

Self- assertion and its relationship to perception of psychological stress among students of Khemis Miliana University

."Practical study at faculty of Social Siences and Humanities "

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Abstract:

Through this study, the researcher seeks to explore the relationship between self-assertion and the level of perception of psychological stress among students at Khemis Miliana University and to determine the degree of self-assertion and the level of perception of psychological stress among them. The study was applied to a sample of 89 male and female students randomly selected from faculty of social sciences and Humanities for the academic year 2019-2020.

The researcher used the descriptive correlational approach, relying on the Rathus Self-Assertion Scale (Rathus, 1978) and the Psychological Stress Perception Scale prepared by (Levenstein, et al 1993). The findings revealed that the students' scores were moderate on both scales (self-assertion and perception of psychological stress), with a statistically significant weak negative relationship at the level (0.05) between the two variables (level of self-assertion and level of perception of psychological stress).

Keywords: self-assertion; perception psychological stress.

ملخص:

يسعى الباحث من خلال هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف العلاقة بين تأكيد الذات ومستوى إدراك الضغط النفسي لدى طلبة جامعة خميس مليانة، وتحديد مدى تأكيد الذات ومستوى إدراك الضغط النفسي لديهم. طبقت الدراسة على عينة قدرها 89 طالبًا وطالبة اختيروا بطريقة عشوائية من كلية العلوم الاجتماعية والعلوم الانسانية للسنة الجامعية 2019-2020. استخدم الباحث المنهج الوصفي الارتباطي، معتمدا في ذلك على مقياس تأكيد الذات لـ (رathوس، 1978) ومقياس إدراك الضغط النفسي من إعداد (لفنستاين وآخرين، 1993). وأظهرت النتائج أن درجات الطلبة كانت متوسطة في كلا المقياسين (تأكيد الذات ومستوى إدراك الضغط النفسي)، مع وجود علاقة سلبية ضعيفة ذات دلالة إحصائية عند مستوى (0.05) بين المتغيرين (تأكيد الذات ومستوى إدراك الضغط النفسي).

الكلمات المفتاحية: تأكيد الذات؛ إدراك الضغط النفسي .

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1- Introduction:

Man is a complex being that combines mind, spirit and emotions, and these aspects interact together to ensure the continuity of life. Rapid developments in societies at the scientific and social levels have led to the emergence of many problems and conflicts, resulting in great pressures on individuals. To overcome these pressures, the individual must achieve his social existence through his ability to communicate effectively with others with high efficiency and skill, which enhances interaction and mutual understanding. In this context, it is clear that self-affirmation is one of the important variables that contribute to improving positive perceptions of ourselves, through freedom to express and act, whether in a positive direction (such as expressing acceptance, participation, love, friendliness, and admiration) or in the negative direction. (such as expressing rejection, disapproval, pain, and sadness).

The individual tends to assert himself out of the need for appreciation, recognition, independence, and self-reliance. The need for self-assertion is not a conflict between individuals, but in fact it is a means of achieving the individual's self-satisfaction. This self-confidence is considered a strong pillar that enables him to succeed in various types of interaction family and social, achieving sensory satisfaction and academic achievement throughout his life.

Self-assertion is a fundamental need from which other psychological, physical and social needs emerge. It pushes the individual towards continuous self-development, while his need for appreciation motivates him to strive towards achieving status and social value. The self-assertion drive is satisfied through personal success and the ability to adhere to high moral standards. (Yasser Al-Amoudi, 2001, p. 26).

Moreover, self-assertion is considered one of the pillars of psychological health, as individuals with high self-assertion can alleviate their tensions through assertive methods such as protest and rejection. They may also request that others change or modify their behavior, or they may offer criticism or warn someone against engaging in certain unacceptable behaviors. On the other hand, those who lack self-assertion tend to suppress their emotions. (Ahlam Hussein Wara, 2018, p. 2431).

Assertiveness is a form of positivity in social relationships. An assertive person is confident, proactive, and unafraid in social situations. They can engage in discussions and express their opinions, even when they differ from others. In contrast, a non-assertive person tends to be shy and fearful. (Mukhaymar et al., 2015, p. 347).

In clearer and more precise terms, "self-assertion is the individual's ability to reveal and openly express their true feelings, which leads to reduced anxiety and improved capacity to form friendships and social relationships. It also enhances self-esteem, adaptability, and self-disclosure, providing the individual with many spontaneous skills in expressing emotions and ideas. This encourage them to initiate relationships with others." (Al-Nabigha, 2016, p. 170).

Self-assertion and the perception of psychological stress among university students are vital topics that intersect with various psychological and social sciences. Self-assertion can be considered a psychological process aimed at enabling individuals to express their feelings, needs, and opinions in a healthy and constructive manner. This behavior fosters self-confidence and improves personal and professional relationships, particularly in environments such as universities where students face numerous academic and social challenges. Students with high levels of self-assertion are able to clearly and directly express their feelings and

thoughts. These factors contribute to achieving psychological and social balance. When individuals are capable of asserting themselves positively, they possess the self-confidence and ability to handle life situations effectively, thereby reducing psychological stress. They also develop better emotional regulation and are able to cope with stress-inducing situations in more positive ways. This, in turn, has a direct and positive impact on their academic performance and mental health.

1.1- Research Problem

The university level is a critical period in a student's life, where their interactions with others increase, making them more susceptible to various pressures and the disturbances resulting from those pressures. This compels the student to assert their personal traits and positions, often causing them to act in ways that differ from their usual behavior in an attempt to assert their identity, personality, and defend their rights. Additionally, the developmental stage they are experiencing can lead to both positive and negative situations that affect their psychological, emotional, and social state.

When students face situations that cause them distress, they express their feelings through opposition and dissatisfaction without infringing upon the rights of other whether fellow students, professors, administrators, or staff. Other factors may also contribute to the psychological pressures they face. If students exhibit assertive behavior, they are better able to actualize their potential and capabilities to cope with these pressures, owing to their ability to express rejection and disclose their feelings. This is supported by Abu Ghazala (1999), who found "a correlation between low psychological stress and the ability to reject, as one dimension of assertive behavior" (Al-Ajala, 2012, p. 82).

Tavakoli et al. (2009) conducted a study aimed at examining the effectiveness of assertiveness training in reducing psychological stress among individuals. The study sample consisted of 118 international students at a North American university. After undergoing training sessions, the results indicated that assertiveness training had a positive effect in reducing stress, negative emotions, and feelings among university students (Al-Dajani, 2023, p. 593).

Assertiveness involves expressing thoughts, opinions, emotions, and beliefs in a balanced and positive manner, appropriate to different social situations. It reflects an individual's ability to express their feelings and emotions as required by the situation, without denying the emotions of others. When persons are positive in their assertiveness, they gain confidence in dealing with others. Conversely, if they are negative in their assertiveness, their self-confidence diminishes, leading to problems that are difficult to solve, causing pressures that may affect their behavior toward themselves and others.

"It has become clear that high self-esteem leads to increased competence and effectiveness in dealing with many life pressures, as it is one of the most important personality variables and represents the psychological core" (MouisyFarid, 2008, p. 162).

Thus, it is evident that enhancing assertiveness among university students is not only a matter of improving personal skills but also a crucial step towards improving overall mental health and reducing psychological stress. This complex and multifaceted relationship between assertiveness and the perception of psychological stress calls for further research and practical applications to ensure a supportive and motivating university environment. Therefore, this study aims to explore the nature of the relationship between self-assertion and the level of perceived stress among university students by answering the following questions:

1. What is the level of self-assertion among university students?
2. What is the level of perceived psychological stress among university students?

3. Is there a relationship between self-assertion and the perception of psychological stress among university students?

1.2- Study hypotheses:

Through the study questions, we can put forward the following hypotheses.

1. University students have a moderate level of self-assertion.
2. University students have a moderate level of perceived psychological stress.
3. There is a negative relationship between the level of self-assertion and the level of perceived psychological stress among university students.

1.3- Study Objectives: This study aims to

- Determine the level of self-assertion among university students.
- Assess the level of perceived psychological stress among university students.
- Explore the nature of the relationship between self-assertion and the perception of psychological stress among university students.

1.4- Significance of the Study :

- This study addresses two highly significant variables in human life: self-assertion and the perception of psychological stress. Self-assertion is considered one of the most critical variables for enhancing an individual's self-confidence, particularly in the current era filled with diverse stressors.
- It focuses on a crucial segment of society—university students—and examines their self-assertion and confidence in their opinions, which has a direct impact on their personality and their ability to achieve positive psychological adjustment. This is particularly important as they undergo a sensitive phase of life, adolescence, where they need to assert themselves through assertive behavior based on openness and honesty in their relationships with others.
- This study also seeks to draw the attention of those in charge to pay more attention to students in order to create an environment that supports good learning and provides solutions to the factors contributing to the stress they experience daily.

1.5- Study limitations :

1.5.1- Objective limits: The study focuses on measuring the level of self-assertion and its relationship to the level of perceived psychological stress among university students.

1.5.2- Geographical limits: The study was conducted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Khemis Miliana University, Ain Defla.

1.5.3- Time limits: The study was applied during the second trimester of the academic year 2019-2020.

1.5.4- Human limits: The study was applied to a sample of students at Khemis Miliana University.

1.6- Operational Definitions :

1.6.1- Self-Assertion: Nashashibi (2003) defines self-assertion as verbal and non-verbal behavioral skills that are situational and involve resistance to the pressures others may exert to compel an individual to act against their desires. It also includes the ability to initiate, continue, or end social interactions. Lang and Jakobowski define assertiveness as "defending one's rights and expressing thoughts, beliefs, and emotions in a clear and

direct manner, in a way that is appropriate and does not harm others or violate their rights" (Ben Zeroual&Yousfi, 2019, p. 25).

It is operationally expressed as the score that the student obtains from his response on the self- Assertion scale applied in this study.

1.6.2- Psychological Stress: Caplan (1981) defines stress as "the discrepancy between the demands that need to be met by the individual and their ability to respond to them."

It is operationally defined in this study as the score that the student obtains from his response on the psychological pressure scale developed by (Levenstein) applied in this study.

2- Method and Tools:

2.1- Research Design: This study adopts a descriptive approach, as it examines the relationship between two variables (self-assertion and perceived psychological stress) among a sample of university students.

2.2- Study Sample:

The study sample is divided into:

2.2.1- Pilot study Sample: The study was applied to a pilot sample of (30 male and female students) from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at KhemisMiliana University during the second semester of the academic year 2019/2020, with the aim of verifying the validity and reliability of the study scales.

2.2.2- Study Sample: The study sample was randomly selected from the the population of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at KhemisMiliana University and it consisted of 89 male and female students.

2.3- Measurement Instruments:

2.3.1- Self-Assertion Scale (Rathus; 1978):

This scale consists of (29) items that measure the level of self- Assertion among the study sample, and are answered according to the following alternatives: (yes, sometimes, no). The values are given to them (3-2-1) in order, and the total score of the scale ranges between (29 -87), when the student answers all of the scale's statements, Students with higher grades have a high level of self- Assertion, while students with lower grades have a low level of self-Assertion.

2.3.2- Perceived Psychological Stress Scale:

This scale consists of 30 items that are divided into positive items and negative items, and are answered according to the following alternatives: (usually, often, sometimes, never), with the values (4-3-2-1) In order, the values for negative items are reversed, then the scores are added to find the total score for the test, and the stress perception index in this scale is calculated according to the following equation:

$$\text{Stress Perception Index} = (\text{Raw Score} - 30) / 90$$

The total score after calculating the Stress Perception Index ranges from zero (0), indicating the lowest level of stress, to one (1), indicating the highest possible level of stress.

Positively worded items: There are 22 positive items (2-3-4-5-6-8-9-11-12-14-15-16-18-19-20-22-23-24-26-27- 28-30), if the student answers it with acceptance, this is evidence of a high level of perception of pressure, but if he answers it with rejection, it indicates a low level of perception of pressure.

Negatively worded items: There are 08 items negative: (1-7-10-13-17-21-25-29). If the student answers it with rejection, this indicates a high level of perception of pressure, but if he answers it with acceptance, it indicates a low level of perception of pressure. (Hakima AitHamouda, 2005, p. 67)

2.4- Psychometric Properties of the Study Tools:

The two scales were applied to a group of students from outside the study sample, numbering 30 male and female students. Then, validity and reliability were calculated as follows:

2.4.1- Self-Assertion Scale:

- **Validity:**

The researcher calculated the “discriminant validity”, where the scores of the survey sample were arranged in ascending order, then a percentage of (27%) was taken from both sides (highest and lowest) and their number was estimated at (8) students from a group, and the difference between the two averages was calculated, using t-test, and the results were as follows:

Table (1) Results of the "t" test to calculate the discriminant validity of the self-Assertion scale.

The two comparison groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Statistical significance
upper third	8	66.75	2.43	10.62	14	0.00
Lower third	8	50.75	3.49			

The Source: Prepared by the researcher using the spss program

It is noted from Table No. (1) that the significance value "sig" was (0.00), which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. so it is statistically significant, meaning that there are differences between individuals with high and low self-assertion, which indicates that the test is valid and can differentiate between individuals.

- **Reliability:**

The reliability coefficient was 0.67 using Cronbach's alpha equation, which is an acceptable value in this type of educational studies.

2.4.2- Psychological stress perception scale:

- **Validity:**

The researcher used "Discriminant validity", where the scores of the survey sample were arranged in ascending order, then a percentage of (27%) was taken from both parties (highest and lowest) .The number of each group was (8) students. The difference between the means of the two groups was calculated using a t-test, and the results were as follows:

Table (2) Results of the t-test to calculate the discriminant validity of the psychological stress perception scale

The two comparison groups	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	Statistical significance
upper third	8	79.12	3.98	8.53	14	0.00
Lower third	8	61	4.50			

The Source: Prepared by the researcher using the spss program

It is noted from table No. (2) that the significance value "sig" was (0.00), which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. so it is statistically significant, meaning that there are differences between individuals with high and low perceived psychological stress, which indicates that the test is valid and can differentiate between individuals.

- **Reliability:**

The reliability coefficient was 0.64 using Cronbach's alpha equation, which is an acceptable value in this type of educational studies

3-Results and Discussion:

3.1- Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the First Hypothesis Results:

The first hypothesis indicates that: University students have a moderate level of self-assertion. To verify this hypothesis, the levels of self-assertion (high, moderate, low) were calculated based on the results of the mean and standard deviation of the study sample, which consisted of 89 university students. The table below presents the obtained results:

Table (3) The mean and standard deviation of the study sample scores on the Self-Assertion Scale.

variable	Sample	Mean	Standard deviation
self-assertion	89	52.87	5.25

The Source: Prepared by the researcher using the spss program

The frequencies of the three levels (high- medium- low) of the self- assertion variable were extracted among the study sample, and the results were as follows:

Table (4) Distribution of self-assertion levels among the study sample.

Levels	Duplicates	Percentage
High level (58 and more)	15	16.85%
Medium level (between 48 and 58)	60	67.42%
Low level (48 and less)	14	15.73%
Total	89	100%

The Source: Prepared by the researcher using the spss program

To compare the extent of agreement of the observed results illustrated in Table N°4 with the expected results, the chi-square Goodness of fit test was applied. The value of the significance level was (0.00), this value is less than the value of ($\alpha = 0.05$). Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis That is, there are differences between the three levels, and after comparing the arithmetic averages for the three categories, it turns out that the differences are in favor of the Medium level category.

From the above table, it can be observed that the sample is distributed across three different levels, with 67.42% in the moderate level, 15.73% in the low level, and 16.85% in the high level. The results from Table 3 show that the self-assertion level was moderate according to the responses of the sample members, with a mean of 52.87 and a standard deviation of 5.25. This result indicates that university students have a moderate level of self-assertion. The researcher concluded that participants are exposed to various situations where they sometimes act cautiously and are unable to defend their personal principles, positions, and rights, especially when dealing with professors or administrators, which sometimes leads them to experience psychological stress. On the other hand, some students express their feelings, desires, and true inclinations with honesty and transparency, defending their principles and personal rights, and sometimes even resorting to aggression, as evidenced by numerous disciplinary councils across different universities.

There is also a group of students who lean more towards non-assertiveness due to fear of facing potential problems. They tend to please others, align with their desires, and seek to satisfy them, even at the expense of their own needs, often resulting in depression, anxiety, and social phobia. This might be due to a lack of experience, as they have not encountered many situations requiring self-assertion, or due to fear of rejection or criticism from peers or professors, which can hinder their self-assertion. Cultural diversity among students from different regions of the country also impacts self-assertion levels. In some cultures, collective behaviors and humility are preferred over self-assertion. Cultures, especially in remote areas, encourage modesty and discourage boasting, affecting individuals' ability to express themselves confidently. This was highlighted in the study by Markus and Kitayama (1991), which found that collective cultures tend to diminish self-assertion compared to individualistic cultures.

Additionally, the age of university students, being in adolescence, focuses on psychological and social development. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development indicates that the youth phase (18-25 years) focuses on identity and relationship-building. Students in this stage may be exploring their identities and forming new relationships, which can affect their level of self-assertion. This is supported by Adams (2001), who emphasized that this age is a critical period for identity formation and self-assertion. These combined factors (life changes and stress, lack of experience, fear of rejection or criticism, upbringing, psychological factors, and social influences) may lead to a moderate level of self-assertion among university students. It is essential to work on developing this skill through training, psychological, and community support to enhance students' self-confidence and their ability to express their opinions and needs.

3.2- Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the Results of the Second Hypothesis:

The second hypothesis indicates that: University students have a moderate level of psychological stress perception. To verify the hypothesis, the stress perception index was calculated using the previously mentioned equation, with a theoretical maximum score of 1

and a theoretical minimum score of 0. The mean score of the sample on the psychological stress perception scale was 0.45, with a standard deviation of 0.116., as illustrated in Table N^o 5.

Table (5) The mean and standard deviation of the study sample scores on the perception psychological stress level scale

variable	Sample	Mean	Standard deviation
perception psychological stress	89	0.45	0.116

The Source: Prepared by the researcher using the spss program

The frequencies of the three levels (high - medium - low) of the perception psychological stress variable were extracted among the study sample, and the results were as follows:

Table (6) Distribution of the pressure perception levels among the study sample.

Levels	Duplicates	Percentage
High level (0.57 and more)	18	20.2%
Medium level (between 0.33 and 0.57)	57	64.1%
Low level (0.33 and less)	14	15.7%
Total	89	100%

The Source: Prepared by the researcher using the spss program

To compare the extent of agreement of the observed results illustrated in Table N^o6. with the expected results, the chi-square Goodness of fit test was applied. The value of the significance level was (0.00), this value is less than the value of ($\alpha = 0.05$). Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis That is, there are differences between the three levels, and after comparing the arithmetic averages for the three categories, it turns out that the differences are in favor of the Medium level category.

This indicates that students at KhemisMiliana University have a moderate level of psychological stress perception, thus confirming the hypothesis. It is inferred from the results that students are in a new phase of their lives, namely university life, which increases academic burdens, especially those related to exams and various homework (research papers, exercises, applications, internships, etc.). Many students feel moderate pressure to achieve an acceptable GPA, some of them also face financial difficulties related to daily expenses in light of the deterioration of their parents' purchasing power. This increases their stress and anxiety.

The transition from high school to university is often accompanied by major changes in social and personal life, represented by forming new friendships, adapting to a new environment, and being away from family. For students residing in university neighborhoods, they can also be sources of stress, especially for first-year students.

Furthermore, they are approaching professional life, which requires certain competencies, whether academically, emotionally, or socially. Anxiety about future career prospects and job opportunities after graduation can be a major source of stress. Students feel the need to excel and gain practical experience and additional qualifications to improve their job market chances amidst high unemployment rates and a shortage of positions. They are also expected their professional future to achieve their personal and social ambitions and succeed in their lives, which – perhaps – adds to their psychological stress and may impact their daily lives in general and their academic life in particular.

3.3- Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the Results of the Third Hypothesis:

The third hypothesis posited that: There is an negative relationship between self-assertion and psychological stress among university students. To answer this hypothesis, the Pearson Correlation coefficient was calculated between the scores of the two variables (self-assertion and the level of psychological stress), and the following table shows the results:

Table (7) Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Self-Assertion and Psychological Stress Perception.

variable	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Pearson correlation coefficient	Statistical significance
Level of perception of psychological stress	89	0.45	0.116	*0.25-	0.018
self-assertion		70.94	5.25		

*Significant at the level ($\alpha = 0.05$)

The Source: Prepared by the researcher using the spss program

From the previous table N^o7, it appears that the correlation coefficients between the level of stress perception and self-assertion among university students in Khemis Miliana were statistically significant at the level (0.05). The value of the Pearson correlation coefficient was (-0.25), which indicates the existence of a weak negative relationship between self-assertion and the level of perception of psychological stress among the university student.

This result suggests that students who are positive in asserting themselves are less prone to psychological stress and are more balanced in their personal lives, able to express their emotions and reactions confidently when interacting with others. Conversely, students who are negative in asserting themselves have lower self-confidence, which may lead to problems they find difficulty to solve, resulting in psychological stress that affects their behavior towards themselves and others. The researcher explains this result by noting that students encounter various situations and exhibit behaviors that fluctuate between assertiveness and non-assertiveness. In all cases, this causes students to be in a state of doubt and fear of the consequences of the situations they experience, which may impact their future and generate psychological stress.

The transition to university represents a significant shift in a student's life, which can cause psychological and social stress that may affect self-assertion, especially given students' limited social and psychological experiences, high academic competition, and insufficient experience in dealing with conflicts and challenging situations. This affects their self-confidence and self-assertion, without neglecting the developmental changes associated with the university age, which can impact self-esteem and self-assertion. Laura J. Friedlander et al. (2007) in their study at the University of Toronto state that the transition from high school to university is a major change in many adolescents' lives. While it provides learning experiences and opportunities for psychological and social development, it can also be a source of stress and pressure due to increased academic demands and the formation of new social relationships. This uncertainty about their ability to meet these demands can lead to decreased academic performance and increased psychological distress, making first-year students particularly vulnerable.

This is also supported by the researcher Hind Omar Jaafar Al-Dajani Al-Otaibi, whose study indicated a statistically significant inverse relationship ($p < .001$) between self-assertion and overall psychological stress and its sub-dimensions (family stress, economic stress, academic stress, social stress, emotional stress, health stress, personal stress) among female students at Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University.

4- Conclusion:

The rapid technological advancements and current global changes indicate a potential increase in life pressures on individuals. These pressures, whether internal or external in nature, elicit varying responses from people depending on their personal characteristics and the intensity of the stress they experience. While some pressures may have a positive and motivating effect, exceeding an acceptable threshold can lead to negative consequences for mental health. In this context, the ability to assert oneself positively is considered a crucial factor in managing these pressures. A person with strong assertiveness skills is more likely to cope with stress effectively, thereby reducing its negative impact on their psychological well-being. Conversely, those who lack this skill may experience lower self-confidence and face difficulties in tackling challenges, which in turn increases their levels of psychological stress.

The findings of this field study support this notion, showing an inverse relationship between Self-Assertion and the perception of psychological stress among university students. The study revealed that students with high levels of Self-Assertion experience lower levels of psychological stress, positively affecting their personal lives and their ability to express emotions confidently. On the other hand, students with weaker Self-Assertion are more susceptible to psychological stress, which negatively impacts their behavior toward themselves and others. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends the following:

- Implementing strategies to enhance Self-Assertion by employing various methods such as lectures, debates, role-playing, brainstorming, and storytelling techniques.
- Expanding university counseling services to improve students' Self-Assertion levels, which would help alleviate their psychological stress.
- Organizing training courses and workshops focused on stress management and Self-Assertion development to equip students with the skills needed to handle stress, reduce tension, and improve concentration.
- Providing social support to students by the administration, And the professors, friends, and family, as this has a positive impact on their psychological health.

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