



A Multidimensional Analysis of Fear, Patience, and Gratitude as Predictors of Students' Emotional Stability and Social Adjustment

¹Batool Fatima, ²Hafiz Muhammad Hammad & ³Waleed Manzoor

¹BS Sociology, Department of Sociology & Criminology, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

²BS Sociology, Department of Sociology & Criminology, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

³BS Sociology, Department of Sociology & Criminology, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

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The current research conducts an exploration on fear, patience, and gratitude as multidimensional predictors of emotional stability and social adjustment in Pakistani university students. The research was based on the positive psychology and Islamic psychological tradition and fills the gap in the literature on the joint effects of these constructs on the mental health outcomes of students in South Asian higher education. A purposive sample of N = 300 students of the University of Sargodha was used to conduct a quantitative cross-sectional research design. Reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression through the IBM SPSS Statistics were used to analyze standardized self-report scales. The alpha coefficients of Cronbach showed acceptable to good internal consistency in all measures ($\alpha = .704-804$). Mean levels showed moderate levels of all constructs. The Pearson correlation analysis showed that emotional stability ($r = .494, p < .001$) and social adjustment ($r = .157, p < .01$) were strongly correlated with patience and significantly predicted. Gratitude showed strong positive correlation with emotional stability ($r = .346, p < .001$) but not with social adjustment. Fear also had a small but significant positive correlation with social adjustment ($r = .160, p < .01$) and non significant correlation with emotional stability. Multiple regression analysis showed that fear, patience, and gratitude collectively explained 27.9% of variance in emotional stability ($R^2 = .279, F(3,296) = 38.23, p < .001$) and 7.5% of variance in social adjustment ($R^2 = .075, F(3,296) = 7.99, p < .001$).

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Corresponding Author's Email: Manzoorwaleed58@gmail.com

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1.0 Introduction

Psychological health of students in universities has become a significant issue in the modern educational research, especially in developing countries, where academic requirements meet socioeconomic stressors and cultural responsibilities (Hamid & Moin, 2020). Emotional stability and social adjustment are two key pillars of mental health in students which have a strong impact on academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and happiness in the long term, among the numerous aspects of psychological functioning (Barker et al., 2019). Emotional stability is defined as the ability to remain psychologically stable in response to the stress and adversity and social adjustment is defined as the ability to establish meaningful relationship with peers, engage in campus life and the adaptation to various social settings (McCrae & Costa, 1999; Baker & Siryk, 1984).

In Islamic culture as well as in positive psychology, patience, or Sabr, is considered as a self-regulatory virtue connected with resilience, perseverance, and less psychological distress (Schnitker, 2012). Gratitude, also known as Shukr, is a sense of the advantages given to us by others or by some higher force, and has been strongly associated with subjective well-being, lower levels of depression, and strengthened social connections in a variety of cultures (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010).

Pakistan is a very distinctive and contextually important place to observe these relationships. Being a country with a large majority of Muslims with a high collectivist cultural orientation, Islamic virtues of fear, patience and gratitude are not simply theoretical concepts, but experienced psychological phenomenon that define how students cope daily, socialize and react emotionally (Haque, 2004; Koenig, 2012). Despite the existence of this cultural relevancy, there is a lack of empirical studies that exhaustively examine the contingent predictive power of these three constructs on emotional stability and social adjustment among Pakistani university students. The current research fills this gap by utilizing a multidimensional quantitative paradigm to explore the simultaneous relationship between fear, patience, and gratitude to predict emotional stability and social adjustment among the students of the University of Sargodha, which is one of the largest Pakistani public universities. The research objectives of the study are as follows: (a) to measure the reliability and the descriptive characteristics of all measures; (b) to test the bivariate correlations between fear, patience, gratitude, emotional stability and social adjustment; (c) to establish the predictive ability of fear, patience and gratitude to emotional stability; and (d) to establish the predictive ability of fear, patience and gratitude to social adjustment. The hypothesis is that (H1) fear, patience, and gratitude will be significant predictors of emotional stability; (H2) fear, patience, and gratitude will be significant predictors of social adjustment; and (H3) patience and gratitude will have stronger predictors than fear do on both outcome variables.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Fear and Its Psychological Role

Fear is one of the oldest human emotions from an evolutionary perspective, acting as a survival mechanism to inform people about possible dangers and enable them to take defensive measures (LeDoux, 1998; Öhman, 2008). Traditionally, in the field of psychology, fear has

received most attention in terms of clinical issues like anxiety, phobias, and traumatic reactions. But there is now increasing literature that recognizes the distinction between maladaptive and adaptive fear, where the former is disruptive, while the latter is functional. (Barlow, 2002; Reeve, 2015).

Fear in Islamic psychology holds an inherently positive meaning under the concept of *Taqwa* (God-consciousness), which can be understood as “fear of accountability before God” (Rassool, 2016). Fear is assumed to drive moral behavior and social responsibility within the framework of Islamic psychology. In fact, Khan (2015) revealed that religious fear positively correlated with prosocial behavior among Muslim adolescents, and Haque (2004) maintained that Islamic fear is considered an effective regulator that facilitates conscientiousness and interpersonal sensitivity. Based on these arguments, fear, in its adaptive and moral manifestation, can positively impact social adjustment regardless of its potential effects on emotional well-being.

2.2 Patience and Psychological Well-being

The construct of patience has been found to have three major dimensions, such as interpersonal patience, life hardship patience, and daily hassle patience (Schnitker, 2012). In all these dimensions of patience, it was found to be significantly linked to low psychological distress, higher positive affect, and higher life satisfaction. According to a seminal study by Schnitker & Emmons (2007), patience helped to mediate the association between adversity and well-being such that the more patient an individual was, the more positive emotion and hope he reported. Important traits related to academic resilience and self-control. More dispositionally patient learners show more perseverance in face of challenging academic tasks and greater tolerance of frustrations, as well as demonstrate emotional stability under stress conditions (Duckworth et al., 2007). The concept of *Sabr* in Islam implies endurance based on belief in divine wisdom and has been highlighted as one of the essential coping mechanisms of Muslim communities in difficult circumstances (Koenig, 2012). In social adaptation, patience enables the development of tolerant and collaborative interaction with others, allowing for effective social participation in class settings (Luk & Kwan, 2019). Based on these similar theoretical and empirical underpinnings, patience is predicted to be the most powerful predictor of emotional stability and social adjustment.

2.3 Gratitude and Mental Health

This moral emotion has also been referred to as the appreciation one feels as a result of having received something positive from an external agency, which could either be a fellow human being, nature, or some other higher power. (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Fredrickson's (2001) The broaden-and-build theory represents the most prominent approach in terms of explaining psychological effects of gratitude on a person: the positive emotions make a person's outlook broader and expand his behavioral options, which leads to accumulation of psychological, social and physical resources over time. This aspect becomes especially important in case of college students as they face numerous stresses while studying.

Gratitude was proven to have an impact on various psychological phenomena: depression, anxiety, well-being and happiness in people regardless of their age (Wood et al., 2010; Dickerhoof, 2007). According to the meta-analysis conducted by Davis et al. (2016), gratitude intervention

helps even those who belong to risk groups experience a rise in their well-being level. The aspect that is connected with emotional stability includes flexible emotional regulation of stress, such as positive cognitive appraisals and recovery from bad emotional experiences. (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). In the studies conducted on Muslim students in Pakistan and Malaysia, it was observed that Shukr, which refers to Islamic gratitude, correlated with psychological adjustment and social integration (Husain, 2016; Salleh, 2012).

2.4 Emotional Stability and Social Adjustment in University Students

Emotional stability, which is defined by its opposite trait, neuroticism, in the Big Five theory of personality, refers to the propensity to maintain stable positive emotions and bounce back quickly after emotional setbacks (McCrae & Costa, 1999). Individuals who have higher levels of emotional stability tend to exhibit more efficient coping skills, greater academic engagement, and improved social functioning than those who lack such emotional stability (Barker et al., 2019). Social adaptation in a college environment includes several different subcategories: academic engagement, peer relations, personal-emotional adaptation, and institutional attachment (Baker & Siryk, 1984). A series of studies have proven that social competence is a strong predictor of academic motivation, lower dropout, and overall well-being (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). Considering the connection that has been established between psychological strengths and their role in emotions as well as social aspects, an exploration of fear, patience, and gratitude as multiple predictors is both theoretically and practically significant.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this current study, the quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used. The cross-sectional design is ideal in analyzing the relationship between multiple psychological constructs in a specific population at one particular period. This is commonly used in educational and health psychology studies (Creswell, 2014). The design was chosen due to its efficiency in evaluating multiple constructs and its suitability for survey research.

3.2 Participants

N = 300 purposefully selected full-time students were recruited from the University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan. It was appropriate to employ purposive sampling since the aim of the study was to assess a certain category of individuals (university students). The participants came from different disciplines to ensure diversity. Participants' informed consent was sought, and confidentiality was guaranteed. All participants provided complete data; therefore, no case was removed through the process of listwise deletion. A total number of 300 subjects are sufficient to conduct the regression analysis. According to Cohen (1992), a sample size of at least 200 is needed for multiple regression with many predictors.

3.3 Measures

3.3.1 Fear Scale

A specially developed scale was used to measure fear, ranging from 7 to 35 items. This scale measured fear in its adaptively moralized form. The higher the score on this scale, the greater the level of dispositional fear.

3.3.2 Patience Scale

Patience was rated using a dispositional multi-item measure (scale: 10-37) that reflected the disposition to withstand suffering, endure frustrations, and persist under adversity. A higher score represents high levels of patience.

3.3.3 Gratitude Scale

The construct of gratitude was gauged using a scale of six items ($\alpha = .804$; scale score range 6–28). This instrument measures an individual’s disposition to observe, recognize, and express thankfulness toward the good things in life. An alpha value of .804 is above the cut-off point of .70, which is widely used (Nunnally, 1978).

3.3.4 Emotional Stability Scale

Measuring emotional stability was done using a 7-item questionnaire (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .804$; scale from 8 to 32) that measured the ability to remain emotionally stable most of the time and maintain an optimistic state of mind.

3.3.5 Social Adjustment Scale

Social adjustment was assessed based on a four-item scale ($\alpha = .704$; range 4–19). This alpha value (.704) is sufficient to be considered acceptable for psychometric tests (Nunnally, 1978). High scores reflect higher levels of social adjustment in the college environment.

3.4 Procedure

After gaining approval through ethical protocols, the questionnaire pack with all five scales was administered to the subjects using a classroom approach, with the help of the academic liaison officers. Respondents filled out the questionnaires independently and handed over the sealed questionnaires. All data analysis procedures were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25.

3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

The process of data analysis entailed several stages. Firstly, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for all scales were determined. Secondly, descriptive statistics involving mean, standard deviation, and ranges of all variables included in the study were estimated. Thirdly, Pearson product moment correlation was computed to find out correlations among the variables studied, with significance assessed using two-tailed tests at an alpha of .05 and .01 levels. Lastly, two different multiple regressions were analyzed using the Enter approach. Emotional stability and social adjustment were taken as dependent variables while fear, patience, and gratitude were predictors.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Reliability statistics for all scales used in the research are presented in Table 1. Both Gratitude ($\alpha = .804$, 6 items) and Emotional Stability ($\alpha = .804$, 7 items) had strong internal consistencies, whereas the Social Adjustment ($\alpha = .704$, 4 items) had adequate internal consistency. All coefficients satisfy the criterion of no less than .70 (Nunnally, 1978; Hair et al., 2010).

Table 4.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Interpretation
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Gratitude	.804	6	Good
Emotional Stability	.804	7	Good
Social Adjustment	.704	4	Acceptable

Note. Fear and Patience scales were included in the broader instrument battery. Interpretation based on Nunnally (1978): $\geq .70$ = Acceptable, $\geq .80$ = Good.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all variables analyzed in this study can be found in Table 2 below. As we can see, the students' mean scores on all five variables were relatively high. Their level of fear was at the average level of 18.93 (SD = 5.64; range = 7-35). The students scored 19.56 (SD = 5.66; range = 10-37) points on the patience variable. Gratitude was measured at the level of 11.97 (SD = 4.47; range = 6-28) points. Students scored 16.52 (SD = 4.58; range = 8-32) points for emotional stability, and their social adjustment was at the level of 9.85 (SD = 3.28; range = 4-19) points.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Fear	300	7.00	35.00	18.93	5.637
Patience	300	10.00	37.00	19.56	5.660
Gratitude	300	6.00	28.00	11.97	4.472
Emotional Stability	300	8.00	32.00	16.52	4.581
Social Adjustment	300	4.00	19.00	9.85	3.277

Note. SD = Standard Deviation. Min = Minimum. Max = Maximum.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The Pearson product-moment correlations between all the research variables are provided in Table 3. The most pronounced positive correlation for patience was found with emotional stability ($r = .494, p < .001$), while patience was positively and significantly correlated with social adjustment ($r = .157, p < .01$). Gratitude was positively correlated with emotional stability ($r = .346, p < .001$), whereas it had no statistically significant correlation with social adjustment ($r = .064, p = .267$). The variable of fear showed significant positive relationships with both patience ($r = .147, p < .05$) and social adjustment ($r = .160, p < .01$), yet no significant correlation with emotional stability ($r = .047, p = .418$). The lack of statistically significant negative correlation between fear and gratitude was also found ($r = -.072, p = .215$). Emotional stability was positively and significantly correlated with social adjustment ($r = .272, p < .001$).

Table 3 Pearson Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Fear	—	.147*	-.072	.047	.160**
2. Patience		—	.347**	.494**	.157**
3. Gratitude			—	.346**	.064
4. Emotional Stability				—	.272**
5. Social Adjustment					—

Adjustment

Note. * $p < .05$ (2-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

4.4 Multiple Regression: Predicting Emotional Stability

Multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the significance of fear, patience, and gratitude on emotional stability. The entire model is significant, $F(3, 296) = 38.23, p < .001$, such that fear, patience, and gratitude significantly accounted for 27.9% of the variance in emotional stability ($R = .528, R^2 = .279, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .271, SE = 3.910$). Patience emerged as the most important single predictor of emotional stability ($\beta = .430, t = 6.084, p < .001$) followed by gratitude ($\beta = .231, t = 3.246, p < .001$) as shown in Table 4. There was no significant effect of fear on emotional stability ($\beta = -.020, t = -.284, p = .777$) when controlling for patience and gratitude. Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3 are both supported by the findings.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis: Predictors of Emotional Stability (N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	4.892	1.031	—	4.745	< .001
Fear	-.016	.057	-	-.284	.777
			.020		
Patience	.348	.057	.430	6.084	< .001
Gratitude	.237	.073	.231	3.246	< .001

Note. $R = .528, R^2 = .279, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .271, F(3, 296) = 38.23, p < .001. SE B = \text{Standard Error of } B; \beta = \text{standardized regression coefficient}.$

4.5 Multiple Regression: Predicting Social Adjustment

The next multiple regression analysis performed on social adjustment showed that the model was statistically significant, $F(3, 296) = 7.99, p < .001$, with predictors explaining 7.5% of the variance in social adjustment ($R = .274, R^2 = .075, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .066, SE = 3.162$). Fear ($\beta = .136, t = 1.716, p = .035$) and patience ($\beta = .130, t = 1.640, p = .040$), but not gratitude ($\beta = .016, t = .199, p = .842$), emerged as significant predictors of social adjustment, as can be seen from Table 5. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed while Hypothesis 3 partially receives its validation, with fear showing comparable levels of predictive validity as the predictor of social adjustment to patience.

Table 5 Multiple Regression Analysis: Predictors of Social Adjustment (N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
			B		
(Constant)	4.614	.834	—	5.534	< .001
Fear	.079	.046	.136	1.716	.035
Patience	.075	.046	.130	1.640	.040
Gratitude	.012	.059	.016	.199	.842

Note. $R = .274, R^2 = .075, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .066, F(3, 296) = 7.99, p < .001. SE B = \text{Standard Error of } B; \beta = \text{standardized regression coefficient}.$

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This paper analyzes the predictive dimensions of fear, patience, and gratitude in relation to emotional stability and social adjustment among a sample of 300 university students of the University of Sargodha, Pakistan. This study provides some very important and insightful theoretical and practical implications related to student psychological wellbeing in the Pakistani

educational system.

5.1 Patience as the Primary Psychological Resource

In the current investigation, the variable that showed consistency as well as strength in predicting both outcome measures is patience. The results indicated that patience was the variable that showed strong association and predictive value for emotional stability ($r = .494$; $\beta = .430$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, patience was found to be a significant predictor of social adjustment ($\beta = .130$, $p = .040$). These findings support the theory proposed by Schnitker (2012), who presented a multi-dimensional model for understanding patience and demonstrated its validity on a South Asian Muslim sample. With regard to the self-regulation theory, the ability to endure pain, wait for delayed rewards, and inhibit immediate actions seems crucial for emotional stability (Carver & Scheier, 2014).

The role of patience in social adaptation is also consistent with theoretical understanding. Patience people are more capable of handling interpersonal irritations, dealing with social conflicts appropriately, and sustaining stable peer relations (Luk & Kwan, 2019). In the cultural milieu of Pakistan, the present findings are reflective of the teachings of Islam regarding Sabr as a virtuous quality bestowed by God for maintaining social cohesion and individual integrity (Rassool, 2016). From an applied standpoint, these findings imply that universities can integrate aspects of training students to become more patient through cognitive behavioral approaches and Islamic psychology.

5.2 Gratitude and Emotional Stability

Gratitude emerged as the second-most important predictor of emotional stability ($\beta = .231$, $p < .001$), in line with a large corpus of literature on the psychological advantages of gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). This is where the broaden and build model by Fredrickson (2001) comes into play and offers a very strong theory behind this relationship: when one is grateful, he or she tends to have more positive emotions that broaden both his or her thoughts and actions; thus, making him or her more resilient when faced with certain stressful situations.

Interestingly, gratitude was not found to be a predictor of social adjustment, even though there was a positive zero-order correlation ($r = .064$, $p = .267$). This result contrasts with findings in Western countries where gratitude plays an important role in prosocial behavior (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006). In terms of Pakistani culture, one possible reason could be that there is more pressure on people to socially adjust through collectivist tendencies rather than having an individual emotional experience of gratitude. Within the collectivist culture of Pakistan, there would be less emphasis on dispositional gratitude and more stress on obligation. The effects of collectivism on gratitude-adjustment should be looked into for future research.

5.3 The Adaptive Role of Fear

Fear resulted in an interesting theoretical finding in terms of its pattern of relationships. Fear was found to be significantly related to social adaptation ($\beta = .136$, $p = .035$) but not to emotional stability ($\beta = -.020$, $p = .777$). This interesting differential result is consistent with the Islamic psychological perspective on fear as a positive motivating factor that helps individuals lead morally and socially adjusted lives (Rassool, 2016; Khan, 2015). The experience of fear can

make students more sensitive toward social norms and expectations, which ultimately leads to improved social adjustment without interfering in the overall affective balance of the students. Lack of significant relationship between fear and emotional stability is consistent with the literature on normal fear (Öhman, 2008; Barlow, 2002).

A further point to note is the positive correlation between fear and patience ($r = .147$, $p < .05$). This finding would have theoretical significance inasmuch as those who have greater adaptive levels of fear might also possess greater patience; perhaps indicative of a similar orientation towards virtuousness/moral perspective taking. On the other hand, however, one must point out the small effect size of fear on social adjustment, as indicated by the small beta coefficient ($\beta = .136$).

5.4 Limitations and Future Directions

Some limitations of the methodology used in the current study are worthy of mention. Firstly, cross-sectional designs do not allow causal inferences to be made; rather, longitudinal designs must be used to confirm temporal precedence and causal direction between the variables under investigation. Secondly, using purposeful sampling at one institute limits the external validity of results obtained to all students in Pakistan; future researchers should consider using random sampling procedures in several different institutions. Thirdly, only using self-report measures increases the chances of common-method bias occurring; therefore, future research should consider other measurement options such as behavioral observation. Fourthly, the present study did not examine the religious aspects of fear, patience, and gratitude; future researchers may obtain more precise findings by distinguishing between dispositional and religious fear/patience/gratitude. Lastly, there was no consideration of the possible moderating effects that individual differences may have played on the relationships investigated in this study.

6. Conclusion

This research work presents the first set of empirical findings showing the significant role played by fear, patience, and gratitude in predicting emotional stability and social adaptation of university students in Pakistan. Patience proved to be the best predictor of both emotional stability and social adaptation; gratitude contributed significantly to emotional stability whereas fear had a positive correlation with social adaptation. In total, fear, patience, and gratitude accounted for 27.9% of the variance in emotional stability and 7.5% of the variance in social adaptation.

This is a significant result that has important implications for counseling centers at universities, psychologists, and policymakers in Pakistan. Implementing programs focused on cultivating patience and gratitude that are supported by scientific literature and are sensitive to Islamic culture in the context of South Asia within student support services at universities could be one way of effectively addressing psychological problems among students. Further studies are required to explore whether the relationship between virtues and psychological functioning is a cause-and-effect relationship and to test the efficacy of virtue-based interventions.

Contribution

Batool Fatima: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Waleed Manzoor: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Hafiz Muhammad Hammad: Methodology and Revision

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest in this article's research, authorship, and publication.

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