BULLYING EXPERIENCES, SELF-CONCEPT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This study examines the relationship between bullying experiences, self-concept, and psychological distress among adolescents.

Methodology: A correlational research design was employed, with 250 adolescents recruited from private schools and colleges using a homogeneous purposive sampling technique. The age range of the adolescents was 13 to 19 years (Mage=14.61, SD =1.41). Both boys and girls were recruited for this study.

Findings: Correlational analysis revealed that social manipulation, verbal victimization, and attacks on property were significantly and positively associated with psychological distress (depression and anxiety). Additionally, negative self-concept showed a moderate positive correlation with depression and a strong positive correlation with anxiety. Multiple hierarchical regression indicated that social manipulation and negative self-concept were significant positive predictors of psychological distress. Gender differences emerged in three dimensions of bullying experiences (physical, verbal, and social manipulation), self-concept (positive self-concept), and psychological distress (depression and anxiety), with notable variations between boys and girls.

Conclusion: The study successfully established a relationship between bullying experiences, self-concept, and psychological distress among adolescents. The findings align with prior research and support all four hypotheses, highlighting the psychological impact of bullying and self-concept on adolescent well-being.

Keywords: Bullying, victimization; Self-concept; Psychological distress, depression, anxiety

1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a type of abusive conduct in which one person intentionally hurts or distresses another person repeatedly. Bullying may occur in the form of physical harm, verbal abuse, or covert tactics (APA). Children who are bullied could think they are less worthwhile than other kids. Bullying can result in both victims' and perpetrators' worsening mental health, declining academic performance, increased violence, and substance abuse. The American Psychological Association defines psychological distress as a group of unpleasant physical and mental signs that are related to the regular mood swings that most people experience. One way to conceptualize psychological distress is as a maladaptive reaction to a stressful circumstance.

1.1 Bullying Experiences & Psychological Distress

Children's bullying is a significant global health issue because it has severe physical and psychological effects on both victims and bullies (Anh, 2021). One in five (20.2%) students say they have experienced bullying. The likelihood of female students reporting bullying at school is higher than that of male students (24% vs. 17%) (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2019). Bullying can result in both victims' and perpetrators' worsening mental health, declining academic performance, increased violence, and substance abuse. Young people's mental health has been deemed a serious health issue because it affects 10–20% of youngsters and adolescents worldwide (Kieling, 2011). Students who are bullied are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, poor academic performance, and

quitting school (Farrington & Baldry, 2010). Peer victimization has been associated in cross-sectional research to psychological issues, including signs of anxiety and sadness in teenagers (Xioyan, 2016).

1.2 Self-concept & Psychological Distress

The term "self-concept" refers to our individual perception of themselves, which consists of all of one's feelings and beliefs regarding how we view ourselves personally, socially, and physically (Sabri et al., 2021; Cynthia, 2018). Having a positive sense of who we are can benefit our overall health, including our mental, social, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Dar et al., 2021). On the other hand, having a poor opinion of ourselves might lead to a decrease in our sense of fulfillment and competence in these domains (Clinic, 2020). Additionally, studies were done to compare the self-concepts of bullied and non-bullied youngsters. The study's findings showed that bullied children had weaker self-concepts than non-bullied children in terms of academic accomplishment, classroom skills, acceptance from peers, confidence, and physical ability or appearance (Wendy, 1996).

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Bullying Experiences

The theoretical basis for this study can be provided by the dominance theory of bullying, developed by Sidanius and Pratto in 1999 and further strengthened by Pellegrini et al. in 2007 in conjunction with Carl Rogers' personality theory from 1959. The concept of social dominance theory holds that people bully others to gain social position, access to resources, and acceptance in society. In this circumstance, they typically create coalitions under the leadership of the bullies. Furthermore, powerful teams might begin tormenting lesser individuals or teams. People who are charismatic and have the capacity to govern others may occasionally use these traits to advance their social standing or establish domination (Subedi, 2020).

2.2 Self-concept

Carl Rogers is credited with creating the concept of self or self-concept, according to personality theory. According to him, it is the structured, coherent collection of ideas and opinions about oneself. He continued by saying that our self-concept is primarily influenced by the things we went through as youngsters and how other people perceive us. Additionally, he listed the two key components of self-concept: ideal self, or how we desire to be, and self-image, or how we see ourselves right now. When our self-image and ideal self are more similar, we are more coherent and feel better about ourselves. A person is said to be in a state of incongruence if a component of their complete experience is unacceptable to them and is rejected or distorted in their self-image (McLeod, 2023).

2.3 Psychological Distress

mental health issues encompass a broader range of psychological conditions, including clinically diagnosed disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, and PTSD. While psychological distress may not always lead to a diagnosable mental health disorder, prolonged or severe distress can increase the risk of developing chronic mental health conditions (Khizer et al., 2024; Sadaf et al., 2024; Kazmi et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021). In context to the present study variables and theories mentioned above, there seems to be connection between bullying, self-concept and psychological distress. It means when a person experiences traumatic events like bullying in his childhood, it is possible he develops a negative self-concept in which his self-image is incongruent with his ideal self, and as a result he may get psychologically distressed or develop other mental health issues (Mayo et al., 2025; Tariq et al., 2024).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Bullying Experiences & Psychological Distress

According to the research, 15.8% of children and 25.9% of adolescents reported cyberbullying during the preceding twelve months. Claims of cyberbullying were more prevalent among females than males, though reports of bullying at school were similar for both sexes in terms of overall victimization from cyberbullying and other forms of bullying. Additionally, victimization through bullying was repeatedly and firmly connected to an increased risk of psychological distress throughout every measure, including reports of attempted suicide and self-harm as well as symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation. The bivariate linkages were supported by substantial associations between bullying victimization and psychological discomfort across all distress markers. The majority of people who experienced psychological distress were those who had been bullied at online or school.

The relationships between different forms of bullying victimization and psychological distress and emotional well-being were examined by Thomas, et al. in 2015. Additionally, the researchers proposed that victimization due to bullying would be linked to greater psychological discomfort and more severe states of emotional well-being if it happened more frequently and generated a negative emotional reaction. 10,273 students made up the sample. For Grades 7, 9, and 11, the corresponding mean ages were 12, 14, and 16, respectively. The results showed that he most often types of bullying victimization was verbal bullying, and physical bullying being the least common. After adjusting for demographic factors, the initial set of results from the regression analysis revealed that each type of bullying victimization was strongly connected with psychological distress. Reduced emotional wellness was also strongly connected with each type of bullying victimization. The second round demonstrated that physical bullying was linked to elevated levels of psychological distress and impaired emotional well-being, irrespective of how often it occurred.

3.2 Self-concept & Psychological Distress

Ashtiani et al. (2007) looked at the relationship between self-concept, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression and academic success in adolescent students of Iran. The process involved making agreements with the selected schools, and upon attendance, pupils were sorted into groups of 15-20 kids each. It is clear from the results that there is a significant positive association between self-concept and self-esteem, which showed a moderate relationship. Additionally, there is a negative substantial relationship between depression, anxiety, and self-concept. Therefore, anxiety (state-trait) and depression decrease when one's self-concept increases. In addition to the foregoing, test results suggest that pupils with poor self-concept perform academically less well than those with high self-concept.

3.3 Indigenous Study

Batool (2023), examined the relationship between adolescents' psychosocial issues, bullying victimization, and self-esteem. She also looked into how, in Pakistani adolescent girls, self-esteem affects links between bullying victimization and psychological problems. A total of 499 participants were chosen, and they ranged in age from 13 to 17. The results showed that bullying victimization of all kinds, including physical, social, and verbal, had a significant positive relationship with psycho-social issues like depression, anxiety, and loneliness while a significant negative relationship with self-esteem. Whereas self-esteem had a significant negative relationship with these issues. In contrast to social victimization, which significantly predicted self-esteem adversely, verbal victimization highly predicted loneliness positively for direct effects pathway coefficients. Physical abuse was a significant positive predictor of anxiety and unhappiness and had a negative effect on self-esteem. The results also revealed significant gender differences in despair, verbal abuse, and physical abuse. Boys experience greater verbal abuse, physical violence, and depression than girls do.

In their study, Dar, et al. (2021) looked into the relationship among self-concept, affirmation of oneself and psychological discomfort in women having polycystic ovarian

syndrome. 100 female patients with polycystic ovarian syndrome between the ages of 21 and 40 were selected using purposive sampling approach. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between psychological distress, self-affirmation, and a poor self-concept. Although psychological distress and positive self-concept strongly and significantly adversely associated, self-affirmation and positive self-concept failed to significantly connect. The findings demonstrated that positive self-concept predicted negatively psychological discomfort in females having polycystic ovarian disease and that self-affirmation has no discernible impact on psychological distress.

3.4 Rationale of the Study

Bullying has become a global issue worldwide and has been increasing at an alarming rate, and no one really understands it. Bullying is still a concept that many people are not familiar with, especially when it comes to adolescents. In addition to this, sense of self/self-concept is another concept that is rarely known. In most of the researches, bullying experiences and psychological distress with other confounding variables are studied. So, this study will be considering all the three variables and the relationship among them. In addition to this, there is scarcely any research done on the variables, self-concept and psychological distress, in adolescents. Additionally, there is a dearth of research in Pakistan on self-concept as a predictor of psychological suffering. Because self-concept is a wider term, this study will fill the void by employing self-concept as a predictor together with bullying experiences.

3.5 Objectives

* To investigate the relationship between bullying experiences, self-concept and psychological distress among adolescents.
* To identify the role of bullying experiences and self-concept as predictors of psychological distress.
* To identify gender differences in terms of bullying experiences, self-concept and psychological distress among adolescents.

3.6 Hypotheses

* Bullying experiences (physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, attack on property) and self-concept (positive self-concept, negative self-concept) are likely to be related with psychological distress (depression, anxiety) among adolescents.
* Bullying experiences (physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, attack on property) and self-concept (positive self-concept, negative self-concept) are likely to be predictors of psychological distress (depression, anxiety) among adolescents.
* There is likely to be significant gender differences in terms of bullying experiences (physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, attack on property), self-concept (positive self-concept, negative self-concept) and psychological distress (depression, anxiety) among adolescents.

4. METHOD

4.1 Research Design and Sampling

This study examined the association between bullying experiences, self-concept, and psychological distress among adolescents using a correlational research design. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), correlational research is a form of study whose objective is to establish the relationship between two or more variables and their origin and consequences (Putra, 2017). The target population for this research study was school and college going adolescents. Homogeneous purposive sampling technique was used to gather 250 participants from private schools and colleges. The range of ages was 13 to 19 years (Mage=14.61, SD =1.41). Both boys and girls were recruited for this study.

4.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants who fall in the age range from 13-19 years (WHO) and have been enrolled in school/colleges. Also, participants who have faced bullying at least more than once in their academic life. Participants who are on leave or study breaks. Participants who are diagnosed with major physical and psychological illness.

Table 1: *Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants (N=250)*

Variables	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*%*
Age	14.61	1.41	-----	-----
Gender				
Girls	------	------	126	63.6
Boys	------	------	72	36.4
Education Level				
Middle	------	------	52	26.3
High School	------	------	124	62.6
Higher Secondary	------	------	22	11.1
Grade in which Experienced Bullying for the first time				
Pre School	------	------	10	5.1
Primary School	------	------	98	49.5
Middle School	-----	------	48	24.2
High School	-----	-----	13	6.6
Don't Remember	-----	------	29	14.6

4.3 Assessment Measures

4.3.1 Demographic Sheet

A demographic sheet was developed and administered to the participants to obtain information regarding their gender, age, educational level/class grade, their current enrollment in school/college and presence or history of medical/psychological illnesses.

4.3.2 Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale

The Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (Mynard & Joseph, 2000) assesses four aspects of victimization: physical victimization (Items 6, 7, 8), verbal victimization (Items 1, 4, 5, 16), social manipulation (Items 2, 11, 13, 14), and property attacks (Items 3, 10, 12, 15). Responses are rated on a 3-point scale (0 = not at all, 1 = once, 2 = more than once). In the current study, the subscales demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.81, 0.61, 0.72, and 0.69, respectively.

4.3.3 Robson Self-concept Questionnaire

The Self-Concept Questionnaire (Robson, 1989) measures individuals' attitudes and opinions about themselves through 30 items across two subscales: positive self-concept (14 items) and negative self-concept (16 items, reverse-scored). Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). The subscales demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.80 and 0.76, respectively.

4.3.4 Kessler Psychological Distress Scale

Kessler et al. created this scale in 2003 to assess the severity of psychological distress experienced during the previous four weeks. It has 10 questions and 2 subscales which measure depression (item number 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10) and anxiety (item number 2, 3, 5, and 6) levels. From "all of the time" to "none of the time," it has a 5-point scale. The two subscales' Cronbach's alpha coefficients (=.001) were 0.82 and 0.78, respectively, indicating a strong internal consistency.

4.4 Procedure

The Department of Applied Psychology's research committee gave their approval to the study protocol in order to conduct this research. Participants who meet the inclusion criteria

were briefed about the research. Moreover, their rights as participants were explained in detail to them. The data was collected from September 22nd till June 22nd. After the data has been collected from 250 participants, 52 were excluded, leaving 198 participants were selected, so the attrition rate was 20.8%. Statistical analysis was carried out to the test the relationships between IVs and DVs.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

All the participants were briefed about the research topic and its importance. They were also made aware that their involvement was entirely optional and that they might stop at any time without incurring any kind of penalties. Moreover, their anonymity and confidentiality were protected. However, they were informed that any information they provide will only be accessible to the researcher. If any participant demands the research result, then they were given the access.

5. RESULTS

The study was conducted to examine the relation between bullying experiences, self-concept and psychological among adolescents. The sample size of the research was (N=198) adolescents from different universities. For data various analyses were performed.

Table 2: *Psychometric Properties of Study Variables (N = 250)*

Scale	M	SD	Range	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. PVS	1.51	1.91	0-6	0.81	6.65	.47
2. VVS	5.15	2.26	0-8	0.61	-3.00	-1.78
3. SMS	4.74	2.48	0-8	0.72	-1.79	-2.94
4. APS	3.38	2.40	0-8	0.69	1.77	-2.41
5. PSC	63.93	15.54	0-98	0.80	-2.80	-0.98
6. NSC	47.29	16.91	0-112	0.76	-1.55	-2.10
7. Depression	18.74	6.04	6-30	0.82	0.24	-3.00
8. Anxiety	11.70	3.99	4-20	0.78	0.76	-1.78

Note: PVS = Physical Victimization Scale; VVS = Verbal Victimization Scale; SMS = Social Manipulation Scale; APS = Attack on Property Scale; PSC = Positive Self-concept; NSC = Negative Self-concept

The table presents the psychometric properties of the study variables, including bullying experiences, self-concept, and psychological distress among adolescents. It provides mean scores, standard deviations, observed score ranges, reliability coefficients (α), and distribution characteristics (skewness and kurtosis) for each scale. The reliability coefficients indicate acceptable to good internal consistency for most measures. The skewness and kurtosis values suggest that some variables deviate from normality, with bullying-related scales showing varied distributions. Overall, the table highlights the measurement quality of the study variables, ensuring their suitability for further analysis.

Table 3: *Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient among Bullying Experiences, Self-concept and Psychological Distress among adolescents (N = 250)*
Note: PVS = Physical Victimization Scale; VVS = Verbal Victimization Scale; SMS = Social

Variables	*n*	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PVS	198	.50	.64	-----	.25***	.08	.33***	-.18*	.14*	-.02	.05
2. VVS	198	1.29	.56		-----	.24**	.37***	-.18*	.26**	.22**	.15*
3. SMS	198	1.18	.62			-----	.29***	.01	.30***	.36***	.31***
4. APS	198	.84	.60				-----	-.11	.29***	.26***	.19**
5. PosSelfCon	198	4.47	1.11					-----	-.42***	-.34***	-.30***
6. NegSelfCon	198	4.04	1.06						-----	.62***	.49***
7. Depression	198	3.12	1.01							-----	.69***
8. Anxiety	198	2.92	.10								-----

Manipulation Scale; APS = Attack on Property Scale; PosSelfCon = Positive Self-concept; NegSelfCon = Negative Self-concept; *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.

The table presents descriptive statistics and correlations among bullying experiences, self-concept, and psychological distress among adolescents. It includes four dimensions of bullying experiences—physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, and attacks on property—alongside measures of positive and negative self-concept, depression, and anxiety. The results indicate significant positive correlations between various forms of bullying and negative self-concept, depression, and anxiety, while positive self-concept shows negative associations with psychological distress. These findings suggest that bullying experiences are linked to adverse psychological outcomes, highlighting the role of self-concept in adolescent mental health.

Table 4: *Multiple Hierarchical Regression showing Bullying Experiences and Self-concept as Predictors of Depression Psychological Distress among adolescents (N= 198)*

Predictors	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LL	*UL*				
Depression Psychological Distress							
Step I						.18***	
Constant	2.12	1.75	2.50	.19			
PVS	-.13	-.35	.08	.11	-.08		
VVS	.20	-.05	.46	.13	.11		
SMS	.48	.26	.70	.11	.30***		
APS	.27	-.03	.52	.13	.16*		
Step II						.45***	.27***
Constant	1.37	.54	2.20	.42			
PVS	-.19	-.37	-.01	.09	-.12*		
VVS	.05	-.16	.26	.11	.03		
SMS	.33	.14	.52	.10	.20**		
APS	.13	-.08	.33	.10	.07		
PosSelfCon	-.13	-.24	-.02	.05	-.14**		
NegSelfCon	.46	.34	.58	.06	.49***		

Note: PVS = Physical Victimization Scale; VVS = Verbal Victimization Scale; SMS = Social Manipulation Scale; APS = Attack on Property Scale; PosSelfCon = Positive Self-concept; NegSelfCon = Negative Self-concept; *p<.05. **p<.01***p<.001.

Multiple Hierarchical Regression identified predictors of psychological distress (depression) among adolescents. In Model I, four dimensions of peer victimization explained 18% of the variance ($R^2 = .18$, $F(4, 193) = 10.29$, $p < .001$). In Model II, adding self-concept dimensions increased the explained variance to 45% ($R^2 = .45$, $F(6, 191) = 25.66$, $p < .001$), with a 27% additional contribution beyond Model I ($\Delta R^2 = .27$, $F(2, 191) = 46.67$, $p < .001$). Social manipulation and negative self-concept were significant positive predictors, while physical victimization and positive self-concept were significant negative predictors of psychological distress.

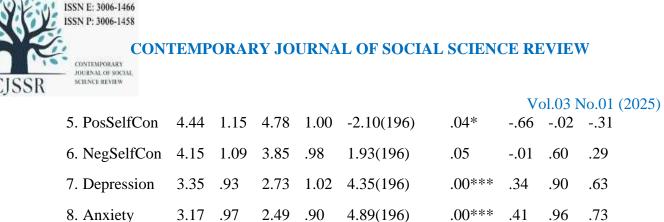**CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW**

Table 5: *Multiple Hierarchical Linear Regression showing Bullying Experiences and Self-concept as Predictors Anxiety of Psychological Distress among adolescents (N= 198)*

Predictors	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LL	*UL*				
Anxiety Psychological Distress							
Step I						.11***	
Constant	2.16	1.78	2.55	.19			
PVS	-.03	-.26	.19	.11	-.02		
VVS	.09	-.17	.35	.13	.05		
SMS	.43	.21	.66	.12	.27***		
APS	.16	-.09	.42	.13	.10		
Step II						.28***	.18***
Constant	1.80	.86	2.72	.47			
PVS	-.09	-.29	.12	.10	-.05		
VVS	-.03	-.27	.20	.12	-.02		
SMS	.32	.11	.53	.11	.20**		
APS	.05	-.18	.28	.12	.03		
PosSelfCon	-.13	-.26	-.01	.06	-.15**		
NegSelfCon	.35	.21	.49	.07	.37***		

Note: PVS = Physical Victimization Scale; VVS = Verbal Victimization Scale; SMS = Social Manipulation Scale; APS = Attack on Property Scale; PosSelfCon = Positive Self-concept; NegSelfCon = Negative Self-concept; *p<.05. **p<.01***p<.001.

Multiple Hierarchical Linear Regression identified predictors of psychological distress (anxiety) among adolescents. In Model I, peer victimization dimensions explained 11% of the variance (R^2 = .11, F(4, 193) = 5.92, p < .001). In Model II, adding self-concept dimensions increased the explained variance to 29% (R^2 = .29, F(6, 191) = 12.91, p < .001), with an 18% additional contribution beyond Model I (ΔR^2 = .18, F(2, 191) = 24.07, p < .001). Social manipulation and negative self-concept were significant positive predictors, while positive self-concept was a significant negative predictor of psychological distress.

Table 6: *Independent Sample t-test showing gender differences in bullying experiences, self-concept and psychological distress among adolescents*

Variable	Females		Males				95% CI		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(df)*	*p*	*LL*	*UL*	Cohen's *d*
1. PVS	.34	.53	.80	.71	-4.81(116.68)	.00***	-.65	-.27	-.73
2. VVS	1.16	.58	1.50	.46	-4.49(175.46)	.00***	-.49	-.19	-.65
3. SMS	1.23	.59	1.11	.67	1.27(132.41)	.20	-.07	.31	.19
4. APS	.74	.57	1.03	.61	-3.32(196)	.00**	-.46	-.12	-.49

	M	SD		SD					
5. PosSelfCon	4.44	1.15	4.78	1.00	-2.10(196)	.04*	-.66	-.02	-.31
6. NegSelfCon	4.15	1.09	3.85	.98	1.93(196)	.05	-.01	.60	.29
7. Depression	3.35	.93	2.73	1.02	4.35(196)	.00***	.34	.90	.63
8. Anxiety	3.17	.97	2.49	.90	4.89(196)	.00***	.41	.96	.73

Note: Females = 126; Males = 72; PVS = Physical Victimization Scale; VVS = Verbal Victimization Scale; SMS = Social Manipulation Scale; APS = Attack on Property Scale; PosSelfCon = Positive Self-concept; NegSelfCon = Negative Self-concept; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; CI = Confidence Interval; LL =Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit. *p<.05. **p<.01***p<.001

The table presents the results of an independent samples t-test examining gender differences in bullying experiences, self-concept, and psychological distress among adolescents. The findings indicate that males report significantly higher levels of physical victimization, verbal victimization, and attacks on property compared to females. In contrast, females report significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety. Additionally, males score higher on positive self-concept, while no significant gender differences are observed in social manipulation and negative self-concept. The effect sizes (Cohen's d) suggest moderate differences in most variables, highlighting the impact of gender on these psychological and behavioral experiences.

6. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between bullying experiences, self-concept, and psychological distress in adolescent. According to the first hypothesis, bullying experiences was likely to be related with psychological distress among adolescents. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to evaluate this, and the findings revealed that verbal victimization and attack on property had a significant, positive and weak relationship with depression and anxiety while social manipulation had a significant, positive and moderate relationship with depression and anxiety. The hypothesis was accepted as most dimensions of bullying were significantly related to both the dimensions of psychological distress. These findings are congruent with those of Schneider et al. (2012), who found that bullying victimization was a frequent and significant predictor of psychological distress across all measures. The findings of his research also revealed that those who were bullied at school or online were at the highest risk of going through psychological distress.

The second hypothesis stated that self-concept is likely to be related with psychological distress among adolescents. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was done to evaluate this hypothesis and the outcomes of it showed that positive self-concept had a significant, negative and moderate relationship with psychological distress (depression, anxiety) while negative self-concept had a significant, positive and strong relationship with depression and a significant, positive and moderate relationship with anxiety. Hence, the above hypothesis can be accepted. These research findings synchronize with the findings of Dar et al. (2021), which revealed that positive self-concept had a significantly negative relationship with psychological distress while negative self-concept had a significant positive relationship with psychological distress.

The third hypothesis states that bullying experiences (physical victimization, verbal victimization, social manipulation, attack on property) and self-concept (positive self-concept, negative self-concept) are predictors of psychological distress (depression, anxiety). To test this, Multiple Hierarchical Linear Regression was run and the results revealed that social

manipulation and negative self-concept emerged as significant positive predictor of depression and anxiety while physical victimization and positive self-concept emerged as significant negative predictor of depression. Our above hypothesis is somewhat accepted. According to Dar et al. (2021) finding, positive self-concept significantly negatively predicted psychological distress among females with polycystic ovarian disease.

The last hypothesis states that there is likely to be significant gender differences in terms of bullying experiences and self-concept are predictors of psychological distress. To examine the gender differences in terms of bullying experiences, self-concept and psychological distress among adolescents, independent sample t test was done. The results revealed a significant difference between boys and girls in terms physical victimization, verbal victimization and attack on property which further suggested that males were more victimized across these three dimensions of bullying experiences. There was a significant difference in both genders in terms of self-concept (positive self-concept) while it further suggested that boys had significantly more positive self-concept as compared to girls. Lastly, a significant difference between boys and girls was found in terms of psychological distress which further suggested that girls were significantly more psychologically distressed than boys. The results of the current study are consistent with those from earlier publications. The research carried out by Batool (2023), revealed that boys faced more verbal and physical abuse than girls.

However, there were very limited studies from Pakistan that supported these hypotheses. One of the major reasons could be because of the cultural values and rules that have been set here. Mostly students are unaware of the fact that they were bullied and most of them were those who were afraid to talk about it. In addition to this, many institutions in Pakistan did not want their school to be exploited or targeted due to which the research on such a topic is less here.

Moreover, there is a dearth of research on self-concept and its relationship with psychological distress specially in context to Pakistan. Here, mostly people are unfamiliar regarding this concept of self. This may be because in our culture, women are taught to sacrifice their self-respect in-front of their parents and husbands and lower their heads when the "head" of the household orders. They are often not allowed to go outside the home due to which their self-worth is lost and they are subjected to feel bad about themselves which often leads to mental health problems. Whereas, men are told that they cannot reveal their emotions or that they cannot cry because they are "men" and are "supposed" to be strong and rigid. They are not allowed to show their weaknesses due to which they have this immense pressure over them which makes their personality stiff. Hence, it leads to depression and anxiety, but they deny these feelings.

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the present study was a success in establishing a relation between bullying experiences, self-concept and psychological distress among adolescents. The results of the current investigation and the prior studies accepted and supported each of the four hypotheses. Moreover, this study also highlighted important insights regarding how bullying including verbal, physical, social manipulation, property attack, can cause psychological distress in adolescents. It also highlighted that positive self-concept can lower depression and anxiety levels. In conclusion, there is an urgent need for attention given to the important relationship that exists between bullying experiences, self-concept, and psychological distress among teenagers in Pakistan.

7.1 Limitations

Firstly, the major problem in this study was the sample size. As the data was to be collected from schools and colleges, some of the schools didn't allow to conduct the research. Due to

which, the sample size was not stratified. Secondly, one of the subscales of Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale showed low reliability. Additionally, some students filled the questionnaires in a hurry as their exams were going on which might have affected their responses.

7.2 Recommendations

A shorter version of self-concept scale can be used so that the children do not get bored while filling out the forms. A comparative study can be done on adolescents who are bullied at homes or outside school. Hence, a comparative analysis could be provided further on whether bullying is more in schools/colleges or at home/outside school.

7.3 Implications

Present study can be used to improve the school and colleges environment in which bullying is taking placing by making rules and restricting any type of bullying. This study can be further used by parents, educators, and lawmakers to take steps in implementing comprehensive anti-bullying policies and support systems that promote a nurturing atmosphere in schools and communities. Furthermore, by using the current study findings, we can enable youth to address and overcome bullying experiences by encouraging empathy, compassion, and open communication. This will help them develop a good self-concept and ensure their mental well-being as they face the challenges of adolescence in Pakistan.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declared NO conflict of interest.

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