



Self-Perception, Behavioural, and Peer Relationship Problems in Adolescents in Public Schools of Karachi

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Abstract

Purpose: This is a pilot study that observes the interchange of self-perception, behavioural problems, and peer relationship challenges among adolescents in Karachi's public schools, where socioeconomic challenges, cultural pressures, and limited mental health resources intensify susceptibilities, leading to reduced academic performance and well-being. The research aims to investigate the interconnections of self-perception, peer relationships, and behavioural issue. It also evaluates behavioural modifications in educational settings and identifies prompting factors while recommending school-based interventions to foster resilience. A qualitative approach was applied, in which initially surveys were conducted to identify the targeted audience followed by semi-structured interviews with students aged 13-18 years old and a few teachers from the public sector. Data collection took place during October-December 2025, with thematic analysis used for transcriptions to gain qualitative insights, accompanied by survey metrics. This thematic analysis unveiled three interconnected themes: (1) socioeconomic and familial constraints (e.g., language barriers, financial burdens and development of inferiority complexes); (2) gendered differences (e.g., boys' after-school work, girls' household chores reducing academic motivation); and (3) support system gaps (e.g., lack of parental involvement declining teacher efforts). These factors cyclically weaken self-perception, strengthen anxiety/depression, and hinder peer relations, aligning with prior studies on resource-limited Pakistani contexts. Implement targeted interventions, including regular self-perception workshops, scheduled behavioural support sessions, anti-bullying peer systems, and parent-teacher relations to address socioeconomic influences. These holistic strategies can enhance mental health literacy and resilience, informing policy for unbiased school environments.

Keywords: Self- Perception, Behavioural Problems, Socioeconomic Constraints, Adolescents, Familial Constraints

Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial stage of a person's life. It can also be a challenging phase where the teens have multiple perspectives about themselves, their appearance, actions, others and society. These perspectives can cause fluctuations in their behaviours and attitudes, which can affect their personal and academic life, especially for the ones studying in public schools in a city like Karachi, where there are various cultural pressures, financial issues for the majority, societal stress and above all, a major lack of mental health awareness. All such problems lead to a negative perspective of oneself and the people around them. This is also one of the key causes

of anxiety, loneliness, depression and bullying, resulting in a weak academic performance and demotivated vision towards life. According to the previous studies, many school-going teens in Karachi are struggling with mental issues like anxiety, which is caused due to strict parenting and weak physical health (Seemi et al., 2023). However, there is still a huge scope of research to know more about the academic conditions of adolescents dealing with emotional and behavioural problems due to the lack of support (Hussein & Malik, 2009). The study aims to use different research methods to figure out what sort of interventions and strategies can be applied to overcome these issues and develop resilience among adolescents. Adolescents belonging to low to middle-income countries, especially in urban and peri-urban schools of Pakistan, face many challenges related to their mental health and overall well-being. These are underlying problems for their psychological wellness, academic performance and social interaction. The rapidly changing world around them makes the lives of these teens stressful, including their academic demands, family expectations and peer interactions. Along with the adolescents' issues, the teachers' mental health literacy is disturbingly low (with only 30.3% of educators confident in assisting affected students) (Imran et al., 2025). Focusing on these issues, we have limited research in the context of the learning environment of public schools in Karachi. It is vital to understand these problems and design effective strategies to support adolescents' mental and social well-being in such environments. The study therefore aims to investigate the prevalence and interplay of self-perception, peer relationships and behavioural issues challenges among adolescents in public schools. Also, it evaluates behavioural patterns exhibited by these adolescents in their educational environment and identify key factors involved in these issues and propose recommendations for school-based mental health interventions.

Literature Review

Studies on adolescent self-concept, their actions and relationships with their peers set the groundwork for understanding the struggles they experience in vulnerable environments such as public schools in Karachi. Self-perception or self-image of teens, i.e. how they assume their appearance, abilities, well-being and worth, is often structured by social and environmental factors. In Karachi's underprivileged areas, self-esteem differs with age, parental involvement and academic performance. This shows that the family and school interactions shape self-views (Naeem et al., 2023). Moreover, the teens are often concerned about their weight and physical appearance, which leads to misperception. This observation has reflected the discrepancies between adolescents' self-image and actual body mass index, which can lead to unhealthy behaviours (Khan et al., 2017). These findings showed that self-perception issues are connected to cultural and socioeconomic factors in developing areas. Self-perception problems in teens are linked to mental and environmental stress, especially in places with few resources, like public schools. For example, feeling anxious can change how self-esteem and confidence relate to grades. The people who are more anxious may think negatively of themselves, which can affect their academics (Nawaz et al., 2021). A study in Pakistan representing 520 teens in a public university shows that anxiety was related to lower self-esteem and confidence. Girls felt better about themselves than boys, even if they were just as anxious. This means that even though anxiety can hurt how teens see themselves, girls might have something that helps them handle it better. Because of this, schools need programs that help teens deal with stress, since school can make these feelings even stronger. Similarly, teens who have trouble learning might have low self-esteem because they keep having problems at school. This can make them feel lonely and like they aren't good at making friends (Musetti et al., 2019). In Italy, a study of 93 teens between 11 and 16 showed that those with learning problems had lower self-esteem when it came to friends, family, and how they looked. Things like special classes can help. These programs can make teens feel more capable and less lonely because of their parents. This shows

that support can change how struggling teens see themselves. Other data from Pakistan backs up these ideas. Adolescents with visual impairment can feel much better when they are supported by their peers. These friendships can help them grow emotionally and socially, which helps fight the loneliness that they might feel because they are different (Jaleel et al., 2022). A study looked at 80 students in Punjab between 15 and 30 years old and saw that strong friendships helped them feel more confident and act in ways that helped them succeed. This means that when people include students with disabilities, it can raise their self-perception. These ideas fit with risk models that say if someone has a problem like a learning disability or trouble seeing, it can hurt their self-image. But if they have support from others, like good friends, it can stop things from getting worse (Wiener, 2004). Wiener (2004) observed the children with learning disabilities and explained that children might have problems in their personality if they don't have good social skills. This can become worse if they are facing other problems like financial issues or lack of support.

Self-perception can also be different for boys and girls and depend on their culture, especially for South Asian teens. In Delhi, teens with low self-esteem don't sleep well and feel anxious, which is more common in girls because they feel pressure to be beautiful (Sonam et al., 2025). A study of 679 teens between 10 and 19 years old found that about 26% felt depressed because they didn't feel good about themselves. Anxiety made these feelings almost five times worse. These data are similar to other data that suggest self-perception is affected by what others expect. The academic and social life of adolescents is mainly affected by certain behavioural issues like anxiety, depression, and a troublesome approach towards objects and peers. Over a third of children have been reported to struggle with emotional and behavioural problems in the public schools of Pakistan. This is mainly due to the lack of mental health resources (Hussein & Malik, 2009). It has been observed that students (age 5-11) experience higher levels of anxiety and depression, regulated by gender, school type, and family mental health history. These patterns increase in adolescents in public schools due to social stressors (Syed et al., 2007). Bullying is another factor, with a significant number of Pakistani adolescents experiencing victimization at school, which intensifies emotional difficulties. Behavioral problems are common in Pakistani teens. These issues often show up as internal symptoms like anxiety and depression, and external ones like aggression and bullying. These problems get worse because of stress at school and home. A study across seven cities looked at 2,315 students aged 10-19. It found that about 27% had been bullied at school, while about 18% faced it outside. The studies found a strong connection between past victimization and bullying others in the future. Internal symptoms were more common in males, older students, victims of bullying, and kids whose mothers worked. External behaviors were linked to bullying others and similar things. This shows how bullying can lead to emotional problems, especially in public schools that don't have enough resources. A study in Karachi involving 544 teens aged 10-19 found that 33% had moderate to severe anxiety, mostly females (57% of the sample). This was connected to strict parenting (20%), lack of tuition (21%), too much screen time playing games (18%), and not enough exercise (31%) (Seemi et al., 2023). Data analysis showed that these were key predictors, with strict parenting playing a role in collectivist families, where high expectations can cause worry and isolation. Teachers need to be more aware to deal with these behaviors. A study of 748 high school teachers from Kenya, Pakistan, and Colombia showed that they didn't score well on questionnaires about anxiety (9.14/22) and depression (9.36/22). Only about 30% felt confident in helping students with these issues (Imran et al., 2025). Pakistani teachers scored worse, blaming it on heavy workloads and stigma. Those with past mental health training scored better on the depression questionnaire ($p < 0.05$). This shows that we need to add this to the curriculum. Teachers spend a lot of time with teens, so they are the first to see who needs help, but they often don't have the means to

step in. A study in rural Pakistan involving 566 teens aged 13-15 found that seven weekly group sessions led by non-specialists lowered scores on a symptom checklist by 3.48 points after 3 months (effect size 0.38, $p=0.0002$). This targeted mental stress without needing experts to diagnose the issues (Hamdani et al., 2024). Sessions with caregivers helped. This shows that it's doable to move tasks around in schools with less money. Bullying in younger students tells us more about external behavior patterns. A study using a questionnaire on 817 students in Lahore in grades 4-6 found that 26% had been bullied (mostly verbally). About 15% were both bullies and victims, and they were most involved in excluding others and physical actions (Khawar & Malik, 2016). Boys were more involved in verbal, physical, racial and sexual bullying (including online), while girls were more involved in exclusion. The younger the students, the more they were involved, meaning we need to step in early in public schools where money is tight. Peer relationships are one of the vital factors for the development of adolescents; however, the difficulties in this zone are common and connected to self-perception and behavior. Studies have shown that the psychosocial distresses, including peer-related issues, inhibit the ability of adolescents to form supportive and cooperative ties (Hamdani et al., 2024). Body image issue is another crucial factor which affects peer relationships. The research by Taqui et al. (2006) has explained that adolescents with misunderstandings of their weight are often linked to body dysmorphic tendencies; therefore, they encounter social challenges that make peer relationships difficult. In Pakistan, a controlling parenting style can intensify difficulties with peer interactions, which may cause teens to either become reserved or engage in conflicts. Furthermore, the ill-treatment by parents towards their children is connected to mental health issues affecting peer dynamics through reduced self-efficacy (Shujja & Malik, 2015). These elements often correlate with each other; low self-perception can enhance behavioural issues, stressing peer relationships, while unsatisfactory peer interactions strengthen negative self-views and actions.

Adolescents with disabilities face difficulties with peers that mirror Pakistani trends. For children with learning disabilities (LD), poor peer status and victimization predict internalizing problems. But friendships can help by reducing isolation (Wiener, 2004). Interviews with LD youth and educators suggest exclusion and labelling are common. Still, healthy relationships lower risks linked to things like ADHD or poverty. Visually impaired students' peer relations predict positive growth, with supportive networks improving social, emotional, and educational skills (Jaleel et al., 2022). A study in Punjab found that understanding peers helps students adjust to the classroom, reducing withdrawal in inclusive settings. For LD adolescents, secrecy and poor friendship quality make loneliness worse. However, interventions can improve relational self-esteem (Musetti et al., 2019). A study of 93 participants found that LD youth with support had less parent-related loneliness and better self-esteem in duties and body image, confirming that peers help with psychosocial well-being. Bullying also strains relationships: Khawar and Malik (2016) found that verbal exclusion was common and suggested teachers and parents get involved. Self-perception, behavioral problems, and peer relationships can create a difficult cycle, but interventions can stop it. Anxiety affects the connection between self-concept and achievement, with relational stress making things worse (Nawaz et al., 2021). Data from Delhi (Sonam et al., 2025) links anxiety (13.70%) and depression (25.92%) to poor sleep and relational status. Findings from a Karachi study (Seemi et al., 2023) connect parenting and inactivity to anxiety and peer conflicts. Teacher knowledge gaps make early detection harder (Imran et al., 2025). Bullying, from victimization to perpetration links behaviors and peer relations, with emotional issues playing a role (Khawar & Malik, 2016). Disability studies (Wiener, 2004; Musetti et al., 2019; Jaleel et al., 2022) show that peers can make up for self-perception deficits, reducing internalizing risks. Hamdani et al. (2024) found that group interventions are effective in breaking this cycle by improving relational skills.

In Karachi's public schools, these issues call for effective approaches. Socioeconomic factors intensify these cycles, but evidence-based programs can offer support, building resilient self-views, good behaviours, and supportive relationships for adolescent success.

Methodology

This research was conducted using a mixed-method design to recognise the interlinked issues of behavioural problems, self-perception, and peer relationships among adolescents studying in the public schools in Karachi. The combination of surveys and measurable data, and one-to-one interviews for qualitative analysis, provided an all-inclusive understanding of these growing issues. This blended approach aligned with the research objectives and enabled us to measure the prevalence, find the patterns, and unveil nuanced experiences that frame the adolescents' lives in unprivileged school environments. The study is driven by a realistic perspective, favouring the practical outcomes like selected interventions instead of the forced theoretical ideas.

Participants and Sampling

The study focused on adolescents aged 13 to 18 in Karachi's public secondary schools, along with their teachers. Public schools were chosen because they often have fewer resources, which can make issues like mental health support and economic stress worse. To get a diverse sample, schools from different districts were included, particularly areas like North Nazimabad, to account for differences related to urban density and family situations. For this study, students (age 13-18) and a few teachers were selected using purposive sampling. We tried to keep a gender balance of 50% male and 50% female whenever possible, along with different age and grade levels. The students were from grades 6-10, covering early and mid-adolescence. The selected teachers had at least five years of experience to give stronger observational data. The students were required to have their parents' permission and must agree to be in the study. Teachers were required to teach at least one class with teenagers each week. Students younger than 12 or older than 18, or those who were not willing to discuss the topics, were not included. This sample size worked well for a pilot study. It gives us sufficient control for data analysis and was doable within our time and budget.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection was conducted from October to December. This time period was selected as the students are mostly found to be regular due to the assessments/ mid-term examinations, which is helpful to collect adequate data. All the activities were conducted during non-instructional periods for ethical and logistical reasons.

Interviews

To obtain a comprehensive idea of our survey data and explore the relationships between experiences and actions, we conducted semi-structured interviews to gain a more detailed understanding of personal experiences. We invited ten adolescents, selected based on the survey results that show they are facing high challenges, and ten teachers to participate in individual sessions lasting 20–30 minutes. The interview questions were open-ended, such as, “Could you describe a specific situation where your concerns about your appearance influenced your interactions with your friends?” or “What changes have you seen in the school environment that have been helpful for students dealing with emotional difficulties?” The interviews also examined the influence of cultural aspects, strict parenting styles or financial difficulties. These interviews were helpful in finding certain impacts within different cultural factors that may contribute to emotional and social strain. With their permission, we made audio recordings of the interviews. These sessions took place in a private room at the school. We then transcribed the recordings exactly as they were spoken in the original

language. This approach was used to focus on the human aspect of the information, providing a platform for the thoughts of individuals who are often not heard in Pakistani discussions. It also gave us the ability to adjust our questioning based on the new ideas and subjects that come up during the interviews. It is important to give a platform to those who need to be heard while giving a chance to explore the potential impacts of cultural or socioeconomic factors. This can help educators, parents, and policymakers make more sound choices when helping the Pakistani youth.

Proposal for Awareness Campaigns

Based on the results of the survey and interviews, the study proposed that campaigns are required to spread awareness about these issues, particularly about self-perception. These campaigns will consist of the following parts:

Workshops on Self-Perception: Student-led sessions can be conducted twice a week using interactive activities like body-positive art projects. These sessions can help to challenge appearance myths and build self-esteem. Teachers will facilitate the students. The target is to get 80% of the students to attend. The purpose of the workshops is to foster a positive and accepting attitude toward oneself and others. This will also help to decrease the negative impact of physical appearance concerns.

Behavioral Support Circles: The monthly meetings should be organised for struggling adolescents. These discussions should focus on dealing with anxiety through mindfulness exercises such as praying routines, breathing activities etc. The aim is to provide solutions for managing stress that resonate with their cultural and religious backgrounds. These meetings will be led by educated facilitators who will encourage open communication and share strategies for coping mechanisms.

Anti-Bullying Peer Networks: The students should be trained to be the ambassadors for anti-bullying. Their task would be to monitor and mediate conflicts. There will also be meetings where students will share their stories based on being bullied, which helps others to empathise with them. The goal is to create a school environment where students feel safe and empowered to speak and stand for their self-esteem and defence. This will also promote kindness and respect towards each other.

Parent-Teacher Linkages: The meetings should be organised with parents or guardians and teachers to discuss the impact of socioeconomic factors on students' overall performance. The collaboration between the stakeholders (parents, teachers and students) will ultimately benefit the students' well-being as they will feel secure with the elders' support.

Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter shares results from interviews with teachers and students in Karachi's public schools. The data was studied using thematic analysis to find common things, experiences, and ideas about how self-perception, behavior, and friends relate to teens. The study found three related ideas that show the problems students face in this setting. Each idea is shown with quotes from interviews, followed by what they mean, and how they relate to the questions asked and what other studies have found. The interviews and surveys had a diverse set of teachers and students, focusing on those adolescents aged 13 to 18 years. The findings showed that boys within this age group demonstrated higher levels of responsibility and confidence when compared to the girls of the same age group. However, it was noted that the boys faced specific challenges to their academic progression, mainly arising from family obligations and the necessity to engage in part-time work after school hours. On the contrary, the situation for the majority of the girls was noticeably different. Many reported being bound to undertake household chores, such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for younger siblings.

These domestic responsibilities not only consumed a considerable amount of their time but also contributed to a feeling of demotivation towards their academic pursuits. As a result, the girls often found it difficult to focus on their studies and achieve their full potential.

The major findings of this study were as follows:

No parental support

Financial issues of students

Illiterate and weak family background

Household chores or after-school jobs, language barriers

Lack of motivation

Use of social media

The data has been analysed based on the thematic analysis. These themes are interconnected and collectively affect the students' academic performance, self-perception and peer relationships. The following themes are designed for the clear and precise analysis of the interviews and surveys:

Theme 1: Socioeconomic and Familial Constraints on Well-Being

The first theme evolving from the data highlights how financial conditions and family situations create foundational barriers to adolescent well-being. This theme directly addresses the realities of Karachi's public schools, where students predominantly come from lower-middle-class backgrounds and face multiple systemic challenges. The socioeconomic restrictions recognised extend beyond simple financial limitations to include educational readiness, language barriers, and familial support structures. These factors together shape students' academic experiences, self-perception, and social integration within the school environment. This theme connects strongly with the literature review findings, particularly research on self-esteem among slum adolescents in Karachi, which demonstrated how family, socioeconomic status and parental education levels affect adolescent self-concept. Additionally, the theme resonates with Hussein and Malik's (2009) observations about the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems in resource-limited educational settings. The findings suggest that socioeconomic factors do not operate in isolation but interact with educational systems to produce specific patterns of adolescent experience and development.

“The majority of the students belong to the lower-middle-class families of interior areas. They face a severe language barrier, which becomes another hurdle in their academic growth.”

“A newly admitted student, who doesn't know even letters, got admission in grade 6 through her parents. She requires constant motivation and guidance. With the teachers' continuous support, she is progressing, and now she can understand what has been taught in class. Due to her poor village background, she had an inferiority complex. She didn't make friends earlier, but now she has started to mingle with others as she's been developing the confidence to speak.”

The transcriptions validate how socioeconomic disadvantages translate into concrete educational and social challenges. The language barrier mentioned represents not only a communication difficulty but a sign of cultural and educational discontinuity between students' home environments and school expectations. The case of the student entering grade 6 without basic literacy skills illustrates general failures in educational progression and assessment. Most significantly, the connection between "poor village background" and "inferiority complex" reveals how socioeconomic status becomes internalized as self-

perception, affecting both academic engagement and social relationships. This finding directly addresses Research Question 1 regarding self-perception issues and Research Question 3 concerning peer relationship difficulties, showing how external constraints become psychological barriers.

Theme 2: Gendered Barriers to Academic and Social Engagement

The second theme reveals distinct gender-based challenges that shape adolescent experiences in Karachi's public schools. Instead of affecting all students the same way, socioeconomic and educational pressures affect them differently along gender lines, creating specific obstacles for boys and girls. For male students, challenges primarily involve external responsibilities and financial necessities that compete with academic commitments. For female students, barriers often originate from domestic expectations and sociocultural norms that limit educational engagement and social participation. This theme aligns with several strands of literature reviewed earlier. Sonam et al. (2025) documented gender differences in self-perception among South Asian adolescents, noting that girls feel pressure about their looks and social expectations. Likewise, Khawar and Malik's (2016) research on bullying patterns in Pakistani schools showed that boys and girls have different kinds of problems with friends. Boys are more openly aggressive, and girls are more socially excluded. The new study adds to these ideas by showing how gender expectations turn into real, daily problems at school. This affects not only how students act but also their basic chances to learn.

“The use of mobile phones and the internet has negatively impacted the academic performance of young girls, especially the students of grades 9 and 10.”

“There are many boys of higher grades who have additional responsibilities after school hours to support their families financially. This affects their academics as they don't get enough time to study.”

The gender-based challenges show how cultural norms and economic necessities create divergent educational pathways. The concern about mobile phone impact on girls' academic performance isn't just about technology, but shows a gender pattern of how time is spent and how involved they are socially. This possibly reflects differential parental supervision or social expectations regarding girls' leisure activities. Meanwhile, boys' after-school work responsibilities highlight how economic pressures particularly affect male adolescents, potentially reinforcing traditional gender roles regarding family economic contribution. These findings address Research Question 2, which is about behavior problems that affect school life. They show how gender changes these problems and their effects on the school. The different challenges also mean that solutions should be different for boys and girls instead of using one solution for everyone.

Theme 3: Gaps in Support Systems and Pathways for Motivation

The third theme focuses on the lack of support structures and the critical role of motivation in educational engagement. Despite clear problems and hardworking teachers, the data reveal significant gaps in all-inclusive support systems for adolescents. These gaps exist at numerous levels: within families through absent parental involvement, within schools through inadequate counselling and mental health resources, and within broader community contexts through insufficient linkages between educational and social support services. Alongside, the idea shows that motivation is lost because of these problems but can also be a way to help. This theme directly relates to the studies on educational support systems in resource-limited settings. Imran et al. (2025) documented that many Pakistani teachers are not aware of the mental wellbeing students, with only 30.3% feeling confident in supporting

students with emotional difficulties. Similarly, Hussein and Malik (2009) emphasised the lack of mental health resources in Pakistani public schools. The theme particularly addresses Research Question 5 regarding potential interventions. It suggests that fixing these system problems is a key way to help.

“All teachers are highly qualified and very hardworking. Their efforts towards students’ progress go in vain as there’s no parental support.”

“All the problems of students are connected to their home and family. There’s no parental support; the parents don’t even attend the parent-teacher meetings.”

The repeated emphasis on missing parental support reveals a serious discontinuity between home and school environments. This gap represents more than non-attendance at meetings; it signifies a broader halt in the educational partnership necessary for adolescent development. The teachers' frustration that their qualifications and efforts are undermined by this disconnection highlights how systemic issues can nullify individual enthusiasm and professional capability. This finding has significant implications for intervention design, suggesting that school-based efforts alone may be unsatisfactory without equivalent engagement with families and communities. The theme underlines the interrelation of various support systems and the need for combined approaches that address educational challenges at multiple levels simultaneously.

Synthesis of Themes and Connection to Research Questions

The three themes identified, socioeconomic and family constrictions, gender-based barriers, and sustenance system gaps, collectively shade a wide-ranging picture of adolescent challenges in Karachi's public schools. These themes are not isolated but interact dynamically: socioeconomic constraints create conditions that worsen gendered challenges, while both are amplified by systemic support gaps. This interconnection directly addresses Research Question 4 regarding how various factors relate to and affect adolescents' lives. The findings reveal a pattern where external constraints (financial gendered) become a part of psychological barriers (inferiority complex, demotivation), which in turn affect both academic performance and social relationships. This outline suggests that interventions need to operate at multiple levels simultaneously: fixing immediate, real problems while also building mental strength and making support systems stronger. The analysis demonstrates that challenges in self-perception, behavior, and peer relationships, the core focus of this research, are deeply tied to broader socioeconomic and cultural contexts. This tie explains why school-based interventions alone may have an incomplete impact and points toward the need for more holistic approaches that connect school support with family involvement and community resources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This pilot study aimed to explore how self-perception, behavioral issues, and peer relationship problems interact among adolescents in Karachi's public schools. Using a mixed-methods approach, including quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, three interconnected themes emerged that collectively explain the challenges facing these young people. The results suggest that teenage difficulties should not be looked at separately but considered through the combined effects of economic problems, gender roles, and a lack of support. The research demonstrates that socioeconomic factors create basic difficulties that affect every aspect of adolescent development. Students from lower-income backgrounds, particularly those migrating from rural areas, face language barriers, academic unpreparedness, and psychological challenges such as inferiority complexes that directly

impact their self-perception and social integration. Gender-based barriers further complicate this situation, creating different challenges for boys and girls. Male students have to work after school to fulfil their family responsibilities, while female students face household expectations that limit their time for education. This gendered division of challenges affects not only academic performance but also patterns of social interaction and peer relationship formation, supporting earlier findings by Khawar and Malik (2016) on gender-specific manifestations of adolescent difficulties.

Most critically, the study reveals how a lack of support structures undermines even well-intentioned educational efforts. Despite dedicated teachers, the absence of parental involvement, limited counseling resources, and disjointed support systems create conditions where individual challenges become deep-rooted patterns. This finding aligns with Imran et al.'s (2025) which recorded low mental health awareness among Pakistani teachers and highlights the urgent need for more comprehensive support methods.

As this is need-based research, there is a huge scope to examine these issues among the students of different regional backgrounds in various areas of Karachi. Quantitative research would provide a clearer picture of the struggles faced by adolescents. The proposed interventions can be implemented and assessed to evaluate the improvements in the behavioural and academic performance of students (aged 13-18) studying in the public schools.

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