



Assessing the Research Students' Perceptions Regarding Their Supervisory Experiences and Well-being

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ABSTRACT

Research experiences may be an indicator of mental well-being among research students in postgraduate institutions. Due to its dire needs, it was felt to investigate the research experiences and well-being of research students. The study objectives were to explore the research experiences and to examine the mental well-being of varsity students. Cross-sectional survey study was used for this research. A total of 190 research students of two faculties from a public-sector university were the participants for this research study. The data were collected by using the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS). The results of this study showed that most male students had higher levels of well-being compared to female research students. As a result of the study, the correlation matrix revealed that supervisory experiences has moderate positive correlation with students' well-being ($r = .527, p < .01$). Good supervision had positive effects on the well-being of research students. The beta coefficient β of .151 indicates that there is a positive relationship between supervisory experiences and wellbeing, meaning that as supervisory experiences increase, wellbeing is also likely to increase. The t-value of 2.09 specifies that the relationship between supervisory experiences and well-being is statistically significant. In-time feedback from the supervisor might enhance the well-being of research students. The study recommends making a proper system that assures the availability of a supervisor, managing meetings with supervisees, and a proper feedback from both supervisor and supervisee.

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1. Introduction

The supervision of postgraduate research students has been observed as an important item in academic writing. It is believed that in order to engage in the research, students' proper supervision is required. If this supervision is not provided in time, then it may create certain difficulties in achieving the required result (Tladi & Seretse, 2022). In Pakistan, the higher educational institutes are making their utmost efforts to produce up to the mark human capital in the form of research students. The quality of supervision provided to these postgraduate researchers has not been discussed here. In order to keep the quality in research supervision, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has given a limited number of supervisees to each supervisor, i.e., 5 PhDs and 7 MPhil research students (Ali, Ullah, & Sanauddin, 2019). Moreover, the research journey is assumed as quite challenging. These challenges include their research supervision, availability of a supervisor, and well-being, etc. Sometimes it causes dropouts from the institutes at the thesis level. If we go through the literature, there are many studies that show, poor relationship with a supervisor may lead to incomplete degree attainment (Burkholder, 2012). Similarly, a few studies suggest that a quality relationship with a supervisor may help in the timely completion of a degree (Woolderink et al., 2015). Different

steps are taken by many universities in order to develop the quality of supervision. Australia, France, UK, and New Zealand have different training to make supervision more effective (Manathunga, 2009). Therefore, it is needed to search the supervisory aspects in higher educational institutes of Pakistan, as it is a much-ignored concern in our country. The issues related to the supervision of research students have been searched by a few Pakistani researchers (Mahmood, 2011; Saleem & Mahmood, 2018). According to a study conducted in Pakistan (Saleem & Mahmood, 2018), most of the supervisees reported that proper time by the supervisor is not given to them owing to the hectic supervisor's workload.

It has been observed that due to a lack of quality supervision, poor infrastructure, insufficient access to university libraries, and internet facilities may cause serious well-being issues for research students. Well-being is a complicated phenomenon that is being studied in different fields of life. Many aspects of well-being have been studied (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). It has been defined in different aspects, but not yet well defined. WHO defines well-being as the health of an individual, in which the individual is socially, physically, and mentally well. (Galvin & Todres, 2011) suggested that well-being is not merely related to the physical, mental, or social status of an individual, but rather it is also related to one's body, personal identity, and mood, etc. Thus, well-being is quite complex to define, and it cannot be restricted to any one thing (Todres & Galvin, 2010). Subjective and psychological well-being have been studied in the last decades. They are also known as hedonic well-being and eudemonic well-being. Hedonic well-being is related to the general happiness of an individual. Or the attainment of pleasure and happiness in one's life. While eudemonic wellbeing is related to self-actualization and a meaningful life, a life in which an individual has some set goals (Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Juniper defined well-being as related to external factors. Based on her findings during several clinical and non-clinical conditions, she designed a questionnaire. The questionnaire included several dimensions, namely: facilities, health, research, home, university, supervisor, and social. By going through the literature, it was observed that different studies by using different methods were carried out to find out the well-being of individuals. These studies included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. In many studies, questionnaires were used, and interviews were conducted. Participants of these studies included doctors, nurses, PhDs, psychologically upset individuals, etc. Less work was observed that was done on supervisory experiences and the well-being of research students. Similarly, the researcher found very little literature in the Pakistani scenario that examined the well-being and supervisory experiences of postgraduate research students. So, in order to fill in this gap, this study was conducted.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Supervision

Supervisors are considered one of the main sources of support, having a big impact on the well-being of research students (García et al., 2025). Traditionally, supervision has been viewed as a teaching and learning interaction between a competent and experienced supervisor and a supervisee with less expertise. Teaching research techniques and supervising the supervisee's work are the supervisor's responsibilities. This method of supervision establishes a hierarchical relationship between the supervisor and supervisee in which the supervisor is positioned as an expert who instructs the supervisee on how to do research and provides advice on the best and ethical ways to carry out research. Students find it difficult to understand the concept of independent thinking and learning under a tiered and power-centered supervisory association. It is very important to emphasize that the problems supervisors and supervisees encounter are extremely complicated and call for contextual, qualitative, and quantitative assessments. For postgraduate students to be able to make an original contribution in their subjects, quality supervision is crucial. The topics up for discussion and argument include the supervisee-supervisor relationship, supervision style, and communication between the two parties. Sidhu et al. (2013) told that the supervisor should aid the supervisee in developing the necessary research abilities and expertise. Effective and fruitful postgraduate supervision is thought to depend on open and honest communication between the supervisor and supervisee. Moreover, (Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2001) commented that good communication and regular meetings between the supervisor and the supervisee are essential components of an efficient supervision process. The supervisory process ought to be engaging for the supervisees on an intellectual level. The effect that their answer and critique have on the student is something that supervisors are expected to be mindful of. This quick assessment of the literature reveals that in order to guarantee postgraduate students receive

quality supervision, several crucial issues in postgraduate supervision must be researched and debated.

Hypothesis 1: There is a difference in supervisory experiences of male and female research students.

2.2. Well-Being

Well-being shows the social progress of an individual (Perera et al., 2022). In line with the World Health Organization (WHO), well-being means being able to cope with the daily stressors, work fruitfully, be a productive individual, and contribute positively to society. There are two types of well-being, eudemonic and hedonic. Aristippus of Cyrene is credited with creating the idea of hedonism. According to him, living a good life entails maximizing opportunities for sensuous pleasure (Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2001). Epicurus extended this type of thought further by claiming that the main purpose of existence is to increase pleasure. Hedonism is the opposite of eudemonism, which was initially defined by Aristotle (Vogt, 2018). According to him, real enjoyment can only be attained by discovering and identifying one's own virtues, which must then be developed. The eudaimonic approach focuses on a person's existing feelings and experiences as they concern self-realization. A person strives for personal accomplishment by cultivating their individual values and distinctive capabilities, which in turn help them realize their own life goals. According to eudaimonism, happiness is defined as having a vibrant understanding of and confidence in attaining worthwhile goals (Dler M Ahmed, Z Azhar, & Aram J Mohammad, 2024; Dler Mousa Ahmed, Zubir Azhar, & Aram Jawhar Mohammad, 2024).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) and Kasap (2021) conducted a thorough assessment of the literature and identified six components in her notion of well-being; the author emphasized that this model's fundamental strength is its holistic perspective of well-being, which goes beyond a focus on the experience of good feelings. As a result, an indicator of how well a person has adapted to stressful conditions in their life is their level of well-being (Dhivya et al., 2023; Ragmoun, 2024). However, a hedonic approach to well-being, which examines life satisfaction and affect, has predominated research to this point, both cross-sectional and longitudinal. Even though it is commonly recognized that stressful events cause people to start looking for meaning, there is not much study on well-being in a eudemonic environment.

Hypothesis 2: There is a difference in the well-being of male and female research students.

2.3. Supervisory Experiences and Well-Being

Research students chasing masters and doctoral degrees reports noteworthy rates of psychological misery, in line with prevalent studies. Universities are looking for evidence-based strategies to better support this student cohort's mental well-being as an outcome (Ryan, Baik, & Larcombe, 2022). The supervisor-student relationship is perceived to be essential for research students' academic achievement (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018). A supervisor, most of the time is considered a mentor and facilitator. His basic purpose is to see that his supervisee is developing and growing. For this, the supervisor sometimes acts as a listener, a motivator, and a supporter. The supervisee and supervisor feel free to share their knowledge, experiences, and skills (Arslan & Allen, 2022). According to a longitudinal study, research efficacy of students is directly related to the mentoring supervisor (Tanaka et al., 2011). For the research students' professional growth matters a lot. This was clearly mentioned in the study results by Doucet et al. (2012). It was also found that the positive relation with the supervisor results in better working conditions and well-being of research students. Due to these studies, the present study claims that better understanding with a supervisor leads to better research students with better well-being (Al Makhamreh & Stockley, 2019).

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant positive relation between the supervisory experiences and the well-being of male and female research students.

Hypothesis 4: There is an impact of supervisory experiences on the well-being of male and female research students.

3. Materials and Methods

The present research examines the research students' perceptions regarding their supervisory experiences and well-being. A descriptive survey research design was adopted to collect relevant data. According to Haider and Hussain (2014), descriptive research is appropriate for analyzing ongoing phenomena in real-life settings. It serves as an effective method for gathering information to test hypotheses or address research questions related to both current and past situations (Haider & Qureshi, 2016). Among the various tools available in descriptive research, questionnaires and interviews are commonly used for data collection. However, for the purposes of this study, data were exclusively gathered through a structured questionnaire (Haider, Ali, & Nosheen, 2021).

3.1. Participants of the Study

A total of 200 research students of working on their research theses were selected conveniently from the different departments as the sample of current study. Out of 200 MPhil research students, 190 responded, so the response rate was 95%. The sample included 154 (85%) females and 27 (15%) males. In the study sample, nine participants did not prefer to disclose their gender, so they were also excluded. All of the participants were regular university students. In order to analyze the characteristics of participant's demographics descriptive statistical analysis was used. Participants ranged from 24 to 45 years. 14.2 % of the participants were males and 81.1% were females. 4.7% participants preferred not to tell their gender. Moreover, 77.9 % participants were employed and doing their study on their own expenses, while 22.1 % participants were having family support for their study expenses and they were unemployed too.

3.2. Research Instruments

The data for this study was collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of three sections, including personal information, supervisory experience, and well-being.

3.2.1. Personal information

This section of the questionnaire asked for the name of the university, department, semester, gender, age, nature of job, source of financial support, and educational level.

3.2.2. Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ)

The supervisory experiences were explored by adapting the PREQ, developed in Australia (Drennan, 2008). It is a 36-item tool with five components. This questionnaire helps in finding the experiences regarding supervisor, infrastructure, research culture, research outcomes, and service quality of research students amongst different educational levels. Seven questions related to supervisory experiences were adapted from it. The reliability coefficient was $\alpha = 0.838$ for the present study.

3.2.3. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)

The WEMWBS was used to collect data about the well-being of research students. This tool consists of 14 items (Tennant et al., 2015). While going through the literature review, the researcher found the above-mentioned valid tools for the present study. These tools were adapted after consulting the supervisor and some research experts. The reliability coefficient was $\alpha = 0.941$ for the present study.

4. Results

The present study explores the supervisory experiences and well-being of research students. The collected data were added to SPSS and Mean values, standard deviation, correlation, and regression were used for the analysis of data.

The six statements were asked about the supervisory experiences of research students. According to the first statement, the results showed 34.2 % students agreed that their supervisor made a serious effort to understand their difficulties, 39.5% were uncertain, 23.2 % strongly agreed, 2.1% disagreed, and 1.1% strongly disagreed. The descriptive analysis showed that 44.2% research students agreed on the availability of a supervisor. Only 1.6% strongly disagreed with this. 34.2 % students agreed that their supervisors understand their difficulties, 23.3 % strongly agreed, and 2.1% disagreed. According to the descriptive analysis, 72.1 % students strongly agreed that their supervisor provides them with additional

information related to their topic, 25.3 % also agreed with it, while 1.6% students strongly disagreed with it. The descriptive analysis revealed that 72.1% research students strongly agreed upon the statement that they get feedback from their supervisor on their progress. 84.2 % research students strongly agreed that their supervisor had given them good guidance in the selection of a topic, 13.7% also agreed to it, and only 1.1 % disagreed with it.

Table 1: Perception of research students about their supervisory experiences

Sr.No.	Items	Level of Agreement (%)					M	SD
		SDA	DA	UC	A	SA		
1	My supervisor(s) make(s) a real struggle to understand the problems I faced.	1.1	2.1	39.5	34.2	23.2	3.76	.86
2	My supervisor(s) offer(s) with additional information pertinent to my topic.	1.6	.5	.5	25.3	72.1	4.65	.67
3	My supervisor(s) delivers helpful comments on my progress	1.6	.5	.5	25.3	72.1	4.65	.67
4	I have expected good guidance in my literature search	.5	1.6	1.1	2.1	94.7	4.88	.52
5	Supervision is offered when it is required.	1.6	1.6	39.5	44.2	13.2	3.65	.78
6	I am provided good guidance in my topic assortment and refinement.	1.1	1.1	2	13.7	82.2	4.78	.59

Table 2: Perception of research students about their Well-being

Sr.No.	Items	Level of Agreement (%)					M	SD
		NOT	R	SOT	O	AOT		
1	I have been attracted in novel things	22.1	1.1	3.2	40.5	33.2	3.61	1.50
2	I felt being valued	1.6	21.6	41.6	4.2	31.1	3.41	1.18
3	I can make up my mind about things	.5	22.1	42.1	34.2	1.1	3.13	.78
4	I feel confident	1.1	21.6	52.6	22.1	2.6	3.03	.76
5	I feel close to other people	1.1	22.1	53.2	21.6	2.1	3.01	.75
6	I am feeling worthy about myself	.5	22.1	43.2	11.6	22.6	3.33	1.07
7	I am thinking clearly	.5	41.6	3.2	42.6	12.1	3.24	1.13
8	I am dealing with difficulties well	1.1	0	41.1	4.7	53.2	4.08	1.01
9	I have had energy to spare	1.1	22.1	42.6	21.6	12.6	3.22	.96
10	I have been feeling interested in other people	22.6	3.2	41.6	12.1	20.5	3.04	1.37
11	I have been feeling relaxed	1.1	1.6	52.6	22.6	22.1	3.63	.87
12	I am feeling useful	22.1	3.2	72.1	2.1	.5	3.70	2.30
13	I am feeling optimistic about the future.	1.1	22.1	53.2	21.6	2.1	3.01	.75

Table 2 shows the perception of research students about their well-being. First statement's result revealed that 40.5% research students were often interested in new things, 22.1% were never interested, 33.2 were all of the time interested, 3.2% some of the time, and 1.1% were rarely interested in new things. The mean value (M= 3.61, SD=1.503) discovered that the majority of the students were often interested in new things. Furthermore, results of

the second statement depict 41.6% of the students felt being loved some of the time, 31.1% felt being loved all of the time. The high mean value ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.182$) showed that most of the research students felt being loved. Descriptive analysis showed 53.2% research students some of the time felt optimistic about their future. 1.1% of them were never optimistic. A high mean value ($M=3.70$, $SD=2.302$) presented that most of the research students some of the time felt being useful. 72.1% research students often felt for being useful. 22.1% rarely felt this. The descriptive analysis yielded that 52.6% research students some of the time felt being relaxed, 22.6% and 22.1% felt being relaxed often and all of the time respectively.

The high mean value ($M=3.63$, $SD=.879$) depicts that most of the research students some of the time felt relaxed. Wide variety of research students (53.2%) were dealing well with their problems, while some of them (41.1%) told that they were able to deal with problems some of the time. The descriptive analysis revealed that only a 1.1% research student made their own mind about things. While 42.1% were some of the time able to make their minds and 34.2% were often abled to make their minds. According to the descriptive analysis, 52.6% research students felt being confident, 22.1% often felt that, 21.6% rarely and 1.1% none of the time felt being confident. High mean value ($M=3.03$, $SD=.765$) indicates that most of the students felt confident. The results are according to the suggested hypothesis.

Table 3: Correlation between students' supervisory experiences and well-being

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Supervisory Experience	3.87	.68	(0.838)			
2. Students' Well-being	3.27	.74	.527**	(0.941)		

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Numbers in brackets are Cronbach's α (reliability) estimates

In the statistical analysis, correlation refers to the degree to which two variables are mutually related. The Spearman's rho correlation coefficient processes the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. The correlation matrix revealed that supervisory experiences has moderate positive correlation with students' well-being ($r = .527$, $p < .01$). This means that as the values of supervisory experiences increase, the values of Wellbeing also incline to increase, and vice versa. The p-value of the correlation coefficient being less than 0.01 indicates that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. It suggests that there is strong validation to suggest that the observed correlation between supervisory experiences and well-being is not just due to chance. This is an important finding because it increases our confidence in the relationship between the two variables. So, our third hypothesis predicted that there is a strong positive correlation between supervisory experiences and the well-being of research students; it is accepted because our results support it.

Table 4: Regression Analysis for Supervisory Experiences and Well-being of research students.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	β	t	F	R^2	Sig
Supervisory Experiences	Well-being	.151	2.09	4.375	.23	.038

This table shows the results of a statistical analysis examining the relationship between supervisory experiences and well-being. The independent variable is supervisory experiences, while the dependent variable is well-being. The beta coefficient β of .151 indicates that there is a positive relationship between supervisory experiences and wellbeing, meaning that as supervisory experiences increase, wellbeing is also likely to increase. The t-value of 2.09 specifies that the relationship between supervisory experiences and well-being is statistically significant. This means that it is not likely to happen by chance. The F-value of 4.375 directs that the overall model is statistically significant in predicting wellbeing, and the R^2 of .23 indicates that approximately 23% of the variation in wellbeing can be elucidated by supervisory experiences. Finally, the level of significance (Sig) is .038, which is below the standard threshold of .05. This suggests that the relationship between supervisory experiences and wellbeing is significant and not likely to be due to chance.

5. Discussion

The present study analyzed the perception of M.Phil. research students about their supervisory experiences and well-being. 190 research students joined this study. Among them were male and female research students. The two groups had different chronological age levels, educational levels, and sources of study. A statistically significant positive relation was found between supervisory experiences and the well-being of male and female research students. Similar results were found in the studies conducted in England (Wisker & Robinson, 2018). The first hypothesis predicted that there is a difference in supervisory experiences of male and female researchers. In a study, the results obtained showed differences in the supervisory experiences of males and females. For example, the male supervisee gave more answers to the supervisor's questions, and more opinions were given by them. While the female supervisees praised their supervisors, their ideas were accepted easily (Hindes & Andrews). In Japan and the United States, the studies conducted by Ryff and the fellows showed that, as compared with males, females show a more positive relationship with others (Ahrens & Ryff, 2006; Karasawa et al., 2011; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). These study results did not relate to the results of the current study. According to the present study findings, both of the respondent groups, i.e., males and females, had equally and almost the same relationship with their supervisors. They had good supervisory experiences. The mean score (M) and standard deviation (SD) for male research students were 78 and 11.79, respectively. For female research students, the mean score (M) and standard deviation (SD) were 76.72 and 11.26, respectively.

The second hypothesis of the study was that there is a difference in the well-being of male and female research students. The statistical results of the current study showed a mean score $M = 46.76$ with a standard deviation (SD) as $SD = 11.15$ for females and a mean value $M = 46.47$ with standard deviation (SD) as $SD = 12.84$ for males. These results depicted almost negligible differences in well-being among male and female research students. Sweeting et al. (2014) concluded that females had more well-being as compared to males. The results of our study showed minor differences in well-being of males and females. The third hypothesis suggested there is a significant positive relationship between supervisory experiences and the well-being of research students. The results of the present study matched the hypothesis. Wollast et al. (2023) investigated the role of the supervisor's support in the emotional well-being of PhD candidates. The research explored gender differences and provided insights about how supervisors could better support their PhD candidates in improving their well-being and increase their determination in completing their study programs. The study suggests that supervisor support plays an important role in the well-being and determination of research students. In another correlational study, it was found that mentoring has a positive role in the well-being of research students (Haider & Dasti, 2022). The fourth hypothesis was, well-being is affected by supervisory experiences. The F-value of 4.375 indicates that the overall model is statistically significant in predicting wellbeing, and the R^2 of .23 indicates that approximately 23% of the variation in wellbeing can be explained by supervisory experiences. One of the studies conducted in Africa also emphasized on effective and well-organized research supervision of research students that ultimately results in positive wellbeing (Igumbor et al., 2022). Furthermore, the well-being of doctoral research students is positively linked with effective supervision (Hazell et al., 2020). The current study is supported by the study of White et al. (2022), who said that those research students who received positive guidance from their supervisors were having well-being.

6. Conclusions

The study aimed at finding the prevalence of supervisory experiences and well-being of research students, the relationship between supervision of research students and their well-being, and the correlation between the supervisory experiences and well-being. Overall, the findings indicated that there as compared to females the male research students had good well-being, younger-aged research students had more well-being and satisfaction with their supervisors, and there is a positive correlation between supervision and well-being of research students. As the present study analyzes the perception of research students about their supervisory experiences and wellbeing, it demonstrated a positive and significant relation between the two mentioned variables. Consequently, when a supervisor is available to the supervisee, there is a great level of relaxation for the research student. If the supervisor understands the difficulties of the supervisee, then it becomes easy for the research students

to cope with their difficulties. The research students feel good when they are provided with timely feedback on their progress. Additional information provided by the supervisor may increase the satisfaction level of the research students. The complete satisfaction of research students increases with the increase in helpful feedback from the supervisor.

6.1. The Study Implications

In the future, it is suggested to make a proper system that assures the availability of a supervisor, managed meetings between supervisor-supervisee, proper feedback from both supervisor and supervisee. This study does not cover most of the geographical regions of the country, so it is suggested to do this study on a larger scale. Furthermore, it is also recommended to run different statistical tests to check the supervisory experiences and well-being of research students. This study is focused only on research students; the well-being of other students must be studied to create large human capital from higher education institutes. Moreover, it is suggested that similar research should be done in private universities also. This is a quantitative research; further data should be collected for a qualitative and mixed-method research study. In addition to all the above suggestions, larger, global samples must be used in further studies.

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