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SOCIAL COMPARISON AND MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN RURAL AREAS

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the relationship among social comparison, need for belongingness and mental well-being among young adults residing in rural areas. The sample of the study has been comprised of young adults with age ranging from 18 to 25 years. Data has been collected using the purposive sampling technique. The mean age of the participants was 21 (ranging from 18-25) years. The sample has been recruited from different universities in Narowal, Pakistan. Data has been gathered while using "the demographic information sheet" to gather personal information. It has been hypothesized that a) there is likely to be significant negative relationship between social comparison and mental well-being, b) there is likely to be significant negative relationship between need for belongingness and mental well-being, c) there is likely to be positive relationship between social comparison and need for belongingness and d) mental well-being has been predicted by social comparison and need for belongingness. To measure, the study variables following scales have been used, Social Comparison Orientation Scale (Buunk & Gibbons, 2006) to measure social comparison and Need to Belong Scale (Leary et al., 2005) to measure need to belongingness and BBC Well-being scale (Kinderman et al., 2011) to measure mental well-being. The data has been analyzed by using SPSS-27, for statistical analysis, the descriptive statistics, the pearson product moment correlation and multiple, regression analysis has been used. Our findings revealed that social comparison significant negative correlation with mental well-being ($r = -.31$, $p < .01$). Multiple linear regression analysis showed that the R^2 value of .18 revealed that the social comparison explained 18% variance in the mental well-being with $F (1, 198) = 33.90$, $p < .001$.

Keywords: *Social Comparison, Mental Well-being, Young Adults.*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present study is to explore, considering adverse conditions, the connection between the mental well-being of young adults and social comparison in Pakistan. The study's findings demonstrated circumstances where individuals are prone to self-hatred due to continually witnessing idealized comparisons of others' lives. Another research discovery revealed that a social comparison could assist young adults facing mental health challenges such as elevated stress, anxiety, and depression. Finally, the research examined Pakistan's cultural viewpoint on mental health, illustrating how cultural norms, restricted social connections, and availability of mental health resources affected young adults' and the impact of comparisons on their mental health.

The Nation's mental health environment is characterized by a shortage of mental health professionals, limited resources, and societal attitudes that deter individuals from pursuing assistance (Ali et al., 2019). Moreover, studies indicate that 25% of Pakistanis experience mental health issues, highlighting the considerable prevalence of anxiety and depression (Khan & Ali, 2021).

Mental health disorders are prevalent in the United States and globally. More than one in five adults in the U.S. is thought to have a mental health issue. In 2022, this number was about 59.3 million people, which make up 23.1% of all the adult population. Mental health problems include many different types of conditions that can be mild moderate or severe. (National Institute of mental health, 2022)

In Pakistan, mental health issues represent over 4% of the overall disease burden, with a greater impact on women. Around 24 million individuals in Pakistan require psychiatric support. Nevertheless, the resources designated for screening and treating mental health issues are insufficient to address the growing demands. As per WHO statistics, Pakistan has merely 0.19 psychiatrists for every 100,000 people, ranking among the lowest in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region and globally. (Dayani K et al., 2024)

The study also contains figures regarding the age categories most affected by mental health issues. It shows that mental health issues increase with age; 20% of adolescents may face a mental health issue, 50% of mental health disorders are identified by age 14, and 75% by age 24. Therefore, our research indicates that adults are highly susceptible to mental health problems. (World Health Organization, 2024).

Pakistan has nearly 200 million inhabitants, yet it possesses some of the lowest mental health metrics and fewer than 500 psychiatrists available for this large population. The shortage of mental health professionals in Pakistan results in a significant treatment gap, with over 90% of individuals suffering from common mental disorders remaining untreated. At the beginning of my career as a psychiatrist, I realized that mental health professionals must do more to make significant contributions at the population level. In my clinic as a clinician, I encounter patients with a wide range of disorders, with depression and anxiety being the most prevalent. As the years go by, I have observed numerous changes. (2020)

Social comparison, the process of assessing oneself against others, is a nearly universal human tendency, especially noticeable on social media sites. The inclination to compare is natural, but its frequency and effect differ among people and societies. Approximately 93% of people state they compare themselves to others on social media, particularly regarding appearance-related comparisons. (Kavakli et al., 2021).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Social comparison and mental health among young adults in rural areas are important because of the particular difficulties that this demographic faces. Social isolation, lack of resources, and financial limitations are common among young adults living in rural areas, and these factors can have an adverse effect on their mental health. Social comparison, especially in the social media age, can make anxiety, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy worse. In addition, social comparison could be harder to satisfy in rural places because of social isolation and a lack of social possibilities. Above-mentioned literature has identified a well-established influence of mental well-being on social comparison as we compare ourselves with others it is have a negative impact on our well-being. However researchers have paid little attention to the phenomenon in rural areas. It is essential to comprehend how social comparison and mental health interact in this setting in order to create focused interventions that support young adults' mental health and wellbeing in rural areas. Researchers can find ways to lessen the detrimental impacts of social comparison, promote a feeling of community, and eventually enhance mental health outcomes in this population by investigating these linkages. It is hoped that this study will shed some light on the potential relationship between mental health and greater social comparison.

Objectives of the research

- To investigate the relationship between social comparison and mental well-being among young adults in rural areas.
- To investigate the predictive role of social comparison and mental well-being in rural areas.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is likely to be significant negative relationship between social comparison and

mental well-being.

2. Mental well-being will be predicted by social comparison.

Method

This chapter details the research methods employed to explore the connection between social comparison and mental well-being. The research was done to achieve a comprehensive insight into the experiences of people with social comparison and their effect on their mental well-being. This section outline research design and sample (participants) used to address the results and to test the purposed hypothesis.

Research Design

This research used quantitative methods and combination of primary and secondary sources. A co-relational research design will be implemented to examine the relationship between the study variables.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling technique will be used to collect data from the participants. Purposive sampling, also known selective or subjective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers intentionally select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to their study. (Bullard & Eric, 2024)

PARTICIPANTS

THE SAMPLE OF THE STUDY WILL COMPRISE OF YOUNG ADULTS (N=200) AGE RANGING FROM 18 TO 25 YEARS INCLUDING MALE (M=71) AND FEMALE (F=129) BOTH GENDERS.

INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Participants will be chosen on the premise of following criteria:

- Minimum education required (intermediate)
- Participants between age 18 – 25 will be included
- Participants with any visible physical disability will be excluded
- Participants not active on social media will be excluded

Measures

Demographic Information Sheet

A Demographic information sheet will be used to gain basic personal information about participants. This information includes: age, gender, academic year/ semester, program of study, type of institution, employment, no of siblings, birth order, marital status, residence type, and daily social media usage in hours, family monthly income, family type, parental education, parental occupation and rural/urban background.

BBC WELL-BEING SCALE

The BBC Well-being developed by Kinderman et al in 2011 to measure well-being. It is a 24-item measure, which assesses the psychological well-being, physical health and well-being and relationship well-being. The items are scored on a likert scale ranging from 0= not at all to 4= completely. Higher score reflects higher wellbeing. The scale has illustrated great inner consistency (α = .935) and concurrent validity (Kinderman et al., 2013).

Social Comparison Orientation

Social Comparison Orientation Scale developed by the formerly referenced Buunk and Gibbons in 2006 to measure social comparison orientation. This is 11 items scale. The participants were asked to rate each item by circling a number 1 (I disagree strongly) and 5 (I agree strongly). The higher the score, the greater the participant's tendency to social compare themselves. This scale had a high reliability (α = .80).

PROCEDURE

The data will be collected after taking approval of the topic from the research committee in the formal meeting of board of studies. Research participants will be contacted in different universities and public space area. The administration office will be contacted first in order to obtain access to the required participants in the case of institutional data. Once the authority has given permission, the researcher will get in touch with the participants. They will be informed about the study project, asked for their written consent to participate, and then given a research questionnaire. Physical data collection will be

done.

Participants will be provided with comprehensive instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. Every effort will be made to ensure the respondents' anonymity and the confidentiality of their answers. Participants will receive gratitude at the conclusion for their cooperation in finishing the intended task.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted with ethical considerations as its primary focus. Research proposal was approved from the institute. To initiate study permission was taken from the authors and then from the supervisor to collect data. Participants' informed consent was also obtained. Data confidentiality has been maintained. Participants were allowed to withdraw whenever they wanted.

Statistical analysis

SPSS-27 version is used for the analysis of the data. Pearson Product moment correlation was used to measure the relationship between all three scales.

Results

Descriptive statistics, that is, mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages were taken to provide preliminary profile of the sample characteristics. Mean, standard deviation, actual/potential scores, and alpha reliability of the study variables were also computed. Pearson Product moment correlation was used to assess the relationship among the study variables.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants

Characteristics	*N*	%	*M*	*SD*
Gender				
Male	71	35.5		
Female	129	64.5		
Age Range				
18-25 Years			1.67	.703
Program of study			2.17	.771
Type of institution			1.09	.280
Residence Type			1.88	.511
Daily social media hours			2.77	.843
Family Monthly Income			2.23	1.124
Family Type			1.96	1.215
Father Education			2.30	.939
Mother Education			1.83	.916
Parental Ocuupation				
Farmer	45	22.5		
Govt/ Privt job	77	38.5		
Businessman	31	15.5		
Other	47	23.5		
Urban/Rural Background				
Urban	42	21.0		
Rural	143	71.5		
Semi – Urban	15	7.5		

Note. N=Frequency, % = Percentage, M= Mean, S.D = Standard Deviation

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Scales

Scales	*M*	*SD*	Range		Cronbach's α
			Min	Max	
1.Social Comparison	38.20	5.577	21	49	.62
3.Mental Well-being	74.95	13.463	35	110	.84

Overall, the reliability measure of each scale of the current study was satisfactory.

Table 3
Correlation for Study Variables

Variables	1	2
Social Comparison	-	
Mental Well-being	-.315**	-

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01.

According to the result social comparison has significant negative correlation with mental well-being (r = -.31, p < .01).

Discussion

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the findings in relation to the literature reviewed and relevant empirical studies. It also outlines the study's conclusion, highlights its theoretical and practical implications, acknowledges its limitations, and offers recommendations for future research. The present study investigated the interrelationships among social comparison and mental well-being in a sample of young adults.

The findings of the study provided empirical support for the proposed hypothesis. Initially, the study hypothesized a significant negative relationship between social comparison and mental well-being, which was confirmed by the results.

The results were according to prediction. Results showed that significant negative relationship between social comparison and mental well-being. Arigo et al., (2024) conducted a study according to Review Objective Through social media and smartphone apps; there are more and more opportunities for social comparison, or evaluating oneself in relation to others. Since numerous researches demonstrate unfavorable links, comparison is frequently thought to be harmful to mental health. The review's goals are to diagram improvements in investigate strategies for analyzing how social comparisons influence mental well-being and to pinpoint significant another steps for improving care. The results emphasize the necessity of context-sensitive and individualized strategies for fostering mental wellness. There is an urgent need for therapy techniques that address this complexity in context since comparisons can have both short- and long-term, positive and negative effects on individuals.

The second hypothesis of the study proposed that mental well-being would be predicted by social comparison and the need to belong. The results supported this hypothesis, indicating that social comparison was significantly predicted levels of mental well-being. The value of change ΔR^2 indicates that the contribution of variables predicting the mental well-being is 18 %. Farahat et al., (2020) has conducted a research on online users, particularly youth, remain continuously drawn to the growth of online networking platforms. Social networking websites' features provide a variety of information that people can use to compare themselves to others. The findings show that an increase in compulsive use will enable people to compare more, which will lead to a rise in young adults' anxiety and sadness. Haward et al., (2023) explore that during emerging adulthood, having strong social networks that provide a negative sense of belonging is essential. However, young adults who have experienced alternative care like residential or foster care frequently lack the social resources needed to make a smooth transition to adulthood. The current study investigated the relationship between care experience, belonging, and well-being outcomes. Additionally, there was a correlation between belonging and outcomes related to well-being, such as homelessness and suicidal thoughts.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study carry several important implications for both psychological research and practical application**:** the demonstrated predictive roles of social comparison a in mental well-being suggest that these constructs should be considered in mental health interventions, especially in digital and social media-driven

environments. in addition, social media use is intricately linked with social comparison, educators, clinicians, and policymakers should promote digital literacy programs to help individuals, especially youth, engage critically and constructively with online content. moreover, the results reinforce the need for culturally responsive mental health practices, particularly in multicultural or immigrant contexts.

Limitations

despite its contributions, the study is with limitations**:** the data were collected at a single point in time, which restricts the ability to draw causal inferences between variables. in addition, the generalizability of the results may be limited by cultural context, as social comparison can function differently across populations**.** also, other influencing factors such as personality traits, family background, or emotional regulation were not accounted for and may have influenced the observed relationships. and, if the sample was not diverse in terms of age, gender, or socioeconomic background, this could further limit the applicability of the findings to broader populations.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine how social comparison influence mental well-being over time. Moreover, to determine causality, future studies could incorporate experimental manipulations of social comparison. In addition, variables such as self-esteem, resilience, or coping styles should be explored as potential mediators or moderators of the relationship between social comparison and mental health. Moreover, future studies should aim to include more demographically and culturally diverse samples to enhance the external validity of the findings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides empirical support for the significant roles of social comparison and need to belong in shaping mental well-being among individuals, particularly in the context of increased social media engagement. While social comparison was found to negatively predict well-being in some contexts, suggests a nuanced interaction that warrants further exploration. The findings underscore the need for awareness around the psychological impact of online social dynamics and call for integrative interventions aimed at enhancing resilience and healthy social engagement.

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