

Self-Concept, Social Support and Empathy in College Students

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Abstract

The present study intended to find the relationship between self-concept, social support and empathy in college students. A purposive sampling technique was used to gather a sample of 200 participants (100 private college students, 100 government college students), ranging from 16 to 18 years of age ($M = 2.3$, $SD = .74$) was taken. The study comprised equal data of both boys and girls. Urdu translated tools such as Urdu Adjective Checklist (UAC), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) were used along with Informed Consent and Demographic Sheet. Different statistical analyses were conducted. The results of the analysis showed significant positive correlation between self-concept and social support ($r=.27^{**}$, $p<.01$) while, self-concept and empathy have significant negative correlation ($r=-.23^{**}$, $p<.01$) in college students. Results also showed that boys have high self-concept ($M=162.72$, $SD=30.52$) as compared to girls ($M=151.54$, $SD=14.26$). Moreover, social support significantly predicts self-concept ($\beta=.26$, $p<.001$) with 7% of variance whereas, empathy negatively predicts self-concept ($\beta=-.20$, $p<.002$) with 16% of variance in college students. Results also showed gender as negative predictor of self-concept in college students ($\beta=-.21$, $p<.002$) with 12% variance while, results depict that family system positively predicts the self-concept in college students ($\beta=.16$, $p<.02$) with a variance of 18%. Results also showed that the qualification of parents affects the level of empathy in students. Students having qualified parents also had higher level of empathy as compared to those with illiterate parents or lesser educated

Keywords: *self-concept, social support, empathy, college students.*

Introduction and Literature Review

College students are important part of our society who are to become the responsible adults subsequently. However this is also a time where the adolescents are going through a lot dealing with their own personal identity formation, peer pressure, education and family related issues. They face many complications during the college period. Parents and teachers have crucial roles in developing their personalities and carrier. Due to ignorance of parents and a lack of

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availability of social support students face many problems. The self-concept of children starts developing in the early childhood then continues to do so in adolescence, the present research has explored college student's self-concept, social support and empathy and how it affects them.

Self-concept is simply to be aware of oneself or a person's perception about him or herself. The one's belief about himself, including the person's characteristics and what is their self (Baumeister, 1999). Lewis (1999) suggested that self-concept has two domains: i) The existential self which means that the sense of being distinct from others, ii) The categorical self which means that one's realization that he or she exists as a separate individual or separate experience and he knows that he is also a part of the world. Development of positive self-concept depends upon one's environmental experience and evaluation of those experiences therefore opinions; approval and positive feedback play a critical role in building positive self-concept (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

Rogers (1959) proposed a theory on self-concept and he described that the self-concept has three aspects: self-image, self-esteem and ideal self. According to Rogers (1959) Self-concept is an individual's perception about himself, and general intellectual skills. Self-concept can be elaborated as a rich network of knowledge or cognitive structure including all the known things about one's self, comprising present knowledge and information, past learning's/experiences, thoughts, reactions, judgments and conclusions about others and one's own self (Markus, 1977). Self-concept is defined as the association of several factors such as self-regulation, stability, personality, culture and development (McConnell, 2011). Individuals prompt their self-identity through the performance of their roles (Jack, 2006). And if they fail to perform those then they may experience incongruence between self and experience and this may then lead to psychological maladjustment hindering personal growth towards self-actualization (Smith & Rogers, 1977).

Social Support can be defined as an interchange of resources amongst at least two people and perceived by the receiver and the giver with the aim to increase overall health of the receiver (Celik, Akgemci & Didem, 2012; Lirio *et al.*, 2007). Mahanta and Aggarwal (2013) also define social support as giving of assistance or relief to an individual in need in order to assist them to deal with various issues. The reciprocal allotment of social, private or moral beliefs within friends or peers helps the person in their social growth (Mahanta & Aggarwal, 2013). In spite of the intensity of strain in an adolescent's life, social support from such places directly influences them to adapt better to any situation (Cohen & Wills 1985; Mahanta & Aggarwal, 2013). According to Ayan (2017), social support can consist of a variety of assistance given by others like giving advice on how to cope with stress and providing emotional support. House (1987) defines social support as the exchange of resources between individuals of emotional (showing love and compassion by a caregiver) and instrumental in nature, that is, advice given in order to deal with a situation. According to Rodriguez and Cohen (1998), social support can be defined as multifaceted phenomenon which refers to the resources, both, psychological and material, accessible to an individual through their close relationships.

Various research studies suggest that it is vital to know the difference between perceived and received social support as studies have found that perceived support had been more constantly and directly related to positive health results than has received social support (Barrera, 2000; Uchino, 2004; Wills & Shinar, 2000). According to Procidano and Heller (1983), there is a distinction between perceived social support and support given by the social environment. Eker, Arkar & YaldOz (2001) suggest that in the last few years, researches on social support tend to discuss a person's own perception about social support based on their

social relations. Sorias (1988a) defines perceived social support as a person's general idea about whether social environment is supportive enough or not. Social support is a significant area of interest which has been reported to influence one's physical and mental health positively (Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lakey & Orehek, 2011; Uchino, 2004, 2009). Lakey and Orehek (2011) report that perceived support is constantly related to psychological well-being, which, according to previous researches on social support, outcomes from unbiased supportive behaviors that buffer tension and worry. Ekinçi and Ekici (2003) states that social support is the fulfillment of basic hierarchal needs of people like love, affection, belongings and self-identity, through the process of communication with other people in their social circle such as family and friends. According to Jackson, Beeken and Wardle (2015) family support basically refers to aiding a member of the family "financially, emotionally, physically and otherwise". As one grows, the social interaction increases with near environment and during the adolescence, interaction with friends in academic atmosphere takes significance as well Gulacti (2010). Cohen and Wills (1985) also believe that aiding in the form of social support can lessen the effects of stressful situations.

Titchener (1924) first used the term empathy and he used it to refer as such a process of humanizing things in different manner. Frued (1960) stated that empathy is a process which makes us think about another person and take the other's person mental life. According to Rogers (1975) empathy has many implications in field of psychological therapy. Clinicians and several therapists refers empathy as a mental process which plays a key role in therapy and through this process one can get insight of another person's mental state (Thwaites & Bennett-Levy, 2007). Basic description of empathy is interaction among any two of the individuals in which one person witness the feelings of the other person (Decety & Jackson, 2006). Recent studies provide evidence which validate the significance of emotional empathy which also includes how emotional empathy encourages altruistic and social behavior. (Stocks, Lishner & Decker, 2009). Lack of empathy is generally inked with negative consequences and researches stated that aggressive behavior occurs due to lack of emotional empathy (Buffone & Poulin, 2014). Absence of empathy has been recognized as major component of psychopathy (Blair, 2005; Harpur, Hakstian & Hare, 1988).

According to Hein and Spencer (2008), empathy is a mental process that allows person's to take target position of another individual in order to witness their emotions and feelings. Many theorists, who belong to different school of thought, consider empathy as being a mentalizing process that allows people to project themselves into the position of a social target and get in touch with their emotions (De Vignemont & Singer, 2006). According to Davis (1980) empathy is a unipolar construct so it cannot be related as set of related constructs.

Demaray (2007) conducted a research on the role of youth's ratings of the importance of socially supportive behaviors in the relationship between social support and self-concept. The purpose of the research was to find out relationship among perceived importance and perceived frequency of social support of youth self-concept. In this research, data was taken from 921 adolescents of class 3rd to 12th. Research results showed that there was significant relationship among frequencies of social support provided from class-fellows, teachers and parents. Whereas, there was a significant relationship between perceived importance of social support provided by teachers with self-concept. Also, an interaction was found among frequency and importance of social support provided by class fellows and friends with the self-concept. Findings suggested that youths' self-concept were influenced by evaluations made by self about the significance of support provided by teachers.

Rationale of the Study

This study is important to bridge the gap in existing literature after identifying the relationship between self-concept, social support, and empathy among college students, while also investigating potential gender differences. By examining these variables and their predictors, such as demographic factors, the study seeks to uncover insights into how these psychological constructs interact and influence each other within the college population.

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between self-concept, social support and empathy among college students.
2. To check the predictive role of self-concept and social support on empathy among college students
3. To investigate the gender differences on self-concept, social support and empathy among college students.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant positive relationship between the demographic variables among the college students.
2. There will be a significantly negative relationship between self-concept and empathy among the college students.
3. Social support and self-concept will have significant positive relation among the college students.
4. Self-concept and social support will predict empathy among college students.

Materials and Methods

Research design

Quantitative research design was used in this study and a convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit participants for the study from different colleges of Lahore.

Sample

Sample of the study was consisted of 200 participants with the distribution of 100 private college and 100 government college students. The age range of the students was 16 to 18 years.

Instruments

Standardized instruments were used to measure for the study.

Self-Concept Scale (Urdu Adjective Checklist). The scale Urdu Adjective Check List (UACL), also called self-concept scale was originally developed and validated in National Institute of Psychology Quaid-e-Azam University by Ansari, Farooqi, Khan, and Yasmin (1982). It is used for the assessment of self-concept. In the present study the higher scores on self-concept scale would mean higher and positive self-concept of individuals. It contains negative and positive adjectives with five point rating Very Much = 5, Much = 4, Moderate=3, Less=2, Very less=1 for positive adjectives and reverse for negative adjectives. High score represents more positive self-concept. It is highly reliable and valid as a scale with the calculated internal consistency of the scale at 0.81, while the test retest reliability is 0.70. Alpha coefficient of .57 is obtained.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support–Urdu Version (MSPSS). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was originally designed by Zimet (1988) and it was translated in Urdu by Zafar and Kausar, (2013). The scale is a 12-item self-administered instrument developed to explore the perceived sufficiency of social support provided by three sources: family, friends and a significant other. It is “7-point Likert type scale with ranging from (1= very strongly disagree to 7= very strongly agree)”.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index. For the purpose of assessing empathy Interpersonal Reactivity Index was used. IRI consists of 28 items. It provides a multidimensional approach to assess empathy as it taps both the cognitive and affective dimension of the concept (Davis, 1980). The questionnaire measures four separate aspects of empathy including, perspective taking fantasy, empathetic concern and personal distress. It is a self-report measure. The scale is Likert type scale ranging from 0 (doesn't describe me at all) to 4 (describes me very well). Urdu translated version is used in this study. It is a reliable and valid measure of empathy to be used. All four subscales of the test are reported to have internal reliability indices ranging from 0.61 to 0.81 (Davis, 1980) and internal consistency coefficient ranges from 0.68 to 0.79.

Ethical Considerations

The research project was first approved by the ethics committee and board of studies of the department. Permission was taken from original authors and authors of Urdu translated version of the scales. Permissions were also taken from the head of the colleges for the collection of data. Permissions were sought from the heads of colleges in Lahore for the purpose of data collection. The participants of the research were informed about the aim of the study. Informed consent was taken from them and they were briefed about their rights pertaining to participation in the study. The participants were ensured that their data would be kept confidential. Permission was taken from authors to use scales, had taken via e-mail. After the collection of data, scores were analyzed by using scoring keys according to the manual of respective scale.

Results

Results section is comprised of reliability analysis, descriptive statistics and hypotheses testing.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability of the College Students (N=200)

Scale	N	A
Urdu Adjective Checklist	52	.89
Perceived Social Support Scale	12	.87
Interpersonal Reactivity Index	28	.73

(Table 1) Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed for ensuring reliability of the scales in this study.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix between Demographic variables, Self-concept, Social Support & Empathy in college students (N=200)

Note: FE=Father Education, ME=Mother Education, IC=Income, NoS= Number of Siblings, BO=Birth order, FS=Family system,

Variables	Class	College	Age	Gender	FE	ME	IC	NoS	BO	FS	SC	E	SS
Class	1	.09	.59**	.39**	-.09	-.05	-.08	.07	-.01	.14*	.04	-.32	-.01
College	-	1	.41**	.01	.42**	.38**	.51**	-.01	-.05	.17*	.14*	-.01	.01
Age	-	-	1	.22**	.08	.07	.11	.01	-.04	.23**	.06	.11	.01
Gender	-	-	-	1	-.18**	-.13	-.26**	.15*	.07	.11	-.23**	.05	-.06
FE	-	-	-	-	1	.67**	.64**	-.23**	-.10	.14	.11	.03	-.04
ME	-	-	-	-	-	1	.56**	-.38**	-.28**	.12	.10	-.02	.04
IC	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-.10	-.10	.08	.19**	.05	.05
NoS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.53**	.14*	.04	-.08	-.06
BO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.11	.04	-.05	-.14*
FS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	.12	-.01	-.07
SC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-.23**	.27**
E	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-.06
SS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
M	1.68	1.50	2.31	1.50	2.33	1.94	2.12	2.21	1.54	1.66	157.13	71.37	59.28
SD	.47	.50	.74	.50	1.36	1.45	.77	.69	.69	.48	24.41	15.42	15.07

UAC=Urdu Adjective Checklist, IRI=Interpersonal Reactivity Index, MSS=Multidimensional Social Support. *p<.05, **p<.01

Pearson correlation analysis showed that the results indicated, Students of both first year and second year showed significant positive correlation with Age, Gender and Family system (p=.59**, p=.39**, p=.14*). Both Govt. and Private college students showed a significant correlation with Age, Father Education, Mother Education, (p=.41**, p=.42**, p=.38**) Income, Family system and Self Concept (p=.51**, p=.17*, p=.14*) on applying correlation analysis on age there was a significant correlation seen between gender and family system (p=.22**, p=.23**). Gender had a negatively significant correlation with father's education and income (p=-.18**, p=-.26**) and showed significant correlation with the number of siblings (p=.15*) and negative correlation self-concept (p=-.23**) among the college students. There was a significant correlation between of father's education with mother's education, income and negative correlation with number of siblings (p=.67**, p=.64**, p=-.23**). A significant positive correlation was seen between mother's education and income (p=.56**) and there was a negatively significant correlation between mother's education, number of siblings and birth order (p=-.38**, p=-.28**) among the college students. Income had a significantly positive correlation with self-concept (p=.19**). There was a significant positive correlation between the number of siblings, birth order and family system (p=.53**, p=.14*). Birth

order had a negatively significant correlation with social support ($p=-.14^*$) and there was a significant negative correlation between self-concept and empathy ($p=-.23^{**}$) and there was a positive correlation between self-concept and social support ($p=.27^{**}$).

Table 3

Stepwise regression predicting Demographics, Self-concept, Social Support and Empathy in College students (N=200)

Note: β = Standardized regression weight, B= Beta, R^2 = change in R (explained variance), F= Variability of the model, CL= Confidence

Variables	Model 1		Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			95% CL		
	B	SE	B	B	SE	B	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	LL	UL
Social Support	.43	.11	.27	.41	.11	.25	.39	.11	.24	.41	.11	.25	.21	.65
Gender	-	-	-	-10.44	3.27	-.21	-9.98	3.20	-.21	-10.77	3.18	-.22	-16.89	-4
Empathy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.32	.10	-.20	-.31	.10	-.20	-.53	-.12
Family System	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8.15	3.36	.16	1.52	14.78
R^2	.07		.12			.16			.18					
F	14.95		12.93			12.14			10.51					
ΔR	.07		.11			.14			.17					

level. $p < .01^$, $p < .01^{**}$*

Stepwise regression analysis was conducted to test the prediction of social support, empathy and self-concept among college students. Four models were gathered after applying step-wise regression. The first model predicted that social support significantly predicts self-concept in college students ($\beta=.26$, $p<.001$). In the first model a variance of 7% was seen. Model two consists of two factors i.e. social support and gender and was seen that gender was a negative predictor of self-concept in college students ($\beta=-.21$, $p=.002$). The variance of the second model was calculated as 12% and is near to the mean. The third model showed that empathy has negatively predicted self-concept in college students ($\beta=-.20$, $p=.002$) with a variance of 16%. The last and fourth model in the regression analysis predicted that family system slightly predicts self-concept in college students ($\beta=.16$, $p=.02$) with a variance of 18%. The results indicate that social support is a significant predictor of self-concept in college students.

Table 4

Independent sample t-test between on Gender Differences in terms of Self-concept, Social Support and Empathy in College Students (N=200)

Variable	Boys (n=100)	Girls (n=100)	t	P	CI		Cohen's d
	M(SD)	M(SD)			LL	UL	
SocialSupport	60.18(14.35)	58.37(15.78)	.85	.40	-2.40	6.02	.12
Empathy	70.60(17.14)	72.13(13.53)	-.70	.48	-5.83	2.78	.10
Self-Concept	162.72(30.52)	151.54(14.26)	3.32	.01	4.53	17.84	.47

*Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, CI= Class Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit, **p<.001*

An independent sample t-test was performed comparing the social support, empathy and self-concept of boys and girls from Govt. and private colleges. The results indicated that there is no significant difference between girls and boys in terms of social support and empathy. While the results showed that there are significant mean differences in girls and boys on self-concept as the boys showed a slightly higher score as compared to the girls (M=162.72, M=151.54).

Table 5

Descriptive of One-Way Analysis of Variance on Empathy of College Students (N=200)

Variable	N	M	SD
Empathy			
Illiterate	18	75.22	14.48
Matric	53	67.96	12.99
Intermediate	29	68.83	13.14
Graduation	45	77.73	14.56
Masters	55	69.51	18.13

Note: M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, N=Number of participants

Table 6 shows mean differences between different qualifications of father's education on empathy. The result indicate that the father qualification affect the level of empathy. Table indicated that the students having graduation qualification of fathers (M=77.73, SD=14.56) had high level of empathy as compared to students having fathers from Illiterate qualification (M=75.22, SD=14.48), Matric qualification (M=67.96, SD=12.99), Intermediate qualification (M=68.83, SD=13.14) and Masters qualification (M=69.51, SD=18.13).

Table 6*One Way Analysis of Variance for Father's education of the College Students (N=200)*

Variables	SS	df	MS	F	p
Empathy					
Between Groups	3082.64	4	770.66	3.40	.01
Within Groups	44251.72	195	226.93		
Total	47334.36	199			

Note: SS= Sum of square, df= Degree of freedom, MS= Mean square, $p < .05$

In table 7, One-way ANOVA analysis was run on empathy. Results revealed the analysis of variance between father's education on empathy. Findings indicate that there are statistically significant differences in mean value of father education and it shows that mean differences of different qualifications are significant as $F(4, 195) = 3.40, p < 0.05$.

Discussion

Self-concept is to be aware of oneself or a person's perception about him or herself. The term self-concept is used to refer that how someone thinks about or evaluates them. The one's belief about himself, including the person's characteristics and what is the self (Baumeister, 1999). A person's degree of empathy might vary in accordance with and be related to personality traits (Carlozziet al., 1995). Studies validate the importance of emotional empathy by including how it encourages pro-social or altruistic behavior amongst other social benefits (Stocks, Lishner & Decker, 2009). Conversely, a host of negative consequences have also been associated with a lack of empathy. Evidence suggest that a poverty of emotional empathy incites aggressive or antisocial behavior in individuals (Buffone & Poulin, 2014). People with diminished levels of empathy fail to comprehend or appreciate the feelings of those around them.

According to the hypothesis made in the present study that there was a statistically significantly relationship between social support and self-concept among college students. It was also found in the evidence from previous researches that there is a significant relationship between social support and self-concept of college students.

Another hypothesis was made that there will be a significantly negative relationship between self-concept and empathy among college students which was then proved by the results that showed that there was a statistically negative correlation between self-concept and empathy among the college students.

In an individual's life, empathy and feelings of warmth and affection play an important role as they make or break a person's personality and shows strength. In the current study there were significant relationships found between age gender and family system among the students. According to the current study higher the levels of self-concept in the college students higher will be the social support among the college students. It has been found consistent with the literature that social support plays an important role in the self-concept of the college students.

It was hypothesized that self-concept and social support will predict empathy among college students. According to the results of the current study it was predicted from regression that self-concept was significantly predicted by social support whereas empathy negatively predicted self-concept in college students. (Demaray, et al., 2007) conducted a research on the role of youth's ratings of the importance of socially supportive behaviors in the relationship

between social support and self-concept. In this research, data was taken from 921 adolescents of class 3rd to 12th. Research results showed that there was significant relationship among frequencies of social support provided from class-fellows, teachers and parents. Whereas, there was a significant relation in perceived importance of social support provided by teachers to self-concept.

Upon the regression analysis on the demographic variables, family system slightly predicts self-concept among college students. It was evidently seen in the literature that there has been an influence of the demographics on the self-concept of the students such as age, gender, class, education system and family systems play a vital role in determining the level of self-concept. Boys had a slightly higher mean than the girls in all three variables self-concept, social support and empathy however only Self-concept showed significant mean differences.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the study explains that self-concept has significant correlation with social support and empathy and they correlate significantly with each other. Moreover social support positively predicts self-concept and empathy negatively predicts self-concept among college students.

Limitations and Suggestions

The present study was conducted on the sample size of 200 students from colleges from Lahore. The sample size was reduced due to the Covid-19 restrictions. It was difficult to approach students because of the pandemic situation. The closure of the institution made it difficult to interact with students in person.

Implication/Recommendations

The present study guides the parents, college administration and counselors about the relation of self-concept, social support and empathy in college students. The findings of the research can be used to educate the importance of role of peers, family and teachers in helping the adolescents receive social support from these various sources and in turn help them to build their self-concept. The present study will be helpful for the future researchers to explore the relationship of self-concept, social support and empathy. It will also highlight the importance of social support, empathy and self-concept in college students.

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