The Impact of Psychological Distress and Self-criticism on Aggression with Moderating Role of Loneliness in University Students

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Aggression is a behavior that can harm individual itself and as well as other person. The study aimed to investigate the impact of psychological distress and self-criticism on aggression with moderating role of loneliness in university students. Data was collected from different universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The sample was comprised of girls (*n*=150) and boys (*n*=150) with age range between18-26 years. Purposive sampling technique was used to recruit the research participants. Self-report measures including, The Aggression Scale, Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), Revised Ucla Loneliness Scale and the Self-Rating Scale were used to assess study variables. Result revealed significant positive relationship between self-criticism, psychological distress, loneliness and aggression. Findings revealed self-criticism and loneliness as significant positive predictors of aggression. Loneliness did not emerge as a significant moderator on the relationship between psychological distress, self-criticism and aggression. Significant gender differences suggested that boys have high level of self-criticism as compared to girls.The research created awareness that decreasing the level of psychological distress, loneliness and self-criticism in university students can help in the management of aggression.
Keyword. Psychological distress, loneliness, self-criticism, aggression.

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Human aggression is any behavior directed toward another individual that is carriedout with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm. In addition, the perpetrator must believe that the behavior will harm the target, and that the target is motivated to avoid the behavior (Bushman &Anderson, 2001: Baron & Richardson 1994,Berkowitz 1993).The clarification of aggression is not based on single idea. Aggression means that level of energy can be 'the exploits at least one individuals purposely to hurt or disapprovingly influence the rights and needs of another or others' Aggression is the part of human behavior that can be characterized as a demonstration that outcomes in sad or hurting others. In any case, there are various sorts of aggression and the expression of aggression can be depending on the situation. Because harming behavior, and interference of this harming behavior, changes according to the person and its mental condition that how a person express (Underwood, Galenand, & Paquette, 2001;Victoroff et al., 2010).

Aggression is divided in to many categories. Aggression is usually observed as being practical or reactive; overt or covert; or physical, verbal, or interpersonal (Researches revealed that there is a huge role of aggressive behavior during adolescence. Studies also provide evidence that some youngsters show aggressive behavior only to gain approval in their age group or peers. So, those youngsters who have faulty peer groups are more involved in aggressive activities. They adopt activities like risk taking. In this study it is also provide proves that adolescents have very positive attitude towards aggression (Werner & Crick, 2004; Crick &Grotpeter, 1995).

Empirical evidence revealed found that loneliness concluded higher levels of aggression and that it was connected with higher steps of

loneliness. Many examinations demonstrated that men may feel forlorn more frequently than ladies since they are not too associated in the social passionate region (Jouriles et al., 2009) and accordingly may manage their aggression in ways that considerably facilitate them to stay at distance from social contact(Prinstein, Boergers, &Vernberg, 2001; Marning, 2018).So the present study aimed to find out the impact of psychological distress and self-criticism on aggression with moderating role of loneliness in university students

Method

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To investigate the relationship of psychological distress, loneliness and self-criticism with aggression in university students.

2. To find out the gender differences in psychological distress, loneliness and self-criticism in university students.

3. To investigate the moderating role of Loneliness on the relationship between psychological distress, self-criticism and aggression in university students.

The following hypotheses are formulated in accordance to the objectives of the study:

1. Psychological distress, loneliness and self-criticism are likely to have positive relationship with aggression in university students

2. Psychological distress, Loneliness and self-criticism are likely to positively predict aggression in university students.

3. Males are likely to be physically more aggressive as compared to female.

4. Females are more likely to express aggression verbally as compared to males.

5. Females are likely to have high level of psychological distress, loneliness and self-criticism as compared to males.

6. Loneliness is likely to moderate on the relationship between psychological distress, self-criticism and aggression in university student.

Sample

Sample was comprised of N= 300 participants including Boys (n=150) and Girls (n=150) Sample aged between 18 to 26 years. Purposive sampling technique was used to induct research participants. Co-relational Research Design was used in the current study as the elementary determination of study was to examine the impact of psychological distress and self-criticismon aggression with moderating role of loneliness in university students. Data was gathered from different universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.Demographic Characteristics of sample are reported in below Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of sample (N= 300)

Variables	*M*	*SD*	
Age	21.19	1.81	
	f		*%*
Education			
BS	231		77.0
MS	69		23.0
Family System			
Nuclear	160		53.3
Joint	140		46.7
Birth Order			
First	101		33.6
Middle	134		44.7
Last	58		19.3
Only	7		2.3

Measures

Following assessment measures were used in the present study

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). This is a 10-item measure of psychological distress (Kessleret al., 2002). Scale has five response option ranging from 1 (*None of the time)* to 5 (*All of the time*). Score under 20 indicate a person to be well, score 20-24 indicate mild mental disorder * score 25-29 indicate moderate mental disorder * score 30 and over indicate severe mental disorder.

Revised UclaLoneliness Scale. A 20-item scale (Russell, Peplau, &Cutrona, 1980) designed to measure one's subjective feelings of loneliness as well as Feelings of social isolation. Participants rate each item as O (3) "*I often feel this way*",S (2) *"I sometimes feel this way,* R (1) "*I rarely feel this way*", N (0) "*I never feel this way"*. Total is sum of all items. High score indicate high loneliness.

The Aggression Scale. It is a 29 item questionnaire where participants rank certain statements along a 5-point continuum from "extremely uncharacteristic of me" to "extremely characteristic of me.*Scale* consists of 4 factors, Physical *Aggression* (PA), Verbal *Aggression* (VA), Anger (A) and Hostility (H). The total score for *Aggression* is the sum of the factor scores(Buss & Perry, 1992).

Self-Rating Scale (SRS). Self-criticism was assessed by using the Self-Rating Scale (Hooley et al., 2002). Scale consisted of 8-items. Participants respond to items on 1-7 response categories from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). High score on scale indicate more self-critical behavior. The reliability of scale is .88.

Demographic Information Questioner. Demographic Scale was comprised of age, gender, education, siblings, occupation, birth order, and residences area.

Procedure

Permission from the authors was taken to use the required scales. The research was conducted on university students. The sample was included educated students. The sample was comprised of N=300 participants with age range between 18-26 years.Participants were informed that provided information will only be used for research purpose and their identity will not be disclosed to any third party or irrelevant person. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Process Macro were used for data analysis.

Results

The following statistical analysis were used in present study (i)co-relation, to find out relationship between psychological distress, loneliness, self-criticism and aggression (ii) Multiple regression, to predict aggression from psychological distress, loneliness and self-criticism (iii) Independent samples t – test, to find out the age differences in psychological distress, loneliness, self-criticism and aggression. Psychometric properties of study variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Major Study Variables (N =300)

Variables	*k*	*M*	*SD*	*α*	Ranges Actual	Ranges Potential	Skew	Kurtosis
Aggression	29	79.83	13.90	.81	42-125	29-145	-.04	.53
Physical	9	23.99	5.32	.68	12 -39	9-45	.23	.12
Verbal	5	14.33	4.18	.57	5 - 25	5-25	.31	.01
Anger	7	19.63	4.49	.68	7 - 31	7-35	-.02	-.44
Hostility	8	21.84	5.08	.44	8 - 4	8-40	-.02	.56
Psychological distress	10	27.43	6.97	.76	11 -49	10-50	-.11	-.13
Self-criticism	8	26.24	8.79	.74	8 - 56	8-56	.10	-.00
Loneliness	20	46.17	6.12	.74	30 -61	20-80	-.22	-.12

Note. *p < .05. **p<.01

Table 3

Correlation between Psychological Distress, Loneliness, Self-Criticism and Aggression (N=300)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	*M*	*SD*
1	Aggression	-	.76**	.65**	.72**	.75**	.18**	.33**	.23**	79.83	13.90
2	Apa		-	.33**	.43**	.38**	.12*	.21**	.19**	23.99	5.32
3	Ava			-	.29**	.36**	-.08	.10	.03	14.33	4.18
4	Aaa				-	.39**	.18**	.22**	.18**	19.63	4.49
5	Aha					-	.27**	.40**	.25**	21.84	5.08
6	Psychological distress						-	.25**	.30**	27.43	6.97
7	Self-criticism							-	.30**	26.42	8.79
8	Loneliness								-	46.17	6.12

Note. N=100; Apa =Aggression physical aggression; Ava =Aggression verbal aggression; Aaa =Aggression anger aggression; Aha =Aggression hostility aggression; ***p<.01. *p<.05

Result revealed that psychological distress, self-criticism, loneliness has significant positive relationship with aggression and its subscales. Significant positive relationship suggested as the level of psychological distress, self-criticism, and loneliness increases aggression also increases in university students.

Table 4

Psychological distress Self-criticism and loneliness as a predictor of as a Aggression (N=300)

	B	S.E	β	95%Cl
Constant	51.01			[39.37,62.64]
Psychological Distress	-.76	0.11	.076	[-0.07, 0.37]
Loneliness	0.28*	0.13	0.12	[.022,.548]
Self-criticism	0.43*	0.09	0.27	[.254, .614]
R	.36			
R²	.13			

Note. *p < .05. **p<.01

Results revealed that self-criticism and loneliness emerged as significant positive predictors of aggression whereas psychological distress did not emerge as significant predictor of aggression.

Table 5
Loneliness as A Moderator onthe Relationship between Psychological Distress and Aggression (N=300)

	B	SE	t	p
Constant	80.26 [78.61,81.91]	.83	95.77	.00
Loneliness	.39 [.08,.07]	.15	2.48	.01
Psychological Distress	.22 [-.06,.50]	.14	1.53	.12
Interaction	-.03 [-.08,.01]			
R	.36	.02	-1.34	.18
R²	.12			
F	8.76			
R²-change	.00			

*Note.*p < .05. **p<.01

Result reveled that loneliness did not emerge as a moderator on the relationship between psychological distress and aggression. The results are shown in table 6

Table 6
Loneliness as a Moderator on Relationship between Self-Criticism and Aggression (N=300)

	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	79.79 [78.28,81.29]	.76	104.46	.00
Loneliness	.33 [.03,.62]	.14	2.22	.02
Self-criticism	.45 [.23,.67]	.11	4.08	.00
Interaction	.00 [-.03,.03]	.01	.04	.96
R	.27			
R²	.07			
F	5.95			
R²-change	.00			

Note.$*p < .05.$ $**p<.01$

Result reveled that loneliness did not emerge as a significant moderator on the relationship between self-criticism and aggression.

Table 7

Gender differences in Aggression, Psychological Distress, Self-Criticism and Loneliness (N=300)

Variable	Boys		Girls				95%Cl		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(288)*	*p*	*LL*	*UL*	*Cohen's d*
Aggression	81.91	13.64	77.77	13.89	-2.59	.70	-7.27	-1.00	0.30
Apa	25.07	5.10	25.07	5.33	-3.55	1.06	-3.33	-.95	0.41
Ava	14.14	4.33	14.51	4.04	-.767	1.14	-1.32	.581	0.08
Aaa	19.79	4.31	19.47	4.68	-.606	.85	-1.33	.70	0.07
Aha	22.53	5.22	21.17	4.86	-2.32	.22	-2.50	-.20	0.26
Psychological distress	26.57	7.11	28.29	6.74	2.15	2.22	.145	3.28	0.24
Self-criticism	28.36	8.82	24.50	8.36	-3.88	.006	-5.81	-1.90	0.44
Loneliness	46.44	5.90	45.90	6.33	-2.59	1.16	-7.27	.857	0.08

Note. CI= confidence interval: *p < .05. **p<.01; Apa =Aggression physical aggression; Ava =Aggression verbal aggression; Aaa

=Aggression anger aggression; Aha =Aggression hostility aggression.

Table 5 showed significant gender differences in self-criticism. Significant gender differences suggested that boys have more self-critical attitude as compared to girls. Moreover it also evident from findings that boys and girls had same level of aggression, Psychological Distress and Loneliness**.**

Discussion

The present research was intended for assessing the impact of psychological distress and self-criticism on aggression with moderating Role of loneliness in university students.

The first hypothesis stated that there will be a positive relationship of psychological distress, loneliness and self-criticism with aggression. The results revealed that Psychological distress, Loneliness and Self-criticism had a significant positive relationship with aggression and its subscales. The findings are supported by different studies in the past. Psychological Distress had a significant relationship with aggression which is linked with the finding of Jaradatet al. (2016) study which found that hostility was allied with higher psychological distress. Loneliness was found to be significantly associated with Aggression which is also consistent with the previous literature. The findings of Check, Perlman andMalamuth (1985) stated that loneliness was highly associated with different forms of aggression while also confirming that loneliness significantly contributed to subsequent prediction of aggression. Some researchers have supported on an operational description, psychological distress has been measured in the historical work characteristically by linking numerous psychosocial constituents (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, anxiety) and mental health (depression, anxiety, psychological complaints) parts to create a Psychological distress which cause

aggression in individuals. Schinka (2013) found that aggressive children cut their activities in peers, expressed in higher levels of loneliness. Qualter and Munn (2002) used parts to analysis to identify groups of children based on sociometric ratings and self-reported levels of loneliness. Four groups of students were identified: rejected children, lonely children, rejected and lonely children, and children of average social standing and loneliness. When comparing the groups on symptoms of maladjustment, it was found that children in the rejected and lonely groups had the highest reported level of aggressive behavior. The authors concluded that it is a combination of these factors, poor social status and loneliness, which relates to higher levels of peer aggression (Chan et al., 2018)

The second hypothesis pertains to prediction of aggression by study variables. Results confirmed self-criticism and loneliness as a significant predictor of aggression. These findings are consistent with findings of various previous studies (Little & Garber, 2000; Esen, Aktas &Tuncer, 2013; Çivitçi, 2011).

Table 5 showed significant gender differences in self-criticism. Significant gender differences suggested that boys have more self-critical attitude as compared to girls. Psychological Distress and Loneliness. Cheng and Furnham, (2004) study on perceived parental rearing style, self-esteem and self-criticism and lead beater et al. (1999) study ona multivariate model of gender differences in adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems found that males have high levels of self-criticism as compared females these findings are consistent with findings of current research. Moreover it also evident from current research findings

that boys and girls had same level of aggression, studies of Mayer et al. (1998) and Mustard (2001) confirmed the current research findings.

Conclusion

Study concludes that self-criticism, psychological distress and loneliness are significantly associated with aggression. Whereas loneliness did not emerge as significant moderator on the relationship between psychological distress, self-criticism and aggression. Moreover boys are having more self-critical attitudes toward themselves as compared to girls.

Limitations and Suggestions

Strictly relaying on self-report instruments is a limitation of the study. Qualitative inquiry in the exploration of aggression will be more fruitful to get the true insight of this damaging behavior. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, young adults who are not enrolled in academic institutions should also be included as a sample.

Implications

Through findings of this study, universities can take step to conduct workshops on how to decrease the level of self-criticism, psychological distress and loneliness, that will ultimately decrease the level of aggression in university Students.

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