

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETAL PRESSURE AND EXPECTATIONS ON
PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF UNDERGRAD FEMALE STUDENTSQasir Abbas ^{1*} , Muhammad Khalid²¹ Department of Leadership and Management, National Defence University (NDU),
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ABSTRACT

The psychosocial impacts of social pressure and expectations on college women are investigated in this qualitative study. The study examines how social standards pertaining to academic achievement, physical attractiveness, and social behavior affect participants' mental health, self-esteem, and identity using purposive sampling and in-depth interviews. By examining the diverse experiences of participants, this study offers comprehensive insights into the challenges young women face in higher education and their coping strategies. The results highlight the need for focused support networks to improve resilience and wellbeing by revealing recurrent themes of stress, anxiety, and the substantial influence of cultural and gender norms.

Keywords: Influence, Psychological effects, Societal pressure, Undergrad, Female students^{*}Corresponding Author. E-mail: qasirjafri512@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Societal expectations and pressures profoundly influence individual behavior, choices, and mental well-being, especially among young women. During their crucial journey into adulthood, college women often face external influences that dictate their behavior, looks, and accomplishments [1-3]. Academic, social, and personal responsibilities might feel burdensome in an atmosphere where these expectations come from a variety of sources, including classmates, family, educational institutions, and cultural standards.

These pressures have significant psychosocial effects, impacting mental health, self-esteem, and interpersonal

relationships. Comprehending how societal expectations shape the experiences of college women is essential for recognizing their broader influence on overall well-being. Societal expectations encompass community beliefs and norms regarding appropriate behavior, roles, and responsibilities. They define acceptable norms in a variety of contexts, such as family, the workplace, and public life, and they have an impact on social interactions and personal decisions. The core of society expectations are established rules that specify appropriate behavior in various contexts. The external forces imposed by these expectations, which push people to

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adhere to particular standards, attitudes, and behaviors, are referred to as societal pressure. Emotional, behavioral, interpersonal, and institutional factors are all components of social pressure [4-6].

Social expectations can have a significant psychological impact on females, influencing their general wellbeing and mental health. Girls are frequently forced by gender stereotypes to conform to social expectations regarding roles, conduct, and appearance. Stress, anxiety, and melancholy can be exacerbated by this strain, especially in adolescence when gender norms become increasingly rigid [7, 8]

Compared to boys, girls typically have worse mental health outcomes, particularly as they approach puberty. In addition to managing complex relationships and identity formation, they frequently experience increased pressure to satisfy cultural beauty standards, behave "appropriately," and achieve academic success. By the age of 15, this strain is most apparent and contributes to increased rates of loneliness, low self-esteem, and mental health conditions including depression. Additionally, girls are more vulnerable to assault, coercion, and discrimination due to gender inequality and social expectations, which worsens their mental health [9-13].

The goal of this study is to comprehend how people's behavior, self-identity, and mental health are impacted by external society norms. This study specifically looks at how societal pressures and expectations affect college women psychosocially. We can investigate strategies to support resilience and well-being by recognizing the detrimental effects of these demands. Finding the underlying causes of mental health problems including stress, anxiety, and depression will direct the creation of support networks, legislation, and remedies. Ultimately, this research seeks to foster healthier social environments, enhance individual well-being, alleviate harmful pressures, and promote emotional resilience and self-acceptance [14-17].

METHOD

This qualitative study employed purposive sampling to select participants who had experienced psychosocial effects due to societal expectations and pressures. Participants were private college students with siblings, enrolled in either the BS departments, who reported experiencing psychosocial effects stemming from societal pressures and expectations.

After receiving approval from the Research Committee and obtaining ethical and methodological clearance, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed. This protocol was informed by a comprehensive review of relevant literature and theories, which guided the formulation of the interview questions [18, 19].

Participants provided informed consent, ensuring their voluntary participation. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and that their data would be used exclusively for research purposes.

Data were collected from four college students who met the inclusion criteria. Before the interviews, participants were encouraged to ask questions about the study and each signed an informed consent form. All interviews followed a semi-structured format, with follow-up questions used to elicit more detailed information about their experiences. The interviews were recorded. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was subsequently transcribed, with all identifiable information removed. Notes were taken before, during, and after each session to capture thoughts, feelings, and observations. These notes provided context for the transcribed data and demonstrated attentiveness during the interviews [20-22]. Participants were undergraduate students aged 19 to 22 years. Two were studying Computer Science, and the other two were pursuing Education. All participants reported experiencing psychosocial effects related to societal pressure and expectations.

Here are the questions:

- A. How do you personally define societal pressure?
- B. Describe a time you felt pressured to conform to societal expectations. How did you react in that situation?
- C. In what ways do social media and broader societal expectations influence your choices and decisions?
- D. Have you ever experienced guilt or shame for not meeting societal expectations? Please explain.
- E. Do you believe societal expectations limit your choices or opportunities? If so, how?
- F. Can you share a situation where you felt conflicted between staying true to yourself and conforming to societal norms?
- G. What effects do you believe social norms have on your general wellbeing and mental health?
- H. What effects do social expectations have on your friendships and family relationships?
- I. What tensions result from the interaction between your personal ideals and society expectations?
- J. What effects do gender norms and beauty standards have on your self-talk, self-perception, and emotional control?
- K. How do social media and technology support or contradict the messages you've absorbed and the demands of society?
- L. What coping mechanisms do you employ to deal with the psychological effects of social pressure, and how does this affect your mental well-being?
- M. How do your personal beliefs or values clash with cultural expectations (such as those on social behavior, beauty, or academic achievement)?
- N. In what circumstances do you find yourself reasoning or defending behaviors that conflict with your personal objectives in order to blend in or satisfy social norms?
- O. What effects do social demands about behavior, beauty, or achievement have on your sense of identity or self-worth?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following themes emerged from the data analysis: Gender Roles Conformity, Career Aspiration and Academic Pressure, Family Expectations and Pressure, Limitations of Personal Choices, Psychological and Emotional Health, and Coping Mechanisms.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides important insights into the relationships between academic pressure, professional goals, and both internal and extrinsic incentives. SDT highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in determining a person's professional objectives. Students and young adults are more likely to pursue occupations that are in line with their inherent interests if they feel empowered in making professional decisions and encouraged in honing their abilities. This can result in higher happiness and long-term contentment. On the other hand, students may lose their sense of autonomy and experience disengagement and burnout if their professional goals are only motivated by external expectations, such as parental pressure or societal conventions.

Researchers have examined the effects of parental pressure, defined as the expectations parents place on their children to achieve specific goals. One study found that while students often possess the belief in their ability to succeed, they struggle with unexpected challenges. Students reported confidence in tackling difficult problems through effort, but their self-efficacy diminished when confronted with unforeseen events. Notably, students demonstrated high self-efficacy in completing school-related tasks [23, 24].

The relationship between parental educational expectations and adolescent mental health problems has also been explored, with academic pressure serving as a moderating variable. Findings revealed a strong correlation between high parental educational expectations and mental health issues among adolescents, particularly for those experiencing elevated academic

pressure. Conversely, for adolescents facing low levels of academic pressure, the connection between high parental expectations and mental health problems was significantly weaker.

The impact of identity and self-perception on interpersonal relationships and mental health has also been investigated. Participants reported feeling pressured by societal beauty standards, gender roles, and traditional expectations, which influenced their self-esteem, career choices, and social roles. Their decision-making processes were further complicated by peer pressure, romantic relationships, and family dynamics. Significant stress, anxiety, and emotional regulation issues resulted from this pressure to fit in. In response, women developed a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with these difficulties, including self-care routines, support networks, and resilience [25-27].

Researchers examined the complex sociocultural factors influencing college women's health. Feminine norms, defined as societal beliefs and expectations about womanhood, are crucial for understanding psychological distress. Recent studies show a strong correlation between following these standards and a number of health consequences, such as substance abuse and eating disorder symptoms. The authors examined the connection between college women's psychological discomfort and adherence to feminine norms, guided by the gender role strain paradigm.

Furthermore, another study looked at how mindfulness affected college students' ability to reduce stress. Results demonstrated that participants' levels of stress and anxiety significantly decreased when they engaged in mindfulness practices. Increased self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-compassion were also linked to mindfulness, according to the study.

Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample to provide deeper insights and enable broader generalizations. To dispel preconceptions and encourage

varied portrayals of girls in the media and in society, awareness programs must be put into place. To lessen damaging comparisons and highlight personal qualities, parental and peer education should be promoted. Fostering long-term cultural change requires advocating for legislation that addresses detrimental societal norms and gender inequity.

CONCLUSION

These results highlight how social expectations have a big impact on women's psychological health and personal decisions. These expectations lead to significant internal and external conflicts that impact women's relationships, identities, and mental health. The study emphasizes the necessity of cultural shifts and supportive measures to advance gender parity and give women the freedom to make their own decisions. Future studies should investigate the intersectionality of different social identities and build on these findings using bigger, more varied populations.

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