

# Physical Appearance, Social Desirability, and Psychological Well-Being in Young Adults

Fatima Kamran  
Institute of Applied Psychology  
University of the Punjab Lahore

Rabia Shafayt  
Institute of Applied Psychology  
University of the Punjab Lahore  
&

Hamna Zahid  
COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus

## Abstract

A cross-sectional study was carried out to investigate the extent to which physical appearance and social desirability tend to predict the psychological well-being of young adults. It was hypothesized that positive perceptions of physical appearance and increased social desirability would consequently have a positive impact on the psychological well-being of young adults. Using convenient sampling, young adults ( $N=180$ ) with an age range of 20-35 years; ( $M=22.26$ ,  $SD=2.02$ ) were recruited. Assessment measures included the Physical Appearance Comparison Scale-Revised (PACS-R) (Schaefer & Thompson, 2014), Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), and psychological well-being flourishing Scale (Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Prieto, Choi, Oishi & Diener, 2009). Pearson moment Correlation, Hierarchal Multiple Regression, and One-way ANOVA analysis were used to test the hypothesis. The results indicated that individuals with a more positive perception of physical appearance and increased social desirability reported better psychological well-being. However, no significant difference in psychological well-being was found in individuals from different income groups, indicating no association between financial conditions and one's psychological well-being. The present research sheds light on the psychosocial aspects influencing the psychological well-being of young adults.

**Keywords:** Physical appearance, social desirability, psychological well-being, young adults

Various powers, such as online life, the web, and advertising funded by the ever-expanding beauty care industry, have attempted to foster large amounts of frustration, stress, and tension with physical appearance in many areas of the world (Alleva, Diedrichs, Halliwell, Martijn, Stuijzand, Treneman-Evans & Rumsey, 2018). Self-perception can be portrayed as the person's substantial appearance and the sort of conduct received to improve the body. There are a few meanings of self-perception, yet most concur that it is a psychological picture we have of the size, shape, and state of our body and our emotions about these attributes and the parts that make it, a psychological picture of the body as it appears to other people (Featherstone, 2010).

Social desirability bias refers to the inclination of examination subjects to offer socially alluring responses as opposed to picking answers that mirror their actual sentiments (DeWall, Deckman, Pond & Bonser, 2011).

Social desirability is the propensity to give biased, mutilated, and excessively sure self-depictions that depict oneself in a manner that can establish a good connection with others (Paulhus, 2017).

Dotse and Asumeng 2015 examined the impact of self-perception fulfillment on individuals' psychological well-being in the African social setting. The types of self-perception have been reclassified and extended to incorporate four different parts: facial appearance, informative supplement appearance, physical appearance and composition, and weight record. The outcomes uncovered a critical negative connection between self-perception fulfillment and psychological well-being directing the relationship as expected (Dotse & Asumeng, 2015).

Psychological well-being is about life that goes well. It is the blend of feeling better and working successfully. Practical prosperity doesn't expect individuals to feel great constantly; experiencing agonizing feelings (e.g., frustration, disappointment, and torment) is a typical piece of life, and having the option to deal with these negative or difficult feelings is basic for long-haul prosperity. In any case, mental prosperity is undermined when contrary feelings are outrageous or dependable and meddle with an individual's capacity to work in their day-to-day life (Wong, 2023).

According to the Cognitive Behavioral approach, cognitive behavior has two types of factors: Historical and proximal factors. Past events, attributes, and experiences that convince the way people think feel, and act because of their body's appearance, shape, and size are included in the historical factors. These are predisposing factors. Although proximal factors are related to current life events and current experiences related to body image, which includes how the person processes information from the external environment, internal dialogue, emotions related to body image, and self-regulatory actions to control thoughts and feelings associated with the body image. These consist of precipitating influences (Cash, 2011).

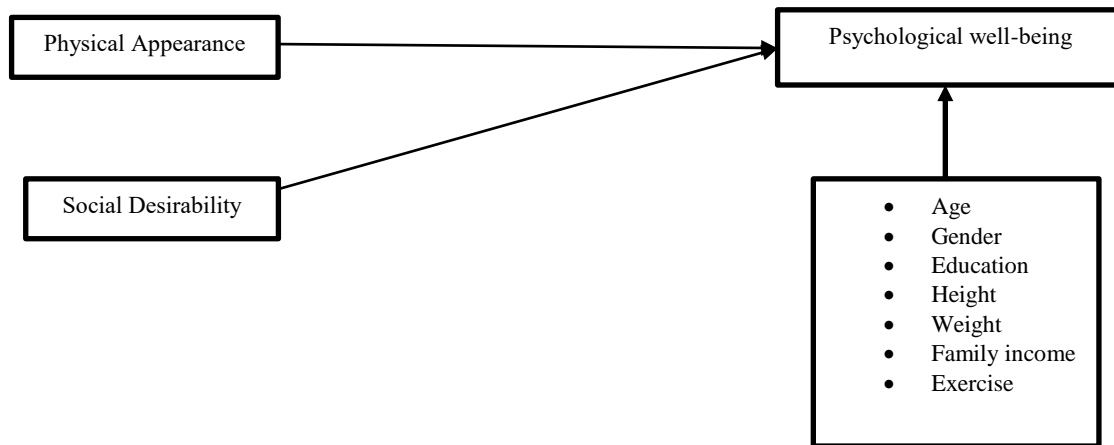
The present study aimed to examine how physical appearance and social desirability influenced the psychological well-being of young adults. Moreover, to identify the factors that act as either barriers or facilitators in psychological well-being.

Physical appearance is a key factor that can influence social desirability, especially in contemporary society where beauty standards are highly valued (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Social

desirability can also harm psychological well-being. The pressure to conform to societal beauty standards can lead to low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and other negative psychological outcomes (Perloff, 2014). Young adults who feel that they do not meet these standards may experience feelings of inadequacy, shame, and anxiety, which can have a detrimental effect on their psychological well-being. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage young adults to focus on positive aspects of their physical appearance, such as health and well-being, rather than conforming to unrealistic beauty standards, which can promote positive self-image and psychological well-being.

### Hypotheses

1. There is likely to be a significant relationship between physical appearance, social desirability, and psychological well-being.
2. Physical appearance and social desirability are likely to predict psychological well-being.
3. There are likely to be differences in psychological well-being based on family income.



**Fig 1.** *Hypothesized Model*

### Method

A cross-sectional research design was carried out to investigate the relationship among physical appearance, social desirability, and psychological well-being in young adults. The research was carried out using a convenient sampling strategy technique. Participants were recruited from government sector universities of Lahore. The sample comprised of (N=180) young adults with an age range of 20-35 years; (M=22.26, SD=2.02). Young adults who met the criteria for inclusion/ exclusion criteria were recruited.

### Participants

#### Inclusion Criteria

- Students enrolled in English-medium government sector universities with a minimum tuition of 10,000 rupees.
- Young adults whose age was within the bracket of 20-35 years.

#### Exclusion Criteria

- Faculty members of the universities were not recruited even if they met the age criteria.
- Students with any physical or psychological conditions were excluded.

**Table 1***Descriptive of the study demographic variables (N=180).*

Variable	f(%)	M(SD)
Age		22.26 (2.02)
Height		5.45(.31)
Weight		5.73(13.14)
Education		
BSc hons /MSc	69(76.7)	
MS/MPhil	10(11.1)	
PhD	1(1.1)	
Monthly Family Income		
Less than 50,000	18(20.0)	
More than 50,000		
100,000 & above	34(37.8)	
	28(31.1)	
Routine Exercise		
Yes	28(31.1)	
No	52(57.8)	

Note: f= Frequency, % = Percentage, N = Sample, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. Salary is expressed in Pakistani Currency (Rupees)

**Measures**

**Revised Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS-R)**

**Table 2**

*Bivariate correlation among Physical Appearance, Social Desirability Scale, and Psychological Well-Being (N=180).*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Age	19.57	5.92	-	.02	.02	-.18	.06	-.19	-.01
2 Height	19.37	9.19		-	-.08	.16	.04	-.04	-.00
3 Weight	17.84	7.61			-	-.21	.01	.13	-.28*
4 Any exercise	15.95	6.14				-	-.21	.02	.02
5 Physical appearance	35.58	9.19					-	.14	.15*
6 Social desirability	50.83	14.03						-	.05*
7 Psychological well-being	26.54	9.17							-

Note: \* $p < .05$

The results of Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed that as the weight gained, it decreased the psychological well-being of young adults. However,

a high perception of physical appearance and social desirability increased psychological well-being.

**Table 3**

*Multiple linear regression analysis for variables predicting psychological well-being (N=180).*

Variables	B	95% CI for B		SE B	B	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
		LL	UL				
Physical Appearance	.18	.07	.28	.05	.16**	.06	.06**
Social Desirability	5.99	10.11	1.88	2.09	.04**	.18	.12**

Note; \*\* $p < .01$ ,  $\Delta R^2$  = R Square Change,  $\beta$  = Standard Coefficients

The model explained a 12% variance in psychological well-being score  $F(2, 16) = 1.04$ ,  $p > 0.05$  and the results indicated that physical appearance (.16\*\*) and social

desirability (.04\*\*) predicted psychological well-being in young adults.

The reconsidered variant of the Physical Appearance Scale (PACS-R) was utilized to evaluate one's propensity to contrast one's appearance with the appearance of others in changed social settings (Schaefer and Thompson 2014). This measure has an adequate internal consistency coefficient of  $\alpha = .78$  and comprises 11 components which are evaluated on a scale extending from 0 (never) to 4 (consistently) (Schaefer & Thompson, 2014).

**Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale**

(MC-SDS) is a 33-item self-report poll that evaluates if respondents are worried about social endorsement. The scale aims to gauge social allure predisposition and has a re-test reliability of  $\alpha = .88$  (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

**Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale**

It measures eight components including connections, confidence, reason, and idealism. The scale gives a solitary score to psychological well-being. The responses are rated on a scale of 1 to 7, for the eight components. The test-retest reliability coefficient of PWB  $\alpha = .82$ . The obtained score ranges from 8 (the least conceivable) to 56 (the most noteworthy conceivable PWB). A high score speaks to an individual with numerous psychological assets and qualities (Diener, 2009).

**Results**

**Table 4**

*One-way ANOVA for family income and psychological well-being (N=180).*

Variable	30k--50k (n=18)		51k--80k (n=24)		More than 80k (n=37)		<i>f</i> (2,76)	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Psychological wellbeing	41.28	8.29	39.99	9.66	44.44	6.29	2.22	.12

*Note: M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, Pw= Psychological well-being,*

One-way ANOVA was done to compare the differences in psychological well-being due to financial conditions. It was found that participants with low and high income did not differ in psychological well-being,  $F(2,76) = 2.22$ ,  $P < 0.05$ . The results showed that there was no difference in the psychological well-being of individuals in different income groups.

Overall findings of the present study suggested that physical appearance and social desirability predicted psychological well-being. Young adults with improved perceptions of physical appearance and social desirability showed increased psychological well-being.

### Discussion

Social Desirability is a multi-component character attribute that alludes to the inclination of people to alter their reactions to set up a positive impression, evade analysis, or fulfill a requirement for social endorsement (Fendrich, Mackesy, Johnson & Pollack, 2010). With high scores on social desirability and higher psychological well-being, it can also be concluded that people have lied on all scales due to social desirability. Psychological well-being is characterized as a condition of enthusiastic well-being in which an individual can utilize their intellectual and passionate capacities, perform well in the public arena, and meet the needs of everyday life (Spriggs, Kettner & Harris, 2021).

Dotse and Asumeng (2015) examined the impact of self-perception fulfillment on individuals' psychological well-being in the African social setting. The types of self-perception have been reclassified and extended to incorporate four different parts: facial appearance, informative supplement appearance, physical appearance and composition, and weight record. The outcomes uncovered a critical negative connection between self-perception fulfillment and psychological well-being

directing the relationship as expected (Dotse & Asumeng, 2015).

### Conclusion

Young adulthood is a period where individuals look out for acceptance of their worth and competence in society. Young adults with poor perception of their physical appearance result in poor psychological well-being especially with the increase in weight gain. Whereas social desirability was positively related to psychological well-being. Parents and educational institutes need to understand and value the existence of young adults to boost their morale. Moreover, the improvement of psychological well-being is crucial for one to excel in interpersonal relationships as well as in their career.

### Limitations and Suggestions

The sample was recruited only from unmarried young adults. Future research can be conducted on married men and women to establish differences based on the perception of physical appearance and acceptance coming from the partner. With high scores on social desirability and higher psychological well-being it can also be concluded that people have lied on all scales due to social desirability so these scales in the future can be validated.

### Implications

The significant finding of physical appearance is negatively related to psychological well-being and prediction. It sheds light on the dire need for required policies and recruitment of therapists in schools, colleges, and universities. Students who have improved psychological well-being will be able to score good grades and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships in the future.

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