



Association of Resilience with Appearance Anxiety in Burn Survivors in Pakistan: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Burn injuries are not only physically devastating but also impair the victim's self-worth, social interactions and occupational functioning with significant social, emotional and physical health consequences among survivors globally and in Pakistan in particular. In Pakistani culture, where appearance is weighed more heavily and it has a significant link with social approval, acceptance and beautification. The cross-sectional study design was used to investigate the association of resilience with appearance anxiety among burn survivors in Karachi, Pakistan. The study involved participants with second- and third-degree burns, recruited from the Burns Ward at Civil Hospital, Karachi. Participants completed the Resilience Scale (RS) and the Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI). Results revealed a significant negative relationship of resilience with appearance anxiety, indicating that higher resilience is associated with a lower level of appearance-related anxiety. The findings underscore that resilience significantly mitigates burn survivors' psychosocial challenges, and incorporating culturally tailored resilience-building strategies into rehabilitation programs is essential for enhancing their quality of life in Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Burns are a substantial health concern, resulting in more than 180,000 fatalities annually, with 60% of these deaths occurring in African and Southeast Asian countries (World Health Organization, 2024). This type of injury occurs when skin or tissue is exposed to extreme temperatures, whether cold or heated, as well as electricity, friction, radiation, or acidic or alkaline chemicals (Żwieręto et al., 2023). Burns can be classified into three primary categories according to their depth. First-degree or superficial burns exclusively affect the epidermis, the uppermost skin layer. Blisters are the result of second-degree or partial-thickness burns, which inflict damage on the outer two layers of the epidermis. Third-degree or full-thickness burns damage the adipose layer of the skin and the

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nerves, leading to a loss of feeling. According to Ho (2024) the “charred” bones, tendons, and muscles comprise fourth-degree burns. Additionally, burns can be categorized according to their source, which may include heat, radiation, chemicals, or electrical contact. Burn injuries have a significant psychological impact on those who endure them. They cause discomfort, which shows as disfigured limbs, anxiety, depression, social isolation, limited physical interaction, and difficulties adjusting to social circumstances (Zaman et al., 2023).

Resilience is a crucial component in the reintegration of patient into society and the restoration of stability when faced with adversity (Zaman et al., 2023). Masten defined resilience as “the capacity of a dynamic system to effectively adapt to disruptions that jeopardize system function, viability, or development” (Masten, 2014). Masten (2014) conducted multiple studies and found that the availability of positive psychological resources augmented resilience. Identifying vulnerability and protective factors that may affect life adversities is essential for examining the individual's resilience in the face of difficult situations, such as an accident or burn trauma (Luthar et al., 2000). A multitude of factors can have a substantial impact on burn victims' resilience, which typically helps them to recover from this difficult situation. Individual traits such as optimism, self-efficacy, spiritual beliefs, and coping strategies can all influence resilience and hence the survivor's healing process (Kornhaber et al., 2016).

Similarly, appearance anxiety might be identified as a contributing factor. Many people struggle with social connections after suffering severe burns (Yeşilyurt & Kendirkıran, 2024). Appearance anxiety is the unease or distress that people feel when they interact with others who they believe are judging them. Appearance anxiety in burn sufferers can cause excruciating stress, impacting their diet and frequently resulting in weight changes. Burn-induced malformations, particularly in prominent areas, have an impact on people's social connections and participation in society. Victims may experience social isolation as they avoid gatherings with large crowds (Yeşilyurt & Kendirkıran, 2024).

The relationship between the resilience and appearance anxiety in burn victims in Pakistan is significant for several reasons. Burns can negatively affect a person's mental health, including; sense of self-worth, and social identity in addition to leaving visible scars (Pruzinsky & Cash, 2002). These survivors avoid others due to feelings of guilt, dissatisfaction with their bodies, and fear of rejection from others (Lawrence et al., 2006). According to Rumsey and Harcourt (2004), survivors who worry excessively about their appearance are prone to develop appearance anxiety, and they have a lower quality of life. This concern constricts their social, and personal lives. In Pakistani culture, physical attractiveness is highly valued for self-esteem, marriage prospects, and social acceptance. According to Mirza and Jenkins (2004), facial damage can unintentionally lead to increased mental health issues.

Burn injuries frequently result in profound psychological consequences, especially concerning survivors' body image and social adaptation. A study demonstrated that social appearance anxiety among burn survivors undermines their quality of life and is significantly influenced by emotion-focused coping strategies (Hussain et al., 2023). This could be due to the cultural factors where society sees both gender differently and women are unable to express their true feelings and emotions and mostly they suppress it. Researchers (Shahzad & Begum, 2012) found similar findings when they assessed the difference of trait emotional intelligence between males and females. Most females suspend their feelings and emotions and make compromise and they do not want to indulge in conflicting situations. Individuals with low emotional intelligence will have low level of life satisfaction (Siddiqui & Shahzad, 2019). It means that emotional intelligence has a direct link with mental wellbeing. Another study found positive association of resilience with dispositional optimism and adaptive coping (problem-focused and supportive), and negatively with emotion-focused coping, ultimately enhancing mental quality of life (Batoool et al., 2020). Earlier work in Pakistan established a strong negative correlation between PTSD symptoms and resilience, with female survivors exhibiting higher PTSD symptoms and lower level of resilience as compared to males (Bibi et al., 2018). Despite these insights into resilience and psychological distress, no study in Pakistan has yet examined the specific association between resilience and appearance-related anxiety among burn survivors.

In Pakistan, most people even if they are experiencing mental health problems are unable to seek help from mental health professionals. Individual who is experiencing burns is not easily adjust to the his/her external environment, people's attitude towards the survivors can exacerbate their both physical and

emotional pain. It is because of the people's attitude and behaviour; survivors of burns try to alienate themselves from other people and they don't want to share their feelings and emotions. Research indicates that individuals with greater resilience are more adept at managing their emotions, maintaining positive self-perceptions, and employing constructive coping mechanisms, such as re-evaluating negative events and seeking support from others (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006). Understanding the resilience of Pakistani burn survivors is critical because cultural factors such as fate, respect, and societal roles can influence the intensity of trauma and the healing process. The fundamental goal of the initiative is to establish a revolutionary approach to burn therapy that takes into account both physical and mental rehabilitation, allowing patients to successfully reintegrate into society with dignity, fortitude, and optimism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted globally to identify the mental health issues of burn survivors. According to Lawrence et al. (2006), burn victims are more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies, which can result in low self-esteem, anxiety, despair, and social disengagement. Location of burn on the part of body is also important to determine the intensity of problem. Research shows that psychological discomfort and body image disruption, can lead to emotional problems. According to Taylor et al. (2002), burn patients who have a poor body image have a lower quality of life, struggle in social situations, and have less than optimal rehabilitation outcomes. Resilience is one of the important protective factors against psychological burden of any condition. This is the ability to overcome to difficult situation and move to that next stage. Resilience has been linked to greater psychological recovery, problem-solving ability, and a superior quality of life following burn injuries (Thombs et al., 2008). Higher resilience among burn survivors has been associated to better coping mechanisms, less mental discomfort, and greater life satisfaction (Kornhaber et al., 2016). Resilience is a major predictor of better long-term psychological outcomes in burn survivors, including fewer feelings of despair and dread. According to a longitudinal study by Van Loey et al., (2008), burn patients who were more resilient recovered faster and had higher life satisfaction over time.

Burns and deformities that can be seen can cause distress and changes in body image, which includes how someone sees, feels, and thinks about their physical look, functionality, and behaviour. The study by Yeşilyurt and Kendirkiran (2024) found that how social anxiety about appearance affect the quality of life of burn survivors. Researchers found that because of higher level of social anxiety, patients wanted to be alone. These findings help us in knowing how the incident of burn can affect the survivor's social and emotional domain of life. To help them overcome fears and anxiety related to burn. A growing body of research investigates how burn survivors' concerns about their appearance affect their ability to recover from traumatic experience. Preliminary research suggests that resilience can help people with anomalies feel better about their bodies. More resilient burn survivors reported being satisfied with their appearance and level of social interaction. Resilient people may change their viewpoint on situations, focus on their strengths, and find flexible solutions to problems. Suresh et al. (2020) investigated the potential role of resilience in the link between burn severity and body image dissatisfaction. The findings indicated that resilience had a substantial impact on this relationship. Matera et al. (2024) found that men and women who use appropriate coping strategies have reduced level of appearance anxiety. This improvement could be attributed to enhanced resistance, which acts as a barrier against negative comments about one's looks.

Objectives

Despite extensive research on the psychological impact of burn injuries and resilience, there remains a significant gap in knowledge about the role of resilience in resolving negative body image among burn survivors in Pakistan. There is limited research on the risk and protective factors for mental health problems among burn survivors. Furthermore, scarcity of evidence-based prevention and treatment interventions exacerbate their mental health. This could lead to increase the risk for severe mental health conditions and suicide among burn survivors. Early detection of the risk factors could help in reducing the burns, and then the mental health and related issues among this vulnerable group. People in low-and-middle-income countries especially Pakistan, have limited access to mental health services, if available then they are unable to get access because of lack of support from family, and significant other,

stigma is one of major barriers to access mental health services, cultural norms are also creating hurdles against the mental health services. Present study aims to investigate the association of resilience with appearance anxiety among burn survivors. Findings of this study would help us in understanding linkage of resilience with the appearance anxiety, and further helps in designing evidence based psychosocial interventions to reduce the risk of psychological harm associated with these conditions.

Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between resilience and appearance anxiety among burn survivors

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A cross-sectional study design was used to execute the study on a sample of 40 burn survivors (Mage=29) ages between 13-57 years. Those participants were recruited who had sustained second- to third-degree burns. Participants were recruited from Burns Ward at Civil Hospital, Karachi using purposive sampling technique was used to collect data and the participants.

Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria

People with various burns, such as those caused by abuse, flame burns, electrical burns, friction burns, chemical or acid burns, thermal or contact burns, radiation burns, and scald burns (from hot liquids or steam). Furthermore, the study encompassed individuals who possessed the ability to communicate and participate in the study. People with cognitive impairments, or those who had difficulty to comprehend instructions were excluded from participation. Additionally, the study included individuals' burns were so severe and were unable to communicate and also those who were at the early stage of treatment and were unable to discuss were also excluded.

Instruments

Personal Information Form

The personal information form included socio-demographic information about the burn victims and questions about their injuries.

Appearance Anxiety Inventory

David Veale developed the Appearance Anxiety Inventory (AAI), a 10-item self-report instrument, to assess the cognitive and behavioural elements of appearance-related anxiety with a specific focus on individuals with body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) (Veale, 2014). It assesses distress, avoidance behaviours, and compulsive inspections for perceived appearance defects. The scale has three subscales: threat monitoring, concealment, and avoidance. A Cronbach alpha of 0.86 indicates a good internal consistency for the scale.

Resilience Scale

The self-report questionnaire, Resilience Scale (RS-25), measures a person's resilience by assessing their self-acceptance, emotional fortitude, and personal competency. The initial scale (RS-25) contained 25 items and has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.867 (Damásio et al., 2011).

Procedure

This study was approved from Departmental Ethical Review Board (ERB), at the College of Clinical Psychology, Ziauddin University, Karachi. After formal approval, researchers approached the concerned heads of the department to conduct the study at the Burns Ward at Civil Hospital Karachi. As part of the data collection procedure, patients in Civil Hospital's Burns Ward were surveyed and interviewed with their permission. After their permission, participants were approached in their residential facility. They were then briefed by the researchers and informed consent was taken, only those participants who met the pre-requisite criteria to participate in the study were then approached and formally invited to participate in the study. They were first given the personal information form, and questionnaires (RS-25 and AAI) were administered in individual settings.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, or SPSS (SPSS V. 25). Pearson's and Spearman's correlation analyses were used to investigate the relationship between resilience and appearance anxiety among the burn survivors.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to collect data, ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board. All participants were briefed about the study, the possible risks and rewards, the voluntary nature of participation with the option to withdraw at any time, and the promise of anonymity were explained to them. All data were handled in compliance with the ethical criteria for psychological research with human subjects, and participant identities were kept anonymous. Guardian authorization was required for participants under the age of eighteen and it was fulfilled.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables (N = 40)

Variables	N	%	
Age Groups	13-18	12	30
	19-25	8	20
	26-35	9	22.5
	36-45	6	15
	46-55	4	10
	56 and above	1	2.5
Gender	Male	19	47.5
	Female	21	52.5
Occupation	Student	13	32.5
	Working	15	37.5
	Nonworking	12	30.0
Education	Below Grade 5	15	37.5
	Matriculation	15	37.5
	Intermediate	8	20.0
	Graduate	2	5.0
Siblings	1	5	12.5
	2	3	7.5
	3	5	12.5
	4 or more	27	67.5
Birth Order	First	14	35.0
	Second	6	15.0
	Third	7	17.5
	Fourth or more	13	32.5
Marital Status	Single	23	57.5
	Married	15	37.5
	Divorced	1	2.5
	Widowed	1	2.5

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of 40 burn survivors. The sample is predominantly young, with 30% aged 13–18 years. Gender distribution is nearly balanced, comprising 52.5% females and 47.5% males. Educationally, 37.5% have completed up to Grade 5, and another 37.5% have completed Matriculation. Occupationally, 37.5% are employed, 32.5% are students, and 30% are non-working. Majority of participants have four or more siblings (67.5%) and are first-born (35%) or fourth-born (32.5%). Regarding marital status, 57.5% are single, 37.5% are married, and 5% are divorced or widowed.

Table 2

Summary of Simple Linear Regressions Predicting Threat Monitoring, Avoidance, and Appearance Anxiety Total from Resilience

Outcome Variable	β	t(df = 38)	Adjusted R ²	SE Estimate	p
Threat Monitoring	-.628	-4.969	.378	3.122	.001
Avoidance	-.378	-2.516	.120	6.074	.016
Appearance Anxiety Total	-.502	-3.581	.233	8.599	.001

Table 2 shows that higher level of resilience were significantly correlated with lower levels of appearance anxiety total, avoidance, and threat monitoring. A significant predictive association was found between resilience and threat monitoring ($\beta = -.628$, $t(38) = -4.97$, $p < .001$), which accounted for approximately 38% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .378$; SE estimate = 3.122). Despite the model's ability to accurately predict avoidance ($\beta = -.378$, $t(38) = -2.52$, $p = .016$), it only partially accounted for the variation (Adjusted $R^2 = .120$; SE estimate = 6.074). Lastly, resilience had a marginally negative effect on appearance anxiety total ($\beta = -.502$, $t(38) = -3.58$, $p < .001$), which accounted for nearly 23% of the variation (Adjusted $R^2 = .233$; SE estimate = 8.599).

Discussion

Present study aimed see if there was a predictive association of resilience with appearance anxiety (threat monitoring & avoidance) among burn survivors. The study found a strong negative predictive association between resilience and threat monitoring, accounting for 38% of the variation ($r^2 = -.628$, $t(38) = -4.97$, $p < .001$). The model accurately predicted avoidance ($\beta = -.378$, $t(38) = -2.52$, $p = .016$), but only covered a small portion of the range. Resilience accounted for 23% of the variation and had a moderate negative predictive association with appearance anxiety Total ($\beta = -.502$, $t(38) = -3.58$, $p < .001$). In other words, resilience was most significantly linked to reduced threat surveillance, slightly lower appearance anxiety, and modestly associated with less social avoidance. In their study Begum et al. (2014) concluded that people who are going through traumatic experiences have higher level of depression and develop feelings of helplessness, and this could put them at risk for suicide. However, there are individual differences and those have ability to bounce back are able to get rid of these problems.

These findings support our understanding of how resilience improves burn sufferers' mental health and ability to adapt to the social situations. Findings of present study support the notion that resilience may reduce some anxiety-related behaviours in burn survivors, such as; threat monitoring and avoidance, these findings are also supported by Thombs et al. (2008) and Fauerbach et al. (2007), who found the resilience as associated with less social anxiety and more social engagement following an injury. This shows that resilience could help burn patients adjust mentally to changes in their appearance. This unique interaction highlights the importance of having inner strength when dealing with the psychological consequences of physical deformities. Findings of present study add to a growing global body of research suggesting that resilience can help people cope with psychological distress after an accident.

CONCLUSION

Physical appearance anxiety is the most common psychological issue encountered by burn survivors, often resulting in functional impairment. Resilience serves as a critical psychological barrier against the mental health issues (appearance anxiety) among burn sufferers. This study empirically supports the hypothesis formulated for burn survivors by collecting and assessing constrained data, laying the groundwork for the future application of appropriate therapeutic options for prevention and treatment. This study emphasizes the importance of mental health professionals in these settings to guarantee burn survivors' recovery from physical as well as mental agony that they are going through, and to use culturally appropriate policies, approaches for effective assessment, treatment and prevention. The current research represents a substantial contribution to the regional literature, as few studies have explicitly investigated appearance-specific anxiety among burn survivors. This support to the idea that resilience-building is critical in assisting this vulnerable group of population by helping them to bounce back in this critical stage of their lives and adjusting to their new surroundings and overcoming their self-consciousness about their appearance and improving their mental wellbeing.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the contributions, this study has few limitations. Because of the small sample size ($N = 40$), the findings may have limited applicability to the larger community of burn survivors in Pakistan. More diverse and extensive sample would strengthen and broaden the scope of current findings. A substantial link was found between resilience and appearance anxiety; however, it is unclear whether increased resilience leads to decreased anxiety or the opposite. Further, longitudinal investigations are needed

to determine the direction of this association. Integrating clinician-rated instruments measures in future research may be helpful. The need for more thorough data screening and, potentially, a more complex psychometric assessment of the tools used in local communities to understand more about the psychological mechanism operating among the burn survivors.

Implications

These findings have several implications. Understanding mental health conditions of burn survivors is imperative to adequately address their problems using contextually relevant evidence-based treatment interventions. These interventions could help burn survivors overcome not only their appearance concerns but also their overall wellbeing and quality of life. Along with helping patients cope with their altered physical appearance, resilience training may improve their overall psychological well-being and quality of life. Furthermore, the results emphasize the importance of incorporating psychosocial rehabilitation into burn care regimes. In professional contexts, the emphasis is frequently on physical treatment, by missing the psychological factors such as resilience. The development of resilience-building interventions, as well as the teaching of medical and mental health practitioners to detect the symptoms of appearance anxiety, can lead to more comprehensive care for burn patients. The findings are especially pertinent to Pakistan, where familial honor and societal attractiveness can have a major impact on an individual's self-image. Stigma and cultural judgments about appearance, particularly among women, can exacerbate their mental health problems. Thus, psycho-education initiatives focusing de-stigmatization related to mental health issues associated with body image stigma, and to enhance psychological resilience could be beneficial.

Competing Interests

The authors declared no competing interests.

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