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Emotional Expressivity, Social Adjustment And Mental Health in Adults (Males and Females): Implication for Psychological Well being and Emotional Distress

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Abstract

The present study was focused on the relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment and mental health in adults. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment and mental health in adults. Emotional expressivity and social adjustment are likely to predict psychological well-being in adults. Emotional expressivity and social adjustment are likely to predict psychological distress in adults. There are likely to be gender differences in emotional expressivity, social adjustment, psychological well-being and psychological distress of adults. The sample was comprised of N (250), male (n=125) and female (n=125) adults. Emotional expressivity scale by Kring (1988), Social adjustment scale by Kausar (2007) and Mental health inventory by Veit and Ware (1983) were used to measure emotional expressivity, social adjustment and mental health, respectively. Purposive sampling technique was used for data collection. Pearson product moment correlation, independent sample t test and multiple regression analysis was used through SPSS. Findings of the study showed that there is likely to be a significant positive relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment and psychological well-being in adults. Results also showed that there is likely to be a significant negative relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment and psychological distress in adults. Results showed that there is likely to be gender differences in emotional expressivity, social adjustment and psychological well-being of adults. But no significant gender differences are found in psychological distress of adults. Multiple regression results showed emotional expressivity, social adjustment are likely to be positively predicts the psychological well-being. While emotional expressivity, social adjustment are likely to be negatively predicts the psychological distress in adults.

Keywords: Emotional Expressivity, Social Adjustment, Mental Health, Adults, Well Being, Distress.

Introduction

Emotional expressivity can be observed by verbal and non-verbal acts during our interaction to external environment (Gross & John, 1997). Emotional expressivity is positively linked to mental and physical health in people and greater the expressivity of emotional expression higher the level of well-being (Sloan & Marx, 2004), whereas suppression of emotions have social costs (e.g., Gross & John, 2003). Individuals who are more expressive are considered to be more socially interacted (Dobbs, Sloan, & Karpinski, 2007). A person struggling with his or her mental behavioral health may face stress, depression, anxiety, relationship problems (Erikson, 1959). The adjustment is the expression towards our demand imposed by social environment and expressing emotions is meant to be integral part of interaction and well-being. Among the pathways of emotional expression, the appearance of emotion and disclosure of emotional experiences appear to have exclusive assumption for mental health in context to social and emotional adjustment (Fivush & Ward, 2005). Emotional expressivity refers to the extent to which individuals convey their emotions through verbal, nonverbal, or textual means, influencing communication, social interaction, and psychological processes (Kring, Smith, & Neale, 1994). In text, emotions are expressed through word choice, sentence structure, punctuation, and emotive symbols, which compensate for the absence of facial and vocal cues (Troiano, Oberländer, & Klinger, 2022). Classical theories such as James–Lange, Cannon–Bard, and Schachter–Singer explain the physiological and cognitive origins of emotion, while appraisal theories emphasize the role of cognitive evaluation in shaping emotional responses and their textual expression (Barrett, 2017; Troiano et al., 2022). Models like the dimensional PAD framework (Pleasure–Arousal–Dominance) and appraisal-based frameworks enable systematic analysis of emotions in text, and sentiment or emotion detection models classify textual data into discrete emotions such as joy, anger, or sadness (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Nandwani & Verma, 2021). Research from Pakistan highlights cultural and individual differences in emotional expressivity, including gender effects and its moderating role in prosocial behavior (Roomana Zeb, Khan, Bibi, & Qadir, 2025; Kausar, Alis, & Ismail, 2023), indicating that textual expressivity integrates psychological, linguistic, and socio-cultural dimensions. Emotional expressivity has examined its multidimensional facets and behavioral correlates, showing that expressivity includes positive and negative emotional tendencies that relate to personality and social outcomes (e.g., Burgin et al., 2012 as cited in related foundational work; see also expressive behavior studies) (e.g., impulse strength, positive expressivity, negative expressivity) (e.g., Kring et al., 1994; multifaceted expressivity research) (e.g., Burgin et al., 2012). In text and language research, methods like linguistic analysis and sentiment classification have been developed to quantify emotional content in writing and narrative structures, demonstrating that textual emotion varies with age, gender, and context in large-scale corpora (e.g., children’s writing studies using lexicon and machine learning approaches) (e.g., John & Gross, 2004). Recent computational work has advanced emotion recognition and correlation mining in natural language texts, improving understanding of how emotions are expressed and confused in online written communication (e.g., Wang et al., 2020). In Pakistani research, emotional expressivity has been studied in relation to prosocial behavior and self-esteem among undergraduate students (showing its moderating role) (Kausar et al., 2023), and gender differences in emotional expressivity have been documented with implications for personal growth

in university populations (Roomana Zeb et al., 2025). Additionally, studies have examined emotional expressivity and related constructs in adolescents, showing valid measurement of emotional patterns and their associations with other emotional phenomena (Zia & Riaz, 2020). Social adjustment refers to an individual's ability to adapt effectively to social environments, maintain interpersonal relationships, and fulfill societal roles and expectations (Sharma & Sharma, 2019). It involves managing social interactions, emotional responses, and behavioral patterns to achieve harmony with peers, family, and the broader community (Crites, 1969). Social adjustment is influenced by personality traits, emotional intelligence, and environmental factors such as family support, cultural norms, and peer influence (Dollinger, 2008; Aslam & Kamal, 2021). Effective social adjustment is associated with better psychological well-being, academic achievement, and overall life satisfaction, whereas maladjustment can lead to social anxiety, behavioral issues, and interpersonal conflicts (Saeed & Siddiqui, 2020). Studies in Pakistan have highlighted the role of social adjustment among adolescents and university students, demonstrating that family environment, peer relationships, and personality dimensions significantly impact individuals' social functioning (Rashid & Malik, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2022). Overall, social adjustment is a critical construct in psychology and education, reflecting the capacity to navigate social demands and maintain effective social functioning. Social adjustment has examined its impact across age groups and contexts, showing that factors such as sensation seeking and behavior problems among adolescents are moderated by social adjustment levels (Ahmad & Naqvi, 2016), and differences in social adjustment have been found between children of working and non-working mothers, indicating the role of self-regulation (Akhtar et al., 2020). Studies on secondary school students demonstrated that parental education relates positively, though weakly, to social adjustment (Ahmad et al., 2021), while research in university settings revealed that cognitive and interpersonal factors like self-efficacy, peer support, and reduced social anxiety significantly enhance social adjustment among Pakistani students (Kayani et al., 2023). Regional research from Malaysia highlights sociocultural adaptation challenges related to language and interpersonal skills (Raihan & Sandaran, 2024). Positive friendship quality predicts better social adjustment among adolescents (Hartup, 2004). Multicultural friendship and physical activity influence friendship development and social integration (Li & Zizzi, 2018). Additional recent work in Pakistan highlights the relationship between emotional maturity and social adjustment in women (Shahzadi et al., 2025) and explores social adjustment experiences of elderly residents in institutional settings, reflecting the influence of social ties and coping strategies in later life (Mohsin & Cheema, 2025). Mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being that significantly influences how adults think, feel, and interact with others (Kessler et al., 2005). It encompasses emotional, psychological, and social functioning, playing a key role in coping with stress, maintaining relationships, and making decisions (Patel et al., 2018). Poor mental health in adults is associated with reduced productivity, increased risk of chronic physical conditions, and impaired quality of life (Murray & Lopez, 1996). Promoting mental health involves early detection of psychological issues, access to appropriate interventions, and strategies that enhance resilience and adaptive coping (Friedli, 2009). Community-based survey in Karachi found that a significant proportion of adults experienced anxiety and depressive symptoms, with higher prevalence among women, those with lower education, and individuals with multimorbidity (Farooq et al., 2019). Pathak (2013) discovered a strong positive correlation between social

adjustment and mental health among college students. Paramanik et al. (2014) reported that girls show higher social adjustment than boys.

Hypothesis

There is likely to be a significant relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment and mental health in Adults.

Sub hypotheses

There is likely to be a significant positive relationship between emotional expressivity and psychological well being in adults.

There is likely to be a significant negative relationship between emotional expressivity and psychological distress in adults.

There is likely to be a significant positive relationship between social adjustment and psychological well-being in adults.

There is likely to be a significant negative relationship between social adjustment and psychological distress in adults.

There is likely to be a significant positive relationship between emotional expressivity and social adjustment in adults.

Emotional expressivity and social adjustment are likely to positively predict psychological well-being in adults.

Emotional expressivity and social adjustment are likely to negatively predict psychological distress in adults.

There are likely to be gender differences in emotional expressivity, social adjustment, psychological well-being and psychological distress in adults.

Method

Research Design

Correlational research designs was used to find out the relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment and mental health in adults (Male and Female).

Sample

Purposive sampling used and sample was consisted of ($N=250$) participants ($n = 125$ male, $n = 125$ female). Data was collected from adults those were easily physically available. Age range 19–25 years. Both male and female and those whose both parents alive. Only unmarried adults were included.

Characteristics	<i>F</i>	%
Gender		
Male	125	49.8
Female	125	49.8
Age		
19 to 22	138	55.0
23 to 25	112	44.6
Birth Order:		

1 to 5	232	92.4
6 to 10	18	7.2
Family		
Nuclear	172	68.5
Joint	78	31.1
Income		
15000 to 40000	218	87.2
40000 to 70000	20	8.0
70000 to 100000	12	4.8

Measures

Emotional Expressivity: scale by King, Smith and Neale (1994) was used. It consists of 17 items which are rated on a six point likert scale. Responses were ranged from (1=always never true, 2=often true, 3= sometimes true, 4=mostly true, 5=almost always true, 6=always true). The scores on item number 2,3,4,7,9,10,11,12,15,16, and 17 are reversed to calculate the final score on emotional expressivity. The total score ranges from 17 to 102. The low score represents lower level of emotional expressivity, and high score represents higher level of emotional expressivity. The EES has shown high internal consistency and test retest reliability in addition to the reliability coefficient for the EES was 0.93.

Social Adjustment Scale: developed by Kausar (2007) was be used to assess the Social Adjustment. There are 27 items in the scale. It was a likert scale with responses 1-5. Responses were ranged from (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree). Permission was taken from original authors. The reliability of the scale was .76. High scores show higher social adjustment while lower scores show lower social adjustment.

Mental health inventory (MHI): by Viet and Ware (1983), a 38 item instrument was used to assess mental health. It focuses on mood and symptoms of anxiety loss of control over feelings, thoughts, behavior. MHI is a hierarchical factor model composed of general underlying mental health factor, a higher order factor structure and a lower order factor structure. The higher order factor structure is defined by two correlated factors- Psychological Distress, which consists of all the items describe negative mental health states, and Psychological Well-Being, which consists of all the items describing positive mental health states. Each items asked respondents to rate on a six point frequency or intensity scale how they had been feeling during past month. Possible answers included 1 = all of the time, 2= most of the time, 3 = a good bit of time, 4 = some of the time, 5 = a little of the time, 6 = none of the time. Items number 2, 3, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36 and 38 are negatively worded. The reliability of the scale was .98. Scores above 88 indicated mental health and below 75 indicated mental illness.

Procedure

To conduct the research ethically, obtain informed consent from participants by explaining the study's nature before administering the questionnaire, and ensure they know they can withdraw at any time. The researcher

must inform participants of their right to terminate participation and that withdrawal will be respected. All data collected from participants will be kept strictly confidential. The information will be used solely for the research purpose stated in the consent. Data were collected from physically and easily available adult participants, both male and female. This procedure guarantees ethical compliance through informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of data. Results reported according to APA 7 format.

Results

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and Reliability of Scales (N=250)

Variables	K	M	SD	Range	A
Emotional Expressivity	17	59.87	5.11	44-77	.78
Social Adjustment	27	88.49	15.17	45-121	.87
Psychological well-being	14	76.18	15.64	87-178	.76
Psychological Distress	24	56.20	15.48	67-145	.65

Note: M=mean; SD= Standard deviation; K= Number of scales item

The Cronbach's Alpha for reliability test of study variables was satisfied.

Table 3

Pearson Product–Moment Correlations Between Emotional Expressivity, Social Adjustment, and Mental Health Variables in Adults (N = 250)

Variables	1	2	3	4
Emotional Expressivity	.	.34*	.14*	-.29**
Social Adjustment	.	.	.14	-.16*
Psychological well-being	.	.	.	-.24**
Psychological Distress

*p < .05; **p < .01

It was hypothesized that there is relationship between the variables. The upper diagonal results showed that there is significant positive relationship between emotional expressivity and psychological well-being in adults. Emotional expressivity is positively correlated with social adjustment. But psychological distress is Negatively correlated with emotional expressivity, social adjustment and psychological well-being. Positive correlation suggests that as the emotional expressivity increase.

Psychological well-being also increase. Higher the emotional expressivity will be the psychological well-being. Positive correlation between emotional expressivity, high the social adjustment suggests that higher the emotional expressivity, social adjustment.

The negative correlation between emotional expressivity, social adjustment, psychological well-being and psychological distress showed that higher the psychological distress, lower will be the emotional expressivity and social adjustment.

Table 4

Differences in emotional expressivity, social adjustment, Psychological well-being and Psychological distress in adults (N = 250)

Variables	Male n=125		Female n=125		t	p	95% CI		Cohen's D
	M	SD	M	SD			UL	LL	
Emotional Expressivity	59.59	4.42	60.12	5.71	.86	.03	-1.83	-.71	0.10
Social Adjustment	84.92	15.19	92.07	14.34	-3.82	.00	-3.47	-10.87	0.48
Psychological well-being	42.38	12.34	44.56	5.62	.76	.01	1.28	1.42	0.68
Psychological Distress	64.23	6.2	43.24	4.2	.84	.05	-1.54	.23	0.37

*Note: N= total number of participants, M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, UL=upper limit, LL=lower limit and CI=confidence interval. p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.*

It was hypothesized that there was gender differences in between variables. T-test was conducted in order to prove the gender differences on emotional expressivity, social adjustment and mental health in adults. Significant gender differences are found in emotional expressivity, social adjustment and psychological well-being of adults. The results showed that females are more emotionally expressive than male adults. Results showed that the social adjustment of male adults is higher than female adults. The psychological wellbeing of females is higher than males. But the results showed insignificant gender difference in psychological distress of adults.

Table 5

Multiple regression for predicting psychological well being (N=125)

Variables			Psychological wellbeing		R	R ²
	B	SE	B	F		
Constant	4.34					
Emotional Expressivity	.83	.18	.22	7.52	.22	0.49

Social	.10	.06	.32	3.05	.30	0.11
Adjustment						

Note: β = Standardized regression weight, R = Explained variance, R^2 = change in R , F = Variability of the model.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

It was hypothesized emotional expressivity and social adjustment are likely to predict psychological well being in adults. The results of table showed emotional expressivity, social adjustment predicts psychological well-being. Social adjustment and emotional expressivity appeared as significant predictor of psychological well-being. 49% of variance in psychological well-being is accounted for by emotional expressivity. Results conclude that social adjustment being accounted for only 11% variance in psychological well-being. Thus, finding have confirmed hypothesis that emotional expressivity and social adjustment are likely to be predicting psychological well-being in adults.

Table 6

Multiple regression for predicting psychological distress (N=125)

			Psychological distress			
Variables	B	SE	B	F	R	R^2
Constant	47.13					
Emotional Expressivity	.88	.18	.28	6.45	.28	.25
Social Adjustment	.11	.06	.10	14.5	.12	.14

Note: β = Standardized regression weight, R = Explained variance, R^2 = change in R , F = Variability of the model.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

It was hypothesized emotional expressivity and social adjustment are likely to predict psychological distress in adults. The results of table showed emotional expressivity, social adjustment predicts psychological distress. All the variables were put into multiple regression analysis and emotional expressivity appeared as significant predictor of mental health, 25% of variance in psychological distress is accounted for by emotional expressivity. Results conclude that social adjustment accounted for only 14% variance in psychological distress. Thus finding have confirmed hypothesis that emotional expressivity and social adjustment are likely to be predicting psychological distress in adults.

Discussion

The present study was designed to investigate the relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment, and mental health among adult males and females, with important implications for psychological functioning. In line with the mental health model proposed by Veit and Ware (1983), mental health was conceptualized as comprising two distinct components: psychological well-being, representing positive mental health, and psychological distress, reflecting negative mental health status. This dual-factor model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how emotional and social processes influence overall mental health. Consistent with previous research, the findings of the present study revealed a significant positive

relationship between emotional expressivity and psychological well-being. Individuals who reported higher levels of emotional expressivity also demonstrated higher levels of psychological well-being. This finding supports earlier evidence suggesting that the ability to express emotions openly and appropriately contributes to positive psychological functioning and overall well-being (Sloan & Marx, 2004; Gross & John, 2003). Emotional expressivity facilitates emotional processing, enhances self-awareness, and promotes adaptive coping strategies, which in turn foster psychological growth and life satisfaction. Supporting this view, Burgin et al. (2012) demonstrated that emotional expressivity is positively associated with daily psychological functioning and subjective well-being. The study also identified a significant negative relationship between emotional expressivity and psychological distress. Adults who exhibited lower levels of emotional expressivity reported higher levels of psychological distress, indicating that emotional inhibition may serve as a vulnerability factor for mental health problems. This finding is consistent with classical and contemporary psychological theories suggesting that suppressing emotions can lead to heightened internal stress and maladaptive psychological outcomes (James, 1890; Alexander, 1950; Gross & Levenson, 1997). Chronic inhibition of emotional expression has been linked to increased physiological arousal, dysregulation of stress-response systems, and greater susceptibility to anxiety and depressive symptoms (Pennebaker, 1997). Although some philosophical perspectives have historically suggested that expressing intense emotions may be harmful (as discussed by Shakespeare and Descartes), empirical research increasingly supports the notion that adaptive emotional expression plays a protective role in mental and physical health. Furthermore, the present study found a significant positive relationship between social adjustment and psychological well-being. Individuals who were better socially adjusted reported higher levels of psychological well-being, highlighting the importance of effective interpersonal functioning in maintaining positive mental health. Social adjustment enables individuals to form meaningful relationships, receive social support, and develop a sense of belonging, all of which are central components of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Keyes, 2002). These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that socially well-adjusted individuals experience greater emotional stability, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Burgin et al., 2012). In addition, emotional expressivity was found to be significantly and positively associated with social adjustment. Adults who were more emotionally expressive demonstrated better social adjustment, suggesting that emotional expression enhances interpersonal communication and social competence. Emotional expressivity allows individuals to communicate their needs, establish intimacy, and regulate social interactions more effectively, thereby facilitating healthier social relationships (Keltner & Kring, 1998). This finding is supported by prior research indicating that individuals high in emotional expressivity are more likely to exhibit better social functioning and relationship quality (Burgin et al., 2012). Given that adjustment encompasses multiple dimensions including social, emotional, physical, and educational domains (Mazaheri et al., 2006) emotional expressivity appears to play a foundational role in promoting overall adaptive adjustment. Gender differences were also examined in emotional expressivity, social adjustment, and mental health outcomes. The results indicated significant gender differences in emotional expressivity, with females displaying higher levels of emotional expression than males. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that males are more likely to restrict emotional expression, whereas females are

encouraged to express emotions such as sadness and vulnerability (Lynch et al., 2001; Buckner & Fivush, 1998; Brody & Hall, 2008). One prominent explanation for these gender differences lies in socialization practices, whereby parents and caregivers tend to reinforce emotional expressivity in girls while discouraging it in boys (Fuchs & Thelen, 1988; Klimes-Dougan et al., 2007; Zeman & Shipman, 1997). Contrary to some previous findings suggesting no significant gender differences in social adjustment (Yengimolki et al., 2014), the present study found a significant difference between adult males and females in social adjustment. This discrepancy may be attributed to cultural context, age-related developmental factors, or differing social roles and expectations in adulthood. It is possible that occupational demands, interpersonal responsibilities, and societal expectations differentially influence social adjustment in adult men and women.

Implications

Overall, the findings of the present study underscore the critical role of emotional expressivity in promoting psychological well-being, reducing psychological distress, and enhancing social adjustment. Emotional expressivity appears to function as a key psychological resource that supports adaptive functioning and mental health. The findings of the present study suggest that emotional expressivity plays a vital role in promoting psychological well-being and reducing psychological distress among adults. Individuals who are able to express their emotions openly tend to experience higher levels of positive mental health, whereas emotional inhibition is associated with greater psychological distress. Furthermore, effective social adjustment contributes significantly to psychological well-being by facilitating supportive interpersonal relationships and emotional stability. Emotional expressivity as an important psychological resource and underscore the value of incorporating emotional awareness and expression into psychological interventions and mental health promotion programs aimed at enhancing well-being and minimizing distress. This research gives knowledge to adults what factors could affect their mental health as well general psychologists and counselors in planning interventions.

Limitations and Suggestions

The sample may not be representative of the broader population, limiting generalizability.

Future research should address these limitations. Longitudinal studies could examine temporal relationships between variables. Multi-method assessments could provide a more comprehensive understanding of emotional expressivity. Intervention studies could test the effectiveness of emotional expressivity training on mental health outcomes.

Conclusion

These findings highlight the need for further research examining cultural and contextual moderators of gender differences in social adjustment. In conclusion, the present study highlights the significant role of emotional expressivity and social adjustment in mental health among adults. Greater emotional expressivity was associated with higher psychological well-being and lower psychological distress, emphasizing its importance as a key psychological resource. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of emotional processes in mental health and offer valuable insights for psychological research and practice.

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