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Gender Differences in Psychological Well-Being and Academic Experiences among Undergraduate Art Students: A Comparative Study

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Abstract
Psychological well-being is a multifaceted concept that is integral for the overall well-being of an individual, making them capable of navigating through life challenges. The university period is a major transition for a young adult marked with many difficulties, including academic stress, psychological issues, etc. While art is known to have a therapeutic power, often art students encounter negative university experiences due to several factors. This study focused on examining gender differences in psychological well-being and academic experiences among undergraduate art students. This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative survey research design with a sample of 157 participants using an adapted questionnaire. The present study examined gender differences in depression, academic stress, creative self-efficacy, resilience, and coping strategies among undergraduate art students. The findings revealed no statistically significant gender differences across any of the variables examined, despite slight variations in mean scores. These results suggest that male and female students enrolled in art-focused disciplines experience comparable psychological and academic characteristics, indicating that shared educational and creative experiences may have a greater influence than gender alone. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on the psychological experiences of art students and highlight the importance of implementing inclusive mental health and academic support initiatives that benefit all students within art education.

Keywords: Psychological Well-being, Academic Experiences, Art Students, Gender, Resilience.

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1. Introduction

Psychological well-being is not a single concept; rather, it consists of several key components, including the ability to perform positively, being autonomous and self-aware, and navigating through life problems (Wan et al., 2025). Mental Health does not exist individually; it is part of overall human health, including emotional, social, and psychological well-being, playing an integral role in an individual's holistic well-being (Hernández-Torrano & Ibrayeva, 2024). Being able to cope with everyday life stressors, whether personal, work, or academic, is counted as part of psychological well-being (Singh & Kaur, 2023).

University years are an important period of young adults' lives. At this time, they go through a major life transition, affecting all aspects of their well-being, including psychological, emotional, social, and intellectual. From educational pressure to interacting with peers, challenges are present in each stage that have an impact on the students one way or the other. They become prone to mental health problems. University students encounter several situations that require them to leave their comfort zones and adjust to the new phase. Those with good psychological well-being can navigate through these changes; however, problems arise for those who are not able to move through this transition without being negatively affected leasing to stress, anxiety, depression, or other behavioral issues. Balancing academic commitments and responsibilities is a major factor that results in students neglecting their mental health (Rois et al., 2021).

Resilience, according to Bernard (2004), means having a hidden personal strength that facilitates an individual in dealing with problems when the situation demands. It means being capable of adapting through adversity, by being solution-focused, having a sense of purpose, and being in control of oneself. When dealing

with stressful circumstances, resilience helps university students to adapt positively and mindfully to the situations (Amreen & Malik, 2021). Resilient individuals can move through any life challenge and focus on thriving from it. It is a key trait that results in improved psychological health. It acts as an inner ability that helps people navigate through their sufferings. University years demand students to adapt to new things and ways, whether it is in or out of their comfort level, and so for a balanced and successful outcome, it is needed for them to be resilient (Suhaimi & Kamaruzaman, 2024). In the face of difficulties, often individuals use coping strategies either focused on the problem or their emotions. The use of such techniques helps them manage stress levels, anxiety, depression, negative thinking, etc. These include ways an individual makes a plan against the cause of stress and unpleasant feelings associated with it (Hatunoglu, 2020).

An art student studies art-related subjects primarily in their academic years. Engagement with art, though known for its therapeutic power (Jean, 2024), does not have the same impact on all individuals. Students in art-focused fields experience their share of struggles that are unique and challenging for them. Long hours of art classes and academic tasks often lead to increased stress and distress (Lee et al., 2023). Stress linked to educational tasks and meeting submission deadlines adds to significant pressure (Xunmeng, 2025). Many students face academic stress in the form of teacher-related stress, fear of assessment, pressure of achievement, peer conflict, and unpreparedness. Some face either one of these challenges or a combination of them, resulting in overall academic stress (Sundas et al., 2022).

It is noteworthy to mention that art students are chosen intentionally for this study so psychological and academic experiences of art students can be explored, despite the expressive and therapeutic role of artistic engagement. This study aimed to investigate the psychological and academic experiences of art students at

the undergraduate level and compare them based on the demographic variable of gender. The research aimed to shed light on the experiences of art students, so findings can help cater to their psychological needs and inform university authorities to take the necessary measures to do so.

1.1. Research Objective

- To examine gender differences in depression, academic stress, creative self-efficacy, resilience, and coping strategies among undergraduate art students.

2. Literature Review

The university period is one of the most significant transitions of a student's life. A study by McCloud et al. (2020) concluded that the shift to university is a time marked with anxious and depressive feelings for which most of the students do not even seek help for one reason or the other. Their findings also revealed that many students reported that assessments and difficult coursework result in anxiety and stress. Moreover, other factors included being away from home and financial pressure, which contributed to their poor well-being as well. Challenges in terms of adjusting to university life often brought unpleasant feelings impacting their mental health. It was found in Arthur et al. (2025)' s study that female students suffered from distressing psychological well-being as compared to their male peers.

Art is a powerful tool for healthy expression due to its therapeutic nature. Art has a notably positive impact on the mental health of individuals, enhancing their overall psychological well-being. A cross-sectional approach focused on Chinese undergraduate students revealed that studying art as a subject in university was linked to good mental health (Jin et al., 2022). A variety of art-focused subjects, including painting, music, etc, facilitate emotional expression among individuals. It is a way for students to express their positive and negative innermost

feelings in a tangible form (Jean, 2024). Dai (2025)'s study concluded that the process of creating art leads to meaningful creative expression, which helps with emotional regulation, expression, and communication, leading to an overall positive psychological well-being. Saif (2024) also confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between art and psychological health.

Despite the vast literature providing evidence of the positive effect of art on mental well-being, some studies contradict it, revealing the other side of this. Despite the therapeutic role of art, it was found that students studying art often face problems that impair their psychological well-being. Their problems are just as significant and should neither be overlooked nor underestimated (Zhang, 2022). Yadahalli et al. (2024) also stated that university art students suffer from poor mental health. Youth who participated in some art activities, including painting, drama, and music, in Washington reported post-engagement that they experienced more depressive feelings, with female students reporting higher levels of it as compared to their male peers (Young & Winner, 2012).

Hako et al. (2023) conducted a longitudinal study highlighting the severity of stress experienced by university students. It was also reported that many students used negative coping mechanisms, and some were focused on perfection to such an extent that it resulted in poor psychological health. Further, an extensive systematic review of around forty articles, university students faced stress, which for some eventually led to depressive symptoms. It was also found that female students experienced more stress than male students (Hawsawi et al., 2025). Othman et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative case study of seven university students, revealing they experienced severe depression due to several factors, including familial, social, and academic conflict, and trauma. They suggested that this area should be researched more to offer the right guidance and services to university students.

Suhaimi et al. (2024) highlighted in their cross-sectional study that resilience is significantly associated with depression, stress, and anxiety among university students. It was suggested that students with higher resilience better coped with psychological challenges. Further, Amreen & Malik (2021), through their cross-sectional analytical study, concluded that university students from their sample had moderate levels of resilience, with female students more resilient than their male peers. It was recommended to conduct more studies focusing on the psychological well-being of university students and exploring resilience as a factor as well. This study included resilience as one of the five variables to examine academic and psychological experiences of undergraduate students.

A comparative study by Vaag et al (2021) highlighted that students enrolled in art fields faced more psychological problems in comparison to non-art students. Cheema et al (2022) deduced through their research on the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among art and non-art students that students faced similar severity of depressive symptoms regardless of their fields. Furthermore, Lee et al. (2023), in their comparative research between art and non-art students focused on factors related to stress-related educational tasks and mental health, concluded that students enrolled in art majors had notably high levels of depression and stress. A leading reason for this was found to be long hours of complex academic assignments, leading to stressful feelings. Thus, the purpose of this study was also to focus on the educational and physical experiences of art students.

The purpose of this study is to add findings to the emerging research centered on academic and psychological factors of young adults so that steps can be taken to support them. The worrisome thing is that students experience severe symptoms of pressure, stress, and depression, but they don't consider it serious enough to seek help for. This leads to mode deeper psychological issues, even resulting in

disorders. This ignorance is associated with stigma related to mental health services, counselling, therapy, etc., and a lack of such effective facilities in educational institutions. This becomes the greatest obstacle for students to seek proper help (Kamarzuman et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the differences in depression, coping strategies, creative self-efficacy, and resilience among undergraduate students from art-focused fields. This approach was considered appropriate as only numerical data were required for this study and were collected from the sample at a single point using a structured questionnaire.

3.2. Sample

The population of this study was focused on art undergraduate students. Using the convenience sampling technique, a total of 157 participants were part of this study, including 85 male students and 72 female students. Inclusion criteria were set for undergraduate students enrolled in art-focused fields in Lahore.

3.3. Tool

An adapted questionnaire was developed using 5-items from five standard scales, including the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), Coping Strategies Inventory (Tobin et al., 1989), Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003), Academic Stress Scale (ASS; originally developed by Kim, 1970; retrieved from Phillips et al., 2020), and Creative Self-Efficacy Scale (Karwowski et al., 2018). A pilot study was conducted on 30 participants to test the reliability of the tool, resulting in a Cronbach's value of 0.775. Items adapted were compiled into a single questionnaire using a five-point Likert response format to maintain consistency

across all constructs. Demographic information included year of study and gender of the participants.

3.4. Data Collection

Data were collected through both online and in-person administration of the questionnaire. Participants were assured confidentiality of their responses. The responses were compiled in a structured order for further statistical analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, SPSS Statistics was used to analyze the numerical data and gain quantitative findings. Descriptive statistics were used to compute the demographic variables of gender and year of study, obtaining their frequency and percentages. Further, an independent samples t-test was administered for each variable to examine the difference between male and female art students.

4. Results

The findings of the present study are shown in the tables below:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	85	54.1
	Female	72	45.9
Year of Study	First Year	12	7.7
	Second Year	28	17.8
	Third Year	74	47.1
	Fourth Year	43	27.4

The table above illustrates the demographic information of the undergraduate art students in terms of gender and year of study. The sample consisted of 85 male students (54.1) and 72 female students (45.9%). Most of the participants were in their third year of undergraduate study (47.1%), followed by fourth year (27.4%), second year (17.8%), and first year (7.7%).

Table 2: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Depression Scores by Gender

Variable	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	t	df	p
Depression	3.23 (0.49)	3.37 (0.53)	-1.74	155	.085

Table 2 above presents the results of the independent-samples t-test conducted to examine gender differences in depression among art undergraduate students. The obtained findings suggest that female students (M = 3.37, SD = 0.53) reported slightly higher levels of depression scores as compared to their male peers (M = 3.23, SD = 0.49). It reveals that the observed difference was not found to be statistically significant p = .085, indicating that while the levels of depression were comparable between male and female art students in the present study, gender was not significantly associated with the depression scores.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Academic Stress Scores Between Male and Female Students

Variable	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	t	df	p
Academic Stress	3.80 (0.60)	3.15 (0.80)	0.28	129.90	.784

The table above shows results obtained from an independent-samples t-test conducted to examine the difference in academic stress among male and female art undergraduate students. Levene's test was also administered, revealing that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated (F = 8.74, p = .004); therefore, the results from the equal variances not assumed analysis were interpreted. The findings showed that the male students (M = 3.18, SD = 0.60) reported notably higher academic stress scores compared to their female peers (M = 3.15, SD = 0.80). However, this difference was not found to be statistically significant, p = .784. These findings suggest that academic stress levels were comparable between male and female undergraduate art students, revealing that gender was not significantly associated with academic stress in the present sample.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Creative Self-Efficacy Scores in terms of Gender

Variable	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	t	df	p
Creative Self-Efficacy	3.79 (0.58)	3.83 (0.60)	-0.45	155	.653

Findings shown in Table 4 demonstrate gender differences in creative self-efficacy, examined with an independent samples t-test. It was found that female undergraduate art students reported a marginally higher mean of creative self-efficacy score (M = 3.83, SD = 0.60) than their male counterparts (M= 3.79, SD= 0.58). With the obtained .653 p-value, the difference was not found to be statistically significant. Thus, it shows that levels of creative confidence were comparable across genders in this sample.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Creative Self-Efficacy Scores in terms of Gender

Variable	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	t	df	p
Resilience	3.72 (0.68)	3.87 (0.56)	-1.46	155	.146

The table above compares resilience scores between male and female art students using an independent samples t-test. It was revealed that the female students obtained a higher average resilience score (M = 3.87, SD = 0.56) than male students (M = 3.72, SD = 0.68). Despite this observed difference in the group means, the analysis did not indicate a statistically significant gender difference, p = .146. These results suggest that resilience was similar among male and female undergraduate art students in the present study.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Creative Self-Efficacy Scores in terms of Gender

Variable	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	t	df	p
Coping Strategies	3.41 (0.47)	3.37 (0.63)	0.50	129.28	.622

To examine the difference in use of coping strategies in terms of gender, an independent-samples t-test was performed. As Levene's test indicated unequal variances ($F = 11.25$, $p = .001$), the results from the equal variances not assumed analysis were interpreted. It was found that the male undergraduate art students demonstrated a slightly higher mean coping strategy score ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.47$) than female students ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.63$). This difference showed no statistical significance, $p = .622$. The obtained results from this test indicate that the use of coping strategies reported by male and female undergraduate art students was broadly comparable, suggesting that gender was not a significant factor influencing coping strategy scores within the sample of the present study.

Overall, the findings from the obtained quantitative results demonstrate that the independent-samples t-test analyses revealed no statistically significant gender differences across any of the five variables examined, including depression, academic stress, creative self-efficacy, resilience, and coping strategies. While the analyses did not provide sufficient evidence to support gender-based differences, some descriptive trends were observed. Female undergraduate art students consistently reported slightly higher mean scores for depression, creative self-efficacy, and resilience, whereas male students demonstrated marginally higher mean scores for academic stress and coping strategies. However, these observed differences in mean scores did not reach statistical significance and, therefore, cannot be interpreted as meaningful gender differences within the present sample. Collectively, these findings indicate that gender was not a significant factor associated with depression, academic stress,

creative self-efficacy, resilience, or coping strategies among undergraduate art students.

5. Discussion

This study sought to examine the academic and psychological experiences of students at the undergraduate level and compare them based on gender. The difference was explored based on depression, creative self-efficacy, academic stress, resilience, and coping strategies.

The findings revealed that in terms of depression, no statistical significance was found between male and female students, although female students reported slightly higher mean depression scores compared to their male peers. This obtained result is consistent with Arthur et al. (2025)'s research findings where it was highlighted that female students had a more distressing psychological well-being in comparison to the male students. It also corroborates the results from Young & Winner (2012)'s study, where, even after engaging with creative activities involving painting and music, the female students reported experiencing more depressive symptoms. This is also echoed in the systematic review of Hawsawi et al (2025), that male students suffered from less stressful and depressive feelings in comparison to females. However, Amreen & Malik (2021)'s study contradicts these findings and revealed that female students in their sample were more resilient, leading to better psychological well-being than males. This study suggests exploring the underlying reasons for female students experiencing more distressing and depressive feelings. It underscores that females are more prone to stress and factors that result in harming their psychological well-being. A qualitative approach should be adopted to gain deeper insights. While the literature has deduced significant differences in depression between males and females, this study found no such significance, suggesting that educational institutions can

develop intentional interventions to reduce such symptoms that may benefit both male and female students.

The present study found no statistically significant gender difference in terms of academic stress. While male students reported a slightly higher mean score, there was no notable difference. Even with art acting as a catalyst for a healthy psychological state, Zhang (2022) states that art students have real and significant stress-related problems which ultimately affect their mental health. While Saif (2024) affirms the positive relationship between art and psychological well-being, the findings from the present study show no significant difference in academic stress between male and female students. Shared learning environments may have contributed to a similar perception of academic pressure. However, Lee et al. (2023)'s study concluded that educational tasks of art students and their related requirements increased their pressure, and this academic stress was a leading factor in students' severe levels of depression and stress. While Jean (2024) stated that subjects of rt provide a variety of artist engagement to students, providing them with a way to healthily express their negative and positive feelings. While the studies don't focus on exploring how both genders individually experience academic stress, this study showed no remarkable difference, which may mean that both male and female students undergo similar learning environments and artistic tasks.

Further results indicated no significant difference in creative self-efficacy among male and female undergraduate students. Although it was found that female students had a marginally higher mean score of creative self-efficacy than their male peers, with no significant difference. This finding aligns with the results obtained from Hashim et al (2026)'s study that indicated that both male and female students have almost similar levels of creative self-efficacy. OECD (2025), however, reported a contrasting statement that girls report higher levels of creative

confidence. Ulger et al. (2016) also affirm that female students have higher levels of creative thinking abilities than the opposite gender. However, Betancourt (2022) shared that both female and male students had the same level of creativity, consistent with the findings of the present study. One possible explanation would be that since both male and female art students experience the same creative techniques, tasks, and environment in university, they have similar priorities for creative exploration and skill development.

The quantitative analysis revealed no significant difference in resilience in terms of gender in the present study. However, female students reported slighter higher mean score of resilience. This finding is consistent with Amreen & Malik's (2021) statement highlighting that university students in their sample, both male and female, experience moderate levels of resilience. However, one of their findings also contradicts by stating that female students were found to be more resilient than their male peers. Furthermore, Ali & Kumar's (2025) research on students' resilience suggested no significant difference in resilience between genders, aligning with the findings of this study. However, on the contrary, Sharma et al (2024) revealed through their comparative study that male students have notably higher levels of resilience than their female peers, recommending that targeted supportive and counselling services should be provided in educational institutions. Moreover, aligning with the results from the present study, Amoadu et al. (2024) also indicated that no statistically significant variation exists between the two genders in terms of resilience.

No statistically significant difference was found among male and female undergraduate art students in terms of coping strategies, with males reporting slightly higher mean scores. Hatunoglu (202) also supports these findings by reporting that in their sample, no notable statistical difference was found between the two genders regarding the usage of coping strategies to navigate life

challenges. However, Graves et al. (2024) contradict these results by concluding that females are more prone to using coping strategies to regulate their emotions. Martínez et al. (2019) support the findings of the present study to some extent, indicating that both genders use coping strategies but varying types of them. It is suggested that future studies can be conducted to explore the variability of coping strategies with more depth.

Collectively, the findings emphasize that psychological well-being and academic experiences among undergraduate art students may be shaped more by shared educational contexts than by gender differences.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the gender differences in depression, creative self-efficacy, academic stress, coping strategies, and resilience among undergraduate art and non-art students. Overall, the findings suggest that gender was not a significant factor across both psychological and academic aspects of undergraduate art students. Although slight variations in the mean scores of each variable are evident, with females reporting slightly higher scores of depression, resilience, and creative self-efficacy, and males reporting slightly higher academic stress and coping strategies scores, these differences are not considered significant. It shows that gender alone may not adequately explain differences in the psychological and academic variables among the undergraduate art students, as both have shared and similar creative, academic, and educational environments. Other associated factors may have a stronger influence, which can be explored in future studies. However, these findings underscore the need for student support initiatives within art education that adopt an inclusive approach. This study highlights the importance of psychological well-being, resilience, academic support, and coping strategies for all undergraduate students regardless of their gender.

Some limitations that may be acknowledged in this study are that the sample was only art-based students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to students from other fields. Additionally, the study focused on gender-based comparison; therefore, other contextual and demographic factors that may influence the independent variable were not examined. Future studies can include students from diverse academic backgrounds and adopt a mixed-methods study to have a more comprehensive understanding of students' academic and psychological experiences in the university phase. This study adds to the ongoing evolution of research focused on student well-being in Pakistan.

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