




Original Article

# Development of Social Groups among University Hostel Students



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## Abstract

*The purpose of the present study was to investigate the development of social groups among hostel students at the university level in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study was mainly concerned with the groups formed by students while residing in the university hostel. Participant observation and interviewing techniques were used to collect the data. The present study focused on how groups are formed among the hostel students, to what extent they support each other, establish social settings, and how they feel while living in such groups. The analysed data reports that the students have different perceptions based on their experiences, which in turn affect their behavioural patterns. A permanent friendship develops between these students due to their similar geographical belongingness and sharing the same academic interests. The findings will support universities in developing relevant policies to minimize untoward incidences in the hostel.*

**Keywords:** Social groups, Social life, University hostel, University students

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, universities have been trying to create high-quality learning environment that not only increases enrolment of students, but also increases the ranking. In university life, the majority of students experience living away from their homes temporarily, but for a lengthy period. With this, students from different family backgrounds interact with other students. Pagan (2019) states that social interaction is a complex phenomenon, which the people are in some specific situation in which they act and react. This reaction is called social relationship and friendship gets much importance in human social relationship. A large number of research studies shows that there is an influence of environment and students' attitude on their satisfaction at the university level (Hassanain, 2008; Khozaei, et al., 2010; Billups, 2008; Khozaei, et al., 2012). For many students residing in university hostels plays a significant role as they encounter a not so smooth transition to university life, which is a pivotal phase in an individual's journey toward self-discovery and personal development. Despite the availability of a number of studies on students' performance and relationship in developed nations, the social problems of university students, especially in hostel-setting, has not been explored in developing countries like Pakistan. Hence, this study aims to investigate about the formation of groups among hostel students in Pakistan and how they benefit from such groups.

### Objectives of the study

This study was designed to explore how social relationships are developed among students' during their hostel life at Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan. The following objectives were developed to carry out the present research study:

- To explore the formation of social groups among hostel students
- To find out the advantages of joining groups
- To study the social setting developed among the hostel students
- To explore the feelings of hostel students being part of certain groups
- Research Questions
- What are the factors involved in the social group development of hostel students?
- Is social group affiliation beneficial for its members?
- Is the social setting developed among hostel students due to group formation?
- What are the feelings of the students being part of a certain group?

### Significance of the study

Social group development lies in its ability to provide insights into how groups are formed and change over a period of time. A hostel is a place where students come from different cultures, localities, disciplines, and languages and live together during their student life. When a student comes to the hostel for the first time, all are aliens for him, however; after completing his studies, and as he leaves the hostel,

he makes a number of lifetime friends. The following are the points that indicate the importance of this study.

- The significance of a study regarding social group development can help researchers and practitioners understand how groups form, evolve, and function over a period of time. This knowledge can be used to improve group dynamics in a variety of settings, such as businesses, schools, and community organizations.
- This study is important to improve the effectiveness and functioning of social groups, which can have a positive impact on society as a whole.
- The results of the study may be helpful to hostel authorities in dealing with the disruptive behaviour of the hostel students at Gomal University.
- Overall, the study of social group development can have practical implications for individuals and organizations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Ritchie, (2020) describes a group as any number of persons who share a consciousness of a membership and of interaction. By this definition, two people waiting for a bus would not be a group, but would become a group if they started a conversation, or shared any kind of interaction. A number of people walking down a street would be an aggregation or a collectively, not a group but when their interests become common, they convert into a group. A hostel is a place that is built with some institutional or formal characteristics (Khozaei, et al., 2010). When the students find themselves in their own social class, their religion, their political views, their sports or music interest then they have the assurance to be in a group. Hostel life helps the students to share certain sentiments and emotions and define with some unanimity the activities and goals of life (Khozaei, et al., 2010), but a few students are not able to adapt to the non-suitable environment (Khurshid, et al., 2012). In modern society, individuals belong to many groups, which affect and reflect their behaviour.

Tuckman and Jensen (1977) stages of Group Development is a well-known model that describes the stages such groups go through as they form and evolve. The model was first proposed by Bruce Tuckman in 1965 and ever since it has been widely used in the field of group dynamics and organizational behaviour. The five stages of the model are:

- **Forming:** This is the initial stage when the group is first formed. Members are polite and cautious, and they tend to avoid conflict. They try to get to know each other, establish relationships, and define the group's purpose and goals.
- **Storming:** This is the stage when the group starts to experience conflict and tension. Members may have different ideas and opinions and they may struggle to establish roles and relationships. This stage can be challenging, but it is important for the group to work through these conflicts to establish a strong foundation.
- **Norming:** This is the stage when the group starts to develop cohesion and a sense of identity. Members begin to work together effectively, resolve conflicts, and establish norms and expectations for behaviour. The group starts to function as a cohesive unit.
- **Performing:** This is the stage when the group is fully functioning and able to achieve its goals. Members work together efficiently and effectively and they are able to accomplish their objectives.
- **Adjourning:** This is the final stage when the group is disbanding or ending its work together. The group members say goodbye, reflect on the experience, and celebrate their accomplishments.

Tuckman and Jensen (1977) opine that stages of group development provide a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of group formation and evolution and at the same time, it can be used to identify and address issues that may arise during the group's development.

Khurshid et al., (2012) found that when students enter universities, they feel free from every stress that influences their studies adversely, even when they fail their exams. There are also some other factors which influence their achievements in their studies. Suki and Chowdhury (2015) found that students'

attitude is strongly affected by their satisfaction with living in the hostel followed by the hostel facilities. Recognition, loyalty, and helpfulness are expected from fellow members of the groups. What a person will do in a situation also depends upon the circumstances of the situation.

In the primary groups, such as family or circles of close friends, the social relationships tend to be informal and relaxed. The members are interested in one another as persons. They confide hopes and fears, share experiences, gossip, agree, disagree, and fill the need for intimate human companionship (Alba, 1976).

In the secondary group, the social contacts are impersonal, segmental, and utilitarian. One is not concerned with the other as a person, but as a functionary who is filling a role. His personal qualities are not important; his performance or segment of his total personality involved in playing a role is important. The secondary group might be a labour union, trade association, or parent-teacher association. In any case, the group exists to serve a specific and limited purpose involving only a segment of the personalities of the members. Primary groups are relationship-oriented, while secondary groups are goal-oriented. Prayogi (2008) cited that one broad meaning mentions social to society as a system of common life, but in another way, it is distinct explicitly from the individuals and individualist theory of society, and this is reflected for instance in the different perspectives of liberalism and socialism on society and public affairs. Paulus (2015) defines a group as two or more people who interact with and influence one another. There is a correlation between roommate relationships with academic performance. He further goes on to say that this relationship also exists between spiritual, social and emotional stability. Hostel life greatly affects the achievement of university students. Some students pick up knowledge in an appropriate way, while others don't. The reason is that students do not feel good in a hostel and feel home sickness (Khurshid, et al., 2012).

Humans affect humans. At the time of birth, human beings are naïve and have no meaning of group dynamics and our role in this world. As we grow up, variations in emotions come. A lot of desires and hopes arise in our hearts and we find ourselves in a world full of diverse people. A study by Bringle and Hatcher (2002) found that students who actively participated in communal events reported a stronger sense of community and satisfaction with their overall living experience.

A common and simple example is the way you interact with people you know, and how this interaction will affect you when you have to do it with the people you don't know. Some people stand in a row and are least bothered about their surroundings, some observe others, while some people tend to become anxious without any obvious reason. McInnes (1999) was of the view that a child becomes familiar with his surroundings at an early age. A child develops a social relationship in his early 5 years, which develops his particular behaviour for his whole life. What behaviour we adopt before we are 5 years old, is termed as basic behaviour. Nonetheless, before attaining this age we have to decide whether we trust others or get frightened of them. Freud believed that the construct developed by a child cannot be changed in the future. Heredity affects human behaviour to a great extent (Weiten, et al., 2016). Heredity brings about some habits in human beings as well. Children develop their first relationship with their parents. This relationship remains for a longer time as compared to other social relationships and the children make their parents ideal when they are kind and effective to them.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was mainly concerned with the groups formed by the students during their stay in the hostels. The study was carried out in the tribal hostel of Gomal University, the second-oldest university in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. One hundred and thirty students were residing in the hostel during the conduct of the study. The researcher used participant observation and interviewing as data collection techniques and the data were collected from those students who volunteered to provide their perceptions on social relationships developed during their hostel life. The researcher studied various groups formed by students based on their academic discipline, native language, area of belongingness, and common interests. The selected sample who showed their willingness to participate was (n= 5). The students who preferred to join social groups had been residing in the hostel for more than one year. Five interview questions were developed for the interview:

- How many friends do you have in the hostel?
- How did you make your first friend in the hostel?
- How was your group of friends formed?
- How do your friends help you in the hostel?
- How do you feel while living with your friends in the hostel?

## RESULTS & FINDINGS

Sincerity and cooperation are the main features of the hostel life. Knowledge and experiences are shared among the students in the hostel and a spirit of nationality is developed among them. Students come from different tribes and regions, but they live together and show unity just like family members. When two students of the same area and same subject of study come closer to each other, they develop a strong bond and become permanent friends, because two bonds are formed due to their language and common interests.

Ali, who is the most senior student of the tribal hostel and an M.Phil. in pharmacy, has been living there since 2021. He has a group of friends known as the pharmacy group. They are five in number all from different fields of pharmacy. His first friend was his roommate, and though he left the hostel after graduation, they are in contact with each other and consider themselves to be best friends. He expressed that there are many advantages of being friends. He explained that four fields of pharmacy are offered by Gomal University and there are students of each field. This helps them understand the problems due to multiple discipline approaches thus, enabling them to easily solve and understand the subject matter. He reiterated:

*"Hostel life can be a unique and exciting experience. It is an opportunity to live with students from different backgrounds, cultures, and disciplines, which can be very enriching. Hostel life can be demanding, with strict rules and regulations, but it can also be a lot of fun. Students may have to share rooms and bathrooms, which can be difficult at times, but it also teaches valuable skills such as time management, teamwork, and adaptability. University hostels usually have a strong sense of community and it can be a great way to make new friends and form lasting bonds. Many students find that the independence and responsibility that come with hostel life is an important part of their personal and academic development. Additionally, living in a hostel can also expose students to different cultures and provide them with opportunities to participate in various activities and events organized by the hostel management."*

He strongly believed that the friend groups in the hostel should be made based on subjects so that they remain fruitful instead of language or area. We should discuss current affairs topics in our groups, and understand our subjects and the lives of our friends better. He further argued that he gains confidence and boldness due to his contacts with his friends. The students belonging to the same area or same subject also interchange their rooms with each other for mutual togetherness.

Another hostel student doing M.Sc. in Physics shared that Jeem became his first friend due to mosque activities because they offered prayers together. He was a great supporter of friendship. He explained that his friends helped him whenever he had academic or personal problems and shared food and chores to the extent that they supported each other when they were unwell. He further elaborated:

*"Friendships can develop at any stage in life and can take many forms, from casual acquaintances to deep, long-term connections. Friendship is often based on shared interests, experiences, and values, and can provide companionship, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. Friendships can also help individuals grow and learn, as well as provide a sense of social and emotional well-being."*

The student stated that he had four best friends in the hostel. He made Alif his best friend in the hostel, who was also his subject fellow. He further recognized that he was enjoying many advantages due to his friends' group. The group helps him in solving his problems. He also identified that whenever he had work in the administration, his friends accompanied him because many a times he failed to put the point across due to his soft nature. He further expressed that they discussed every topic in the group and he felt at ease in the group. He added:

*"Friendship can bring joy, companionship, and a sense of belonging. It can also provide support during difficult*

*times and help individuals to grow and develop emotionally. A good friendship is built on mutual respect, trust, and honesty. Friendship is important for mental and emotional well-being and many people consider to be one of the most valuable aspects of their lives."*

Bey is a student of mathematics who made his best friend from his area and studying the same subjects. He told me that his friends support him even during exam preparation week. He claimed that his friends are very sincere and loyal. He further went on to proclaim:

*"Friendships can be formed for various reasons, such as shared interests, experiences, or goals. They can be strengthened through regular communication, spending time together, and helping each other through difficult times. Friendships can also provide a sense of belonging, validation, and companionship. They can be a source of strength and inspiration and can have a positive impact on mental and physical well-being. Friendship can be a valuable and rewarding aspect of life and can come in many forms, such as family friends, school friends, and lifelong friends."*

Student Alif responded that he had few friends in the hostel, who were his seniors. They guided and helped him during the admission phase. Few were his class fellows and they studied together and got involved in gossiping. They went for dinners and outings quite often. He was also of the view that:

*"Friendship can also be strengthened through shared activities, communication, and spending time together. Friendship can be an important source of emotional support and can provide a sense of belonging and community. They can also have a positive impact on physical and mental well-being. However, as with any relationship, friendship can also have their challenges and may require effort to maintain and strengthen over time."*

## Discussion

This paper has briefly described the findings related to what students perceive about groups developed in the hostel and the effects of such groups on their social life. Hostel life is a unique and often constructive experience for many students. Living in a hostel typically means sharing a room with several other people and having access to communal spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms, and common areas. Hostel life can be a great way to meet new people from different backgrounds and cultures, and many hostels have a strong sense of community. Students have to follow a certain set of rules and regulations set by the hostel management and may have to do chores, maintain cleanliness, and often have a strict schedule to follow. Hostel life can be challenging, but it can also be a lot of fun and a great way to learn independence and own responsibility. The researcher found similar behaviours in the students when they became part of certain groups. Common goals are usually the basis of group formation. Groups are often formed among students of similar status. The students can get the advantages of groups when they are formed based on subject and study level. According to Najib and Osman (2011), students' residential satisfaction does not depend on physical attributes only, but some other factors can influence their satisfaction like social factors. When there are more bonds between the students, for example, subject bond, culture bond, and interest bond then their friendship becomes permanent and lifelong.

Most of the students were of the view that group formation should be based on the same academic discipline and having the same session of enrolment. A study by Kong and In-Cheol (2014) found that students engaged in subject-specific study groups demonstrated higher academic performance and a deeper understanding of course materials. Someone who lacks social skills and does not have friends or refuses to participate in any social activity may become very shy, anxious, or self-conscious within themselves. Computer and internet facilities affect social relationships. Rinn (2004) observed that students living in hostels are more social and they participate more in co-curricular activities than those who are non-boarders. Wentzel (1998) found that significant relationships exist between perceived support from classmates and motivation to display pro-social forms of behaviour at the school level. Adriaanse (2007) also pointed out that satisfaction is a function of actual performance. When students are satisfied with their living environment, it affects their lifestyle and studies on campus, and also their impression of the university's management (Suki & Chowdhury, 2015). Exposure to cultural diversity positively influenced students' critical thinking skills and contributed to a more inclusive and tolerant community. Students who participated in conflict resolution workshops reported higher levels of satisfaction in their social interactions.

Esser (2006) found that language has a particularly significant role to play in the process of individual and societal integration. It constitutes both the medium of everyday communication and a resource, particularly in education and the labour market. Furthermore, languages and accents can act as symbols of belonging and give rise to differentiation and discrimination. Neustadt (1992) contended that social relations are reinforced in this matter as individuals, families, and communities exchange food or shared meals to create and strengthen social bonds within the community culture.

## CONCLUSION

Hostel life provides a unique opportunity for students to form a close bond and friendship with their peers from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The shared living space and sense of community can foster strong social connections and support networks. The diverse environment can also expose students to different perspectives, communication styles, and ways of life, which can be challenging but also teaches them to be more understanding, empathetic, and respectful towards others. These social groups can provide students with a support system and a sense of belonging, which can have a positive impact on their academic and personal development. Therefore, hostel life can be an important and formative experience for many students and young adults.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the study:

- Hostel management should facilitate and encourage group discussions among students, focusing not only on academic topics, but also on current affairs and life matters. This can foster intellectual growth and a broader perspective among hostel residents.
- When assigning roommates, consider mixing students from various regions and academic disciplines. This can promote cross-cultural interactions and collaboration among individuals with diverse perspectives.
- Literary societies and club formation should be encouraged in hostels.
- The political interference of political parties should be minimized. For this purpose, hostel wardens and university management need to deliver quality service and offer better hostel facilities to improve students' attitudes.
- Hostel management should organize some events where students can enhance their creative abilities such as annual debate competitions, group discussions as students' have different perceptions based on their own experiences, which in turn affect their behavioural patterns.
- Students should be encouraged to engage in community service projects as a group. This not only strengthens the bonds among students, but also instils a sense of social responsibility and empathy.

### Competing Interest

The authors had no competing interests.

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