

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**Mediating Role of Self-Objectification between Emotional Maturity and Psychological Distress in Pakistani Women**Kiran Tariq Malik<sup>1</sup>, Hina Rana<sup>2\*</sup>, Rabbia Ashraf<sup>3</sup>, Izza Tariq<sup>4</sup>**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** The present research intended to find the association among emotional maturity, self objectification, and psychological distress in Pakistani women. It also aimed to investigate the mediating role of self-objectification between emotional maturity and psychological distress.

**Study Design:** Correlational research.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study was conducted at the Department of Clinical Psychology, Riphah Institute of Clinical and Professional Psychology Lahore, Pakistan from March 2020 to June 2020.

**Methods:** A sample of 153 women was recruited from all over Pakistan and data was collected through an online Google Forms link. The emotional maturity scale, objectified body consciousness scale, depression anxiety stress scale, and demographic sheet were used for assessing the target study variables. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to measure the strength of a linear association.

**Results:** Emotional maturity has a significant positive correlation with psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress). Moreover, self-objectification (surveillance and body shame) was significantly positively related to psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress). Hierarchical regression analysis indicated that emotional maturity is significant predictor of depression ( $\beta=0.78$ ,  $P$ -value  $< 0.001$ ), anxiety ( $\beta=0.68$ ,  $P$ -value  $< 0.001$ ), and stress ( $\beta=0.69$ ,  $P$ -value  $< 0.001$ ) whereas self-objectification- body shame only serves as significant predictor of stress ( $\beta=0.19$ ,  $P<.01$ ).

**Conclusion:** Findings revealed that emotional maturity and self-objectification were significantly positively correlated with psychological distress. It was observed that emotional maturity predicts psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress). Whereas, the self-objectification subscale (body shame) predicts psychological distress (stress). Moreover, body shame mediates the relationship between emotional maturity and psychological distress (stress).

**Keywords:** *Body Image, Mental Health, Psychological Maturity, Psychological Distress, Stress, Self-Concept.*

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**Introduction**

Women are frequently seen by society as objects, with a sexual focus on their bodies rather than on their skills.<sup>1</sup> Women are socialized to accept an observer's viewpoint on their body because of the ubiquitousness of these objectification experiences. Women who conceive of and treat themselves as things to be viewed and judged based on appearance are said to be self-objectifying.<sup>1,2</sup>

According to objectification theory, self-objectification results in continual self-monitoring and a state of self-consciousness that promotes feelings of shame and fear.<sup>3</sup> Self-

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objectifications have been linked to harmful results in both men and women. According to the literature, self-objectification is linked to increased rates of body shame and appearance anxiety.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the guilt and anxiety that arise from it have been proven to later cause depression.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, increased self-objectification promotes general shame and heightens negative emotions.<sup>6</sup>

Emotions are a powerful motivating force on one's goals, ideas, and behavior.<sup>7</sup> The emotional aspect of maturity is the most important factor in the development of a comprehensive personality, especially for females.<sup>8</sup> According to Menninger, emotional maturity is the capacity to deal with reality in a healthy way.<sup>9</sup> A person's capacity to manage distressing emotions and have a balanced personality is referred to as emotional maturity.<sup>10</sup> Emotional maturity provides individuals the strength to deal calmly with all adversities and tragedies in life. Instead, understanding one's own emotions provides insight into the behaviors and emotions of others.<sup>11</sup>

According to the literature, emotional maturity is significant in increasing one's self-esteem, empathy, independence, emotional stability, and mental stability.<sup>10</sup> According to Kaplan and Baron emotional maturity affects a person's enjoyment of qualities like the ability to tolerate a delay in meeting needs, to tolerate a sense of deprivation and frustration, the ability to postpone or revise their expectations in terms of circumstances, and the belief in long-term planning.<sup>12</sup> Emotionally immature people, on the other hand, are unable to move past their negative emotions and are unable to make sense of circumstances or properly defend themselves resulting in psychological distress.<sup>13,14</sup>

The present study was conducted to assess how low emotional maturity and self-objectification will disturb women's lives and lead to psychological distress. Women are the crucial building blocks of society, so it is important to explore the factors that lead to the development of distress them. Besides this, the mediating role of self-objectification has not been explored yet in Pakistani culture, so it is necessary to fill the gap and conduct research.

## Methods

A correlational study plan was utilized to elaborate relationship among emotional maturity, self-objectification, and psychological distress. The study was carried out at the Department of Clinical Psychology, Riphah Institute of Clinical and Professional Psychology from March 2020 to June 2020. After obtaining permission from the Ethical Review Board held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 vide letter no. FSS & H/ERC/RICPP/20/0323. The hypothesis included whether There is likely to be a relationship among emotional maturity, self-objectification, and psychological distress in women; emotional maturity and self-objectification are likely to predict psychological distress in women and self-objectification is likely to mediate the relationship between emotional maturity and psychological distress in women.

The Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from 153 women of the age range 18-25 years of mean age 21.54 years  $\pm$  2.12 standard deviation. Only unmarried educated women were included in the current study. The research instrument used were the emotional maturity scale, objectified body consciousness scale (OBSC), and depression anxiety stress scale (DASS).<sup>14-16</sup>

The emotional maturity scale comprised 48 items, rated on a five-point Linkert scale (5 Always and 1= Never), where a higher score shows high immaturity. The internal consistency of the scale on the current sample is excellent i.e. 0.86.<sup>14</sup>

The Objectified Body Consciousness Scale has a total 24-item objectified body consciousness scale was used to measure self-objectification. The scale range is from 1-7 in which 1 strongly disagrees and 7= strongly agree. The internal consistency of scale on present data was moderate i.e. 0.65.<sup>15</sup>

Depression anxiety stress scale consist of 21 items. The scale comprised of three self-reported scales assessing negative psychological states of depression, anxiety, and stress.<sup>16,17</sup> The scale was rated on a 3-point scale i.e. from 0-3 in which 0=mild, 1=moderate, 2=severe, and 3= extremely severe. The internal consistency of its subscales is between 0.90-0.84 which is excellent.

Formal permission from the research ethical committee of my own academic institute for

conducting research was taken. Formal permission from respective authors for using their tools was taken and permission from authors who translated these tools in Urdu was also taken. First, a pilot study was conducted on sample of 20 participants to assess the research logistics and comprehension of the questionnaires. In a pilot study, data was collected physically from different women. The participants were briefed about the aim and class of the study and completed the questionnaire. They reported no confusion in understanding the questionnaire thus no changes were suggested in

piloting. Then online form was created that included important instructions, demographics, and questionnaires. The link was shared with women through social media sites. Records forms were gathered online in three weeks and the total data was 153.

**Results**

Results of Table-1 showed that emotional maturity has a significant positive correlation with psychological distress subscale's depression, anxiety, and stress.

Moreover, results also showed that self-

**Table-1: Relationship among emotional maturity, self-objectification and psychological distress**

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	S.D
<b>Emotional Maturity</b>									
1. Emotional Maturity	-	0.25**	0.28**	-0.11	0.78**	0.74**	0.76**	107.2	30.5
<b>Self-Objectification</b>									
2. Surveillance		-	0.48**	0.41**	0.29**	0.29**	0.30**	34.5	9.96
3. Body Shame			-	0.40**	0.27**	0.32**	0.41**	29.3	10.1
4. Control Beliefs				-	-0.03	-0.03	0.01	36.7	10.0
<b>Psychological Distress</b>									
5. Depression					-	0.85**	0.81**	7.43	5.91
6. Anxiety						-	0.78**	6.26	5.07
7. Stress							-	9.30	5.65

Note. M= mean, S.D= Standard Deviation, \*\*P<.01; \*P<.05

objectification (subscale surveillance and body shame) was significantly positively related to psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress). This means that a high score in self-objectification was found to be related to higher psychological

distress (depression, anxiety, and stress).

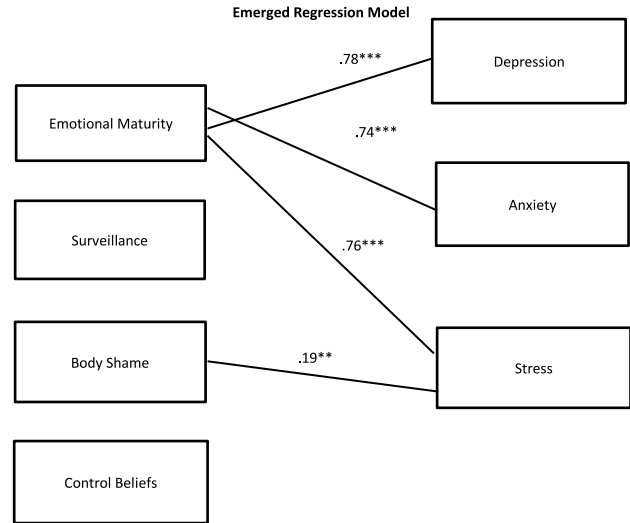
Table-2 results showed that emotional maturity emerged as a powerful predictor. when depression was taken as an outcome variable ( $\beta=0.78$ ,  $P$ -value < 0.001). Beta ( $\beta$ ) in a regression table is a standardized

**Table-2: Hierarchal regression predicting self-objectification and psychological distress in women**

Variables	Depression		Anxiety		Stress	
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$B$
<b>Model 1</b>	0.10		0.00		0.00	
Age		-0.10		-0.09		-0.04
<b>Model 2</b>	0.78		0.55		0.58	
Age		-0.03		-0.02		0.02
Emotional maturity		0.78***		0.74***		0.76***
<b>Model 3</b>	0.67		0.57		0.62	
Age		-0.03		-0.03		0.01
Emotional maturity		0.75***		0.68***		0.69***
Surveillance		0.09		0.08		0.03
Body Shame		0.01		0.10		0.19**
Control Beliefs		0.00		-0.36		-0.00
Total R <sup>2</sup>	0.67		0.57		0.62	
n						153

Note. EM=Emotional Maturity; \*P<.05; \*\*P<.01; \*\*\*P<.001; n= no. of participants,  $\beta$  = Standardized Coefficient;  $\Delta R^2 = R^2_{Squarechange}$ ;  $R^2 = R^2_{Squ}$

coefficient showing the direction and strength of an independent variable's effect on the dependent variable (holding others constant). The standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.78 indicates a strong positive correlation. This means higher emotional maturity significantly reduces the likelihood of depression, with this factor alone explaining a substantial 67% of the variation in depression scores. The  $P$ -value, which is less than 0.001, signifies an incredibly low chance of this result happening by random chance. Similarly, it was seen that when anxiety was added as an outcome variable then again emotional maturity came out as a significant predictor of anxiety ( $\beta=0.68$ ,  $P$ -value < 0.001). This model was significant with  $R^2$  change showing the variance explained by emotional maturity is 57%. Moreover, when stress was taken as the outcome variable, emotional maturity ( $\beta=0.69$ ,  $P$ -value < 0.001) and self-objectification subscale' body shame ( $\beta=0.19$ ,  $P<.01$ ) strongly predicted stress. The overall model was significant with  $R^2$  change of 0.62 means it explained



**Fig.1: Model showing Standardized Coefficient Values, of Emotional Maturity and Self-Objectification (Body shame) as significant predictors of Psychological Distress  $p$  denote statistical significance level, \*\*\* =  $P < .001$  (very high significance), \*\* =  $P < .01$  (high significance)**

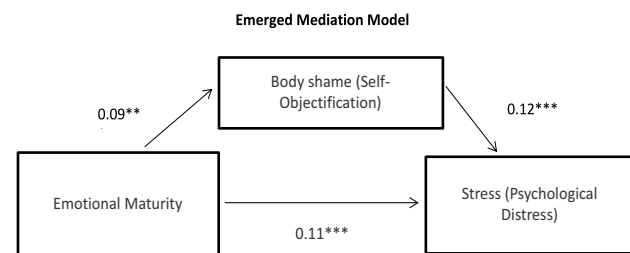
**Table-3: Mediation analysis showing self-objectification (Body shame) as a mediator between emotional maturity and psychological distress (Stress)**

Antecedent	M (Body Shame)				Consequent			
		B	SE	P	c'	$\beta$	SE	P
Emotional Maturity	a	0.09	0.02	0.001	c'	0.12	0.01	0.001
M (Body Shame)					c	0.01	0.00	0.001
Constant	$i_M$	19.19	2.89	0.001	$i_Y$	-8.32	1.58	0.001
		$R^2=.08$				$R^2=.62$		
		F(13.39), $P<.001$				F (61.2), $P<0.001$		

Note. Body Shame(mediator), c = direct effect, c'= indirect effect,  $\beta$ = standard coefficient, SE= Standard Error.  $P$ = significant value,  $i_m$ =constant value of mediator,  $i_y$ = constant value of outcome

62% variance in the model. A graphical depiction of the emerged regression model is shown in Figure.1. The Table-3 demonstrated that emotional maturity has a significant direct relationship with body shame (denoted by path a) and the stress subscale of psychological distress (denoted by path c). The standardized coefficients for these relationships are  $\beta =0.09$  ( $P < 0.001$ ) and  $\beta = 0.12$  ( $P < 0.001$ ), respectively. Additionally, the results indicated that the indirect effect (denoted by path c') is also significant, with a standardized coefficient of  $\beta = 0.01$  ( $P < 0.001$ ). Therefore, the mediation analysis revealed that body shame partially mediates the relationship between emotional maturity and psychological distress. A value of  $P < 0.001$  suggests a

very low probability (less than 1 in 1000) that the relationship occurred by chance. The F-value and  $R^2$  (explained variation) indicate how well the model fits the data. A higher F-value



**Fig.2: Emerged Mediation model showing Standardized Coefficient Values subscale of Self-Objectification (Body shame) as a mediator between Emotional Maturity and Stress \*\* $P < .001$ , \*\*  $P < .01$**

suggests a better fit, and  $R^2$  represents the percentage of variation explained by the model. The table showed that the F-value and  $R^2$  for the indirect relationship of emotional maturity with psychological distress through body shame were significantly higher ( $F = 61.2$ ,  $R^2 = 67\%$ ) compared to the direct relationship ( $F = 13.30$ ,  $R^2 = 8\%$ ). This suggests that the model explaining the indirect relationship provides a much better fit and accounts for a larger portion of the variation in the data. A graphical depiction of the mediation model is shown in Figure.2.

Thus, emotional maturity influences psychological distress both directly and indirectly through body shame. As emotional maturity decreases, body shame increases, which in turn contributes to higher levels of psychological distress. This indicates that body shame is a significant mediator in the relationship between emotional maturity and psychological distress.

Two mediators such as surveillance and control beliefs were non-significant with stress and mediation was also done with outcome variables such as depression and anxiety but they were not significant.

## Discussion

Throughout a person's life, emotions have a powerful motivating effect on their goals, ideas, and behaviors. One of the most important factors in determining personality is emotional maturity, which also benefits one's mental health.<sup>7</sup> The present study focused on assessing the relationship among emotional maturity, self-objectification, and psychological distress in Pakistani unmarried women.

Current study results indicate that emotional maturity and self-objectification (surveillance and body shame) are positively related to psychological distress (depression anxiety and stress) in women. Moreover, the present study also revealed that emotional maturity predicts psychological distress. These results are consistent with the existing literature. The ability to perceive life properly and clearly, as well as the capacity to manage life's ups and downs in a healthy manner, are the key characteristics of emotional maturity.<sup>14</sup> Studies have found that immaturity is linked with feelings of

anxiety and stress.<sup>18</sup> Emotionally mature people have less stress, anxiety, and depression.<sup>19,20</sup> This may be because emotional maturity imparts critical abilities like self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience.<sup>21</sup>

Firdos and Amanullah also found a significant link between emotional maturity and the mental health of women.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Muehlenkamp and Saris-Baglama state in their study that self-objectification has a direct relationship with depressive symptomatology.<sup>23</sup> A study done by Kahalon et al. also found a positive relationship between self-objectification and depression in women.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Duchesne et al. found a negative perception of one's body image has the effect of lowering self-esteem, which in turn increases psychological distress in adolescents.<sup>25</sup>

Research also revealed that the self-objectification subscale (Body shame) also plays a predicting role in stress. Previous research also supports this as Body shame and body esteem emerged as significant predictors of response to stress and outcomes related to stress.<sup>26</sup>

Self-objectification in terms of body shame was found as a mediator between emotional maturity and stress. In Pakistani culture, Ullah and Khan placed a strong emphasis on the fact that media has not only shaped the female image of "ideals" of beauty that are best, faultless, and perfect, but has also normalized it in our culture and social standards.<sup>27</sup> Physical disorders caused by self-objectification, such as body shame, appearance anxiety, and eating abnormalities, are also among its less desirable side effects in Pakistani women. Moreover, Farhan et al. conducted a study to learn more about Pakistani women's awareness of objectification and self-objectification in women, how it affects women's well-being, and what women have sacrificed to fit into their perspective as seen by a third party.<sup>28</sup> According to their research society was the major leading factor in causing self-objectification, which leads to the development of distorted self-image and psychological disturbances like stress and depression. The study done by Szymanski also shows that sexual objectification was, directly and indirectly, related to depression via greater body surveillance and self-blame.<sup>29</sup> Choma et

al. also found the mediating role of body image between self-objectification and the well-being of individuals.<sup>30</sup> Thus, this shows that emotionally mature females are likely to be less distressed if they don't objectify their bodies.

### Conclusion

Findings revealed that emotional maturity and self-objectification were significantly positively correlated with psychological distress. It was observed that emotional maturity predicts psychological distress (depression, anxiety, stress). Whereas, the self-objectification subscale (body shame) predicts psychological distress (stress). Moreover, body shame mediates the relationship between emotional maturity and psychological distress (stress).

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**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest

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#### Authors Contribution

**KTM:** Idea conception, study designing, data collection, data analysis, results and interpretation

**HA:** Idea conception, study designing, data analysis, results and interpretation, manuscript writing and proofreading

**RA:** Data analysis, results and interpretation, manuscript writing and proofreading

**IT:** Manuscript writing and proofreading