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# Journal of Modern Psychology

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## Research Paper: Comparison of Parenting Stress and Locus of Control in Parents of Children with and without Specific Learning Disorder



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### Abstract

**Objective:** Families frequently experience a variety of wonderful occurrences and, at times, face difficult circumstances, such as the birth of a child with special needs. These conditions can profoundly affect the dynamics of a family. This research aimed to examine parental stress and locus of control between parents of children with certain learning disorder and those without.

**Methods:** This study utilized a descriptive-comparative methodology. The statistics population comprised all primary school students in the city of Talesh during March to June 2024. The research sample consisted of 116 people (56 parents of children with specific learning disorder and 60 parents with children without specific learning disorder) who were selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) and the Internal-External Locus of Control (IPC) scale. Multivariate analysis of variance and independent t-tests were employed to analyze the data.

**Results:** The findings revealed a notable disparity in parental stress and locus of control between parents of children with specific learning disorder and those without ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The findings indicate that parents of children with learning disorder endure elevated stress levels and a heightened perception of loss of control, hence increasing their risk.

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## 1. Introduction

Specific learning disorder, often referred to as learning disabilities, are neurodevelopmental disorders that involve persistent difficulties in one or more of the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, which are essential for learning. These difficulties, such as dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, and aphasia, can occur alone or in combination, ranging from mild to severe (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders estimates the prevalence of all learning disorder (including dysgraphia, dyslexia, and dyscalculia) to be around 5 to 15% worldwide (Scaria et al., 2022). In total, learning disorder affect 2-10% of the school-age population globally (Lino & Chieffo, 2022). Specific learning disorder have a detrimental impact on the adaptation and psychological well-being of families. Research findings indicate that parents of children with specific learning disorder experience more psychological problems compared to parents of typically developing children, including feelings of social deprivation, emotional deprivation, and higher levels of stress and depression (Moradi & Kiany, 2019). Family stress, especially when chronic and occurring early in a child's development, has harmful effects on the health of parents, children, and parent-child relationships. Raising children with specific learning disorder is a stressful experience, and one type of stress that mothers of these children experience is parental stress (Hsiao, 2018). As the prevalence of children with specific learning

disorder has increased significantly over the decades (Pourebrahim & Doniamaly, 2021), parents face the challenge of raising a child with a specific learning disorder, and their parenting is associated with unique challenges (Neff & Faso, 2015) and is correlated with lower maternal mental health and emotional disturbances (Ceballos et al., 2019). Parental stress results from a perceived mismatch between parental demands and individual resources, and such stress can be experienced in several domains related to child-rearing (Craig et al., 2016). Research suggests that parents of children with specific learning disorder experience higher parental stress, more emotional symptoms, and lower levels of quality of life related to health and psychological well-being compared to parents of typically developing children or children with other developmental disabilities (Johansson et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2020).

According to Attribution Theory, individuals attribute their life successes and failures to either controllable factors (Internal Locus of Control) or uncontrollable factors (External Locus of Control) (Heywood et al., 2017). Those with an internal locus of control believe they have significant control over their lives and behave accordingly. As a result, these individuals experience less anxiety, have higher self-esteem, take responsibility for their actions and decisions, and enjoy better physical and mental health (Malik et al., 2015).

Conversely, individuals with an external locus of control believe they are powerless in the face of external stressors and perceive their efforts to improve their circumstances

as futile. These individuals have poorer mental health compared to those with an internal locus of control. Some research has shown that locus of control is a significant factor in reducing quality of life and increasing psychological disorders in parents of children with specific learning disabilities (Barros et al., 2017, Rajan et al., 2018).

Generally, parents of children with specific learning disabilities experience limitations such as impaired mental health, feelings of social deprivation, and high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression compared to parents of typical children. In these families, members experience various emotional and cognitive reactions, ranging from complete rejection to full acceptance, from intense anger to love, and from neglect to over-care (Hallahan et al., 2014).

The increasing number of children with specific learning disabilities has led to a critical need for healthcare and nursing services focused on families. This necessitates research in this area, and professionals such as psychiatric nurses can play a role in promoting the mental health of mothers, children, and families, ultimately contributing to societal well-being and modern locus of control. Given the importance of a healthy parent-child relationship in a child's psychosocial development and the crucial role of parents in maintaining the family's psychosocial balance, it is necessary to plan strategies to address the challenges faced by parents of children with specific learning disabilities. In fact, many children with learning disabilities go undiagnosed, and their academic

weaknesses are attributed by teachers and parents to laziness or lack of cooperation, which increases the stress experienced by parents. Moreover, due to the lack of research comparing these variables both domestically and internationally, the results of these differences can be used to plan and inform parents and to engage them in the treatment process. Based on the aforementioned points, this research aims to answer the question of whether there is a difference in parental stress and locus of control between parents of children with and without specific learning disabilities.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research Design, Statistical Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

This study was descriptive-comparative in nature. The study population comprised all primary school children in the city of Talesh during March to June 2024. The sample comprised 116 individuals, including 56 parents of children with learning disorder and 60 parents of children without specific learning disorder. Participants were chosen based on their eligibility for the study, employing a convenience sample strategy for parents of children with learning disorder and a purposive sampling method for parents of children without specific learning disorder. Data were collected using the Parental Stress Index and the locus of control scale. Multivariate analysis of variance and independent t-test were utilized to evaluate the research hypotheses. All data analyses were conducted utilizing SPSS22.

## 2.2. Instruments

**Parenting Stress Index (PSI):** Developed by Abidin (1990), the PSI is a questionnaire designed to assess the significance of stress within the parent-child relationship. This questionnaire is based on the principle that parental stress can arise from various child characteristics, parental attributes, or diverse situations directly related to the parental role. In this study, the 36-item version of the Parenting Stress Index was used. The scoring method was based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The internal consistency reliability coefficient, calculated using Cronbach's alpha for a group of 248 Hong Kong mothers, was 0.93. The item-total correlation was 0.93, and the range of the concurrent validity coefficient with five other stress measures was 0.38 to 0.66 (Tam-Chan & Wong, 1994; as cited in Dadsetan et al, 2006). Abidin (1983) obtained an internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.93 for the entire questionnaire in a group of American mothers.

**Internal-External Control Scale (IPC):** This questionnaire was developed by Lewinsohn (1972) and consists of 24 questions. The questionnaire comprises three subscales: Internality (I), Powerful Others (P), and Chance (C). The questions are rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with -3, -2, and -1 on one end and +1, +2, and +3 on the other. The questionnaire has three subscales: Internality, Powerful Others, and Chance. The total score is calculated by

summing the scores of the subscales. The score for each subscale is obtained by summing the test-taker's scores on the 8 items related to that subscale, which is then added to 24 to eliminate negative signs. Therefore, the score range for each scale is between zero and 48. Higher scores on each scale indicate that the individual expects a higher degree of control from the source represented by that scale (Soleymannezhad & Shahrarai, 2002).

Lewinsohn (1972) reported the validity of this questionnaire for each of the IPC scales as 51, 77, and 64, respectively. Furthermore, in the research of Soleymannezhad and Shahrarai (2002), the reliability using Cronbach's alpha for the IPC scales was 64, 71, and 68, respectively. Goodarzi (1999) reported the reliability of the questionnaire and its components using Cronbach's alpha as 0.64 for Internality (I), 0.60 for Powerful Others (P), and 0.69 for Chance (C).

## 3. Results

A total of 116 participants were studied (56 mothers of children with specific learning disorder and 60 mothers of typically developing children). The average age and standard deviation for moms of children with learning disorder was  $39.91 \pm 30.3$  years, while for mothers of generally developing children, it was  $40.55 \pm 20.3$  years. Subsequently, the frequency and percentage of children per family and the child's grade level were computed for both groups of moms with children with and without learning disorder. The findings indicated that 16 children (28.6%) with learning disorder and 9 children (15%) without disabilities were in the second grade; 24 children (42.9%) with learning disorder and 27

children (45%) without disabilities were in the third grade; 14 children (25%) with learning disorder and 19 children (31.7%) without disabilities were in the fourth grade; and 2 children (3.6%) with learning disorder and 5 children (8.3%) without disabilities were in the fifth grade. Furthermore, an

analysis of family size indicated that 33 persons (58.9%) of children with learning disorder and 39 individuals (65%) of children without learning disorder were only children, while the remainder had two siblings in both cohorts.

Table 1  
*Mean and Standard Deviation of Parental Stress and Locus of Control by Group*

Variable	Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	kurtosis
Parental Stress	With Learning disorder	67.62	5.34	60	75	-0.020	-1.177
	Normal	47.28	7.30	38	65	0.771	-0.030
Internality	With Learning disorder	13.82	2.08	10	20	0.010	0.345
	Normal	15.95	1.68	13	19	0.302	-0.820
Powerful Others	With Learning disorder	16.41	1.70	14	20	0.330	-0.955
	Normal	17.06	3.38	10	25	-0.070	0.450
Chance	With Learning disorder	16.94	1.65	14	20	0.138	-1.005
	Normal	17.50	1.99	12	20	-0.344	-0.630
Total Locus of Control	With Learning disorder	47.17	3.27	39	54	0.019	-0.004
	Normal	50.51	4.69	40	64	0.036	0.302

Table 1 illustrates that the mean parental stress ratings indicate elevated stress levels in moms of children with learning difficulties relative to mothers of generally functioning children. A comparison of the mean scores on the dimensions of internal locus of control, powerful others, and chance, together with

the overall locus of control score, revealed that these scores were elevated in moms of generally developing children in contrast to mothers of children with learning difficulties. Additionally, an analysis of the skewness and kurtosis for all three variables in both groups revealed that the data were normally

distributed, thus permitting the application of parametric statistical methods without restrictions.

An independent t-test was employed to compare the total parental stress scores and total locus of control scores between mothers of children with learning difficulties and

those without. Levene's test results indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied ( $P < 0.05$ ), therefore validating the use of the independent t-test. **Table 2** displays the outcomes of the independent t-test conducted to compare total parental stress levels and locus of control scores.

Table 2

*Outcomes of the Independent Samples t-test for Analyzing Mean Parental Stress and Total Locus of Control Scores in Mothers of the Two Groups*

Variable		Mean Difference	df	t	Significance Level
Parental Stress	Assumed Equality of Variances	20.33	113	16.972	0.0001
	Assumed Inequality of Variances	20.33	106.229	17.108	0.0001
Locus of Control	Assumed Equality of Variances	-3.338	114	-4.411	0.001
	Assumed Inequality of Variances	-3.338	105.732	-4.464	0.001

The independent samples t-test results, displayed in **Table 2**, indicated a significant difference in total parental stress and locus of control between the two groups of mothers. The comparison of means revealed that moms of children with learning difficulties had elevated parental stress and diminished locus of control relative to mothers of generally developing children. To compare the dimensions of locus of control (internal, powerful others, and chance), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed due to the multivariate character of the dependent variables. Consequently, its assumptions were initially scrutinized. The outcomes of Box's M test for the homogeneity of covariance matrices

indicated that this assumption was violated ( $M_{\text{box}}=30.952$ ,  $F_{9,2931,282}=5.011$ ,  $P=0.001$ ). The assumption of homogeneity of variances was subsequently assessed using Levene's test. Levene's test results indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied for the internal and chance dimensions ( $P < 0.05$ ), but not for the powerful others dimension ( $P > 0.05$ ). Subsequently, multivariate tests were employed to analyze the differences in the three variables between the two groups. The Wilk's lambda multivariate test results (Wilk's Lambda=0.749,  $F_{3,112}=12.537$ ,  $P=0.001$ ) indicated a significant difference in the locus of control dimensions between the two groups of mothers of children with and

without learning difficulties. Table 3 presents more specifics on the multivariate analysis of variance for each dimension.

Table 3

*Outcomes of Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) for Comparing Locus of Control Dimensions Across Two Groups*

Variable	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance Level	Eta-Square
Intercept	131.237	\	131.237	36.754	0.001	0.244
Powerful Others	12.463	\	12.463	1.701	0.195	0.015
Chance	8.876	\	8.876	2.623	0.108	0.022

The multivariate analysis of variance results (Table 3) indicated a significant difference between the two groups just in the internal locus of control dimension, while differences in other dimensions were not significant.

#### 4. Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine parenting stress and locus of control among parents of children with specific learning difficulties and those without. The findings indicated a considerable disparity in overall parental stress between the two maternal groups, with mothers of children with learning difficulties exhibiting elevated stress levels in contrast to mothers of generally developing children. The results of the current study align with those of Johansson et al. (2020) and Zeng et al. (2020).

Raising a kid is among the most significant, delicate, and demanding responsibilities that parents encounter. This process entails confronting intricate and distinctive circumstances that not only perplex parents but also frequently subject

them to various psychological detriments and issues, including communication breakdowns and parental stress. Parental stress is characterized as the gap between the expectations parents perceive and the resources they possess to fulfill those demands (Fucà et al., 2022). When a child encounters an issue that disrupts their functioning or diverges from the standard educational procedure, the stress levels of each parent will escalate. Any disorder in a child's functioning, particularly for perfectionist parents, adversely affects the family's mental health, disrupts family interaction and communication, induces psychological pressure, elicits emotional responses, fosters incompatibility and social isolation, and contributes to depression, anxiety, and other emotional disturbances, as well as straining relationships with the child. Consequently, it is understandable that parents of children with learning disabilities, particularly when education and academic achievement are significant to them, endure greater stress levels than mothers of children who do not have learning disabilities and

navigate the educational process with greater ease. Mothers, owing to their caring responsibilities, assume greater obligations for a kid with difficulties, leading to increased stress and psychological issues. A literature analysis indicates that parents of children with certain learning difficulties encounter challenges such as stress, sadness, and significant anxiety in comparison to other parents (Zyga et al., 2020).

The results indicated a substantial disparity in the overall locus of control score and the internal dimension between the two maternal groups, but differences in other dimensions were not significant. The comparison of means revealed a diminished locus of control in moms of children with learning difficulties relative to mothers of generally developing children. The findings of the current study align with the research conducted by Barros et al. (2017) and Rajan et al. (2018).

The results indicate that locus of control significantly influences the conduct of mothers with children who have certain learning difficulties. Mothers possessing an external locus of control perceive themselves as lacking influence over their current and future circumstances, believing that their activities do not affect the results of their endeavors. Consequently, they undervalue their efforts, and this conviction impacts their performance. These mothers ascribe life events to external influences and do not assume responsibility for the circumstances in their lives. They perceive themselves as powerless against life's occurrences, believing their fate is governed by external influences such as chance or destiny. Mothers

possessing an internal locus of control have more adaptive coping skills for societal interactions. Internalizers perceive life events and incidents as under their control, assume responsibility for them, and possess confidence in their capacity to influence life occurrences. They exhibit increased independence in their ideas and less susceptibility to environmental influences, leading to enhanced life expectancy. Consequently, individuals possessing an internal locus of control, owing to their comprehension of their influence on life perceptions and their acknowledgment of accountability for their actions' outcomes, tend to experience enhanced happiness and exhibit greater efficiency, persistence, cognitive engagement, and adaptability than mothers with an external locus of control. Mothers possessing an internal locus of control experience superior mental wellness. They exhibit reduced anxiety, a lower susceptibility to mental disease, and superior psychological adjustment in social and personal contexts, as well as in all facets of their lives. The study indicated that mothers of children with learning difficulties exhibited a weaker internal locus of control compared to mothers of generally developing children. As a result, mothers of children with learning disabilities, after grappling with their children's challenges, perceive a lack of control over these issues, which can adversely impact their mental health, stress levels, and quality of interaction with their children (Li et al., 2015). A weakness of this research was the absence of control over demographic variables, including socioeconomic position, parental education

level, and family size. A further weakness of this research was the non-random selection of participants, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. It is recommended that, in conjunction with the therapeutic and educational services offered to these children, strategies be developed to alleviate parental stress and enhance their understanding of their children's diseases, with these strategies being delivered by service-providing institutions.

## 5. Conclusion

This research indicates that the study has broad implications for healthcare practitioners who are crucial in assisting parents to manage stress and enhance their locus of control for children with unique learning difficulties. Parents should be adequately prepared for alterations in the dynamics of their connections with children who have unique learning difficulties.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors assert that no conflict of interest exists.

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## Research Paper: The Effects of Aerobic Training on Depression and Resilience among Healthcare Workers



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### Abstract

**Objective:** Identifying factors that can positively influence the mental health and resilience of healthcare workers is crucial. As such, this research aims to explore the impact of aerobic exercise on depression and resilience among healthcare workers.

**Methods:** This study was conducted as an experiment, focusing on healthcare workers employed in hospitals in Tehran. A sample of 64 health care workers was selected using a convenience sampling method. These individuals were then randomly divided into two control groups (32 people each) and one experimental group (32 people). Data was collected using standard questionnaires. T tests and ANCOVA were used to analyze data.

**Results:** The results showed that there is no significant difference in both depression and resilience in the pretest (both  $P > 0.05$ ). However, it was observed that experimental group had significantly lower depression and higher resilience compared to control group in the posttest (both  $P = 0.001$ ). Finally, the results of ANCOVA showed significant differences between experimental and control groups in both depression and resilience (both  $P = 0.001$ ).

**Conclusions:** These results suggest that physical activity and sport can be considered as an important factor in coping with severe job-related conditions in healthcare workers. Therefore, by increasing physical activity and sport, better conditions can be created for healthcare workers to ensure their mental health.

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## 1. Introduction

Depression is a widely prevalent condition often referred to as a psychiatric cold. The key characteristic of this condition is a minimum two-week period marked by either a depressed mood or a loss of interest and pleasure in nearly all activities (American Psychological Association, 2014; Jolivet, et al. 2010). Symptoms may include changes in appetite or weight, disruptions in sleep patterns and psycho-motor functions, fatigue, decreased energy levels leading to impaired social, occupational, and academic performance, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, cognitive difficulties, and suicidal ideation or behaviors. Suicide is a grave consequence of depression (Masten, 2001; Sadeghipor & Aghdam, 2021a, 2021b). Recent research indicates that major depressive disorder has the highest lifetime prevalence (around 17%) among psychiatric illnesses. Studies involving student populations have also revealed a significant prevalence of this disorder. While drug therapy and various forms of cognitive therapy have shown efficacy in treating major depressive disorders, their effectiveness diminishes in milder cases (Sadeghpour & Sangchini, 2020; Taso et al., 2014). Moreover, these treatments are resource-intensive, costly, and may have adverse effects. Hence, there is a pressing need to explore non-pharmacological interventions for different severity levels of depression.

Several research studies have explored the impact of exercise on depression, revealing that physical activity is effective in

alleviating symptoms of depression (Abdi et al., 2022; Afsanepurak et al., 2012; Dana & Shams, 2019; Dana et al., 2021; Ghorbani & Bund, 2014, 2016; 2017; Ghorbani et al., 2020; Khosravi et al., 2023; Moradi et al., 2020; Sadeghipor & Aghdam, 2021a, 2021b; Sadeghipor et al., 2021a; Sadeghipor et al., 2021b; Seyedi-Asl et al., 2016, 2021; Taghva et al., 2020). For instance, a study involving 43 depressed women found that those who engaged in aerobic exercise experienced a greater reduction in depression compared to those who participated in relaxation exercises or received no intervention (Chris et al., 2010). In a separate study, 12 patients diagnosed with major depression underwent a 30-minute daily aerobic training session for 10 days, resulting in a significant improvement in mood (Ellis et al., 2013). Another study focused on the effects of physical exercise on depression, neuroendocrine stress hormones, and overall well-being in young women with depressive symptoms. This study, which involved 49 volunteer participants, demonstrated that an 8-week exercise program led to a significant decrease in depression scores (Faircloth, 2017).

In the realms of developmental psychology, family psychology, and mental health, resilience has garnered significant attention. Resilience, in essence, refers to the successful adaptation to challenging circumstances, encompassing a process, ability, or outcome. It is important to note that resilience extends beyond mere stability against harm or threats, as it involves active and constructive engagement with one's environment (Bandura, 1997; Conner &

Davidson, 2003; Hartfiel et al., 2011). Essentially, resilience entails an individual's capacity to uphold a state of biological-psychological equilibrium amidst perilous situations. Moreover, resilience has been recognized as a safeguarding element in the realm of mental health and the facilitation of growth (Letvak et al., 2012; Mikkelsen et al., 2017; Newhan et al., 2014; Ohler et al., 2010).

Healthcare professionals worldwide are at an increased risk of facing negative mental health consequences. Studies indicate that these individuals often grapple with high levels of psychological distress, anxiety, emotional fatigue, and burnout. Notably, depression is a major concern among healthcare workers, with rates ranging from 21.53% to 32.77% in high-income nations - significantly higher than the global average of 4.40% in 2015 (Ramachandra et al., 2013; Ulger & Yagli, 2010; Vasconcelos et al., 2013; Sharma, 2014). The demanding nature of their academic and professional responsibilities, coupled with personal stressors, can have a detrimental impact on their overall well-being. Consequently, healthcare workers not only endure prolonged exposure to stress but may also see a decline in the quality of care they provide to patients. This can result in patient dissatisfaction, increased turnover rates within the healthcare workforce, medical mistakes, and heightened financial burdens. Therefore, identifying factors that can positively influence the mental health and resilience of healthcare workers is crucial. As such, this research aims to explore the impact

of aerobic exercise on depression and resilience among healthcare professionals.

## 2. Methods

This study was conducted as an experiment, focusing on healthcare workers employed in hospitals in Tehran. The research included a statistical population consisting of all healthcare workers in these hospitals. For the study, a sample of 64 health care workers was selected using a convenience sampling method. These individuals were then randomly divided into two control groups (32 people each) and one experimental group (32 people). In order to participate in the study, the participants had to meet certain criteria, including not receiving any drug treatment, and demonstrating both the ability and willingness to take part in the study. Additionally, individuals with any clear disorder or those who failed to complete the exercise protocol were excluded from the study.

### 2.1. Instruments

**The Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21):** The depression subscale of the DASS-21 (Letvak et al., 2012) was used to assess depression. This specific subscale consists of seven items, with responses ranging from "did not apply to me at all" to "applied to me very much, or most of the time." The total score ranges from zero to 21, where a higher score indicates a higher level of depression. Scores falling between 0-4 suggest a normal condition, 5-6 indicate mild depression, 7-10 indicate moderate depression, 11-13 indicate severe depression, and 14+ indicate extremely severe

depression. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined to be 0.92.

**The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC):** Connor and Davidson (2003) developed a Resilience Scale comprising of 25 items. This scale employs a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Increased scores on this scale indicate higher levels of resilience. The creators of this questionnaire suggest that it can effectively differentiate between individuals who are resilient and those who are not, in both clinical and non-clinical populations. Furthermore, they believe that it has the potential to be utilized in research and clinical settings. In the current study, the reliability of this scale was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90.

**The aerobic training program:** This program spanned over a period of eight weeks, with two sessions scheduled per week. Prior to each session, participants were required to arrive at the training hall 30 minutes early. During this time, an expert coach provided them with instructions on aerobic exercises, as well as guidance on measuring carotid and wrist pulses. The session itself consisted of several components. Firstly, the resting heart rate was measured and recorded using either the carotid or wrist pulse. The exercise then commenced with warm-up exercises, stretching, concentration techniques, and basic breathing exercises. Typically, the movements began from either the head and neck or the feet, gradually progressing with gentle tapping. This initial stage lasted for approximately 10 minutes. Subsequently, the

movements were performed with increased intensity, targeting a moderate heart rate range of 0.60-0.80. During this stage, participants engaged in faster movements of their arms and legs, both separately and in various combinations. The heart rate was monitored and recorded using either the carotid pulse or the wrist. This stage lasted for approximately 30-35 minutes. The final stage of the session involved a cooling down period, during which the movements were performed with reduced intensity. This stage lasted for about 10-15 minutes. The control group, on the other hand, did not receive any treatment and were instructed to refrain from participating in any sports or therapeutic activities until the completion of the sessions.

## 2.2. Statistical Analysis

The data underwent statistical analysis using SPSS software version 26. The normality of the quantitative data distribution was determined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. To compare the difference between pre-tests and post-tests within each group across all scales, the paired t-test was employed. The covariance test was utilized to compare the difference between the pre-test and post-tests between the two groups, as well as to compare the average scores and the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores within each group across the two groups. Independent t test was used for calculating the differences between posttests of two groups. The level of significance was set at  $P < 0.05$ .

### 3. Results

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of individual characteristics of the

Table 1  
Demographic features of the participants

Indicator	Group	No.	mean±SD	P
Age (year)	Control	32	32.84±8.91	0.79
	Training	32	31.99±7.28	
Height (M)	Control	32	1.65±0.07	0.87
	Training	32	1.66±0.05	
Weight (Kg)	Control	32	70.17±3.47	0.77
	Training	32	71.27±2.64	
Body mass index (Kg/M <sup>2</sup> )	Control	32	24.36±1.19	0.46
	Training	32	24.49±1.28	

Table 1  
Demographic features of the participants

First of all, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests showed that all research variables had normal distribution (all  $P>0.05$ ). The results of the paired-sample t-test (Table 2) revealed a significant influence of the aerobic training on depression ( $P=0.001$ ) and resilience ( $P=0.001$ ) among

subjects, including age, height, weight, and body mass index (BMI).

the individuals in the training group from the pretest to the posttest. Conversely, there were no significant differences in the impact observed between the pre- and post-tests in the control group for both depression and resilience ( $P>0.05$ ).

Table 2

Paired-sample t test results for intra-group comparison of depression and resilience

	Control Group				Training Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	T	P	Pretest	Posttest	t	P
Depression	9.93±2.17	10.02±2.20	0.201	0.57	9.87±2.69	7.31±1.75	6.57	0.001
Resilience	62.08±10.27	61.22±9.83	0.187	0.66	63.29±8.71	78.38±12.67	11.84	0.001

Table 3 presents the findings of the covariance test analysis conducted to compare the two groups. According to Table 3 and the level of significance is 0.001, which is less than 0.05, there is a significant difference between the estimated mean depression scores of experimental and control subjects, and the amount of difference

indicates that 65.21% of the variance of the post-test scores is due to the effect of aerobic training on depression. Therefore, aerobic training is effective on the depression of the healthcare workers, and according to the averages, it has reduced the amount of depression.

Table 3

*Analysis of covariance test outcomes for inter-group evaluation of depression*

	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	P	Eta squared
Pretest	3947.612	1	3947.612	16.169	0.001	21.08
Group	36247.228	1	36247.228	200.17	0.001	73.28
Error	3093.515	47	124.616			

Table 4 presents the findings of the covariance test analysis conducted to compare the two groups. According to Table 4 and the level of significance is 0.001, which is less than 0.05, there is a significant difference between the estimated mean resilience scores of experimental and control subjects, and the amount of difference

indicates that 72.55% of the variance of the post-test scores is due to the effect of aerobic training on resilience. Therefore, aerobic training is effective on the resilience of the healthcare workers, and according to the averages, it has increased the amount of resilience.

Table 4

*Analysis of covariance test outcomes for inter-group evaluation of resilience*

	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	P	Eta squared
Pretest	4487.697	1	4487.697	10.965	0.001	7.01
Group	40278.368	1	40278.368	120.95	0.001	56.39
Error	3265.029	47	91.749			

The Independent t test results (Table 5) indicated a significant difference in the post-test results between the control and training groups (P=0.001). More precisely, the

training group exhibited a significant improvement in depression and resilience in comparison to the control group.

Table 5

*Results of Independent t test to investigate the difference inter-groups in depression and resilience*

	Test stage	t	P
Depression	Posttest	8.497	0.001
Resilience	Posttest	7.694	0.001

#### 4. Discussion

Identifying factors that can positively influence the mental health and resilience of healthcare workers is crucial. As such, this research aims to explore the impact of aerobic exercise on depression and resilience among healthcare workers. The results of the current study indicated that individuals engaging in aerobic exercise experienced a significant reduction in depression scores when compared to the control group and their own scores prior to exercise. This finding is in line with those of previous studies (Khosravi et al., 2023; Moradi et al., 2020; Sadeghipor & Aghdam, 2021a, 2021b; Sadeghipor et al., 2021a; Sadeghipor et al., 2021b; Seyedi-Asl et al., 2016, 2021; Taghva et al., 2020). Various factors may contribute to this observation, with one such factor being biological processes. The data presented align more closely with the theory suggesting that mood disorders involve diverse regulations in biological amines. Norepinephrine and serotonin are two key biological amine neurotransmitters that play a significant role in the pathophysiology of mood disorders (Bandura, 1997; Conner & Davidson, 2003; Hartfiel, et al. 2011). While there are theories proposing the involvement of dopamine in depression, it appears that the levels of this neurotransmitter decrease in cases of depression. Several studies have explored the relationship between noradrenaline, serotonin, dopamine, and exercise, despite variations in experimental protocols. The findings suggest that there is support for alterations in the synthesis and metabolism of monoamines during physical

activity. Furthermore, there is additional evidence indicating that exercise can impact the concentration of neurotransmitters in the nervous system. Physical exercise has the potential to serve as a therapeutic approach in managing severe depression by enhancing the release of neurotransmitters (Dana et al., 2021; Ghorbani & Bund, 2014). According to the British National Health Association, exercise leads to an increase in serotonin levels in the brain. Another factor contributing to the outcomes of this research may be linked to psychological variables. For instance, research has demonstrated that exercise not only reduces depression but also boosts self-esteem. In a separate study, it was revealed that the severity of depression is inversely related to changes in effective coping and event memory (Masten, 2001; Sadeghipor & Aghdam, 2021a, 2021b). Overall, this study highlights the positive cognitive and psychological transformations associated with exercise in individuals with depression.

In addition, the research findings indicate that participating in an aerobic exercise course can enhance the resilience of healthcare workers. This outcome aligns with previous research (Davidson, 2003; Jolivet et al., 2010) and demonstrates the positive impact of sports involvement on resilience. When explaining the resilience-related results, it can be observed that athletes with higher ambiguity tolerance are less likely to avoid uncertain situations. Instead, they effectively utilize available resources to navigate challenging circumstances. It is important to note that sports conditions,

including competitions, often involve unpredictability and ambiguity. Individuals who solely excel in unambiguous environments may struggle in such situations (Ramachandra et al., 2013; Ulger & Yagli, 2010; Vasconcelos et al., 2013; Sharma, 2014). Athletes with higher tolerance for ambiguity and resilience, on the other hand, are better equipped to handle and manage ambiguous and difficult scenarios, as well as anxiety-inducing pressures. As resilience increases, so does psychological toughness, and conversely, individuals with heightened resilience and psychological toughness experience reduced treatment anxiety.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the current study indicated that engaging in aerobic exercise resulted in a significant reduction in depression and also an increment in resilience. These results suggest that physical activity and sport can be considered as an important factor in coping with severe job-related conditions in healthcare workers. Therefore, by increasing physical activity and sport, better conditions can be created for healthcare workers to ensure their mental health. Our findings can have practical implications for healthcare responsibilities. Accordingly, it is suggested that healthcare responsibilities encourage healthcare workers to engage in physical activity and sport such as aerobic to improve their mental health.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest with any organization. Also, this research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## Research Paper: Parental Verbal Abuse, Substance Use and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Mental Health among In-School Adolescents in Lagos, Nigeria



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### Abstract

**Objective:** Mental health has remained an issue that affects various age groups with different levels of outcomes. One age group that needs urgent attention is the in-school adolescents. Studies have used various predictors to explore in-school adolescents' mental health with varied results. Therefore, this study investigated parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem as predictors of mental health among in-school adolescents in Lagos, Nigeria.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted while purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to select three local government areas and 200 in-school adolescents for the study. Data were collected using General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), Hare Self-esteem Scale (HSS), Verbal Abuse Questionnaire and Substance Use Scale and analyzed using multiple regression analysis.

**Results:** The results revealed that parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem jointly predicted mental health among study participants [ $R^2=.12$ ,  $F(4,199) = 6.64$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Also, parental verbal abuse ( $\beta = -.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and self-esteem ( $\beta = -.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ) independently predicted mental health among study participants. However, substance use ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p > .05$ ) did not independently predict mental health among study participants.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem are strong predictors of mental health among study participants. The paper recommended that in order to enhance the mental health of in-school adolescents, government and other stakeholders should advocate for the development and implementation of policies that prioritize mental health support and resources for adolescents within Lagos State and Nigeria.

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## 1. Introduction

Mental health, like physical health, is viewed to exist on a continuum from healthy living to chronic illness. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2018) defines mental health as the way our thoughts, feelings and behaviors affect life. Positive mental health leads to assertive self-image, satisfying relationships, constructive decision-making and dealing with one's challenges. It means how individuals look at themselves, their lives, and other people in their lives, evaluate their challenges and problems and explore choices (APA, 2018). Mental health is an important contributing factor to an individual's overall health status. One group of individual whose mental health needs to be monitored regularly is that of in-school adolescents. This is because they are constantly exposed to diverse physical, social and internal factors that affect their mental health (Omotuwa, 2024).

Some factors have been investigated as predictors of mental health among in-school adolescents. Three factors were investigated in this study. Parental verbal abuse is first considered in this study as predictor of mental health which refers to the use of words to inflict psychological pain on individuals such that the "child feel less favorable about his/herself leading to a negative effect on mental health (Nwankwo & Agu, 2018). Kirk et al. (2019) has identified humiliation, disrespect, unjustified criticism, yelling, bullying, harassing, name-calling, and threatening as some of common parental verbal abuse on adolescents. In this study, parental verbal abuse is the use of harmful

language or communication by parent or caregiver causing emotional, psychological and even physical harm to the child. Studies have shown that parents who frequently use abusive words on their children caused depression and anxiety on them which affected their mental health (Fitriana et al., 2021; Fairuzza et al., 2023).

In addition, substance use is considered in this study as a predictor of mental health. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2023) defines substance use as an individual's participation or engagement in the consumption, possession, distribution, or any other related activities associated with illicit or controlled substances. This involvement can manifest in various forms ranging from experimentation with drugs to regular use, addiction, or involvement in the illicit drug business (SAMHSA, 2023). Specifically, the use of drugs without prescriptions from medical officers (doctors) or advice from a pharmacist constitutes substance abuse. When applied to this study, substance use among in-school adolescents involves the use of un-prescribed drug that would affect their normal functioning and behaviors both in school and in other areas of lives. The common drugs widely use and abuse among in-school adolescents in Nigeria include alcohol, cigarettes, nicotine, caffeine, marijuana, Tramadol, codeine, Toluene, cocaine and other unspecified substances (James, 2023). Studies have revealed that substance use causes mental health problems. For example, Obosi et al. (2022) found substance use as a predictor of poor mental health among in-school adolescents.

Besides substance use, another factor considered in this study as a predictor of mental health is self-esteem which describes the positive and negative evaluation of the self and the way individuals perceive themselves (Farid & Akhter, 2013). Also, it is the ability to realistically acknowledge one's strengths and limitations and accept oneself as worthy and worthwhile without conditions or reservations (Ersögütçü & Karakas, 2016). Self-esteem encompasses beliefs such as "I am competent" and "I am worthy", as well as emotions like triumph, despair, pride, and shame. Keane and Loades (2017) found an association between low self-esteem and negative outcomes for adolescents' behavioral and mental health problems. Therefore, a high sense of self-esteem is perceived as a factor that allows an individual to maintain a positive and optimistic outlook amidst negative circumstances in which they passed through. Studies have found low self-esteem as predictor of substance use among in-school adolescents which by extension affects their mental health (Badriyah et al., 2023; Fairuzza et al., 2023; Uba et al., 2013).

Some studies have examined parental verbal abuse on mental health among in-school adolescents with varied results. For example, Fairuzza et al. (2023) who investigated the effect of parental verbal abuse on mental health among found negative correlation between parental verbal abuse and mental health. Also, Badriyah et al. (2023) revealed negative relationship between parental verbal abuse and mental health. Another study by Lani (2018) indicated that verbal abuse as a predictor of

mental health among study participants. Earlier studies (Damodaran et al. 2014; Rizvi & Najam, 2014) supported psychological abuse by parents as significant predictor of mental health among adolescents). Finally, Coates et al. (2013) concluded that mothers' verbal abuse to be a stronger predictor of psychological distress (mental health) among adult daughters and sons than fathers' verbal abuse. All these studies confirmed that adolescents who perceived their parents as more abusive exhibited greater mental health problems.

Studies on substance use on mental health have consistently supported the negative implications of substance use on mental health. For instance, Obosi et al. (2022) found substance use to have a negative effect on mental health among in-school adolescents. Also, Diraditsile and Rasesigo (2018) confirmed mental health effects and substance abuse to be high among youths and the early onset of substance abuse preceded mental disorders such as depression, suicidal tendency and personality disorders. Extant study by Cranford et al. (2009) revealed substance use as a predictor of mental health problems among undergraduates.

Finally, studies that have been conducted to determine the effects of self-esteem on mental health have produced consistent results. For example, Cong et al. (2019) found self-esteem correlating with depressive symptom which is a part of mental health. Also, Fiorilli et al. (2019) and Peñate et al. (2020) revealed that self-esteem as a strong predictor of mental health (depression) among their study participants. Besides,

Yücens and Uzer (2018) who found in-school adolescents low in self-esteem reported low mental health while Nguyen et al. (2019) found prevalence of low self-esteem and mental health such as anxiety, depression, educational stress and suicidal ideation among in-school adolescents in Vietnam. Finally, Aboalshamat et al. (2017) reported an inverse relationship between self-esteem and mental health.

Studies have investigated parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem as independent predictors of mental health among different populations and across different samples with varied results. Also, no study has investigated joint contributions of parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem as predictors of mental health among in-school adolescents which left a gap in knowledge to be filled. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem as predictors of mental health among in-school adolescents in Lagos State, Nigeria.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research Design, Population, Sampling Method

A cross-sectional research design was adopted in this study while validated questionnaires were used to collect data from the study participants. The independent variables were parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem while the dependent variable was mental health. The study was conducted in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Lagos State:

Iba LGA, Ojo LGA and Amuwo Odofin LGA. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the LGAs while convenience sampling technique was used to select participants for the study.

### 2.2. Instruments

**General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12):** Participants' mental health status was assessed using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988). The GHQ-12 utilizes a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (always) to 3 (never). Sample items include "Able to concentrate" and "Loss of sleep over worry." Higher scores indicate poorer mental health. The authors of the original scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, while a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76 was obtained in this study, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

**Verbal Abuse Questionnaire (VAQ):** For assessing parental verbal abuse, the VAQ (Teicher et al., 2006) was used, consisting of 15 items on yelling, swearing, blaming, threatening, demeaning, ridiculing, insulting, criticizing, screaming, belittling, and devaluating, among other types. It is presented on a 9-point Likert's format that ranges from 0 = not at all to 8 = every day. Sample items include: "My parents scold me" and "My parents yell at me". The authors reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.98 (maternal) and 0.94 (paternal). In this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 was obtained.

**Substance Use Scale:** To assess substance use, the Substance Use Scale (Méndez et al., 2017) was applied. This scale consists of 19

items with a response format coded as "Yes (1)" or "No (0)". Sample items include: "Have you ever smoked a cigarette", "Have you ever used cocaine powder (coke, candy cane, cocaine hydrochloride) or freebased cocaine (base cocaine paste, basuco, crack, baseball)", and "Do you think that you carry out activities that put your health at risk". Méndez et al. (2017) obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 for total scores. In this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 was obtained.

**Hare Self-esteem Scale (HSS):** The HSS (Hare, 1980) was used to measure self-esteem. The scale is uni-dimensional. All items are presented using a 4-point Likert's format ranging from 1 = Strongly Agree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4= Strongly agree. Example of items include: "My parents are proud of the kind of person I am", and "I am an important person to my family". Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. The author obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 while in this study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.71 was obtained.

### 2.3. Procedure

The researchers collected formal letter of introduction from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria for identification by the school authority. Principals of the selected schools were contacted and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Verbal approval was given to the researchers where they were directed to see the Vice-Principal or the School Counselors for assistance. The teachers helped the researchers to gather students in designated classroom to participate in the completion of the

questionnaires. The researchers addressed the students on the purpose of the study and verbal consents were sought for and obtained from them. The potential participants were told that participation was voluntary and anyone who is not interested in the study should put up his/her hands. In one school, four students put up their hands that they would not participate and were allowed to leave the classroom. Participants were told that their responses would be kept confidentially as no data would identify them. It took less than 15 minutes to complete the questionnaires. A total of 209 questionnaires were administered, 200 were completely filled while 9 questionnaires were halved filled and were discarded. The total questionnaires from each LGA were: Iba LGA has 41 (21%), Amuwo-Odofin LGA has 58(29%), and Ojo LGA has 101 (50%).

### 2.4. Data analysis

IBM SPSS version 23 was used for data analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. Hypothesis 1, 2 and 3 were tested using linear regression analysis while hypotheses 4 was tested using multiple regression analysis. All hypotheses were accepted at a  $p < 0.05$  level of significance.

### 3. Results

Descriptive statistics revealed that 77(39%) of the participants were males while 123 (61%) were females with the age ranges from 13 to 19 years with mean age of  $14.50 \pm 1.78$  years. In terms of their classes, 96 (48%) were in Junior Secondary School (JSS) while 104(52%) were from Senior Secondary School (SSS). The participants ethnic groups showed that 107(59%) were Yoruba,

57(29%) were Igbo, 8(4%) were Hausa and 18 (9%) belonged to other ethnic groups. In terms of their religious affiliations, 116

(58%) of the participants were Christians, 79 (40%) were Muslims and 5(2%) were traditional worshippers.

Table 1

*Zero-order correlation statistics of the study variables*

S N	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1	Parental Verbal Abuse	28.80	9.41	-	.		.
2	Adolescent Substance Use	21.64	3.02	.32	-	.	
3	Self-esteem	31.24	3.45	.22*	.03	-	
4	Mental Health	30.31	4.51	-.24*	-.19*	-.23*	-

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results in [Table 1](#) indicated that parental verbal abuse had a negative relationship with mental health [ $r(199) = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Also, substance use had a negative relationship with mental health [ $r(199) = -.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Furthermore, self-esteem had a negative relationship with mental health [ $r(199) = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. This means that as self-esteem increases, mental health

decreases. Based on the results of the zero-order correlation statistics, the variables were used for the linear and multiple regressions analyses.

Linear regression analysis was used to investigate the role of parental verbal abuse in predicting mental health and the result is presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2

*Linear regression analysis showing parental verbal abuse as independent predictor of mental health among in-school adolescents*

Predictor	B	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
Parental Verbal Abuse	-.24	-3.42	<.05	-.24	.06	11.70	<.05

Dependent Variable: Mental Health

The results in [Table 2](#) revealed that parental verbal abuse independently predicted mental health among study participants ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Hypothesis one is confirmed.

Linear regression analysis was used to investigate the role of substance abuse in predicting mental health and the result is presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3

*Linear regression analysis showing substance use as independent predictor of mental health among in-school adolescents*

Predictor	$\beta$	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	p
Substance Use	-.19	-2.73	<.05	.19	.04	7.45	<.05

Dependent Variable: Mental Health

The results in [Table 3](#) revealed that substance use independently predicted mental health among study participants ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Hypothesis two is hereby accepted.

Linear regression analysis was used to investigate the role of self-esteem in predicting mental health and the result is presented in [Table 4](#).

Table 4

*Linear regression analysis showing self-esteem as independent predictor of mental health among in-school adolescents*

B	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
-.23	-3.32	<.05	.23	.05	11.05	<.05

Dependent Variable: Mental Health

[Table 4](#) shows the linear regression of self-esteem on mental health among in-school adolescents. The result showed that self-esteem independently predicted mental health among study participants ( $\beta = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the role of parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem in predicting mental health and the result is presented in [Table 5](#).

Table 5

*Multiple regression analysis showing parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem as joint predictors of mental health among in-school adolescents*

Predictors	$\beta$	T	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	p
Parental Verbal Abuse	-.20	-2.82	<.05				
Substance Use	-.11	-1.49	>.05	.35	.12	6.64	<.05
Self-Esteem	-.20	-2.95	<.05				

Dependent Variable: Mental Health

The results in [Table 5](#) revealed that parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem jointly predicted mental health among study participants [ $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F(4, 199) = 6.64$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. This means that parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem explained 12% variance observed in mental health among study participants. This supported the hypothesis.

#### 4. Discussion

The study investigated parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem as predictors of mental health among in-school adolescents in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Lagos State, Nigeria. Four hypotheses were tested and accepted at  $p < .05$  level of significance.

The hypothesis that parental verbal abuse would independently predict mental health was supported. The result revealed that parental verbal abuse predicted mental health among in-school adolescents. The more verbal abusive the parents are to their children or wards, the more the children would experience mental health challenges. The result supported [Fairuzza et al.'s \(2023\)](#) finding that negative parental verbal abuse in childhood affects mental health right into their children adulthoods. The study finding also supported [Badriyah et al. \(2023\)](#) who found parental verbal abuse as a strong predictor of mental health among residents in Sumber Asri Village. Also, studies by [Lani \(2018\)](#) and [Damodaran et al. \(2014\)](#) supported the present finding. Specifically, mother's verbal abuse was stronger than the father's verbal abuse as the causes of mental

health problems among their children ([Coates et al., 2013](#)).

The hypothesis that substance use would independently predict mental health among in-school adolescents was supported. The result shows that substance use significantly influenced mental health among study participants. The result of this study lent credence to the finding by [Obosi et al. \(2022\)](#) that substance use has negative effects on mental health among their study participants. Also, [Diraditsile and Rasesigo \(2018\)](#) result supported the present finding that substance use predicted mental health among adolescents. Finally, extant results ([Cranford et al., 2009](#); [Stewart et al., 2001](#)) also confirmed the negative effects of substance use on mental health among their study participants.

The hypothesis that self-esteem would independently predict mental health among in-school adolescents was accepted. The result indicated that self-esteem predicted mental health among study participants. This finding is consistent with previous results that self-esteem is a strong predictor of mental health across different samples and populations ([Cong et al., 2021](#); [Fiorilli et al. 2019](#); [Yücens & Uzer., 2018](#)). Specifically, [Nguyen et al. \(2019\)](#) finding supported the present result where they found low self-esteem as predictor of diverse types of mental health such as anxiety, depression, educational stress and suicidal ideation. Individuals low in self-esteem tended to have increase anxiety and depression levels over time thus affecting their mental health.

Finally, the hypothesis that parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem would jointly predict mental health among in-school adolescents was accepted. Parental verbal abuse, substance use and self-esteem jointly predicted mental health among study participants. The result of the study supported finding by Rizvi and Najam (2014) who found parental verbal abuse as a predictor of mental health among adolescents. Also, Nwankwo and Agu (2018) finding that parental verbal abuse predicted psychological (mental) well-being among their study population supported the result of the present study. In terms of substance use among study participants, the result supported finding by Ham and Hope (2005) that a negative association exist between mental health and weekly alcohol consumption among students. Finally, Keane and Loades (2017) and Cong et al. (2019) findings supported the result of this study that self-esteem is a strong predictor negative mental health in term of depressive symptoms among adolescents. High self-esteem was related to higher mental health.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proffered. To begin with, intervention programs that address parental verbal abuse, adolescent substance use, and self-esteem issues should be designed to target both in-school and out-school adolescents in order to provide supports and resources to improve their mental health outcomes. Also, education and awareness campaigns should be launched to create awareness about the detrimental effects of parental verbal abuse, substance use and low self-esteem on mental health.

These campaigns should target parents, adolescents, educators, and community members to foster understanding and encourage proactive measures to promote positive mental health.

Furthermore, counseling services should be provided for in-school adolescents experiencing mental health challenges related to parental verbal abuse, substance use and low self-esteem problem. These services should be readily available in schools, community centres and healthcare facilities in a confidentially and culturally sensitive environment to address in-school adolescents mental health needs.

Finally, policy development and advocacy that prioritize mental health supports and resources for in-school adolescents should be enacted and implemented in Lagos State and in Nigeria. These policies should address systemic issues contributing to parental verbal abuse, substance use, and low self-esteem and in-school adolescents.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concluded that parental verbal abuse, substance abuse and self-esteem are joint predictors of mental health among in-school adolescents in Lagos State, Nigeria. Also, parental verbal abuse and substance independently predicted mental health among study participants. Some limitations of this study need to be mentioned. For example, the study sample size of 200 in-school adolescents from three out of 20 LGAs in Lagos State hindered generalization of the study findings. Further studies should increase sample size and the number of

LGAs. In addition, data for the study were collected using self-reported questionnaires in a control classroom environment which was not free of response bias. Further studies should include group interviews and documentary evidence from the school authority to triangulate self-reported data. Finally, the three independent variables investigated were not exhaustive. Further studies should include personality traits, social support and learned helplessness to explore mental health among in-school adolescents.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Research Paper: The Relationship between Coping Styles and Psychological Well-being of Women Heads of Households



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### Abstract

**Objective:** The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between coping styles and psychological well-being in female heads of households.

**Methods:** The research design was quantitative, descriptive and within the framework of the correlational method. The statistical population of the research was formed by all the women heads of the household in Sarai, Yousef Abad neighborhood of Tehran in 2024. In this study, using convenience sampling, 50 women were selected as samples. In order to collect research data, Coping Styles Questionnaire for Stressful Situations (CISS) and Ryff scale of psychological well-being (RSPWB) were used. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS-26 software, and research hypotheses and data were analyzed using correlation test, one-sample t, one-factor ANOVA, and Tukey's post hoc test.

**Results:** The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between problem-oriented coping style and psychological well-being in women heads of households. Also, there is a significant negative relationship between emotional and avoidant coping styles with psychological well-being. According to ( $P < 0.01$ ) for all hypotheses, the level of significance has been proven.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, it can be concluded that female heads of households who use a problem-oriented coping style have a greater sense of self-efficacy and peace of mind, and the use of previous experiences in solving various life problems will make them self-reliant people. And they have higher psychological well-being, and in contrast to female heads of households who use an emotional and avoidant coping style, they have lower psychological well-being.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the family is considered as the most basic social unit, the effects of any change in its management process on the level of integration of the society are not far from expected, and the destruction and prosperity of tomorrow's society will take place in today's family. Throughout history, men have always been responsible for the family. In fact, the father, as the main and central member of the family, was in charge of managing the family, and the important responsibility of the woman was to educate the human race and provide the growth and prosperity of the family, but with the passage of time and the phenomenon of globalization, the structure The family is also affected and now we see that women are taking on the responsibility of running the family for various reasons. Women heads of the family are women who are in charge of the family without the regular presence or support of an adult man, and they are responsible for economic management and major and vital decisions (Fekori Belgouri & Babaei Kasmai, 2023).

There are adult men in these families due to divorce, immigration, lack of marriage, or widowhood, or if they are present, they do not have a share in the family's income, such as drug addicts, unemployed men, escaped prisoners, or disabled men. This causes them to be subjected to pressures and tensions beyond their strength and capacity, which, if continued, may lead them to illness, social incompatibility, and lack of mental health, which will have negative effects on their health (Flakodin et al., 2023).

The conditions governing the life of families headed by women are:

- 1- Lack of access to job opportunities equal to men.
- 2- Lower levels of literacy among both women and children.
- 3- Lower wages.
- 4- High percentage of academic failure and delinquency of children and teenagers.
- 5- The issue of time poverty for full-time working women.

The term female head of the family is a new term that has been used with the presence of more women in the cultural, social, economic and political fields. Today, mental health is one of the inalienable rights of citizens, and women heads of families and their children are among the vulnerable groups that must be supported in order to provide mental and social health.

Researchers conducted on the subject of female heads of the family show that female heads of the family face more physical, psychological, social, legal and economic stressors than non-headed women. Therefore, to ensure the mental health of the family, the psychological well-being of the head of the family is needed (Najafi, 2023).

Playing multiple and conflicting roles, lack of social support and negative attitude towards female heads of the family can lead to mental disorders in them. Also, low income and poverty cause pressure and tension, burnout and feelings of helplessness in female heads of households because the findings show that the share of poverty of

female heads of households has always been higher than that of male heads of households and being a woman is likely to be it increases the circle of poverty, but the gap between these two groups has decreased over time. Female heads of the household are among the poorest due to illiteracy, having small households and fewer workers in the household. (Sighlani et al., 2024).

A survey conducted on female heads of the family showed that in most cases, due to the loss of their husbands and then the loss of the circle of friends and family, these women have many emotional problems in their daily lives (Afshari & Rezai., 2023).

The management of life by a mother-parent forces difficult tasks to be assigned to the female head of the household: such as raising children, providing for their material and spiritual needs, providing housing and taking care of household affairs, they face many issues and problems. it turns A large group of these women are facing poverty, disability, and powerlessness, especially in managing the household's economic affairs, so that their self-esteem and mental health are impaired and they are prone to depression and other disorders. makes Due to the fact that they are not able to manage their economic affairs and their families, this group has turned to support organizations and is satisfied with the ad hoc assistance and meager pensions of these organizations and deal with the issues of living within the framework of the home. And they struggle. On the other hand, another group of these women, in addition to playing the role of mothers, have entered the economic field and

the job market and direct the economic affairs of the family, and due to the lack of access to dignified jobs, they are forced to work in marginal jobs. They become part-time, informal and low-income (Masoom Khani, 2023).

It will have a direct effect on the quality of life. According to Cobb's (1976) definition, social support, affection and attention is the help that a person receives from family members, friends and other people. Social support acts as a shield against stressful events and will leave a positive impact on the quality of life. Social support as a mediator between stressors and the occurrence of physical and mental problems reduces perceived stress, increases survival and ultimately improves the quality of life (Pourmohamedreza Tajrishi, 2007).

Today, mental health is a concept that is of special importance, because along with technological, industrial, economic and social developments, mental disorders are spreading day by day and many people suffer from mental disorders severely. They suffer and not only are themselves in agony, but they also cause problems for the family and finally the society (Kanfi et al., 2023). General or mental health is the compromise of a person with the world around him as much as possible, so that it causes happiness and a useful and effective perception completely (Amini & Goli, 2023). In its definition of health in 1950, the World Health Organization considers it to be complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease. Jahoda (1958) believes that only not having a mental

illness is not a suitable criterion for mental health. In his opinion, health is a multidimensional concept that includes the feeling of happiness and well-being in addition to the absence of illness and disability.

The initial concept of psychological well-being was mainly centered around happiness, life satisfaction and positive impact, but Rief conceptualized well-being based on an ideal life and means the flourishing of human capabilities, and pointed out that this point of view, in terms of Similar and complementary are positive psychological health. According to Rief's model, psychological well-being consists of 6 factors: self-acceptance, positive relationship with others, autonomy, purposeful life, personal growth and mastery of the environment. Psychological well-being is rooted in the concept of the superior man of Aristotle and Nietzsche, and its dimensions are often derived from developmental, humanistic, and existential theories. The concepts of Erikson's transformational growth, Jung's individuality, Alport's personal maturity, Maslow's self-actualization, Rogers' perfect human, Frankel's meaning-making, and Buhler's fundamental tendencies have played a role in the formation of the concept of psychological well-being. (Garhanipour & Ghasemi, 2023).

People with psychological well-being try to take steps to improve their talents and abilities, have effective interpersonal communication, and minimize conflicts in their lives (Hadoinejad, & Sadoughi, 2022). Research findings have shown that coping styles have a significant relationship with

psychological well-being. In fact, coping resources include the person's own characteristics that exist before the occurrence of stress, such as having self-respect, a sense of mastery over the situation, a source of control and self-efficacy, problem-solving ability, cognitive styles (Brooks et al., 2020).

In the current century, the subject of stress and coping styles has been one of the most important fields of research in health psychology. From the point of view of Folkman and Lazarus (1986), coping is the intellectual, emotional and behavioral efforts of a person when faced with stress in order to overcome, tolerate or minimize the complications. Stress and negative consequences and increasing adaptation of the person to the environment are used. Lazarus believed that tension consists of 3 stages: First is the initial assessment, which is the observation of a risk. The second stage includes secondary evaluation, which is the search for an answer in the mind, and in the third stage, the application of that answer or, in other words, confrontation is considered (Saidi, 2022).

According to Lazarus and Folkman, there are 2 main methods of coping with stress, which are known as problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping methods. Problem-oriented coping methods, in which the main goal is to master the situation and create a change in the source of tension, and emotion-oriented coping methods, in which the main goal is to reduce or quickly transform emotional turmoil (Ahmadi Thani & Khalilzadeh, 2023).

In a research, they investigated the effectiveness of group reality therapy on the psychological well-being of 40 female heads of households in Tehran. The results showed that group reality therapy intervention has significantly increased the psychological well-being of female heads of households (Eskandar et al, 2016).

Campos (2018), in his research, investigated the relationship between coping styles, social support and psychological well-being in 200 elderly people in Tehran. The results showed that there is a positive and significant correlation between problem-oriented coping styles and psychological well-being, while there is a negative and significant correlation between avoidant coping styles and psychological well-being. Also, the findings showed that social support can strengthen the positive effect of coping styles on psychological well-being. Women heads of the household are women who alone are responsible for providing livelihood and raising their children. These women face many challenges, including economic, social and psychological problems, which can significantly affect their psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is a multifaceted concept that refers to a favorable state in terms of mental health, feeling satisfied with life, the ability to function effectively in life, and having healthy relationships with others (Campos, 2018).

Considering the important role of coping styles in psychological well-being and the numerous challenges faced by women heads of households, it is very important to study

the relationship between these two issues. The findings of this research can help to better understand the challenges faced by female heads of households and provide appropriate solutions to improve their psychological well-being.

Some studies conducted in Iran have examined the relationship between coping styles and psychological well-being of female heads of households. For example, Rezaei & Vermziar, (2017), in a study they conducted on 200 female heads of households in Tehran, showed that there is a relationship between problem-solving coping styles and problem-focused coping with the psychological well-being of these women. There is positive and meaningful. Also, this study showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between avoidance and emotion-focused coping styles with the psychological well-being of female heads of households. The findings of this study and other similar studies show that coping styles play an important role in the psychological well-being of female heads of households. Some studies have shown that female heads of households increasingly use unhealthy coping styles such as avoidance and emotion-focused coping (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). These coping styles can lead to negative consequences such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse and relationship problems. On the other hand, the use of healthy coping styles such as problem solving and problem-focused coping can help women heads of households to improve their psychological well-being (Selajqa, 2023). These coping styles help people to effectively face their problems and find solutions for them.

Therefore, in today's world, especially in developing countries, women face many problems. One of these issues that is very important is the role of their guardianship and the problems that arise from this role. The new roles of family members, especially the double role of family management by the mother, the tolerance of social controls, the reduction of social acceptance and financial security, and in general the loss of family support, on mental health and psychological well-being and the type of style. Family confrontations hurt especially women who are responsible for the family. Researches have shown that female heads of the family have more psychological problems compared to other women. In addition to facing economic problems, they face some negative social pressures, such as the negative attitude towards female heads of households and divorcees. Based on the problems faced by female heads of the family, the present research tries to investigate the relationship between coping styles and the psychological well-being of female heads of the household. Therefore, paying attention to the things that have been stated, it can be said that conducting research in this field can help women heads of families to find the best solutions to increase mental health. These studies can include the examination of coping styles and psychological well-being of female heads of the family. Therefore, the necessity of conducting research in this area is considered very important and vital in the current era. Paying attention to women heads of the family as a specific and respectable group in the society is not only a necessity but also a need and considering the role of

psychological well-being in interpersonal relationships and its impact on well-being and well-being. Family and the effect of using coping styles on psychological well-being, the current research tries to answer the question of whether there is a relationship between the psychological well-being of female heads of the family and coping styles.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research Design, Population, and Data Collection Methods

The current research was carried out in a quantitative descriptive manner and within the framework of the correlation method. The statistical population of the research was formed by all women heads of households in Sarai, Yousef Abad neighborhood in 2024, and in this study, 50 subjects were selected by convenience sampling method and with written consent and participated in the research.

In order to collect research data, 2 questionnaires of coping styles with stressful situations were used by [Andler and Parker \(1990\)](#) and psychological well-being questionnaire by [Ryff \(1989\)](#) and they were uploaded online in the Porsal system and the link they were made available to Fred. In order to analyze the data, statistical indicators and methods including mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients were used at the significance level (0.01).

### 2.2. Instruments

Coping Styles Questionnaire for Stressful Situations (CISS): This questionnaire was created by [Endler and Parker \(1990\)](#) in order

to evaluate the types of coping styles of people in stressful situations. After several revisions, the number of questions was reduced to 48 through factor analysis (Endler & Parker, 1990). This 48-question questionnaire is designed to measure the 3 main coping styles of people (problem-oriented coping, emotion-oriented coping, and avoidant coping) in facing stressful situations. problem-oriented and avoidant coping style, where the answer to each question is determined based on a 5-point Likert scale from never (1) to always (5), and finally, whichever style receives a higher score is the dominant style. Endler and Parker (1990) estimated the reliability coefficient of 0.90 for the problem-oriented style, 0.85 for the emotion-oriented style, and 0.82 for the avoidant coping style (Noori & Nilforooshan, 2016).

Ryff's scale of psychological well-being (RSPWB): This questionnaire compiled by Ryff in (1989) was used in this research. The original form of this scale has 120 questions, but shorter forms with 84, 54, and 18 questions are also proposed. In the current

proposed research, its 18-question form was used. They reported the correlation of psychological well-being questionnaire scores with the scores of Rosenberg's life satisfaction and self-esteem questionnaire as 0.47, 0.58, and 0.46, respectively. In addition, in their research, the results of the validity check through retesting in a period of two months for a total score equal to 0.82 and for each of the subscales of self-following, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationship with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. 0.78, 0.77, 0.78, 0.77, 0.70, 0.71 were reported respectively. Cronbach's alpha: Various studies have shown that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all 6 dimensions of psychological well-being is high (0.70 to 0.80). This shows the internal stability of this questionnaire (Bayani & Kouchaki, 2008; Ryff, 1989).

### 3. Results

The statistical population of the present study included 50 female heads of households in Sarai, Yousef Abad neighborhood in 1403, Tehran.

Table 1

*Mean and standard deviation of coping styles and psychological well-being*

Variables	Mean	SD
Problem-oriented coping style	23.45	5.23
Exciting confrontational style	18.76	4.12
Avoidant coping style	14.32	3.87
Psychological well-being	14.32	6.54

The results of table (1), which show that the psychological well-being variable has the highest mean among other variables, and the

avoidant coping style has the lowest mean value.

Table 2

*Correlation between coping styles and psychological well-being and comparison of mean psychological well-being based on dominant coping style*

Correlation type	Correlation coefficient	Sig
Problem Oriented	0.52	0.01
Excited	- 0.38	0.05
Avoidant	0.45	0.01

The results of [table \(2\)](#), the correlation between emotional coping style and psychological well-being was negative in all cases and the components of the results were significant according to ( $P < 0.01$ ).

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study show that there is a positive relationship between problem-oriented coping style and psychological well-being of female heads of households, and there is a negative relationship between emotion-oriented and avoidance-oriented coping styles with psychological well-being. Also, women heads of households who use problem-oriented coping styles have a higher level of psychological well-being on average, while women who use emotion-oriented or avoidance-oriented coping styles. On average, they have a lower level of psychological well-being. This finding is consistent with the results of [Khadri and Dabbaghi \(2013\)](#), [Gustems Carnicer and Calderon \(2013\)](#) and [Hayat and Zafar \(2015\)](#). In explaining the results of the research, it can be said that using problem-oriented coping requires acquiring skills such as defining the problem, finding different solutions, lightening and weighing the solutions, and finally making a decision about choosing the

best solution. It helps a person to overcome obstacles. People who are equipped with these skills and as a result of this coping style, will feel more self-efficacy and peace of mind, and the use of previous experiences in solving various life problems will make them self-reliant people. All these things can keep a person's psychological well-being at a high level.

The research results also showed that there is a significant negative relationship between emotional and avoidant coping styles with psychological well-being. This finding is in line with the results of [Gustems Carnicer and Calderon \(2013\)](#) and [Khadri and Dabbaghi \(2013\)](#). In explaining the results of the research, it can be said that emotion-oriented coping styles make a person resort to other tools such as (anger, crying, etc). In an avoidant coping style, he avoids facing problems and issues, as a result, he will learn to solve them using these tools every time he encounters a problem. Therefore, he will no longer be able to effectively solve his problems. Because instead of focusing on the problem itself, he resorts to other strategies and blames others, and as a result, he cannot solve his problems. Therefore, it can be concluded that people who use this type of coping strategy are cognitively and

emotionally confused and helpless, and their psychological well-being decreases. On the other hand, it can be stated that when people feel that the situation is beyond their skills and abilities, they will use emotional coping strategies. Therefore, people who experience severe or out-of-control stressful events use this type of strategy more often, and as a result, the frequent experience of stressful situations and the continuous use of emotion-oriented coping strategies. It endangers their mental well-being.

Also, the findings of this research show that the psychological well-being of female heads of the family is at a low level and the stress of the female heads of the family has caused them to be more vulnerable and vulnerable since most of these women are covered by the Imam Relief Committee. are located, their health and efficiency can lead to entrepreneurship and economic and social self-sufficiency for them, so their participation in training courses on problem-solving and decision-making skills, anger control and life stress management and Effective interpersonal communication can increase self-efficacy, psychological well-being and their growth and excellence (Folkman & Lazarus,1988).

This research was also faced with some limitations: among others, we can mention the statistical population of the research, which was female heads of the household of a region, and the type of research was correlational, which has limitations in the field of generalization of findings, interpretations. And creates the etiological documents of the studied variables.

Therefore, it is suggested that in order to conduct researches with higher generalization power and formulate general plans, future researchers should implement their research plan for different societies. In addition, this study was cross-sectional and the results of this study may be less stable compared to the results of longitudinal studies. Because the comprehensive examination of the variables of this research, i.e. coping strategies and psychological well-being, requires longer researches.

Therefore, it is suggested to use longitudinal studies in future researches so that more accurate and valid results can be obtained, especially about variables that are affected by time, such as psychological well-being.

## 5. Conclusion

The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between problem-oriented coping style and psychological well-being in women heads of households. Also, there is a significant negative relationship between emotional and avoidant coping styles with psychological well-being. Therefore, it can be concluded that female heads of households who use a problem-oriented coping style have a greater sense of self-efficacy and peace of mind, and the use of previous experiences in solving various life problems will make them self-reliant people. And have higher psychological well-being, and in contrast to female heads of households who use an emotional and avoidant coping style, they have lower psychological well-being. Therefore, the empowerment of coping styles has an impact

on the well-being and better quality of life of women heads of households, and it is necessary to pay special attention to the empowerment of coping styles of this stratum in macro-planning for growth and excellence.

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### Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest has been reported.

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## Research Paper: Meaning of Life in Iranian Adolescents: A Qualitative Study

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### Abstract

**Objective:** The construction of meaning in one's life is a long endeavor. This small-scale exploratory study used a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach involving in-depth online interviews to explore meaning in life for typically-developing Iranian adolescents.

**Methods:** The investigation was conducted over six months in 2020, using a purposive sampling method with three male and nine female participants. Although meaning in life is unique to each person, there were similarities in meaning across this small sample of adolescents. Data analysis used Van Manen's six-step phenomenology method.

**Results:** The result revealed six main influences on the development of meaning—Ego-directed, Others-directed, Challenge-seeking, Spiritual, Future-directed, and Self-directed.

**Conclusion:** This study showed that the new generation on Iranian adolescent is confronting a new pattern of meaning of life but at the same acquire a solution to fix it. Their solution is to integrate the different or even opposite side of what they experiencing, yet they are experiencing both hedonism and spiritual aspect in this regards.

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## 1. Introduction

Meaning in life has been described as the possession of a clear purpose in life and devoting motivation and energy to accomplish it (King et al., 2006). Adding to this view, Yalom contends that meaning in life consists of a sense of cohesion and a feeling of purpose (Yalom, 2020). Within any group of people some individuals may have already developed meaning in life and this is revealed in the extent to which they see their life as important relevant and understandable. There will be other individuals who are still searching for meaning to better understand the significance and purpose in their life (Steger et al., 2008).

Among the many valuable outcomes of possessing meaning are greater satisfaction and better quality of life improved academic achievement and greater psychological flexibility (Arslan & Allen, 2022). Lack of meaning in life can be associated with depression, psychological distress (Li et al., 2019) and even suicidal tendencies (Kalashnikova et al., 2022). Searching for meaning in life is a driving influence that appears to be an innate characteristic of humans (Frankl, 1985). Studies in meaning in life among adolescents shows that personal meaning is strongly associated with the cognitive dimension and psychological wellbeing (Krok, 2018). In another study in adolescent, it showed even controlling for IQ and demographic variables, meaning-making can predict youths' more satisfying relationships and daily affective experiences, it is associated with greater working memory,

executive functioning, long-term memory, social reasoning, and creativity (Gotlieb et al., 2024).

The creator of logotherapy Frankl (Frankl, 2014) argued that the most important human drive is "the will to meaning"—and the non-fulfillment of this drive leads to "existential frustration" (Frankl, 2014). Frankl also posited that each person develops their own unique meaning. It is also accepted that humans may perceive different meanings in life at various stages across their lifespan (Alter & Hershfield, 2014). For example, adolescence is seen as a stage in which the formation of individual identity emerges and may also be the period when the search for meaning begins in earnest (Brassai et al., 2012). Identity formation in adolescence is closely linked to this searching for and acquiring meaning in one's life (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016). In this context the more important role identity is to a person the more it should provide a sense of purpose and meaning in life (Thoits, 2012).

Identity processes and meaning in life dimensions are interconnected across time. To build personal identity adolescents need to shape a picture of their world and their place in it; and sometimes they must integrate and make sense of ostensibly conflicting information and experiences (Schwartz et al., 2011). The most common questions on the minds of adolescents are often those related to ontological concerns about "who am I" and the future — death religion philosophy of life and the meaning of life (Steger et al., 2011). Adolescence is thus a period that marks the emergence and consolidation of a personal meaning system (Heine et al., 2006; Reker &

Woo, 2011). Potential sources of influence for acquiring meaning in life are abundant. They include activities that give pleasure recognition of self-worth personal growth and observation of and relationship with others (Aupers & Houtman, 2006).

Frankl (Frankl, 2014) stressed that people might discover meaning through their normal actions—such as struggling to succeed experiencing new things becoming close to someone or forming a particular attitude towards the suffering of others. It is said that primary evidence of meaning includes altruism sacrificing for a cause hedonism self-actualization social interactions a collective lifestyle and participation in rituals and ceremonies (Heidarabadi et al., 2018; Mokhtarpour & Kiani, 2020; Hoo, 2021; Yalpm, 2020; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Meaning of life is affected by local culture as well as immediate environment (Speziale et al., 2011; Steger et al., 2008) and meaning in life may vary across cultures. For example, cultural context and demographic characteristics will influence values and beliefs acquired by individuals and these often become a foundation for finding meaning in life. Thus the sources of each person's meaning in life at a particular time reflect an interaction between micro-level life events and experiences and the macro-level cultural value system (Simon, 2008).

Today Iranian culture is being more heavily influenced by other cultures and a transformation is occurring in the value system and mores of the younger generation (Remschmidt & Belfer, 2005). Through media and communication technologies this

generation now encounters new and often conflicting opinions and ideas and they acquire new values and look at life from their own developing perspective (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012). The small-scale exploratory study reported here was an attempt to examine typically-developing Iranian adolescents' awareness of the concept of meaning in life and to determine their perception of certain aspects of meaning in their own lives. It was also hoped to highlight cultural and other influences on meaning for this group.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

Data were gathered from online interviews with 12 adolescents (nine females and three males) from 4 different provinces of Iran. Interviewees' age range was from 13 to 18 years ( $M = 16.25$ ;  $SD = 0.86$ ). All participants were Muslim. The full range of socio-economic classes was represented in the group with five individuals from the middle class five from the high class and two from the lower class. Participation was voluntary and participants received no compensation.

### 2.2. Sampling and Inclusion Criteria

Participants were selected by purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were: interviewees must be within the age range 13-18 years. As meaning-making is significantly associated with higher psychological well-being (Hill et al, 2013) the authors chose participants that have no obvious mental problems or illnesses.

### 2.3. Interview Process

The topics addressed in the interview were influenced by reference to existing theoretical viewpoints and prior research on the nature of meaning in life and its acquisition (Frankel, 2014; Hoo, 2021; Yalom, 2020). Before using the interview protocol to collect data the interviewer evaluated its suitability by interviewing three adolescents in a pilot run. The final format for the protocol was determined by selecting questions that appeared to yield the most relevant information to clarify the adolescents' understanding of 'meaning in life.' The final protocol consisted of 12 questions covering various topics. In addition to the prescribed questions the interviewer also used appropriate probing and exploratory follow-up questions to obtain more detail. Interviews lasted from 45 to 95 minutes ( $M = 72.08$  min;  $SD = 12.65$ ).

Before conducting the interviews, the interviewer pondered her own beliefs expectations prejudices and assumptions about meaning in life frequently and consolidated them in a notebook. During subsequent data analysis the interviewer referred to these notes and made a conscious effort to avoid her beliefs influencing her interpretations.

### 2.4. Ethical Considerations

Participants were given the explanation about the goals and process of the research. They were also told that they had the right to withdraw from the interview. To protect privacy, they were suggested to be in a private place. The interviewees were

identified by a number, not their real name, on transcripts or other material.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

For data analysis all interviews were transcribed verbatim and reference was made to any other relevant information that the interviewer had noted down during the online interview (such as pauses repetitions self-contradictions and confusions). The transcripts were input to MAX.QDA qualitative software. Participants' responses were analyzed using Van Manen's six-step method of phenomenology (Van Manen, 2023). The transcripts of the interviews were re-read and the researchers made notes of their initial interpretations. Then they each wrote down in a few paragraphs summarizing their general understanding of the picture emerging from the interview data. The codes were used as the frame of reference for classifying and collating the responses. The relationship of each emerging theme with other themes was also examined. To increase the rigor and accuracy of the study the Guba and Lincoln (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) criteria were used (Remschmidt & Belfer, 2005).

## 3. Results

Analysis of the transcripts identified six themes that emerged from participants' explanations of meaning in life, which are explained below;

#### *Ego-directed themes*

This ego-directed outlook led to egoistic experientialism. In this regard, Girl#11 said: "I hold a perspective toward life that a person should enjoy life as much as he/she can. This

*is my life, and I should enjoy it as much as I can; and I think my life priority is me myself."*

The main themes that all interviewees revealed was *hedonism* and their desire to gain instant pleasure from life. They believed that if they can accomplish a happy life where they can gain pleasure, then they will achieve meaning in life. Girl#1 said, "*Joy we can gain in this life is the aim, and I think that's enough*".

Some forms of hedonism are Egoistic goal-directed, which embraces desires like gaining fame or wealth. One participant said: "*I always had in mind that I will hold my concert one day, and people will sing my songs. I would like to be a famous person so that everyone knows me.*"

#### *Others-directed themes*

Some saw the family as a pillar of endurance in times of crisis. For this group, meaning of life came from humanistic goals, such as helping the family in any way possible, and this was one of the constituents of life for these adolescents. Boy#8 said "*The goal is to help my parents, to have a job, and to help others.*" They also treated the family as a source of hope, as well as a source of meaning. Some adolescents express a different view of family, believing that meaning in their life is associated more with freedom and independence than dependence on family. Girl #1 said: "*It's not like I want to continue for the sake of my family.*" For these participants, friendship and connection within the community also gave meaning to their lives.

The majority of these interviewees believed that humanitarian practices such as helping others can bring meaning to their life. Making friends and connecting with society also gave meaning to their life. One participant said: "*I think what people can at least do is to make each other feel good. I think this is a social responsibility that every person should do in addition to the job responsibility*".

#### *Challenge-seeking themes*

It is reasonable to assume that meaning in life is shaped to some extent by the challenges one faces every day. The participants remarked that they face the challenge of lack of independence in their lives due chiefly to parental constraints. They also reported intergenerational ideological conflicts and witnessing gender discrimination in society. They worry about nonacceptance by their families and other adults based on their gender, behavior, or interests. Girl#10 said: "*I think being obliged to do whatever they [parents] ask you to do is a form of coercion. You are not free to say that you don't like this or that. Often, you have to do things out of compulsion and a set of restrictions.*"

Life, in their view, was a set of ups and downs and contrasting elements that give meaning to life. Girl#6 said: "*There are bright days and dark days in life. The dark days may outweigh... but if it was not for those days, you could not understand the bright days and appreciate them.*" Adolescents believed that to have meaning in life, one can carry on despite difficulties in achieving goals. The desire to make changes

in individual, family and social life processes gave meaning to their lives. Girl #2 stated: *“What makes me happy is that there are so many things to learn and change. Change can be just as gratifying as it can be devastating. Change is all I have.”*

#### *Spiritual themes*

The adolescents whose responses revealed this source of themes considered the universe to have meaning and believed that everything in the universe was created by God and has purpose. Many believed that the soul is the essence of humans and continues after death. *“The human body eventually decays, but your soul is perpetual. It does not vanish”* (Girl #4). These interviewees believed that soul puts the afterlife into perspective and human life cannot be meaningless. They believed that in the hope of creating an afterlife, man should pursue his actions in the material world in the right direction and in the pursuit of talents as well as helping others.

#### *Future-directed themes*

Some were hopeful for the future and had a positive outlook on life. This made them eager and motivated to continue living. Girl#8 said: *“I see the future very clearly and positive. I never think negatively because that can ruin my work. It’s because of the future that I strive for.”*

They saw pursuing career-educational goals as a way to achieve personal aspirations and advance one’s socio-economic class. The effort for academic success and participating in the country's best universities was a promise for a bright future.”.

#### *Self-directed themes*

It appears that for most teens, meaning in life is related to pursuing goals and realizing one’s potential. Participants here saw life as a journey that enables them to develop their potential when the environment is compatible with their abilities.

It is the individual who must self-direct and adapt to existence to accomplish desired goals. In this regard, an interviewee said: *“We did not come to make sense of life—life itself has meaning.”* This belief made adolescents capable of fulfilling the mission that they think God has put on humans to continue life and pursue their aims. In this regard, one participant said: *“We were born to fulfill a mission, and I believe that God created us for a reason.* Independence and agency in personal life was the main motivator within adolescents’ meaning in life.

An important aspect of self-direction is *self-actualization*. Striving for progress and success leads adolescents to take steps towards personal growth and self-improvement. *“I always think about the ideal person and try to achieve that in my own life. That’s the meaning of all of striving and life.”*

Table 1

*Themes and Sub-themes of meaning in life*

Main themes	Sub-themes	Frequency
	egoistic experientialism	32
Ego-directed influences	egoistic goal-directed influences	31
	search for happiness and inner satisfaction	27
	living in accordance with desires	25
Others-directed influences	family and social relationships	28
	experiencing love and emotional relationships	25
	altruism and social interest	23
Challenge-seeking influences	life as a challenge	29
	pain, as a source of meaning	24
	hardiness and endurance in the face of adversity	22
Spiritual influences	adaptability and striving for change	20
	The precedence of the soul over the body	21
	purpose in the world of creation	20
	God as a life planner	15
Future-directed influences	belief in the resurrection and the afterlife	6
	hope for the future and positivity	18
	career and educational perspectives	18
Self-directed influences	believing in life as a mission	15
	autonomy and individual agency	13
	self-actualization	13

#### 4. Discussion

Growing up in any society necessitates adolescents seeking to find and establish their identity (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012). It can be concluded that the Iranian adolescents are trying to construct a more or less integrated meaning of life among the conflicting poles. In this process they are similar to teenagers in other parts of the world. However, they are different from them in some ways because they live in a different culture with some different values traditions and beliefs. Different historical events and

happenings have shaped that culture and culture and norms of society are known to have a strong influence on meaning in life (Simon, 2008). All adolescents in the world today face conflicts (Hill et al, 2013) but our study shows that Iranian adolescents choose and suggest ways to resolve them. In comparison to other studies, this studies tried to delve into the dimation of meaning in life, other studies take the existence of meaning to which a person considers his life important, meaningful and understandable, and the second part which is the search for meaning refers to the active effort and exploration of a person in order to understand the meaning,

importance and purpose of his life (Steger, 2012). The other study in alignment of this study showed that searching for meaning in life has the most important role in defining behaviours in adolescents (Brassai, 2012). Also some non aligned studies with the current one, stated that family is the most important component of meaning in life in adolescents (Ahmadi, et.al, 2016), while this study shows that the most frequent component were Ego-directed desires like behaving in cordinance with personal goals or making joy and happiness. In the same study of Ahmadi, et.al, 2019 they showed hendonism is ranked as the 10<sup>th</sup> component of dimation of meaning in life, while the current study showed hendonism is one of the most frequent component in meaning in life in new generation of adolescent.

The first conflict that manifests itself by reflecting on the first theme is the pressure that the Iranian adolescent endures through the efforts of society (formal and informal institutions and structures) for otherness and commitment to moral standards. This pressure can be called "pious socialization" which is somewhat different from the pressures in Western and secular societies; Adolescents worldwide face a challenge called community in finding and establishing their identity (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012). In addition to this challenge Iranian adolescents must endure the special pressure of society to follow and pursue a moral and pious life that is desirable to them. The content of the Ego-oriented approach and hedonistic content of the first theme found in this study shows that the Iranian adolescents

in this scale are not only severely under the pressure of "pious socialization" but also they do not accept it and have risen up against it; However, by analyzing other themes this demand has been a source of conflict itself. The participants tend to have a hedonistic and Ego-centered life by the pressure from urgent needs (the first theme; Ego-centered approach), on the other hand they try to live in society cope with social norms establish stable close relations with others and even be committed to its humanistic and humanitarian beliefs (second theme; Other-centered approach). They also tries to endure hardships with a challenging approach and create meaning from pain to change the world (the third theme; challenge-seeking approach). They want to build the future with optimism by pursuing a long-term career and educational goals (the fifth theme; the future-directed approach). On one side, believing in God as the designer of life he should prioritize the soul over the body and try to preserve his afterlife and save himself from eternal destruction in any way he can (the fourth theme; Self-directed approach). The Iranian adolescent on the one hand experiences the present clearly or is exposed to its pressures both immediate here & now (ego-directed approach) and here and now socially (others-directed approach) and on the other hand faces the future both the physical future (future-directed approach) and the metaphysical future (spiritual-directed approach).

The following figures illustrates this conflict:

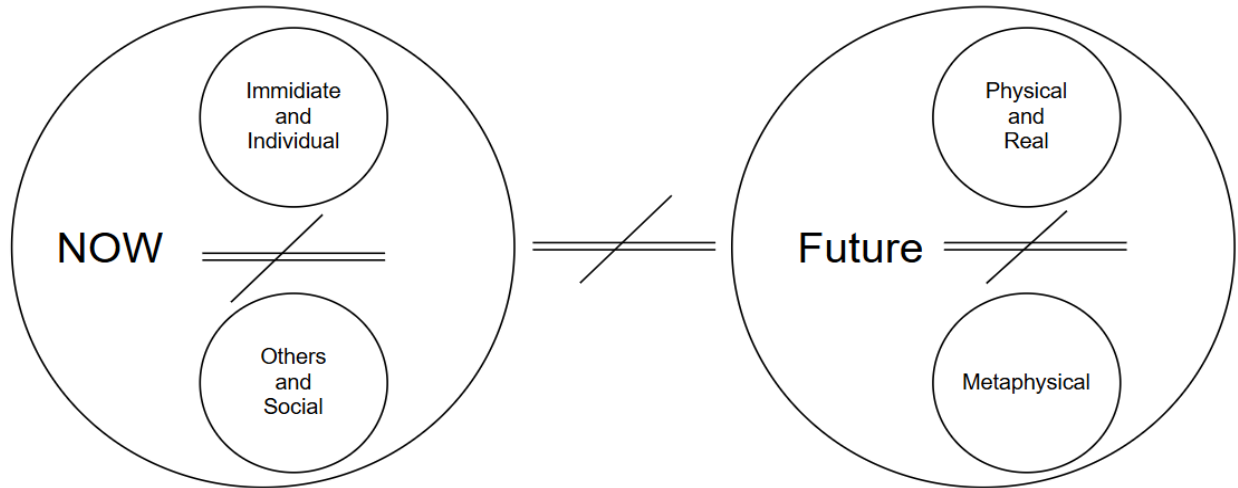


Figure 1

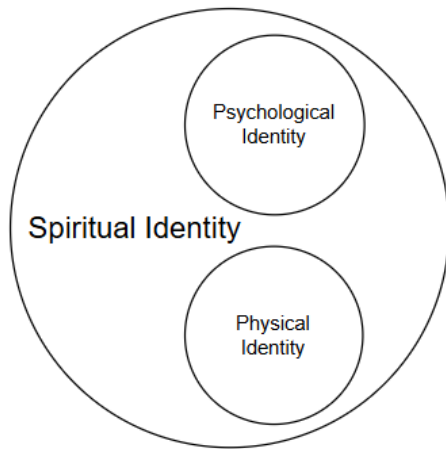


Figure 2

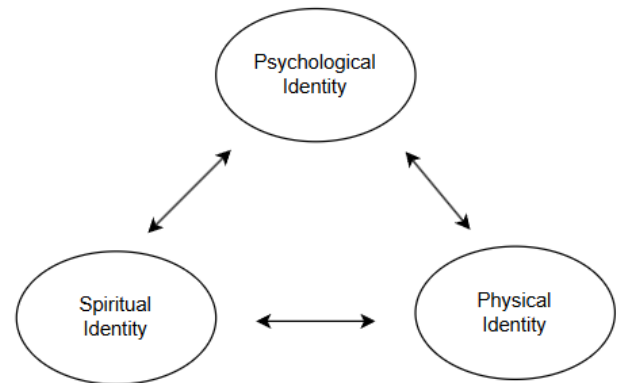


Figure 3

These three identities are normally in conflict: Ego with the Other and Ego with spirituality (Figure 1). Although spiritual identity per se has the capacity to accommodate physical and psychological identities and eliminate conflict this is only possible if spirituality is at the forefront of

individual identification as it is the case with orthodox believers in different religions (Ivtzan et al., 2013) (Figure 2). The sixth and final theme (self-directed approach) seems to be the second and more modern solution to conflict resolution. Based on this theme the Iranian adolescent believes that he has a

mission throughout his life trying to find the will and the ability to act as psychologists like William Glasser (Glasser, 2005) and Albert Ellis (Ellis, 2001) believe in human agency or as can be seen in Will Therapy from Otto Rank (Wadlington, 2012), and to stand on its own and flourish it the ideal path that

Abraham Maslow depicts for human life (Gawel, 2019). If he finds such a capacity, he can resolve the conflicts mentioned above and achieve a unified identity without necessarily following in the footsteps of the ancestors and being forced to submit to religious behavioral and belief frameworks.

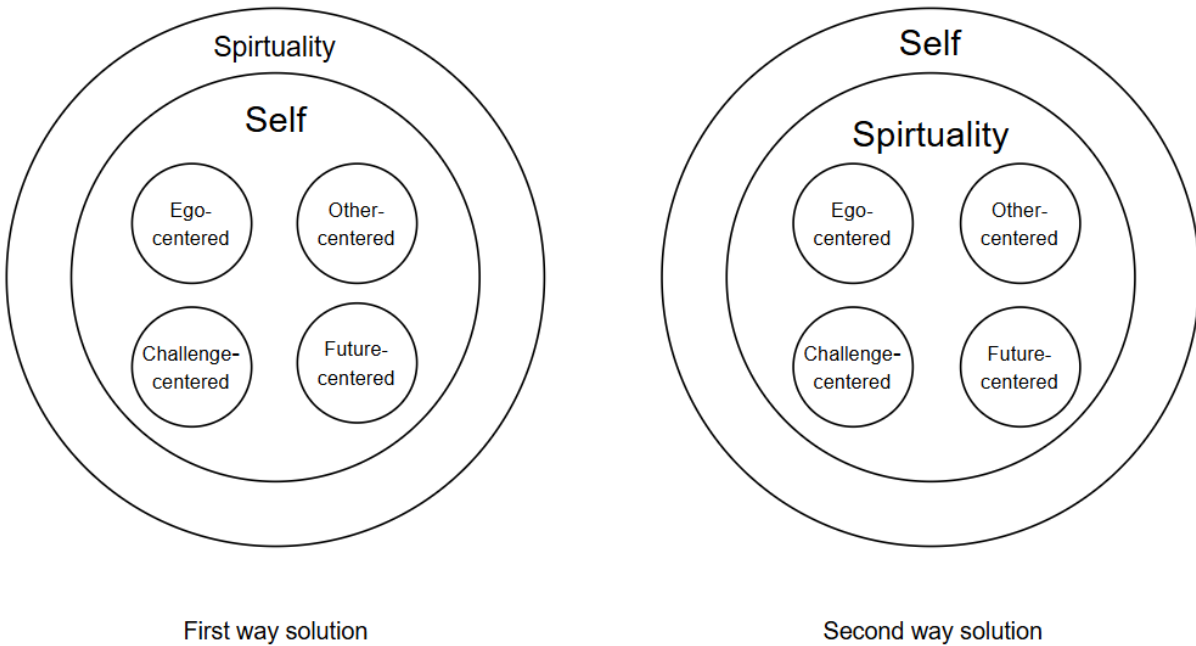


Figure 4

Based on the findings of this study Iranian adolescents are faced with fundamental conflicts in the meaning of life that seem to have two ways to resolve these conflicts and build a unified meaning of life. The first way which is the way of many religious people of the world and the society of the previous culture of Iran is to resolve their conflicts by hanging on to spirituality and religion (Aupers & Houtman, 2006; Rajaei et al, 2010; Memar, 2017). The second way which is more modern and has been considered by some psychologists and many existentialists is to use oneself to resolve all conflicts. One

of the reasons for this preference is the easier access and more sociable the first way is in Iran as Iranian society is still one of the most religious communities (Ahmadi et al, 2016). Another reason could be that the Iranian adolescent prefers to follow a tried and tested path (first solution) to a path that has not yet been tried and its components are not yet very familiar (second solution). Based on our analysis of the findings of this study the Iranian adolescents according to this scale are faced with conflicting meanings of life but they suggest two solutions that can help us

better understand their present and future behaviors that become influential adults.

## 5. Conclusion

This study highlights the diverse and multifaceted nature of meaning in life as experienced by Iranian adolescents. The results underscore that while each adolescent navigates a unique path toward meaning, common themes emerge that reflect both personal and cultural influences. The six identified themes—ego-directed, others-directed, challenge-seeking, spiritual, future-directed, and self-directed—illustrate the interplay between individual desires, social relationships, and existential questions. The adolescents in this study demonstrated a capacity to integrate opposing forces, such as hedonistic pursuits and spiritual beliefs, suggesting resilience and adaptability in their search for meaning. Ultimately, the findings emphasize the importance of fostering environments that encourage personal growth, social connection, and a sense of purpose, which can contribute to greater psychological well-being and life satisfaction during adolescence.

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## Conflict of Interest

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## Research Paper: Gender-Leadership in the Ivory Tower: A Case Study of Institutions of Higher Learning in Taraba State



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### Abstract

**Objective:** This study investigated Gender-Leadership in the ivory tower, a study of institutions of higher learning in Taraba State, Nigeria.

**Methods:** Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Simple random sampling method was used to select a sample size of 372 academic and non-academic staff for this study. The instrument used for the study was Gender- Leadership Questionnaire (GLQ). Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test.

**Results:** The findings revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. Furthermore, the findings revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. women representation in leadership positions is lopsided in favour of their male counterparts.

**Conclusion:** Factors that contribute to women underrepresentation in leadership positions includes cognitive bias, uneven access to knowledge, opportunities and administrative responsibility and societal privileges that favour the males among others.

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## 1. Introduction

For decades, the issue of gender representation in institutions of higher learning has been an ongoing concern, globally (Rosa & Clavero, 2022). This gender representation is seen across global higher institutions, where women continue to be under-represented in senior leadership roles in higher institutions in the United Kingdom (Manfredi et al., 2019). With a staggering 24.3% of women advancing to vice-chancellors and principal positions and 23.6% advancing to university board chairs. However, women represent more than half of the higher education workforce in the United Kingdom (Manfredi et al., 2019). Several extant studies have looked at some of the underlying causes of gender representation in institutions of higher learning (Zulu, 2019), and posited findings such as structural issues that underpin women's career progression. Such as organizational cultures that are based on gender, and cognitive bias which places women at a disadvantage, and tends to overrate men and underrate women (Manfredi et al., 2019). In the long run, some of these challenges could pose national security challenges, if not handled properly.

Gender representation in institutions of higher learning is a vital factor in enhancing equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusiveness in educational settings (UNESCO, 2019). It is generally known that achieving gender balance in higher institutions is not only a matter of social justice but also has implications for national security. Statistics indicate that female enrollment in these institutions is disproportionately lower compared to male

enrollment (Dada, 2020). The underrepresentation of women in higher education not only limits their access to knowledge and opportunities but also perpetuates gender inequalities in society. This gender gap raises concerns about the inclusiveness and fairness of the educational systems in Taraba State. Gender representation in institutions of higher learning has broader implications for national security. National security encompasses various aspects, including economic stability, social cohesion, and political resilience. Gender disparities in educational opportunities can hinder the development of a skilled and diverse workforce. When women are underrepresented in institutions of higher learning, their potential contributions to the economy remain untapped. This limits the overall economic progress and stability of Taraba State and Nigeria as a whole (World Bank, 2012). Furthermore, gender balance in educational institutions foster social cohesion by providing equal opportunities for all members of society. When women are excluded or underrepresented, it reinforces societal inequalities and marginalization. This can lead to social unrest, as marginalized groups may feel excluded from decision-making processes and experience a sense of injustice (Htun et al., 2016). There continues to be concern about the need to develop more women leaders in all sectors and industries in most countries around the world. This includes the need for more women to be positioned to take on critical leadership roles within higher education (Susan, 2012). The situation of women,

under-representation is worse in Nigeria where women academics were denied maternity leave under the University Law and in some cases, they were not allowed to get married or have children (Olaogun et al., 2015) while others were even refused employment despite the fact that they were qualified (Eboiyehi et al., 2016).

Studies have shown that women generally are under-represented in top leadership positions in Africa. This fact has been revealed by the survey done across 10 African countries in 2007 Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe and found that “even though women constitute over 50 percent of the higher education, workforce, only eight percent were vice chancellors and 12 percent were registrars; while 21 percent of women were appointed as deputy vice chancellors and executive directors” (Madimbo, 2016). Many women take maternity leaves or request shorter workdays to take care of their children. This, too, can hinder their chances of being considered for promotions. There may be simple answers to explain these trends, such as women are more likely to have their careers interrupted by parental leaves (Acker & Armenti, 2004), or are unable to stay long due to home and parenting responsibilities, or are hired with less experience than men. Women are facing many obstacles which led them to lag in leading organizations and find strategies to overcome those barriers which differ from those of their male counterparts (Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

There are various forms of women discrimination such as job segregation, wage gaps, sexual harassment, the denial of career development opportunities (including mentoring and poor performance evaluations), and a lack of promotion chances. Hence, being a woman who works in an organization and the mother who raise family could be seen as a serious concern on sex and gender biases that women could not be good managers who can perform multiple priorities. However, various efforts have been done over the years worldwide, aiming at improving the condition of women in managerial level of higher education (Dezsö & Ross, 2012) with assistance from the United Nations and its specialized agencies, but females still suffer from being involved in top decision-making discussions as well as taking senior leadership positions like Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Deans of faculties and Directors of institutes (Mohajeri et al., 2015). These facts have been witnessed in previous studies (Fitzgerald, 2013; Rubini & Menegatti, 2014).

Accordingly, the meaningful participation of women in national, local, and community leadership roles has become an important focus on global development policy. Still, some may ask why it matters if women become political leaders, elected policymakers, or civil society activists. Why does the world need more women involved in all aspects of the political process? Women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and a more sustainable future. Across theories,

one commonality among gender equity literature is that participation of women is important in leadership positions to bring critical perspectives and insights often overlooked by traditionally male-dominated structures (Madsen, 2012). It has been argued that women's limited participation in executive positions in the global economy is a misuse of talent and human capital that has led to missed opportunities for gender parity and skill advancement (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2016). Organizations and institutions that women are represented in the leadership and policy making tend to be more diverse and inclusive. The rulings and the decisions in those organizations also tend to be more diverse, more representative, and inclusive of the different views and modern views of society (Wilson & Graham, 2019). Abalkhail (2005) notes that countries that have more women in leadership positions tend to have lower levels of income inequality and discrimination. Thompson (2015) asserts that women in leadership positions tend to yield more benefits for the general population especially in the general health of the population.

Taraba state is in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria and is one the regions where gender disparities persist in institutions of higher learning. Taraba State, like many other regions in Nigeria, is faced with enormous gender differences in its institutions of higher learning. The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within Taraba State institutions of higher learning raises concerns about gender equality and its potential implications for national security. Despite progress in education and gender equality,

women continue to be significantly underrepresented in top leadership roles such as vice-chancellors, deans, department heads, and other influential positions like the senate of the university. The lack of gender diversity in leadership may have profound consequences for the overall development and security of the nation. Currently, there is a limited understanding of the underlying factors contributing to the gender gap in leadership positions within Taraba State institutions of higher learning. It is essential to explore the root causes, barriers, and systemic biases that prevent women from attaining leadership roles. Additionally, the potential implications of this gender disparity on national security, particularly in a state as diverse and significant as Taraba, need to be examined and its significance for the nation. This study therefore intends to:

1. Examine the status of women representation in leadership positions within Taraba State institutions of higher learning.
2. Determine the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research Design

The design adopted by the researchers in this study is descriptive survey design. The rationale behind adopting this design is because, descriptive research employs surveys and use of questionnaires to analyze variables and describe current state of a problem.

## 2.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised all the staff in two tertiary institutions in Taraba State. The sample size for this study was 161 Academic and 211 Non-academic staff. To get this sample, the researchers utilized stratified sampling. The population was divided into two strata based on gender. Thereafter, simple random sampling method was used to arrive at a sample size of 372 respondents that participated in this study.

### 2.2. Instrument

**Gender Leadership Questionnaire (GLQ):** This instrument was structured and designed by the researchers in 2023. The questionnaire was designed based on a 4-points Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was divided into two sections; section A contained personal data of the respondents, while section B contained 10 items measuring women representation in leadership. To ensure the validity of the instrument, three experts from the Faculty of

Education, Taraba State University carried out a face and content validation of the instrument. Their corrections and recommendations were crucial in producing the final draft of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha and the internal consistency for the instrument was found to be 0.78; therefore, the instrument was adjudged to be reliable.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The data collected by the researchers were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions, while inferential statistics of t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## 3. Results

**Research question 1:** What is the status of women representation in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State?

Table 1

*Mean Ratings & Standard Deviation Scores of women representations in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State.*

SN	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The gender representation in leadership positions of this school is lopsided	207	62	61	42	3.17	0.88	Agreed
2	The principal officers of this school are mostly males	248	62	62	0	3.50	0.93	Agreed
3	2 out of 10 management staff are female	284	58	14	16	3.64	0.91	Agreed
4	Sensitive positions and assignment are mostly handled by male in my school	251	49	43	29	3.40	0.90	Agreed
5	Most HODs, Deans, Directors of unit, members Governing council, senate committee are male	71	83	134	85	2.38	0.89	Disagreed

The results shown in **Table 1** presents the descriptive statistics in frequencies, mean and standard deviation, the views of the respondents on the status of women representation in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State. The mean scores of the respondents shows that item 1, 2, 3 and 4 are above the cut off mean of 2.5, indicating an agreement with the items on the status of women representation in leadership positions. However, item 5 disagrees with the statement with a mean score lower than 2.5. This implies that gender

representation in leadership positions of this school is lopsided, principal officers of this school are mostly males, the males are mostly holding sensitive position. The standard deviation scores ranged from 0.88 to 0.93, indicating homogeneity amongst responses and a similar consensus.

**Research question 2:** What are the factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State?

Table 2

*Mean Ratings & Standard Deviation Scores of factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State.*

SN	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
6	Cognitive bias, underrating women cognitive capacity	201	104	41	26	3.29	0.94	Agreed
7	Uneven access to knowledge, opportunities, and administrative responsibility	154	108	94	54	3.18	0.86	Agreed
8	Family issues and household duties	18	108	209	37	2.29	0.92	Disagreed
9	Culture and religious values are responsible for imbalance in representation	112	58	28	174	2.29	0.90	Disagreed
10	Societal privileges that favour masculinity	224	29	93	26	3.21	0.89	Agreed

The results shown in **Table 2** presents the descriptive statistics in frequencies, mean and standard deviation, the views of the respondents on the factors contributing to

women underrepresentation in leadership positions. The mean scores of the respondents shows that item 6, 7 and 10 are above the cut off mean of 2.5, indicating an

agreement with the items on factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions. However, item 8 and 9 disagree with the statements. This implies that factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions includes cognitive bias, uneven access to knowledge, opportunities and administrative responsibility and societal privileges that favour the males. The standard deviation

scores ranged from 0.86 to 0.94, indicating homogeneity amongst responses and a similar consensus.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff.

Table 3

*Summary of the Analysis on the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff*

Groups	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-Value	$\alpha$ -value	Decision
Academic Staff	161	3.339	0.491					
Non-Academic Staff	211	3.225	0.510	370	1.99	0.823	0.05	Rejected

Source: Field Work (2023)

**Table 4** is a summary of t-test analysis conducted to compare the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. The table revealed that, p-value of 0.823 is greater than the  $\alpha$ -value of 0.05 ( $p = 0.823 > \alpha = 0.05$ ) hence the null hypothesis which says (there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership

positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff) was upheld.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff.

Table 4.

*Summary of the Analysis on the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff*

Groups	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-Value	$\alpha$ -value	Decision
Academic Staff	161	2.709	0.456					
Non-Academic Staff	211	2.721	0.453	370	0.253	0.717	0.05	Rejected

Source: Field Work (2023)

Table 4 is a summary of t-test analysis conducted to compare the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. The table revealed that, p-value of 0.717 is greater than the  $\alpha$ -value of 0.05 ( $p = 0.717 > \alpha = 0.05$ ) hence the null hypothesis which says (there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff) was upheld.

#### 4. Discussion

The results obtained revealed that gender representation in leadership positions of this school is lopsided, principal officers of this school are mostly males, the males are mostly holding sensitive position. The findings also revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. This finding agrees with Rosa and Clavero (2022) that gender representation in institutions of higher learning has been an ongoing concern. The implication of this finding is that women underrepresentation has been a thing of concern and worry that needs to be addressed in no distant time. This is because, it is generally known that achieving gender balance in higher institutions is not only a matter of social justice but also has implications for national security. Findings by Dada (2020) also

indicates that female enrollment into leadership positions in higher institutions is disproportionately lower compared to male enrollment. This means that underrepresentation of women in higher education do not only limits their access to knowledge and opportunities but also perpetuates gender inequalities in society which may pose a threat to national security and increase the rate of social injustice.

The findings also revealed that, factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions include cognitive bias, uneven access to knowledge, opportunities and administrative responsibility, and societal privileges that favour the males. The finding also revealed that, there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. This finding agrees with previous research conducted by (Eboiyehi & Fayomi, 2016; Olaogun et al., 2015) on gender inequality among staff in Nigerian institutions that, the rate of women underrepresentation in leadership position is high. Alarmingly, these studies also revealed that, women who are even more qualified than most men, are ignored when it comes to selection for employment, and being involved in critical decision-making discussions. The finding also aligns with previous study conducted by Mohajeri et al. (2015). The researchers point out that, females still suffer from being involved in top decision-making discussions

as well as taking senior leadership positions like Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties and Directors of Institutes. The implication of this finding is that, since women are still grossly under-represented especially at the height of the leadership ladder, proper measures that encourage equal chances for both male and female staff of higher institutions can be put in place to address this challenge. One of the limitations of this study is that, while this study sheds light on gender representation in Taraba State, what is obtainable in this region may not be applicable in other regions.

## 5. Conclusion

This study revealed that women representation in leadership positions is lopsided in favour of their male counterparts. Factors that contribute to women underrepresentation in leadership positions includes cognitive bias, uneven access to knowledge, opportunities and administrative responsibility and societal privileges that favour the males among others. Addressing these factors can contribute to a more diverse, inclusive, and effective national security apparatus which can lead to improved decision making, innovative solutions and stronger foundation for addressing complex security challenges. Based on the results of the findings, it is recommended that equal opportunity policies should be formulated and implemented in all higher institutions in Nigeria. Similarly, gender sensitivity trainings and transparent selection criteria should be adopted by all Nigerian higher institutions. In the same vein, university authorities should consider the implementation of diversity and inclusion

initiatives to address cognitive biases, promote equal access to knowledge and opportunities, and distribute administrative responsibilities fairly.

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## Conflict of interest

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