

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF PAKISTANI PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

Background: Pakistan is going through a financial crisis and a recent wave of political intolerance has polarized the society to an unprecedented level, adding to the already high prevalence of mental health issues and traditional, deeply ingrained religious intolerance in Pakistan.

Methodology: Cross-sectional analytical study design was used for this study, which was completed from march to June 2023 with sample size of 225 using a purposive sampling technique. A validated and reliable Political and economic analysis checklist and DASS-21 checklist was used for data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistic was calculated through SPSS 20.

Results: In the current study the total participant was 225, where the number of male was in majority (80.4%) compare to female participant (19.6%). In political analysis the majority of

participants (39%) responded that accountability, political stability, rule of law, control on corruption, government effectiveness, and freedom of press level is “extremely low”. While in economic analysis, most of the participants (56%) report that their monthly expenses, inflation, fear of investment and unemployment is “high”. Furthermore, the high mean score was report of stress (0.96 ± 0.48), followed by depression (0.90 ± 0.57), and anxiety (0.88 ± 0.48).

Conclusion: The study concluded that Pakistan face range of difficulties as political turmoil and economic crisis which break all their own records. Moreover political and economic instability, and profession is mild negative correlated with DASS, while Age, gender, marital status, education and profession are moderately positive correlated each other.

Keywords: Polarization, anxiety, economic crisis, political turmoil, mental health

Introduction

Pakistan is a South Asian Muslim nation of in excess of 235 million populace with somewhat unsteady political history and horrifying financial and health indicators. The statistics regarding mental health are staggering, with a significant treatment gap and no dedicated budgetary allocation of 10 percent of GDP annually. [1]. Pakistan, a nation confronting a scope of hardships that have influenced its financial strength and majority rule framework, has encountered prominent repercussions on psychological well-being. Economic instability, portrayed by inflation, political turmoil joblessness, and pay differences, has brought about financial pressure and increased uneasiness among people, significantly influencing their psychological well-being. The purchasing power of the people are affected by the inflation, making people battle to meet their essential necessities. Unemployment is another significant factor that affect the psychological well-being of the peoples [2]. Furthermore the country is hug gaps in education as well as in health sectors which required a significant number of investments. Another on going issue is the increasing population, without planning of administrative authorities that increase the ratio of poverty and reduce the economic growth of individuals.

Psychological well-being means the mental prosperity of any specific one or populace and is impacted by social as well as financial elements of well-being [3]. The factors that enhance the level of mental stress or became a risk factor for the stress are unemployment, increasing loans, and shrinking income or reduction in factors that protect their life such as reduction in welfare program significantly affect the psychological well-being of people [4]. The current political wave in Pakistan has polarized the community to exceptional level, and un-rep the deep rooted religious extremism, that are adding toward mental health problems. With sporadic reports of violence, this wave of political polarization has saturated all social strata and is likely to worsen in the presence of free and excessive social media use. One of the causes of social and political polarization that could lead to further deterioration in the near future is the extensive consumption of social media reports without confirmation of their authenticity [5].

Pakistan is going through a financial crisis; Everyone's level of stress is on the rise as well as the price of petrol. It has been observed that the declining economy is one of the principal explanations behind the declining psychological well-being in Pakistan. There has been a critical expansion in misery, uneasiness, and suicide rates. These days, Pakistanis' primary concerns include rising food prices, fewer employment opportunities, and low wages [6]. The wealthy and middle class look for ways to leave the country. Frustration, worthlessness, and a loss of purpose are all felt when one is unable to find a steady job or leave the country. The mental stress related with joblessness and vulnerability with the nation can have extreme ramifications for psychological well-being, fueling the difficulties looked by people in their expert lives [2]. Several studies have reported that psychopathology like anxiety disorders, mood disorders, attempts at suicide, and psychological distress have been found to be on the rise in the aftermath of the financial crisis [7].

Economic growth is largely dependent on political stability. The economy can seriously be powerless against political flimsiness. The idea of political instability is credited to Lipstel (1960) that expressed that for a country to be considered as steady, it should have a vote based system or, even tyranny consistently for a considerable length of time [8]. The division of people into distinct groups with opposing viewpoints and tiny chance of convergent action on a common agenda is known as political and social polarization [9]. Nonetheless, the given political environment of polarization and its effect on psychological wellness, centering the issue in a

logical way is basic. Furthermore, in late years the circumstance has been made more unstable and muddled by social media entertainment intensification with more prominent consequences for psycho-social well-being of individuals [10]. Currently in Pakistan mental health has also been significantly affected by the country's struggle with bad governance, weak democratic institutions, and a broken justice system. Debasement, political unsteadiness, and an absence of responsibility have disintegrated public confidence in the public authority, encouraging bafflement and pessimism among residents. People's stress levels rise as a result of the current state of political uncertainty, which can lead to feelings of helplessness, depression, and anxiety [2].

Psychological well-being experts are additionally confronting the difficulty of unpleasant climate produced around governmental issues, which features the requirement for additional preparation to think about such issues without being critical or one-sided in clinical setting [11]. To address the current situation of Pakistan, no study is available that reflect on the opinion and response of the people toward this political turmoil and economic criteria and what the level that affect their mental health, therefore the aim of the study was to determine the impact of political and economic instability on the psychological well-being of the people.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Swat, Khyber Pukhtankhwa Pakistan from March to June 2023, where 225 number of people participated in the study having a purposive sampling technique and analytical study design. Those participants whose age group is above 18 years, having no physical deformity and participated as a social well-being in any category of the work group or studying was the inclusion criteria for the participants, while respondents not willing to participate in the study voluntarily were excluded from the study.

Two instruments were used in this study, the first checklist was self-structured political and economic analysis questionnaire that contains 12 items, that contain political analysis 7 items having a 5-point Likert scale, while 5 items economic analysis checklist having 3-point Likert scale. The checklist was validated from 5 experts, while a pilot study was conducted for the reliability of the checklist that shows Cronbach alpha of 0.87. The second instrument was valid

and reliable checklist of DASS-21 (Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale). The Cronbach alpha of the instrument was 0.74 [12].

The data was collected in three parts; *part-A* contains the demographic data of the participant (age, gender, marital status, education, and profession).

Part-B contain 12 items that was divided as 7 items regarding the confidence of participant regard political situation which was reported through 5 point Likert scale from 1-very low to 5-very high, while 5 items were about economic situation to rate how worst is the current situation through 3 point Likert scale from 1-low to 3-high.

Part-C was *DASS 21* checklist having a 4 point Likert scale from 0 to 3, 0 means “did n,t apply to me”, while 3 means “apply most of the time to me” [12].

Data were analyzed through SPSS 24 as descriptive statistics. Mean and standard deviation were calculated for continuous variables while for categorical variables frequency and percentages were calculated. Moreover Pearson correlation test was applied to identify the association of selected articles with psychological well-being.

The study was approved by ethical review committee, while consent were taken from each participants. The aim and objectives of the study was explained before data collection, and to protect the ethical rights of the participants.

Results:

In total, 225 number of people participated in this study, (80.4%) of the respondents was male, while only (19.6%) was female, and the mean age was (24.3 ± 5.1). Mos the respondents was single (69.8%), and married was (30.2 %). The number of bachelor qualified participants was higher (56.4%), and students among the professional was in higher number (53.3 %). (See table 1).

Table 1: Demographic data of the participants			
Characteristics	Categories	Frequency (n=225)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	181	80.4 %
	Female	44	19.6 %
Age	Mean	24.3 ± 5.1	
Marital status	Single	157	69.8 %

	Married	68	30.2 %
Education status	Intermediate	35	15.6 %
	Bachelor degree	127	56.4 %
	Master degree	63	28 %
Profession	Student	120	53.3 %
	Health worker	81	36 %
	Teacher	18	8 %
	Businessman	3	1.3 %
	Others	3	1.3 %

Political analysis

Table 2 illustrate the 7 items having a five point Likert scale. Most of the responded (35.6%) consider that accountability is “very low”, while maximum number of people (43.1%) report that rule of law is “very low”, majority (52.9%) of people reveals that control on corruption is “very low”, (38.7%) consider that government effectiveness is “very low”, (47.1%) report that availability of food is “low”, and (38.2%) of people reveals that freedom of press is “low”. The lowest mean score was report in “political stability” (1.8 ± 1.1) and “control of corruption” (1.8 ± 1.1), which means that people consider that there is political instability and no control on corruption. (See table 2).

The responses of economic analysis was recorded as 3 point Likert scale, 1- low, 2 medium, and 3 high. Most of the responded (49.3%) report that monthly expenses was “medium”, majority (71.6%) report that unemployment is “high”, (87.6%) reveals that inflation is “high”. (43.6%) of the respondent considered that taking of loans is “medium”, and (56.9%) of people report that fear of investment is “high”. In the analysis the high mean score (2.8 ± 0.46) was report that people considered that inflation is major issue in economic instability, followed by the mean score of (2.6 ± 0.66) employment. (See table 2).

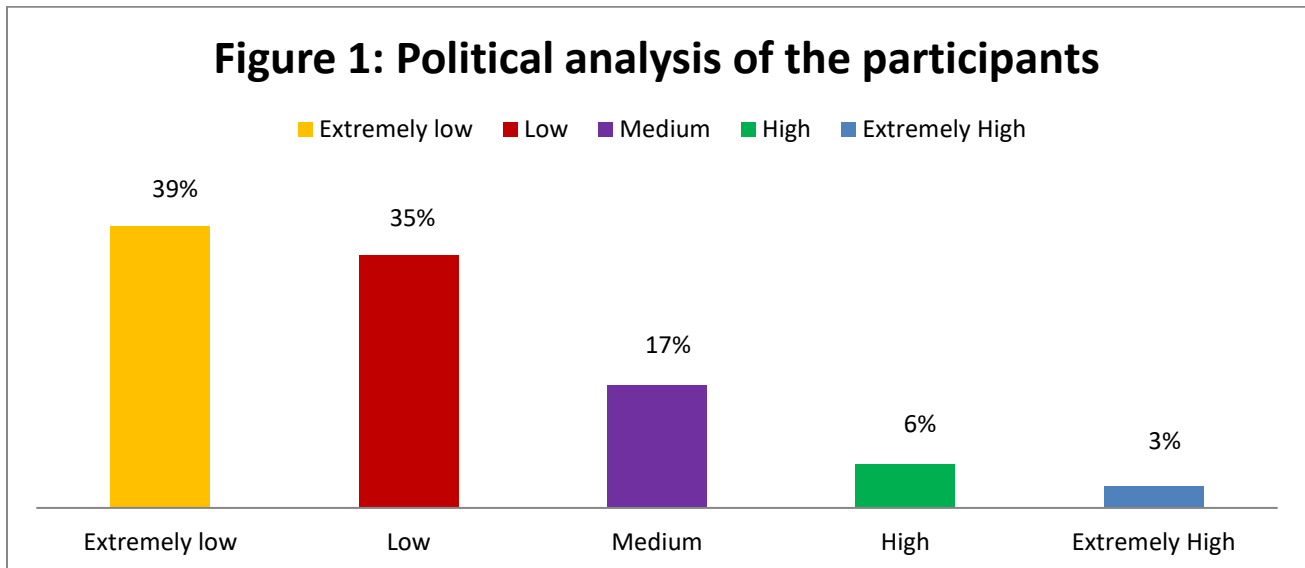
Table 2: Political and economic analysis of the participants

Political analysis			Economic analysis		
Items	Most Response	Mean score \pm SD	Items	Most Response	Mean score \pm SD

Accountability	Low (35.6%)	2.1 ± 1.0	Monthly Expenses	Medium (49.3%)	2.3 ± 0.62
Political stability	Very low (54.2%)	1.8 ± 1.1	Unemployment	High (71.6%)	2.6 ± 0.66
Rule of law	Very low (43.1%)	1.9 ± 1.0	Inflation	High (87.6%)	2.8 ± 0.46
Control on corruption	Very low (52.9%)	1.8 ± 1.1	Taking of loans	Medium (43.6%)	1.8 ± 0.73
Government Effectiveness	Very low (38.7%)	1.9 ± 1.0	Fear of investments	High (56.9%)	2.4 ± 0.72
Food availability	Low (47.1%)	2.3 ± 0.88			
Freedom of press	Low (38.2%)	2.1 ± 1.0			

Overall political analysis of the participants

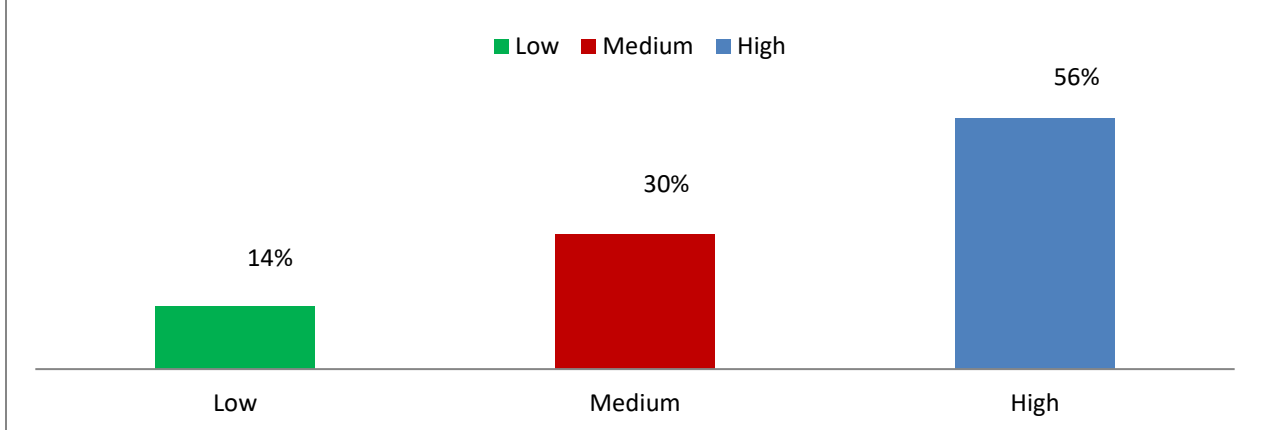
Figure 1 demonstrates that majority of the participant confidence level was extreme low on current situation (39%), followed by low confidence (35%), and (17%) of the respondent response was average confidence (Figure 1).



Overall Economic analysis of the participants

Figure 2 shows that most of the participants response was (56%) was high, then (30%) of the respondent response was medium, while (14%) response was low. (See figure 2)

Figure 2: Economic analysis of the participants



Psychological analysis of the participants

The DASS 21 checklist contains 21 items; the scale was further divided into 3 subdomains (Stress, anxiety and depression). In the current study the high mean score was report of stress (0.96 ± 0.48), followed by depression (0.90 ± 0.57), and anxiety (0.88 ± 0.48). The severe level of stress was reported (2%) in depression domain, while (1%) in anxiety domain, and (2%) in stress domain. The moderated was reported (6%) in depression, (2%) in stress, and (1%) in anxiety. The mild level was noted (12%) in stress, (10%) in anxiety and depression domain. (See table 3).

Table 3: Psychological analysis of the participants

	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
Mean ± SD	0.96 ± 0.48	0.88 ± 0.48	0.90 ± 0.57
Normal	191 (85%)	199 (88%)	185 (82%)
Mild	27 (12%)	22 (10%)	23 (10%)
Moderate	4 (2%)	1 (1%)	13 (6%)
Severe	3 (1%)	3 (1%)	4 (2%)

Correlation of DASS-21 with political, economic and selected variables

Table 4 illustrates that Political instability and economic instability is mild negative correlated with DASS, while profession is mild negative correlated with DASS. Age, gender, marital status, education and profession are moderately positive correlated each other. (See table 4).

Table 4: Correlation of DASS-21 with selected variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1: Political	-	-.282	.216	-.157	-.265	-.175	-.164	-.003
2: Economic		-	.055	.158	.272	.205	.191	-.035
3: Gender			-	.468	-.007	.355	.253	-.170
4: Age				-	.656	.594	.545	-.150
5: Marital					-	.471	.489	-.118
6: Education						-	.591	-.157
7: Profession							-	-.220
8: DASS-21								-

Discussion

In the present study the total number of participants was 225, where the male was in majority (80.4%) compare to female participants (19.6%). The single status respondents was in maximum number (69.8%), while married people was (30.2%), and the mean age of the respondents was (24.3 ± 5.1). A study conducted in Hong Kong support our study that reveals that male were in majority (52.4%) compare to female participants (47.6%), while majority of the participants (46%) belong to the aged 60-69 years [13]. Another study conducted in Palestine Gaza bank reveals that male were in majority (52%) compare to female respondents (48%), while the mean age was (35.03 ± 12.67), and the maximum number of participants education status was, 34.3% finished elementary school [14].

In the current study most (39%) of the participants report that they consider that towards political stability, rule of law, control on corruption, government effectiveness and freedom of press, the effectiveness of government is “very low”. While (35%) of the respondents consider that towards; accountability and availability of food, in Pakistan is “Low”. Both of these responses demonstrate that in Pakistan there is political instability which affect the daily living of the people and also affect the lives of their nationals. The study also reveals that political instability is mild negative correlated with DASS (Depression, anxiety and stress scale). According to the queen university publication “In a 2019 study, almost 40% of Americans said that politics caused significant anxiety, insomnia, and even thoughts of suicide”. Young people, those who were active in politics, and those who disagreed with the government felt the impact more strongly. The consistent openness to political pressure has been related with expanded hazard of tension, sorrow and unfortunate way of life decisions, as well as weakening in everyday clinical well-being. Additionally, social media algorithms appear to amplify extreme voices. We are currently divided politically and facing a serious health crisis. These straightforwardly influence emotional wellness; however can prompt radicalism [15]. A study conducted in Ethiopia report that corruption affects political stability of the nation and the co-variate further influences Ethiopian endeavors' innovation in 2011 and 2015. The regression also took into account variables like the personalities of businesses and their access to infrastructure [16]. Another study conducted in United States illustrates that most recent presidential election worsened Americans' perceptions of how politics affects their physical, mental, and social health. Resolving this issue in any significant sense plainly presents a test. Exposure reduction is an obvious way to reduce a risk to public health; however, in this instance, it seems civically irresponsible because it would require citizens to not be attentive and knowledgeable. If that course of action is followed, the public's health may improve, but the polity's democratic health may suffer. From 2016 to 2020, a political climate that is less polarized and fractious appears likely to naturally reduce these health effects. However, it is likely that due to high level of conflicts and polarization will affect the electoral system of United States. Furthermore the health of those people will be affected more seriously who view are politically disagree, youths, or people who are interested in politics having less honest and more close minded [17]. Another study have reported that about one fourth of the people participating

in politics are thinking to move as a result of political stress, while more than 100 million resident of United states have suffering from stress as result of politics. Surprisingly, approximately 12 million adults, or 5% of adults, have suicidal thoughts because of politics. Generally, these discoveries could scarcely be steadier of past examination contending that more consideration ought to be paid to the connection among political issues and well-being [18]. The study of Goedhuys et al (2016) reports that corruption meaningfully negatively affects the probability that a firm is an innovator [19]. Lorenzo and Núñez-cacho (2013) additionally contended that corruptible way of behaving can influence development by implication through the overflow of nepotism, which makes an under-enhancement inside the firm and makes it ugly for outside abilities that trim down inventive way of behaving of endeavors [20]. A Romanian study report that their economic growth are affect by political turmoil that negatively affect the value of GDP per capita, moreover the financial investor face worry regarding the right of the property as a result of political crisis [21].

The current study reveals that most of the participants (56%) consider that towards unemployment, inflation, and fear of investment, there worries is “high”, while towards monthly expenses and taking of loans most of the students (30%) response is “medium”. The participants response clarify that economic crisis is rising among the Pakistani nationals which affect their savings, majority of the people lost their jobs, while inflation is high compare to any other nation of the south Asia, those people who are economical stable are worried from the investment. These types of circumstances affect the psychological well-being of people when there is no hope visible in the coming future. Furthermore the study report that economic instability is mild negative correlated with DASS (Depression, anxiety, and stress scale). A study conducted by Guerra et al. (2021) that looking into a bunch literature pointed due to economic crisis affect the psychological well-being of the participants. The effect of worldwide financial downturns on the mental well-being of the worldwide populace is obvious from writing as enhancing prevalence of normal mental issues including depression, fear, anxiety, suicide, bipolar disorder, psychosis and stress remembering obligation stress after worldwide financial downturn for 2008 [22]. According to the Chen, et al (2016) during the economic crisis, women had a higher rate of mental health visits than men did, but the overall number of mental health visits stayed the same. Likewise, an expansion in the

utilization of psychotropic medications was seen in the post-recession time [23]. According to Tapia et al, countries with greater rates of unemployment in the post-global economic crisis era of 2008 compared to the pre-global economic instability era had a higher prevalence of psychiatric disorders. Similarly, rising unemployment rates resulted in an increased likelihood of chronic mental problems during the 2008 global financial crisis. The unfavorable job status produced by COVID-19 during the economic crisis led in a rise in sadness, anxiety, fear, tension, and suicide attempts [24]. The adverse work status during the financial emergency brought about by Coronavirus additionally brought about an expanded frequency of fear, dread, anxiety, and suicides [3]. A systematic review conducted in 2023 report that 80% of the studies included this survey report about mental health and the prevalence of mental issues including fear, anxiety, depression, burnout, loneliness and suicides though the rest of the articles talked about mortality with respect to mental issues, punctuality, and financial ability [25]. According to Avdic et al. (2020), a significant steep fall in life satisfaction among Germans was noticed in the post-economic recession era of 2008 as a result of the economy's unfavorable financial state, increasing unemployment rates, and poor job security [26]. According to the findings of another study, life satisfaction and economic crisis was reported as a result of the global economic recession of 2008 [27].

Economic growth is decreased by political upheaval in Pakistan, and the opposite is also true. A weak government increases the liability of investors' money and reduces investment in the country. The administration is also unable to keep corruption under control. This has a negative impact on the country's development and employment. When considering Pakistan's economy, the stability of political institutions is more significant than political administrations. Many lockdowns, downsizing, and employee layoffs have already occurred as a result of economic instability. Uncertainty means that due to external circumstances and positions a negative sensation of doubt and uncertainty prevails [28]. As a result, the threat is not only financial, but also multidimensional. Losing a job frequently leads to sadness and self-isolation, and because no man is an island, disengagement is harmful to one's psychological well-being. Economic hardship is linked to mental health issues [29].

Conclusion

The current study concluded that majority of the people consider that Pakistan is suffering from political turmoil and the state fail to enhance the process of fair accountability, implement rule of law, control the corruption in public and private sectors, and to provide freedom to press and expression. The majority of people also concluded that there is not only political instability but also economic crisis is on peak, and Pakistan is on edge of unannounced economic default, because people consider that their monthly expenses is high compare to income, inflation is historic high, unemployment is also on peak, and increased the fear of investment. The young people in this age group is planning and dreaming about their future so if the turmoil increased they will loss trust due to un-clear direction of the state.



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