

Navigating Creativity and Culture: The Impact of Perceived Social Support and Cultural Discrimination on Mental Health among Creative Art Workers in Pakistan

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Abstract

The current study was carried out to explore the relationship among perceived social support, cultural discrimination and mental health of creative art workers in Pakistan. The data was collected from (N=300) art workers including photographers, musician artists with the age range using purposive sampling technique. Multidimensional perceived social support Scale (Zimet et al., 1988; Akhtar et al., 2010), the Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams & Mohammed, 1997), and a Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) were used along with demographic information sheet. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for social Sciences SPSS was used. The result of study revealed that there is significant positive relationship among the social support and mental health. The result also indicated that cultural discrimination is also positively correlated with mental health. The result of study also indicated that social support and cultural discrimination is significant predictor of mental health among the art workers. The limitation of the study is discussed below.

Keywords: Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Everyday Discrimination, Family, Friends, Significant Others and Creative Art Workers

Introduction

Art covers a wide range of cultural activities rooted in creativity and imagination, aimed at producing experiences that are emotionally or intellectually meaningful (Oxford Dictionary of Art & Design, 2005). These expressions often reflect emotional depth, abstract thought, technical expertise, or aesthetic beauty (Oxford Dictionary of Art & Design, 2005). While there is no single agreed-upon definition of a “creative art worker,” the term is generally used to describe individuals who earn a living through creative work in the performing, visual, or literary arts (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Another definition of creative art worker is that a person who not only produces original artistic content but also takes part in the technical, managerial, and professional aspects of creating, presenting, and sustaining art as a source of income (Banks, 2010). Perceived social support is considered one of the best defenses against stress and burnout is acknowledged to be this (Baptista et al., 2021). When someone believes that their friends,

family, or coworkers can provide them with emotional support, helpful advice, or practical help when they need it, that person is said to have perceived social support. Colleagues, friends play a very important role in helping creative professionals like musicians, theater artists, and photographers cope with the pressure of audience reception (Zhang et al., 2022). Perceived social support is a psychological construct that defines the extent to which an individual feels cared for, valued, and can rely on others for emotional or practical support when needed. Individuals who feel supported experience less stress and pain and are better equipped to deal with life's difficulties (Lakey and Orehek, 2011). The rigid social structure in Pakistan tends to underestimate artistic occupations, making it difficult for artistic professionals' actors, to be successful. Artistic expression is sometimes looked upon with suspicion in most traditional societies (Fatima, 2021). Culture is the way of life that is transmitted from one generation to another. Culture influences the identity of a person and consists of a variety of factors such as values, beliefs, religion, language, symbols, customs, and social norms (Keshina, 2018). In a historical context, the unfair treatment of people due to language, beliefs, customs, or physical appearance is referred to as cultural discrimination (Delgado et al., 2019). For major human decision-making, emotion regulation, clear thinking, and forming enduring bonds with others mental health is crucial (World Health Organization 2013). A dynamic and balanced state that allows an individual to do everyday tasks, apply their skills, work well, and interact constructively with others in their community is known as mental health. (Galderisi et al., 2015). Encouraging mental well-being through social support systems, early mental health care, and supportive policies can help build resilience and protect individuals and communities from the negative effects of stress, illness, and inequality (WHO, 2022). High level of perceived social support is related to lower levels of emotional distress and sadness, especially in times of difficulty, according to a study carried out by Santini et al. (2015), so a comparative study between music majors and non music majors wo explore the link between social support and anxiety the data was collected from 609 participants. The result of study indicated that social support is a very significant factor in coping with performance-related anxiety and can be used in educational settings such as conservatories and music schools (Schneider & Chesky, 2011). Another study was carried out to investigate the relationship among the social support and mental health. The data was collected from 1378 students. The result of the study indicates lower socioeconomic backgrounds, international students, and students from minority groups felt more socially isolated. The result also indicates that students who felt less supported were nearly six times more likely to experience depressive symptoms than those who felt more supported (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009).

The rigid social structure in Pakistan tends to underestimate artistic occupations, making it difficult for artistic professionals' actors, to be successful. Artistic expression is sometimes looked upon with suspicion in most traditional societies (Fatima, 2021). A research was conducted to investigate the effect of cultural discrimination and mental health. The data was collected from religious minorities. The results of study showed that psychological wellness was negatively affected by higher levels of prejudice, especially among those who felt neither supported nor accepted in society (Ali & Ahmad, 2022).

Objective of the Study

- To examine the relationship between perceived social support, cultural discrimination, and mental health among creative art workers in Pakistan.
- To identify gender differences in perceived social support, cultural discrimination, and mental health among the study participants.

- To determine the predictive roles of perceived social support and cultural discrimination in influencing the mental health of creative art workers.

Hypotheses

- There will be significant relationship among Perceived social support and cultural discrimination and mental health among creative art workers.
- The perceived social support and cultural discrimination will be the predictor of mental health of creative workers
- There will be significant gender difference in perceived social support, cultural discrimination and mental health among the creative workers.

Methodology

Participants

A N=300 creative workers were recruited for cross sectional study consisting of 256 male and 44 female with the age range of 18 and 45 years (Mage=1.39; SD=.042). The data was collected by using purposive sampling technique. The data for the study was collected from the different universities and Arts school from the Lahore city.

Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

The data was collected from the art workers and the students who were students of arts school rest of participants were excluded form the study. The participants were included in the study who have minimum 12 years of education below this cut off the participants were excluded. the participants were included in the study who have at least one year experience at art schools fresher were excluded. only professionals' creative workers were included in the study and participants were excluded from the study who choose the art as their hobby.

Measures

Demographic information sheet. The self-designed demographic information sheet was used to collect the personal data of the participants which includes the information of age, gender, phone number, institute, socioeconomic status, religion, level of education, type of artistic profession, level of art experience, primary source of income, parental support in early artistic stages.

Multidimensional scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et., 1988): MSPSS is 12 items 7-point Likert type (1= Strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree) self-report instrument. The scale comprises of three subscale named family support, friends support and significant others. The family support subscale comprises items 3, 4, 8, and 11. This subscale examines the support that is perceived from family members. The friends support subscale comprises items 6, 7, 9, and 12. This subscale examines the support that is perceived from one's social group of friends. The significant other subscale comprises items 1, 2, 5, and 10. This subscale examines the support that is perceived from a partner or a close and trusted person.

Everyday Discrimination Scale (Lewis et al., 2012): The everyday discrimination scale is 9 items 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6 (1= never and 6= everyday). The scale is designed to record discrimination that often occur in everyday social situation. A higher score represents a higher level of discrimination, and the scores can range from 9 to 54. The respondent is asked to think about the last 12 months and answer how often they have experienced different levels of abuse, such as being treated less politely, receiving poor service, or being seen as less intelligent

or dishonest. The Urdu translation of the EDS had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 in a Pakistani study by Nawaz and Gilani (2020), which indicates that the scale is a good measure of the everyday experience of discrimination in the cultural context of Pakistan.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) is a widely recognized psychological scale designed to capture the three primary aspects of emotional distress: depression, anxiety, and stress. The scale consists of three subscales, each with seven items. DASS is 4-point Likert type scale ranging from 0 (Did not apply to me at all) to 3 (Applied to me very much or most of the time). Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.84 for depression, 0.82 for anxiety, and 0.89 for stress

Procedure

Following the permission granted from the relevant authors of the scale the data collection process started. In-person visits to pertinent organizations, art schools, and creative communities were used to gather data. Photographers, theatre artists and musicians were contacted directly. Hard copies and google forms were used to collect data of the research. Participants received an informed consent form prior to completing the questionnaire, providing a clear explanation of the research's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their answers. The participants filled the questionnaires and the collected data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, version 27).

Results

Table 1 Psychometric Properties of Major Study Variables

Variables	K	M	SD	α	Skewness
1. FS	4	17.2	6.9	.86	-.237
2. FS	4	18.7	7.2	.91	-.532
3. SO	4	17.0	7.6	.89	-.285
4. ED	9	4.1	2.7	.80	.073
5. ANX	7	8.9	5.6	.85	.174
6. DEP	7	9.1	6.1	.89	.125
7. STR	7	9.5	5.6	.86	-.001

Note: K = Total no of items, α = Cronbach's alpha, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. FS = Family Support; FS = Friends Support; SO = Significant Others; ED = Everyday Discrimination; ANX = Anxiety; DEP = Depression; STR = Stress.

The results of table 1 indicate the psychometric properties of the scale, perceived social support (Family, friends and significant others), Everyday discrimination scale and mental health (Depression, anxiety and stress).

Table 2 Intercorrelations of social support, cultural discrimination and mental health among the creative workers (N=300).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Family Support	...						
2. Friends' Support	.46 ^{***}	...					
3. Significant Others' Support	.57 ^{***}	.64 ^{***}	...				
4. Everyday Discrimination	-.24 ^{**}	-.24 ^{***}	-.20 ^{***}	...			
5. Anxiety	-.00	-.01	.00	.47 ^{***}	...		
6. Depression	-.16 ^{**}	-.02	-.08	.48 ^{***}	.83 ^{***}	...	
7. Stress	-.11 [*]	.00	-.05	.43 ^{**}	.83 ^{***}	.86 ^{***}	...

P<.001; p<.01; p<.05

The results of table 2 indicate the relationship among the variables. The result showed that the subscales of social support family support, friends support and significant others are significantly negatively correlated ($r=-.24^{***}$; $r=-.24^{***}$ and $r=-.20^{**}$) with everyday discrimination respectively. The results also showed that the depression, anxiety and stress are positively correlated ($r=.47^{***}$, $r=.48^{***}$, $r=.43^{***}$) with everyday discrimination respectively. The result of the study also indicated that the family support is negatively correlated ($r=-.11^*$) with stress but there is not significant relationship among the family support friends support and significant other with depression and anxiety.

Table 3 The Multiple Regression Analysis indicating family support, friends support, significant others support and everyday discrimination as predictor of Depression (N=300)

Predictor	B	SEB	β	t	p<
R ² =.26; Δ R ² = .25					
Constant	3.77	1.22		3.08	.002
Family Support	-.11	.07	-.10	-1.60	.111
Friends Support	.17	.07	.16	2.41	.016
Significant others	-.03	.07	-.03	-.38	.706
Everyday discrimination	1.11	.12	.50	9.44	.000

P<.001

The result of table 3 indicate multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to explore whether family support, friends' support, support from significant others, and everyday discrimination predicted depression. The overall regression model explained 26% of the variance in depression ($R^2 = .26$, $\Delta R^2 = .25$), indicating a moderate level of explanatory power. The individual predictors showed that everyday discrimination was a strong and statistically significant predictor of depression ($B = 1.11$, $SE = .12$, $\beta = .50$, $t = 9.44$, $p < .001$). This indicates that higher levels of everyday discrimination were associated with higher levels of depression. Similarly, friends' support significantly predicted depression ($B = .17$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = .16$, $t = 2.41$, $p = .016$). This suggests that friends' support made a significant unique contribution to the prediction of depression when controlling for other variables in the model. However, family support did not significantly predict depression ($B = -.11$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = -.10$, $t = -1.60$, $p = .111$). Likewise, support from significant others was also not a significant predictor of depression ($B = -.03$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = -.03$, $t = -0.38$, $p = .706$). Overall, the findings suggest that everyday

discrimination and friends' support significantly contributed to predicting depression, whereas family support and support from significant others did not show significant predictive effects in the model

Table 4 The Multiple Regression Analysis indicating family support, friends support, significant others support and everyday discrimination as predictor of Anxiety (N=300)

Predictor	B	SEB	β	t	p<
R ² =.24; Δ R ² = .23					
Constant	2.26	1.14		1.99	.05
Family Support	.07	.06	.07	1.16	.25
Friends Support	.05	.07	.05	.70	.48
Significant others	.04	.06	.04	.58	.56
Everyday discrimination	1.06	.11	.51	9.70	.001

P<.001

The result of table 4 indicates the predictor of the anxiety among the creative artist. The overall regression model explained 24% of the variance in anxiety ($R^2 = .24$, $\Delta R^2 = .23$), indicating that the set of predictors moderately explained anxiety levels among participants. The individual predictor revealed that everyday discrimination was a statistically significant predictor of anxiety ($B = 1.06$, $SE = .11$, $\beta = .51$, $t = 9.70$, $p < .001$). This result indicates that higher levels of everyday discrimination were associated with higher levels of anxiety. However, family support did not significantly predict anxiety ($B = .07$, $SE = .06$, $\beta = .07$, $t = 1.16$, $p = .25$). Similarly, friends' support was not a significant predictor ($B = .05$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = .05$, $t = .70$, $p = .48$). Likewise, support from significant others did not significantly predict anxiety ($B = .04$, $SE = .06$, $\beta = .04$, $t = .58$, $p = .56$).

Table 5 The Multiple Regression Analysis indicating family support, friends support, significant others support and everyday discrimination as predictor of Stress (N=300)

Predictor	B	SEB	β	t	p<
R ² =.21; Δ R ² = .20					
Constant	4.49	1.16		3.86	.000
Family Support	-.06	.06	-.07	-.99	.319
Friends Support	.15	.07	.16	2.27	.024
Significant others	-.02	.07	-.03	-.33	.740
Everyday discrimination	.94	.11	.45	8.37	.000

P<.001

The result of table 5 showed that the overall regression model explained 21% of the variance in Stress ($R^2 = .21$, $\Delta R^2 = .20$), indicating that the predictors collectively accounted for a moderate proportion of variability in stress levels. Examination of individual predictors revealed that everyday discrimination was a strong and statistically significant predictor of stress ($B = .938$,

SE = .112, β = .452, t = 8.37, p < .001). This indicates that higher levels of everyday discrimination were associated with higher levels of stress among participants. Additionally, friends' support significantly predicted anxiety (B = .151, SE = .067, β = .157, t = 2.27, p = .024), suggesting that friends' support made a significant unique contribution to the prediction of stress when other predictors were controlled in the model. However, family support did not significantly predict stress (B = -.064, SE = .064, β = -.065, t = -0.999, p = .319). Similarly, support from significant others was not a significant predictor of stress (B = -.022, SE = .066, β = -.025, t = -0.333, p = .740).

Discussion

Live performers/ artist and musicians are under stress, unemployment, and financial problems, which affected their mental health and creativity (Mehr et al., 2023). Therefore, the current study was planned to investigate the relationship between perceived social support, everyday discrimination, and psychological distress among creative art workers. The study also sought to explore the predictive power of perceived social support and everyday discrimination on anxiety, depression, and stress. The current study yielded interesting findings that are discussed below. Since the first objectives of the study was to explore the relationship among the perceived social support, everyday discrimination and psychological distress so, it was hypothesized that there would be the significant relationship among the study variables among the art workers. The result of the study supported the result and indicated that everyday discrimination is significantly positively correlated with depression, anxiety and stress among the art workers. The previous published literature also supports the results and found that perceived discrimination was a significant predictor of mental health problems, but higher levels of social support were associated with lower levels of mental health problems both directly and indirectly through quality of life. This is consistent with my findings, which also show that discrimination is linked to poor mental health outcomes and that social support has a protective effect. (Kakemam et al., 2024). Nguyen and colleagues (2026) found that perceived discrimination was linked with greater mental distress among Vietnamese Americans, and that smaller social networks and lower acculturation also predicted worse mental health outcomes. The study also revealed that social support is negatively correlated with mental health. The previous literature support and in line with this finding. perceived discrimination significantly impairs both mental and physical health and is linked to both engagement in unhealthy activities and nonparticipation in healthy ones (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). A study conducted by Noah & Okunola (2025) that indicates and support our study findings that strong social support helps reduce these negative effects and improves psychological adjustment. The second objective of the study was investigate the predictor of psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress), so it was hypothesized that everyday discrimination and perceived social support will predict psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress). Our study finding supported the results and indicated that people with poorer perceived social support tend to have worse mental health outcomes over time, including more severe symptoms, poorer recovery, and greater functional difficulties in conditions like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, showing that low support or social isolation is linked with poorer mental health prognosis (Wang et al., 2018). Another study indicated that higher levels of perceived social support were associated with better mental health among older adults, with emotional and general support linked to fewer psychological symptoms. This means that older people who believed they had more support from others were likely to rate their mental health as better, indicating that social support is a crucial factor in shielding against mental health issues in old age (Nazari et al., 2021). In conclusion the research indicates that the increase of social support especially friends support help in reducing the mental health problems as well as everyday discrimination leads to mental health issues.

Conclusion

Overall, based on the results of the four tables, perceived social support and perceived discrimination are crucial factors in predicting mental health outcomes. In addition, perceived support and its sub forms had negative associations with mental health concerns, indicating a protective effect against mental health concerns. In this way, perceived support is helpful in preventing mental health issues. Conversely, perceived discrimination had positive associations with mental health concerns. The findings indicate that when individuals experience high levels of discrimination, they are more likely to have mental health concerns.

Implications of study

The current study sheds light on the emotional turmoil of Pakistani creative artists who are stigmatized and lack support. It goes a long way in giving voice to their neglected mental health needs. The results of the study will provide valuable information to therapists to understand and support creative artists who are stressed, discriminated against, and anxious. By consulting this study new knowledge is added to Pakistani psychological research by studying an understudied population. Culturally sensitive therapeutic interventions are needed to address the stress from discrimination and strengthen the social support systems among the Pakistani creative artists suffering from mental distress.

Recommendations and Limitations

Correlational and Cross-Sectional Design was used in the current study that does not predict cause and effect relationship for the further studies experimental research should be conducted to investigate cause-and-effect relationships between perceived social support, discrimination, and mental health outcomes. Data was collected from only Lahore city for the further research data can be collected from other cities of Punjab for more result generalization. Quantitative research method used in study focus groups or interviews may provide a more detailed insight into personal experiences.

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