

## Predictors of Academic Performance in Undergraduate Students

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Mental health is intricately linked to academic factors. However, the complex relationships between academic motivation, performance, and mental health in college students are unclear, and there is an evident lack of studies addressing these facets alongside key aspects such as self-esteem and personality traits. Understanding this is paramount in predicting one's life outcomes, such as academic achievement and overall mental health. This study aims to shed light on the intrinsic relationship between mental health and academic outcomes, underscoring the need for comprehensive support systems to promote academic success and well-being among college students. Participants consisted of 200 female college students ( $19.27y \pm 0.87$ ) recruited through convenience sampling. Data were collected using standardised measures: Academic Motivation Scale, Big Five Inventory, Psychological Well-Being Scale, Self-Esteem Scale, and Academic Performance Scale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, multiple linear regression, and factorial ANOVA were used for statistical analysis. Self-esteem, Personality traits such as Conscientiousness and Agreeableness as well as Psychological Well-being of the student, were found to have a significant correlation with Academic Motivation and Performance ( $p < .01$ ). Psychological well-being ( $p = .001$ ) and Conscientiousness ( $p < .001$ ) were found to be better predictors of academic performance. In addition, demographic factors such as Area of Primary Residence ( $p = .044$ ) and Father's Education ( $p = .001$ ) were found to significantly affect Academic performance and Motivation respectively. This study extends the current literature by investigating the multi-faceted relationships between mental health, academic outcomes, self-esteem, and personality characteristics.

**Keywords:** Mental health, academic performance, college students, academic motivation, self-esteem, personality

Academic performance and well-being are interconnected, particularly for female college students navigating personal, social, and academic challenges. Motivation, self-esteem, and personality qualities all have an impact on students' academic achievement as well as their overall mental health and resilience. Understanding these relationships gives light on the larger dynamics of education and psychology, highlighting the need of supporting both intellectual growth and emotional well-being in academic settings. This current study intends to explore these factors and their interconnections that

are responsible for creating a comprehensive landscape of students' academic and personal functionality.

Psychological well-being is a definitive term that describes an individual's best psychological experiences and functioning. It can be defined as having resilience [coping, emotion regulation, healthy problem solving], eudaimonic (meaning, fulfilment), and hedonic (enjoyment, pleasure) happiness. Aspects of psychological well-being include a sense of balance in emotion, thoughts, social relationships, and pursuits,

which necessitates active participation in self-control processes such as emotion regulation. Various researchers have defined psychological well-being as an individual's emotional health and overall functioning, which includes positive social relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, a sense of purpose, and personal growth (van Dierendonck and Lam, 2023; Ryff and Keyes, 1995).

Psychological well-being and mental health, although used interchangeably, are complex, multifaceted, and interconnected concepts that weave together a broader landscape of our overall well-being. The unique elements of psychological well-being tend to bear a relationship with how we think, how we view ourselves, and interactions with the world around us. Mental health encompasses not only these characteristics but also broader aspects of emotional and social well-being. There is an ongoing feedback cycle between psychological and mental health. Negative thought patterns and actions can result from poor mental health, and they may deteriorate psychological health. Conversely, psychological well-being can act as a protective barrier against mental health issues, enabling us to recover from life's adversities (*Mental Health vs. Psychological Health*, 2024).

Academic motivation is an important aspect of student life, as it is directly related to positive engagement and performance in learning. Acknowledging the importance of motivation in education allows stakeholders to more effectively support and improve students' learning experiences. Motivation refers to the process that drives, directs, and sustains behaviours aimed at achieving specific goals. Academic motivation is an inexplicable factor in determining a student's academic performance. Academic performance refers to academic outcomes, such as grade point average (GPA), course grades, or test scores (Wood et al., 2012).

Academic performance is said to include not only academic results but also study-related attitudes and behaviours (such as motivation, study time, and concentration) and perceived academic learning (i.e., students' perceived comprehension and performance on academic tasks).

The association between psychological well-being, academic performance, and motivation is complicated and multifaceted. A student's ability to connect with the academic material, handle daily stressors of life, and stay motivated is highly impacted by their psychological well-being. Better well-being is linked to enhanced academic motivation, in turn leading to better academic performance. Academic achievement can improve psychological well-being by instilling a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy. Poor psychological health, on the other hand, can demotivate and impair academic achievement, producing a vicious cycle that can be difficult to escape. Deb et. al. (2016) underpinned that, positive views of academic environments, and living arrangements were found to be positively correlated with better mental health, which in turn led to enhanced academic performance. Velagapaly and Bolla (2023) discovered a strong correlation between self-social mental health recovery and the factors that contribute to poor mental health, as well as between academic performance and mental health.

Mahdavi et al. (2023) found that mental health significantly correlated with achievement motivation and not so much with educational success. Academic motivation and achievement also depicted a significant correlation. The study of the impacting background factors showed that students with more appropriate mental health status rate high in academic motivation essentially. Kumar et al. (2018) realised that academic performance and mental health are negatively impacted by internet addiction, marking the impact of internet addiction as a

contributing factor towards deteriorating mental health and overall well-being, and hence implicating the academic outcomes of the students' suffering from the same. Wani et al. (2023) found psychological well-being to be moderately and positively correlated with the academic achievement of secondary school students irrespective of their gender, whereas the achievement motivation exhibited a weak positive correlation with academic success.

Aside from these aspects, the current study also investigates causal elements such as a student's self-esteem and personality dispositions, as well as how these interact with motives and psychological strengths to influence academic and well-being outcomes. The basis of self-esteem lies in unconditional appreciation of oneself, which encompasses an acute awareness of one's own potential, both positive and negative. Students with strong self-esteem are more likely to persevere in the face of academic difficulties, stay motivated, and achieve better academic results. Academic success, on the other hand, can boost self-esteem, resulting in a positive feedback loop that improves psychological well-being overall. Personality variables exacerbate this complex interaction. Personality is the distinct and lasting arrangement of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that sets an individual apart from others. Understanding how these personality factors interact with self-esteem, motivation, and well-being can lead to more in-depth insights on student behaviour and outcomes.

Banu et. al. (2015) found that female students experienced more academic stress compared to male students. Similarly, students from arts and humanities streams were found to be more stressed than that of science and management students, underpinning factors like low self-esteem, social isolation and lack of support reinforcing the cycle of low well-being and decreased performance. Agnafors et al. (2021), in a

longitudinal birth cohort study, concluded that early childhood and adolescent experiences of internalising or externalising maladaptive behaviours, developing relative personality traits, and emotional propensities lead to an overall decline in academic performance of the individual, lack of self-worth, and overall psychological well-being. Ciorbea and Pasarica (2013), in their study, concluded a negative correlation between academic performance and neuroticism as well as psychoticism. Extraversion was found to have a weak negative correlation with academic performance. It also showed a positive correlation with the level of organisation and self-esteem. It was concluded that individual differences, such as personality, accounted for some serious implications for academic performance. In their research, Punia and Malaviya (2015) found that task orientation correlated with better well-being and personal progress.

Where these larger concepts and aspects of students' lives interact and determine varied outcomes, there are numerous underlying factors behind each of these aspects that also contribute to a particular learning and mental health outcome in a student. These include various socio-demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, parental qualification, financial status, etc.), and many other personal as well as contextual factors come together and create a comprehensive account of one's psychological and learning status. Ashwini and Barre (2014) found that students' levels of stress varied significantly. Notable distinctions were underpinned between arts, sciences, and adaptive fields' students. Girls and boys and students in arts and sciences were said to significantly differ in academic performance. Abdunnazar (2019) also discovered that, regardless of topic stream, there are no appreciable differences between college students' mental health and academic ability and that there are notable

gender differences in both mental health and academic achievement.

Agrawal and Krishna (2022) found that depression caused more people in Taiwan than in India to feel ashamed and embarrassed about who they were, raising worry about the effect of the same on their academic performance. Also, contrary to previous studies, a higher percentage of male students than female students in this study reported experiencing melancholy and anxiety. Rather than seeking therapy, the majority of participants preferred to talk to their friends or use social media to deal with mental health issues. This depicts the underlying attitudes of the eastern societies towards mental health concerns and the still prevailing stigma regarding the same. Deb et. al. (2016) also found that female students had higher levels of depression. Students majoring in humanities were found to have lower academic performance than those in sciences and management. Talawar and Das (2014) attributed the gender differences to the lack of opportunities, familial support, and negative social attitudes regarding female education. Urban students' access to facilities and financial satisfaction have been linked to improved mental health and academic achievement.

Raju and M (2017) concluded that there was diminished interest and hesitation in attending the practical lectures in female students during menstruation. Lack of concentration due to preoccupation with menstrual symptoms, many reported its negative impact on mood, enhancing feelings of inferiority, an increase in neurotic symptoms, and an evident decline in self-confidence and enthusiasm. Ganaie and Mudasar (2015), while investigating and quantifying college students' academic achievement and social intelligence, found that college students majoring in social science had higher social intelligence than those in science. It was nevertheless

discovered that science students outperform their counterparts in the classroom. Arora and Bhat (2019) concluded that there is a difference in personality traits and level of aspiration on the basis of gender.

### **Rationale of the study**

The review of existing literature revealed a clear and significant lack of exploratory studies attempting to delineate the complex relational interplays between aspects such as personality traits, self-esteem, and psychological well-being on learning outcomes such as academic motivation and performance, and vice versa. There are bilateral or reciprocal studies investigating connections between two or three of these variables, but little research has focused on understanding the polyadic relationship between variables like academic motivation, performance, psychological well-being, and other key elements like personality traits and self-esteem of college students. The current study aimed to unravel these complex interrelations between several psycho-social factors among female college students in Jammu, a fairly under-represented and under-researched demographic. This study has also sought to extend a novel perspective beyond the existing bilateral or reciprocal studies, underpinning the unique socio-regional context and its impact on the academic as well as psychological outcomes of the female college students. To explore the same, this research aims to address the following key questions:

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between psychological well-being, academic motivation, and academic performance in female college students?
2. How do self-esteem and personality traits influence academic motivation and performance in female college students?

## Hypotheses

- H<sub>1</sub>: Higher levels of psychological well-being are associated with greater academic motivation and better academic performance in female college students.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Self-esteem and specific personality traits, such as conscientiousness and openness, are positively correlated with academic motivation and performance in female college students.

## Method

### Sample

This study included 200 female college students aged between 17-22 years ( $M = 19.27$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) recruited through convenience sampling. The students were recruited from a government college in the Jammu district, J&K. The students enrolled under various academic courses offered by the institution were encouraged to participate voluntarily in the study. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to data collection. Confidentiality was assured and maintained throughout the study.

### Research Design

This study employs a correlational research design, aiming to understand the type, strength, and direction of associations between various psychological variables, such as well-being, self-esteem, personality traits, academic motivation, and academic performance. A cross-sectional approach was used to collect data from a sample of 200 female college students.

### Measures

**Demographic Profile.** A self-designed questionnaire was used to collect demographic information from the participants, including age, religious affiliation, parental education level, marital status, family background, economic status, living arrangements, and academic stream.

**Academic Motivation Scale (AMS-C 28)** [Vallerand et al., 1992]. The Academic Motivation Scale (AMS-C 28) is a 28-item self-report instrument that assesses level of academic motivation in students. The scale differentiates between intrinsic motivation (driven by internal factors like interest and enjoyment), extrinsic motivation (driven by external factors such as rewards and pressure), and amotivation (a lack of motivation).

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)** [Rosenberg, 1965]. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a 10-item self-report scale that measures an individual's overall feelings of self-worth and value. It assesses both positive and negative evaluations of oneself. The scale demonstrates high reliability ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and strong predictive validity. Low self-esteem has been linked to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, which can negatively impact academic performance.

**Big Five Inventory (BFI)** [John & Srivastava, 1999]. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a 44-item self-report inventory designed to measure individual personality traits along five broad dimensions: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. These personality traits can influence various aspects of academic life, including motivation, study habits, and social interactions.

**Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS-SDCP)** [Sisodia & Choudhary, 2012]. The Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS-SDCP) is a 50-item scale that assesses five dimensions of psychological well-being, with ten items for each dimension: Satisfaction, Efficacy, Social Ability, Mental Health, and Interpersonal Relations. The scale demonstrates strong reliability ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and high validity (validity coefficient = .94).

*Academic Performance Scale (APS)* [Birchmeier et al., 2015]. The Academic Performance Scale (APS) measures students' perceptions of their own academic performance. It assesses factors such as study habits, class participation, effort, and problem-solving skills. By including the APS, the study aimed to examine the relationships between predictor variables (motivation, self-esteem, personality, and psychological well-being) and perceived academic performance.

### Procedure

A total of 200 female participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The students were recruited from a government college in the Jammu district, J&K. Each participant was briefed about the purpose of the study. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant voluntarily intending to engage in the study prior to data collection. Participants were individually provided with a set of questionnaires, (see Appendix for data collection measures/tools). Participants were instructed to complete the scales independently. Questionnaires were administered in a quiet and distraction-free environment to ensure accurate responses. Specified instructions were given to the participants prior to the administration of the tests. Assistance was available for any questions related to the instructions. Confidentiality was assured and maintained throughout the study. To uphold participant privacy, no personally identifiable information was collected.

### Results

Descriptive statistics were undertaken to elucidate the central tendency and variability for various factors. The analyses were conducted on a sample of 200 female students. The mean age of the participants was 19.27 years ( $SD = 0.87$ ). For academic motivation, an overall measure called the

self-determination index was assessed, and the average score was 4.17 ( $SD = 4.27$ ), indicating moderately high levels of self-determination among the participants. The mean score for the psychological well-being was 173.31 ( $SD = 22.47$ ), depicting moderate levels of psychological well-being among the participants. The average score for the self-esteem measure was found to be 19.38 ( $SD = 5.04$ ), indicating moderate levels of self-esteem in the participants. The mean for academic performance scores was 29.79 ( $SD = 5.40$ ), depicting high levels of academic performance in the participants.

Proportionally, 51% of the participants reported that their fathers had up to secondary school level of education, and 25.5% were graduates/postgraduates. 49% of the participants had an annual family income between 3 lakhs and 10 lakhs, and 34% with less than 3 lakhs of annual family income. On the basis of birth order, 42.5% of the participants were the eldest children and 36%, the youngest siblings. 42% of the participants reported rural as their area of primary residence, and 33.5% were found to be urban dwellers. 51.5% of participants belonged to the arts and humanities stream of academics, and 39.5% to the sciences.

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to analyse the relationships between key psychological and academic variables. The most prominent correlations among the variables are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlational Coefficients between Psychological and Academic variables

Variable 1	Variable 2	<i>r</i>
Self esteem	Academic motivation	.40
Self esteem	Academic performance	.40
Self esteem	Psychological well-being	.40
Conscientiousness	Academic performance	.30
Conscientiousness	Self esteem	.39

Conscientiousness	Psychological well-being	.33
Agreeableness	Academic motivation	.23
Psychological well-being	Academic motivation	.32
Psychological well-being	Academic performance	.38
N=200		

\*All coefficients are significant at  $p < .01$

There was a moderately strong positive and significant relationship between self-esteem and academic motivation and between self-esteem and academic performance, indicating that higher self-esteem corresponded to greater academic motivation and outcomes among the participants. Personality traits, such as conscientiousness, exhibited a positive and significant relationship with academic performance and self-esteem, suggesting that greater conscientiousness was associated with better performance levels. Psychological well-being showed moderately positive, significant correlation with academic motivation and with academic performance, indicating that better psychological well-being in the participants was related to improved academic outcomes.

Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the predictor variables and the dependent variables. The regression model was conducted to test whether age, academic motivation, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and different personality traits had a significant predictive influence on academic performance. The overall model was statistically significant,  $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(9,190) = 7.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that predictors explained 27% of the variance in academic performance. Another regression model, testing predictors of academic motivation, was found to be statistically significant,  $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(9,190) = 7.79$ ,  $p < .001$ , accounting for 27% of the variance in academic motivation. Self-esteem, academic performance, openness to experience, and agreeableness were significant predictors of academic motivation. However, psychological well-being ( $B = .02$ ,  $\beta = .09$ ,  $p = .255$ ) did not have significant predictive effects on academic motivation. The regression model used to analyse predictive effects of different variables on psychological well-being was statistically significant,  $R^2 = .36$ ,  $F(9,190) = 12.13$ ,  $p < .001$ , explaining 36% variance in the same. The most prominent predictive relations among variables are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression coefficients between Psychological, Academic and Age variables

Model (DV)	Predictor variables (IV)	Coefficients		
		B	$\beta$	p-value
1. Academic performance	Psychological wellbeing	0.06	.25	.001
	Academic motivation	0.25	.20	.005
	Self-esteem	0.18	.17	.031
2. Academic performance	Conscientiousness	0.28	.28	<.001
3. Academic motivation	Self-esteem	0.26	.31	<.001
	Academic performance	0.16	.20	.005
	Openness to experience	0.13	.15	.026
	Agreeableness	0.10	.14	.047

4. Psychological wellbeing	Self-esteem	1.08	.24	.001
	Openness to experience	0.96	.22	<.001
	Academic performance	0.91	.22	.001
	Extraversion	0.79	.18	.003
	Age	2.99	.12	.049

\*All coefficients are significant at  $p < .05$

Factorial ANOVA was conducted to assess the effects of demographic factors on academic performance and motivation. A factorial ANOVA model was computed to examine the effects of area of primary residence and living arrangements and travel arrangements on academic performance. The overall model was not statistically significant, indicating that the predictors variables did not collectively explain the variance in academic performance. The main effect of area of primary residence was statistically significant. Another factorial ANOVA model was conducted to examine the

effects of religious affiliation, educational level of the father, and educational level of the mother of the participant on their academic motivation. The overall model was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors collectively explain the variance in academic motivation. The main effect of a father's level of education was statistically significant,  $F(4,169) = 4.72, p = .001$ ; yielding an effect size of .100, which indicated that 10% of the variance in academic motivation was explained by the level of participants' father's education. The most prominent factor effects among variables are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA models showing Effect of Factor variables on Academic Outcomes

Model (DV)	Factor variables	Effect values		
		df	F	p-value
1. Academic performance	Model	31	1.32	.138
	Primary Residence	3	2.76	.044*
	Living arrangements	3	1.70	.168
	Travel arrangements	4	1.22	.306
	Residence*Living*Travel	2	2.14	.121
	Error (N-P)	168		
	Total (N)	200		
1. Academic motivation	Model	30	1.68	.022*
	Religious affiliation	3	1.04	.378
	Fathers' education	4	4.72	.001*
	Mothers' education	4	2.05	.090
	Religion*Edu F*Edu M	1	0.16	.693
	Error (N-P)	169		
	Total (N)	200		

\*. Effects are significant at  $p < .05$

## Discussion

The descriptive results indicated that the levels of psychological well-being of the female college students were moderate, indicating that while the participants generally experienced satisfactory overall psychological health, the lack of better well-being outcomes may be accounted to academic and career stress, which is common at this stage in life, and various other stressors that come with tackling the academic, social, and personal demands of student life. Deb et. al. (2015) found that students experienced stress from academic, examination, and parental pressure, with also symptomatic vulnerability to psychiatric conditions due to the same. This also suggests that there may still be room for improvement in terms of emotional stability, life satisfaction, and coping mechanisms to fully achieve optimal well-being for college students. For academic motivation, an overall measure called the self-determination index was assessed, and moderately high levels of self-determination among the participants were underpinned. Chebrolu (2024), in their study, found that females were observed to have higher motivation in general. Academic performance was also assessed in the current study, reporting high levels of academic performance among the female participants.

Psychological well-being showed moderately positive, significant correlation with academic motivation and with academic performance, indicating that better psychological well-being in the participants was related to improved academic outcomes. This aligns with previous research, suggesting a strong and favourable relationship between college students' academic success and mental health (Abdunnazar, 2019). The findings support the first hypothesis of the current study, stating that higher levels of psychological well-being are associated with greater

academic motivation and better academic performance in female college students.

The current study found a moderately strong positive and significant relationship between self-esteem and academic motivation. The study also underpinned a moderately strong, positive, and significant relationship between self-esteem and academic performance, indicating that higher self-esteem corresponded to greater academic motivation and outcomes among the participants. Bhatt and Bahadur (2018) found a strong positive correlation between students' self-efficacy and self-esteem; a weak positive relationship was also ascertained between self-efficacy, self-esteem, and achievement motivation of the students. This further elucidates the findings of the current study.

Personality traits, such as conscientiousness, exhibited a positive and significant relationship with academic performance, suggesting that greater conscientiousness was associated with better performance levels. Conscientiousness also demonstrated a moderately strong, positive relationship with self-esteem. Arora and Bhat (2019) concluded that personality traits emerged as significant predictors of level of aspiration, motivation, and academic performance. In light of the previous literature and the findings from the current study, the second research hypothesis is supported that self-esteem and specific personality traits, such as conscientiousness and openness, are positively correlated with academic motivation and performance in female college students.

Psychological well-being, academic motivation, and self-esteem were found to significantly predict academic performance, and so was conscientiousness. In their research, Talawar and Das (2014) also discovered a favourable relationship between academic success and mental health. Gul

(2015) found a significant positive correlation between socio-emotional adjustment and academic achievement of adolescent girls, with the former being a better predictor of the latter. Academic motivation was found to be significantly predicted by self-esteem, academic performance, openness, and agreeableness in the current study. The current study found that relational analyses on academic outcomes indicated 10% of the variance in academic motivation was explained by the level of participants' fathers' education. Deb et. al. (2015) also found that students with non-graduate fathers had a higher likelihood of reporting academic stress and parental pressure. The current study also found a statistically significant effect of area of primary residence on participants' academic performance.

### Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of psychological well-being, self-esteem, and personality traits such as conscientiousness in shaping academic motivation and performance among female college students. This study offers a discerning view of the interaction between these factors and their potential influence on each other. Findings from this research reflect how psychological well-being, self-esteem, and specific personality traits have a significant impact on academic outcomes such as motivation and performance. These assessments shed light on areas that may be wrought for introducing various support interventions. Limitations include the study's cross-sectional design and exclusive focus on female students, which may restrict broader applicability. Prospective studies could delve further into comprehending the intricate interplay among these causative elements that mould the associations that are shown. Engaging in population studies and hypothesis testing could facilitate the improvement of academic outcomes and mental health in the targeted group while also

dissecting different causal pathways. Overall, this study not only adds to our knowledge of the complex interactions between academic and mental health issues, but it also emphasises how important integrated support strategies are to the general well-being and improved academic performance of female college students.

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