

Psycho-Social Challenges of Hostel Inmate Female Students and their Coping Strategies in Higher Education

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Abstract

The present study aimed to study the psycho-social challenges of hostel inmate's students while undertaking higher studies and how they cope with it. The study focused to know the effect of hostel life on student's mental health, social relationships, and academic performance. The study discloses that student in hostel are most vulnerable to psychosocial stressors such as homesickness, loneliness, and stress, which affect their academic performance as well as their mental well-being. Students use various coping mechanisms such as seeking social support and engaging in extracurricular activities, and stress-reducing activities as disclosed by the study to cope with their psychosocial problems. Students using effective coping mechanisms, as disclosed by the findings, are better academically and mentally. Correlation and regression analysis was used to identify the relationship between psychosocial challenges and coping strategies. The relationship between the variables was found to be significant, as disclosed in the results section. The study findings can be utilized to formulate suitable support services and resources which assist hostel inmate's students in coping up with psychosocial problems and achieving academic success.

Keywords: Psychosocial Challenges, Hostel Inmates, Coping Strategies, Higher Education, Mental Health, Academic Performance.

Introduction

Living in hostels is an important but challenging phase for female students pursuing higher education. While it offers independence and opportunities for growth, it also brings several psychosocial challenges that can affect learning, emotions, and social life (Akmal et al., 2023). These challenges include mental health issues and difficulties in adjusting to new social environments, often leading to anxiety, loneliness, financial stress, and isolation.

Hostel life can be particularly stressful. Female students often face pressure from academics, adapting to unfamiliar environments, and maintaining social balance. Many feel the strain of competition, homesickness, and the need to juggle academics with personal life, which impacts their overall well-being (Shrestha et al., 2023).

Homesickness and loneliness are especially common among female students from rural areas or highly supportive families. These students may feel sad and isolated, withdrawing from social activities. Prolonged isolation can lead to depression and poor academic performance, highlighting the importance of building friendships and emotional resilience (Ishaq et al., 2017).

Lack of social support is another major concern. Support from teachers, peers, and family plays a vital role in maintaining emotional balance and academic focus. Many students struggle to form

close friendships, leading to increased loneliness and disengagement from studies. Building strong social support systems helps students cope better with stress (Igbal et al., 2024).

The hostel environment itself can affect students' mental health. Issues like poor hygiene, strict rules, unhealthy food, and bad habits contribute to stress and adjustment difficulties. Cultural differences among students can also cause misunderstandings, conflicts, and feelings of alienation (Memon et al., 2023).

Financial challenges are significant, especially for students from underprivileged backgrounds. High hostel fees, food costs, and educational expenses often lead to stress, force students into part-time jobs, and distract them from studies. Students facing financial issues are more likely to suffer from mental health problems and have lower academic commitment. Financial aid and training in money management are essential in such cases (Norazlan et al., 2020).

One effective coping strategy is social engagement. Forming supportive friendships and participating in extracurricular activities help reduce loneliness and boost emotional and academic adjustment. Students with good peer support tend to manage stress better and perform well academically (Shrestha et al., 2023).

Time management is another key tool. Students who can organize their time efficiently are better able to balance academics, hostel life, and personal tasks, leading to less stress and better performance (Raju, 2009). Self-management strategies such as mindfulness and emotional regulation also play a significant role. These help students manage emotions, lower anxiety, and maintain mental wellness (Zheng, 2016).

Shared living arrangements in hostels often lead to conflicts due to differences in lifestyles and personalities. However, students with good conflict-resolution skills are better equipped to maintain peaceful relationships and reduce stress (Nourafkan et al., 2020).

Financial stress can also be managed through budgeting skills. Students who know how to prioritize their spending can reduce anxiety and focus better on studies (Norvilitis & MacLean, 2010). Overall, students use a variety of coping methods such as communication, time management, conflict resolution, and financial planning to reduce stress and improve academic and emotional outcomes (Labrague et al., 2019).

Adjustment issues like homesickness and social isolation are widespread and significantly impact academic performance and mental health. Hostel students often report higher stress levels than those living at home (Kaur & Singh, 2019). Research shows that effective coping strategies like engaging with friends and managing time lead to better mental health and academic success (Sharma & Kumar, 2018).

Female hostel students often face emotional challenges due to lack of companionship or difficulty building supportive relationships. These feelings of loneliness can lead to helplessness and poor academic performance (Raju, 2009). Financial problems further increase anxiety, especially for students from poor families. Rising costs of living, accommodation, and tuition can force them to work part-time, disrupting their focus on studies (Igbal et al., 2024).

Time management is crucial in reducing the stress of balancing academic and personal life. However, many hostel students lack guidance on managing time effectively, which can lead to procrastination and increased stress (Misra & McKean, 2000). Conflicts among roommates from different cultural backgrounds are also common and can affect students' emotional stability (Idress & Malik, 2022).

Conflict resolution skills are essential in maintaining harmony in shared spaces. Universities should promote these skills to create a peaceful and supportive hostel environment. Moreover, social support—whether from peers, teachers, or families—helps students develop emotional strength and manage stress more effectively (Yin, 2014).

Students who feel supported emotionally tend to perform better academically and socially. Building a hostel environment that promotes interaction and support is critical to enhancing students' overall well-being (Sanyal et al., 2016). Emotional resilience is especially important.

Students who develop emotional strength can recover from setbacks and manage hostel life more effectively. Support services, mindfulness programs, and peer groups can help build this resilience (Hassan et al., 2017).

Hostels with poor infrastructure, unclean environments, and rigid rules can harm students' mental health. Improvements in hostel conditions can enhance students' academic performance and emotional well-being (Nwadi et al., 2023). Cultural misunderstandings or roommate conflicts can lead to social isolation and stress. Programs that promote cultural awareness and respect are essential in building better interpersonal relationships (Akmal et al., 2023).

Review of Literature

Female students living in hostels often experience a range of psychosocial problems like homesickness, loneliness, academic pressure, and difficulty adjusting to new environments. Being away from family leads many to feel isolated, which can increase anxiety and emotional distress, negatively affecting their academic performance (Yousfani et al., 2024).

Hostel life brings additional challenges such as peer pressure, body image concerns, relationship issues, and bullying. These stressors cause emotional strain and may worsen if not addressed properly. Female students who use positive coping methods— like visiting counselors, seeking support from friends, or managing their time well— tend to do better emotionally and academically than those who avoid problems or turn to harmful habits like substance use (Igbal et al., 2024; Bibi et al., 2024).

Interpersonal conflicts, especially with roommates from different cultures or backgrounds, also create stress. Students who learn to handle these conflicts constructively experience less anxiety and perform better academically (Patel & Jones, 2021). Cultural differences play a significant role: students from collectivist cultures often find comfort and reduce stress through social support networks, while those from individualistic cultures tend to isolate themselves, leading to more stress and difficulties (Sahranavard et al., 2019; Tan & Wong, 2022).

Hostel students often struggle with managing their time effectively, balancing academic work, personal tasks, and social life. Poor time management increases stress and leads to lower academic achievement, especially for female students juggling multiple responsibilities. Universities are encouraged to offer workshops and counseling to help students improve these skills (Rasool et al., 2022; Shrestha et al., 2023).

Effective coping is key for female hostel students to manage academic and emotional stress. Two broad types of coping strategies are used: problem-focused (such as planning and seeking help) and emotion-focused (like seeking social support or mindfulness). Research shows that students who use problem-focused strategies tend to have better academic results, while those using emotion-focused strategies improve their emotional well-being (Bibi et al., 2024; Shruthers et al., 2000).

Emotional intelligence also influences coping. Students with higher emotional intelligence manage their feelings better and adopt healthier coping strategies, reducing stress and improving academic outcomes (Idress & Malik, 2022; Ashraf, 2024). Social support from family, friends, and hostel staff plays a vital role. Female students who maintain regular contact with family or build strong peer networks cope better with hostel life pressures and loneliness (Ihegihi et al., 2024; Okoye, 2010). Hostel staff who provide emotional support and organize social activities help create a supportive environment that improves students' mental health and academic success (Akmal et al., 2023; McMordie, 2021).

Mindfulness techniques such as meditation and breathing exercises have proven helpful in reducing stress and anxiety, improving emotional control, and building long-term resilience (Robinson & Lee, 2021).

Financial difficulties related to hostel accommodations add another layer of stress, affecting students' psychological well-being and academic focus. Those who struggle financially may need to work, reducing study time and worsening academic performance (Musa, 2021).

To address conflicts, students benefit from learning conflict management and communication skills, which reduce stress and improve hostel life experience (Sasaki & Yamasaki, 2007).

Lastly, cultural adjustment is a major issue for female students from different regions. Lack of respect and understanding between diverse cultural groups often leads to conflicts and loneliness. Promoting cultural respect and social interaction programs can ease this adjustment and reduce stress (Kinnaird et al., 2023).

Students employ various coping strategies to manage stress, categorized into problem focused (e.g., time management, academic planning) and emotion-focused (e.g., seeking support, physical activity) approaches. Both types contribute to reduced stress and better academic or emotional outcomes (Shruthers et al., 2000). Emotional intelligence enhances the effectiveness of coping, with emotionally intelligent students more likely to use adaptive methods like social interaction and relaxation (Ashraf, 2024). Social support from peers, family, and colleagues also plays a key role in stress management and improves emotional resilience (Pontes et al., 2024).

Research Methodology

This section provides detailed information about the methods and approaches the researcher used to collect and organize data for the study. It explains the overall design of the study, how the participants were selected through sampling, and the specific techniques and tools used for gathering information. Additionally, it covers important steps such as pretesting, the process of data collection, and how the data was analyzed. The study was carried out at the University of Gujrat and aimed to explore the psychosocial challenges experienced by female students living in hostels, as well as the different coping strategies they use to deal with these challenges.

Data Analysis

This was used to interpret the statistical results of the general information about the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, psychosocial challenges they faced and coping strategies that they applied.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents (N=270).

Variables	Categories	F	%
Faculty Name	Social Sciences	49	18.1
	Science	105	38.9
	Management	11	4.1
	Administration		
	Engineering Technology	7	2.6
	Computer & Information Technology	62	23.0
	Arts	32	11.9
	Architecture & Design	4	1.5
Semester	2 nd	56	20.7
	4 th	61	22.6
	6 th	62	23.0
	8 th	91	33.7
Program	BS	252	93.3
	MPhil	18	6.7

Age of the Respondents	18-20	92	34.1
	21-23	118	43.7
	24-26	52	19.3
	26+	8	3.0
Family Occupation	Business	51	18.9
	Job	133	49.3
	Foreign	26	9.6
	Farmer	60	22.2
Family Income	20000-40000	45	16.7
	40001-60000	69	25.6
	60001-80000	43	15.9
	80001-100000	66	24.4
	100001+	47	17.4
Family Size	2-5	10	3.7
	6-9	116	43.0
	9-13	129	47.8
	14+	15	5.6
Duration of Stay	Less than 1 year	54	20.0
	1-2 year	88	32.6
	3-4 year	53	19.6
	Above 4 year	75	27.8
Distance	30km to 60km	31	11.5
	61km to 90km	59	21.9
	91km to 120km	77	28.5
	151 to 180km	22	8.1
	Above 180km	31	11.5
No. Of Roommates	1 to 3	111	41.1
	4 to 6	98	36.3
	7 to 9	61	22.6
Frequency to visit home	Weekly	174	64.4
	Monthly	76	28.1
	Rarely	20	7.4

The data shows that most students were from the 8th semester (33.7%), with the majority enrolled in BS programs (93.3%). Students mainly belonged to Sciences (38.9%), followed by Computing & IT (23%) and Social Sciences (18.1%). Most were aged 21–23 (43.7%). Regarding family background, 49.3% had job-oriented fathers, while 25.6% reported a monthly income of PKR 40,001–60,000. Family sizes were mostly between 9–13 members (47.8%). Hostel stay varied, with 32.6% staying 1–2 years and 27.8% over 4 years. The largest group (28.5%) lived 91–120 km from home. Room-sharing was common, with 41.1% living with 1–3 roommates. Most students (64.4%) visited home weekly, while a small portion (7.4%) did so rarely due to distance.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by their responses towards Stress and Anxiety

Sr.N	Stress and Anxiety	SA	A	D	SD
		f %	f %	f %	f %
I	Feeling of Sadness	63	111	74	22

		(23.3)	(41.1)	(27.4)	(8.1)
ii	Feeling of hopelessness	52 (19.3)	86 (31.9)	103 (38.1)	29 (10.7)
iii	Feeling of Overwhelming to Manage Routine Life	50 (18.5)	135 (50.0)	59 (21.9)	26 (9.6)
iv	Feeling Drained and Exhausted	67 (24.8)	121 (44.8)	66 (24.4)	16 (5.9)
V	Feeling Stress Due to Academic Pressure	69 (25.6)	127 (47.0)	67 (21.1)	17 (6.3)
vi	Lack of Emotional Support in the Hostel	65 (24.1)	99 (36.7)	90 (33.3)	16 (5.9)
vii	Feeling Change in your Appetite	86 (31.9)	120 (44.4)	48 (17.6)	16 (5.9)

Table 2 showed the students experiences of stress and anxiety in hostels. A majority reported emotional challenges: 64.4% felt sad, 51.2% experienced hopelessness, and 68.5% felt overwhelmed managing routine life. Additionally, 69.6% felt drained or exhausted, and 72.6% reported stress due to academic pressure. Emotional support appeared lacking, with 60.8% feeling its absence. Physical symptoms were also noted, as 76.3% reported changes in appetite. Overall, the data suggests that a significant portion of students face emotional and psychological stress while living in hostels.

Test of Normality

The table displays results from two tests of normality: the **Kolmogorov-Smirnov** and the **Shapiro-Wilk** tests. These tests evaluate whether the data for the two variables, Psycho-social Challenges and Coping Strategies, follow a normal distribution.

Test of Normality						
	Kolmogorov- Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Psycho-social Challenges	.039	270	.200	.995	270	.555
Coping Strategies	.094	270	.000	.962	270	.000

The normality of the data was assessed using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. For psycho-social challenges, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed a statistic of 0.039 with a p-value of 0.200, and the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a statistic of 0.995 with a p-value of 0.555—both greater than 0.05, indicating normally distributed data. However, for coping strategies, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test had a statistic of 0.094 ($p = .000$) and the Shapiro-Wilk test had a statistic of 0.962 ($p = .000$), both below 0.05, suggesting the data is not normally distributed.

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2711.999	1	2711.999	13.236	.000 ^b
	Residual	54912.998	268	204.899		
	Total	57624.996	269			

a. Dependent Variable: Psychosocial Challenges

b. Predictors: (Constant), Coping Strategies

The F-ratio in the ANOVA table shows that the independent variables statistically significantly predict the dependent variable, $F(1, 269) = 13.236$, $p < .005$. The analyses revealed that psychosocial challenges were significantly positively related to coping strategies of the respondents ($\beta = 0.253$, $p < .005$). ($B = 0.312$, $p < .005$). So, it is concluded that psycho-social challenges have positive impact to enhance students coping strategies in form of the social engagement, time management, self-management, conflict resolution and budget management. Thus, the results supported our hypothesis and objectives.

Conclusion

This study found that female students living in hostels face many psychosocial challenges that affect their emotional health and academic performance. Common problems include feeling homesick, emotional stress, peer pressure, academic demands, and worries about safety and health in the hostel. These difficulties can harm their mental well-being, grades, and overall quality of life. Despite these challenges, the study also revealed that students use several helpful coping methods to deal with these issues. Getting support from friends, family, and classmates is one of the most important ways they manage stress. In addition, many students practice self-care activities like exercise, relaxation techniques, and hobbies to help reduce tension. Religious and spiritual practices also play a key role in managing emotional struggles. The study highlighted that academic coping skills, such as seeking help when needed, managing time well, and handling academic pressure effectively, are useful strategies. While hostel life presents significant psychosocial challenges, the coping strategies students use can lessen their negative impact and help promote both academic success and emotional well-being.

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