

Role of Mental Health in Academic Performance of University Students of Karachi

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Rates of mental health concerns among university students have been rising at a concerning pace (Beroíza-Valenzuela et al., 2024; Emmerton et al., 2024; McGorry et al., 2025). In response, the present study adopted a quantitative correlational survey design to explore the relationship between mental health and academic performance among university students. Data were gathered from 200 students in Karachi, Pakistan (Government sector, $n = 96$; Private sector, $n = 92$; Semi-Government sector, $n = 12$) using purposive convenience sampling, with an equal representation of male and female participants. The Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF; Keyes, 2009) and a Demographic Information Form were administered, while academic performance was assessed based on students' GPA and CGPA. Results revealed no significant relationship between mental health—encompassing emotional, social, and psychological well-being—and academic performance. However, a significant gender difference emerged in overall mental health, with male students ($M = 54.9$, $SD = 12.36$) reporting better mental health than their female counterparts ($M = 47.88$, $SD = 12.30$). This pattern held consistently across all three subdomains—emotional, social, and psychological well-being—with male students outperforming female students in each. These findings carry meaningful implications for both clinical and educational psychologists.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Mental Health, Gender, Emotional Wellbeing, Social Wellbeing, Psychological Wellbeing, University Students

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University students face academic, social, and personal challenges that impact their emotional, social, and psychological well-being (Awang et al., 2014). Emotional well-being affects stress management and motivation, social well-being influences peer support and engagement, and psychological well-being shapes cognitive abilities and resilience. Understanding this connection is essential for developing effective support systems to enhance students' academic success and overall well-being. A systematic review found that between 12% and 46% of undergraduate students experience distress related to mental health issues (Harrer et al., 2019). After the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation has worsened the stress level and stress enhancement among students (De Coninck et al., 2022). Hence it can be seen that mental health problems are arising among university students, and they impact on their different areas of functioning, particularly academic performance, and are needed to be seen.

Stress and strain can adversely affect academic achievement, as measured by GPA, meaning of obtained marks added over subjective courses. University life brings valuable transformations, as students need to make decisions about academic, social interpersonal demands that affect their performance (Jamil, et al., 2024). Much of the existing research points to a cross-sectional association between poor mental health and diminished academic performance (Castaneda et al., 2008; Wickersham et al., 2021). When students experience emotional or psychological instability, it can take a toll on their overall well-being, ultimately undermining their academic achievement.

Arnett (2000) introduced the concept of emerging adulthood, describing it as a distinct developmental period during which individuals transition from adolescence into adulthood.

University undergraduates represent a population undergoing this very transition, navigating a range of changes as they move between these life stages. In coping with the demands of university life, many students struggle to manage lifestyle-related behaviors effectively (Harrer et al., 2019; Kayaba et al., 2021), which can, in turn, negatively affect their academic outcomes. In light of this, the present study aims to examine the relationship between mental health and academic performance among university students.

Research conducted at Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh uncovered troubling patterns in student mental health, with 45% of students reporting moderate-to-severe stress and 50% reporting moderate-to-severe anxiety. Notably, more than 44% experienced extreme levels of anxiety, and over half showed signs of moderate depression, while 22% reported severe depression and 7% experienced extreme depression (Jannatul, 2022). A separate study spanning ten universities found that roughly one in five students had received a current mental health diagnosis, and nearly half reported having faced a serious psychological difficulty they felt warranted professional support (Abrams, 2022). Poor mental health appears to disproportionately affect university students more broadly. According to a 2019 report by the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, approximately 42.3% of university students self-identified as experiencing a mental health problem, with depression and anxiety emerging as the most commonly reported concerns. Moreover, mental health issues have been found to occur at higher rates among university students than in the general population, a pattern that may have downstream effects on their academic performance, social relationships, and career prospects (Hussain et al., 2025). Recent evidence clearly demonstrates that mental-health problems are highly prevalent among university students worldwide, making this population particularly vulnerable during their academic years. The overall body of research highlights that the transition into higher education, combined with academic workload, emerging adult responsibilities, and social pressures, contributes to the heightened prevalence of mental-health issues.

When students experience instability in their mental health, it can take a toll on them emotionally and psychologically, ultimately weakening their academic performance. Given that education plays a foundational role in both social and personal development, researchers have emphasized the importance of examining the link between students' mental health and their academic outcomes (Baker et al., 2021).

Gender differences in mental illness relate to how certain psychological conditions and their symptoms come to be culturally associated with masculinity or femininity, a pattern largely shaped by broader gender stereotypes. For instance, because women are often stereotyped as more emotionally expressive, conditions like depression and anxiety tend to be viewed as more "feminine" disorders. This gendered framing may also reflect an underlying reality: women tend to be more prone to internalizing disorders such as depression and anxiety, whereas men are more likely to experience externalizing conditions like substance abuse and conduct disorders (Boysen et al., 2014). Additionally, women are generally more likely than men to encounter stress and trauma over the course of their lives (Klonoff et al., 2000). Across both disorder categories, women consistently showed higher prevalence rates than men—5.1% versus 3.6% for one condition, and 4.6% versus 2.6% for the other. Within Pakistan specifically, population-level estimates indicated a prevalence of 4.2% for depressive disorders and 3.5% for anxiety disorders. Notably, Pakistani women were found to experience anxiety and depressive disorders at two to three times the rate of men, a disparity consistent with findings reported in other regions (Hussain et al., 2017).

Rationale and Significance of the Study

While numerous studies have focused on mental health issues among the elderly population, limited attention has been given to university students particularly those in Karachi

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who face unique academic and social pressures. This research addresses this gap by exploring how mental health challenges affect the academic performance of university students. As these students are on the verge of entering their professional careers, their mental well-being plays a crucial role in shaping their future success. Understanding this relationship can help universities, policymakers, and mental health professionals develop targeted interventions to support students during this critical stage of their lives. As in current culture the academic performance of the university students determines their future career success, therefore an identification of the early predictors of academic performance particularly mental health will help the universities to form policies to address mental health issues at a macro level and consequently improve the academic performance of university students, which will not only help them in developing sound professional careers but also take part in the development of the nation in the longer run.

University life is a developmental period marked by increased academic workload, social transitions, and psychological pressure. These challenges can directly influence students' emotional, social, and psychological well-being, which together constitute mental health. Moreover, post-pandemic changes have further intensified stress, academic demands, and adjustment difficulties among students (De Coninck et al., 2022). This period brings increased demands that can significantly influence students' emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing. Ongoing research continues to show that mental health issues can influence students' concentration, motivation, and learning capacity both directly and indirectly, ultimately shaping their overall academic success. However, despite widespread global recognition of the mental health challenges facing students, the relationship between mental health and academic performance remains mixed and appears to vary depending on context. Some studies report that mental distress negatively affects academic outcomes, motivation, and engagement, while others show weak or no direct relationship between well-being and GPA, suggesting that factors such as resilience, coping styles, and institutional support may buffer these effects (Busalim et al., 2019). This inconsistency underscores the need for more localized and culturally relevant research, particularly in countries like Pakistan where environmental pressures, family expectations, societal norms, and resource limitations may uniquely shape students' academic and psychological experiences.

Given this rising concern, understanding the association between mental health and academic performance is crucial. Academic performance, commonly operationalized through GPA and CGPA is a key determinant of career opportunities and future success. Yet, in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi, limited empirical work has explored whether students' mental health actually influences their academic outcomes. This study is significant because it addresses a critical research gap by examining how emotional, social, and psychological well-being relate to academic performance. Whether mental health predicts academic achievement among university students. Gender differences in mental health, a notable and culturally important variable in Pakistan.

Hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship between mental health and academic performance of university students.
- There is a significant difference in the mental health of male and female university students.

Method

Research Design

This study employed quantitative correlational research design to examine relationships of mental health with academic performance and to explore gender differences. This design allows researchers to identify statistical relationships between naturally occurring variables

without manipulating them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Standardized measures and numerical data analysis provide precise evaluation of patterns between students' mental well-being and their GPA or CGPA.

Participants

The study included a total of 200 university students. Among them, 96 were from public sector universities, 92 from private universities, and 12 from semi-government universities. The gender distribution was balanced with 100 males and 100 females, and the age range of participants was between 18 and 25 years. Students represented multiple faculties, including engineering, social sciences, management, medicine, law, and others. The participants were approached through purposive convenient sampling techniques.

Participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria. They were required to be enrolled in a degree program and be between the ages of 18 and 25. Their most recent GPA or CGPA needed to be announced, and they should not have any diagnosed psychological disorders. Additionally, participants were expected to voluntarily agree to participate in the study. The details of the participants are given below in the table.

Table 1

Showing the Details of Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=200)

Variables	<i>f</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age			23.25	2.66
No. of Family Members			7.10	3.77
GPA			3.68	3.69
CGPA			3.67	3.68
Gender				
Male	100	50.0		
Female	100	50.0		
Birth Order				
First	54	27.0		
Middle	64	32.0		
Last	59	29.5		
Only	23	11.5		
Social Class				
Upper	101	50.5		
Middle	97	48.5		
Lower	2	1.0		
Family Type				
Nuclear	126	63.0		
Joint	61	30.5		
Extended	9	4.5		
Sector of University				
Private	92	46.0		
Government	96	48.0		
Semi-government	12	6.0		
Degree Program				
Undergraduate	81	40.5		
Graduation	98	49.5		
Post-graduation	21	10.5		
Faculty				
Social Sciences	28	14.0		
Management Sciences	12	6.0		
Medical Sciences	38	19.0		
Engineering Sciences	20	10.0		

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Others	102	51.0
Reasons for Choosing Program		
Self Interest	142	71.0
Parental Choice	39	19.5
Trend	13	76.5
Others	5	2.5
Satisfaction with Academic Progress		
Not At All Satisfied	52	26.0
Not Satisfied	39	19.5
Neither Satisfied Nor Dis-Satisfied	27	13.5
Satisfied	79	39.5
Satisfied A Lot	2	1.0
Academic Workload		
None	41	20.5
Somewhat	69	34.5
A Lot	90	45.0

Table presents the frequency distribution and percentages for several of the demographic variables examined in the present study, which aimed to obtain a sample that accurately represented the broader population.

Measures

Informed consent form was provided to all participants, detailing the purpose of the study, procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and withdrawal rights.

Demographic information was obtained through a form that included details such as age, gender, family structure, socioeconomic status, department, degree program, GPA, CGPA, satisfaction level, and academic workload. Academic performance was measured through students' most recent GPA and cumulative CGPA, which are widely recognized indicators of academic achievement.

Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF). Mental health was assessed using the 14-item Mental Health Continuum – Short Form (MHC-SF), which measures emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Items were rated on a six-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting better overall mental health (Keyes et al., 2008). The measure has shown strong internal consistency overall ($\alpha = .91$), and among indigenous populations, reliability estimates were reported as satisfactory for the overall mental health continuum ($\alpha = .76$) as well as for the emotional ($\alpha = .67$), social ($\alpha = .56$), and psychological well-being ($\alpha = .55$) subscales (Keyes, 2009; Kousar & Bhutto, 2023).

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained before starting data collection. Students from various universities were approached and explained the study's objectives, potential risks, and confidentiality safeguards. Participants provided informed consent and subsequently completed the demographic information form, the MHC-SF, and submitted their GPA or CGPA details. Completing the forms took participants approximately 15–20 minutes. All responses were systematically recorded and later analyzed using SPSS version 27.

Results

Pearson Product Moment Correlation and an independent samples t-test were used to analyze and compile the results.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliability Coefficients Study Variables (N=200)*

Variables	α	Min	Max	M	SD
GPA	-	2.00	40.00	3.68	3.69
CGPA	-	2.09	40.00	3.67	3.68
Mental Health	0.88	18.00	84.00	51.39	12.79
Emotional Well-being	0.81	3.00	18.00	11.61	3.77
Social Well-being	0.81	5.00	30.00	16.22	5.78
Psychological Well-being	0.79	8.00	36.00	23.55	5.81

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the study variables. The reliability analysis confirmed adequate internal consistency across the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC-SF) and its subscales. The overall mental health scale demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$), while the emotional well-being ($\alpha = .81$), social well-being ($\alpha = .81$), and psychological well-being ($\alpha = .79$) subscales each showed acceptable levels of internal consistency. Together, these values indicate that the scales employed in the study were reliable and appropriate for subsequent analysis. Furthermore, the data distribution met normality assumptions, supporting the use of parametric statistical tests.

Table 3*Pearson Product Moment Product Correlations of Academic Performance and Mental Health (N=200)*

Variables	MH	EW	SW	PSY
GPA	-0.33	.036	-.121	.025
CGPA	-.024	.039	-.112	.033

Note. MH= Mental Health, EW= Emotional Well-being, SW= Social Well-being, PW= Psychological Well-being

Table 3 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation between academic performance (GPA and CGPA) and mental health, including its domains (emotional, social, and psychological well-being). The results indicate that there was no significant relationship of CGPA, GPA with mental health or any of its domains. Therefore, the hypothesis is not supported.

Table 4*Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value for Gender in Academic Performance and Mental Health (N=200)*

	Male (n=100)		Female (n=100)		<i>t</i> (df)	<i>p</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Mental Health	54.90	12.36	47.88	12.30	-4.02(198)	.038	-10.46	-3.57

Table 4 reports the mean scores, standard deviations, and t-test results examining gender differences in mental health. The findings revealed a statistically significant difference between male and female students, with male students reporting higher mean mental health scores than their female counterparts.

Discussion

The present study found no significant relationship between mental health—encompassing emotional, social, and psychological well-being—and academic performance among university students, suggesting that academic outcomes may remain relatively stable

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even amid fluctuations in mental well-being. This aligns with prior findings indicating that some university students are able to effectively manage increased stress or challenges while still sustaining their academic performance (Chemers et al., 2001).

In many university settings, students often develop coping strategies, rely on social or familial support, or prioritize academic tasks despite experiencing emotional strain. Additionally, academic performance may be influenced by factors such as study habits, course structure, assessment patterns, institutional expectations, and grading policies, which can buffer the negative effects of poor mental health. Therefore, even when students face emotional or psychological challenges, these external academic pressures and internal coping mechanisms may help them sustain their GPA and overall academic standing.

The findings show that mental health is not related with academic performance, it remains essential for emotional stability, interpersonal functioning, and long-term psychological well-being. Maintaining good mental health supports positive social relationships, effective decision-making, resilience, and overall quality of life, all of which are crucial for students' personal development and future success beyond university achievement (Anthonysamy, 2022).

However, the study revealed significant gender differences, with male students scoring higher on overall mental health and all subdomains. This aligns with research indicating that female students often report higher stress, emotional burden, and social pressures, especially in collectivist cultures (Kayaba et al., 2021). Research indicates that certain widely diagnosed mental health conditions—such as depression, anxiety, and anorexia nervosa—tend to occur more frequently among women (Johnson et al., 2023).

Female students tend to show a greater propensity toward internalizing difficulties such as anxiety and depression, wherein distressing emotions are directed inward rather than expressed outwardly. This encompasses both mild and severe forms of depression, as well as most anxiety-related conditions, including generalized anxiety disorder and various phobias. Higher rates of depression among women translate into more frequent experiences of deep sadness, negative self-perception, guilt, self-blame, and self-criticism compared to men. Women are also more likely than men to report significant declines in energy, motivation, and overall interest in life. Additionally, they more commonly experience feelings of hopelessness, often accompanied by a profound sense of powerlessness to change their circumstances. Female students may face compounded pressures related to academic achievement, family obligations, and future career uncertainty, all of which can lead to worse mental health. (Cheng, et al., 2025).

These gender differences may be linked to societal expectations, traditional gender roles, reduced autonomy, and increased emotional and academic demands placed on female students. In many cultural contexts, females experience greater pressure to excel academically while simultaneously managing family responsibilities and social expectations, which may heighten their vulnerability to mental-health concerns. Moreover, females tend to internalize stress more frequently than males, leading to higher reporting of emotional and psychological difficulties also they have to play multiple roles at a time.

Conclusion

The findings revealed no significant relationship between mental health and academic performance. This suggests that fluctuations in students' emotional, social, or psychological well-being do not necessarily translate into differences in their academic outcomes. One possible explanation is that many students may continue to prioritize academic requirements despite experiencing distress, relying on resilience, coping strategies, or external academic pressures to maintain performance. Additionally, academic performance is shaped by numerous factors such as study habits, assessment structure, peer support, institutional expectations, and

personal motivation which may buffer or overshadow the influence of mental health. Therefore, academic success does not always reflect a student's internal psychological state.

However, the study identified significant gender differences in mental health, with male students reporting higher well-being across all three subdomains compared to female students. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that female students are more susceptible to stress, emotional burden, and social pressures, particularly in collectivist cultures where expectations and responsibilities may be gendered. These differences highlight the importance of considering gender when evaluating students' psychological experiences and designing mental-health interventions.

In conclusion, academic performance alone cannot be considered a sufficient indicator of students' psychological well-being. Universities must adopt a more comprehensive approach that promotes both academic growth and mental health to foster healthier, more resilient, and more successful student communities.

Implications of the Study

Overall, the study contributes meaningful evidence to the field of educational and clinical psychology by demonstrating that while mental health may not directly predict academic performance, it remains crucial for students' emotional balance, social functioning, and long-term psychological well-being. The results emphasize the need for universities to address mental-health concerns proactively, not merely for academic improvement but to support students' holistic development. Strengthening counseling services, reducing stigma, promoting well-being programs, and creating supportive learning environments can enhance students' overall quality of life. Furthermore, the gender disparities observed underscore the importance of gender-sensitive mental-health support, ensuring that the unique challenges faced by female students are acknowledged and effectively addressed.

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