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Predicting Psychological Resilience Based on Perfectionism and Body Image Among Adolescent Girls

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study was conducted to investigate psychological hardiness based on perfectionism and body image among adolescent girls.

Methods: This research employed a descriptive-correlational design. The statistical population included all female high school students (second cycle) in Kahnouj city during the 2023–2024 academic year. A multi-stage cluster random sampling method was used to select participants. The data collection instruments included the Psychological Hardiness Scale (Kloh et al., 2012), the Perfectionism Questionnaire (Terry-Short et al., 2010), and the Body Image Questionnaire (Cash, 2015). Data were analyzed using simultaneous regression analysis in SPSS version 27.

Results: The findings revealed that perfectionism negatively and significantly predicted psychological hardiness ($p < 0.05$), while body image positively and significantly predicted psychological hardiness ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions: The results suggest that perfectionism reduces, while a positive body image enhances, psychological hardiness in adolescent girls. Psychologists, school administrators, and teachers can apply these findings to improve the psychological resilience of adolescent girls.

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Introduction

Addressing the psychological problems of adolescents is of great importance, and all countries pay particular attention to this matter, as it involves multiple personal, social, biological, genetic, and cultural factors. Mental health issues such as negative body image, perfectionism, and low psychological hardiness, due to their chronic nature, affect the psychological, social, and academic dimensions of adolescents and may cause harm across these domains. Therefore, research focusing on this group of individuals has particular significance.

Psychological hardiness has attracted much scholarly attention because of its explanatory power in relation to psychological concepts such as coping with stress, self-confidence, and motivation, as well as its relevance to a broad range of health-related behaviors (Sadeghi et al., 2021). Psychological hardiness reflects a set of positive psychological variables that help neutralize the harmful effects of stress and allow individuals to function consistently regardless of prevailing circumstances. It consists of values, attitudes, cognitions, and both general and specific emotions—innate and acquired—that shape how a person approaches, responds to, and evaluates both positive and negative pressures, challenges, and adversities encountered in pursuit of goals (Gucciardi & Jones, 2022).

Perfectionism, on the other hand, as a personality trait, is closely related to self-acceptance. It is often conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that can play either an adaptive or maladaptive role in behavior (Hamachek, 2022). Perfectionism is typically divided into two dimensions: normal and neurotic. Normal perfectionists set high standards for self-evaluation, possess intrinsic motivation, and exhibit greater interest, enthusiasm, and confidence in their activities. Their defining characteristic is the need for achievement and personal success, which manifests in striving for excellence, mastery, and superiority (Abd Khodaei et al., 2021).

However, research has consistently shown that perfectionistic tendencies are associated with a range of psychological difficulties. Goldstein (2020) argues that striving for unattainable perfection can generate multiple psychological problems; although perfectionists may attempt to meet high personal standards to avoid disappointment, they rarely feel satisfied with their achievements. Numerous studies confirm that perfectionism includes components that heighten vulnerability to psychopathology, particularly among women, and adolescent girls in particular, where it contributes to the development of negative body image (Shirazi et al., 2019).

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Body image is not about one's actual physical appearance, but rather one's relationship with the body—encompassing beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with physical appearance (Cash, 2020). Although women are more prone than men to negative body image, men are not immune. A common misconception is that only women struggle with body dissatisfaction, a belief partly rooted in the fact that women more openly express such concerns. While women consider expressing dissatisfaction as "normal" and often share it with others, men typically endure such distress silently. In many cultures, men are expected not to worry about their appearance, as doing so is perceived as inconsistent with masculinity. Research shows that nearly one-third of individuals of both genders report dissatisfaction with their upper body or chest, while fewer than 20% express concerns about their face or height, the least problematic areas. Muscular tone and firmness are among the central foci of body dissatisfaction. For instance, in a 2021 study, 57% of women and 45% of men reported dissatisfaction with muscle firmness. Another survey in 2020 found that only 28% of men and 15% of women were satisfied with all seven domains of body image assessed. Thus, complete satisfaction is the exception rather than the rule, and specific dissatisfactions can undermine overall body image satisfaction (Cash, 2021).

Previous research has also indicated that perfectionism is negatively associated with psychological hardiness (Stoeber et al., 2020). In another study, Khosheghbal et al. (2021) found that individuals seeking rhinoplasty reported greater dissatisfaction with body image compared to non-applicants, while the latter group scored higher in perfectionism.

Based on this evidence, the present study aims to answer the following research question: Do perfectionism and body image predict psychological hardiness among adolescent girls?

Material and Methods

The present study employed a descriptive-correlational design, focusing on the relationships among psychological hardiness, perfectionism, and body image. In terms of its aim, the study was applied in nature, and in terms of data collection, it was categorized as a field study. The statistical population included all female students enrolled in the second cycle of high schools in Kahnouj city during the 2023–2024 academic year (approximately 4,000 students). Based on Cochran's formula, the minimum sample size was estimated at 351. However, given that this article represents part of a larger research project with access to data from 400 participants, and following

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Klein's (2004) recommendation that correlation studies may include up to 400 cases, the final sample size was determined to be 400 students.

A multi-stage cluster random sampling method was used. First, from four geographical zones of the city (north, south, east, and west), four high schools were randomly selected. Within each selected school, one class from each field of study was chosen. Ultimately, 20 classes with an average of 20 students per class were included, yielding the total of 400 participants.

Instruments

Psychological Hardiness Scale (Clough, Earle, & Sewell, 2012): This instrument contains 48 items across six subscales: challenge (8 items), emotional control (7 items), life control (7 items), commitment (11 items), confidence in abilities (9 items), and interpersonal confidence (6 items). Prior studies have confirmed its validity and reliability. For instance, Perry et al. (2022) reported satisfactory psychometric properties in a sample of 8,207 participants, while Sheard et al. (2019) obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 and a test–retest reliability coefficient of 0.90. In Iran, Afsanehpourk and Vaezeh-Hosseini (2019) reported an overall alpha of 0.93. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability.

Body Image Scale (Cash, 2015): This 56-item self-report questionnaire is rated on a five-point Likert scale (from "very little" to "very much") and includes five dimensions: appearance evaluation (items 11–19), appearance orientation (items 1–10), satisfaction with body areas (items 30–52), body comparison (items 53–56), and overweight preoccupation (items 20–29). Cash (2015) established its reliability and validity, while Dehghani et al. (2016) confirmed its psychometric properties in an Iranian sample, reporting a validity coefficient of 0.89. Subscale reliabilities ranged from 0.70 to 0.85.

Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale (Terry-Short et al., 2010): This 40-item questionnaire assesses two dimensions: positive perfectionism (20 items) and negative perfectionism (20 items). Terry-Short et al. (2010, cited in Akbari, 2019) reported Cronbach's alphas of 0.81 and 0.83, respectively. In an Iranian study, Besharat (2014) reported alphas of 0.90 and 0.78, with a four-week test–retest reliability of 0.86, supporting the reliability of the instrument. Construct validity was also confirmed through correlations with self-acceptance and general health subscales.

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Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize the data. Pearson correlation coefficients and simultaneous regression analyses were employed to test the study hypotheses. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. Approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was secured from all students and their legal guardians. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with data used exclusively for research purposes. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The study followed the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (2013 revision).

Results

Based on the demographic characteristics of the participants, 133 students (33.3%) were 16 years old, 169 students (42.3%) were 17 years old, and 98 students (24.4%) were 18 years old. In terms of grade level, 133 students (33.3%) were in 10th grade, 169 students (42.3%) in 11th grade, and 98 students (24.4%) in 12th grade. Table 1 presents the descriptive indices for the study variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Psychological Hardiness	98	172	147.81	21.87	0.307	-0.061
Body Image	94	272	174.74	29.70	-0.309	-0.112
Perfectionism	65	175	117.39	23.29	0.175	0.907

To assess data normality, the Shapiro–Wilk test was applied. The test statistics for psychological hardiness, body image, and perfectionism were nonsignificant ($p > .05$), confirming the normal distribution of all variables. This finding was consistent with the skewness and kurtosis indices, which fell within the acceptable range of -2 to +2. Therefore, the use of parametric tests was justified.

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationships among the variables. Results indicated a positive and significant correlation between psychological hardiness and body image, a negative and significant correlation between psychological hardiness and perfectionism,

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and a negative correlation between body image and perfectionism. All associations were statistically significant at acceptable levels.

The study data were collected cross-sectionally, which minimized the likelihood of time-related effects. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.851, which was sufficiently distant from the critical values of 0 and 4, confirming the independence of residuals. Variance inflation factors (VIF) were also examined to assess multicollinearity. The VIF values were 1.842 for body image and 1.962 for perfectionism, both well below the threshold of 5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. Thus, regression analysis was permissible.

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive roles of body image and perfectionism on psychological hardiness. Table 2 summarizes the unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and significance levels.

Table 2. Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Hardiness

Predictor	B	β	SE	t	p
Body Image	0.39	0.27	0.053	7.36	<.001
Perfectionism	-0.53	-0.31	0.049	-10.82	<.001

The ANOVA results for the regression model are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA Results for Regression Model

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	82,547.334	2	41,273.667	85.277	<.001
Residual	192,144.047	397	483.990		
Total	274,691.381	399			

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the model was 0.30, indicating that 30% of the variance in psychological hardiness was explained jointly by perfectionism and body image. These findings confirm the research hypothesis: perfectionism negatively predicts psychological hardiness, while body image positively predicts it.

Discussion

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research, including Moore et al. (2023) and Stoeber et al. (2020), which highlighted the significant roles of body image and perfectionism in predicting psychological hardiness.

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One of the most important findings concerns the predictive power of body image. When adolescent girls compare parts of their bodies with perceived ideals and experience dissatisfaction with specific areas such as their face, hair, torso, or muscles, this negative body image can undermine their psychological strength. Inability to accept one's own appearance often leads to the assumption that others also dislike one's appearance. Consequently, during social interactions—whether with peers of the same or opposite gender—adolescents may experience feelings of shame and inadequacy. Fear of scrutiny and social rejection can then drive avoidance of situations in which they feel exposed to evaluation. In some cases, this excessive preoccupation with appearance becomes pathological and is referred to as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), in which individuals develop a distorted and abnormal perception of their appearance. Such distortions foster fear of negative evaluation by others, generating anxiety, negative thoughts, and diminished psychological hardiness.

Conversely, adolescents who maintain a positive body image exhibit stronger psychological resilience. They are more capable of organizing and pursuing life plans, maintain a clear sense of purpose, and demonstrate greater life satisfaction. Positive body image is also associated with optimism toward the future, the ability to build warm and close social relationships, and a higher likelihood of being perceived as cheerful and adaptive by peers. Such individuals are more open to new experiences, develop a sense of existential meaning, and cultivate positive attitudes toward themselves, others, and life in general. These outcomes align with the perspective of Gold et al. (2021), who conceptualized a resilient mindset as a product of positive youth development. They argue that the components of psychological hardiness can be transformed into life skills that enable adolescents to overcome obstacles, control fears and anxieties, and remain committed to their goals. In this regard, a healthy perception of one's body reduces mental fears—such as social appearance anxiety—making the predictive power of body image for psychological hardiness both logical and theoretically justified.

Another key finding was the negative role of maladaptive perfectionism in predicting psychological hardiness. High levels of maladaptive perfectionism reduce resilience, whereas adaptive (or positive) perfectionism is associated with enhanced psychological strength. For example, when an adolescent girl demonstrates excessive sensitivity, doubts her ability to perform even minor tasks, expects perfection from peers and herself, and exhibits rigid standards of order

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and precision, she becomes psychologically vulnerable. This is consistent with Goldstein's (1995) assertion that striving for unattainable perfection generates multiple psychological difficulties. Although perfectionists may attempt to avoid disappointment by adhering to excessively high standards, they rarely feel satisfied with their achievements.

Numerous studies confirm that perfectionism comprises maladaptive components that heighten vulnerability to psychopathology, thereby weakening psychological resilience. Such vulnerability can result in negative self-perceptions, reduced unconditional self-acceptance, and a tendency to evaluate oneself harshly (Shirazi et al., 2019). In the long run, maladaptive perfectionism fosters persistent stress and self-criticism, both of which deplete the psychological resources necessary for resilience. In contrast, adaptive perfectionism—characterized by striving for excellence while maintaining flexibility and self-compassion—can reinforce self-confidence and help adolescents better cope with life's challenges.

Taken together, these findings emphasize that fostering a positive body image and adaptive perfectionism may significantly enhance psychological hardiness among adolescent girls. Programs aimed at strengthening resilience in youth should therefore integrate psychoeducational strategies that address both appearance-related beliefs and perfectionistic tendencies.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional and correlational design prevents causal conclusions, and the relationships observed may be influenced by unmeasured variables. Second, data were collected exclusively through self-report questionnaires, which can introduce bias due to social desirability or inaccurate self-perceptions. Third, the sample included only adolescent girls from high schools in a single city, limiting the generalizability of findings to other populations, including boys, different age groups, or adolescents from other cultural or socioeconomic contexts.

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to explore the causal relationships among body image, perfectionism, and psychological hardiness over time. Studies should also include diverse populations, including boys and adolescents from various regions or cultural backgrounds, to enhance generalizability. Additionally, incorporating multi-method assessments, such as parent or teacher reports and behavioral observations, would complement self-report data and improve reliability. Finally, intervention studies are recommended to examine whether programs aimed at

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promoting positive body image and adaptive perfectionism can effectively enhance psychological resilience in adolescents.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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