

**PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT AND VULNERABILITY TO ANXIETY  
/ DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS IN BOARDERS AND DAY SCHOLARS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study was conducted to investigate the differences in the levels of depression, anxiety and social support among boarders and day scholars. It was hypothesized that: (1) Boarders will be more depressed and anxious as compared to the day scholars. (2) Individuals scoring high on AKUADS will perceive less social support than the individuals scoring in the normal range. The sample consisted of 80 students (40 boarders and 40 day scholars) aged between 18 to 25 years enrolled in Honors and Masters Programs in various departments of Arts. The sample was selected from University of Karachi by using convenient sampling technique. Aga Khan University Anxiety Depression Scale (AKUADS) and Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support (MSPPS) were administered to both the groups. 't' test was applied to find out the statistical significance of the results using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS 12 version). According to the results of the study boarders were found to be more depressed and anxious as compared to day scholars ( $t = 2.258$ ,  $p < .027$ ), and level of social support was found to be low in boarders as compared to day scholars ( $t = -11.666$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

## INTRODUCTION

Social support is essential for general well being and mental health of the individuals. Physical and psychological comfort provided by friends and family plays an important role in an individual's life. People who have close interpersonal contacts are generally able to avoid illness than those who remain isolated (Sarason, Sarason & Pierce, 1994).

Furthermore, ill people who receive social support recover more quickly than those who do not receive. Similarly individuals whose attachment pattern is secure are more likely to cope affectively with stress than those with ambivalent or avoidant attachment patterns (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, 1997). The findings of the studies conducted by Pennebaker, Hughes & Heron, (1987) Costanza, Derlega & Winstead(1988), Larson & Chastain, (1990) Clark, (1993) suggested the view that the individuals who share their experiences with someone or vent out their emotions by talking it out to the other individuals, report less incidences of both major and minor health issues. Whereas on the other hand, the more the individual is secretive and conceals distressing personal issue the greater the possibility of developing anxiety and depression symptoms or reporting somatic complaints.

Moreover, Positive self-concept and good social support have a combined effect in preventing a state of depression and anxiety during an acute crisis (Hebfall & Walfisch, 1984).

Social support is negatively correlated to the incidence of psychiatric symptoms. Absence of social support is a better predictor of disorders as compared to other stressful life incidences (Lin. et al., 1979; Silberfeld, 1978). Those people who have a high quality of family relationships tend to report fewer general psychiatric and neurotic symptoms including depression and anxiety (Dean, Lin, Ensel, 1981, Barrera, 1981).

Dangler, (1990) at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, suggested that support system (friends and significant others), state related anxiety, and stress are significantly correlated with loneliness.

The present study highlights the role of social support in the mental well being of the individuals. The findings of the above mentioned researches clearly states that sharing one's feelings and emotions with others lead to comfort and mental well being. Considering this fact an attempt was made in the present study to explore and scientifically analyze the differences in the levels of depression, anxiety and social support among boarders and day scholars. It was assumed that since boarders are away from their families, they are unable to have a good social support which is essential for maintaining a positive outlook on life. Thus they are more vulnerable to develop anxiety depressive symptoms as compared to day scholars. As in Pakistani educational system this factor is almost ignored and boarders are not provided with the professional counselor, who may provide the essential support required by them at that time when they are away from their families and facilitate the process of adjustment.

In the light of the literature review the following hypotheses were postulated:

1. Boarders will be more depressed and anxious as compared to the day scholars.
2. Individuals scoring high on AKUADS will perceive less social support than the individuals scoring in the normal range.

## METHOD

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 80 female students (40 boarders & 40 day scholars) aged between 18 to 25 years enrolled in Honors and Masters Programs in various departments of the faculty of Art from the University of Karachi.

### *Procedure*

After taking the informed consent from the participants, demographic information was obtained through a form which focused on the subject's age, department, qualification, siblings, birth order and residence. The Aga Khan University Anxiety Depression Scale (AKUADS) and Multidimensional scale for Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was administered on the participants.

### *Operational Definitions*

#### *Depression*

A mood state characterized by a sense of inadequacy, a feeling of dependency, a decrease in activity or reactivity, pessimism, sadness and related symptoms.

#### *Anxiety*

A feeling of apprehension and fear characterized by physical symptoms such as sweating and feelings.

#### *Social Support*

Social support is defined as "physical and psychological comfort provided by friends and family." Sarason, Sarason & Pierce, (1994).

*Measures*

**The Aga Khan University Anxiety Depression Scale (AKUADS)**

The Aga Khan University Anxiety Depression Scale AKUADS (Ali, 1996) is 14 items scale of anxiety and depression. The subjects were asked to report their emotional states over a period of two weeks, on a 4 point likert scale ranging from never (0) to always (3). AKUADS is an indigenously developed screening instrument for anxiety and depression. The scale does not differentiate between symptoms of anxiety and depression. AKUADS has demonstrated high internal consistency and good criterion and construct validity.

**Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)**

Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support MSPSS (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farly, 1988) is a 20 items questionnaire designed to assess perceptions of social support adequacy from three specific sources. Those sources were family, friends and significant others. The subjects are required to rate their perception of support on 7 point likert scale ranging from very strongly agree (7) to very strongly disagree (1). MSPSS has good internal validity (.88) and test-retest (.85) reliability. Kazarian, & McCabe (1991) also reported the scale to demonstrate excellent internal consistency and showed little relationship to social desirability. MSPSS is correlated negatively with two separate measures of depression and positively with a self concept measure.

RESULTS

Table I  
Showing Descriptive statistics

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AKUADS	Boarders	40	28.88	16.59	2.62
	Day scholars	40	21.90	10.31	1.63
MSPSS	Boarders	40	23.10	12.75	2.02
	Day scholars	40	58.03	14.00	2.21

**Boarders result of AKUADS and MSPSS**  
 (AKUADS)  $N = 40, M = 28.88, SD = 16.59$   
 (MSPSS)  $M = 23.10, SD = 12.75$

**Day Scholars result of AKUADS and MSPSS**  
 (AKUADS)  $N = 40, M = 21.90, SD = 10.31$   
 (MSPSS)  $M = 58.03, SD = 14.00$

Table II

Showing Mean differences on the variables of depression / anxiety and social support

Variable		$\bar{X}$	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
AKUADS	Equal variance Assumed	2.258	78	$P < .027$	6.98	3.09
MSPSS	Equal variance Assumed	-11.666	78	$P < .000$	-34.92	2.99

**AKUADS**  $t = 2.258, df = 78, sig. (2-tailed) = .027, M Diff = 6.98$

**MSPSS**  $t = -11.666, df = 78, sig. (2-tailed) = .000, M Diff = -34.92$

DISCUSSION

The scientific analysis of the result indicates that hypotheses No1, that pertains to the anxiety and depression level of boarders and day scholars stands proved. Participants who belong to hostel scored high on AKUADS. This clearly indicates that participants from hostel are more depressed and anxious as compared to participants who were not from hostel. Hence a significant difference in the level of depression and anxiety of both the groups was observed. In contrast day scholars scored high on Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) as compared to boarders. Thus significant difference is found in their perceived social support levels.

Boarders were found to be more vulnerable to anxiety and depressive symptoms as compared to day scholars, due to the reasons that, they were away from their homes, or in other words away from the primary support group (parents, siblings, friends and significant others). Hence, they might feel isolated and lonely because they were not able to share their joyous events or discuss their problems with their loved ones. In addition to this in Pakistani educational system these students are not provided with the professional counselors who may play a role in facilitating their adjustment process and provide them support while they are away from their family and friends.

On the basis of the findings of the present study it can be concluded that boarders are more vulnerable to anxiety and depressive symptoms as compared to day scholars. This study highlights the role of social support in developing anxiety and depressive symptoms among boarders especially when secondary support groups such as student counselor is also not present.

In Pakistan, the concept of campus counselor is an uprising need and the present research further provides evidence in favor of this need. Finding support from counselor through sharing experiences while adjusting to the hectic schedule of studies (while living away from home) makes life easier.

The challenges that boarders have to face in their educational journey along with their lifestyle at hostels becomes less threatening when they can talk to a professional who can guide them along with providing them with adequate emotional support. This may lead to more productive and less anxious depressed students.

It is recommended that in future studies, this issue may be studied considering other areas as well e.g. other environmental factors and personality traits of the individuals.



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