored the relationship between these variables among local and relocated college students within the Indian context, particularly in Thiruvananthapuram. Understanding these differences is important as relocation for higher education may influence students' developmental experiences and social relationships.

Thus, the problem for the present study is entitled “A Comparative Study of Emerging Adulthood Characteristics and Social Connectedness among Local and Relocated College Students in Thiruvananthapuram.”

Delimitations of the Study

The present study is delimited to local and relocated undergraduate and postgraduate college students studying in educational institutions located in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The study includes students aged 18-29 years, which corresponds to the developmental period of emerging adulthood. The study is confined to students who are currently enrolled in regular academic programs. Students below 18 years of age, students above 29 years of age are excluded from the study. The study employs a cross-sectional research design and relies exclusively on standardized self-report instruments, namely the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) and the Social Connectedness Scale, along with a socio-demographic checklist.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

A literature review is a piece of academic writing demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the academic literature on a specific topic placed in context. A literature review also includes a critical evaluation of the material; this is why it is called a literature review rather than a literature report. According to Creswell (2005), a review of the literature “is a written summary of journal articles, books and other documents that describes the past and current state of information, organizes the literature into topics and documents a need for a proposed study.”

Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) examined the relationship between mental health and social support in a large, random sample of college students. A Web-based survey was administered at a large, public university, with 1,378 students completing the measures in this analysis (response rate = 57%). The results support our hypothesis that students with characteristics differing from most other students, such as minority race or ethnicity, international status, and low socioeconomic status, are at greater risk of social isolation. In addition, the authors found that students with lower quality social support, as measured by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, were more likely to experience mental health problems, including a sixfold risk of depressive symptoms relative to students with high quality social support. These results may help administrators and health providers to identify more effectively the population of students at high risk for mental illness and develop effective interventions to address this significant and growing public health issue.

Wilcox et al., (2005) in their findings on ‘It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people’: the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education” states that the presence or lack of social support networks and supportive interactions is a major

factor for students in deciding whether to stay or leave. Integrating into the university is a complex process, and finding a place between old and new social contexts creates tensions for students which are often difficult to resolve; for some students ‘over attachment’ to social contacts at home can lead to withdrawal from university. Academic staff need to ensure that students have a wide range of opportunities to form alliances with other students and with tutors, but our findings suggest that university estates departments and accommodation services also have a crucial role to play in this respect.

Hall et al., (2025) examined Lonely and connected in emerging adulthood: The ambivalence of sociality in a time of transitions utilizing a large, representative sample of Americans (N = 4,812), the present manuscript explores individuals’ age in relation to social well-being (i.e., connection, companionship, friendship support, and number of friends) and social ill-being (i.e., loneliness, disconnection). Participants ranged between the ages of 18–95, with a mean age of 43.7. Regression results demonstrate that although social ill-being is higher for emerging adults, social well-being is high for both younger and older adults. Cluster analysis identified four clusters of social ill-being and well-being. Participants in the cluster with high well-being and moderate ill-being were more likely to be young, educated females who had gone through many life changes in the past year. Participants in the cluster with high well-being and lowest ill-being were more likely to be older adults, facing fewer life changes. The present manuscript suggests that loneliness among young adults is not bereft of connection, companionship, and friendship, but instead is characteristic of rapid life changes and a lack of relational permanence and routine.

Thomas and Kannan (2022) examined the influence of social networking sites (SNS) on social capital formation among emerging adults in Idukki, Kerala. The study was carried out among 455 undergraduate students using a cross-sectional research design and cluster sampling method. Findings revealed that nearly three-fourths of the participants actively used

social networking sites, with smartphones being the primary mode of access. The study highlighted that SNS use played a positive role in enhancing social capital among emerging adults. Specifically, the number of total friends, close friends, and online-only friends significantly predicted bonding social capital, while close friends and online-only friends were important predictors of bridging social capital. The researchers concluded that social networking platforms contribute positively to maintaining interpersonal relationships and social connectedness among emerging adults.

Lee et al., (2002) examined the effects of social connectedness, social appraisal of the campus climate, and perceived stress of college women and men. Drawing from self-verification theory, social appraisal was hypothesized to mediate the effects of connectedness on perceived stress. Two hundred and fourteen college students were surveyed. Results support a partial mediation effect for women. Men, however, were more likely to negatively appraise the campus climate, and social connectedness was more negatively related to perceived stress for men than for women. Results are interpreted according to gender differences in independent and interdependent self-construal. The need to clearly define and measure social connectedness and social appraisal is also discussed. Counselling implications focus on the promotion and assessment of connectedness on campus.

Mondisa and McComb (2014) conducted among undergraduate and graduate engineering students at a large Midwestern university explored the role of social community in promoting connectedness and retention among students in STEM disciplines. The researchers examined differences in students' perceptions of connectedness and satisfaction based on gender and academic status. An online survey adapted from Rovai's Classroom Community Scale and the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (MOAQ) was administered to both male and female engineering students. The findings revealed significant differences in the way undergraduate and graduate students, as well as male and female students, perceived

their social communities and sense of belonging. The study emphasized that supportive social communities within educational settings can enhance students' connectedness, satisfaction, and retention, particularly in academically demanding fields such as engineering. The researchers also highlighted the importance of designing inclusive campus communities that foster meaningful peer interaction and social support.

Girmay and Singh (2019) in their research on "Social Isolation, Loneliness, and Mental and Emotional Well-being among International Students in the United States" states that the impact that poor acculturation can have on the students' mental and physical health, and how bridges between the international and non-international communities can be built and more importantly, sustained. Moreover, the results highlight the critical need for more effort to be focused on attending to both the mental and physical health needs of migrant students during their stay at the host university.

Lozano et al., (2024) examined the relationship between relocation and psychosocial outcomes among Latinx college students. The study included 159 first- and second-year Latinx students and examined variables such as mental health, psychosocial stress, campus belongingness, and social support. Findings revealed that students who relocated for college reported significantly higher levels of campus belonging and social support compared to non-relocating students. The study suggested that relocating may provide greater opportunities for social integration and adjustment within the college environment. The researchers emphasized the importance of institutional support systems and transition programs in improving the college experiences of Latinx students, especially in commuter-based universities.

Booker et al., (2022) examined the role of relatedness during the college transition among incoming college students in the United States. The researchers examined dispositional relatedness and situational relatedness and their association with college adjustment and

subjective well-being. Findings indicated that students who maintained stronger social connections and successfully built supportive relationships during the college transition demonstrated better campus adjustment, increased belongingness, lower homesickness, and greater life satisfaction. The study highlighted that social connectedness plays a significant role in promoting psychological well-being and successful adaptation during the transition to college life.

Kegel (2015) conducted study among Asian international college students in the United States examined the relationship between homesickness, social connectedness, universal-diverse orientation (UDO), and psychological distress. The study included 386 Asian international students from various American universities and explored how homesickness contributes to psychological distress during the college transition process. Findings revealed that homesickness was strongly associated with lower social connectedness and increased psychological distress among students. The researchers found that social connectedness and universal-diverse orientation acted as important mediating factors in reducing the negative psychological effects of homesickness. Students with stronger interpersonal connections and greater openness toward diverse social interactions demonstrated better psychological adjustment and lower distress levels. The study highlighted the importance of social support systems, inclusive campus environments, and counselling interventions in helping international students cope with homesickness and successfully adapt to college life.

Arnett and Mitra (2020) A large-scale study conducted among adults aged 18 to 60 examined the characteristics proposed in the theory of emerging adulthood, including identity exploration, self-focus, instability, feeling in-between, optimism, freedom, and excitement. The findings showed that individuals aged 18–25, identified as emerging adults, were more likely to endorse these characteristics compared to older age groups. Emerging adults reported higher levels of identity exploration, instability, and optimism regarding future possibilities, reflecting

the transitional nature of this developmental stage. However, the study also found that a considerable number of adults in older age groups similarly experienced some of these characteristics, suggesting that the features of emerging adulthood may not be entirely unique to individuals aged 18–25. The researchers concluded that although emerging adulthood is marked by distinct developmental experiences, certain psychosocial features such as self-focus, uncertainty, and exploration may continue across later stages of adulthood as well.

Peer and McAuslan (2016) examined the relationship between developmental experiences during emerging adulthood, mindfulness, and self-doubt among young adults. Using data from 1,293 participants from the “Emerging Adulthood Measured at Multiple Institutions” project, the researchers explored how mindfulness influenced the association between characteristics of emerging adulthood and self-doubt. The study focused on dimensions such as identity exploration, experimentation and possibilities, negativity and instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between. Findings revealed that mindfulness significantly mediated the relationship between developmental challenges—particularly negativity/instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between—and self-doubt. Age and gender also moderated certain aspects of these relationships. The study emphasized that mindfulness can serve as a protective psychological factor that helps emerging adults cope with uncertainty, instability, and identity-related challenges during this transitional developmental period.

Nankani and Vijayan (2024) examined the relationship between social connectedness and the dimensions of emerging adulthood among young adults in India. The study was conducted among 207 participants aged 18–25 years from different Indian cities using the Social Connectedness Scale–Revised (SCS-R) developed by Lee and Robbins (1995) and the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA-R) developed by Reifman et al. (2007). The findings revealed that social connectedness was positively associated with the dimensions of experimentation/possibilities and self-focus, whereas no significant relationship

was observed with identity exploration and feeling in-between. Regression analysis further indicated that social connectedness significantly predicted experimentation/possibilities and self-focus. Additionally, no significant gender differences were found in either social connectedness or the dimensions of emerging adulthood. The study highlights that stronger social connectedness may facilitate positive developmental experiences during emerging adulthood, particularly by encouraging self-development and openness to future opportunities among young adults in the Indian context.

Research Gap

Emerging adulthood and social connectedness have been well studied in developmental and social psychology. Previous research has looked at the traits of emerging adulthood, such as identity exploration, self-focus, instability, feeling in-between, and possibilities. It has also examined how social connectedness affects psychological well-being and adjustment. However, there is limited research that directly compares the characteristics of emerging adulthood and social connectedness between local and relocated college students, especially in the Indian context, and more specifically in Kerala.

Moving for higher education often leads to major changes in social networks, living arrangements, and developmental experiences. These changes can impact both emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness. Despite the growing number of students relocating for education, few studies have explored these factors together among local and relocated college students. Therefore, it is important to address this gap to understand students' developmental experiences. This understanding can help in creating effective counselling interventions and student support programs that encourage social adjustment, connectedness, and psychological well-being.

Relevance of the Study

Theoretically, this study adds to the developmental theory of emerging adulthood proposed by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett by examining its characteristics in local and relocated college students. It helps us understand how factors like relocation, changing social environments, and new life experiences affect the developmental tasks tied to emerging adulthood. Additionally, it contributes to the literature on social connectedness by looking at its role during this important developmental time. Furthermore, this study adds to the existing knowledge in developmental psychology and counselling psychology within the Indian and Kerala contexts.

Practically, the study's findings have important implications for counselling psychologists, college counsellors, educators, student welfare departments, and policymakers. The research can help identify the specific developmental and social challenges that local and relocated students face. This can lead to the creation of targeted counselling interventions and support services. The findings could inform orientation programs, peer-support initiatives, social integration activities, and mental health promotion programs aimed at improving students' social connectedness and overall well-being. The study also provides valuable insights for educational institutions to build a more supportive and inclusive environment for students who move for higher education. In addition, it contributes to the growing body of Indian literature on emerging adulthood, student adjustment, and psychological well-being, supporting evidence-based practices in higher education settings.

Chapter III

Methodology

The research methodology is made up of the specific ways and tools that have been applied to discover, choose, and analyse information about a certain subject. In the case of a research paper, the methodology allows the readers to make an evaluation of the validity and reliability of the entire study. Creswell (2002) states that quantitative research deals with the collection, analysis, interpretation, and documentation of the results of the study while qualitative research covers the ways and means of collecting, analysing, and reporting data that are different from the conventional methods of quantitative research. Methods of research refer to the ways and processes of collecting data and evidence for purposes of analysis in order to generate new knowledge and increase understanding of a certain subject. The methodology is a general research approach that provides the ways and means through which research is to be carried out, among others. It shows the way that researchers use to frame their problem and goals as well as the way through which the results of the study have been generated based on the collected data. This chapter therefore focuses on the research methods.

Aim of the Study

The present study aims to compare the emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram and to examine the relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness within the study sample.

Variables of the Study

The study variables in the present study are emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness. The grouping variable is student status, which classifies participants into two groups: local college students and relocated college students. Emerging adulthood

characteristics and social connectedness are compared across these two groups. Additionally, the relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness is examined within each group.

Operational Definitions of Variables

Emerging Adulthood

In the present study, emerging adulthood refers to the developmental characteristics experienced by individuals aged 18-29 years during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. It is characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in – between adolescence and adulthood, and a sense of possibilities for the future. Operationally, emerging adulthood is measured the scores obtained on the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA).

Social Connectedness

In the present study, social connectedness refers to the subjective sense of belongingness, interpersonal closeness, and emotional connection that individuals experience with others and society. It reflects the extent to which individuals feels accepted, supported, valued, and connected within their social relationship. Operationally, social connectedness is measured through the scores obtained on the Social Connectedness Scale developed by Lee Robbins and Stephen B Robbins.

Local College Students

In the present study, local college students refer to undergraduate and post graduate students who pursue higher education within near or their native place or hometown and continue to reside in familiar family, social, and cultural environments. These students

generally maintain regular contact with their family members and existing social support systems during their college education.

Relocated College Students

In the present study, relocated college students refer to undergraduate and postgraduate students who have moved away from their hometown or native place to pursue higher education in Thiruvananthapuram. These students are required to adapt to new academic, social, cultural environments and generally reside in hostels, paying guest, accommodations, or rented residences away from their families.

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, descriptive- comparative research design with a cross sectional survey approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design is appropriate as it enables the comparison of emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness between two naturally occurring groups- local college students and relocated college students and the examination of the relationship between these two study variables within each group. The study does not involve the manipulation of any variable; rather, it focuses on assessing and comparing the characteristics of the selected groups as they naturally occur. Data were collected from the participants at a single point in time through standardized self-report measures, making the study cross-sectional in nature.

Participants

Population

The target population of the present study consist of local and relocated undergraduate and postgraduate college students aged 18 – 25 years who are enrolled in colleges and

universities located in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. The study focuses on students who are currently pursuing higher education within the district.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The total sample size for the present study will be $N=157$, comprising $n=82$ local college students and $n=75$ relocated college students in various colleges and universities in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala.

Purposive sampling technique will be employed to select participants who specifically meet the operational criteria of local and relocated student status. This method is appropriate as it enables the researcher to recruit participants who possess the characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: The study includes (a) Undergraduate and postgraduate college students aged between 18 and 25 years, (b) Students currently enrolled in colleges or universities located in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala, (c) Students belonging to either the local or relocated category as defined operationally, (d) Students who are willing to participate and provide informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria: The study excludes: (a) Students studying educational institutions located outside Thiruvananthapuram district, (b) Individuals below 18 years or above 25 years of age, (c) Married individuals, (d) Employed adults who are not full-time students, (e) Students who are unwilling to participate in the study.

Instruments

Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA)

The IDEA Inventory (Reifman, A., Arnett, J.J., & Colwell, M.J. 2007) is a standardized self-report instrument utilized to assess emerging adulthood characteristics. The instrument consists of 31 items that measure six dimensions of emerging adulthood, namely Identity Exploration, Experimentation/Possibilities, Negativity/Instability, Self-Focus, Feeling In-Between, and Other-Focus. Responses are recorded on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The scale can be administered individually or in groups and generally takes about 10–15 minutes to complete. Scores are obtained by summing the responses to the items, with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of the characteristics of emerging adulthood. The IDEA has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .70 to .85 across the subscales. Test-retest reliability over a one-month interval ranged from .64 to .76 for most subscales. The scale has established construct validity, and factor-analytic studies support its multidimensional structure, making it a reliable and valid measure of emerging adulthood characteristics.

Social Connectedness Scale–Revised (SCS-R)

The Social connectedness Scale (Lee, R. M., Draper, M., & Lee, S. 2001) to assess an individual's sense of interpersonal closeness and connectedness with others. The scale consists of 20 items and is designed as a unidimensional measure of social connectedness. Responses are recorded on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The instrument can be administered individually or in groups and typically requires 5–10 minutes to complete. Scoring involves summing item responses after reverse scoring the negatively worded items, with higher scores indicating a greater sense of social connectedness and belongingness. The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised has demonstrated excellent

reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients generally ranging from the high .80s to low .90s across different samples. The scale has also demonstrated satisfactory construct and convergent validity through its significant associations with measures of loneliness, social support, interpersonal functioning, and psychological well-being.

Demographic Data Sheet

A demographic data sheet was prepared by the investigator to collect relevant socio-demographic information from the participants. The data sheet includes details such as age, gender, residential status (local or relocated), permanent residence or native place, present place of residence, duration of stay in Thiruvananthapuram, current programme of study, year of study, family type, and socioeconomic status. For participants classified as relocated students, additional information regarding their type of accommodation, such as hostel, paying guest accommodation, or rented residence, may also be collected. The classification of participants as local or relocated students is determined through self-report in accordance with the operational definitions adopted for the present study. The information obtained through the demographic data sheet is used solely for descriptive and analytical purposes related to the objectives of the study.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the concerned authorities of the selected colleges and universities in Thiruvananthapuram. The participants were approached individually and informed about the purpose and objectives of the study. They were also informed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary, that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences, and that the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses would be strictly maintained.

Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before the administration of the research instruments. The participants who met the inclusion criteria were provided with the socio-demographic data sheet, the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA), and the Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R). The instruments were administered either individually or in small groups, depending on participant availability and convenience. Uniform verbal and written instructions were provided to all participants to ensure consistency in administration.

Data were collected using both paper-and-pencil questionnaires and online Google Forms, depending on the accessibility and preference of the participants. Participants were encouraged to respond honestly and were assured that the information collected would be used solely for academic and research purposes. The completed questionnaires were collected and checked for completeness immediately after administration. For online responses, submitted forms were reviewed to ensure that all required items had been completed.

The data collection process was carried out over a period of approximately February 2026 to March 2026. Upon completion of the questionnaires, participants were debriefed regarding the nature and significance of the study, and their cooperation and participation were acknowledged with gratitude.

Data Analysis Technique

The data collected from the participants were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, whereas inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses and examine differences and relationships between the study variables. Since

the data were found to be non-normally distributed, non-parametric statistical tests were applied. The major statistical techniques used in the study are as follows:

Shapiro–Wilk Test

The Shapiro–Wilk test is a statistical test used to assess whether the data are normally distributed. It was developed by Samuel S. Shapiro and Martin B. Wilk (1965). The test evaluates the null hypothesis that the sample is drawn from a normally distributed population. A significant p-value ($p < .05$) indicates that the data deviate significantly from normality. In the present study, the Shapiro–Wilk test revealed that the data were not normally distributed; therefore, non-parametric statistical tests were selected for further analysis.

Mann–Whitney U Test

The Mann–Whitney U test is a non-parametric alternative to the independent samples t-test. It is used to compare differences between two independent groups when the assumptions of normality are not met. Instead of comparing means, the test compares the distribution of ranks between the groups.

In the present study, the Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare the emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness between local college students and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram. The test determined whether significant differences existed between these two independent groups.

Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation

The Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation (Spearman's rho) is a non-parametric statistical technique used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables measured on an ordinal scale or when the assumptions of normality are violated. The correlation coefficient (ρ or r_s) ranges from -1 to $+1$, where positive values indicate a positive

relationship, negative values indicate a negative relationship, and values close to zero indicate little or no relationship.

In the present study, Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation was used to examine the relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness separately among local college students and relocated college students. The test helped determine whether a statistically significant association existed between the two study variables.

Chapter IV

Result and Discussion

The results chapter of every study simply and objectively reports exactly what was found, without speculating on what or why these results mean. The discussion section, on the other hand, goes into detail explaining the results in terms of their implications and how they fit into the context of the study.

The current study aimed to investigate differences in the dimensions of emerging adulthood characteristics and the level of social connectedness among local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram. In addition, this research analysed the relationship between social connectedness and emerging adulthood characteristics for both groups of participants. One hundred and fifty-seven undergraduate and postgraduate students (82 local and 75 relocated) aged 18 to 25 took part in the current study. The participants completed the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA), the Social Connectedness Scale–Revised (SCS-R) and a socio-demographic data sheet. Since the distribution of the data was not normal, non-parametric statistical tests were conducted. In particular, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare the two independent groups, while Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation was used to assess the relationship between IDEA and SCS-R. The current study's results were discussed in terms of the study's objectives, hypotheses, and previous research conducted on related topics.

The present chapter discussed the results and their detailed analysis. In order to evaluate whether the data supported the study's hypothesis, the collected data underwent multiple descriptive and inferential analysis. The analysis was primarily guided by the previously established hypothesis. The following paragraphs present the results and their discussion.

Table 1*Shapiro -Wilk Test of Normality for the Study Variables*

Variables	W	df	p Value
Identity Exploration	.952	157	<.001
Experimentation/Possibilities	.940	157	<.001
Negativity/ Instability	.964	157	<.001
Other-Focused	.961	157	<.001
Self-Focused	.953	157	<.001
Feeling In-Between	.926	157	<.001
Social Connectedness	.987	157	.173

Note: W = Shapiro–Wilk statistic. A p value less than .05 indicates that the variable significantly deviates from a normal distribution.

The normality of the study variables was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test. The results indicated that Identity Exploration ($W = .952, p < .001$), Experimentation/Possibilities ($W = .940, p < .001$), Negativity/Instability ($W = .964, p < .001$), Other-Focused ($W = .961, p < .001$), Self-Focused ($W = .953, p < .001$), and Feeling In-Between ($W = .926, p < .001$) significantly deviated from a normal distribution. In contrast, Social Connectedness ($W = .987, p = .173$) did not significantly deviate from normality, indicating that it was normally distributed. Since the majority of the study variables were not normally distributed, the assumption of normality was not met. Therefore, non-parametric statistical tests, namely the Mann–Whitney U test and Spearman's rank-order correlation, were used to analyse the data.

Table 2

Mann-Whitney U Comparison of Emerging Adulthood Scores of local and relocated college students

Variable	Group	n	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	p Value
Emerging Adulthood	Local	82	80.20	2976.50	-0.35	.729
	Relocated	75	77.69			
Social Connectedness	Local	82	81.97	2831.50	-0.86	.392
	Relocated	75	75.75			

Note: n = Sample size. p < .05 indicates statistical significance.

A Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to compare the total scores of emerging adulthood and social connectedness between local and relocated college students. The results showed no significant difference in emerging adulthood between local students (Mean Rank = 80.20) and relocated students (Mean Rank = 77.69), $U = 2976.50$, $Z = -0.35$, $p = .729$. Similarly, no significant difference was found in social connectedness between local students (Mean Rank = 81.97) and relocated students (Mean Rank = 75.75), $U = 2831.50$, $Z = -0.86$, $p = .392$. Therefore, the findings indicate that residential status did not significantly influence emerging adulthood characteristics or social connectedness among the participants.

Table 3

Spearman's Rank Correlation Between Emerging adulthood and Social Connectedness Among Local (N=82) and Relocated (N=75) College students

Variables		Spearman's rho(r_s)	p Value
Emerging Adulthood and Social Connectedness	Local	-0.156	.162
	Relocated	.014	.905

Note: r_s = Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient. $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between emerging adulthood and social connectedness among both local and relocated college students. Among local college students, a weak negative correlation was found between emerging adulthood and social connectedness ($r_s = -.156$, $p = .162$), indicating that the relationship was not statistically significant. Similarly, among relocated college students, a very weak positive correlation was observed ($r_s = .014$, $p = .905$), which was also not statistically significant. Overall, the findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between emerging adulthood and social connectedness among either local or relocated college students. Therefore, the null hypotheses H03 and H04 were accepted, suggesting that emerging adulthood characteristics were not significantly associated with social connectedness in the present sample.

The present study did not find any significant differences in emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness between local and relocated college students. This outcome implies that the residential status of students in Thiruvananthapuram has no influence on their characteristics during emerging adulthood. Although students relocated from their home towns to college towns may face challenges such as homesickness, loneliness, and maladjustment, they may adjust to the new environment by making friends and engaging in extracurricular activities. In addition, local students who receive much support from their parents and siblings still encounter similar developmental challenges during their college life. The present findings agree with those of Arnett and Mitra (2020), who concluded that the characteristics of emerging adulthood are universal among young people regardless of their living conditions. In a similar vein, Nankani and Vijayan (2024) found no significant differences in emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness between Indian students. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that students' residential status has limited impact on their emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness.

The present study also did not find any significant associations between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness for both local and relocated college students. The correlation coefficient for local students was negative and weak, whereas the coefficient for relocated students was positive and very weak. This conclusion contradicts the results of previous studies by Booker et al. (2022) and Lee et al. (2002), who found that higher levels of social connectedness during the transition to college were strongly associated with better adjustment and psychological well-being. However, most students who participated in the present study were attending colleges within the same district. In addition, local students could interact with their parents and siblings through technology and always visit their home towns, which probably reduced the stress of staying away from their family. Moreover, local and relocated students could freely interact with their peers at college and have equal

opportunities to build friendships. These factors may explain why the present study did not find significant associations between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness.

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusion

The chapter contains a summary of the research, the interpretation of the results and the limitations of the study, as well as the implications for further study.

Summary of the Work

The present study was undertaken to compare emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram. Emerging adulthood represents a unique developmental stage during which young people experience identity exploration, increasing independence, instability, self-focus, and a transition towards adult roles. At the same time, social connectedness plays a vital role in promoting psychological well-being, adjustment, and a sense of belonging. Since relocation for higher education often requires students to adapt to new academic, social, and cultural environments, the study sought to examine whether these experiences differ between students who continue to live in their hometowns and those who relocate for their education.

A quantitative descriptive-comparative research design with a cross-sectional survey approach was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 157 undergraduate and postgraduate college students aged between 18 and 25 years from colleges and universities in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. Among the participants, 82 were local students and 75 were relocated students. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who met the inclusion criteria.

Data were collected using a socio-demographic data sheet, the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) developed by Reifman, Arnett, and Colwell (2007), and the Social Connectedness Scale–Revised (SCS-R) developed by Lee, Draper, and

Lee (2001). The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to assess the normality of the data, followed by the Mann–Whitney U test to compare local and relocated students and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation to examine the relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness within each group.

The findings revealed that there was no significant difference in emerging adulthood characteristics or social connectedness between local and relocated college students. Furthermore, no significant relationship was found between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness among either local or relocated students. Overall, the study suggests that both groups experience similar developmental characteristics and levels of social connectedness despite differences in their residential status. The findings contribute to the existing literature on emerging adulthood and social connectedness within the Indian context and provide useful insights for counsellors, educators, and higher education institutions in developing inclusive student support programmes that promote healthy psychological development and social well-being.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to compare emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness of local and relocated college students in Thiruvananthapuram. The study concluded that there was no significant difference in the emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness of local and relocated college students. There was also no significant relationship between emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness of local and relocated college students. In other words, the findings of the study revealed that local and relocated college students had similar levels of emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness. The study's findings also revealed that there was no relationship between

emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness of local and relocated college students. In conclusion, the findings demonstrated that local and relocated students had similar levels of emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness.

Implications of the Study

A study on the emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness of local and relocated college students has several implications for students, educational institutions, counsellors, and researchers. Knowledge about the characteristics of emerging adulthood and social connectedness is essential to facilitate the adjustment processes of college students because students experience social isolation and loneliness during the transition to emerging adulthood. However, the implications of this study extend beyond the aforementioned points. One of the main implications of the present study is that even though there was no significant difference between local and relocated students in emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness, college counsellors should provide students with adequate resources and opportunities to improve their social adjustment to help them cope with the challenges of life. The findings of this study also have implications for future research because the study provides valuable information on developing and testing interventions to improve the social adjustment of relocated students. Another implication of this study is that it can help educators and counsellors understand students' experiences in college. The findings can also motivate educational institutions to create inclusive environments where local and relocated students feel welcome and supported.

Some of the major implications of the present study are as follows.

- **Student Support Services:** The findings of the study can help colleges provide students with appropriate social support and resources to cope with various stressors.

In addition, the findings of the study can help counsellors work closely with students to improve their general wellbeing, social adjustment, and social connectedness.

- **College Counselling:** Counsellors can work with students to develop effective strategies to increase their level of social connection. The findings of the study can also help counsellors provide students with resources and information about social adjustment to facilitate their transition to college life.
- **Educational Institutions:** The findings of the study can help educational institutions make an effort to create an inclusive campus community where both local and relocated students feel welcome and supported. In addition, the findings can help them understand how both local and relocated students adjust to college life.
- **Student's Development:** Knowledge of the characteristics of emerging adulthood can help teachers and college authorities understand students and help them navigate through various developmental challenges.
- **Future Research:** The findings of the present study can encourage researchers to investigate further into the aspects of emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness of college students in other parts of Kerala and the country and conduct similar studies with a larger sample size. The findings also encourage future researchers to consider other psychological variables such as resilience, self-esteem, perceived social support, loneliness, coping mechanisms, and psychological wellbeing when studying the aspects of emerging adulthood.
- **Psychological Intervention:** The present study emphasizes the need for psychological intervention in the form of programmes that encourage healthy social connections among students and facilitate their adjustment to college life, which will ultimately promote their mental wellbeing.

Limitations

- The present study was restricted to 157 college students who were selected from a few colleges and universities in Thiruvananthapuram.
- The findings of the present study cannot be generalized because the study was conducted with a convenience sample. In other words, only a limited number of students were included in the study.
- The study used self-reported questionnaires, and thus the validity and reliability of the findings depend on how truthful the participants were when providing responses to the items.
- The study focused on only two variables, namely, emerging adulthood characteristics and social connectedness.
- The study was conducted only in Thiruvananthapuram district.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the present study, the following suggestions are made for future research:

1. Conduct the research study with a bigger sample size: The study was conducted in a smaller target group of students – the Thiruvananthapuram district. Hence, a study with a bigger and more diverse sample size can be conducted in the future with the inclusion of students representing various other districts in Kerala and India. This can help yield better results as a more diverse group can help identify the heterogeneity in the variable emergence of adulthood and social connectedness better.

2. Conduct the study using a longitudinal design: The study that was conducted was cross-sectional in nature. A longitudinal study design can be adopted by future researchers instead to observe the changes taking place within emerging adults at different points in time. This can

give a better perspective on the variables of the study as the students grow more independent and exposed to the outside world as they finish college.

3. Take into consideration other psychological variables that might contribute to

developmental transition: The study did not consider other vital psychological variables like resilience, self-esteem, perceived social support, loneliness, coping, life satisfaction, well-being, and stress which can be considered as mediators or moderators of the key variables, namely, emergence of adulthood and social connectedness. These additional variables are pertinent to the study as future research can focus on exploring the mechanisms of action of the key variables and explain why there was no association found in this particular research study.

4. Instead of relying only on quantitative methods, use mixed or qualitative methods for

conducting the research study: The study was conducted using quantitative surveys only, with students submitting self-reported responses. Future research can consider using mixed methods or qualitative methods such as focus group discussions or interviews to gain more insight into the topic of investigation.

5. Compare categorical groups of college-going students to identify differences among

them: As opposed to comparing students who stay in hostels versus those who stay at their home, future research can compare hostel students with day scholars or compare other categorical groups of students to identify if such differences account for variation in patterns of social connections or emerging adulthood.

6. Consider the impact of various institutional or environmental variables like orientation

programs, clubs, extracurricular activities, etc., on the level of emerging adulthood and social connectedness of the students: Such variables can be manipulated to help counsellors and

educational institutions understand what factors can aid students in adjusting to college life and better cope with the developmental transition process.

7. Conduct Intervention based research studies to discover effective counselling interventions for helping students adjust to college life: Intervention-based research can be carried out in order to find out effective counselling treatment programs for improving social connectedness and adjusting to the developmental transition to college-going life. This would benefit counsellors and educational institutes to prepare suitable intervention programs for students.

8. Consider the impact of other sociocultural variables on the patterns of social and familial connections and emerging adulthood of the students: The impact of culture, family, the internet and technology on social and familial connections can also be considered as factors affecting emerging adulthood. Especially in the current scenario where students are interacting with family and friends almost daily using online modes of communication, their level of connectedness is less likely to change drastically due to relocation. This would explain the insignificance of the difference found in this research study.

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Appendix A

Dear friends. I am conducting research on the topic “A Comparative Study of Emerging Adulthood Characteristics and Social Connectedness among Local and Relocated College Students in Thiruvananthapuram.” Your cooperation and information are vital for this study. Rest assured that all the information provided will be treated as strictly confidential, and your identity will remain anonymous throughout the process. Please kindly answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge and abilities.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

1.Name

2.Gender

Female

Male

Other

3.Age

18-20 Years

21-23 Years

24-26 Years

27-29 Years

4.Residential Status

Local Student (Native of Thiruvananthapuram)

Relocated Student (Came to Thiruvananthapuram for studies)

5. Permanent Residence /Native Place

(Local Students choose "Thiruvananthapuram", Relocated students choose their home district.)

6. Present Place of Residence

With family in Thiruvananthapuram

College hostel in Thiruvananthapuram

Rented accommodation/PG in Thiruvananthapuram

With relatives in Thiruvananthapuram

Other

7. Duration of Stay in Thiruvananthapuram

1- 2 years

3 - 4 years

More than 4 years

Since birth/ More than 18 years

8. Current Programme of Study

Undergraduate (UG)

Postgraduate (PG)

Appendix B

Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA)

Instructions: The following statements describe different experiences and feelings that people may have during the present phase of their life, such as personal growth, independence, responsibilities, uncertainty, and future planning. Please think about your current life period, including the recent past and the near future, and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

Is this period of your life a...

1. time of many possibilities?
2. time of exploration?
3. time of confusion?
4. time of experimentation?
5. time of personal freedom?
6. time of feeling restricted?
7. time of responsibility for yourself?
8. time of feeling stressed out?
9. time of instability?
10. time of optimism?
11. time of high pressure?

12. time of finding out who you are?
13. time of settling down?
14. time of responsibility for others?
15. time of independence?
16. time of open choices?
17. time of unpredictability?
18. time of commitments to others?
19. time of self-sufficiency?
20. time of many worries?
21. time of trying out new things?
22. time of focusing on yourself?
23. time of separating from parents?
24. time of defining yourself?
25. time of planning for the future?
26. time of seeking a sense of meaning?
27. time of deciding on your own beliefs and values?
28. time of learning to think for yourself?
29. time of feeling adult in some ways but not others?
30. time of gradually becoming an adult?
31. time of being not sure whether you have reached full adulthood?

Appendix C

Social Connectedness Scale – Revised (SCS-R)

Instructions: The following statements describe about individuals' experiences and feelings in relation to others in their social environment. Please read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree based on your personal experience.

Strongly	Disagree	Somewhat	Somewhat	Agree	Strongly
Disagree		Disagree	Agree		Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)

For negatively worded items, scores are reversed. These are the items with asterisks (*).

1. I feel distant from people. *
2. I don't feel related to most people. *
3. I feel like an outsider. *
4. I see myself as a loner. *
5. I feel disconnected from the world around me. *
6. I don't feel I participate with anyone or any group. *
7. I feel close to people.
8. Even around people I know, I don't feel that I really belong. *
9. I am able to relate to my peers.
10. I catch myself losing a sense of connectedness with my society. *
11. I am able to connect with other people
12. I feel understood by the people I know.

13. I see people as friendly and approachable.
14. I fit in well in new situations.
15. I have little sense of togetherness with my peers. *
16. My friends feel like family.
17. I find myself actively involved in people's lives.
18. Even among my friends, there is no sense of brotherhood/sisterhood. *
19. I am in tune with the world.
20. I feel comfortable in the presence of strangers.