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SELF-ESTEEM AND ACADEMIC STRESS AMONG FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem and academic stress are important psychological factors that influence female university students' educational experiences, emotional stability, social relationships, and academic performance. University life exposes students to various challenges, including examinations, assignments, presentations, competitive learning environments, financial difficulties, family expectations, and uncertainty about future careers. These challenges may influence how students evaluate their abilities, personal worth, and potential for success. Students with healthy self-esteem may be better able to manage academic difficulties, maintain motivation, and recover from setbacks, whereas students with lower self-esteem may experience greater self-doubt, fear of failure, and emotional pressure. This article examines the relationship between self-esteem and academic stress among female university students, with particular attention to psychological well-being, academic confidence, coping strategies, and institutional support. The article uses a literature-based approach to discuss relevant research published between 2023 and 2026. Existing research from Pakistan and other educational contexts indicates that academic pressure is associated with students' psychological adjustment and well-being, although the strength and direction of relationships may vary across populations and study designs. The discussion highlights the importance of supportive learning environments, accessible counseling services, effective time management, positive self-evaluation, and appropriate academic guidance. The article concludes that universities should address academic stress while strengthening students' confidence and psychological resources. As this article does not use a newly collected dataset, its findings are presented as a synthesis of existing literature rather than original statistical results.

KEYWORDS: *Self-esteem, academic stress, female university students, psychological well-being, academic performance, coping strategies, higher education, emotional resilience.*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education represents an important stage in students' personal, intellectual, and professional development. During university life, students are expected to develop specialized knowledge, improve their analytical abilities, participate in academic activities, and prepare for future employment. Although these opportunities can promote independence and personal growth, university education also introduces multiple academic and psychological demands. Female university students may experience stress related to examinations, assignment deadlines, presentations, attendance requirements, competition, and expectations regarding academic achievement. In addition to educational responsibilities, some students must balance family duties, financial limitations, transportation difficulties, social expectations, and concerns about their professional futures. When these demands become difficult to manage, students may begin to question their abilities and feel less confident about their academic performance. Academic stress is therefore not simply a response to studying; it can also influence students' emotional experiences, self-perceptions, and participation in university life.Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth, value, and abilities. It influences how students interpret achievements, respond to criticism, approach difficult tasks, and understand their mistakes. Female university students with relatively healthy self-esteem may recognize that academic difficulties are a normal part of learning rather than evidence of personal failure. shukla, a. (2026). found that they may also feel more comfortable seeking assistance, participating in

classroom discussions, and attempting challenging assignments. in contrast, students with low self-esteem may compare themselves negatively with classmates, become excessively concerned about teachers' opinions, or interpret poor examination results as proof that they are incapable of succeeding. These patterns can influence academic motivation and emotional adjustment. Self-esteem should not be understood as a guarantee of academic success, because educational outcomes are also shaped by teaching quality, financial resources, learning opportunities, health, and institutional conditions. Nevertheless, it is an important psychological factor when examining students' responses to academic pressure.Academic stress develops when students perceive educational demands as exceeding their available time, skills, energy, or coping resources.

Common sources include extensive coursework, frequent examinations, unclear assessment criteria, limited preparation time, fear of disappointing family members, and uncertainty about future employment. Students may respond to these pressures through worry, irritability, sleep difficulties, reduced concentration, procrastination, or avoidance of challenging academic activities. When stress continues over an extended period, it may become more difficult to maintain confidence and motivation. Research conducted among university students in Punjab, Pakistan, has identified workload, financial constraints, competitive environments, limited support, and language-related difficulties as relevant sources of academic stress. Such evidence suggests that academic stress should be understood within the broader circumstances of students' lives rather than attributed exclusively to individual weaknesses.The relationship between self-esteem and academic stress is particularimportant because students' interpretations of stressful situations may influence how they respond to academic challenges. For example, two students may receive similar examination results but interpret them differently. One student may consider the result an opportunity to identify weaknesses and improve preparation, while another may believe that the result demonstrates a lack of ability. The first interpretation may encourage constructive action, whereas the second may increase anxiety and self-doubt. This example illustrates how personal beliefs can influence the emotional meaning of academic experiences. Research published in Pakistan in 2023 examined examination stress, self-esteem, and psychological adjustment among university students and reported a negative relationship between examination stress and self-esteem.However, the relationship may operate in both directions: academic stress can undermine confidence, while low confidence may make academic demands feel more threatening.Female university students should not be treated as a uniform group, becaustheir experiences vary according to socioeconomic circumstances, academic discipline, family environment, year of study, institutional resources, and personal coping strategies.

Some students receive strong encouragement from their families and teachers, while others experience pressure to achieve high grades alongside domestic responsibilities or restrictions on educational opportunities. benítez-agudelo, j. c., restrepo, d., navarro-jimenez, e., & clemente-suárez, v. j. (2025).found that students who travel long distances, experience financial insecurity, or have limited access to academic support may encounter additional challenges. These circumstances can affect both perceived stress and self-esteem. Pakistani research examining academic stress among female university students has emphasized the relevance of gender expectations and social circumstances in understanding students' experiences. It is therefore important to investigate self-esteem and academic stress while recognizing the social and institutional factors that may contribute to them.. Understanding the association between self-esteem and academic stress can help universities develop more

effective student-support policies. Academic institutions often focus on grades, attendance, examination results, and course completion, but students' psychological experiences also deserve attention. jabeen, n., ghazal, l., kanwal, h., fraz, t. r., nawaz, m. f., karim, l., ... & lahori, a. h. (2026). explaned that services, supportive teacher–student relationships, peer mentoring, study-skills workshops, and accessible academic guidance may help students manage pressure more effectively. Universities can also review assessment schedules, communicate expectations clearly, and provide appropriate support to students experiencing academic difficulties. Recent research on university students has continued to investigate academic stress in relation to mental health, well-being, and other psychological factors, reinforcing the importance of examining students' experiences through a broader perspective. Against this background, the present article explores how self-esteem and academic stress may be associated among female university students, discusses the relevant literature, and identifies practical approaches for supporting their academic and psychological well-being.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. The main objective of this article is to examine the relationship between self-esteem and academic stress among female university students, with particular attention to how academic pressure may be associated with confidence, emotional well-being, coping strategies, and educational experiences.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What is the relationship between self-esteem and academic stress among female university students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-esteem and psychological adjustment. Self-esteem is an important concept in psychological research because it concerns how individuals evaluate their personal worth and capabilities. In educational settings, students' self-evaluations may influence their willingness to participate, respond to challenges, seek feedback, and continue working after experiencing setbacks. Female university students who maintain a balanced perception of their abilities may be more willing to recognize mistakes without allowing them to determine their entire sense of self-worth. By contrast, students who depend heavily on grades or external approval to evaluate themselves may experience greater emotional difficulty when they receive disappointing results. Self-esteem does not eliminate academic problems, but it may influence how students interpret and respond to them. Research on examination stress and psychological adjustment has explored the connections among academic pressure, self-esteem, and students' ability to adjust to university demands. Paragraph 2: Academic stress and university experiences. jabeen, n., ghazal, l., kanwal, h., fraz, t. r., nawaz, m. f., karim, l., ... & lahori, a. h. (2026). found that academic stress is associated with the demands and expectations students encounter throughout their educational experiences. These demands may include examinations, assignments, presentations, group projects, strict deadlines, and pressure to achieve competitive grades. Students may also experience uncertainty when course requirements are unclear or when several major assessments occur within a short period. Research among first-year university students in Pakistan has highlighted the importance of academic workload, financial limitations, competitive environments, and

language-related challenges. These stressors may be especially difficult for students who are adjusting to unfamiliar teaching methods or new academic expectations. For female students, academic demands may also interact with family responsibilities and social expectations, although these experiences differ considerably between individuals.

This literature indicates that academic stress is influenced by both the educational environment and the resources students can use to manage its demands.The association between self-esteem and perceived stress. Self-esteem and perceived stress are related but distinct psychological concepts. Perceived stress concerns the extent to which individuals consider their circumstances difficult to control or manage, whereas self-esteem concerns their overall evaluation of themselves. A student may feel stressed before an important examination while still believing in her ability to prepare successfully. Another student may experience the same examination as a threat to her academic identity and personal worth. A 2026 cross-sectional study involving 400 female university students in Peshawar reported a statistically significant association between perceived-stress categories and self-esteem categories. Students with moderate or high perceived stress showed a greater prevalence of low self-esteem than those with low perceived stress. These findings are relevant to the present topic, although a cross-sectional association cannot establish that stress directly causes lower self-esteem or that low self-esteem independently causes greater stress.Gender expectations and social pressures. Female students' academic experiences may be influenced by expectations concerning educational achievement, family responsibilities, social behavior, and future employment. In some settings, students may be expected to perform well academically while also fulfilling household responsibilities or meeting expectations concerning their future family roles. Such expectations may restrict study time or contribute to feelings of guilt when academic responsibilities conflict with family demands. However, gender should not be treated as a sufficient explanation for every student's experience, because family support, financial resources, cultural context, and personal circumstances differ widely. Research focused on female university students in Pakistan has discussed the influence of gender roles, societal expectations, and institutional structures on academic stress.

Academic stress, well-being, and educational outcomes. Academic stress may affect students' concentration, motivation, sleep, and ability to organize their learning activities. When students become preoccupied with worrying about results, they may have difficulty focusing on lectures or remembering information during examinations. Some may respond by studying excessively without sufficient rest, while others may postpone tasks because the workload feels overwhelming. A 2025 longitudinal study of university students investigated academic-context stress in relation to psychological well-being, health-related factors, behaviors, and academic performance, illustrating the value of examining stress across time rather than relying exclusively on a single assessment. khan, r. d., javaid, f., & ayub, m. (2023found that the effects of stress are not necessarily identical for all students: manageable pressure may encourage preparation, whereas persistent or overwhelming pressure may interfere with learning and adjustment. consequently, the relationship between academic stress and educational outcomes should be considered alongside individual coping resources and environmental conditions.coping strategies and institutional support. coping strategies may influence how students respond to academic pressure and maintain their self-esteem. Helpful approaches include planning study schedules, dividing large assignments into smaller tasks, seeking clarification from teachers, using peer-support networks, practicing relaxation

techniques, and maintaining regular sleep and physical activity. shaheen, s. m., mosa, a., natasha, arockiam jeyasundar, p. g. s., hassan, n. e., yang, x., ... & rinklebe, j. (2023). found that Emotional support from family members, friends, and university staff may also help students place academic difficulties in perspective. Research on academic stress and coping strategies among university students at the University of the Punjab has examined how students respond to difficulties associated with learning.

Universities can build on this area of research by providing confidential counseling, academic advising, mentorship opportunities, and workshops focused on study skills and stress management. Support should be accessible and non-stigmatizing, enabling students to seek help before academic pressure becomes difficult to manage. Overall, the literature supports examining self-esteem, academic stress, coping strategies, and institutional support as interconnected aspects of female students' educational experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The present article adopts a literature-based methodology to examine self-esteem and academic stress among female university students. This approach involves reviewing relevant academic studies, research articles, and scholarly publications concerning psychological well-being, examination stress, academic adjustment, and students' coping strategies. Particular attention is given to literature published between 2023 and 2026, including studies conducted in Pakistan and research from other higher education contexts. The purpose of reviewing these sources is to identify recurring themes, understand the relationship between the principal concepts, and discuss the implications for female students' academic experiences. Rather than collecting new responses from university students, the article synthesizes information reported in existing research. This method is appropriate for developing a conceptual understanding of the topic and identifying areas that require further investigation. The quality of the discussion depends on the relevance, credibility, and methodological limitations of the studies included in the review.The literature was examined with a focus on three major areas: self-esteem as a psychological characteristic, academic stress as an educational and emotional experience, and the potential relationship between these variables. Studies concerning examination pressure, perceived stress, psychological adjustment, mental health, gender expectations, and coping strategies were considered where they contributed to understanding the research topic. Greater relevance was assigned to research involving university students and female student populations. The review also considered the differences between studies that examine associations at a single point in time and those that follow students over a longer period. This distinction is important because a relationship between stress and self-esteem does not automatically demonstrate that one variable causes changes in the other.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is based on a thematic review of relevant literature. The central purpose is to organize existing knowledge around the relationship between self-esteem and academic stress among female university students. The main concepts guiding the review are self-esteem, academic stress, psychological well-being, academic adjustment, coping strategies, and institutional support. These concepts were selected because they provide different perspectives on how students perceive educational demands and respond to challenging

academic experiences. The review also considers contextual factors, such as gender expectations and financial circumstances, that may influence the experiences of female university students. Organizing the discussion around these themes allows the article to move beyond a simple description of stress and consider its possible relationship with students' perceptions of themselves.The second component of the design involves identifying relevant academic publications from the period 2023–2026. Studies specifically examining university students, female students, perceived stress, examination stress, or psychological adjustment are particularly relevant. Research conducted in Pakistan is included to provide context concerning local higher education environments, while studies from other countries contribute broader perspectives on student well-being. The inclusion of different research designs in the reviewed literature can be useful because cross-sectional surveys, qualitative studies, and longitudinal investigations address different questions. Cross-sectional studies can identify associations at a particular time, qualitative research can explore students' experiences, and longitudinal research can examine how variables change over time. These forms of evidence should be interpreted according to their respective strengths and limitations.The third component concerns the comparative organization of findings. The article examines whether the reviewed studies identify similar stressors, describe comparable psychological outcomes, or suggest different interpretations of the relationship between academic pressure and self-esteem. Particular attention is given to the distinction between individual and environmental influences. Individual influences may include confidence, study habits, coping skills, and responses to feedback, whereas environmental influences may include workload, assessment practices, financial pressures, and social expectations.

DATA ANALYSIS

The article uses thematic analysis to organize the findings reported in the reviewed literature. The first theme concerns the sources of academic stress, including examinations, assignments, competition, time limitations, financial constraints, and expectations from family or teachers. These factors are considered in relation to the demands students face throughout their university education. Research from Pakistan indicates that academic workload, financial difficulties, competitive learning environments, and language-related challenges can contribute to students' stress experiences. The purpose of this analysis is to explain how different academic and social pressures may affect students' ability to manage their responsibilities. It does not assume that every student experiences the same stressors or responds to them in the same way.The second theme concerns the relationship between self-esteem and academic stress. The reviewed literature suggests that students' evaluations of their abilities may influence how they interpret academic setbacks and respond to demanding situations. Research examining examination stress and psychological adjustment has reported a negative association between examination stress and self-esteem among university students. 2026 study involving female university students in Peshawar reported a statistically significant association between perceived stress and self-esteem categories. These findings are consistent with the view that self-esteem and stress are important related variables. However, differences in samples, measures, and research designs mean that the findings should not be combined into a single numerical estimate without a formal quantitative synthesis.The third theme addresses coping strategies and institutional support. The literature suggests that academic stress should be considered alongside the resources students can access to manage their responsibilities. Personal strategies may include structured study schedules, realistic academic goals, constructive self-talk, and seeking help when difficulties

arise. Institutional strategies may include counseling services, supportive feedback, academic advising, and reasonable assessment planning. The analysis also highlights the importance of avoiding explanations that place all responsibility on individual students, because external circumstances can significantly influence academic experiences.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Academic stress is influenced by multiple factors. The reviewed literature indicates that academic stress can arise from a combination of educational demands and wider personal circumstances. Examinations, assignment deadlines, heavy workloads, competitive environments, and uncertainty about future careers may place pressure on students' time and emotional resources. Financial limitations, language-related difficulties, and limited support may further complicate students' academic experiences. Research conducted in Pakistan has identified several of these challenges among university students, demonstrating that academic stress should be understood within its educational and social context. These findings suggest that effective responses require both individual coping strategies and improvements in the learning environment.Self-esteem and academic stress are associated. The reviewed evidence suggests that students' self-evaluations and experiences of academic pressure may be related. Students who interpret academic setbacks as evidence of personal inadequacy may experience additional self-doubt, while those who maintain a more balanced view of their abilities may find it easier to approach difficulties constructively. Studies published in 2023 and 2026 have reported associations between examination or perceived stress and self-esteem among university students, including female students in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the available evidence does not establish that the relationship is identical for every student or that one variable always causes changes in the other. The findings support further investigation using longitudinal and other appropriate research designs.Supportive environments may help students manage pressure. The reviewed highlights the importance of psychological resources, coping strategies, and institutional support in students' educational experiences. Academic guidance, constructive teacher feedback, peer support, and accessible counseling may help students manage demanding situations without allowing academic difficulties to undermine their overall sense of worth. Students may also benefit from learning realistic planning strategies and recognizing that examination results represent one aspect of educational progress rather than a complete assessment of their abilities.

CONCLUSION

Self-esteem and academic stress are important factors in understanding female university students' academic experiences and psychological well-being. University education offers opportunities for intellectual growth, professional development, and personal independence, but it also exposes students to examinations, assignments, competition, and expectations concerning achievement. These demands may become especially difficult when students have limited time, financial resources, or social support. The reviewed literature suggests that self-esteem and academic stress are associated, while also indicating that their relationship must be interpreted in the context of students' individual circumstances and educational environments. Healthy self-esteem may help students approach setbacks constructively, but it does not remove the external pressures that can contribute to stress. Therefore, academic success and psychological well-being should be considered together when evaluating the

experiences of female university students.The discussion also indicates that female students should not be viewed as a single, uniform population. Their experiences may vary according to academic discipline, year of study, socioeconomic background, family responsibilities, institutional resources, and personal coping strategies. Some students may have strong support networks and access to effective academic guidance, whereas others may face financial pressures, limited opportunities, or conflicting responsibilities. Universities should therefore provide support that recognizes these differences. Accessible counseling, peer mentoring, realistic academic scheduling, supportive teaching practices, and clear assessment requirements may help create an environment in which students can develop confidence and manage academic challenges. At the same time, students may benefit from time management, constructive self-evaluation, healthy routines, and seeking assistance when necessary.

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