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Perceived Stress, Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem in Female University Students

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to assess the perceived stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem of women studying in co-education and uni-gender institutions. The sample comprised a total of 200 female students, 100 from uni-gender institutions and 100 from co-education institutions. Convenience and purposive sampling techniques were used to collect the data. The standardized Urdu versions of Perceived Stress Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale and Self-esteem Scale were used to collect the responses of students. SPSS (19th version) was used to analyze the data. Findings showed that women studying in uni-gender institutions are more stressed as compared to female students of co-education institutions but their self-esteem and life satisfaction remain unaffected. The results indicated that there is a significant difference between perceived stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem among female students. Moreover, they also revealed that stress and self-esteem affect the life satisfaction of women studying in co-education and uni-gender institutions. Furthermore, the results also depicted significant relationships between perceived stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem. The study will be helpful in improving the educational systems so that female students may enjoy a better learning environment which will boost up their confidence and self-esteem.

Keywords: life satisfaction, perceived stress, self-esteem, PSS, SWLS, SES

Introduction

The time spent at university is one of the best and most unforgettable times in the lives of students because they become sensible and mature enough to know their responsibilities as adults. Hence, they also get a bit more freedom from their families as compared to the times they were

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studying in school or college. Academically, it's a very critical time because their performance, test scores and grades have the potential to affect their entire career. All these factors could also become the causes of student stress which may affect their life satisfaction and self-esteem. Rosenberg ([1965](#)) stated self-esteem as a person's beliefs about himself, which might be positive or negative, good or bad, right or wrong. Furthermore, Lazarus and Folkman ([1984](#)) stated that self-esteem could be a source to cope with stress, a person's beliefs about himself could moderate once level of stress and life satisfaction is individuals cognitive evaluation about own self in which life events are being compared to the persons self-made standards (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin,[1985](#); Shin & Johnson, [1978](#)).Stress can be defined as an uncomfortable mental condition in which a person suffers from worries and tensions caused by problems in his daily life, work or a strong feeling of anxiety and worry which affects both his physical and psychological health (Merriam-Webster, [2015](#)).Life satisfaction is defined as the satisfaction of a person with his own life and environment and his ability to enjoy his experiences with a degree of excitement (Parker, & Calhoun, [1996](#)). When a person is happy with his life then it means that person is satisfied. It's a kind of happiness that exists within a person when that person is living in a good social circle, has positive feelings about himself and others and is spending a healthy life.

Stress is a common problem that affects almost all of us at some point in our lives. "Anything that possess a challenge or a threat to our wellbeing is a stress" (Afridi, & Maqsood, [2017](#)). Stress is of two types. Stress we can endure could be helpful in keeping us energetic, focused and alert. But when it becomes unbearable it can adversely affect mood, health, relationships, quality of life and so on (Lovallo, [2015](#)). All these factors have the ability to effect self-esteem in one way or another. These influences in turn may effect a student's life satisfaction. Especially, female students are affected by stress in many ways. This study is thus intended to study stress, life satisfaction, self-esteem and the correlation between them. In the current study, the main focus remains on female students' stress, self-esteem and life satisfaction at uni-gender and co-ed institutions.

Selye (1956) in his research found that stress is not something that is necessarily bad. It depends on how people take it. For instance, the stress of doing something creative is beneficial; whereas the stress of a failure, insult or disease is harmful.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define stress in the transactional model of stress and say that there is a difference between what people perceive when there is a change in their environment and their inability to deal with that change and to create a coping response. Stress is a health related problem which almost everyone suffers in their daily life routine. Diener and Suh (1997) define life satisfaction as an individual's self-examination of his/her own life. Different researches have also shown the impact of life satisfaction on adolescents' adjustment in a positive light (Gilman and Huebner, 2003; Huebner, 2006).

Need-based theories suggest that people are happy when their need is satisfied. The top-down approach stresses that different individuals have different personalities and different criteria for their life satisfaction; whereas, the bottom-up approach stresses that life events and conditions affect life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985).

Self-esteem is a person's overall perception of his self-worth or personal belief about himself that could either be positive or negative. Moreover, self-esteem is created through a person's life experiences and it then goes on to effect that person's happiness and life satisfaction (Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey & Leitten, 1993).

In Maslow's famous hierarchy model, it is important to satisfy one stage before reaching the next level and self-actualization comes after self-esteem. A person has to fulfill the requirements of self-esteem first, only then s/he would be able to achieve self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

A very famous and well known humanist and psychotherapist in the history of psychology Carl Rogers believed that if a person attains self-actualization then s/he would be living a happy and healthy life with his/her complete functioning. According to him, such an individual would have high self-worth, would trust his/her feelings and would be able to adjust him/herself according to the environment. Through the work of Maslow and Roger it is clear that without satisfying the level of self-

esteem, one cannot achieve self-actualization but very few are able to achieve it in any case. Self-esteem is something that may change with a person's experiences and age and with increasing experience there are greater chances for a person to achieve a high degree of self-esteem and happiness (Hill, 2015).

Behavior Plasticity theory of Brockner (1984) explains that the individual outcomes of behavior are due to the moderating effects of self-esteem (Campbell, 1990; Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). The effect of external stimuli such as stress on an individual is behavioral plasticity. The theory posits that individuals having low self-esteem are more prone to be effected by the external stimuli because they are easily distracted by the external world; whereas individuals with high self-esteem are less vulnerable to external effects because they care less about the external world (Baumeister, 1982). Therefore, individuals with high self-esteem are less prone to stress and individuals with low self-worth are more prone to stress and may seek more ways to cope with it (Olatunji, 2014).

2. Literature Review

A research study investigated the association between perceived stress and life satisfaction of Turkish college students by analyzing the data of 235 students. A significant negative correlation of life satisfaction with perceived stress was found which suggested that student's life satisfaction was affected by college stress. Female students had high life satisfaction as compared to male students (Laurence, Williams, & Eland 2009).

A study by Hackman and Farah (2009) was conducted to find out if low socioeconomic status increases the level of stress in children and adults. In her research, she focused on poverty which is associated with stress. Poor people with a low socioeconomic status would suffer from a high level of stress as compared to people with a high socioeconomic status because of their unhealthy lifestyle, money saving instead of expending, leaving their desires behind in order to get food and shelter, and living with an inferiority complex as compared to those with a high socioeconomic status which leads them towards higher chronic stress. The young ones are totally unaware of household problems such as money problems, otherwise they would understand the complications of running a

household and would become tense. They are mostly avoided by their parents because of their day night struggle for money making and managing the household. Hence, people with a low socioeconomic status have a high level of stress than people with a high socioeconomic status.

Laurence, Williams, and Eland (2009) conducted a survey on 453 students in which they revealed that a higher level of stress was highly correlated with symptoms of depression due to the fear of getting lowest grades or failing in examination; fear of exam preparation also negatively affected their self-esteem.

Thawabieh and Qaisy (2012) conducted a survey in Tafila Technical University on 471 students. The focus of the study was to analyze the students' level of stress in their university environment and to find out if the stress of getting low grades or an uncomfortable university environment has an effect on their academics due to which they not only suffer emotional but also physical symptoms of stress. The results revealed that female students are more stressed as compared to male students because female students face more community pressures and cultural restrictions.

Another study conducted by Mehmood, and Shaukat (2014) investigated life satisfaction and psychological well-being among adult female university students. The study concluded that self-esteem and depression are predictors of life satisfaction and they observed no difference in life satisfaction of male and female students.

A study by Cohen (1983) claimed that positive emotions are strong predictors of the level of life satisfaction. Headey, Kelley and Wearing, (1993) concluded that people's life satisfaction has a positive relation with self-esteem and is negatively related to depression and anxiety. Another study was conducted by Bibi, Chaudhary and Awan (2015) in which students' level of life satisfaction was explored. The study also concluded that culture and age has an effect on student's life satisfaction and that male and female students have the same level of life satisfaction with no significant difference.

Another study was conducted to explore if age and money affect female students' life satisfaction. The results of the study showed that age

and money have no effect on female students' level of life satisfaction (Mehmood & Shaukat, 2014). Huebner, Drane and Valois (2000) in their study also revealed that money has very little or no effect on individuals' life satisfaction.

3. Rationale

Co-education is an educational system where girls and boys study together in the same learning environment, whereas uni-gender institutions are those that are made separately for both girls and boys. There are many pros and cons of both institutions but the focus of the current research is that women studying in uni-gender institutions lack opportunities to explore their abilities. Social biasness and cultural limitations are essential obstacles for many women to get admission in co-educational settings where they can get better opportunities and explore themselves. Lack of interaction with the opposite gender and the lack of freedom inside and outside the campus could also make students stressful which may affect their self-esteem and life satisfaction. Women from the middle and lower classes mostly suffer from stress and inferiority complex due their conservative family background, financial condition and poor pick and drop facilities. The main purpose to conduct this research is to explore all of the above factors which contribute greatly to make women studying in uni-gender institution stressful and they have poor self-concept and self-perception.

4. Objectives

- The aim of the current research is to find out the difference between perceived stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem among women studying in co-ed and uni-gender institutions.
- To explore the level of stress of women studying in co-ed and uni-gender institutions.
- To investigate the relationship between stress, self-esteem and life satisfaction of women studying in both types of institutions.
- To analyze the effect of self-esteem on life satisfaction of women studying in co-ed and uni-gender institutions.
- To find out the impact of stress on life satisfaction of female students.

- To explore whether women are comfortable in co-ed and uni-gender institutions.

5. Implications

The findings of this research will help to spread awareness among families with a limited mindset. It will be helpful for these families to gain insight and awareness about women rights which help them to achieve their goal and contribute positively in society. This study will also highlight the cultural and social bias regarding female education. The current study will be helpful for women who are studying and will allow them to overcome their stress and to participate in educational activities with a positive mind set. This study will also be helpful to understand how to improve the educational system so that women get a better opportunity to come along and become the primary source for the development of our country. It will help to improve their lifestyle and to provide a comfortable environment for female students in both types of institutions. It will also help to make such institutions culturally acceptable for most of the families with a limited mindset.

6. Hypothesis

H1 Difference among women studying in co-ed and uni-gender institutions regarding their self-esteem.

H2 Difference among women studying in co-ed and uni-gender institutions regarding their life satisfaction.

H3 Difference between women studying in co-ed and uni-gender institutions regarding stress.

H4 Relationship between perceived stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem.

H5 Stress would predict life satisfaction among female students.

H6 Self-esteem would predict life satisfaction among female students.

7. Method and Material

7.1 Research Method and Design

The research uses a correlational research design to examine the relationship between different variables. In social research, survey research is a standout amongst the essential ranges of measurement

research. Quantitative research method is used for the purpose of this research

- to describe variables
- to examine the relationships among variables
- to determine the cause-and-effect interactions between variables

7.2 Sample and Sampling Strategy

The sample size for the study was limited to 200 female students. 100 female students were selected from co-ed institutions and 100 from uni-gender institutions. The sample was taken from Defense Degree College for Girls, Kinnaird College, Government College University and Punjab University. The sample comprised students studying in graduate and post-graduate programs. The age of the sampled students/respondents was from 18-25 years and they all had distinctive financial status.

Convenience and purposive sampling was used to select the students/respondents from various institutions. Convenience sampling is one type of non-probability sampling in which only those respondents are selected who are easily available, whereas in purposive sampling respondents are selected to fulfill the specific purpose of the study.

7.3 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

- The study focused on the female students of masters and graduation levels.
- Females from both co-education and uni-gender institutions were included.
- Male students were excluded.
- Pre-graduation and post-masters students were excluded.

8. Operational Definition

Stress is a two way process which involves environmental stressors and the response of an individual to these stressors. In short, it's what we feel when we think we have lost control of events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Life satisfaction could be a person's inner happiness, feeling of completeness, feeling that he/she is something and can have their own ideas, having good relations with others and know how to overcome their

daily hazards. It is when a person is overall happy with his life and not just at some specific situations (Hayborn, (2001).

Self-esteem is a person's overall perception of his/her self-worth or personal belief that could either be positive or negative (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

9. Assessment Measures

Cohen's (1983) Perceived Stress Scale is a 10 item Likert scale with 5 possible responses. Some items are positively worded which has reverse scoring. Total score can be obtained by summing up all the responses. Higher scores indicate a higher stress level whereas lower scores are the indication of a low level of stress.

Satisfaction With Life Scale designed by Diener et al. (1985) is a 7 point Likert scale comprising 5 items which measures cognitive judgments of the life satisfaction of an individual in the global prospective.

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES;Rosenberg, 1965) is a Likert scale composed of 10 items which was basically designed for the measurement of adolescents and children across the globe. It has four possible responses. Half of the items are positively worded and the other half are negatively worded. The scale contains reverse scoring in some items. Total score of the scale ranges between 0-30 and it can be obtained by adding the responses of all the items. High score means high self-esteem and low score translates into low self-esteem.

10. Statistical Analysis

The statistics that we are going to apply in the current study are

- ➢ Independent sample t test
- ➢ Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
- ➢ Linear regression

10.1 Procedure

Firstly, the researcher selected the topic that is stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem among women studying in co-ed and uni-gender institutions. Stress has been a popular topic in the studies of students' academic performance. Then, the researcher selected the scales

appropriate for the research. She selected the standardized Urdu versions of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) and Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and the English version of the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983).Official permission and informed consent was sorted to draw the sample from different universities of Lahore. The questionnaire was administered directly and individually. Some students hesitated and refused to fill the questionnaire while others cooperated with the researcher by giving their responses willingly and with interest. Those respondents who were interested to take part in the study were briefed about the research purpose. Some instructions were given to the students to put their true and actual responses. There was no time limit imposed to fill up the questionnaires.

11. Results

The purpose of the study was to explore the differences between the women studying in co-ed and uni-gender institutions. It was also intended to find out if stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem are interrelated and affect each other. The relationships between these variables were also examined.

Table 1
Psychometric Properties of Perceived Stress, Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem

Variables	K	M	S.D	α	Potential	Actual
Perceived stress	10	19.0900	6.74309	.768	0-40	3-38
Life satisfaction	4	21.1558	7.17254	.784	4-28	5-35
Self-esteem	10	19.4975	4.63177	.497	0-30	8-51

Table 4.1 shows that the reliability of perceived stress and life satisfaction was good but the reliability of self-esteem was average.

Table 4.2

Difference between Women Studying in Co-Ed and Uni-Gender Institutions Regarding Perceived Stress, Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem

Variables	Co-education female students		Uni-gender female students		T	p	95% CI	
	M	S.D	M	S.D			LL	UL
Perceived Stress	18.2414	6.31715	20.2619	7.16437	-2.110	.040	-3.95010	-.09095
Life Satisfaction	21.0174	7.40908	21.3452	6.87495	-.321	.748	-2.33973	1.68404
Self Esteem	19.1034	4.00734	20.0482	5.36225	-1.357	.177	-2.32107	.43158

Table 4.1 indicates that there is a significant difference between perceived stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem but there is no significant difference between life satisfaction and self-esteem in co-ed and uni-gender institutions; whereas there is a significant difference regarding stress in co-ed and uni-gender institutions.

Table 4.3
Correlation between Perceived Stress, Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem of Women Studying in Co-Ed and Uni-Gender Institutions

Variables	1	2	3
Perceived Stress	—	-.398**	-.202**
Life Satisfaction	-.398**	—	.211**
Self Esteem	-.202**	.211**	—

Table 4.2 indicates that there is a significant relationship among stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem of female students.

Table 4.4
Linear Regression Analysis for Perceived Stress, Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem among Female Students

Variables	B	β	96% CL
Life satisfaction	24.757		[19.49,30.01]
Perceived stress	-.398**	-.374	[-.53,-.25]
Self-esteem	.206*	.133	[.004,.409]
R2	.179		
F	21.20		
ΔR2	.179		
ΔF	21.20		

Table 4.4 shows that perceived stress has a significantly negative effect on life satisfaction and self-esteem has a significantly positive effect on life satisfaction.

12. Discussion

The current study is intended to explore the differences between the female students of co-ed and uni-gender institutions. It is also intended to

find out if stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem are interrelated and affect each other. The relationships between these variables are also examined.

A survey research done by Nikitha, Jose and Valsaraj (2014) examined the level of perceived academic stress and self-esteem among adolescents. The findings of the study revealed moderate to severe level of academic stress among adolescents whereas their self-esteem was not affected. The study concluded that self-esteem and academic stress have a low negative but significant relationship with each other.

Another similar experiment was conducted on female students of co-ed and uni- gender institutions in which the researchers explored self-perceptions among female students in both institutions. The study was also intended to find out the differences in five different domains regarding their self-esteem and to know the domain in which they had a higher level of self-esteem. The variables they selected were women's physical appearances, their behaviors, competition in studies, athletics and social acceptance. The results of the study revealed that female students of co-ed and uni-gender institutions were not significantly different from each other but a significant difference was found between the selected variables. Female students studying at co-ed institutions had a higher level of self-esteem in the domains of physical appearance, athletics and social acceptance; whereas female students studying at uni-gender institutions had a higher level of self-esteem regarding their academic performance and behavioral conduct which shows that self-esteem of female students was same in both institutions (Granleese & Joseph, 1993).

A survey research was done in Hong Kong on university students during their first year of education in the university. The aim of the study was to analyze depression, anxiety and stress among them. The results revealed that 27.5% students scored high at depression, anxiety and stress scales (Wong, Cheung, Chan, Ma, & Wa Tang, 2006).

Another research was conducted on university students to examine their stress. The sample contained students of the initial year and the final year. The results showed that the final year students were suffering from a low level of stress as compared to the first year students. The results also

indicated a significant difference among university students of educational sciences, finance, administration colleges and other university colleges regarding academic stress. Due to cultural restrictions and pressures imposed by the community, female students were found to be more stressed as compared to male students (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012).

Bibi et al., (2015) conducted a study to find out the impact of cultural differences and age on life satisfaction of university students. The sample comprised students of Muzaffarabad and Hazara University who belong to two different cultures and traditions. The results of the study showed that both areas' students were enjoying different levels of life satisfaction. The life satisfaction of Muzaffarabad University students was less than the students of Hazara University. The findings also showed that culture has an effect on life satisfaction of students and there is a positive relationship between life satisfaction and age.

Ali et al. (2015) in his co relational research explored the levels of perceived stress and life satisfaction among college going students who participate actively in extracurricular activities. The findings of the study showed that students who have less belongingness in college would have low level of life satisfaction and high level of perceived stress as compared to the students of high belongings.

Stress would predict life satisfaction among female students. The previous researches also support the hypothesis. A study was conducted by Huerta, Cortina, Pang and Torges, (2006) on 1,455 female college going students to explore the impact of sexual harassment on female students. The findings revealed that due to sexual harassment female students suffer more under psychological stress which negatively affects their studies, level of satisfaction with their academics, and causes greater body illness and more eating problems.

Another study was conducted by Abolghasemia and Varaniyaba (2010) to examine the predictors of life satisfaction. The results of the study revealed that stress would predict life satisfaction; as stress would decrease life satisfaction would increase.

The findings also supported the hypothesis. In the previous study conducted by Suldo and Huebner (2006), the results showed that parental

behavioral variables may, to a certain degree, affect the development of adolescents' internal resources such as self-esteem and contribute to their life satisfaction. Although friends' support is a very important determinant of an adolescent's subjective well-being, the results suggested that this influence is only indirectly related to global self-worth. Positive interaction with peers may be reflected in the way adolescents evaluate themselves and may enhance their self-esteem and overall life satisfaction. This may be especially important for young people living in poor families who are more socially isolated and have less opportunity to socialize with their peers.

In order to overcome the stress of students it is important to conduct seminars, workshops, to give lectures etc. to create awareness and to provide a sense of freedom in female students. Girls should be given equal opportunities so that they do not lag behind in any field. Universities should hire the services of mental health professionals to treat students' stress, to enable them to fight with their daily stress and to cope with it. Like physical health, mental health is also very important in order to live a good quality life. At any stage of life, a person might suffer from any physical problem and with that s/he might have mental health problems which also need to be cured. So, mental health professionals should also support the students through timely intervention which is very important for a better quality life (Bano, Deb, Bardhan, & Rao, 2015).

There are so many ways to cope with daily stresses like daily exercise; many relation techniques can also be helpful; time management is also very important which means that everything should be done in its proper timeframe, such as studying, playing games and other indoor and outdoor activities (Carter, Elzubeir, Abdulrazzaq, Revel, and Townsend, 2003).

13. Conclusion

The conclusion of the current study is that female students studying in uni-gender institutions are more stressed as compared to the female students studying in co-education but their life satisfaction and self-esteem remain the same. A significant correlation is found between perceived stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem of female students of both types of institutions. The study also concludes that self-esteem and perceived stress

affect the life satisfaction of female students.

13.1 Limitations

- Limited sample size was used in the current research.
- There were few universities covered in this research.
- Gender differences were not explored in this study.

13.2 Recommendations

According to the results of the study, some recommendations have been formulated that may be helpful for the future researches.

- In future, we can find out the relationships and differences among male students also.
- The current research covered a few universities of the Lahore city only. Future research can also be conducted on different universities of Pakistan.
- The size of the research sample can be increased so that it may cover a larger population.
- Another group of foreign degree holders can also be included.

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