

**RESEARCH PAPER****Self-efficacy, Optimism and Social Support as Predictors of Health Behaviors in Young Adults****¹Zehra Mohsin*, ²Dr. Sarah Shahed and ³Dr. Talat Sohail**

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***Corresponding Author:** zehramohsin.official@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The present research aims to find out self-efficacy, optimism and social support as predictors of health behaviors. It also aims to explore the relationship between the variables and examine mean differences between men and women. Correlational research design was used and convenient sampling was done to select data of N=397 young adults from different universities of Lahore, Pakistan. Assessment protocol included; a demographic form, general self-efficacy scale, optimism scale, multidimensional scale of perceived social support and health promoting and preventive behaviors scale. Findings of the study revealed that self-efficacy, optimism and social support were positively correlated to health behaviors and were significant. It was seen that self-efficacy, optimism and social support were significant positive predictors of health behaviors in young adults. Women scored higher on self-efficacy, optimism and health behaviors than men and the difference was significant whereas, men scored higher on social support but the difference was not statistically significant. Policy makers and public health experts can take these findings as a basis of introducing programs and implement plans that focus on enhancing optimism and self-efficacy in young adults so that they opt health promoting and preventive behaviors in future.

KEYWORDS Health Behaviors, Optimism, Prevention, Promotion, Self-efficacy, Social Support, Young Adults**Introduction**

A significant age range of young adulthood (18 – 25years) which has a plethora of decisions to be made by an individual that will impact the said individual's future in many different ways, be it career, health, relationships, stability or well-being. The phase of life from adolescence to adulthood is a critical stage of developments in young adult's life, particularly for a 20-year-old individual. In this age group many individuals are getting education, becoming part of nation's workforce, settling in, buying houses and starting serious relationships, these changes can take a toll on physical and mental health outcomes and what health behaviors one starts to practice which can influence and alter health of individuals in future (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2006).

Health behaviors are those activities that one practices in daily life which in turn can have effect on one's physical health (Glanz et al., 2008). Health behaviors are the most crucial component of an individual's health and well-being as its importance has not only lengthened to sanitation and medicinal route but it has also taken nutritional aspect. It is observed that taking care of nutritional health behaviors results in scoring high in

academics (Khan & Shahed, 2015). Whereas, sanitation and hygiene maintenance has reduced the disease occurrence while medicines have made diseases that used to be fatal and untreatable became avertible and curable. Thus, health behaviors have become an important part in public health and working on refining them is fundamental.

Self-efficacy is defined as ability to strategize and then carrying out said set of actions in a confident manner that will result in certain outcome. It is the belief in oneself that influences them to opt and maintain health behaviors (Buckworth, 2017). Optimism is often related to attachment coping on a greater level. Available literatures have reported that optimism is taking part in health protecting behaviors. Optimism is also linked to attaining better physical health (Carver & Scheier, 2014). Perceived social support is one's personal evaluation of having accessibility to resources and responses from their social circle. An individual's social circle can majorly contribute towards individual's health behaviors that can be emotional, economic, moral and interpersonal stability (Paykani et al., 2020).

Gender is another significant determinant of health behaviors. It is observed that men lead a less healthy lifestyle when compared to women, as men usually do not take part in health promoting behaviors (Hayden, 2022). The behaviors that can affect the person's health by the means of disease, injury or death are referred to as health risk behaviors and men are more prone to risky health behaviors. It is observed that women exhibit greater hygiene standards and they are less likely to display health risk behaviors as compared to men (Rehman et al., 2018).

Literature Review

In many countries the bigger population portion being young adults dictates how the future of the country looks like. It is of great importance to keep their health, growth and well-being in check as it would affect the next generations (Bonnie et al., 2015).

Arnett (2000) describes young adulthood as an age of experimentation, individuals in this age are responsible for their own decisions. They can go for risky behaviors or they can become responsible citizens. However, many transitions may take place, independence and individualistic decisions can lead to varied responses to health (Nelson et al., 2008). Young adult's health behaviors are essential to provide basis for upcoming challenges in life. Other psychosocial factors like self-efficacy, optimism, social support and gender can influence health behaviors.

Bandura (1977) explains self-efficacy as a person's belief about their ability to do certain actions to get the required results. This notion has an important relation with health behaviors associated with health promotion. His research findings have shown that people with higher self-efficacy have great chance of engaging in health-related behaviors. It is seen more often that those who engage in physical activity, are capable of managing stress and show adherence to medical advice and also score higher on self-efficacy. Schwarzer and Renner (2000) highlighted the involvement of self-efficacy in choosing health behaviors with the period of time. Those who score higher on self-efficacy eventually perform better and can tackle lapses and setbacks more efficiently. Self-efficacy of a person can be increased by educating them about the topic (Shahed, 2015). Perceived self-efficacy also plays an important role in different health behavior practices like eating and controlling weight, experiencing pain and its treatment, smoking cessation and relapse (O'Leary, 1985).

Optimism is explained as a desire to expect most likeable results in future. Scheier and Carver (2001), explained that people who are optimistic likely to engage in health

promoting behaviors. Optimism can manifest increased physical activity and healthy diet intake. Rasmussen et al. (2009) has established that people who are optimistic are expected to observe health information useful and helpful, to improved self-management of health behaviors. It is also reported that individuals with higher optimism levels tend to partake in behaviors that are good for health for example eating fruits and vegetables, exercising and not smoking (Boehm et al., 2018).

Social support has an essential part in influencing a person's health related choices and behaviors. Berkman and Glass (2000), explained that social support can play an important part in results related to health by promotion and maintenance of healthy behaviors. Support from family, friends and significant others help in reducing stress, leading a healthy life by indulging in activities like; healthy eating, physical activity and self-management. Umberson et al. (2010) discussed that social relationships acts a safeguard for risky health behaviors. A person positively influenced by his or her family and other social connection abstain from engage in behaviors such as smoking, drinking, sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy eating patterns.

According to Bandura (1977) gender related differences are evident when observed in different fields. It is also very commonly observed that women tend to exhibit lower self-efficacy than men (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). This can have certain effects on their occupation selection, professional life, educational ventures, personal and societal life which will eventually have a significant impact on their life and health (Bandura, 2006). According to Carver et al. (2010) women are observed to be more optimistic in situations where they are affected immensely as compared to men, which shows that women have different views related to life. A study showed that men display different form of optimism than dispositional optimism (Matud et al., 2015). When social support is studied in terms of different genders it is seen that social support is received and perceived differently among genders. Taylor and Seeman (1999) reported that woman mostly focus on emotional social support. It is of great significance to consider the different cultural effects and circumstances when observing the differences across genders in social support as they have effect on stress, well-being, health and coping (Hyde, 2005). According to Janz et al. (2014) women are more likely to participate in healthy lifestyle practices compared to men. Men are more susceptible to to risky health behaviors (Grieser et al., 2008).

It can be concluded from literature that self-efficacy, optimism and social support can positively influence health behaviors in young adults. It is also seen that gender differences are prominent in choosing health behaviors and the psychosocial factors associated with it.

Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that;

- There would be an association between self-efficacy, optimism, social support and health behaviors in young adults.
- Optimism, self-efficacy and social support are likely to be the positive predictors of health behaviors.
- There are likely to be mean differences on scores of self-efficacy, optimism, social support and health behaviors in men and women young adults.

Material and Methods

Correlational research design was used and a sample of N=397 young adults (18 to 25 years) was collected through convenient sampling. The sample was collected from the universities in the city of Lahore, Pakistan. Students enrolled in regular degree programs were included in this study. Students with physical and psychological issues were excluded from the present study.

Measures

Measures included the following.

Demographic form. It included questions related to the sample's age, gender, family monthly income and relationship with family members.

Table 1
Demographic details of the participants of the study (N= 397)

Variables	M (SD)	f (%)
Age	20.41(2.05)	
Family Monthly Income	122442.32(214626.41)	
Gender		
Men		140(35.30)
Women		257(64.70)
Relationship with Family Members		
Unsatisfactory		24 (6.00)
Satisfactory		161 (40.60)
Highly Satisfactory		212 (53.40)

General self-efficacy scale. It consists of 10 items with a rating of one (not all true) to four (exactly true) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). This scale was used to measure self-efficacy in this study. The Cronbach alpha value for this study was $\alpha=.80$. Self-efficacy was measured from this scale.

Optimism Scale. Coelho et al. (2018) developed the scale. It comprises of nine items. Participants rate a five-point scale, which ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Item four was reverse coded. The Cronbach alpha value for the present study was $\alpha=.85$. This scale measured optimism in the present study.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Zimet et al., (1988) developed scale on social support which consists of twelve items of three sub-scales that were friends, family and significant others. The participants rate the 7-point rating scale, ranging from very-strongly disagree to very-strongly agree. The Cronbach α of present study was $\alpha=.94$. The scale was used to measure social support in young adults.

Health Promoting and Preventive Behaviors Scale (HPPBS). This scale consisted of 42 items and is a 5-point Likert rating scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). The scale was a self-constructed. The Cronbach alpha value for this study was $\alpha=.92$. This scale was used to gauge health behaviors in young adults in the present study.

Ethical considerations

Adequate ethical considerations were taken. Study was approved from the institutional advance research board. Ethical guidelines provided by APA important for research were taken. Permissions from the authors of the scales and participants were

taken before data collection. The data was collected anonymously and participants were guaranteed about the confidentiality of their data. Formal consent was taken before data collection.

Results

The results of the study were examined by running Pearson correlation, regression and independent *t* test analyses using SPSS-25.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics, inter correlation between Self-efficacy, Optimism, Social Support and Health Behaviors. (N= 397)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Self-Efficacy	31.26	4.19	-	.674**	-.030	.614**
2. Optimism	33.39	6.21	-	-	.028	.743**
3. Social Support	42.40	18.76	-	-	-	.108*
4. Health Behaviors	138.72	23.20	-	-	-	-

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 depicts the findings, health behaviors are positively correlated to self-efficacy, optimism and social support, and are significant.

Table 3
Hierarchical regression analysis summary for Optimism, Self-Efficacy and Social Support Predicting Health Behaviors

Variable	B	95% CI		SE B	β	R ²	Δ R ²
		LL	UL				
Step 1						.55	.55***
Constant	46.03	37.63	54.42	4.27			
Optimism	2.77	2.53	3.02	.13	.74***		
Step 2						.58	.02***
Constant	32.93	23.05	42.82	5.03			
Optimism	2.26	1.93	2.58	.17	.60***		
Self-efficacy	.97	.56	1.39	.21	.21***		
Step 3						.59	.01**
Constant	27.64	17.25	38.03	5.29			
Optimism	2.23	1.90	2.55	.17	.59***		
Self-efficacy	1.01	.61	1.42	.21	.22***		
Social support	.12	.04	.19	.09	.09**		

Note. CI= confidence interval; LL= lower limit; UL= upper limit ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3 shows the impact of optimism, self-efficacy and social support on health behaviors in young adults. The findings showed that optimism, self-efficacy and social support were significant predictors of health behaviors in young adults. Whereas optimism was found to be the superlative predictor of health behaviors.

Table 4
Independent Sample t-test for Mean Difference in Men and Women, on General Self-efficacy, Optimism, Perceived Social Support and Health Promoting and Preventive Behaviors

Variable	Men		Women		<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	(N=140)		(N=257)				LL	UL	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>					
GSE	29.04	5.68	32.47	3.95	-6.35(213.73)	.00	-4.50	-2.37	.70
OPT	29.35	6.55	35.59	4.75	-9.92(220.10)	.00	-7.47	-4.99	1.09
PSS	44.61	16.82	41.20	19.67	1.81(325.24)	.07	-.29	7.10	.18
HPPBS	123.6	21.97	146.91	19.48	-10.84(395)	.00	-27.4	-19.02	1.12

Note. GSE; General Self-efficacy, OPT; Optimism, PSS; Perceived Social Support, HPPBS; Health Promoting and Preventing Behaviors Scale.

Table 4 depicts the findings of independent sample *t*-test which indicates mean differences on self-efficacy, optimism, social support and health behaviors in men and women. Women scored greater on self-efficacy, optimism and health behaviors than men and the results were statistically significant. While, men scored higher on social support than women but the difference on scores is not significant.

Discussion

Young adults are a major part of the total population in Pakistan, which is neglected while addressing different policies and initiatives for different age groups. The current study attempts to explore aspects that can contribute in attainment of health behaviors and better lifestyle. Studies have indicated that psychosocial factors including optimism, social support and self-efficacy can develop sense of opting health behaviors in young adults.

The sample of the present study comprised of both men and women, while women being higher in number, which complies with the stats of survey conducted in 2020 related to population composition of Pakistan (Pakistan Demographic Survey, 2022). All the participants belonged to a rich background of education as they all were acquiring higher education degrees from top universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The sample's mean age was around 20 years which is considered to be an important age of development (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2006). The average family monthly income was over one hundred thousand rupees. Which is considered to be an adequate amount for a small family. Majority of the participants reported that they had satisfactory and higher satisfactory relationship with their family members. Relationship with family members can act as a catalyst for the perception of social support, optimism and health behaviors specifically in our culture.

Psychometric properties were tested before analyses of the hypotheses. The values for internal consistency for all scales were good. Correlation analysis was done to see the association between self-efficacy, optimism, social support and health behaviors. Findings revealed that self-efficacy and optimism are positively associated and are significant. It also showed that social support had negative relationship with self-efficacy and positive relationship with optimism but both associations were statistically insignificant. Health behaviors had positive significant relationships with self-efficacy, optimism and social support which is supported by the finding of Karademas and Kalantzi-Azizi (2005) that health behaviors are influenced by self-efficacy, optimism and social support.

Findings revealed that optimism and self-efficacy were highly significant predictors of health behaviors, whereas, social support was also observed to be significant predictor of health behaviors. Optimism acted as the superlative and most important predictor of health behaviors. It was supported by research findings of Non et al. (2020) that social support and optimism have been a reported as significant predictors

of health behaviors, as for opting health behaviors it is of great importance to have a level of self-efficacy. Thus, self-efficacy was observed to be one of the predictors of health behaviors alongside social support as they depend on each other to maintain social networks (Schwarzer & Fuchs, 1996).

It was also observed that self-efficacy, optimism and health behaviors were significantly higher in women as compared to men. It is seen in researches that health related behaviors are influenced depending on gender (Saeed & Shahed, 2015). Findings of Debska et al. (2016) revealed that women follow more health-related behaviors than men. Similar to the findings of Olson et al. (2017) which said men are more likely to indulge in behaviors like substance use, poor dietary habits and unhealthy lifestyles as compared to women. Whereas, men scored higher on social support than women but the mean difference was not statistically significant. Men scoring higher on social support could be a reason of belonging to a conservative society in which men are more socially encouraged to take major decisions for themselves as compared to women.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the variables were positively associated with health behaviors, optimism, self-efficacy and social support were positive predictors of health behaviors in young adults. Women scored higher on all variables as compared to men.

Limitations

- The data was collected from students enrolled in universities in the city of Lahore only. This limits the generalizability of the results.
- Data was only collected from young adults from 18 to 25 years of age.

Recommendations

- Pakistan is a blend of many cultures. Cross cultural comparisons can be done to get more detailed understanding of health behaviors in our society. Data from other cities and provinces can be included for wide-ranging the scope of the future findings.
- Increasing the age bracket may have yielded different results. Future researchers can draw data from different age groups to get a wider picture of variables that may predict health behaviors. Other age groups can be included in forthcoming researches.

Implications

In this study standardized measures were used to quantify self-efficacy, optimism, social support and health behaviors. The most neglected group of the population was tapped to test the study variables and hypotheses. As the findings revealed that optimism and self-efficacy are important predictors of health behaviors, this can help policy makers to introduce programs and courses that can enhance optimism and self-efficacy in young adults that will ultimately boost health related behaviors in them. Self-management and health education related plans should be introduced on national level to create awareness about the importance of opting healthy lifestyle.

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