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Interpersonal Needs and Psychological Distress: The Moderating Role of Social Support

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Abstract

The current study aimed to explore the relationship between interpersonal needs, social support, and psychological distress in university students. The study also aimed to explore the moderating role of social support between interpersonal needs and psychological distress in university students. The data (N=300) was collected from university students using a purposive sampling technique and three questionnaires i-e (i) interpersonal needs questionnaire (ii) perceived social support questionnaire and (iii) depression anxiety stress scale-21 items. The results of the current study highlight that interpersonal needs have a negative relationship with social support whereas interpersonal needs have a positive relationship with psychological distress. The results also indicate that social support moderates the relationship between interpersonal needs and psychological distress in university students. Therefore, the finding suggests that social support is an important factor in maintaining psychological well-being, especially for individuals who have high levels of interpersonal needs. Therefore, researchers could focus on investigating the different types of social support that are most effective in buffering against psychological distress for people with high levels of interpersonal needs.

Keywords: Interpersonal Needs, Social Support, Psychological Distress, University Student, Relationship.



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Introduction

According to recent statistics, high levels of psychological distress have been observed in university students, specifically depression, anxiety, and suicide risk with a percentage ranging from 52% to 85%, among which 49% to 59% are high school students (Granieri, Franzoi, and Chung 2021). However, the increase can be stopped by interpersonal needs as interpersonal needs buffer psychological distress (Bright et al. 2020). Additionally, interpersonal needs are the motivates to one's behavior regarding how much interaction they want with others. A person whose have control over their interpersonal needs has less psychological distress than a person who doesn't (Aron and Lewandowski 2001). Furthermore, social support also plays an important part in reducing psychological distress (Fasihi Harandi, Mohammad Taghinasab, and Dehghan Nayeri 2017). Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between interpersonal needs, social support, and psychological distress in university students so that the percentage of psychological distress could be reduced. Moreover, the role of social support is also to be explored between interpersonal needs and psychological distress in the Pakistani cultural context. Interpersonal needs in university students refer to the social and relational aspects of their lives and the fundamental desires they have for meaningful connections with others (Bakken and Romig 1992). These needs encompass various dimensions, including the need for social interaction, belongingness, and the development of supportive relationships. University students often experience a significant transition period where they leave their familiar social environments and enter a new academic setting. During this time, they may encounter challenges in establishing new connections, building friendships, and finding a sense of belonging within the university community. (Akbar and Aisyawati 2021)

Meeting interpersonal needs is crucial for their overall well-being, as positive social interactions can enhance their emotional and mental health, academic performance, and personal development. Where, psychological distress refers to the unpleasant sentiments or emotions individuals may experience when they are overwhelmed (Health e-University, 2019). It has also been described as a state of emotional anguish caused by daily stressors and expectations that are difficult to manage (Viertiö et al. 2021).

Interpersonal Needs and Psychological Distress

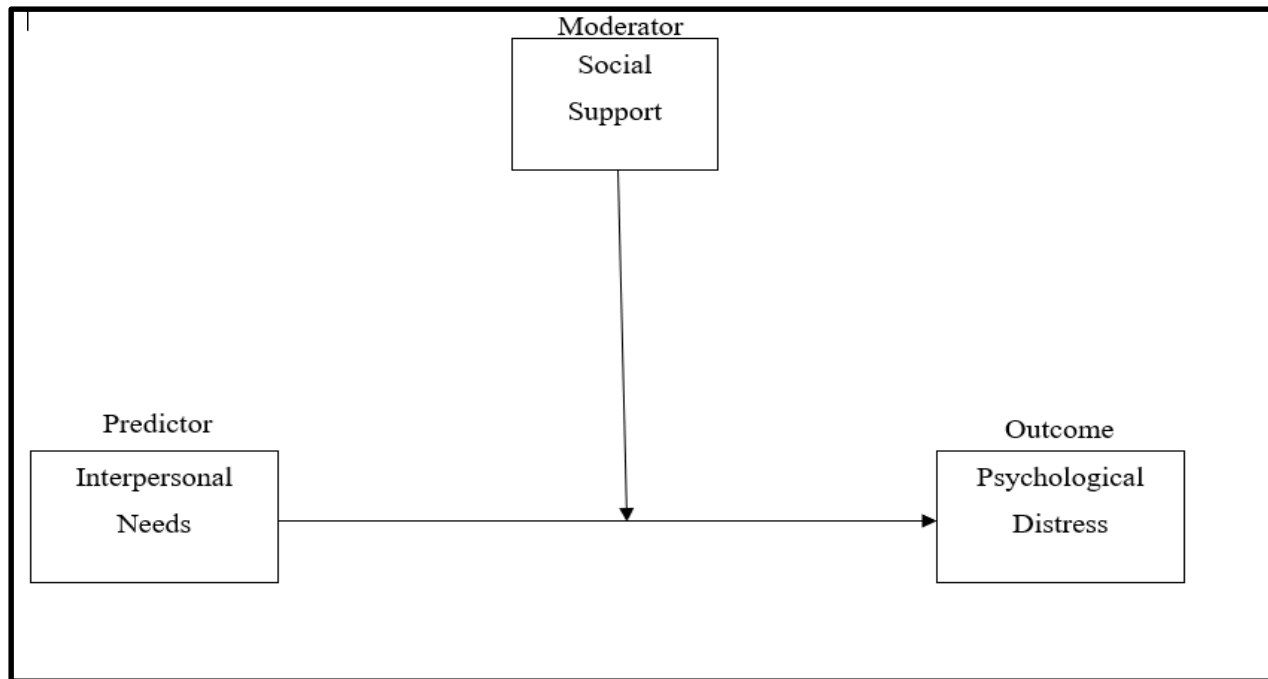
Need of interpersonal can effectively to psychological distress in higher education institutions when students not gaining an absolute means. (Hewitt et al. 2003).Some of the university students faces problems in their life when they suffer from highly stress and anxiety due to the negative behave of the society. (Goodwin et al. 2020). Without the absent of interpersonal support, student's life highly effects and they might face study pressures, depression, and uncertainty. ((Zhang et al. 2022). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:Therefore, is likely to be a positive relationship between Interpersonal Needs and Psychological distress in University Students. (MacNeil, Stewart, and Kaufman 2000).

Social Support as a Moderator

The Social support provides individuals with a sense of belonging, validation, and emotional comfort, creating a safety net during times of stress or difficulty. It offers a platform for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and receiving encouragement, which can enhance students' resilience and coping abilities. MacNeil, Stewart, and Kaufman 2000). By having individuals who genuinely care and offer understanding, empathy, and assistance, students are more likely to perceive their interpersonal needs as being fulfilled, leading to decreased levels of psychological distress. Social

support can provide reassurance, foster a sense of self-worth, and alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness (Kaniasty 2020). Thus, it can be hypothesized that: Social Support is likely to moderate the relationship between Interpersonal Needs and Psychological Distress among University Students Based on the hypotheses of the study, the hypothetical model of the study is presented in Figure

Figure 1: *Hypothesized Model*



Method

Research Design

In the present study, the correlational research design was used to explore the relationships between interpersonal needs, social support, and psychological distress in university students.

Participants and Sampling

The present study focused on young adults, specifically those aged 18 to 24 years old. In order to obtain a sample for the study, 420 participants were initially approached using a purposive sampling technique. However, a total of 120 participants were excluded from the final analysis due to various reasons such as not meeting the inclusion criteria or errors in their responses. The inclusion criteria involved (i) students enrolled in semester three or above who can thoroughly understand the English language. The students who took counseling sessions to control their interpersonal needs were excluded from the study. After the exclusion, the final sample size was N=300. It is important to note that the process of participant recruitment and screening was carefully conducted to ensure that the selected participants met the necessary criteria for the study.

Assessment Measure

The current study used the interpersonal needs questionnaire, perceived social support questionnaire, and short DASS. Along with the questionnaire were a set of demographics that consisted of relevant information.

Demographics Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire consisted of relevant information about the participants such as age, gender, sector, how often they meet their family or friends, etc.

Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire

The interpersonal needs questionnaire was developed by Orden et al. (2015) to measure the intensity of interpersonal needs. The questionnaire consists of two subscales (i) thwarted belongingness and (ii) perceived burden. The scale is rated on a seven-point Likert Scale from 1= not at all true for me to 7= very true for me. There are reverse-coded items (7, 8, 10, 13, 14, and 15). The questionnaire includes items like “*These days, I think I am a burden on society*” etc.

Perceived Social Support Questionnaire

The Perceived Social Support questionnaire was developed by Zimet et al. (1988) to measure individuals’ perceptions about the social support they receive. The scale consists of 12 items and 3 subscales (i) family (ii) friends and (iii) significant others. The scale uses a seven-point Likert scale from 1= very strongly disagree to 7= very strongly agree. There are no reverse-coded items, and the questionnaire includes items like “*my friends really try to help me*” etc.

Depression, Anxiety Stress Scale-21 items

The depression, anxiety, and stress scale was developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). The original version consists of 42 items that measure three constructs: (i) depression (ii) anxiety and (iii) stress in an individual. In the current study, the short version with 21 items was used. The short version also measures the same constructs. However, previous studies reveal that DASS-21 can be used to assess psychological distress in clinical and non-clinical settings. All items are summed to measure the severity and frequency of psychological distress symptoms (Al Saadi et al. 2017). By having individuals who genuinely care and offer understanding, empathy, and assistance, students are more likely to perceive their interpersonal needs as being fulfilled, leading to decreased levels of psychological distress. Social support can provide reassurance, foster a sense of self-worth, and alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Procedure

To gather data for the research, we followed a major step to prove ethical and valid research practices. First of all, we get permission from the prime authors of the scales used in the study to ensure absolute usage. Then, we submitted the research proposal to the institution's research ethics committee for review and approval. With their permission, we were able to interact with students and conduct the study. The individuals involved in the study were approached and asked for their permission through a consent form. The form obtained via knowledge about the research and their right to left out any time. To confirm the participants understood the research and its proportions, they were given complete guide on the research process. Additionally, after the consensus of all the participants they were asked to cover the proportions based on their own observations, without any pressure. Finally, information was collected from 420 university students, and appropriate quality checks were performed. As part of these checks, 120 participants were discarded from the sample due to non-eligibility or errors in the questionnaire. The remaining data was then analyzed using the statistical software SPSS version 25.0, which allowed for comprehensive data analysis and interpretation of the study's findings. (Park and Kim 2019).

Results

Correlation Matrix

We used Pearson product-moment correlation analysis to explain the linkages among interpersonal needs, societal support, and psychological distress. The findings can be found in Table 1.

Table 1:

Variables	1	2	3
1 Interpersonal needs	-	-.69**	.81*
2 Social Support	-	-	-.79*
3 Psychological Distress	-	-	-

Note. ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

Table 1 reflects that interpersonal needs have a valuable positive ties with psychological distress in university students. (Aggraval t al. 2022). However, interpersonal needs have a significant negative relationship with social support in university students. (Ortiz et al. 2023). Similarly, social support has a significant negative relationship with psychological distress in university students. (Park and Kim 2019).

Moderation Analysis

Moderation analysis was conducted to examine the moderating role of social support in the relationship between interpersonal needs and psychological distress. (Mitchell et al. 2019).

Table 2: Regression Analysis Examining the Interaction Effect of social support and interpersonal needs on psychological distress ($N = 300$)

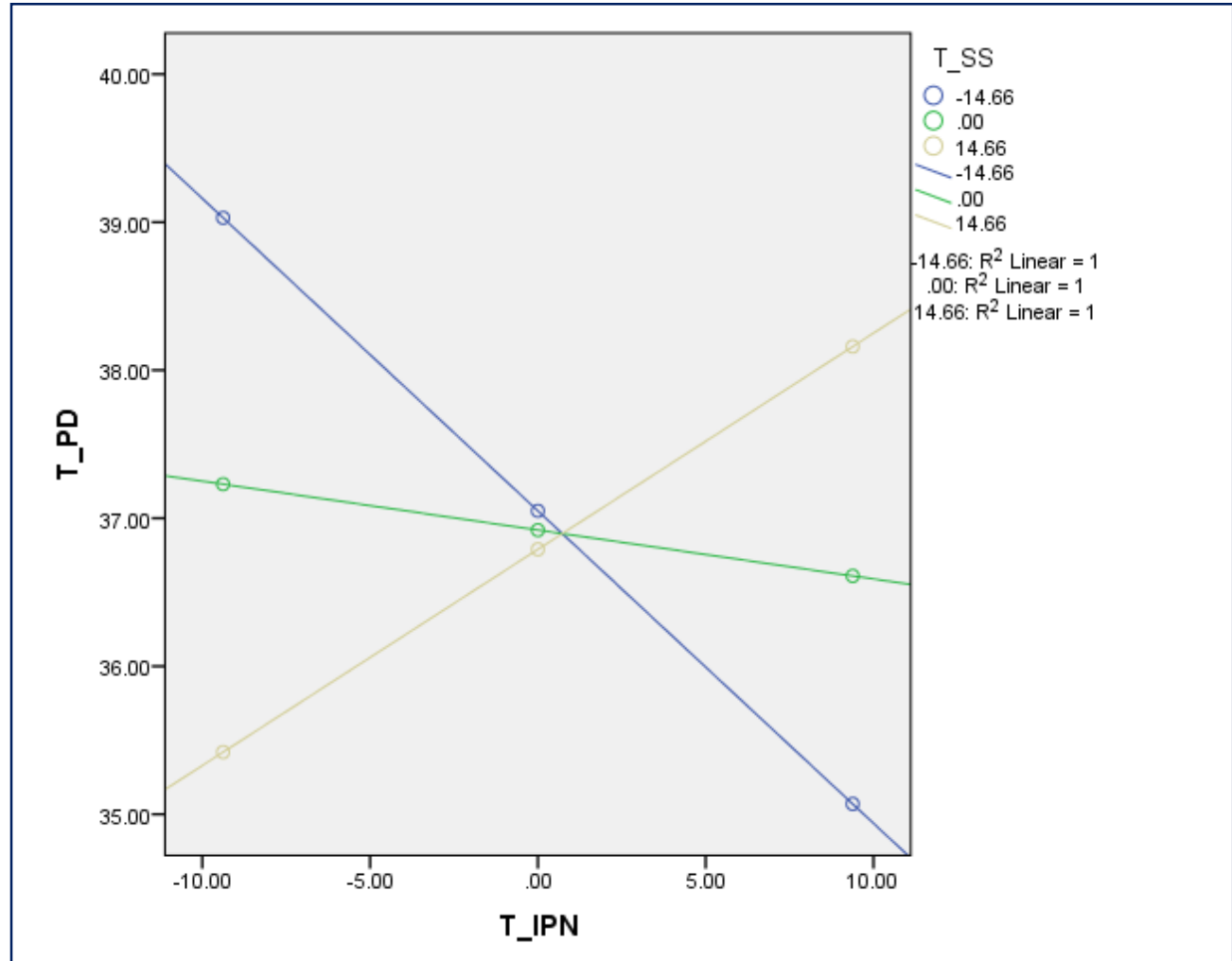
Variables	Psychological Distress		
	B	SE	95% CI
Constant	24.70	.25***	[24.21 25.35]
Interpersonal Needs	.47*	.12***	[.22, .71]
Social Support	-.64	.05***	[-.76, -.52]
Interpersonal Needs x Social Support	-.20	.01**	[.02, .08]
Low Social Support	-.02	.17	[-.32, .36]
Moderate Social Support	-.46	.12	[-.22, .71]
High Social Support	-.91	.19***	[.53, 1.29]
R^2	.22		
F	2.48		

*** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

Table 2 shows that social support is a significant moderator in the relationship between interpersonal needs and psychological distress in university students. (Granieri, Franzoi, and Chung 2021). The table also depicts the conditional effects of social support (. Aggarwal et al.

2022) At low and moderate level of social support interpersonal needs and psychological distress is not moderate. (Aron and Lewandowski 2001) However, at the high level of social support, the relationship between interpersonal needs and psychological distress is weakened. (Granieri, Franzoi, and Chung 2021). The conditional effects are represented in Figure 2

Figure 2: Conditional Effects



Conclusion

To sum some up the research work, there are number of departments, fields and institutions people can face highly stress and anxiety but in the university students the ratio are very high level. The interpersonal needs of the students concretely danger due to poor response and behave of the society and lack of proper facilities. (Aron and Lewandowski 2001). Therefore, the study aimed to explore the relationship between interpersonal needs, social support, and psychological distress in university students. The study also aimed to explore the moderating role of social support in the relationship between interpersonal needs and psychological distress in university students. Countries are carved on the map of the world offering great services and sacrifices but poor linkages among societal support and both interpersonal needs and psychological distress highlights the importance of building strong support networks for university students. Educational institutions a vital role for the uplifting of the life of the students and Alain work for the mental

health of the students. It includes programs that facilitate peer mentorship or opportunities for students to volunteer and give back to their communities. Moreover, the role of social support is also to be explored between interpersonal needs and psychological distress in the Pakistani cultural context. Interpersonal needs in university students refer to the social and relational aspects of their lives and the fundamental desires they have for meaningful connections with others (Bakken and Romig 1992). These needs encompass various dimensions, including the need for social interaction, belongingness, and the development of supportive relationships. University students often experience a significant transition period where they leave their familiar social environments and enter a new academic setting. During this time, they may encounter challenges in establishing new connections, building friendships, and finding a sense of belonging within the university community. It is also necessary for educational institutions to enhance a culture of empathy and compassion, where students feel relaxed reaching out for help and supporting each other through hard times. In addition, the finding that societal support moderates the connections among interpersonal needs and psychological distress underscores the importance of building strong support groups. Universities can support this by promoting opportunities for students to connect with others and building a culture of empathy and compassion.

Implications

- The societal phenomenon is very basic concepts to promoting psychological wellbeing especially for those people who have absolute levels of interpersonal needs.
- Collaboration among technology firms, civil society organizations, and governmental bodies is vital in addressing extremism issues. By promoting cultural awareness, education, and financial self-sufficiency win the society.
- The mentioned project covered a particular proportion of society, and university students, so outcomes may not be applying to other scales of people.
- The study reflects on the different assumption articulated measures, which could be subject to partial and missteps.
- The very research project utilised information from a single point in time, making it difficult to determine the cause and effect of the observed relationships.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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