

Gaslighting, Resilience and Mental Well-being among Young Adults

Ayesha Irshad^{1*}, Aisha Ateeq²**Abstract**

This study explored the relationship between gaslighting, resilience, and mental well-being among young adults in Pakistan. A sample of 400 university students (aged 20–26) from academic institutions in Lahore participated in the study using purposive sampling. Standardized instruments were used to measure gaslighting experiences (Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire), resilience (Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, CD-RISC-25), and mental well-being (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale, WEMWBS). Pearson's correlation analyses revealed that gaslighting was significantly negatively correlated with resilience ($r = -.25, p < .01$) and mental well-being ($r = -.33, p < .01$). Mediation analysis showed that resilience partially mediated the relationship between gaslighting and mental well-being, with the direct effect of gaslighting on mental well-being remaining significant but reduced when resilience was included as a mediator ($B = -.34, SE = .07, p < .001$). These findings suggest that resilience serves as a protective factor, reducing the adverse impact of gaslighting on psychological health. The study emphasizes the need for awareness programs targeting emotional abuse, as well as resilience-building interventions in academic settings. Psychologists, educators, and institutional leaders should collaborate to provide supportive environments and mental health resources that empower young adults to cope with manipulative interpersonal dynamics.

Keywords: Emotional Abuse, Gaslighting, Resilience, Victim Mental Well-being

Received: 24 August 2025; Revised
Received: 16 October 2025; Accepted: 19
October 2025

^{1*}BS (Hons) Scholar, Department of Psychology, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore, Pakistan.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore, Pakistan.

***Corresponding Author Email:**

251686663@formanite.fccollege.edu.pk

Introduction

Gaslighting, a covert form of emotional manipulation, has become an increasingly concerning phenomenon in intimate and interpersonal relationships among young adults. It involves systematically undermining an individual's perception of reality, leading them to question their judgment, memory, and emotional responses

(Hightower, 2017). Unlike general emotional abuse, gaslighting is characterized by persistent denial, blame-shifting, and distortion of truth, which subtly erode an individual's sense of self and autonomy (Sweet, 2019). In the Pakistani socio-cultural context, where collectivist family structures and relationship hierarchies often discourage confrontation, such manipulative patterns may go unnoticed, leaving young adults highly vulnerable.

The psychological impact of gaslighting is profound. Victims often experience self-doubt, emotional confusion, reduced self-worth, and progressive dependency on the manipulator (Mento et al., 2023). Over time, this persistent invalidation increases susceptibility to anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional exhaustion (Nall, 2020). These consequences directly threaten mental well-being, which refers to an individual's ability to function effectively,

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial 4.0 International License (<https://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-Commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified.

© Copyright: The Authors (2025)

maintain emotional balance, cope with stress, and experience life satisfaction (Galderisi et al., 2015). In emerging adulthood, a developmental stage marked by identity exploration, decision-making, and emotional instability, the risk of compromised mental well-being becomes significantly heightened. In such conditions, resilience functions as a critical protective factor. It is defined as the capacity to adapt positively and maintain psychological stability in the face of adversity (Herrman et al., 2011). Resilience enables individuals to regulate emotions, reinterpret negative experiences, and maintain internal control over life circumstances. Psychological resources, such as self-efficacy, hope, and optimistic appraisal, enable resilient young adults to resist internalizing the distortions imposed through gaslighting (McRae et al., 2008). However, limited empirical attention has been given to how resilience operates within the cultural and relational dynamics of young adults in Pakistan, where emotional manipulation is often normalized under the guise of care, obedience, or relational loyalty.

The psychological mechanism through which gaslighting impacts mental health can be further understood through the lens of Learned Helplessness Theory (Peterson & Seligman, 1983). The theory states that whenever individuals are continuously exposed to unpredictable and distressing situations, they develop an internalized feeling of powerlessness in life's challenges and thus are unable to change their circumstances (Boyd, 2013). Due to gaslighting, victims experience deep distortion of reality and struggle to develop coping strategies. Their internalized belief that their actions or judgments are fruitless and powerless aligns with the core mechanism of learned helplessness. Thus, gaslighting victims with reduced resilience are more likely to develop learned

helplessness, and together, these factors impair mental well-being.

Pakistan faces rising mental health concerns among youth, yet conversations around emotional manipulation remain largely hidden within private relational domains. Understanding the relationship between gaslighting, resilience, and mental well-being in this context is essential. By examining these constructs together, this research highlights not only the detrimental psychological outcomes of gaslighting but also the role of resilience as a potential buffer.

Literature Review

Gaslighting and Mental Well-being

Research highlighted several core vulnerabilities and deficiencies due to gaslighting and mental well-being. These vulnerabilities include cognitive dissonance, heightened experiences of depression and anxiety, self-doubt, and low self-esteem. Traits such as neuroticism, sensitivity to stimuli, and low tolerance for ambiguity increase susceptibility to gaslighting. Christensen and Evans-Murray (2021) further emphasized gaslighting's broad psychological impact, linking it to chronic stress, hypervigilance, addictive behaviors, and suicidal ideation.

In addition to societal constraints and self-esteem, gaslighting can have a profound negative impact on emotional regulation, frequently causing victims to internalize uncertainty and challenge their perceptions. According to research, victims frequently experienced emotional upheaval, bewilderment, and denial, leading them to prioritize the gas lighter's perspective over their own, and this act made their anxiety and self-doubt worse (Sengkey & Illahibaccus-Sona, 2024). These studies support the negative impact of gaslighting and mental well-being, but they lacked emphasis on the mental well-being of young adults in Pakistani culture.

Gaslighting and Resilience

Through research, scholars highlighted the complex relationship between gaslighting and resilience, showing that resilience not only buffers against the psychological harm of gaslighting but also enhances life satisfaction. Similarly, Ji (2024) concluded that childhood emotional abuse (CEA) significantly undermines resilience in adolescents, leading to low self-compassion, high suicidal tendencies, hopelessness, and diminished gratitude. Lee et al. (2018) further supported this by demonstrating that early emotional neglect or abuse predicts diminished resilience and is associated with high depressive symptoms, including anxiety, shame, and dysfunctional attachment.

Shousha (2023) identified that narcissistic gaslighters manipulate and control victims, leading to stress, aggression, and the "gaslighting effect," wherein victims question their rationality. Social networks, spirituality, and emotional support played a critical role in fostering resilience and aiding victims in leaving such abusive relationships. Ciabatti et al. (2025) expanded on this idea and determined that resilience, self-compassion, and perceived social support were negatively correlated with gaslighting experiences, underscoring their role in promoting psychological well-being.

The psychological toll of gaslighting fosters self-doubt, helplessness, and isolation, eroding identity and autonomy (Kurniawan, 2021). However, fostering resilience through self-affirmation, journaling, and self-worth restoration aided recovery. Case studies of gaslighting victims showed that regaining self-trust, confidence, and assertiveness, along with setting boundaries, enabled them to break free of the toxic cycle and rebuild their reality (Hailes & Goodman, 2023).

Resilience and Mental Well-being

It is important to study the long-term benefits of resilience to reinforce its importance in

sustaining mental health. As a coping mechanism, resilience has been consistently linked to positive mental health outcomes, supporting individuals throughout life. The early development of resilient traits, such as optimism, self-worth, and self-efficacy, fosters lifelong mental health benefits (Srivastava, 2011). Furthermore, Resilience has been widely examined for its effect on mental health and cognitive-behavioral abilities, including self-esteem, anxiety reduction, communication, and social bonding. A study emphasized resilience as a key factor in fostering essential personal skills that enhance social interaction, stress management, and the development of supportive relationships (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

In uncertain environments, self-driven development and coping skills strengthened by high resilience help to support the mental health of young adults. Results from a survey of 300 Pakistani university students found that personal growth initiative and resilience strongly predict and positively correlate with psychological well-being (Asif et al., 2024). Another study discussed that while risk factors such as stress, peer pressure, and bullying negatively impacted the mental health of young adults, the protective factors, like high self-esteem, strong interpersonal relations, and prosocial behavior, played a significant positive role in enhancing mental well-being (Mustafa, 2024). These protective traits closely align with psychological resilience, acting as buffers that help adolescents adapt and maintain mental well-being despite adverse conditions.

Objective of the Study

This study addresses a key gap in the literature by examining how gaslighting relates to mental well-being among young adults in Pakistan, with a focus on its impact on psychological functioning. It offers insights into how young adults perceive and cope with gaslighting. Further, it studies

resilience as a mediator between gaslighting and its psychological damage to mental health. The study findings contribute to informing targeted mental health interventions to support young adults in protecting their well-being.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** A higher level of gaslighting is associated with a lower level of resilience among young adults.
- **H2:** A higher level of gaslighting is associated with a lower level of mental well-being among young adults.
- **H3:** High resilience mediates a negative relationship between gaslighting and mental well-being among young adults.

Method

Research Design

A cross-sectional study and correlational design were employed to examine the relationship between gaslighting, resilience, and mental well-being.

Participants

This study used non-probability purposive sampling to obtain 400 participants, as determined by a sample size calculator with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Participants were 20–26-year-old undergraduate or graduate students from various private and public institutions in Lahore across multiple disciplines. They were approached by visiting them in person. As inclusion criteria, English-speaking individuals were included. Participants between the ages of 20 to 26 were included. As an exclusion criterion, those under 20, over 26, or unable to understand English were excluded.

Instruments

The study used the instrument booklet to gather data from the sample population. The instrument booklet included an information sheet, consent form, demographic sheet, and three psychometric scales: the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ) (2023), Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-

RISC) (Connor & Davidson, 2003), and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (2006).

Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ)

The psychometric development and validation of the victim gaslighting questionnaire (VGQ) was developed by Bhatti et al. (2023). It is a 5-point Likert-scale self-report survey consisting of 14 items. Peer disagreement and loss of self-trust are two theoretically constructed characteristics that are measured by it. With an internal consistency of $\alpha = .93$, it has high alpha reliability. Respondents were asked to rate a scale from how strongly they disagree (1=strongly disagree) agree with each statement to agree with each statement (5=strongly agree), with a total score range of 14-70. High scores indicate high victimization, and lower scores indicate lower victimization. It includes items such as "Your point of view is dismissed or said to be 'wrong' completely," "You get accused for 'overreacting' when you try to explain your feelings," and "You apologize without knowing what you did wrong."

Scale is specific to Pakistani culture and was developed with only a female sample, but as mentioned, inclusion of a male sample in future studies can help in studying whether men are also victims of gaslighting. So, this study chose this questionnaire as it exact study effect of gaslighting and is relevant to Pakistani culture. Moreover, the study used mixed-gender sample to ensure the presence of gaslighting experience among both genders.

Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25)

In 2003, Kathryn M. Conner and Jonathan R.T. Davidson created the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25), a self-report questionnaire designed to gauge resilience. The CD-RISC-25 is a 5-point Likert-scale personality survey consisting of twenty-five items. The five components assess aspirational standards, tenacity, and

competence, as well as the ability to control negative emotions, trust one's instincts, positive attitude toward change, relationship security, perceived control, and spirituality (Velickovic et al., 2020). It has high internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha value of .89 and $r = .52-.67$. Respondents were asked to rate a scale from how strongly they disagree (0=strongly disagree) with each statement to agree with each statement (4=strongly agree) with a total score range between 0-100, where higher numbers signify increased resilience. It includes items, i.e., "The best way to manage people is to tell them what they want to hear," "I am able to adapt when changes occur," "I have one close and secure relationship," "Having to cope with stress can make me stronger."

Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

The Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was developed by Sarah S. Brown and Kulsum Janmohamed in 2008. It is a 5-point Likert-scale self-report survey consisting of 14 items. It has a high internal consistency and reliability of up to .83, with a .89 Cronbach's alpha value. Respondents rated each item from "1=none of the time" to "5=all the time" with a total score range of 14- 70. High scores indicated high mental well-being, whereas low scores indicated low mental well-being. It contains statements like, "I've been feeling optimistic about the future", "I've been feeling confident," and "I've been able to make up my own mind about things".

Procedure

A purposive sample of 400 young adults from Lahore universities participated in an in-

person survey. They were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of an information sheet, demographic sheet, and three scales assessing gaslighting, resilience, and mental well-being. The title of the scales was not mentioned above the scale. The study's purpose, participation rights, confidentiality, and withdrawal options were explained before obtaining informed consent. The survey took 20–30 minutes, and participants were encouraged to ask questions. After completing the survey, the researcher thanked the participant and kept the data safe. Data was encrypted, accessible only to the principal investigator and supervisor, and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed. The proposal was submitted to the Board of Studies, the Institutional Review Board, and the Ethics Review Committee for approval. Participants were informed about the research aims and their right to withdraw and provided written consent. Confidentiality was maintained by using data only for research purposes and by keeping information access only to the author. No deception or physical or psychological harm occurred, and precautions were taken to address any discomfort. Free counseling from the counseling campus center's psychologist was available for participants experiencing distress. The study was self-funded by the principal investigator with no external funding.

Results**Table 1***Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=400)*

Variables	F	%	M(SD)
Gender			
Male	211	52.8	
Female	189	47.3	
Education level			
Undergraduate	339	84.8	
Postgraduation	61	15.3	
Age	400		22.3

Table 2*Reliability and Descriptive Analysis (N=400)*

Variables	Actual Range	M	SD	α	Skewness	Kurtosis	95% CI
	(Minimum- Maximum)						
Gaslighting	8-33	20.5725	4.72817	0.710	0.013	-0.320	20.1-21.0
Resilience	12-99	64.4050	12.65113	0.860	-0.554	0.970	63.2-65.6
MWB	14-68	45.3100	9.39145	0.863	-0.677	0.734	44.4-46.2

Note: MWB= Mental Well Being

Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha), skewness, and kurtosis values for the variables. The gaslighting's scores indicate acceptable internal consistency and skewness and kurtosis values suggesting a fairly symmetrical and mesokurtic distribution, indicating that the data is normally distributed without extreme peaks or outliers. Resilience scores suggested strong reliability and exhibited slight negative skewness and a moderate positive kurtosis, suggesting a mild

lean to the left and a slightly sharper peak than normal. Mental well-being (MWB) scores showed high internal consistency and more pronounced negative skewness and moderate kurtosis, indicating a slight left skew with a moderately peaked distribution. All values fall within the acceptable range of ± 1 , suggesting no significant departures from normality. Therefore, the data is suitable for parametric testing and reliable for assessing the intended constructs in this population.

Table 3*Pearson Correlation Analysis between Gaslighting and Resilience (N=400)*

Variables	1	2	M	SD	R ²	95%CI
1. Gaslighting	-	-.25**	20.58	4.72	.06	[-.33, -.16]
2. Resilience	-.25**	-	60.41	12.65	-	-

** $p < .01$

A Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between gaslighting and resilience among young adults. As presented in Table 4, a significant negative correlation was found between gaslighting and resilience ($r = -0.25, p < .01$). Squaring the correlation coefficient indicated that gaslighting accounted for approximately 6.3% of the variance in resilience ($R^2 = .06$), suggesting that while the effect size is small, the association is meaningful in the context of psychological dynamics. The 95% confidence interval for the correlation [-.33, -

.16] further indicates that the true population value is likely to fall within this negative range, reinforcing the reliability of the observed association. Although the negative correlation is small in magnitude, it indicates an inverse relationship, such that as experiences of gaslighting increase, the ability of young adults to bounce back or adapt positively in the face of adversity tends to decrease. This supports the hypothesis (H1) that a higher level of gaslighting is associated with a lower level of resilience.

Table 4*Pearson Correlation Analysis between Gaslighting and Mental Well-Being (MWB) (N=400)*

Variables	1	2	M	SD	R ²	95% CI
1. Gaslighting	-	-.32**	20.58	4.72	.10	[-.40, -.24]
2. MWB	-.32**	-	45.31	9.39	-	-

** $p < .01$

A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to study the relationship between gaslighting and mental well-being among young adults. The results, presented in Table 5, revealed a significant negative correlation between gaslighting and mental well-being, $r(398) = -.33, p < .01$. Further analysis showed that gaslighting explained approximately 10.6% of the variance in mental well-being ($R^2 = .11$), indicating a meaningful effect in psychological research terms. The 95% confidence interval [-.40, -

.24] suggests that the true correlation in the population is likely to fall within this negative range, providing additional support for the stability of this association. The correlation reflects a moderate inverse relationship, indicating that individuals experiencing higher degrees of psychological manipulation tend to report a decline in mental health outcomes. These findings support the second hypothesis, reinforcing the notion that gaslighting adversely impacts the mental health of young adults.

Table 5

Mediation Analysis of the Effect of Gaslighting on Mental Well-Being Through Resilience (N = 400)

Measures	β	SE	<i>p</i>	R^2	f^2
Step 1 (Path c)					
Outcome: MWB				0.10	0.11
Gaslighting	-0.64	0.09	.000		
Step 2 (Path a)					
Outcome: Resilience				0.06	0.06
Gaslighting	-0.67	0.12	.000		
Step 3 (Path b)					
Outcome: MWB				0.44	0.80
Resilience	0.44	0.02	.000		
Step 4 (Path c')					
Mediator: Resilience					
Predictor: Gaslighting	-0.34	0.07	.000		

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; MWB = Mental Well-Being

A mediation analysis was conducted to test whether resilience mediates the negative relationship between gaslighting and mental well-being among young adults. The total effect model indicated that gaslighting accounted for 10.6% of the variance in mental well-being ($R^2 = .10$), with a significant total effect ($B = -0.64$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals who reported higher experiences of gaslighting tended to have lower levels of mental well-being. Furthermore, gaslighting significantly predicted resilience ($B = -0.67$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$), explaining 6.3% of the variance in resilience ($R^2 = .06$), suggesting that gaslighting negatively impacts an individual's capacity for resilience. In turn,

Discussion

The findings of this study establish a significant negative correlation between gaslighting and resilience, and gaslighting and mental well-being. Individuals who experience greater psychological manipulation tend to exhibit lower levels of

resilience emerged as a strong positive predictor of mental well-being ($B = .44$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$), and the inclusion of resilience in the model substantially increased the explained variance in mental well-being to 44.7% ($R^2 = .44$). When resilience was included as a mediator, the direct effect of gaslighting on mental well-being remained significant but was reduced ($B = -.34$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$), providing evidence of partial mediation. These findings support Hypothesis 3 and suggest that resilience plays a meaningful role in buffering the adverse psychological effects of gaslighting on mental well-being in young adults.

resilience. Among young adult Pakistanis, high exposure to gaslighting tends to be linked with a lower capacity to change and overcome a negative experience, which is a quantifiably poor effect on their psychological resilience.

In the Pakistani cultural context, collectivism, hierarchical family systems, and inflexible gender roles often cloud or naturalize emotionally abusive tendencies. Essentially, having the ability to seek emotional support through trusted relationships and peer validation or within a therapeutic environment can be a buffer against the psychological harm of gaslighting by reassuring the individual of their experiences and reality of self. But, in contrast, these factors are lacking in Pakistani culture.

Continuing on the argument from the cultural perspective, the Pakistani sociocultural environment is the place where the psychological harm caused by gaslighting can be enhanced. Traditional family structures feature an aspect where those in power tend to have their way unquestioned and opposition is not encouraged, particularly among women and younger adults (Butt & Park, 2024). Emotional manipulation, such as denying one's perspective or enforcing silence, can be misinterpreted as parental control or moral discipline rather than abuse. This cultural normalization of dominance hinders the recognition of gaslighting, thus letting it continue unabated and adding psychological consequences to its victims. Within such an environment, resilience is not a natural occurrence and has to be nurtured in the context of systemic oppression of agency. This is also consistent with the research conducted by Ahmad & Kutty (2024), who stated that emotionally manipulative parents' practices in Pakistan have a devastating impact on emotional regulation and long-term psychological adjustment of children. Repeated gaslighting destroys psychological safety, enforces helplessness, and slowly weakens the internal coping mechanism, but people do not seek help or express turmoil of gaslighting experiences, as expressing traumas is considered a sign of stigma or

taboo. This is echoed in a study by Sahar and Muzaffar (2018), who concluded that Pakistani youth tend to suppress their emotions and lack family validation in addressing psychological distress, which leads to the internalization of helplessness, decreased emotional resilience, and impaired internal coping. This highly consistent evidence supports the idea that in the absence of conscious counteraction and affirmation of experiences, the repetitive psychological invalidation prevailing in gaslighting gradually undermines psychological defenses.

Similarly, besides family dynamics, young adults in Pakistan experience negative impacts of gaslighting on many other areas of their lives as well. For instance, gaslighting in peer relationships is exacerbated by societal pressures and technological influences. Emerging adulthood is a period in which identity, self-worth, and belonging become psychologically central. In this context, manipulation often takes subtle forms in peer communication, such as blame-shifting, ghosting, and passive-aggressive digital messaging, which are normalized under the guise of modern relationship dynamics. Sanghai (2024) observed that young adults exposed to gaslighting in social media and other digital communication contexts, such as ghosting, blame-shifting, or passive-aggressive messaging, frequently suffer from low self-esteem and elevated anxiety. These outcomes are intensified by the "fear of missing out" (FOMO) and social comparison, leading to psychological instability and deteriorating mental well-being. In such scenarios, gaslighting not only distorts perception but also erodes social trust and emotional security. For Pakistani young adults, where peer validation and digital visibility carry significant social value, these manipulative patterns can intensify feelings of self-doubt, erode social trust, and

compromise resilience and mental well-being.

The impacts of gaslighting have also been reverberated in the workplace and at institutional levels for young adults. As stated by Sarkar (2024), academic gaslighting, including the denigration of students' academic interests or the dismissal of emotional discomfort, produces epistemic injustice and institutional betrayal, reinforcing the notion that the individual's perspective is unreliable. This academic gaslighting erodes academic trust, disrupts studying, and creates the conditions of constant psychological distress, highlighting the broader societal reach of this form of abuse. In the case of young adults in academic environments of Pakistan, such invalidation may hinder the emergence of intellectual integrity and emotional strength, putting them at a greater risk of chronic disengagement and self-doubt.

Additionally, regarding gaslighting in the workplace, Newport Institute (2021) stated that the effects of gaslighting in the workplace are emotional burnout, confidence crisis, and task disengagement, and therefore, these symptoms are all the more similar to the symptoms of impaired mental health, such as low self-esteem, emotional confusion, exhaustion, burnout, and avoidance. In the Pakistani context, where questioning authority is often discouraged and professional hierarchies are deeply respected, employees or young interns may normalize manipulation from supervisors, interpreting it as discipline rather than psychological abuse. This cultural conditioning makes it difficult to identify gaslighting as a form of emotional violence, leading to internalized blame and, over time, diminished resilience."

However, despite gaslighting vulnerability to mental health, in hypothesis 3, another perspective suggests that resilience remains a powerful protective buffer against gaslighting. The partial mediation found in

this study suggests that resilient individuals retain the capacity to reinterpret manipulation, reassert their emotional boundaries, and sustain psychological stability even under stress. It is consistent with the resilience framework advanced by Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) that resilience is not a fixed property but rather a dynamic, socially embedded process in which individual, relationships, and contextual factors all play a role. Moreover, psychological treatments involving self-understanding, expression of emotions, and cognitive restructuring have proved useful in enhancing resilience. The study by Fava and Tomba (2009) showed that these demonstrated that such interventions significantly improved mental well-being in emotionally vulnerable individuals, providing a tangible way of psychological recovery, even when stressors, such as gaslighting, were still present.

As Pakistani households hold on to Socialization strategies that are used I stress obedience, modesty, and family image, and may not allow making independent decisions and expressing feelings. It is within this sociocultural context that the young adults get minimal aid in the advancement of their important psychological abilities, including self-regulation and emotional hardiness, and assertiveness. Instead, they have to repress their emotions and instead focus on obedience, which makes such individuals unable to deal with emotional manipulation like gaslighting. Barber (1996) discovered that psychological control in parenting, which incorporates guilt/induction and emotional manipulation, was highly linked with reduced emotional autonomy and elevated internalizing difficulties in teenagers. All of these impacts are reflected in the collectivistic societies where family cohesion is regarded, in certain cases, at the cost of the emotional growth of the person. But, on the same note, Taylor et al. (2004)

established that perception of social support enhances adaptive coping, stable emotions, and psychological restoration of stress. These results imply that although cultural norms in Pakistan might inhibit resilience, protective mechanisms, including peer support, spiritual involvement, and relationships with emotional validation, can be used to promote it in culturally relevant patterns.

Finally, the results of the study reinforce the notion of resilience as a mediating mechanism between the gaslighting and mental well-being connection. Although gaslighting in itself leads to tremendous damage to psychological well-being, its effect can be tremendously enhanced when resilience is undermined. However, the research evidence also indicates resilience as a strength that can be modified. Resilience can be developed through culturally congruent interventions, including social support, reflective practices, and values-based mentorship, which can provide individuals with a significant source of protection against the corrosion that gaslighting inflicts. These reflections outline the importance of immediately focusing on ways to develop resilience on an individual level, but also as a culturally embedded mechanism of protection against emotionally invalidating contexts in young adults' lives.

Implications

The results of this study have significant implications for various factors, including academic research, clinical, institutional policy, and future studies with a focus on the psychological health of young adults.

Universities and counseling centers can design workshops to help students recognize gaslighting and strengthen resilience. Academic advisors and student support services can use these findings to implement preventive mental health strategies.

The buffering mechanism of resilience promotes its application to therapeutic interventions aimed at promoting adaptive

coping mechanisms. To counteract the impact of gaslighting on mental health, clinicians can include in their therapeutic techniques known to build resilience, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness, narrative therapy, and emotional regulation techniques.

On the policy level, the research brief emphasizes the necessity of understanding gaslighting as a valid community mental health issue within the shortest period. Government officials ought to emerge and implement mental health policies that particularly deal with emotional abuse in academic and family environments.

The implications of this study also extend to future academic research. Future research could determine how effective specific resilience-based programs are in preventing emotional damage. Lastly, qualitative research focused on personal stories and lived experience may further our knowledge of how people internalize gaslighting and recover their psychological integrity via resilience.

Limitations & Suggestions

One of the primary drawbacks of this study is the use of non-probability purposive sampling, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Participants mainly belonged to academic institutions in Lahore, which may not reflect the diverse demographics of rural, lower-income, or less-educated populations. The absence of random sampling raises the possibility of selection bias. Probability based sampling techniques can be applied in future researches across Pakistan to ensure generalizability and reduce selection bias.

Along with all these, the study reported gender distribution, but it did not conduct a deeper gender-based analysis. Similarly, socioeconomic status was not included in the demographic analysis. A more nuanced understanding of how gender roles and class dynamics intersect with gaslighting, and

resilience can add depth to the study's interpretations or in future studies.

Moreover, the current study was purely observational and did not include any intervention or post-assessment measures. Therefore, the effectiveness of resilience-building strategies or mental health support in combating gaslighting remains untested. Future studies could implement resilience-based psychoeducational interventions and assess their impact over time.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between gaslighting, resilience, and mental well-being among young adults in Pakistan, confirming all three hypotheses. High gaslighting experiences are linked with lower resilience and poor mental well-being. Although the harm of gaslighting cannot be fully eliminated, building resilience can significantly reduce its impact, highlighting its value in therapeutic and preventive efforts. In terms of culture, the study emphasizes the additional challenges that young adults in Pakistan face due to gaslighting. Research emphasizes the urgent need for culturally sensitive interventions and offers a foundation for action and change. Mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers are encouraged to develop psychoeducational initiatives for gaslighting, support services, and resilience-training programs to safeguard the mental health, autonomy, and developmental potential of young adults navigating an increasingly complex relational and cultural landscape.

Ethics Statement

All the ethical standards of APA were met. Informed consent was taken in written form from all the respondents to participate in this study.

Contribution of Authors

Ayesha Irshad: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft,

Aisha Ateeq: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

Source of Funding

The authors declared no source of funding.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [A.I.] upon the reasonable request.

References

- Ahmad, & Kutty, M. (2024). Gaslighting, parenting styles, and the mental health of secondary school students. *Special Education [SE]*, 2(1).
<https://doi.org/10.59055/se.v2i1.26>
- Asif, A., Yasin, H., & Laraib Iqrar. (2024). Personal Growth Initiative, Resilience and Psychological Wellbeing in Young Adults of Pakistan. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(1), 412–421.
<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.1.35>
- Barber, B. K. (1996). Parental Psychological Control: Revisiting a Neglected Construct. *Child Development*, 67(6), 3296–3319.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1131780>
- Bhatti, M. M., Shuja, K. H., Aqeel, M., Bokhari, Z., Gulzar, S. N., Fatima, T., & Sama, M. (2023). Psychometric development and validation of victim gaslighting questionnaire (VGQ): across female sample from Pakistan. *International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare*, 16(1), 4-18.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/ijhrh-12-2020-0119>
- Boyd, N. (2013). *How Seligman's Learned Helplessness Theory Applies to*

- Human Depression and Stress - Video & Lesson Transcript | Study.com.* Study.com.
<https://study.com/academy/lesson/how-seligmans-learned-helplessness-theory-applies-to-human-depression-and-stress.html>
- Butt, M., & Park, S. (2024). The Influence of Cultural and Social Factors on Education in Pakistan. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13(2), 546–556.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i2/21336>
- Ciabatti, M., Nerini, A., & Matera, C. (2025). Gaslighting Experience, Psychological Health, and Well-being: The Role of Self-Compassion and Social Support. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 40(23-24), 5751–5773.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241307232>
- Christensen, M., & Evans-Murray, A. (2021). Gaslighting in nursing academia: A new or established covert form of bullying? *Nursing Forum*, 56(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12588>
- Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. T. (2003). Development of a New Resilience scale: the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). *Depression and Anxiety*, 18(2), 76–82.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/da.10113>
- Fava, G. A., & Tomba, E. (2009). Increasing Psychological Well-Being and Resilience by Psychotherapeutic Methods. *Journal of Personality*, 77(6), 1903–1934.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00604.x>
- Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2005). Adolescent Resilience: A Framework for Understanding Healthy Development in the Face of Risk. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 26(1), 399–419.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.26.021304.144357>
- Galderisi, S., Heinz, A., Kastrup, M., Beezhold, J., & Sartorius, N. (2015). Toward a New Definition of Mental Health. *World Psychiatry*, 14(2), 231–233.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20231>
- Hailes, H. P., & Goodman, L. A. (2023). “They’re out to take away your sanity”: A qualitative investigation of gaslighting in intimate partner violence. *Journal of Family Violence*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00652-1>
- Herrman, H., Stewart, D. E., Diaz-Granados, N., Berger, E. L., Jackson, B., & Yuen, T. (2011). What is Resilience? *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. Revue Canadienne de Psychiatrie*, 56(5), 258–265.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/070674371105600504>
- Hightower, E. (2017). An Exploratory Study of Personality Factors Related to Psychological Abuse and Gaslighting – ProQuest. *Www.proquest.com*.
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/0c6d2066bc1732bdd632be2194fad496/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- Ji, L. (2024). Childhood emotional abuse and depression among Chinese adolescent sample: A mediating and moderating dual role model of rumination and resilience. *Child Abuse & Neglect (Print)*, 149, 106607–106607.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106607>
- Kurniawan, L. (2021). Unwritten Scars: Gaslighting in Relationships. *KaTa Kita*, 9(2), 253–258.

- <https://doi.org/10.9744/katakita.9.2.253-258>
- Lee, S. W., Bae, G. Y., Rim, H.-D., Lee, S. J., Chang, S. M., Kim, B.-S., & Won, S. (2018). Mediating Effect of Resilience on the Association between Emotional Neglect and Depressive Symptoms. *Psychiatry Investigation*, *15*(1), 62–69. <https://doi.org/10.4306/pi.2018.15.1.62>
- McRae, K., Ochsner, K. N., Mauss, I. B., Gabrieli, J. J. D., & Gross, J. J. (2008). Gender Differences in Emotion Regulation: An Fmri Study of Cognitive Reappraisal. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *11*(2), 143–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430207088035>
- Mento, C., Lombardo, C., Nicholas Ian Whithorn, Rosaria, M., Bruno, A., Casablanca, M., & Maria Catena Silvestri. (2023). Psychological violence and manipulative behavior in couple: A focus on personality traits. *Journal of Mind and Medical Sciences*, *10*(2), 172–177. <https://doi.org/10.22543/2392-7674.1399>
- Mustafa, A. (2024). Association of risk and protective factors with the mental health status among adolescents in Punjab, Pakistan. *Journal of Population Therapeutics & Clinical Pharmacology*, 2071–2080. <https://doi.org/10.53555/jptcp.v31i6.6824>
- Nall, R. (2020, June 29). *Gaslighting: What it is, long-term effects, and what to do*. Medical News Today. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/long-term-effects-of-gaslighting>
- Newport Institute. (2021). *How to Tell If Someone Is Gaslighting You*. Newport Institute. https://www.newportinstitute.com/resources/mental-health/what_is_gaslighting_abuse/
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1983). Learned Helplessness and Victimization. *Journal of Social Issues*, *39*(2), 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1983.tb00143.x>
- Sahar, N., & Muzaffar, N. (2018). Role of Family System, Positive Emotions and Resilience in Social Adjustment among Pakistani Adolescents. *Journal of Educational, Health and Community Psychology*, *6*, 46-58. <https://doi.org/10.12928/jehcp.v6i2.6944>
- Sanghai S., (2024) A Study on Psychological Distress due to Fear of Missing Out and Gaslighting among Young Adults. *Psychopediajournals.com*. <https://psychopediajournals.com/index.php/ijiap/article/view/137/109>
- Sarkar, Q. (2024). From Tolerance to Transformation: Unraveling the Impact of Organizational Culture and Policies on Addressing Gaslighting in Academia. *International Journal of Innovation in Teaching and Learning (IJITL)*, *10*(1), 22–39. <https://doi.org/10.35993/ijitl.v10i1.304>
- Sengkey, M. M., & Illahibaccus-Sona, S. B. (2024). Psychological and behavioral impacts of early adult women victims of gaslighting behavior in romantic relationships. *INSPIRA: Indonesian Journal of Psychological Research*, *5*(1), 38–48. <https://doi.org/10.32505/inspira.v5i1.7277>
- Shousha, N.M. (2023). *Now, You Can Breathe: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences and Resilience of Egyptian Women Victimized by*

- Narcissistic Relationships*. Virtual Commons - Bridgewater State University.,25(1),14
<https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss1/14>
- Srivastava, K. (2011). Positive mental health and its relationship with resilience. *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, 20(2), 75.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3530291/>
- Stewart-Brown, S., & Janmohamed, K. (2008). *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) User Guide*.
<http://www.mentalhealthpromotion.net/resources/user-guide.pdf>
- Sweet, P. L. (2019). The Sociology of Gaslighting. *American Sociological Review*, 84(5), 851–875.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419874843>
- Taylor, S. E., Sherman, D. K., Kim, H. S., Jarcho, J., Takagi, K., & Dunagan, M. S. (2004). Culture and Social Support: Who Seeks It and Why? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(3), 354–362.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.3.354>
- Velickovic, K., Rahm Hallberg, I., Axelsson, U., Borrebaeck, C. A. K., Rydén, L., Johnsson, P., & Månsson, J. (2020). Psychometric properties of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) in a non-clinical population in Sweden. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 18(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12955-020-01383-3>