# EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF SHYNESS AND SELF-ESTEEM ON MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Aisha Shakeel[1]*, Ayesha Azam[1], Rukha Faisal[1], Saqlain khan[1], Saneha Kanwal[1], Abdulrehman[1], Maham Sahi[1], Anfal Farooq[1]
[1]University of Sialkot.

## Article Info

*Corresponding Author
Email Id: Ayesha.Shakeel@uskt.edu.pk

## Abstract

This study has been conducted to examine the link and influence of shyness, self-esteem and psychological/mental well-being among university students with regard to age, gender and family status. A sample of 150 university students were taken from different universities of Sialkot using convenience sampling. 108 females and 34 males participated in the study while 8 forms were discarded. Data collection was done through paper survey using different questionnaires like consent and demographic form, Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS), Urdu Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (URSES) and Flourishing Scale for psychological Well-being (FS). All measures were used in Urdu and were valid and reliable. The research findings indicated that there is a significant notable influence of self-esteem on psychological well-being. In addition to this, there is a significant difference between shyness with regard to age, self-esteem with regard to gender and family status. Three hypotheses proposed in the current study are confirmed by the findings of research.

## Keywords
Shyness, Self-esteem, Mental Well-being, Flourishing

## 1. Introduction

Psychological well-being is something which is crucial to mental health and vice versa. It is just as important as physical health which refers to having a positive mental health, being happy in life, emotionally balanced, having positive self-image and being able to cope with challenges and stress in a healthy way. Psychological well-being is crucial for university students as they face different challenges on daily basis. When

university students have healthy psychological well-being, they are more likely to experience higher level of motivation, focus and academic achievements. Prioritizing well-being not only benefits student`s academic performance but also enhances their personal growth, social interactions and overall satisfaction (Duffy *et al*., 2020). On the other hand, students with poor psychological well-being face challenges that can affect various aspects of their lives such as academic performance, mental health issues, social isolation, reduced engagement, impact on physical health etc. Psychological well-being of university students is essential to support their overall success and well-being. Self-esteem is considered a very important aspect of one's life. It influences cognition, emotions, motivation, and behavior (Campbell & Lavallee, 1993). Self-esteem is overall sense of a person's self-value and self-worth (Bong & Clark, 1999). Also to which extent one has belief in his abilities and capabilities to do something under any circumstances.  It plays an important role in shaping the way people perceive themselves as individuals. Self-esteem among the university students, it play significant role and has great impact on various aspects of their academic and personal lives. University is a time of personal growth, self-development and self-discovery. Students with healthy self-esteem will be able to engage in activities that will promote different domains otherwise he/she will face difficulties including academic struggles, social isolation, perfectionism, negative self-talk and mental

health challenges. While low self-esteem can lead to behavioral issues like maladjustment, suicidal ideation, and psychological problems like anxiety, stress, depression, and feelings of loneliness (Bhattacharjee & Deb, 2007; Manani & Sharma, 2013; Leary, 2004). Apart from self-esteem, shyness is another factor playing significant role in lives. It is a common personality trait, characterized by feelings of discomfort, being uneasy or feeling nervous in social situations. Shyness can impact the university students in different ways some of them are difficulty making friends, limited participation in class discussions, and avoidance of social events, increased stress and impact on mental health which is also explained by Zimbardo (2017), shyness is experienced at four different levels affective, behavioral, cognitive and physiological level; intense feelings of nervousness or uneasiness, inability to react appropriately, negative thoughts about one's own self, and increased heartbeat and perspiration respectively. These maybe prompted by different situational events. People who are shy may feel a strong desire to avoid attention and may struggle initiating or maintaining conversations. As we, all know at university level students have to interact with many people in daily life. A student who is more reserved may encounter various challenges, particularly in seeking assistance when encountering difficulties. This hesitancy to seek help could stem from finding certain tasks or situations daunting. As professional settings require effective communication skills for vital success shyer,

students may struggle with it. As mentioned above, all the three variables play directly or indirectly a significant role in a student's life so interplay of these variables can not only provide valuable information but also help to improve the well-being and resilience of students. For this purpose the current study explores the links of shyness and self-esteem with mental/psychological well-being.

## 1.1. Problem Statement

This study aims to investigate the impact of shyness and self-esteem on psychological well-being among university students.

## 1.2. Objectives

Following are objectives of this study:

1. To examine the relation between shyness, self-esteem and mental well-being of university students.
2. To investigate the impact of shyness and self-esteem on mental well-being of university students.
3. To explore the difference in shyness, self-esteem and psychological well-being among university students with regard to age, gender and family status.

## 1.3. Hypothesis.

These hypothesis are formulated to pursue the objectives of this study:

1. There would be a significant relationship between shyness, self-esteem and mental well-being among university students.
2. There would be a significant impact of shyness and self-esteem on psychological well-being among university students.

3. There would be a significant difference in shyness, self-esteem and mental well-being among university students with regard to age.
4. There would be significant difference in shyness, self-esteem and mental well-being among university students with regard to gender.
5. There would be significant difference in shyness, self-esteem and mental well-being among university students with regard to family status.

## 1.4. Rationale

This research has been conducted to investigate the link and impact of shyness and self-esteem on the mental well-being of university students. The mental well-being of university students can impact their professional and academic functioning which plays a significant role in the development of society. Shyness and self-esteem are negatively correlated Singh *et al*. (2013) but there has been little research on the impact and relationship between shyness and self-esteem with psychological well-being among university students. So, this research will address questions like the impact of shyness and self-esteem on psychological well-being, and the difference between shyness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being with regard to age, gender, residential area, and family status. Since psychological well-being plays a significant role in university students' lives, this study explores the impact of two variables on it. The key factors important in university life for students are their own self and

interaction with their environment. The flourishing scale that is used in the current research to measure psychological well-being is a measure of psycho-social flourishing which is based on the theories of psychological and social well-being. This research will provide information about students' psychological well-being and the variables impacting it. Once this information is found then it can be used to take further decisions for the well-being of university students. This research will be productive for students, teachers, and university management as well.

## 1.5. Significance of the study

- The results of this study would help to gain knowledge about two variable traits impacting psychological well-being which can be further used for decision making to improve psychological well-being of university student which then promises higher academic Beiter *et al*. (2015) and professional performance.

- This study would also give results about the respective variables regarding different demographic variables like age and gender allowing to deal with students accordingly.

- These research findings would allow lecturers, students, parents and university administration to help students with shyness and poor self-esteem to increase their psychological well-being for the sake of providing the society with

students of high academic and professional performance.

## 2. Literature Review

When students enter universities they go through a series of transitions, changes and challenges. These challenges end up impacting the mental health and well-being of university students. Indeed, there is evidence of well-being and mental health of students being impacted once they begin at the university, and even though it keeps decreasing throughout their studies (Macaskill, 2013; Mey & Yin, 2015), but it does not return to the levels prior university (Cooke *et al*., 2006; Bewick *et al*., 2010). Also, adolescents are at greater risk of experiencing psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, which reaches at a peak in early adulthood (Kessler *et al*., 2007) this makes university students a particularly vulnerable population to psychological problems. So, psychological well-being among university students has become an important construct and recently multiple variables are being studied that can be impacting the psychological well-being of students so that the risks of psychological issues can be reduced. Thus, researches that studied the academic correlates of flourishing (psychological well-being) showed that flourishing or psychological well-being was related with high goal orientation, self-control, grades, and low levels of procrastination among undergraduate students (Howell, 2009); higher goal orientation in adults (Keyes, 2005); and lower truancy, higher self-determination, and more involvement and

satisfaction in school among adolescents (Keyes, 2010). Academic satisfaction is defined as "enjoyment of one's role or experience as a student" (Lent, *et al*., 2007, p.87), and is negatively related with procrastination, while positively related with academic achievement, person-environment fit (Balkıs & Duru, 2016), and sense of belonging (Duru & Balkıs, 2015). Just like psychological well-being, Shyness too has a significant impact on an individual's life. It affects different areas of students functioning as well. Social adjustment is a key factor in university for a student to learn and engage with peers and shyness has a negative association with social adjustment Gao *et al*. (2022), academic engagement (Hughes & Coplan, 2010), self-esteem (Fehr & Stamps, 1979), self-reported creativity and creative process engagement (Tan, Shan, & Khai-Lee, 2017); and creative performance (Kemple *et al*., 1996). While shyness is positively related with problematic internet use Ahmed *et al*. (2022) anxiety (Tarub, 1983), guilt (Fehr & Stamps, 1979) and loneliness (Cheek & Buss, 1981; Zimbardo, 1977) which as a result causes a decrease in life satisfaction (Salimi, 2011). Since self-esteem is the attitude towards one's own self Rosenberg *et al*. (1995), it also refers to a characteristic of liking or disliking oneself and in the academic environment, it is defined as the students' perception (positive or negative) of self-value and capability Rosenberg *et al*. (1995) so this characteristic can also play a significant role in students' life. Moreover, self-esteem impacts the wellbeing, motivation,

behavior, and performance of students in the educational and work areas Chen *et al*. (2004). Self-esteem is also related to initiating conversation and speaking out in group conversations. It is also positively related with happiness and has a negative correlation with depression Baumeister *et al*. (2003). Individually, shyness and self-esteem seem to impact multiple areas and factors in a student's life so explored collectively with mental wellbeing these two factors can be proved helpful to make further decisions for the improved mental health of students and to make them more resilient against the challenges of life academically as well as professionally.

## 3. Research Methodology

Correlational research design was used for this study. The sample was selected using convenience sampling from universities of Sialkot.

### 3.1. Research Variables

This study has three main variables, shyness, self-esteem and psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is dependent variable while shyness and self-esteem are independent variables.

### 3.2 Participants

This research was conducted in a different Universities of Sialkot. The participants were the students of University of Sialkot, university of management and technology (Sialkot), Murray College, GC women university (Sialkot). Furthermore, they were chosen using a convenient sampling approach. The total of one fifty

participants were involved and participated in the research. The data were collected by using survey method.

### 3.3. Measures

In this study, the participants filled three self-report measures along with the consent and demographic forms. All the measurement tools were used in Urdu versions since the native language of population is Urdu. All the tools used for study are as follows:

### 3.3.1. Consent form and Demographic form

The consent form was used to inform the participants about the research purpose and to take their permission to participate in study willingly. Demographic form was used to take information about age, gender and family status of the participants.

### 3.3.2. Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS)

The RCBS (Cheek, 1983) is a 13-item self-report measure of shyness which is based on the original 9-item measure of shyness and sociability (Cheek & Buss, 1981). The answers are given using a five-point likert scale (from 1 to 5). Scores range from 13 to 65, with higher results reflecting greater levels of shyness. This tools is translated in Urdu to be used in the current research by students of clinical psychology, university of Sialkot.

### 3.3.3. Urdu Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (URSES) Rizwan *et al*. (2017)

This scale is the Urdu version of Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) which measures global self–esteem. This is translated in Urdu by Rizwan *et al*. (2017). It consists of 10 items and subjects have to rate their responses on 4 point likert scale from strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. The score ranges from 0-30. Scores between 15 and 25 are within the normal range but scores below 15 is considered as low self-esteem.

### 3.3.4. Flourishing Scale for psychological Well-Being (FS) Choudhry *et al*. (2018)

The Flourishing scale (FS) was originally developed by Diener *et al*. (2009). It has eight dimensions that measured human functioning features; Purpose/meaning in life, life satisfaction, optimism, competence, engagement in activities, positive relationships, contributing to others' happiness, being respected by others. 7-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 "Strongly disagree" to 7 "Strongly agree" Score ranges from 1 to 7, for all eight items. The range of scores is from 8 (lowest possible) to 56 (highest possible). A high score at flourishing scale represents a person with many psychological resources and strengths. Its Urdu version Choudhry *et al*. (2018) is used in the current study.

### 3.4. Procedure

The sample was taken from different universities of Sialkot; University of Sialkot, University of management and technology Sialkot, Murray College Sialkot and Government girls' college university Sialkot. The data was collected through paper survey in two weeks. Before data collection permission from the respective universities was taken and then the students were approached to

participate in the research. The purpose of research was explained to them and then an informed consent was signed by the participants before filling the questionnaire. Participants were also informed about their right of withdrawal that they could withdrawal at any moment they felt uncomfortable. Then Participants willingly filled out the research forms in 2023.

## 4. Results

In the study, a sample of 150 students were taken out of which 8 were discarded so following tables represent the data of remaining 142 participants.

### 4.1 Demographic Analysis

In table 1, the demographic information of 142 participants is represented in quantitative form along with the means and standard deviation of variables according to which 97 (68.3%) participants belonged to the age group 18 to 20 and 45 (31.7%) were from 21 to 23 age group.

**Table 1:** Quantitative interpretation of Demographic information of participants

| Variables | f | (%) | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | | | 1.32 | .467 |
| 18-20 | 97 | 68.3 | | |
| 21-23 | 45 | 31.7 | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 34 | 23.9 | | |
| Female | 108 | 76.1 | | |
| Family Status | | | | |
| Nuclear | 95 | 66.9 | | |
| Joint | 47 | 33.1 | | |

And from all the participants that participated in the study, 34 (23.9%) were males and 108 (76.1%) were females. While 95 (66.9%) participants were from nuclear families and 47 (33.1%) students belonged to joint family systems.

### 4.2. Correlation Analysis

According to the correlation analysis, shyness (RCBS) is negatively correlated with self-esteem (RSES) and psychological well-being (FS) while self-esteem is positively correlated with psychological well-being. Shyness has a low negative correlation (-.132) with self-esteem and low negative correlation (-.038) with psychological well-being. On the other hand, self-esteem has a positive correlation (.434) with psychological well-being. This means that if shyness increases it will cause a decrease in self-esteem and psychological well-being vis-à-vis. While if self-esteem is increased the students will have an increased psychological well-being.

**Table 2:** Quantitative interpretation of Correlation

| Variables | RCBS | RSES | TFS | M | SD |
|-----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| RCBS | **** | -.132 | -.038 | 39.20 | 5.96 |
| RSES | -.132 | **** | .434** | 19.28 | 4.72 |
| TFS | -.038 | .434** | **** | 40.56 | 7.87 |

## 4.3. Regression Analysis:

The table no. 3 shows that 18.9% of the variance in shyness can be attributed to the model comprises. Analysis explicated in the table that shyness is a non-significant predictor of Psychological well-being ($R^2$= .189, t= .263), (F= 16.180, β= .020). Whereas, self-esteem is a significant predictor of psychological well-being ($R^2$= .189, t= 5.67), (F= 16.180, β= .437).

**Table 3:** Influence of Shyness on Psychological Well-Being

| Variables | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | B | SE | β | t | p | F(Model) |
|-----------|-------|--------------|------|------|------|------|-----|----------|
| Constant | .189 | .189 | 25.45 | 5.00 | | 5.08 | .00 | |
| RCBS | | | .027 | .102 | .020 | .263 | .79 | 16.18 |
| RSES | | | .729 | .129 | .437 | 5.67 | .00 | |

## 4.4. T-test Analysis of Age:

According to the t-test analysis of age, shyness has a significant difference among the participants depending on age. Students belonging to the age group 21 to 23 are shyer than the students from the age group 18 to 20.

**Table 4:** Quantitative interpretation of T-test (Age):

| Age | M | SD | t(142) | P | 95% CI UL | LL | Cohen's D |
|-----|-----|-----|--------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------|
| RCBS | | | | | | | 0.39 |
| (18-20) | 39.95 | 5.88 | 2.21 | .029 | 4.45 | .25 | |
| (21-23) | 37.61 | 5.91 | 2.20 | .030 | 4.47 | .24 | |
| RSES | | | | | | | 0.16 |
| (18-20) | 19.53 | 4.83 | .87 | .382 | 2.44 | -.94 | |
| (21-23) | 18.78 | 4.51 | .90 | .371 | 2.39 | -.91 | |
| TFS | | | | | | | 0.20 |
| (18-20) | 41.07 | 7.58 | 1.10 | .270 | 4.39 | -1.24 | |
| (21-23) | 39.45 | 8.49 | 1.06 | .292 | 4.53 | -1.38 | |

## 4.5. T-test Analysis of Gender:

As it is stated in table no. 5, the self-esteem has a significant difference with regard to gender. As

males have higher self-esteem as compared to the females.

**Table 5:** Quantitative interpretation of T-test (gender)

| Gender | M | SD | t(142) | P | UL | LL | Cohen's D |
|--------|------|------|--------|------|------|-------|-----------|
|        |      |      |        |      | 95% CI |    |           |
| RCBS   |      |      |        |      |      |       | 0.26 |
| Male   | 38.06 | 6.22 | -1.367 | .174 | .702 | -3.85 |      |
| Female | 39.64 | 5.85 | -1.324 | .191 | .808 | -3.96 |      |
| RSES   |      |      |        |      |      |       | 0.42 |
| Male   | 20.75 | 4.47 | 2.136  | .034 | 3.72 | .144  |      |
| Female | 18.81 | 4.73 | 2.201  | .032 | 3.69 | .176  |      |
| TFS    |      |      |        |      |      |       | 0.42 |
| Male   | 40.55 | 7.85 | -.011  | .991 | 3.61 | -3.04 |      |
| Female | 40.56 | -.011 | .991  | .991 | 3.63 | -3.07 |      |

## 4.6. T-test Analysis of family status

According to the quantitative analysis of t-test, there is a high significant difference between self-esteem with regard to family status. Which means

that participants belonging to nuclear families have higher self-esteem as compared to the participants from joint family systems.

**Table 6:** Quantitative Analysis of T-test (Family status):

| Family Status | M | SD | t(142) | P | UL | LL | Cohen's D |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-----------|
|      |      |      |      |      | 95% CI |    |           |
| RSES |      |      |      |      |      |       | 0.12 |
| Nuclear | 19.49 | 4.35 | .729 | .040 | 2.25 | -1.03 |      |
| Joint | 18.88 | 5.39 | .681 |      | 2.37 | -1.16 |      |

## 5. Discussion

The results from the survey sample of 150 university students of Sialkot, Pakistan supported the expected hypotheses. The findings showed that there is a significant influence of self-esteem on the psychological well-being of university students and also there is no significant impact of

shyness on psychological well-being. The study demonstrates a negative correlation of shyness with self-esteem and psychological well-being of university students. Likewise in Pakistani culture, where social interactions and group dynamics are significant, individuals who are shy may experience lower self-esteem and reduced

psychological well-being due to societal expectations of assertiveness and social engagement. Results also indicated that self-esteem and psychological well-being are positively correlated with each other and both have negative correlation with shyness. An increase in shyness can lead to lower self-esteem and reduced psychological well-being among students. Conversely, an increase in self-esteem can reduce shyness and enhance the psychological well-being of students. Additionally, this study indicate that males generally exhibit higher self-esteem levels compared to females. Moreover, students from nuclear families tend to have higher self-esteem than those from joint family systems. In Pakistani culture, traditional gender roles often assign greater value to assertiveness and leadership qualities in males, potentially contributing to higher self-esteem levels observed among men compared to women. According to Rashid and Rashid (2013), traditional gender roles in Pakistani culture emphasize assertiveness and leadership qualities in males, potentially contributing to higher self-esteem levels observed among men compared to women. According to the developmental stages of Erik Erikson (1950), the participants of current research belonged to stage five and six of adolescence and early adulthood respectively, ranging from 18 to 23 years old. These two stages of development are significant for identity formation and intimacy while fixation at these stages may lead to role confusion and isolation which in turn will impact the development of the individual. The

psychological and behavioral factors like shyness, self-esteem and psychological well-being are amongst many determinants of development at these stages and problematic shyness, self-esteem and psychological well-being can directly influence the development of university students as psychologically healthy adults. Empirical results indicate that shyness correlates negatively with self-esteem among adolescents Lawrence and Bennett (1992) and young adults Ran *et al*. (2018) which means that people who are shyer tend to have a low perception of self-worth, and negatively unrealistic evaluation of their abilities and themselves. Since shyness is a social determinant and it can impact how an individual forms and maintains relationships, it can contribute in the development of intimacy or loneliness. Researchers suggest that even though shy people are more motivated to make a desirable image of themselves in front of others still they are convinced that they are unable to make any favorable impact on others. So, they tend to use defenses like self-presentation with the intentions of avoiding to make negative impressions rather than aiming to create positive ones. In this way they do not tend to demonstrate the strengths of their personalities instead might focus on not to disclose the unrealistic negative unfavorable information about themselves Bober *et al*. (2021). Research has shown that shyness can negatively impact self-esteem and psychological well-being of students. For instance, Findlay and Coplan (2009) demonstrated that shyness significantly contributes to higher levels of anxiety and

depression among university students. The study found that shy individuals are more prone to experiencing social anxiety, which can escalate into broader mental health issues if not addressed (Findlay & Coplan, 2009). Similarly, Cheek and Buss (1981) revealed a strong negative correlation between shyness and self-esteem. Shy students tend to have lower self-esteem, primarily due to their tendency to avoid social interactions, which limits their opportunities for positive social feedback and self-validation (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Jackson *et al*. (2002) explored the relationship between shyness, loneliness, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Their path analysis showed that shyness indirectly affects psychological well-being through its impact on self-esteem and loneliness. Shy individuals often feel isolated and undervalued, leading to poorer mental health outcomes (Jackson, Fritch, Nagasaka, & Gunderson, 2002). Regression analysis shows that there is a significant impact of shyness on psychological well-being (45.3%), which supports the hypothesis. In the context of Pakistani culture, where social norms often value assertiveness and sociability, the significant impact of shyness on psychological well-being, as indicated by regression analysis, aligns with expectations. The cultural emphasis on social interaction may intensify the negative effects of shyness, potentially exacerbating its impact on individuals' overall psychological well-being. Cultural factors can play a significant role in shaping an individual's self-esteem and shyness. For example, in some cultures, shyness may be viewed as a desirable trait, while in others it may be seen as a weakness. Similarly, self-esteem can be influenced by cultural values and beliefs. In some cultures, individualism and self-promotion are highly valued, while in others, humility and modesty are more highly regarded. It is important to take these cultural factors into account when examining the impact of shyness and self-esteem on psychological well-being, as they can influence how individuals perceive and respond to these traits. In Pakistan, Ahmed & Qazi, (2019), cultural factors such as collectivism, social conformity, and the importance of family and community can influence an individual's self-esteem and shyness. For example, individuals may feel pressure to conform to social norms and expectations, which can affect their self-esteem and willingness to express themselves. In contrast, in some foreign cultures, individualism and self-expression may be more highly valued, which can affect how individuals perceive and respond to shyness and self-esteem. It is also important to consider how cultural factors can interact with other factors, such as gender and socioeconomic status. For example, in Pakistan, cultural expectations around gender roles may influence how men and women perceive and express shyness and self-esteem, while socioeconomic status can affect access to resources and opportunities that can impact psychological well-being. Similarly, in foreign cultures, factors such as race and ethnicity can interact with cultural factors to influence psychological well-being. The results of the

current study can be used by researchers, psychologists, institutions and governments to introduce programs for students which may help them to perform to their best potential in life. Other than these, the results can also be implied by teachers, lecturers and even students themselves in class rooms and personal lives to improve their overall well-being.

## 5.1 Limitations

This study due to limited time and resources had a small sample size while further studies with more robust designs can find the exact causal relationships between the variables among more diverse population.

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