Self-Concept, Gullibility and Interpersonal Difficulties in University Students of Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship among Self-Concept, and Interpersonal Difficulties in University Students of Punjab, Pakistan. The quantitative research design was used to gather the information from the university students. The research was carried out by using three indigenous scales; Self-Concept Scale, The Gullibility Scale, Interpersonal Difficulties Scale and a demographic form. The Cronbach alpha of these scales was following; Self-Concept Scale .80, The Gullibility Scale .83 and Interpersonal Difficulties Scale .92. In this study, 300 university students were included as research participants (50% men and 50% women) with an age range of 18-25 years (M = 21.28, SD = 1.82) through purposive sampling technique. The main hypotheses of the current study were examining the relationship among positive self-concept, negative self-concept, gullibility and interpersonal difficulties. Results indicated the significant positive relationship among negative self-concept, gullibility and interpersonal difficulties. Results of hierarchal regression indicated that gullibility is a highly significant predictor of interpersonal difficulties in university students. On the other hand, men have scored significantly higher on interpersonal difficulties than women. Moreover, Results were discussed in term of culture relevance, gender differences and implications for counseling services.

Keywords: gullibility, interpersonal difficulties, self-concept, university students

Introduction

Earliest psychologists of America such as James and Cooley show the importance of individuals' self-concept. During the past decades, a little extent of emphasize on this psychological construct as Bracken and Lamprecht (2003) stated that encourage the children and students to have a healthy and positive self-concept is only a lite exaggeration (Bracken & Lamprecht, 2003). Self-concept refers as a composite of attitudes, ideas and feelings individuals have about their selves.

Self-concept is also known as the self-image that individuals have about their selves. As self-image develops and changes over time because of multiple factors but Cherry (2021) stated that self-image particularly got influence by the most important people we interact a lot. Emotional, cognitive outcomes and behaviors of people such as anxiety, self-esteem, social interaction, level of happiness academic achievement, academic adjustment, life satisfaction and quality of life can influence by self-concept. Self-concept is how people perceive their own behaviors, characteristics and abilities. These perceptions can change over time or situation to situation (Cherry, 2021).

According to Lewis (1990) explained that self-concept has two aspects that are; The Existential Self and The Categorical Self. He suggested that self-concept plays a vital role in society in order to fulfill the responsibilities and to move within interpersonal relations (Lewis, 1990). Well the existential self is a basic element of self-concept in which people have perception of being distinct and distinguish from other people. Existential self is also described as a sense of self-constancy. Individuals think that they are separate and will be above time and space. On the other hand, categorical self is defined as when people that they are parts or objects of world and start to categorize their selves as gender, big, small, age (Bee, 1992).

There are three parts of self-concept given by Rogers; ideal self (an individual you like to become), self-image (the way you think yourself is) and self-esteem (the extent you accept, value and like yourself) (Cherry, 2021). People are concerned regarding what they are, what they can be and how they can fit within their environment for performing actively. They try to get a secured sense of self, strive to attain their goals. Wehrle and Fasbender (2019) stated that students try to be act with confidence in their social, cultural, family, university or work settings in which they have personal interests, duties and responsibilities. Students reflect them-selves through their behaviors in order to evaluate the extent of association between their aspirations related to past, present, future and their current states (Wehrle & Fasbender, 2019).

Positive self-concept is a developing or growing faith regarding oneself that assist one to face one's life's events successfully in order to make healthy impacts on one's live and to leave positive effects on others' lives. Students often face positive and negative feedbacks in their universities, families and social situations, that can develop both positive and negative feelings about their-selves (Reid, Haas, & Hawkings, 1977). Self-concept got attention increasingly for mental health investigations as self is a term used to explain the ways the people think, evaluate and perceive about their selves and it is related to individuals' surroundings they live in. Rene Descartes was the first person who talked about self and then self; such as self-actualization, self-image, self-affirmation and ego were reintroduced by Allport (Rashid & Iqbal, 2015).

Self-concept consists of a belief system in which individuals' cognition and evaluation is included about themselves and about the people in their surroundings. Moreover, Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith (2012) claimed that self-concept is core aspect of everyone's personality as everything related to people, are important contents and aspects of them (Oyserman et al., 2012). Jansen, Scherer, & Schroeders, (2015) defined the students' self-concept as their personal views, perceptions and thoughts regarding their own skills, capabilities, talent and aptitude to be successful in their studies because academia plays a vital role and leaves a strong impact on students. He defined the academic achievement as students' earlier and primary achievement.

Apart of this, students' self-concept can be affected by their personal characteristics, race, age, gender, parents' education, family background and sometimes birth weight is also included (Jansen et al., 2015).

There are various theories given by many psychologists and philosophers on the self-concept. "Carl Roger" one of famous psychologists defines self as phenomenological experiences of an individual's life. "Coolay" later stated the theory of self-concept in which he explains the symbolic interaction as an individual give meaning to "self" based on his social interactions. "Mead" further enhanced the theory of "Coolay" and argues that our self is develop from the interaction with others as how a person deals with the social environment. Thus, the self is the social identity of an individual and the reaction of people towards the self as an object. Moreover, he elaborated his theory and considers language as a basic element which connects the person's self to his social environment. To conclude the above theories, it suggested that self is formed by the combination of physical characteristics and interpretation of social environment (Mead, 1934).

The personality characteristics and gender form the gullibility tendency as facial appearances also depict the personality. The baby faces tend to be found more gullible as women has round faces, submissive characteristics in comparison to stereotypical men. Studies depicted that emotional expressions depicted the perception of gullibility as happier faces found to be more gullible victims as compare to aggressive faces. The women face tends to be more submissive, smiling and naive as compare to men dominative faces that found them to be more gullible (Stewart, Swanek, & Forth, 2024). Due to the scarcity of literature on gullibility tendency this would be the one of unique research specifically in Pakistan to find the gullibility tendency in students and their effect on formation of self-concept and interpersonal relations. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship of self-concept, gullibility and interpersonal difficulties in university students and investigate the predicting role of self-concept and gullibility among university students (Stewart et al. 2024). This study father investigates the difference of experience of gullibility and interpersonal difficulties between women and men university students of Punjab, Pakistan.

Method
The methodology section allows to understand the research design of study and provides appropriate plan to test research hypotheses and answers of research questions. In this section, settings, sampling strategy, sample description, procedure of data collection, measures used for research and ethical considerations are described.

Research Design
In current research, cross sectional research design was used to find the answers of research questions and to find out the association between variables; self-concept, gullibility and interpersonal difficulties. The data was collected from both government and private educational sectors of Sialkot including University of Management and Technology (UMT), Government College Women University (GCWUS), Murray College and University of Sialkot (UOS) from Punjab, Pakistan. For choosing the study sample, a multistage sampling technique was used. In first stage, stratified sampling, a type of probability sampling was used to distribute the sample into two main strata including 150 women and 150 men students from private and government

universities of Sialkot. In second stage, these two strata were further divided into four sub strata including men undergraduate students, women undergraduate students, men graduated students and women graduated students.

Participants
The data was collected from 300 students from all private and public universities of Sialkot. The sample was systematically divided into two main strata according to gender and sub divided into further two strata according to educational level. All graduate and undergraduate men and women students from universities of Sialkot were recruited for data collection in which 150 (50%) undergraduate students, 150 (50%) graduated students were included. In this research, students between 18-25 years old were included from both private and government universities of Sialkot and apart of this, married students and the students with specific disabilities were also excluded from the research.

Measures
In this research, the indigenous developed scales were used such as Self-Concept Scale (Naz, 2024), The Gullibility Scale (George, Teunisse, & Case, 2020).) and Interpersonal Difficulties Scale for University Students (Nadeem, Mahmood, & Saleem, 2014). The description of scales is given below;

Demographic Sheet
In the current study, a Demographic Performa consisted on demographic variables was used. Demographic variables were related to basic information of the participants such as; age, gender, university type, educational level, current semester, living area, number of siblings, father's education, mother's education, father's status, mother's status, father's occupation and mother's occupation.

Self-Concept Scale
The Self-Concept Scale is developed by Naz, 2024. It is a self-report measure which has 38 items and two factors as well; positive self-concept and negative self-concept. In this study the Self-Concept Scale was used for measuring the university students' positive and negative self-concept. Positive self-concept factor (F1) has 22 items and negative self-concept factor (F2) has 16 items. It is a five-point Likert scale as "0 = Not at all, 1 = Rarely, 2 = To some extent, 3 = Considerably, and 4 = Very much". The scale has excellent psychometric properties, its Cronbach alpha is .80 (Naz, 2024).

The Gullibility Scale
The Gullibility Scale was developed by George at al in 2020. It is a single factor scale and has 30 items. The response options were based upon 5 points Likert scale as "0 = Not at all, 1 = Rarely, 2 = Some times, 3 = Often, and 4 = Always". Its Cronbach alpha is .83 (George at al in 2020)

Interpersonal Difficulties Scale for University Students
Interpersonal Difficulties Scale for University Students has 59 items and six factors (F1 Dominated by Others, F2 Low Self-Confidence, F3 Mistrust, F4 Lack of Assertiveness, F5 Lack of Boundaries and F6 Unstable Relationships. The items were rated on 5-point Likert scale as "0

= Not at all, 1 = Rarely, 2 = Some times, 3 = Often, and 4 = Always". Its Cronbach alpha is .92 (Nadeem et al., 2014).

Procedure

At initial stage the official permission was taken from the authors of scales. A demographic sheet of basic information of the participants, Self-Concept Scale, The Gullibility Scale, and Interpersonal Difficulties Scale, were used to assess the relationship between self-concept, gullibility and interpersonal difficulties in universities students. There were 300 students were selected as research sample. Before starting the data collection procedure, the researcher got a permission letter for data collection from Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology Sialkot. The permission letter allowed the researcher to go out in order to approach the participants individually from their universities for data collection.

After taking an informal informed consent and explaining the purpose, nature and information regarding the research, the participants were asked to fill a form of demographic information first and answer the questions accordingly. In this phase of data collection, ethical considerations were followed and the participants were provided reassurance that their privacy will be maintained and their basic personal information will be kept confidential. The participants were provided with the right of withdrawal from research at any time in case they find research harmful for their psychological health. They were instructed to answer the questions according to their perception and thoughts. The participants were informed that there is no right or wrong answer so that they could feel an ease. After completing the form participants were provided the gratitude expression.

Results

In this section, the demographic variables such as; age, gender, institute, education, educational year, living area, family system, number of siblings, parents' education, parents' occupation are described in order to examine the descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages of demographic variables is also taken for analysis.

Table 1 *Mean and Standard Deviation of Age in Years (N = 300)*

Variable	*M*	*SD*
Age	21.28	1.82

Note. M = mean, *SD* = standard deviation

The above Table 1 shows that the mean age of population of the current study was 21.28 and the standard deviation of the age was 1.82.

Psychometric Properties of Scales

This section allows examining the psychometric properties of measures that were used in current research including Self-Concept Scale, The Gullibility Scale, and Interpersonal Difficulties Scale, In order to analyze the psychometric properties of these scales, Cronbach Alpha was used to check.

Table 2 *Number of Items and Cronbach Alpha for Self-Concept Scale, Gullibility Scale and Interpersonal Difficulties Scale (N=300)*

Scales	No. of Items	A
SCS	38	.80
GS	30	.83
IDS	59	.92

Note. SCS = Self-Concept Scale, GS = Gullibility Scale, IDS = Interpersonal Difficulties Scale, α = Cronbach alpha

The data father analysis of main hypotheses of the research such as relationship of positive and negative self-concept with interpersonal difficulties and the predictors of gullibility and interpersonal difficulties in university students. In order to test these hypotheses Correlation and Regression Analysis was carried out.

Table 3 *Correlation, Mean and Standard Deviation of Positive Self-Concept, Negative Self-Concept, Gullibility and Interpersonal Difficulties (N = 300)*

Variables	M	SD	PSC	NSC	G	ID
PSC	60.67	12.20	-	-.11	.06	-.08
NSC	29.66	9.83	-	-	$.40^{**}$	$.24^{**}$
G	59.81	15.07	-	-	-	$.51^{**}$
ID	101.2	30.04	-	-	-	-

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, PSC = positive self-concept, NSC = negative self-concept, G = gullibility, ID = interpersonal difficulties.
$**p < .01$.

The data presented in Table 3, depicts the correlation of gullibility with positive self-concept and negative self-concept. Apart of this the Table 3 is showing the significant relationship among interpersonal difficulties, negative self-concept and gullibility in university students. No positive relationship is seen between positive self-concept and interpersonal difficulties whereas positive self-concept has an insignificant positive correlation with gullibility. In simple words, with the increase in scores on positive self-concept, the score of interpersonal difficulties will decreases and with the increase in scores on negative self-concept and gullibility, the scores of interpersonal difficulties will increase too. Similarly, with the increase in scores on negative self-concept the scores of gullibility will increases also.

Table 4 *Mean Differences in Interpersonal Difficulties and Positive Self-Concept between Men and Women (N = 300)*

Variable	Men (n = 150)		Women (n = 150)			Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD	t	
PSC	59.20	13.08	60.23	15.47	-2.09*	.07
NSC	30.22	10.12	29.10	9.53	.98	.11
G	59.40	14.70	60.23	15.47	-.47	.05
ID	105.20	29.11	97.22	30.52	2.31*	.26

Table 4 depicted that gender category was found to have no significant difference for having negative self-concept and the tendency of gullibility. On the other hand, men students have scored significantly higher on interpersonal difficulties than women. Moreover, Table 6 is showing that women students scored significantly higher on positive self-concept as compare to men.

Table 5 *Mean Differences in Interpersonal Difficulties and Gullibility between Students from Joint Family System and Nuclear Family System (N = 300)*

Variable	JFM ($n = 135$)		NFM ($n = 165$)			Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T*	
PSC	59.13	12.35	61.59	12.09	-1.66*	.20
NSC	31.43	9.89	28.59	9.89	2.40**	.28
G	62.19	15.01	58.48	14.96	2.04*	.24
ID	110.36	30.73	96.10	28.49	4.01***	.48

Table 5 indicated that students from joint family system have significantly high scored on gullibility, negative self-concept and interpersonal difficulties as compare to those students who come from nuclear family system. Moreover, it is also depicted by the

Table 6 *Mean Differences in Interpersonal Difficulties between Students from Government Institutes and Private Institutes (N = 300)*

Variable	GI ($n = 130$)		PI ($n = 170$)			Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T*	
PSC	59.83	13.22	61.31	11.37	-1.04	.12
NSC	29.77	9.27	29.57	10.27	.18	.02
G	60.85	16.23	59.02	14.11	1.04	.12
ID	92.26	27.29	108.04	30.32	-4.66***	.54

Table 6 depicted those students of private institutes, significantly scored high on interpersonal difficulties as compare to those students who studied in government institutes. Moreover, institute category has no statically significant difference for having positive self-concept, negative self-concept and gullibility.

Discussion
University phase is a very complex, multi-system and transitional process as the students move towards a bigger and much different environment. Apart of personal experiences, students' self-

concept, self-image, self-perception, personality characteristics, social intelligence, communication and interpersonal skills assist them in multiple ways. According to Rogers (1977), it is an individual's perception of regarding his or her self and the three components of self-concept are self-image, ideal self, and self-esteem. Moreover, self-concept can be affected by individuals' motivation, social situations, and social experiences (Rogers, 1977).

Gullibility is not equal to trust because gullibility often feels as an act of foolishness and a negative personality characteristic whereas trust is considering as a positive personality characteristic. Sometimes it is a difficult challenge to be aware of tricky people and sometimes there are many warning signs of cheating and manipulation but students still become the victims of gullibility (Rotter, 1980). Researches also indicates that the people with positive self-concept and high self-esteem are more likely to be willing for trust but not become gullible as Weining and Smith (2012) found significant positive relationship between individuals' will of trust and high self-esteem (Weining & Smith, 2012). This excessive trust in relations, also lead the individuals towards gullibility when they move in bigger social circles (Merzoni & Trombetta, 2012).

Students with the tendency of gullibility trust others easily even when they have no reason to trust and make misconceptions about their interpersonal relations. In this way, sometimes they stop getting close to the individuals in their family, educational settings and peer groups just because of their suspiciousness (Branzei et al., 2007). Apart of this, negative self-concept also increases the individuals' interpersonal difficulties, as Yanhong, Zhenrong, & Yiping, (2021) supported that negative self-concept increases the interpersonal difficulties and positive self-concept make the students able to face and deal the interpersonal difficulties in more appropriate ways (Yanhong et al., 2021). Gutirrrez and Exposito (2015) claimed that the students with negative self-concept, with lower social intelligence and tendency of credulity are generally consider on more risk of indulging in interpersonal difficulties as they are unable to handle the conflicts due to their poor self-perception and self-image (Gutirrrez & Exposito, 2015).

Positive self-concept, lower tendency of gullibility and healthy interpersonal relationships assists the students in their academic outcomes, social adjustment, and make them able to deal with interpersonal difficulties adequately whereas Ciumageanu et. al. (2020) stated that negative self-concept and gullibility directly affect the students' interpersonal relationships and social adjustment. Interpersonal difficulties in students have strong association with negative self-concept (Ciumageanu et al., 2020).

In Pakistan, it is common to have interpersonal difficulties for everyone but gender difference cannot be ignoring in the investigation of interpersonal difficulties in students, because Pakistani women are often having tendency of social adjustment and adaptation whereas most of the men have an urge to be powerful and they want to be considered as right within their dealings. That's need of power and relationships in men lead them towards interpersonal difficulties as stated by Hopwood (2018), men often have more will to be powerful and they suffer from more interpersonal difficulties than women (Hopwood, 2018). The research reported that both men and women students have to face equal level of interpersonal difficulties but men students experience more unstable interpersonal relationships and mistrust issues as compare to women (Naz, 2024).

Conclusion

The ground work of this research is to examine the relationship among self-concept, gullibility and interpersonal difficulties in university students. The findings indicated that the students with positive self-concept might have to face gullibility because it's a personality trait and can be found in anyone but they do not face interpersonal difficulties. On the other hand, students with negative self-concept are more gullible and they face interpersonal difficulties because they have lacking points such as low confidence and trust issues. Moreover, negative self-concept leads them towards mistrust, lack of assertiveness, low confidence and unstable relationships.

Limitations

Data was collected from few universities of Sialkot such as University of Management and Technology, GC Women University Sialkot, University of Sialkot and Murray College Sialkot only, so the findings cannot generalize on other areas. Researcher has no control on demographics of participants as equal proportions of demographic properties could not make.

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