

**Relationship between Optimism and Self-Esteem among University Students**

**Mahnoor Ghulam Mustafa**

[mahnoormustafa892@gmail.com](mailto:mahnoormustafa892@gmail.com)

MPhil scholar Department of Psychology University of Balochistan, Quetta, Pakistan

**Syed Azizddin Agha**

[aziz.psyp.phd@gmail.com](mailto:aziz.psyp.phd@gmail.com)

Head, Department of Psychology, University of Balochistan, Quetta, Pakistan

**Corresponding Author: \* Mahnoor Ghulam Mustafa** [mahnoormustafa892@gmail.com](mailto:mahnoormustafa892@gmail.com)

**Received:** 15-06-2025

**Revised:** 28-07-2025

**Accepted:** 10-08-2025

**Published:** 26-08-2025

**ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study was to investigate relationship of optimism with self-esteem. It also investigated differences between optimism and self-esteem based on gender and education level. The data were gathered from 300 male and female students using self-reported Questionnaires of life orientation and Rosenberg self-esteem scale. Outcomes indicated acceptable alpha reliability for the study scales. The results have supported the hypothesis regarding positive correlation between optimism and self-esteem. The male reported high self-esteem and the female reported optimism to a greater extent. Nevertheless, these the difference on gender and education level was not significant.*

**Key words:** optimism and self-esteem

**INTRODUCTION**

The word self-esteem is a sense of respect for oneself and one's potential. Self-esteem is an individual's belief about him or herself; it is basically self-judgment and opinions regarding personal value, i.e., the way a person thinks he or she matters (Alyaa et al., 2025; Rosenberg, 1965, Wani, 2017). People lacking healthy self-esteem are unable to deal with life challenges or be happy (Branden, 2007). Self-esteem is a key psychological construct to lead a happy life. Literature indicates that successful experiences boost self-esteem, while failure or rejection results in low self-esteem (Mruk, 2006). Self-esteem is also seen as a key aspect for development from adolescence to adulthood (Chub et al., 1997).

In addition, high self-esteem assists people in developing constructive relationships with the environment. As self-esteem is high, one does not permit themselves to feel inferior. High self-esteem enhances the mental status, which enhances coping ability and reduces susceptibility to depression (Birndorf et al., 2010).

Low self-esteem is a barrier between an individual and his or her aspirations. Low self-esteem hinders positive thoughts about oneself and others. Theorists expand on how individuals with low self-esteem tend to be more involved in dangerous activities (Wild et al., 2004). If an individual with whatever degree of self-esteem sees themselves as deserving, this has a positive impact on well-being (Diener, 1984, Duy & Yildiz, 2017).

The word optimism is used to indicate the expectation that good things will happen or something anticipated will occur. Optimism has positive impacts on people (Scheier & Carver, 1985; Carver et al., 2010; Segerstrom et al., 2017). It is the belief of dealing with both positive and negative circumstances whereby people define failure as a temporary condition, do not become depressed, and are in good health (Scheier et al., 2001; Seligman, 1990; ). Optimism is regarded as a behavioral skill that allows individuals to be healthier physically, more prosperous, and happier (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). Optimists are also academically better (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992) and do better in their

careers (Long, 1993). Happiness is also closely related to optimism (Gorsy & Panwar, 2016). Optimism, self-esteem, and life satisfaction have a positive relationship. As per Arshad (2015), good self-esteem is good in all respects for an individual.

Previous studies have primarily worked with pessimism and low self-esteem. The current study lays stress on illustrations of the given variables and tries to quantify the relationship between optimism and self-esteem in university students. It explores how optimistic thinking influences self-esteem and stresses various dimensions of the issue. For instance, Firdous (2017) explored the optimism and self-esteem levels of female students in public and private institutions in Lahore. The findings showed the levels of self-esteem varied significantly, as private-sector students had higher self-esteem, which was highly correlated with socioeconomic status.

Seligman (2008) proved that optimism has a great influence on psychological and mental well-being, lowering stress and enhancing immune system function. Likewise, Siddique et al. (2006) established that optimism is highly associated with self-efficacy, predicting that highly able students with high optimism perform better in their academic work. Earlier research (Gardner, 1981; Holland, 1985; Super, 1980) has proven that highly self-esteem adolescents possess more definite self-concepts, career aspirations, and decision-making skills than those with low self-esteem.

Findings also uncover gender differences. Some of the studies discovered that males have greater optimism and self-esteem compared to females (Birndorf et al., 2005; Puskar et al., 1999; Sung et al., 2006). Pritchard et al. (2007) associated negative moods with low self-esteem and hypothesized that low self-esteem individuals exhibit more negative behaviors. Low self-esteem has also been linked with drug addiction (Furnham & Lowick, 1984) and suicide among various cultures and ages. Optimism and self-esteem are also connected to subjective well-being that comprises life satisfaction, positive affect, and lower negative affect (Diener, 2000; Diener et al., 2002, as cited in Duy, 2017).

Trzesniewski et al. (2006) reported that low self-esteem is risky for physical and mental well-being and is linked with increased instances of illegal activity. Trzesniewski and Robins (2006) reported that self-esteem peaks in childhood, drops during adolescence (particularly for females), increases later in adulthood, and falls in old age. Sung, Puskar, and Sereika (2006) also reported that males had greater self-esteem than females in rural communities. Twinomugisha (2008, cited in Ahmat, 2018) carried out a research on university students in East Africa and discovered that self-esteem was positively correlated with academic achievement, although there were gender differences, wherein male self-esteem increased as grades improved, whereas female self-esteem decreased even when there was equal performance.

Sadaat, Ghasemzadeh, and Soleimani (2012, as cited in Mahmood, 2015) conducted research on self-esteem and academic performance among university students, demonstrating considerable differences between men and women students across different fields including education, psychology, and computer science. Literature also indicates minority groups have lower self-esteem compared to majority groups (Gordon, 1971; Heiss & Owens, 1972; Hurstfield, 1978; Lefebvre, 1973; Martinez & Dukes, 1987; Turner & Turner, 1982).

Schweizer, Beck-Seyffer, and Schneider (1999) found that optimism positively influences well-being, while Strassle, McKee, and Plant (1999) reported that optimism correlates with mental health and life satisfaction. Optimism has also been associated with workplace outcomes. Kluemper (2009) argued that optimism is linked with essential organizational results, while Strivastava et al. (2006) found that it promotes better social functioning, long-term friendships, and reduced social isolation. Likewise, Medlin and Green (2009) demonstrated that optimism is positively correlated with attitude and performance within and outside the workplace.

## **METHOD**

### **Problem statement**

The study aim is to analyze the correlation between optimism and self-esteem among university students and investigate gender differences on optimism and self-esteem.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To investigate gender differences between optimism and self-esteem
- To analyze the correlation between optimism and self-esteem among university students

### **Research design**

It was a cross-sectional descriptive study with a correlational design.

### **Hypotheses**

H1. There exists a positive correlation between optimism and self-esteem.

H1. Female will tend to report more optimism.

H2. Male report will tend to score higher on self-esteem.

### **Sample**

300 students were sampled from the University of Balochistan containing both male (150) and female (150) students. The students were enrolled in different disciplines- Arts, science, and professionals. Convenient sampling technique was employed.

### **Questionnaire**

Rosenberg's self-esteem scale was applied to assess self-worth. It was created by Rosenberg (1965). Ten items on Rosenberg's self-esteem scale are rated on a four-point response on a scale from strongly agree (0) to strongly disagree (3). The item numbers 1,3,4,7 and 10 are reverse scoring. The scale on a 0-30 score 15-25 scores fall in average ranges; scores of below 15 indicate low self-esteem, the values are 0=strongly agree 1=agree 2=disagree 3=strongly disagree.

### **Optimism**

Scheier and Carver (1987) created a scale to quantify optimism. The scale has 10 ten items. The answers range from strongly agree, strongly disagree, agree, disagree and neutral. Out of the ten optimism items, three items are used to assess pessimism which when reversed are used to assess optimism, and three assess optimism while 4 items are fillers which are not scored for analysis, the values include 0=strongly disagree, 1= disagree, 2=neutral, 3=agree, 4= strongly agree.

### **Procedure**

Data for the present research study were gathered from students of University of Balochistan belonging to various departments of Arts and Science and professionals. Data were gathered through questionnaires and were analyzed subsequently through SPSS (21 Version).

## **RESULT**

### **Table 1**

Differences in Mean and Standard Deviation on the Scores of Participants in Three different education groups on optimism and self-esteem LOT and RSES (N=300)

Ser no	Scale	Edu	N	M	SD	F	P
Group							
1	OPT	MSc	100	19.85	4.457	4.567	.011
		MA	100	21.04	1.657		
		DPT	100	20.78	1.761		
2	SE	MSc	100	19.17	3.819	.436	.647
		MA	100	18.89	3.725		
		DPT	100	18.69	3.395		

Note. OPT= Optimism; SE=Self-esteem

The result indicates that there are meaningful differences among three different education groups. The result of OPT is significant  $p < .05$  and the SE is non-significant.

**Table 2**

The table indicate the Differences in Mean and Standard Deviation of Men and Women on the score of OPT = Optimism; and SE= Self-esteem (N=300)

Ser no	Scales	Men (n=150)		Women (n=150)		T	P	Cohen's d
		M	SD	M	SD			
1	OPT	19.96	2.69	20.0	2.40	-.294	.769	0.01
2	SE	19.30	3.57	18.53	3.68	1.82	.068	0.21

Note. OPT= Optimism; SE= Self-esteem

The outcome investigates that there are differences in mean and standard deviation on the OPT score and SE between men and women. And the outcome is not significant.

**Table 4**

The following table presents the reliability coefficient for participants' score on OPT- Optimism and SE- Self-esteem (N=300)

Ser no	Variables/scale	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	OPT	6	.445
2	SE	10	.433

Note. OPT=Optimism; SE=Self-esteem

The outcome takes into account that the Cronbach's Alpha reliability on the OPT score is poor and testing the Cronbach's Alpha reliability on the SE score is also poor.

**Table 5**

Difference in Mean and Standard Deviation on the Scores of Participants in Three different socio-economic groups on optimism and self-esteem LOT And RSES (N=300)

Ser no	Scale	SEC	N	M	SD	F	P
		Group					
1	OPT	Lower	29	20.31	2.33	.132	.877
		Middle	208	20.56	3.26		
		Elite	63	20.65	2.05		
2	SE	Low	29	19.20	3.94	.182	.834
		Middle	208	18.83	3.49		
		Elite	63	19.04	4.04		

Note. OPT= Optimism; SE=Self-esteem

The result indicates that there are mean differences among three different socio-economic groups. The result is non-significant.

## DISCUSSION

Correlation coefficient analysis was applied in the present research. The outcome shows that correlation between optimism and self-esteem is positive. The level of optimism when high among students enhances students' level of self-esteem. When a person maintains an optimistic mindset, he or she will automatically enhance their level of self-esteem as well. Seligman in 1991 said that optimism and self-esteem are connected to each other since optimism is held accountable for developing high self-esteem. This study has also paid attention to gender differences whether there exist gender differences based on optimism and self-esteem or not, the finding of present study indicated that there exist gender differences and men possess more self-esteem. Equally, the literature has offered a wide range of findings concerning optimism and self-esteem as it relates to gender. Other studies have brought to light greater self-esteem among males (Birndorf et al.2005; Kling et al., 1999; Puskar et al, 1999; Sung et al.2006). Along with this Trzesniewski and Robins in (2006) mentioned that at childhood average self-esteem is high while decreases in adolescence especially among females similarly it develops during adulthood and falls on very low level during old age. Moreover the emphasis of present study was on various education groups as well. A study was done in United States international university in east Africa. The purpose of the research was to ascertain whether the level of self-esteem has any relationship with their academic success or not. The outcome predicted a negative correlation with self-esteem but academic success was positively related with gender. Also, Sadat, Ghasemzadeh and Suleiman's 2012 discovery revealed that students from different departments or domain such as education science, psychology computer had varying levels of self-esteem.

## RECOMMENDATION

Since the results of this study anticipated that there is a positive correlation between optimism and self-esteem, therefore, students need to adopt an optimistic way or attitude to develop their self-esteem. But another suggestion to this study is a lot of time duration should be allocated so that data could be gathered from a larger number of universities. Limitation

## LIMITATION

There were a number of limitations for the current research study. Among which one was the short time span due to which the research study area was restricted to University of Balochistan. Owing to

paucity of time, I was unable to gather data from other universities of Quetta except Balochistan University. Implication

### **IMPLICATION**

The research outcomes of present study created a significant impact in identifying the association between optimism and self-esteem, and reflected a positive correlation between optimism and self-esteem. Optimism refers to one's positive attitude towards life, and self-esteem refers to one's self-worth. Therefore, students should have a positive approach towards life short comings, and society as well as family should be supportive with the students in developing optimistic approach.

### **CONCLUSION**

The focus of the present study on optimism and self-esteem among university students. It is necessary to understand whether optimism is related to self-esteem of students or not, or estimate if low and high self-esteem is the result of an optimistic style. Yet, the purpose of the ongoing research was to evaluate that whether there occur gender and education differences on the bases of self-esteem and optimism. Likewise, these research results have indicated that men comparatively scored on self-esteem whereas women expressed higher level of optimism. Furthermore, this paper discloses that differences on the groups of education also occur. There are certain factors which impact optimism and self-esteem, like mental health drug abuse and neglect from society peers or family and low socio economic status. Therefore the family environment should be positive to develop people optimism and self-esteem.

### **REFERENCES**

- Ahmat, S. N., Muda, M. R., & Neoh, C. F. (2018). Self-esteem level and its relationship to academic performance among undergraduate pharmacy students in a Malaysian public university. *Indian Journal of Pharmaceutical Education and Research*, 52(2), 197–201.
- Alyaa, H. A. N., Rosnawati, R., & Widjajanti, D. B. (2025). Educational Self-Esteem Research Over the Last 50 Years: A Bibliometric Analysis of the Scopus Database. *Journal of General Education and Humanities*, 4(3), 1019-1034.
- Arshad, M., Zaidi, S. M. I. H., & Mahmood, K. (2015). Self-esteem and academic performance among university students. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(1), 156–162.
- Caprara, G. V., Alessandri, G., Eisenberg, N., Kupfer, A., Steca, P., Caprara, M. G., & Abela, J. (2012). The positivity scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 24(3), 701–712.
- Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Segerstrom, S. C. (2010). Optimism. *Clinical psychology review*, 30(7), 879-889.
- Chapman, P. L., & Mullis, R. L. (2000). Racial differences in adolescent coping and self-esteem. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 161(2), 152–160.
- Çikrikci, Ö., Erzen, E., & Yeniçeri, İ. A. (2019). Self-esteem and optimism as mediators in the relationship between test anxiety and life satisfaction among a school-based sample of adolescents. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, 29(1), 39–53.
- Dar, A. A., & Wani, M. A. (2017). Optimism, happiness, and self-esteem among university students. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(3), 300–304.



- Doğan, T. (2011). Two-dimensional self-esteem: Adaptation of the self-liking/self-competence scale into Turkish: A validity and reliability study. *Eğitim ve Bilim / Education & Science*, 36(162), 126–137.
- Duy, B., & Yıldız, M. A. (2017). The mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between optimism and subjective well-being. *Current Psychology*, 38(6), 1456–1463. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-017-9688-1>
- Emler, N. (2001). *Self-esteem: The costs and causes of low self-worth*. York Publishing Services.
- Gentile, B., Grabe, S., Dolan-Pascoe, B., Twenge, J. M., Wells, B. E., & Maitino, A. (2009). Gender differences in domain-specific self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Review of General Psychology*, 13(1), 34–45.
- Homaei, R., Bozorgi, Z. D., Ghahfarokhi, M. S. M., & Hosseinpour, S. (2016). Relationship between optimism, religiosity and self-esteem with marital satisfaction and life satisfaction. *International Education Studies*, 9(6), 53–61.
- Javed, Z., & Tariq, O. (2016). Career-decisions, self-efficacy and self-esteem among students of private and government academic institutions. *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 14(2), 42–47.
- Kavas, A. B. (2009). Self-esteem and health-risk behaviors among Turkish late adolescents. *Adolescence*, 44(173), 187–198.
- Kling, K. C., Hyde, J. S., Showers, C. J., & Buswell, B. N. (1999). Gender differences in self-esteem: a meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin*, 125(4), 470.
- Marcić, R., & Grum, D. K. (2011). Gender differences in self-concept and self-esteem components. *Studia Psychologica*, 53(4), 373–384.
- Martinez, R., & Dukes, R. L. (1991). Ethnic and gender differences in self-esteem. *Youth & Society*, 22(3), 318–338.
- Patton, W., Bartrum, D. A., & Creed, P. A. (2004). Gender differences for optimism, self-esteem, expectations and goals in predicting career planning and exploration in adolescents. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 4(2–3), 193–209.
- Purba, A. W. D. (2017). The correlation between self-esteem and optimism for the recovery of hemodialysis patients in the Dr. H. Kumpulan Pane Hospital. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 22(10), 71–81.
- Puskar, K. R., Bernardo, L. M., Ren, D., Haley, T. M., Tark, K. H., Switala, J., & Siemon, L. (2010). Self-esteem and optimism in rural youth: Gender differences. *Contemporary Nurse*, 34(2), 190–198.
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (2001). Optimism, pessimism, and psychological well-being.
- Seegerstrom, S. C., Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2017). Optimism. In *The happy mind: Cognitive contributions to well-being* (pp. 195–212). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

- Shaheen, F. (2015). Study of optimism and self-esteem in relation to psychological distress among professional and nonprofessional students. *International Journal of Education and Psychological Research*, 4(1), 49–54.
- Tan, C., & Tan, L. S. (2014). The role of optimism, self-esteem, academic self-efficacy and gender in high-ability students. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 23(3), 621–633.
- Tsivilskaya, E. A., & Artemyeva, T. V. (2016). The study of optimism and positive self-concept of students. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 1(1), 199–205.
- Watkins, D., Dong, Q., & Xia, Y. (1997). Age and gender differences in the self-esteem of Chinese children. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 137(3), 374–379.
- Windle, M. (1990). A longitudinal study of antisocial behaviors in early adolescence as predictors of late adolescent substance use: Gender and ethnic group differences. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 99(1), 86–91.