Interpersonal Problems, Social Media Addiction and Psychological Mental Health among Youth: The Mediating Role of Resilience

Fareeha Ahmed[1], Dr. Arooj Zahra Rizvi[1]

[1]The Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan
Email: Fareehha023@gmail.com , Aroojzahra.fsd@superior.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  Corresponding Author: **Fareeha Ahmed,** Email: Fareehha023@gmail.com	The present study aimed to investigate the impact of Interpersonal Problems on Psychological Wellbeing, specifically examining the mediating role of Resilience and the influence of Social Media Addiction among youth. A cross-sectional correlational design was employed with a sample of $N = 200$ young adults (ages 18–28) recruited via convenience sampling from Lahore, Pakistan. Data was collected using the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP-32), Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21), Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), and Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). Descriptive statistics indicated high digital engagement, with 84.5% of participants utilizing gadgets primarily for social media. Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between interpersonal problems and psychological distress ($r = .36$, $p < .01^{**}$), as well as between interpersonal problems and social media addiction ($r = .31$, $p < .01^{**}$). Regression analysis indicated that interpersonal problems and social media addiction were significant positive predictors of psychological distress, whereas resilience was a significant negative predictor, collectively accounting for 48% of the variance in distress levels ($R = .48^{***}$). Furthermore, mediation analysis confirmed that resilience partially mediated the relationship between interpersonal problems and psychological distress; higher interpersonal problems significantly predicted lower resilience, which in turn predicted higher psychological distress. The study concludes that interpersonal problems and social media addiction are detrimental to mental health, but resilience serves as a vital mediating factor. Interventions should focus on enhancing resilience and regulating digital behavior to improve wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence and youth represent a critical developmental period characterized by significant psychological, emotional, and social transitions. During this stage, individuals are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems, with many psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress-related conditions first emerging before the age of 25 (Kessler et al., 2007). In recent years, the rapid expansion of digital technology and social media platforms has substantially transformed the social interactions of young people. Although social media offers opportunities for social connection, self-expression, and access to support, increasing evidence suggests that excessive and maladaptive use may adversely affect psychological mental health (Khalaf et al., 2023; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2023).

Interpersonal problems defined as persistent difficulties in initiating, maintaining, or regulating social relationships are a well-established risk factor for poor mental health among youth. Research indicates that interpersonal difficulties are strongly associated with depressive symptoms, social anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and loneliness (Turner et al., 2016). Youth experiencing interpersonal problems may turn to online environments to compensate for offline social deficits, increasing their reliance on social media for validation and connection. However, such reliance can become maladaptive, reinforcing avoidance of face-to-face interactions and further deteriorating interpersonal functioning (Lee, 2021).

Social media addiction, also referred to as problematic social media use, is characterized by compulsive engagement, loss of control, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, and functional impairment in daily life (Andreassen et al., 2016). A growing body of literature has documented a significant relationship between social media addiction and adverse mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, stress, sleep disturbances, and reduced life satisfaction among adolescents and young adults (Khalaf et al., 2023; Primack et al., 2017). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that the relationship between problematic social media use and mental health is consistent across cultures, although the magnitude varies depending on individual vulnerabilities and contextual factors (HHS, 2023).

Interpersonal problems and social media addiction appear to be closely interconnected. Studies suggest that individuals with poor interpersonal problem-solving skills, heightened interpersonal sensitivity, or social anxiety are more likely to develop problematic patterns of social media use (Mercan et al., 2023). Conversely, excessive social media engagement—particularly passive use and social comparison—can exacerbate interpersonal conflicts, reduce relationship satisfaction, and increase feelings of isolation, thereby worsening psychological well-being (Primack et al., 2017). This bidirectional relationship highlights the need to examine interpersonal problems and social media addiction together when investigating youth mental health.

Resilience has emerged as a key protective factor in the mental health literature. Resilience refers to the ability to adapt successfully in the face of stress, adversity, or trauma, enabling individuals to maintain or regain psychological well-being (Masten, 2014). Empirical evidence indicates that higher resilience is associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among youth, even in the presence of interpersonal difficulties and environmental stressors (Lee, 2021). Importantly, recent studies suggest that resilience may function as a mediating mechanism through which risk factors such as loneliness, interpersonal stress, and problematic social media use influence mental health outcomes (Yam et al., 2024).

For example, Yam et al. (2024) demonstrated that resilience partially mediated the relationship between loneliness and social media addiction among adolescents, indicating that

lower resilience increases vulnerability to maladaptive online behaviors, which in turn negatively affect mental health. Similarly, resilience has been shown to reduce the psychological impact of interpersonal stress by enhancing coping skills, emotional regulation, and perceived social support (Masten, 2014). These findings suggest that resilience is not merely a buffering variable but may explain *how* interpersonal problems and social media addiction translate into psychological distress.

Despite growing interest in these constructs, important gaps remain in the literature. Few studies have simultaneously examined interpersonal problems, social media addiction, and psychological mental health within a single integrative framework. Moreover, the mediating role of resilience in these relationships has received limited empirical attention, particularly in youth populations. Much of the existing research is cross-sectional, highlighting the need for theoretically grounded models that clarify underlying mechanisms (Khalaf et al., 2023). Addressing these gaps is essential for informing prevention and intervention strategies targeting youth mental health in the digital age.

Rationale of the Study

Existing literature has largely focused on the direct correlation between interpersonal problems and clinical disorders like OCD or bipolar disorder. There is a gap in understanding *how* positive psychological traits like resilience function within this dynamic.

Objectives of Study

1. Investigate the relationship between Interpersonal Problems and Psychological Wellbeing.
2. Examine if Resilience mediates the relationship between social difficulties and mental health outcomes.
3. Examine how Social Media Addiction interacts with these variables among the youth population.

Hypothesis

H1: Interpersonal problems, Social Media Addiction, resilience significantly associated with psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress) among young adults.

H2: Interpersonal problems, social media addiction and resilience significantly predict psychological distress among young adults.

H3: Resilience will significantly mediate the relationship between interpersonal problems and psychological distress, such that higher interpersonal problems will lead to lower resilience, which in turn will predict higher psychological distress among young adults.

H4: There are Gender different on Interpersonal problems, Social Media Addiction, resilience and psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress) among young adults.

Conceptualized Model

Figure 1: *Conceptualized Model of the Study*
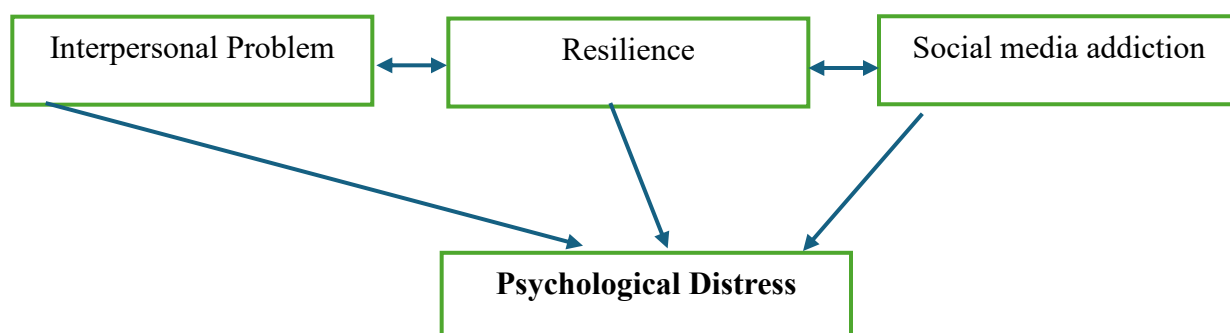
METHODOLOGY
Research Design
The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between interpersonal problems and psychological wellbeing among youth, with resilience as a mediating variable and social media addiction as an associated maladaptive coping behavior. This design was appropriate for identifying relationships and indirect effects among psychosocial variables within a natural setting.

Sample
A total of N=200 young adults were recruited using convenience sampling from universities and surrounding communities in Lahore, Pakistan. Age between 18 and 28 years. They are active user of social media and ability to understand English and willingness to provide informed consent. Further, diagnosed severe psychiatric or neurological disorder were excluded from the study

Instruments
1. *Demographic Information Sheet*
A self-developed demographic sheet was used to collect information regarding age, gender, education, family background, screen time, primary gadget usage, and purpose of gadget use.

2. *Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP-32) (Horowitz et al., 1988)*
The Inventory of Interpersonal Problems–32 (IIP-32) was used to assess interpersonal difficulties. The response format: 5-point Likert scale (0 = Not at all, 4 = Extremely). It measure difficulties such as being too submissive, socially avoidant, nonassertive, or overly controlling. Its reliability α = .85–.92 in previous research.

3. *Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)*
The DASS-21 was used to measure psychological distress. The response format is 4-point Likert scale. The reliability is α = .88–.94.

4. *Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) (Andreassen et al., 2016)*
The BSMAS assessed problematic social media use. It has 6 items and it measures salience, tolerance, mood modification, withdrawal, conflict, relapse. The response format is based on 5 point likert scale and its reliability is .83.

5. *Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008)*
The BRS measured the ability to bounce back from stress. It is 6 item scale based on 5 point Likert scale. Its reliability is α = .80–.91

Procedure and Ethical Consideration
After obtaining informed consent, participants completed the demographic sheet followed by the standardized questionnaires. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured. Data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26) employing descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

RESULTS
Table 1
Frequency and percentage of participants (N = 200)

Demographic variables	f	%
Age		
18-20	162	81.0
20-25	21	91.5

25-28	17	100.0
Gender		
Male	53	26.5
Female	116	84.5
Prefer not to say	31	100.0
Qualification		
BS	67	33.5
MS	114	90.5
Inter	19	100.0
Screen time		
3-5 hrs.	40	20.0
5-8	68	54.0
8-10	51	79.5
Other	41	100.0
Family Background		
Elite	12	6.0
Upper middle class	140	76.0
Lower middle class	48	100.0
Most used Device		
Mobile	160	80.0
Emulator	19	89.5
Tablets	14	96.5
Others	7	100.0
Work on gadget		
Office Work	17	8.5
Games	13	15.0
Social media	139	84.5
Education	31	100.0
Birth Order		
1st	50	25.0
2nd	55	52.5
Middle born	51	78.0
Last	33	94.5
Only child	11	100.0
Occupation		
Teacher or education		
Department		
Artist	7	21.0
IT department	13	27.5
Lawyers	6	30.5
Marketing	7	34.0
Student	102	85.0
Jobless	15	92.5

Doctor	5	95.0
Trading or business	8	99.0
Engineer	2	100.0
Parental life status		
Alive both	82	41.0
Alive 1	109	95.5
Late	9	100.0

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Interpersonal Problems	62.41	14.32	.80
Psychological Distress (DASS-21)	21.70	12.10	.87
Social Media Addiction	18.65	5.40	.82
Resilience	19.12	4.85	.78

Table 2 represent the all scales reliability which were is acceptable to good internal consistency. Mean scores indicate moderate to high interpersonal difficulties and psychological distress, alongside high engagement in social media use.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation Matrix among Study Variables (N=200)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Interpersonal Problems	—			
2. Psychological Distress	.36**	—		
3. Social Media Addiction	.31**	.34**	—	
4. Resilience	−.29**	−.42**	−.27**	—

Note: $p < .01$**
Table 3 Interpersonal problems were positively correlated with psychological distress and social media addiction, and negatively correlated with resilience. Resilience showed a strong negative association with psychological distress.

Table 4
Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Distress (N=200)

Predictor	B	SE	β	p
Interpersonal Problems	.28	.05	.32	.000
Social Media Addiction	.22	.04	.29	.000
Resilience	−.35	.06	−.41	.000

R² = .48, F(3,196) = 28.45, p < .001***
Table 4 Interpersonal problems and social media addiction positively predicted psychological distress, whereas resilience significantly reduced distress, accounting for 48% of the variance.

Table 5
Regression Paths for Mediation Analysis (N=200)

Path	Predictor → Outcome	B	SE	β	t	p
a	Interpersonal Problems → Resilience	−0.31	0.06	−.29	−5.17	.000
b	Resilience → Psychological Distress	−0.42	0.07	−.41	−6.00	.000
c	Interpersonal Problems → Psychological Distress (Total Effect)	0.39	0.05	.36	7.80	.000
c′	Interpersonal Problems → Psychological Distress (Direct Effect)	0.26	0.05	.24	5.20	.000

Table 5. Interpersonal problems significantly predicted lower resilience (Path a). Resilience significantly predicted lower psychological distress (Path b). The direct effect (c′) remained significant but reduced in magnitude compared to the total effect (c), indicating partial mediation.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between Interpersonal Problems (IP), Social Media Addiction (SMA), and Psychological Distress among youth, with a specific focus on the mediating role of Resilience[1111]. The findings provide empirical support for the proposed conceptual model, highlighting the complex interplay between social difficulties, digital coping mechanisms, and protective psychological traits.

Consistent with the hypothesis (H1), the results revealed a significant positive correlation between interpersonal problems and psychological distress (r = .36, p < .01**). This aligns with established literature suggesting that persistent difficulties in initiating or maintaining relationships are strong predictors of depression and anxiety. As noted by Horowitz (2004), interpersonal distress often serves as a foundation for psychopathology, where failures in social connection lead to heightened emotional dysregulation. The regression analysis further confirmed this, showing that interpersonal problems significantly predict psychological distress (beta = .32, p < .001***).

The study also found that interpersonal problems significantly predict Social Media Addiction (r = .31, p < .01**). This supports the "social compensation" hypothesis, where youth with social deficits retreat to online environments to avoid face-to-face confrontation. However, the results indicate that this is a maladaptive strategy; Social Media Addiction was found to be a significant positive predictor of psychological distress (beta = .29, p < .001***). This corroborates the findings of Primack et al. (2017), who argued that excessive social media use particularly when driven by social comparison or isolation worsens mental health outcomes rather than alleviating them. The high prevalence of social media use in the current sample (84.5% using gadgets for social platforms) underscores the urgency of addressing this issue.

A central finding of this study was the mediating role of Resilience (H3). The mediation analysis demonstrated that resilience partially mediates the relationship between interpersonal problems and psychological distress. Specifically, higher interpersonal problems predicted lower

resilience (Path a, beta = -.29), which in turn predicted higher distress (Path b, beta = -.41). This suggests that individuals with chronic social problems may struggle to develop the adaptive capacity (resilience) needed to bounce back from stress, making them more vulnerable to depression. These findings echo recent research by Yam et al. (2024), which found that resilience functions as a buffer against the negative impacts of loneliness and digital addiction. The fact that the direct effect remained significant (c') implies that while resilience explains part of the relationship, interpersonal problems also directly harm mental health independent of one's resilience levels.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the significant findings, several limitations must be acknowledged: The study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences. While mediation analysis suggests directional pathways, it cannot confirm that interpersonal problems *cause* social media addiction or low resilience over time. The sample consisted of *N = 200* young adults recruited via convenience sampling from Lahore, Pakistan. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts or age groups. Data was collected using self-report measures like the DASS-21 and BSMAS. These instruments are susceptible to social desirability bias, where participants might underreport their level of distress or addiction. Gender Imbalance: The sample had a higher proportion of female participants (n=116) compared to males (n=53), which may skew the results regarding the manifestation of interpersonal problems and social media usage patterns.

Recommendations

Based on the study's conclusions mental health professionals should adopt a dual-focus approach. Therapy for youth should not only address symptoms but also target interpersonal skill deficits and digital hygiene. Since resilience was identified as a vital protective factor, educational institutions should implement resilience-building workshops. These programs can teach youth how to "bounce back" from social rejection without resorting to digital escapism. Awareness campaigns are needed to educate youth about the cycle of escaping social problems through screens. Highlighting the link between passive scrolling and increased anxiety could encourage healthier usage patterns. Future studies should utilize longitudinal designs to track how interpersonal problems in early adolescence evolve into social media addiction in adulthood

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical intersection of social, digital, and psychological worlds for today's youth. The findings confirm that Interpersonal Problems are a significant risk factor for poor mental health, driving youth toward Social Media Addiction as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Crucially, Resilience emerged as a key mediator, explaining how social difficulties erode mental well-being by diminishing an individual's capacity to adapt to stress. Ultimately, the "digital escape" offers no true refuge; instead, real-world connection and internal resilience remain the pillars of psychological health. Interventions that strengthen these internal resources while regulating digital consumption offer the most promise for improving youth well-being

REFERENCES

Horowitz, L. M. (2004). *Interpersonal foundations of psychopathology*. American Psychological Association.

Horowitz, L. M., Rosenberg, S. E., Baer, B. A., Ureño, G., & Villaseñor, V. S. (1988). Inventory of interpersonal problems: Psychometric properties and clinical applications. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 56(6), 885-892.

Bjerke E, Solbakken OA, Monsen JT. (2014). Are there specific relationships between symptom patterns and interpersonal problems among psychiatric outpatients? *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 96(2), 237-244,

Starr. L. R. & Davila, J. (2008). Excessive reassurance seeking, depression, and interpersonal rejection: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology.* 117(4), 762-775.

Lyndsay E. Evraire, David J.A. Dozois, (2011). An integrative model of excessive reassurance seeking and negative feedback seeking in the development and maintenance of depression, Clinical Psychology Review, Volume 31, Issue 8

James C. Coyne. (2016). Toward an Interactional Description of Depression, Psychiatry Interpersonal and Biological Processes, Volume 39, 1976-Issue 1

Evans III, F.B. (1996). Harry Stack Sullivan: Interpersonal Theory and Psychotherapy (1st ed.). Routledge

Neuberg, S. L., Kenrick, D. T., & Schaller, M. (2010). Evolutionary social psychology. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 761-796). John Wiley & Sons, Inc..

Hammen, C., Shih, J. H., & Brennan, P. A. (2004). Intergenerational Transmission of Depression: Test of an Interpersonal Stress Model in a Community Sample. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 72(3), 511-522.

Alloy, L. B., Abramson, L. Y., Grant, D., & Liu R. (2009). Vulnerability to unipolar depression: Cognitive-behavioral mechanisms. In K. Salzinger & M. R. Serper (Eds.), Behavioral mechanisms and psychopathology: Advancing the explanation of its nature, cause, and treatment (pp. 107-140). American Psychological Association.

Horowitz, L. M., Rosenberg, S. E., & Bartholomew, K. (1993). Interpersonal problems, attachment styles, and outcome in brief dynamic psychotherapy. Journal *of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 61(4), 549-560.

Lacoviello, B. M., McCarthy, K. S., Barret, M. S., Rynn, M., Gallop, R., & Barber, J. P. (2007). Treatment preferences affect the therapeutic alliance: Implications for randomized controlled trials. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 75(1), 194-198.

Cheryl, T. Beck, R. N., M. S. N., C. N. M., (1979), The Occurrence of Depression in Women and the Effect of the Women's Movement, *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services,* Volume 17-number 11

Shechtman, N., & Horowitz, L. M. (2006). Interpersonal and Noninterpersonal Interactions, Interpersonal Motives, and the Effect of Frustrated Motives. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 32(8), 1126-1139.

Aaron L. Pincus and Jerry S. Wiggins, (1990), Interpersonal Problems and Conceptions of Personality Disorders, *Journal of Personality Disorders*, Volume 4- number 4

Gude T, Moum T, Kaldestad E, Friis S. Inventory of interpersonal problems: a three-dimensional balanced scalable 48-item version. *Journal of Personality Assessment* 2000; 74(2): 296-310.

Lovibond, S.H. & Lovibond, P.F. (1995). Manual for the Depression Anxiety & Stress Scales. (2nd Ed.) Sydney: Psychology Foundation.

Andreassen, C. S., Billieux, J., Griffiths, M. D., Kuss, D. J., Demetrovics, Z., Mazzoni, E., & Pallesen, S. (2016). The relationship between addictive use of social media and video games and symptoms of psychiatric disorders: A large-scale cross-sectional study. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 30*(2), 252–262. https://doi.org/10.1037/adb0000160

Kessler, R. C., Amminger, G. P., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Alonso, J., Lee, S., & Ustün, T. B. (2007). Age of onset of mental disorders: A review of recent literature. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry, 20*(4), 359–364.

Khalaf, A. M., et al. (2023). The impact of social media on the mental health of adolescents and young adults: A systematic review. *Cureus, 15*(2), e35234.

Lee, T. S. H. (2021). Interpersonal relationships, resilience, and depressive symptoms among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 89*, 1–10.

Masten, A. S. (2014). *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development.* Guilford Press.

Mercan, N., et al. (2023). The relationship between social media addiction, personality traits, and interpersonal problem-solving styles. *Addictive Behaviors Reports, 18*, 100520.

Primack, B. A., et al. (2017). Social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults in the U.S. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 53*(1), 1–8.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2023). *Social media and youth mental health: The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory.*

Yam, F. C., Yıldırım, O., & Köksal, B. (2024). The mediating and buffering role of resilience in the relationship between loneliness and social media addiction among adolescents. *Current Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024-XXXX