

STUDYING THE EFFECT OF SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL SUPPORT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine the impact of self-esteem, social support, and academic performance of male and female undergraduate medical students

Materials and methods: A correlational study was conducted among students at Khyber Girls Medical College, utilizing various instruments and scales to achieve the study's objectives.

Results: The frequency of males and females was equal in the study, while variables such as self-esteem and academic performance showed a weak correlation with academic performance. On the other hand, social support showed a strong positive correlation with academic performance.

Conclusion: Self-esteem and social support are highly individual phenomena, with social support playing a key role in enhancing academic performance.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Social Support, Academic Achievement, Undergraduate Medical Students

This article may be cited as: Ahsan J, Ayub R, Irfan S, Junaid N, N Nawaz N. Studying The Effect Of Self-Esteem And Social Support On Academic Achievement In Undergraduate Medical Students. PMSRJ 2025 January-April;2(1):87-91

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem has become a household term today. Teachers, parents, therapists, and others focus on boosting self-esteem, believing that high self-esteem leads to many positive results. Academic failure and dropout are widespread challenges in most education systems worldwide. Social support plays a crucial role in encouraging learning and perseverance. When students sense support from peers, family, institutions, and teachers, they typically exhibit greater motivation and achieve impressive academic success more easily. Social support is considered a valuable resource for managing stress and meeting the demands of school or university. It directly increases motivation and engagement in learning activities. People have devoted considerable attention to the quality of life in their

pursuit of overall well-being.

Additionally, improving the well-being of citizens is a key government goal. Therefore, the quality of life, which is an individual's overall assessment of their life, is of great interest to researchers, policymakers, and the public¹. Although previous research has examined different socioeconomic groups, there has been a limited focus on the quality of life among university students, who are a crucial group in most societies². This represents a critical research gap because, during their young adulthood, university students go through significant transitions marked by change, confusion, and exploration, and the choices they make during this time can have lasting effects³. Furthermore, due to their relatively limited social experience, university students generally have lower self-awareness and psychological resilience compared to employed individuals, making them more susceptible to psychological problems⁴.

Previous studies have shown that the quality of life of university students predicts dropout or withdrawal⁵ and significantly impacts their subjective well-being⁶, as well as their physical and mental health⁷. Therefore, students' quality of life is a significant concern⁸. Academic failure and dropout are widespread challenges across all levels

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Date Received: 24/12/2024

Date Revised: 30/09/2025

Date Accepted: 01/10/2025

of education in most countries. Research so far has highlighted various aspects of this widespread issue. On the one hand, some researchers suggest that social support is a key factor in promoting learning and persistence. In fact, they have found that when students perceive support from peers, family, institutions, and teachers, they tend to be more motivated and achieve academic success more easily⁹.

Many teachers and some scholars have emphasized the role of student motivation and engagement in improving academic performance, supported by empirical findings¹⁰. This evidence highlights one aspect at a time. However, theoretical models that address this topic tend to be more comprehensive and suggest that social support enhances students' motivation and engagement, which then promotes better performance throughout the process. Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall self-evaluation of their abilities¹¹.

It is through self-evaluation and descriptive conceptualization that people form and maintain their self-perceptions. In this context, self-esteem refers to an individual's personal assessment of their own worth and value. Self-esteem reflects the degree to which a person "sees him [her] self as a competent, need-satisfying individual"¹²; therefore, a person with high self-esteem has a "sense of personal adequacy and a sense of having achieved need satisfaction in the past"¹³. Besides representing a cognitive perception of oneself, self-esteem also includes an emotional component—people with high self-esteem tend to like who and what they are¹⁴.

Therefore, people with high global self-esteem tend to agree with statements such as "I am a person of worth, on an equal plane with others" and "I am satisfied with myself"¹.

The self-esteem construct is typically viewed as a hierarchical concept. As such, it exists at various levels of specificity, often seen as global and task- or situation-specific self-esteem¹⁵. As a multifaceted view of the self, scholars generally agree that self-esteem can also develop in relation to several other dimensions (e.g., the social, physical, academic, and moral self)¹². To date, most of our understanding of self-esteem in general and in the work and organizational context comes from research focused on global (chronic) self-esteem¹⁶. However, research concentrating on an organization-based view of the self has begun to appear.

Before the 1970s, interest in gender differences in academic performance centered on the idea that girls were outperforming boys in reading during the elementa-

ry school years¹⁷. Girls generally performed better than boys in reading and related subjects throughout elementary school and into adolescence¹⁸. By the 1970s, focus shifted to the possibility that boys were excelling over girls in Math and Science, especially during adolescence. However, boys have rarely been found to outperform girls in Math and Science grades, even during adolescence; in fact, girls often perform better than boys¹⁸.

Regarding self-esteem, many researchers have found that males generally have higher levels of self-esteem compared to females¹⁹, suggesting that males tend to have higher self-esteem. Gender differences across various personality aspects were identified, with a slight advantage for males ($d=.10$)²⁰, and this finding was compared to another analysis, which also found a subtle advantage for males ($d=.12$)²¹. Before the advent of meta-analysis, studies on gender differences in self-esteem suggested there was no consistent difference; however, their reasoning varied²². Nonetheless, some researchers found no gender differences in self-esteem²³.

Since academic performance and self-esteem development are crucial for an individual's future and personal growth, it is essential to examine the relationship between these variables. Generally, there are meaningful connections among the four variables: family functioning, social support, academic performance, and self-esteem. Previous research has shown that these variables are interconnected, with family functioning and social support being linked to both self-esteem and academic performance. Additionally, past studies have identified significant gender differences in educational performance and self-esteem. Typically, males tend to outperform females academically and also report higher levels of self-esteem compared to females.

Social support enhances students' self-esteem, which, in turn, promotes their academic achievement and relieves their emotional exhaustion. Self-esteem is an overall appraisal of oneself, reflecting the attitudes one holds toward oneself²⁴. Social support can promote students' appraisals of self-worth and appreciation of their own capacity²⁵, which in turn helps them perform better in academic contexts²⁶. Therefore, we expect that social support improves students' academic achievement by enhancing their self-esteem.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a correlational study conducted at Gajju Khan Medical College in Swabi, using simple random sampling with a sample size of 170. Both males and females were included in the study. All participants were

between the ages of twenty and thirty years; students who did not submit their questionnaires by the deadline were excluded. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support were used to assess self-esteem and social support, respectively, and were correlated with academic performance. For data entry and analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 was utilized.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the number, frequency, and percentage of the data sample, broken down by gender differences.

Table 2 presents the mean, Standard deviation, frequency, and Pearson correlation between the selected variables.

Self-esteem has a weak positive correlation with academic performance ($r = .038$).

Table 3 shows the mean, Standard deviation, frequency, and the Pearson Correlation between the selected variables.

Social support has a strong positive correlation with academic performance ($r = .899$).

Table 1: Gender distribution of participants in the study

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage
Male	85	50.0	50.0
Female	85	50.0	50.0
Total	170	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Mean, Standard deviation, frequency, and Pearson correlation between self-esteem and academic performance

Variables	M	SD	f	P
Self-esteem	22.37	4.086	170	.038
Academic performance	70.17	11.92	170	.038

Table 3: Mean, Standard deviation, frequency, and Pearson correlation between social support and academic performance

Variables	M	SD	f	P
Social support	62.09	13.95	170	.899**
Academic performance	70.17	11.92	170	.899**

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of self-esteem and social support on GKMC students and to examine their relationship with academic performance among both male and female students. This research is quantitative. A sample of 170 GKMC students

was selected, consisting of 85 males and 85 females, with ages ranging from 20 to 30 years. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was used to assess social support among participants. MSPSS is a 12-item tool designed to measure perceived social support from three sources: family, friends, and significant others. The scale evaluates the extent to which respondents perceive support from each source and includes three subscales: family (items 3, 4, 8, 11), friends (items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12), and significant others (items 1, 2, 5, 10).

Hypothesis No. 1 was that students with high self-esteem would have higher academic performance. The results in Table 2 indicate that a relationship exists between self-esteem and students' academic achievement; however, this relationship is very weak, suggesting that students' scores are not significantly affected by their self-esteem, whether it is high or low, but instead that it has a mild influence on their grades. These findings are inconsistent with studies that explain how negative feelings about oneself and experiences of failure affect self-esteem³⁰. Hypothesis No. 2 was that students with more social support would have higher academic performance. The results in Table 3 suggest a significant positive correlation between social support and academic performance, indicating that students with greater social support, such as family, friends, and significant others, tend to perform better academically. These findings align with studies conducted by different researchers, which also state that social support has a significant effect^{31, 32}.

The findings of this study contribute to the limited body of research that has investigated the relationship between self-esteem and social support and its impact on students' academic achievement. As one of the early empirical studies in the area of student self-esteem, this study broadens and deepens our understanding of the practical role of social support in research. The findings support and expand existing knowledge in this field. Addressing the research hypotheses, the study identifies and recommends additional areas for future research. Past research has focused on self-esteem itself; however, most studies have been conducted in Western countries with individualistic cultures, rather than in collectivistic cultures. This was the gap in previous research. To the researcher's knowledge, no studies are available in the context of Pakistan. Many studies have been conducted on the general population in Pakistan, but not specifically on students in any medical college. Therefore, it was necessary to study this population. The current research included male and female students from GKMC, Swabi, to fill this gap.

Like any other academic research, this study has

some limitations. These limitations can be grouped into two main categories: those related to the research methodology and those affecting the generalization of the findings. Limitations also include the fact that participants are from a specific medical college, GKMC in Swabi. Additionally, participants may have responded in a biased manner.

CONCLUSION

Self-esteem and social support are both highly individual phenomena. The results of the present study show that both self-esteem and social support are related to students' academic scores. Compared to self-esteem, which showed a weak correlation with academic performance, social support has a robust correlation with the educational performance of GKMC students. Students with high social support tend to perform better and achieve higher marks in their academic careers. They are expressive, original, intuitive, introspective, and value certain qualities. Students with low self-esteem are not severely impacted in their grades but are mildly affected, whereas those with high self-esteem show a very weak positive correlation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Authors declare no conflict of interest

GRANT SUPPORT AND FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE: NIL

Authors Contribution:

Following authors have made substantial contributions to the manuscript as under

Authors	Conceived & designed the analysis	Collected the data	Contributed data or analysis tools	Performed the analysis	Wrote the paper	Other contribution
Ahsan J	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Ayub R	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Irfan S	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Junaid N	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
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Authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.



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