



Effect of Psychological Distress on Proactive Coping among University Students in Gilgit Baltistan: Moderating Role of Self-Compassion and Resilience

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to examine the effect of psychological distress on proactive coping with moderating role of self-compassion and resilience among university students of Gilgit-Baltistan. The sample of the study comprised of university students (150 male and 150 female) of Gilgit-Baltistan with age range from 18 to 29 years. The cross sectional design was used. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. Kesslers Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler, 1992), Proactive Coping Scale (Greenglass, Schwarzer, Jakubiec, Fiksenbaum, & Taubert, 1999), Self-Compassion Scale (Short Form) (Neff, 2003) and Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008) were used to measure psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience respectively. Findings showed good reliability of the scales. Regression analysis showed that psychological distress negatively predicts proactive coping. Correlational analysis revealed positive correlation between proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience. Correlational analysis also revealed negative correlation of psychological distress with proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience. Regression analysis also demonstrated that self-compassion and resilience significantly moderates among the relationship of psychological distress and proactive coping. The differences on the basis of demographic variables gender, age, education, relationship status, discipline and socioeconomic status were also evaluated on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience. The t-test analysis found non-significant differences along demographic variables on the study variables except for resilience. Male students scored higher on resilience as compared to female students and on socioeconomic status, middle class socioeconomic students, scored higher on resilience as compared to upper and lower class students.

Keywords: Psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion, resilience



Introduction

Emotionally and mentally, an individual's university years are more stressful than almost any other level of education. A person faces a lot of pressures and challenges at this stage that pose a range of physical, social and emotional challenges. A significant number of studies have centered on researching the existence of common mental health issues among university students, and the results showed that a huge number of university population are experiencing mental health related issues in the world. Over the past decade, college and university counseling facilities have observed a shift in the interests of students accessing counseling care from developmental disabilities to more serious mental health problems (Saleem & Mehmood, 2013). While research suggests that psychological problem is a huge issue for Pakistani university students as well. Previous studies into mental health problems in Pakistani university students revealed a high incidence of mental illness (Bibi et al., 2019). This is for the reason that students are exposed to experience various stressors such as educational difficulties, burden of work, peer pressures, stresses that result due to expectations to succeed from teachers or parents, financial burden and above all an uncertain least predictable upcoming. The time at university for the students can be a tough time in one's life, and pursuing higher education, among its many benefits, can be a frustrating experience (Muzaffar, 2017). A study administered by the American College Health Association (ACHA) in 2018 and 2019 found that around 60 percent of the students experienced "overwhelming" anxiety, whereas, 40 percent encountered severe depression that they faced problems in their daily life functioning. This situation is similar in Youth, particularly the university students of Gilgit-Baltistan, are finding themselves under immense pressure and psychological distress. (Muzaffar, 2017). The problem of mental health issues among Pakistani university students has received limited attention. In light of these findings, the mental health of the younger population of Gilgit-Baltistan deserves our special attention.

Theoretical Basis

For thousands of years, the presence of psychological distress has been known. It is basically a mental pain that interrupts with the everyday functioning (Darby, 2020). According to the Pearlin's principle of psychological distress, all people are in a continual state of transition as a result of the circumstances and stressors that come with them and help them develop. These stressors may include moving out of the home, leaving for university, embarking on a new path, and others. As a result, these stressful situations can ultimately cause psychological distress (Aneshensel & Avison, 2015). Psychological distress, has been related to substantial declines in academic achievement and involvement (Stallman, 2010). According to the theory of self-compassion, self-compassion is a healthy mode of self-acceptance that consists of three bipolar aspects: self-kindness versus self-judgment, common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus identification. Self-compassion assists in the tolerance to stressful feelings that university students face in both their academic and social lives (Neff, 2003). Resilience theory explores the talents, skills, experience, and wisdom that develop over time as individuals continue to conquer adversity and face challenges (Garmezy & Masten, 1994). A student's perceived capacity to overcome stressful events in their life, is characterized here as a resilience. If a student has high levels of resilience, he or she is less likely to experience poor levels of mental health or psychological distress in the future. Resilience has been related to academic achievement at university, and it can also help recognize at-risk students (Agteren et al., 2019). In a



theory of proactive coping according to Greenglass (2002), proactive coping, is multipurpose and forward looking mechanism. Using proactive coping means that the person is goal-oriented, and makes efforts to create general resources to cope with future challenges. It was found that increases in proactive coping are linked to decreases in psychological distress, and it was predictive of well-being to conceptualize a proactive coping as positively oriented target pursuit among university (Cato, 2012).

Literature Review

Evidence from previous literature describes psychological distress as an emerging problem that affects university population globally. In a Pakistani research conducted on various university students has revealed that out of 200 samples 58%, 69% and 40% of students reported mild to severe level of psychological distress. In case of gender differences studies reported female to be higher in psychological distress than male students i.e. in a study it was showed that female students scored higher on stress variables as compared to males (Hamid & Shahrill, 2014). In the same way another study performed in Gilgit Baltistan female to be higher on anxiety and depression (Najam & Hussain, 2015). So these problems implicated the need to address the psychological problems of the students to strengthen their abilities. Therefore, it can be expected that positive psychological traits can theoretically buffer psychological distress (Choi & Lee, 2014). Those university students who are high in psychological wellbeing used more adaptive coping strategies i.e. proactive coping (Frier, Ferradas & Valle, 2016). In a cross-sectional study it was indicated that, the use of effective coping styles helps university students resolve psychological distress, by improving their well-being (Bukhari & Ejaz, 2020). Many studies also reported male to be higher in proactive coping than females i.e. As one study revealed that male students tend to use more problem focused coping (proactive coping) and female students tend to use more emotion focused coping (Amin, Asadullah & Sultan, 2019). Eisenbirth (2019) also reported female students use more emotional and instrumental support and men use more proactive coping in face of adversity. As positive psychological trait self-compassion also seems meaningful psychological wellbeing indicator (Tavares et al., 2020). In a meta-analysis discovered that increased levels of self-compassion were related to reduce levels of psychological distress among teenagers (Marsh, Chan & MacBeth, 2018). In case of gender differences studies found that males have a higher degree of self-compassion than females (Yarnell et al., 2015). Ilyas and Aslam (2018) also reported that male students to be having greater self-compassion as compared to female students. In Positive Psychology, resilience has been also considered a component that protects against stress as a personal trait (Hernandez et al., 2019). Resilience, along with better mental health and adjusting to university life, is correlated with good social and personal well-being. One study found that high-resilient university students demonstrated lower levels of psychological distress (Mcgillivray & Pidgeon, 2015).

In case of gender based disparities male are reported to be higher than female's e.g. a study revealed that male students are having more resilience than female students in the face of hardships (Thabet, Elheloud & Vostanisc, 2015). Sharif and Akhtar (2018) also suggested that male adolescence are higher at resilience than female adolescence. Self-compassion is considered to be mechanism of resilience. One research on college students revealed that self-compassion intervention improves students' resilience and wellbeing (Smeets, Neff, Alberts & Peters, 2014). In prior research self-compassion and resilience have been shown to defend against depression and to enhance resilience of students (Olson,



Kemper, & Mahan, 2015). It is also fair to believe that self-compassion is in many respects associated with coping actions (Ewert, Vater & Schroder 2021). In a study it was revealed that after failing an exam, self-compassion was related to an underlying engagement in learning more proactive coping among students (Neff, Rude & Kirkpatrick, 2013). Research on undergraduate students has shown that people with a high self-compassion cope proactively with tough times (Abbondandolo & Sigal, 2018). In a study on university students, it was found that there was a strong link between resilience and proactive coping (Amin, Asadullah, & Sultan, 2019). Proactive individuals appear to be internal locus of control-oriented that are highly efficient in resilience. In this regard, proactive individuals are supposed to demonstrate resilience in different facets of their lives (Oğuz & Sariçam, 2015). The results of one study showed that proactive coping is likely to be followed with highly resilient university students (Sagone & Caroli, 2014).

Rationale

During the last three to four decades, the Gilgit region, a remote mountainous area in northern Pakistan, has seen a remarkable rate of transformation in its social and economic environment. Aside from positive developments, this transition has brought with it a slew of new social problems. Students of this region are one of the segments who have experienced the impact of this rapid change in social-economic as well as academic landscape. There are many everyday issues in the lives of students of this region, such as academic challenges, parents and teacher expectations and social problems (Muzaffar, 2017). Among other significant stresses faced by university students are sustained denial of civil and political rights, falling short of satisfying educational system, injustice on educational basis, the academic pressure coupled with witnessing of economic discrimination between people, constitutional ambiguity, economic pressures, perspective of sectarianism and post COVID scenario. All these stressors manifests into complex psychological issues amongst the university students in Gilgit-Baltistan by making them unable to cope with the modern world (Ali & Akhunzada, 2015). Student stress is recognized as a danger that should be addressed in a constructive manner by ensuring adequate services to students. Or else, it may have disastrous consequences for university progress (Khan et al., 2017). In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan very few studies had been conducted regarding to facilitate the positive mental health of students in dealing with their variety of issues effectively. It is so far an ignorant part of study in Gilgit-Baltistan which needs to be addressed. It is crucial to properly understand the psychological distress among the population of university students. By recognizing a significant research gap in this way, the present quantitative study was endeavored to explore the effect of psychological distress on proactive coping with moderating role of self-compassion and resilience among university students in Gilgit-Baltistan. Further the study was intended to find the differences among variables on the basis of demographic i.e. gender.

Objectives

The following are the objectives of the study:

- To examine the relationship between psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience among university students.
- To study the effect of psychological distress on proactive coping among university students.
- To explore the role of self-compassion and resilience as moderator between psychological distress and proactive coping among university students.



- To investigate differences on the basis of demographic variables like gender, age, education, socioeconomic status, relationship status and discipline on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience among university students.

Hypotheses

The following are the objectives of the study:

- Psychological distress will be negatively correlated with proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience among university students.
- There will be positive correlation between self-compassion, proactive coping and resilience among university students.
- Psychological distress will predict proactive coping among university students.
- Self-compassion will work as moderator between psychological distress and proactive coping among university students.
- Resilience will work as moderator between psychological distress and proactive coping among university students.
- Male students will have more proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience than female students.
- Female students will have more psychological distress than male students.

Conceptual Framework

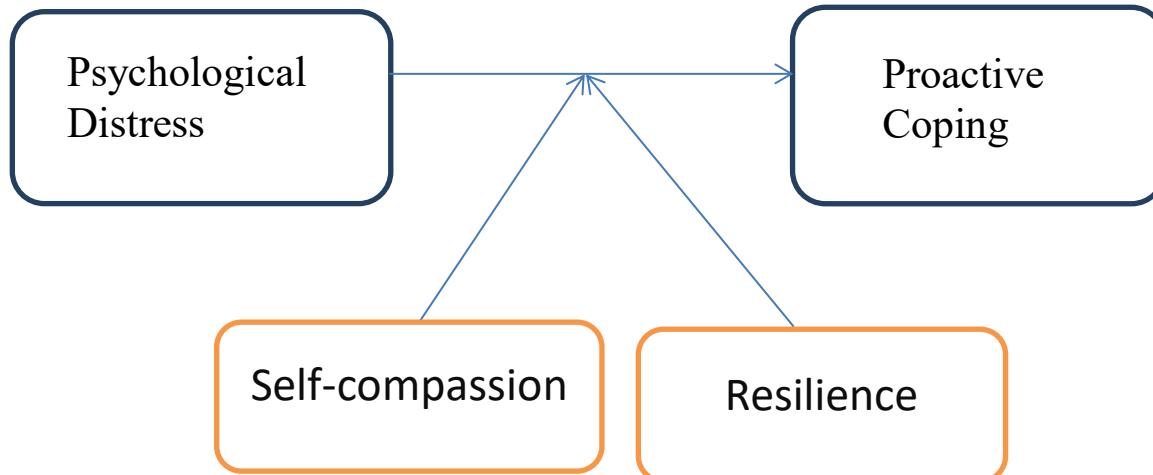


Figure 1: Correlational Model

Method

Sample/Participants

The researcher has used Cross sectional design. The purposive sampling technique was used. The sample of 300 (n=150 males, n=150 females) with age range from 18 to 29 years, studying in BS and Masters and who scored high (above 20) as it is the range from where the psychological distress starts, on Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler, 1992) were included. Those participants were excluded who were below 18 years old and having lower scores (below 20) on Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler, 1992).

Operational Definitions

Psychological distress: According to Mirowsky and Ross (2002) psychological distress is defined as a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety that threatens the physical and mental health of a person (Lerutla, 2000).



Proactive Coping. Proactive coping is defined as a set of efforts aimed at building up general resources that facilitate the achievement of challenging goals and promote personal growth (Greenglass, 2002).

Self-compassion. According to Neff (2019) self-compassion is a type of coping mechanism that allows one to see their own experience as part of the common human experience, acknowledging that failure, suffering, and inadequacies are part of the human condition. (Neff, 2003).

Resilience. Resilience is the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful (Walsh, 2015).

Instruments

Following instruments were used for measuring the variables.

Demographic Sheet. Demographic information form was developed by researcher to collect information about participants' gender, age, relationship status, department, education and socioeconomic status.

Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale. Kessler's psychological distress scale was developed by Kessler (1992). It contains 10 items. The scale indicates Cronbach's alpha .88. Scale scores ranges from 10 to 50 (Kessler & Barker, 2003).

Proactive Coping Scale. The Proactive Coping Scale was developed by Greenglass, Schwarzer, Jakubiec, Fiksenbaum, & Taubert (1999). It consists of 14 items. The scale indicates Cronbach's alpha in two samples was .71 and .85. The scale score ranges from 14 to 56 (Stanojević, 2014).

Self-Compassion Scale-Short form. Self-Compassion Scale was developed by Neff (2003). The short form of the Self-Compassion Scale contains 12 items. The scale indicates Cronbach's alpha $\geq .86$. Scale scores ranges from 1 to 5.0 (Neff & Tóth-Király, 2020).

Brief Resilience Scale. The Brief Resilience Scale was developed by Smith et al. (2008). The scale consists of six items. The scale indicate Cronbach's alpha from .80 - .91. Scale scores ranges from 1.00 to 5.00 (Kyriazos et al., 2018).

Procedure

The researcher addressed university students with the consent of the relevant authorities. Following a short introduction to the study, respondents and officials gave their informed consent. After that the demographic information sheet, Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler, 1992), Proactive Coping Scale (Greenglass, Schwarzer, Jakubiec, Fiksenbaum, & Taubert, 1999) Self-Compassion Scale (Short Form) (Neff, 2003) and Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008) were applied at a time on 400 (18 to 29 years old) university students. Furthermore, participants were asked to be honest in their responses. After that 300 (150 male and 150 female) those university student were screened out to include in sample for present study who scored high (above 20) on Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler, 1992). SPSS version 21 was used to assess the outcomes.

Results

Table 3: Correlation of Psychological Distress, Proactive Coping, Self-Compassion and Resilience Among University Students (N=300)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1 Psychological Distress	-	-.30**	-.22**	-.15**
2 Proactive coping	-	-	.28**	.15**
3 Self-compassion	-	-	-	.11*
4 Resilience	-	-	-	-



Note. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows correlation matrix for all the study variables. Results revealed that psychological distress has significant negative correlation with proactive coping ($r = -.30$, $p < .01$), self-compassion ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$) and resilience ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$). Proactive coping has significant positive correlation with self-compassion ($r = .28$, $p < .01$) and resilience ($r = .15$, $p < .01$). Self-compassion has significant positive correlation with resilience ($r = .11$, $p < .05$).

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression Showing Psychological Distress as Predictor of Proactive Coping Among University Students (N = 300)

Variable	B	SEB	β	T	P
Constant	49.26	1.87		26.30	.00
Psychological distress	-.34	.06	-.30	5.41	.00

Note. $R = .31$, $R^2 = .09$

Table 4 shows the impact of psychological distress on proactive coping among university students. The R^2 value of .09 revealed that the predictor variable explained 9% variance in the outcome variable with $F (1, 298) = 29.60$, $p < .01$. The findings revealed that psychological distress negatively predicted proactive coping ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .01$).

Table 5: Moderating Effect of Self-Compassion on Psychological Distress and Proactive Coping Among University Students (N=300)

Predictors	Proactive coping					
	B	B	SEB	t	p	95% CI
Constant	39.23	39.28	.32	120.43	.00	38.63 - 39.87
Psychological distress	-.1.74	-.1.63	.33	4.93	.00	-.2.29 - -.98
Self-compassion	1.32	1.32	.33		.00	.67 - 1.97
				4.00		
Psychological distress × Self compassion		.45	.21	2.08	.03	.02 - .88
R^2	.09	.10			.03	
F	15.43	11.85			.00	
ΔR^2		.02			.03	
ΔF		4.24			.03	

Table 5 shows the moderating effect of self-compassion in relationship between psychological distress and proactive coping. The interaction effect of psychological distress and self-compassion has significant moderation effect along with explaining 9% to 10% variance in relationship with proactive coping ($B = .45$, $p < .05$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$).



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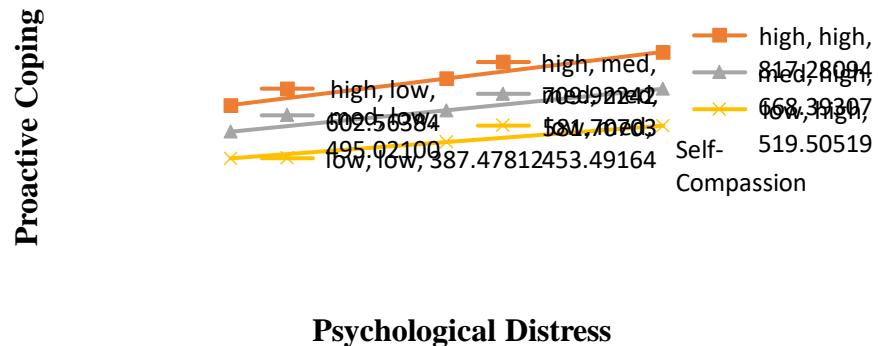


Figure 2. Moderating effect of Self-Compassion in relationship between Psychological Distress and Proactive Coping among university students.

Table 6: Moderating Effect of Resilience on Psychological Distress and Proactive Coping Among University Students(N=300)

Predictors	Proactive coping					
	B	B	SEB	T	p	95% CI
Constant	39.23	39.25	.33	121.89	.00	38.61 - 39.88
Psychological distress	-1.77	-1.65	.33	5.08	.00	-2.29 - -1.01
Resilience	.66	.65	.33	1.96	.04	.00 - 1.30
Psychological distress x Resilience		1.09	.33	3.30	.00	1.74 - .44
R ²		.09	.12		.00	
F		15.34	14.20		.00	
ΔR ²			.03		.00	
ΔF			0.90		.00	

Table 6 shows the moderating effect of resilience in relationship between psychological distress and proactive coping. The interaction effect of psychological distress and resilience has significant moderation effect along with explaining 9% to 12% variance in relationship with proactive coping ($B = 1.09$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .03$).

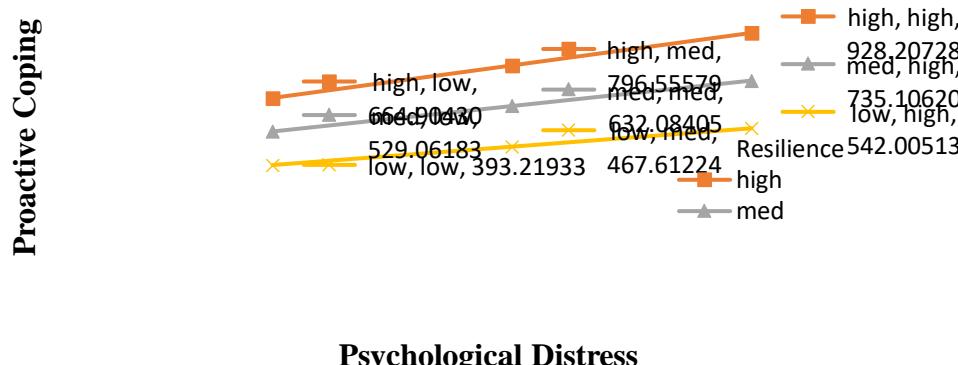


Figure 3. Moderating effect of Resilience in relationship between Psychological Distress and Proactive Coping among university students.



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Table 7: Mean, Standard Deviations and t-values Along Gender on Psychological Distress, Proactive Coping, Self-Compassion and Resilience Among University Students (N = 300)

Variables	Male		Female		<i>t</i> (298)	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>	
	<i>n</i> = 150	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i> = 150	<i>M</i>					
Psychological Distress	28.34	5.22	29.18	4.97	1.42	.15	-2.00	.32	0.28
Proactive Coping	39.45		39.01	5.88	.65	.52	-.90	1.78	0.07
Self-Compassion	5.99		36.80	5.53	1.05	.29	-.57	1.87	0.12
Resilience	37.46	5.24	17.12	3.01	2.40	.01	.15	1.53	0.27
	17.97	3.07							

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit.

Table 7 shows the differences between male and female university students on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience. Findings revealed non-significant mean differences between male and female students on psychological distress, proactive coping and self-compassion. Whereas, there were significant difference between male and female students on resilience with $t(298) = 2.40$, $p = .01$. The mean column shows that male students scored higher on resilience with ($M = 17.97$, $SD = 3.07$) than female students ($M = 17.12$, $SD = 3.01$).

Table 8: Mean, Standard Deviations and t-values Along Age on Psychological Distress, Proactive Coping, Self-Compassion and Resilience Among University Students (N = 300)

Variables	18 yrs. to 23 yrs.		24 yrs. to 29 yrs.		<i>t</i> (298)	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>	
	<i>n</i> = 155	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i> = 145	<i>M</i>					
Psychological Distress	28.83	5.17	28.68		.25	.80	-1.01	1.31	0.02
Proactive Coping	39.10	5.80			.37	.71	-	1.09	0.04
Self-Compassion	37.30	5.15	39.36		.56	.57	1.60	1.57	0.06
Resilience	17.71	3.09	6.08		.97	.33	-.87	1.04	0.11
			36.95						
			5.64						
			17.37						
			3.04						

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit.

Table 8 shows non-significant mean differences between age groups of students on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience.



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Table 9: Mean, Standard Deviations and t-values Along Education on Psychological Distress, Proactive Coping, Self-Compassion and Resilience Among University Students (N = 300)

Variables	BS		Masters		t(298)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d			
	(n = 154)		(n = 146)									
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL				
Psychological Distress	28.75	5.16	28.78	5.07	.04	.96	-1.19	1.13	0.00			
Proactive Coping	39.77	5.60	38.65	6.22	1.64	.10	-.22	2.46	0.18			
Self-Compassion	37.50	5.11	36.73	5.65	1.23	.21	-.45	1.99	0.14			
Resilience	17.69	2.96	17.39	3.17	.83	.40	-.40	.99	0.09			

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit.

Table 9 shows non-significant mean differences between Masters and BS students on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience.

Table 10: Mean, Standard Deviations and t-values Along Relationship Status on Psychological Distress, Proactive Coping, Self-Compassion and Resilience Among University Students (N = 300)

Variables	Married (n = 136)		Unmarried (n = 164)		t(298)	P	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Psychological Distress	28.56	5.64	28.93	4.63	-.60	.54	-	.82	0.07
Proactive Coping	39.09	5.86	39.34	6.00	.36	.71	1.55	1.10	0.04
Self-Compassion	36.94	5.54	37.28	5.27	.53	.59	-	.90	0.06
Resilience	17.53	3.11	17.56	3.03	.06		1.60	.67	0.00
					.94		1.57		
							-		
							.72		

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit.

Table 10 shows non-significant mean difference between married and unmarried university students on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience.

Table 11: Mean, Standard Deviations and F-value along Disciplines on Psychological Distress, Proactive Coping, Self-Compassion and Resilience Among University Students (N = 300)

Variables	Life sciences	Social sciences	Art humanities	& Natural sciences	F	p	η^2	Post hoc
	n=(75)	n=(109)	n= (56)	n= (60)				
	M	M	M	M	SD	SD	SD	SD
Psychological distress	284.2	29.00	29.37	5.92	28.05	.78	.50	0.00
	6.53	5.01			5.46			1<2<3<4



Proactive coping	38.85 5.72	39.33 5.83	39.37 6.01	6.29 5.46	39.40 5.34	.13. .84	.93 .46	0.00 0.00	1<2<3<4 1<2<3<4
Self-compassion	36.69 4.80	36.90 5.46	37.14 5.34	6.01 5.34	38.08 5.34	.84 .46	.46 .00	0.00 0.00	1<2<3<4 1<2<3<4
Resilience	17.00 3.07	17.65 2.89	18.17 3.24	3.13 3.24	17.46 3.24	1.65 .17	.17 .01	0.01 0.01	1<2<3>4 1<2<3>4

Table 11 shows non-significant differences across discipline among university students on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience.

Table 12: Mean, Standard Deviations and F-value Along Socioeconomic Status on Psychological Distress, Proactive Coping, Self-Compassion and Resilience Among University Students (N = 300)

Variables	Lower class		Middle class		Upper class		F	p	η^2	Post hoc
	n=(135)	M	n=(98)	M	SD	SD				
Psychological distress	28.41	4.99	28.39 5.00	30.01 6.02	5.38 6.42	2.59 .93	.07	0.01	1>2<3	
Proactive coping	39.50	5.61	39.45 5.93	38.35 36.52	6.42 5.21	.39 .65	.39	0.00	1>2>3	
Self-compassion	37.44	5.06	37.12 5.93	36.52 17.47	5.21 2.85	.52 3.11	.00	0.00	1>2>3	
Resilience	17.14	3.13	18.15 3.05	17.47 3.05	2.85 3.05	.04	.02	0.02	1<2>3	

Table 12 shows differences among lower class, middle class and upper class socioeconomic status university students on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience. Results revealed non-significant differences across socioeconomic status among university students on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion whereas, there was significant difference on resilience with $F(2, 297) = 3.11, p < .05$. The mean column shows that middle class socioeconomic students have greater resilience with ($M = 18.15, SD = 3.05$) than lower class and upper class socioeconomic students. The upper class socioeconomic students have high resilience with ($M = 17.47, SD = 2.85$) than lower class socioeconomic students and have low resilience than middle class socioeconomic students. Lower class socioeconomic students have lower resilience with ($M = 17.14, SD = 3.13$) than middle class and upper class socioeconomic students.

Discussion

The present research was design to explore the effect of psychological distress on proactive coping with moderating role of self-compassion and resilience among university students. The differences among university students on demographic variables were also examined. For this purpose the data was collected from the universities students in Gilgit Baltistan within age range of 18 years to 29 years old. The scales had satisfactory internal consistencies and the data was normally distributed as indicated by skewness and kurtosis values. The first hypothesis of the study that was made on the basis of literature was that psychological distress will be negatively correlated with proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience. The findings of the current study supported the first hypothesis by revealing



that there is significant negative correlation of variables with psychological distress. This outcome is consistent with findings of prior researches i.e as one research conducted on Lahore university students also found a negative association between psychological distress with proactive and preventive coping mechanisms (Mughal, Mughal, Mughal & Farah, 2019). In the university setting, multiple findings have shown that students who are more versatile in their proactive coping exhibit lower susceptibility to psychological distress (Freire et al., 2018). The increased level of self-compassion are associated with better mental health effects (Westphal et al. 2016). A research, found that Mindfulness and self-compassion have a strong inverse association with psychological distress. Furthermore, self-compassion has been shown to be a good predictor of symptoms of depression in university students (Sibghat-ullah & Batool, 2018). A study on Pakistani university students discovered that resilience would help students mitigate sources of stress, and less susceptible to psychological distress (Zahra & Riaz, 2017). In a survey of undergraduate psychology students, the significant negative association among resilience and psychological distress was shown (Cheng & Catling, 2015).

The second hypothesis of the present research was that there will be positive correlation between self-compassion, proactive coping and resilience among university students that was made in accordance with the existing literature. The outcome of the present study supported the second hypothesis which is in concurrence with the prior studies i.e. A statistical analysis of a study revealed strong positive association between self-compassion and resilience (Shebuski, Bowie & Ashby, 2020). Another study also revealed Self-compassion to be strongly correlated with resilience (Sabir, Ramzan & Malik, 2018). On undergraduate students, one study found self-compassion and proactive coping to have significant positive correlation (Abbondandolo & Sigal, 2018). In a survey of university students, it was also discovered that effective self-compassion approaches would improve academic success by increasing proactive coping (Egan, Hara, Cook & Mantzios, 2021). A cross-sectional study of undergraduate students revealed that increased level of resilience is linked to a more proactive coping approach (Wu et al., 2020). Mara and Greenglass (2017) also discovered a positive connection between resilience and proactive coping.

The third hypothesis of the present study was that psychological distress predicts proactive coping which was created on the basis of literature. The outcome of the present study supported the third hypothesis, which confirms with the previous studies i.e. in a study conducted on Pakistani university students, it was discovered that learning how to proactively deal with stress lowered educational stress in the experimental population (Zarei, Hashemi, Sadipoor, Delavar & Khoshnevisan, 2016). Pascoe, Hetrick and Parker (2020) have conducted the analysis on school and higher education students and indicated that Students' psychological distress could be decreased by providing proactive coping mechanisms.

The outcome of the current study also supported the fourth hypothesis that self-compassion plays as a moderator between the relationship of psychological distress and proactive coping. Akin (2014) suggested that Self-compassion is linked to how a person views himself as well as the ability to deal successfully with stressful life experiences. As a result, proactively coping with difficult situations can be profoundly affected by self-compassion. A study found that self-compassion projected proactive coping and decreased depressive suffering in a positive way among university students (Akin, 2014). Another



study revealed that self-compassion relationship to proactive coping strategies help to maintain positive future goals and is often related to excitement and hope (Shaheen, Bibi & Karim, 2020).

The findings of the present research supported the fifth hypothesis that resilience plays as a moderator between the relationship of psychological distress and proactive coping. As resilience seems to moderate the association between psychological distress and psychological well-being (Zubair, 2018). According to one study conducted among adults, resilience act as a moderator in the interaction between proactive coping and anxiety (Li & Miller, 2016). Naseem and Munaf, (2020) suggested that resilience improves a person's ability to cope in a proactive manner with adversity. Singh (2021) argued in the study conducted on international students that resilient students can respond to problems proactively, and this has a positive impact on their academic performance.

The sixth hypothesis of the present study was that male students will have more proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience than female students. The outcome of the current study didn't support the sixth hypothesis except for resilience. There were non-significant gender differences on proactive coping and self-compassion whereas, there was significant gender difference on resilience were found. The reason behind the non-significant gender differences may be that in Gilgit Baltistan better literacy rate seems to lead to encouragement by parents to both genders equally. Therefore, this may make females stronger to overcome their daily life hurdles. The research findings also reported no major gender gap in proactive coping (Basharat, Zubair & Mujeeb, 2014). Another research also found non-significant gender disparities in proactive coping among university students (Bukhari & Ejaz, 2020). A research looked at gender variations in self-compassion within Malaysian university student also found no major differences (Chang & Pua, 2019). Sibghat and Batool (2018) also found no gender discrepancies in self-compassion among university students. Whereas, in case of resilience Drolet and colleagues (2015) argue in their findings that limiting and overloading females with commitments and stringent demands raises their susceptibility to stressors and renders them to be less resilient as compared to males in Pakistani culture. Over all the researchers discovered that the Pakistani socio-cultural tradition of placing a high value on boys contributes significantly to their resilience (Malik & Afzal 2015). A study also revealed that male students displayed greater resilience and subjective well-being than female university students (Abbasi & Zubair, 2015).

The seventh hypothesis of the current study which was that female students will have more psychological distress than male students. The present research outcome didn't support the hypotheses. One possible explanation for non-significant gender differences on psychological distress may be that although personal factors may vary between the genders, yet the perception of academic and environmental stress among male and female students remains the same. In the context of Gilgit Baltistan their academic commitments, lack of time management skills due to their involvement in joint family affairs and financial pressures and the negative effects of current pandemic, lack of electricity for hours and lack of internet access has common negative effects on both genders. Siddiqui, Jahangir and Hassan (2019) suggested that both male and female students suffer from to psychological distress problems in similar amounts throughout academic life. Similarly, another study also discovered non-significant variations in gender on psychological distress among students (Farhan& Khan, 2015). The mean differences across age, relationship



status, discipline, education and socio-economic status on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience among university students were also explored. The current study outcome revealed non-significant differences across all these demographic variables on study variables among university students. Whereas the significant differences along economic status on resilience were revealed in the present study. Findings indicated that middle class socioeconomic students are more resilient than lower class and upper class socioeconomic students. Also the upper class socioeconomic students are more resilient than lower class and less resilient than middle class socioeconomic students and the lower class socioeconomic students are less resilient than both middle and upper class socioeconomic students. One possible explanation for non-significant differences along age groups on study variables may be that as university students are at the stage of maturity and are therefore considered as responsible and generally more practical and self-directed. They are mature enough to take the responsibility of their own learning and decisions regarding their career and life goals. Therefore, these study variables were not affected by age group. In case of relationship status the student is married or unmarried they both have common goals regarding their education and career. They face common challenges such as to pressure of time, workloads, stress and other academic responsibilities with accompanying psychological issues. So the study variables were not affected by relationship status. As for non-significant differences along disciplines on study variables it may be the reason that students perceive their curriculum significantly harder as compare to other and they have to prepare themselves for more hard work to emerge successfully with their university studies. So they all have to face same amount of pressure and difficulties regarding their studies as well as other social problems. So the study variables were not affected by groups of discipline. As non-significant differences were also observed along education on study variables. The reason for this may be because as Masters and BS students both are enrolled in higher education. As university life is more academically challenging than college and school which requires more effort. The demands of education are virtually inexhaustible for both Masters and BS students which contribute to mental health problems. Therefore, the education didn't affect the study variable. As for socioeconomic status the results revealed non-significant differences on study variables along socioeconomic status except for resilience. The reason behind this may be that as lower socioeconomic students faced daily with overwhelming challenges. As they lack in social skills require for overcoming daily life issues. Due to which they face emotional and social instability. Therefore, they may be less resilient. On the other hand upper socioeconomic students enjoy more resources. That provides access to influential people and ideas. So they don't have to struggle much in life due to which they may not be less resilient. As the present study proved socioeconomic class students scored higher on resilience as compared to lower and upper class. The results are in consistent with existing literature i.e. one study revealed that students from low and high socioeconomic class were less resilient than middle class students (Cocorada, Farcas & Orzea, 2019). In the same way one study revealed that middle class students were more resilient than lower and higher socioeconomic status students (Macintosh & Shaw, 2017).

Limitations and Suggestions

There are some limitations of the present study which need to be addressed. The present study is a correlational which shows limited capacity for cause and effect relationship of variables under study. So which should be explored in future studies. Another limitation of



the current study is that data is collected only from some campuses of Karakoram International University. In future study data should be collected from other areas campuses also for enhancing results generalizability. In order to increase the validity of the study outcomes it is suggested not to collect data only through measures but also to take an interview of sample of the study.

Implications

As university students are facing stress at personal, social and academic level, which have detrimental effects on their mental health. So the present study was conducted to address the mental health issues among university students. The findings of the present study will provide an insight in the field of positive psychology to facilitate the students with constructive ways of coping with their mental health problems. In the field of education this research will contribute towards further study about the potential sources of stress that negatively influence the performance and the health of university students. This research would be useful to improve students' academic performance and social functioning that potentially affect their future career opportunities. Thus, this research has also brought out convincing evidence to persuade the universities to consider introducing counseling services and facilitate the students with mental health professionals at the campus.

Conclusion

Finally, the findings of the present study prove that most of the university students of Gilgit Baltistan are suffering from psychological distress. Both male and female are suffering from mental stress with same intensity. Further study highlighted the existence of correlation among the study variables. The outcomes revealed how psychological distress negatively affects the positive psychological resources i.e. proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience. Additionally proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience are found to be positively associated with each other. Further the findings of present study also demonstrated the moderating role of self-compassion and resilience. The findings illustrated that those students who are high in self-compassion and resilience proactively cope with stressful situations and are less likely to suffer from psychological distress. Lastly non-significant differences were found on all demographic variables except for resilience on gender. Outcomes of the present study highlighted gender differences in resilience by showing male higher in resilience as compared to females. Further non-significant differences along demographic variables i.e. age, relationship status, discipline, education and socio economic status on psychological distress, proactive coping, self-compassion and resilience among university students were found. The significant differences on resilience along socioeconomic status was revealed by present study by indicating that that students belonging to middle class family are more resilient than students belonging to lower and upper class families.

Overall the findings suggest that for higher education students, university life is by far the most stressful and insecure period in their lives. It brings new life challenging experiences. They also have to face personal issues and family as well as social demands. So all these problems may have influential negative effects on student's mental health which in turn effects their social and academic functioning. In this case the positive psychological resources can help to mitigate the mental health issues among the university students. Therefore, the universities need to explore the stressors among the students so that they can facilitate their students with possible resourceful methods to deal with their mental stress by providing them mental health professionals and counseling at their universities.

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