

Fear of Rejection, Self-Compassion, and Submissive Behaviour Among University Students in Lahore: A Cross-Sectional Moderation Study

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Abstract

Fear of rejection may shape how university students respond to criticism, interpersonal uncertainty, and the possibility of exclusion, while self-compassion may provide an internal resource that reduces threat based responding. This study examined relationships among fear of rejection, self-compassion, and submissive behaviour and tested whether self-compassion moderated the association between fear of rejection and submissive behaviour among university students in Lahore, Pakistan. A quantitative cross sectional correlational design was used. Publication analyses were restricted to 133 observed participant records retained after consent, scale completion, and response quality screening; 48 clearly identified synthetic rows in the supplied workbook were excluded from all empirical claims. Participants completed the Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, the Self-Compassion Scale Short Form, and selected Nonassertive and Exploitable items from the Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Problems. Fear of rejection was not significantly related to submissive behaviour, $r = .077$, $p = .378$, and self-compassion was not significantly related to submissive behaviour, $r = .011$, $p = .904$. In simultaneous regression, neither fear of rejection, $B = .017$, $p = .383$, nor self-compassion, $B = .006$, $p = .956$, uniquely predicted submissive behaviour. The interaction between fear of rejection and self-compassion was also non-significant, $B = .015$, $p = .609$. Findings suggest that social evaluative threat, compassionate self-relating, and submissive interpersonal behaviour may operate as distinct

processes in this sample. Measurement reliability and culturally specific meanings of deference and submission require particular attention in future Pakistani research.

Keywords: fear of rejection, rejection sensitivity, self-compassion, submissive behaviour, university students, moderation

Introduction

University life places students in repeated situations in which they are evaluated, compared, accepted, rejected, and expected to negotiate increasingly independent social roles. Students must manage classroom participation, presentations, group assignments, teacher feedback, friendships, intimate relationships, family expectations, and digital communication, often while developing a more stable sense of identity. In these settings, the possibility of negative evaluation or exclusion may affect not only emotional wellbeing but also interpersonal behaviour. Some students may respond to anticipated rejection by withdrawing, seeking reassurance, becoming defensive, or working harder for approval. Others may respond through self-silencing, excessive accommodation, or difficulty asserting personal needs. Understanding why one response occurs rather than another is clinically relevant because outward politeness or compliance may sometimes conceal anxiety, shame, or perceived lack of interpersonal power.

Rejection sensitivity provides one framework for understanding heightened concern about social acceptance. Downey and Feldman (1996) conceptualized rejection sensitivity as a cognitive affective disposition involving anxious expectations of rejection, a readiness to detect rejection in ambiguous social cues, and strong reactions when rejection is perceived. The construct is therefore more specific than a general desire to be liked. It describes a pattern in which the individual anticipates disapproval before it occurs and may organize behaviour around preventing that outcome. Later work has linked rejection sensitivity with a range of emotional and interpersonal difficulties, while also showing that its expression varies across contexts and outcomes (Gao et al., 2017; Minihan et al., 2023). For university students, ambiguous messages, delayed replies, critical feedback, exclusion from peer groups, or disagreement with authority figures may all become socially threatening when interpreted through an expectation of rejection.

One possible behavioural response to perceived interpersonal threat is submissive behaviour. Social rank theory suggests that yielding, inhibition, and reduced assertion may function as defensive responses when individuals perceive themselves as lower in rank, less powerful, or more vulnerable in a relationship (Gilbert & Allan, 1994; Allan & Gilbert, 1997). Submissive behaviour in this sense should not be equated with cooperation, humility, courtesy, or culturally appropriate respect. The clinically relevant form is repeated loss of agency: difficulty saying no, avoidance of disagreement despite personal cost, inability to maintain boundaries, excessive compliance, or allowing others to dominate. These patterns may temporarily reduce conflict but can also maintain unequal relationships and reinforce beliefs that acceptance depends on self-silencing.

The present study also considers self-compassion as a potential protective factor. Self-compassion refers to responding to personal difficulty with self-kindness, recognition of common humanity, and balanced mindful awareness rather than harsh self-judgment, isolation, or over identification (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion has been associated with lower psychological distress and better adjustment in student populations (Chan et al., 2022). It is plausible that a student who can tolerate mistakes, criticism, and social discomfort without global self-condemnation may feel less pressure to please others in order to preserve self-worth. From this perspective, self-compassion could be associated directly with lower submissive behaviour and could also weaken the relationship between fear of rejection and submission.

However, the proposed model should not be treated as automatic. Fear of rejection is an internal expectancy and appraisal process; self-compassion is a style of responding to personal distress; submissive behaviour is an interpersonal action pattern. These constructs operate at different levels. A rejection sensitive student may withdraw rather than submit, become angry rather than compliant, or seek reassurance without showing nonassertive interpersonal problems. Similarly, self-compassion may primarily influence emotional recovery after a difficult interaction rather than immediately alter assertive behaviour. A weak or non significant direct association can therefore be theoretically informative if the measures and context are carefully considered.

The Pakistani university context makes this distinction especially important. Interpersonal behaviour is embedded within expectations concerning respect for elders, family obligation, modesty, teacher authority, reputation, and gendered social roles. In such a context, deference may be voluntary and values consistent rather than fear driven. Conversely, a student may experience substantial internal fear while outwardly behaving in ways that are socially interpreted as respectful. Evidence obtained in Western settings cannot therefore be transferred automatically to Pakistani students without examining cultural meaning and measurement fit. Recent Pakistani work on submissive behaviour has emphasized the value of culturally and linguistically sensitive assessment (Mubashir & Batool, 2024).

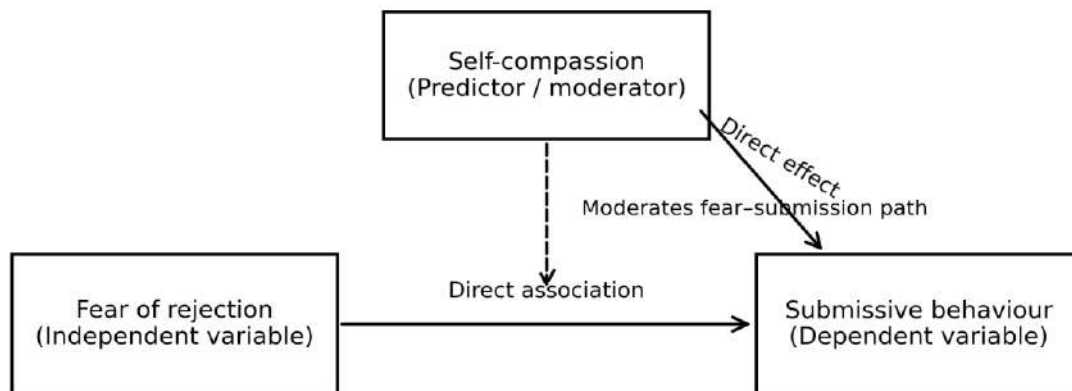
Lahore provides a relevant setting because its universities include public and private institutions, varied academic disciplines, and students from diverse residential and socioeconomic backgrounds. Students encounter traditional expectations alongside increasing emphasis on autonomy, confidence, professional communication, and digital social participation. This creates a useful context for examining whether fear of rejection is related to maladaptive submission and whether self-compassion alters that relationship.

The study had five objectives: to examine the relationship between fear of rejection and submissive behaviour; to examine the relationship between self-compassion and submissive behaviour; to determine whether fear of rejection uniquely predicts submissive behaviour after controlling for self-compassion; to determine whether self-compassion uniquely predicts submissive behaviour after controlling for fear of rejection; and to test whether self-compassion moderates the relationship between fear of rejection and submissive behaviour. Correspondingly, it was hypothesized that fear of rejection would be positively associated with and positively predict submissive behaviour, self-compassion would be negatively associated

with and negatively predict submissive behaviour, and the positive fear of rejection to submissive behaviour relationship would be weaker at higher levels of self-compassion.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Note. Self-compassion was specified both as a direct predictor of submissive behaviour and as a moderator of the fear of rejection to submissive behaviour relationship.

Literature Review

Fear of Rejection and Social Evaluative Threat

The rejection sensitivity model proposes that earlier or repeated experiences of rejection can contribute to anxious expectations that become activated in situations where acceptance is uncertain (Downey & Feldman, 1996). When a social cue is ambiguous, a person high in rejection sensitivity may be more likely to interpret it as evidence of disapproval. The resulting emotional arousal can influence attention, interpretation, and behaviour before actual rejection has occurred. Berenson et al. (2009) demonstrated that rejection sensitivity is associated with disruption of attention by social threat cues, reinforcing the idea that it involves a readiness to detect interpersonal danger rather than a simple global self-description.

Student life contains many cues that may activate this system. Evaluation by teachers, comparison with classmates, group project negotiations, social media interactions, friendships, and intimate relationships can all create uncertainty about acceptance. Andrews et al. (2022) further showed the importance of distinguishing online and offline rejection sensitivity in contemporary social life. Although the current study did not separate digital and face to face contexts, this distinction is relevant because university students may move rapidly between both forms of social evaluation.

Meta analytic evidence indicates that rejection sensitivity is associated with mental health difficulties, but the size and form of associations differ across outcomes (Gao et al., 2017). This variability matters for the present study. Emotional distress is not the same as submissive behaviour, and an internal expectation of rejection can produce several possible behavioural strategies. Consequently, a theoretically plausible relationship between fear of rejection and submission still requires direct empirical testing.

Submissive Behaviour, Social Rank, and Interpersonal Agency

Social rank models emphasize how perceived inferiority, low power, and threat of exclusion can shape defensive behaviour (Gilbert & Allan, 1994). Submissive actions can reduce immediate confrontation when the individual believes that challenging another person is risky. Allan and Gilbert (1997) linked submissive behaviour with psychopathology and described it as part of a broader defensive system organized around rank and threat. In university settings, perceived rank can be influenced by academic achievement, language confidence, financial background, teacher authority, popularity, gender norms, and access to supportive networks.

The present study operationalized submissive behaviour through selected Nonassertive and Exploitable sectors of the Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Problems (CSIP; Boudreaux et al., 2018). This approach emphasizes interpersonal difficulty rather than the mere frequency of polite or accommodating behaviour. Nonassertive problems involve difficulty expressing needs, taking the lead, or standing up for oneself, whereas exploitable problems involve allowing others to dominate or take advantage. Combining these domains provides a behavioural outcome focused on reduced interpersonal agency and boundary protection.

This distinction is particularly useful in collectivistic or hierarchical social contexts. A respectful response to a teacher, elder, or family member may be intentional and consistent with personal values. It becomes clinically relevant when the person perceives no acceptable alternative, experiences fear or resentment, repeatedly loses boundaries, or is vulnerable to exploitation. The same outward action can therefore have different psychological meanings. Research that treats all compliance as pathology risks confusing cultural norms with distress; research that ignores fear driven compliance risks overlooking students whose difficulties are hidden behind socially acceptable quietness.

Self-Compassion as a Protective Resource

Neff (2003) proposed self-compassion as an adaptive way of relating to oneself during failure, embarrassment, inadequacy, or suffering. It includes self-kindness rather than self-criticism, common humanity rather than isolation, and mindfulness rather than over identification. The construct is especially relevant to social evaluative threat because rejection can quickly become globalized into negative conclusions about personal worth. A self-compassionate response may allow a student to experience disappointment or criticism without treating it as proof of complete inadequacy.

The Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SCS SF) was developed to provide an efficient estimate of overall self-compassion while retaining representation of the major components of the full scale (Raes et al., 2011). Research with university students has linked self-compassion

with lower distress and more adaptive functioning. Chan et al. (2022), for example, reported relationships between compassion, flourishing, meaning in life, and psychological distress among university students. Other research has shown that brief self-compassion interventions can improve aspects of wellbeing in student samples (Smeets et al., 2014).

Evidence connecting self-compassion specifically with submissive behaviour is less extensive. Akin (2009) reported an association between self-compassion and submissive behaviour, and Eraydin and Karagozoglu (2017) examined self-compassion, self-confidence, and submissive behaviour among nursing students. These findings support the idea that compassionate self-relating may be linked with stronger interpersonal agency. Yet a direct association should not be assumed across populations because the meaning of submission, the measurement instrument, and the interpersonal contexts being assessed can differ.

Theoretical Integration and Moderation

The current conceptual model integrates rejection sensitivity theory, social rank theory, self-compassion theory, and a cognitive behavioural interpretation of safety behaviour. A student who anticipates rejection may think that disagreement, refusal, or self-assertion will lead to criticism or loss of belonging. Compliance may then function as a safety behaviour because it reduces immediate interpersonal anxiety. If the student repeatedly avoids testing whether respectful disagreement is actually safe, the pattern may be maintained over time.

Self-compassion could interrupt this process by reducing self-criticism and shame and by making uncomfortable emotions more tolerable. The moderation hypothesis therefore predicts not merely that self-compassion is associated with lower submission, but that the slope linking fear of rejection with submission changes as self-compassion changes. Statistically, this requires an interaction test rather than visual inspection of separate lines or the presence of a self-compassion main effect (Hayes, 2022). A significant interaction would indicate that the association between fear of rejection and submissive behaviour differs across levels of self-compassion.

At the same time, moderation effects are difficult to detect when predictors are measured imprecisely. Interaction terms combine variability and measurement error from both predictors, so low reliability can reduce statistical power. The scoring of the A-RSQ and SCS-SF is therefore not a minor technical issue. The A-RSQ is based on scenario products of rejection concern and reversed acceptance expectancy rather than a simple sum of 18 interchangeable raw items. The SCS-SF requires negatively keyed items to be reversed before an overall score is computed. Reliability should consequently be evaluated for the indicators that actually form the analytic score.

Cultural Context and Research Gap

Most theoretical work on rejection sensitivity, self-compassion, and social rank has been developed outside Pakistan. The local context may alter both the distribution and meaning of measured responses. Teacher student hierarchy, family reputation, gendered expectations, language use, and norms surrounding disagreement may influence whether students label a pattern as a serious interpersonal problem. English language measures can also create subtle differences in interpretation even when respondents are generally proficient.

Pakistani validation work on submissive behaviour supports the need for local psychometric attention (Mubashir & Batool, 2024). More broadly, social rank research shows that perceived rank is closely connected with mental health outcomes and should be interpreted within the social structures in which it occurs (Wetherall et al., 2019). The present study therefore addressed a gap not simply by testing three variables in a Pakistani sample, but by examining whether a theoretically expected risk protective model is empirically observable when submissive behaviour is defined as interpersonal difficulty rather than culturally normative respect.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Setting

A quantitative cross sectional correlational design was used. All variables were measured at one point in time and no variable was experimentally manipulated. The design was selected because it permitted estimation of bivariate associations, unique regression effects, and an interaction effect while maintaining non causal interpretation. The target population comprised university students aged 18 to 25 years enrolled in public or private universities in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Convenience sampling was used because recruitment depended on institutional access, classroom availability, online distribution channels, and voluntary participation.

Participants and Data Provenance

The supplied workbook contained 200 response rows, but it did not represent 200 observed participants. The accompanying provenance information identified 152 original response rows and 48 synthetic rows created for analytical testing. Because publication ethics require empirical findings to represent actual participant data, the 48 synthetic rows were excluded from every analysis reported in this article. The publication dataset therefore began with the 152 original rows only.

Three original rows contained a refusal of consent and no study responses, leaving 149 consenting records. Minimum completion rules were applied before calculating the main variables. Fifteen records did not contain sufficient valid responses to produce all three principal scale scores, leaving 134 records. One additional record showed a global invariant response pattern across all 46 psychological items despite the instruments using different response ranges and meanings. This record was excluded as a response quality problem. The final observed analytic sample was $N = 133$. No record was excluded merely because its psychological score was high, low, or inconsistent with the hypotheses.

The mean age of the analytic sample was 23.59 years ($SD = 1.71$, range = 18–25). Most participants were women ($n = 86$, 64.7%), followed by men ($n = 37$, 27.8%) and participants who preferred not to report gender ($n = 8$, 6.0%); two records had missing gender information. Eighty-nine participants (66.9%) were enrolled in private universities and 43 (32.3%) in public universities; one record had missing university sector information.

Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria

Participants were eligible if they were 18–25 years old, currently enrolled in a Lahore based university, able to understand the questionnaire language, and willing to provide

informed consent. Records were excluded if consent was declined, required scale responses were insufficient for valid scoring, or an obvious global response quality problem was identified. The screening process was deliberately based on consent and scoreability rather than statistical significance or the direction of the participant's scores.

Measures

Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire

Fear of rejection was assessed using the Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (A-RSQ), an adult scenario based measure of rejection sensitivity (Berenson et al., 2009). Nine interpersonal scenarios are each followed by two ratings: concern or anxiety about possible rejection and expectancy that the other person will respond acceptingly. Both components use six point response scales. For each scenario, rejection sensitivity was calculated as rejection concern multiplied by (7 – acceptance expectancy). The participant's fear of rejection score was the mean of available scenario products. At least eight of nine complete scenario pairs were required. Higher scores represented greater anxious expectation of rejection.

Self-Compassion Scale Short Form

Self-compassion was assessed with the 12 item SCS-SF (Raes et al., 2011). Responses range from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Items representing self-judgment, isolation, and over identification were reverse scored (items 1, 4, 8, 9, 11, and 12 in the administered form), after which the mean of the oriented items was computed. At least 10 of 12 valid items were required for a score. Higher values represented greater self-compassion.

Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Problems

Submissive behaviour was operationalized using 16 items from the Nonassertive and Exploitable sectors of the CSIP (Boudreaux et al., 2018). Items were rated from 0 (not a problem) to 3 (serious problem). The study composite was the mean across the selected 16 items, with at least 13 valid responses required. Higher scores indicated more serious nonassertive or exploitable interpersonal problems. The Nonassertive and Exploitable sectors were also examined separately for reliability, but the combined 16 item score was used as the primary dependent variable.

Procedure

Following supervisor and institutional approval, eligible students were approached through approved classroom and online channels. Participants received information about the purpose of the study, the approximate 15 20-minute completion time, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without penalty. After consent, participants completed demographic questions followed by the A-RSQ, SCS SF, and selected CSIP items in a standardized order. Direct personal identifiers were not required in the analytic dataset.

Data Cleaning and Scoring

Item values were checked against the response range of each instrument. Two age fields created by the online form were reconciled to obtain a single age value. Psychological scores were computed only after the required transformations had been applied. For the A-RSQ, scenario products were calculated from each valid concern expectancy pair. For the SCS SF, negatively keyed items were reversed before averaging. For the CSIP, the 16 selected items

were averaged to form the submissive behaviour composite. No unsupported values were inserted into missing items. When the minimum completion threshold was met, the mean of the available valid indicators was used.

Statistical Analysis

Analyses were conducted on the 133 observed records. Demographic characteristics were summarized with frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Internal consistency was estimated using Cronbach's alpha for complete indicator sets contributing to each scale. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the three primary study variables.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were evaluated using Pearson correlations with two tailed tests and 95% confidence intervals. Because fear of rejection and self-compassion departed from normality, Spearman rank correlations were also examined as robustness checks. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were tested with simultaneous multiple regression in which submissive behavior was the outcome and fear of rejection and self-compassion were entered together as predictors.

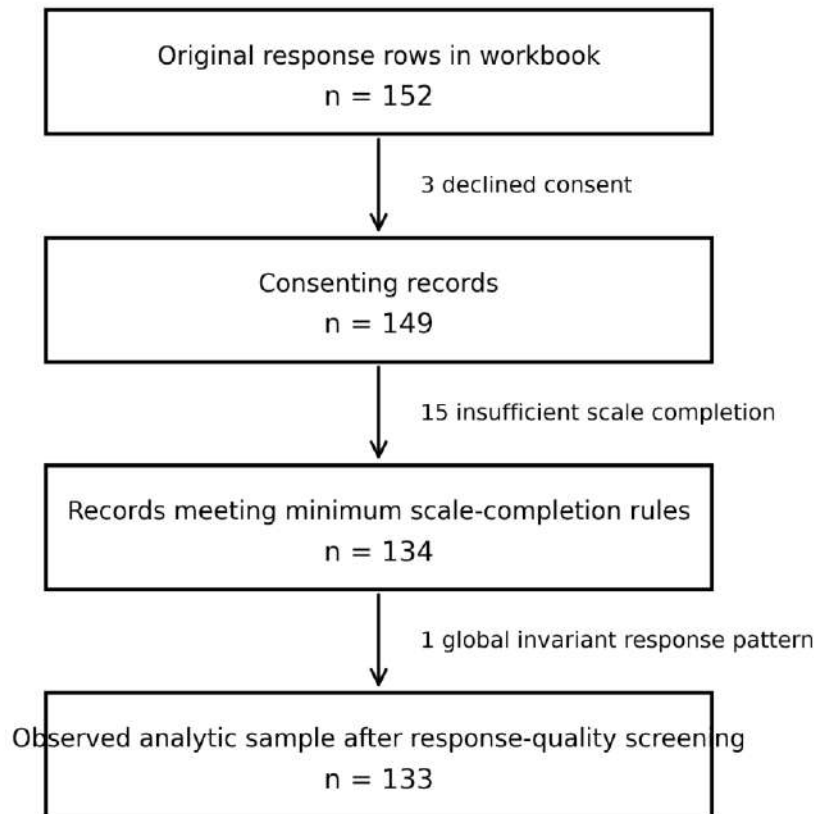
For Hypothesis 5, fear of rejection and self-compassion were mean centered and their product term was entered in a moderation model analogous to a simple PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2022). Moderation was inferred only if the interaction coefficient differed significantly from zero. Conditional slopes were estimated at one standard deviation below the mean, the mean, and one standard deviation above the mean of self-compassion. A 5,000 resample bootstrap interval was also calculated for the interaction coefficient. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$ using two tailed tests.

Regression diagnostics indicated no major violation likely to invalidate the model. Residuals did not significantly depart from normality, $W = .987$, $p = .240$; the Durbin Watson statistic was 2.20; predictor variance inflation factors were low (approximately 1.05 1.27); and the Breusch Pagan test did not indicate heteroscedasticity, $p = .729$. Several observations exceeded the conservative 4/N influence flag, but the maximum Cook's distance remained well below 1.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained before demographic or psychological questions were administered. No names or registration numbers were required for the analytic dataset, and results were analyzed and reported in aggregate. The questionnaire addressed potentially uncomfortable topics such as rejection, self-criticism, and interpersonal difficulty; participants were informed that they could stop participation without penalty. The thesis reports supervisor and institutional approval. A formal ethics committee reference number was not provided in the source material and should be added to the manuscript if one was issued by the institution.

Figure 2
Observed Participant Screening and Case Retention



Note. The 48 synthetic rows identified in the supplied workbook were excluded before the publication screening flow began.

Results / Findings

Sample Characteristics

The final publication sample consisted of 133 observed participants. The sample was concentrated toward the upper end of the eligibility range, with 58 participants (43.6%) aged 25, 23 (17.3%) aged 24, and 23 (17.3%) aged 23. Women represented 64.7% of the sample, and two thirds of the participants were enrolled in private universities. The participant screening flow is shown in Figure 2.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Observed Analytic Sample

Characteristic	n / Value	%
Age, M (SD)	23.59 (1.71)	

Characteristic	n / Value	%
Age range	18 25	
Female	86	64.7
Male	37	27.8
Prefer not to report gender	8	6.0
Gender missing	2	1.5
Private university	89	66.9
Public university	43	32.3
University sector missing	1	0.8

Note. N = 133. Percentages may not total exactly 100 because of rounding.

Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

The reliability of the measures differed substantially. The nine A-RSQ scenario product indicators showed modest internal consistency, $\alpha = .647$ ($n = 128$ complete indicator sets). The correctly oriented SCS-SF total showed relatively low internal consistency, $\alpha = .550$ ($n = 126$). In contrast, the CSIP outcome measures were stronger: $\alpha = .828$ for the Nonassertive sector, $\alpha = .767$ for the Exploitable sector, and $\alpha = .894$ for the 16 item submissive behaviour composite. These coefficients are important for interpretation because measurement error in the two predictors can attenuate both correlations and interaction effects.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency of Study Measures

Measure	N	M (SD)	Range	alpha (n)
A-RSQ fear of rejection	133	9.73 (2.85)	1.78 26.11	.647 (128)
SCS-SF self-compassion	133	3.00 (0.47)	1.75 4.83	.550 (126)
CSIP nonassertive	133	1.65 (0.67)	0.00 3.00	.828 (127)
CSIP exploitable	133	1.69 (0.61)	0.00 3.00	.767 (127)
CSIP submissive composite	133	1.67 (0.61)	0.00 3.00	.894 (121)

Note. Alpha values were calculated from complete indicator sets for each scale. A-RSQ = Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire; SCS-SF = Self-Compassion Scale Short Form; CSIP = Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Problems.

Fear of rejection had a mean of 9.73 ($SD = 2.85$) on the scenario product metric, with scores ranging from 1.78 to 26.11. Self-compassion had a mean of 3.00 ($SD = 0.47$), with scores from 1.75 to 4.83. The mean submissive behaviour score was 1.67 ($SD = 0.61$), ranging from 0 to 3. Fear of rejection showed positive skew and self-compassion showed a smaller departure from normality, whereas submissive behaviour did not significantly depart from normality.

Bivariate Associations

Fear of rejection was weakly and positively correlated with submissive behaviour, but the association was not statistically significant, $r(131) = .077$, $p = .378$, 95% CI [.094, .244]. The scatterplot in Figure 3 illustrates the small positive linear trend and substantial dispersion

around the fitted line. The corresponding Spearman association was also non significant, $\rho = .016$, $p = .858$. Hypothesis 1 was therefore not supported.

Table 3

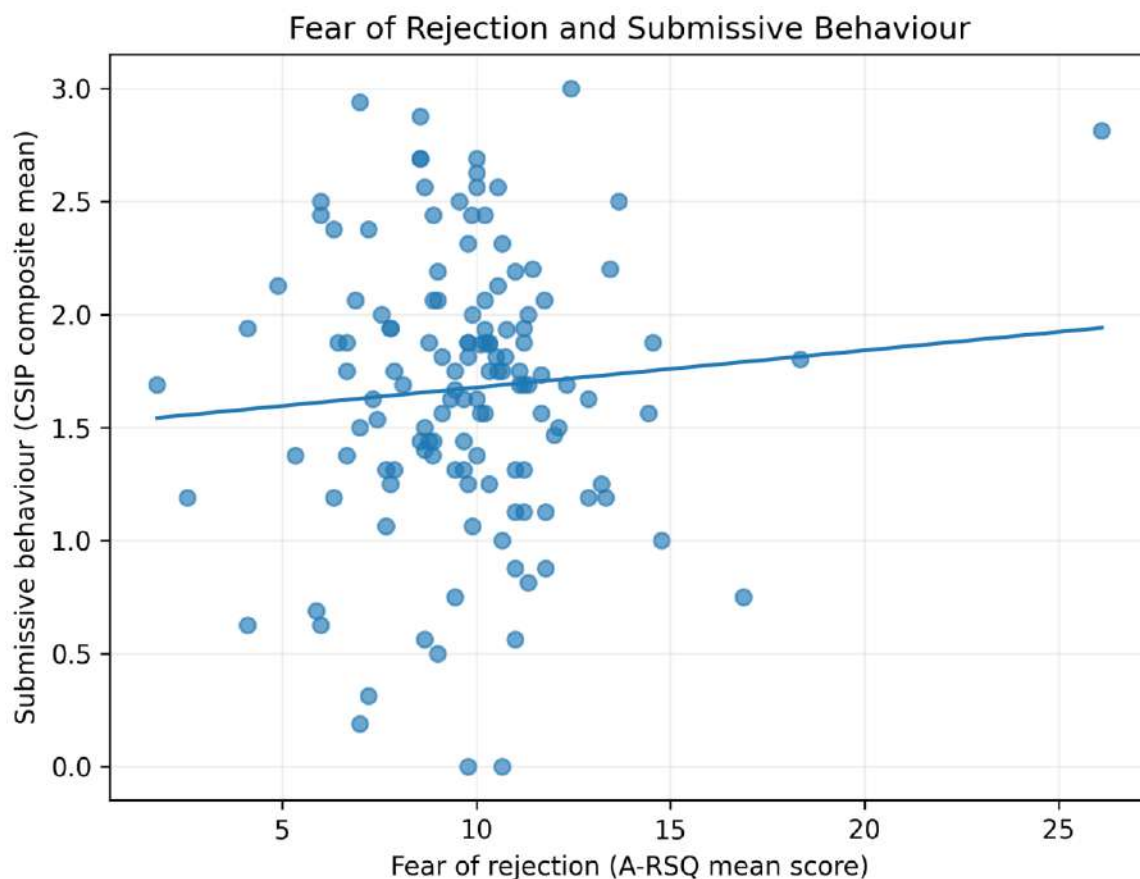
Pearson Correlations Among the Main Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Fear of rejection		.199*	.077
2. Self-compassion	.199*		.011
3. Submissive behaviour	.077	.011	

Note. N = 133. * $p < .05$. Fear of rejection and submissive behaviour: $p = .378$; self-compassion and submissive behaviour: $p = .904$; fear of rejection and self-compassion: $p = .021$.

Figure 3

Association Between Fear of Rejection and Submissive Behaviour



Note. The fitted line corresponds to the small, non-significant Pearson correlation ($r = .077$, $p = .378$).

Self-compassion was essentially unrelated to submissive behaviour, $r(131) = .011$, $p = .904$, 95% CI [.181, .160]. The Spearman coefficient was $\rho = .068$, $p = .437$. Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Fear of rejection and self-compassion were themselves significantly

negatively related, $r(131) = .199$, $p = .021$, 95% CI [.358, .030], although this association was not one of the directional hypotheses.

Multiple Regression

A simultaneous regression model tested the unique contributions of fear of rejection and self-compassion to submissive behaviour. The model was not statistically significant, $F(2, 130) = 0.391$, $p = .677$, $R^2 = .006$, adjusted $R^2 = .009$. Fear of rejection did not significantly predict submissive behaviour after self-compassion was controlled, $B = .0166$, $SE = .0190$, $\beta = .078$, $t = 0.875$, $p = .383$, 95% CI [.021, .054]. Self-compassion likewise made no unique contribution, $B = .0064$, $SE = .1147$, $\beta = .005$, $t = 0.056$, $p = .956$, 95% CI [.220, .233]. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were therefore not supported.

Table 4

Regression and Moderation Models Predicting Submissive Behaviour

Model	Predictor	B (SE)	beta	p	95% CI
Main	Fear of rejection	.0166 (.0190)	.078	.383	.021, .054
Main	Self-compassion	.0064 (.1147)	.005	.956	.220, .233
Moderation	Fear of rejection (c)	.0173 (.0191)	.081	.367	.020, .055
Moderation	Self-compassion (c)	.0340 (.1269)	.026	.789	.217, .285
Moderation	Fear x self-compassion	.0153 (.0299)	.050	.609	.044, .074

Note. $N = 133$. Multiple regression model: $R^2 = .006$, $F(2, 130) = 0.391$, $p = .677$.

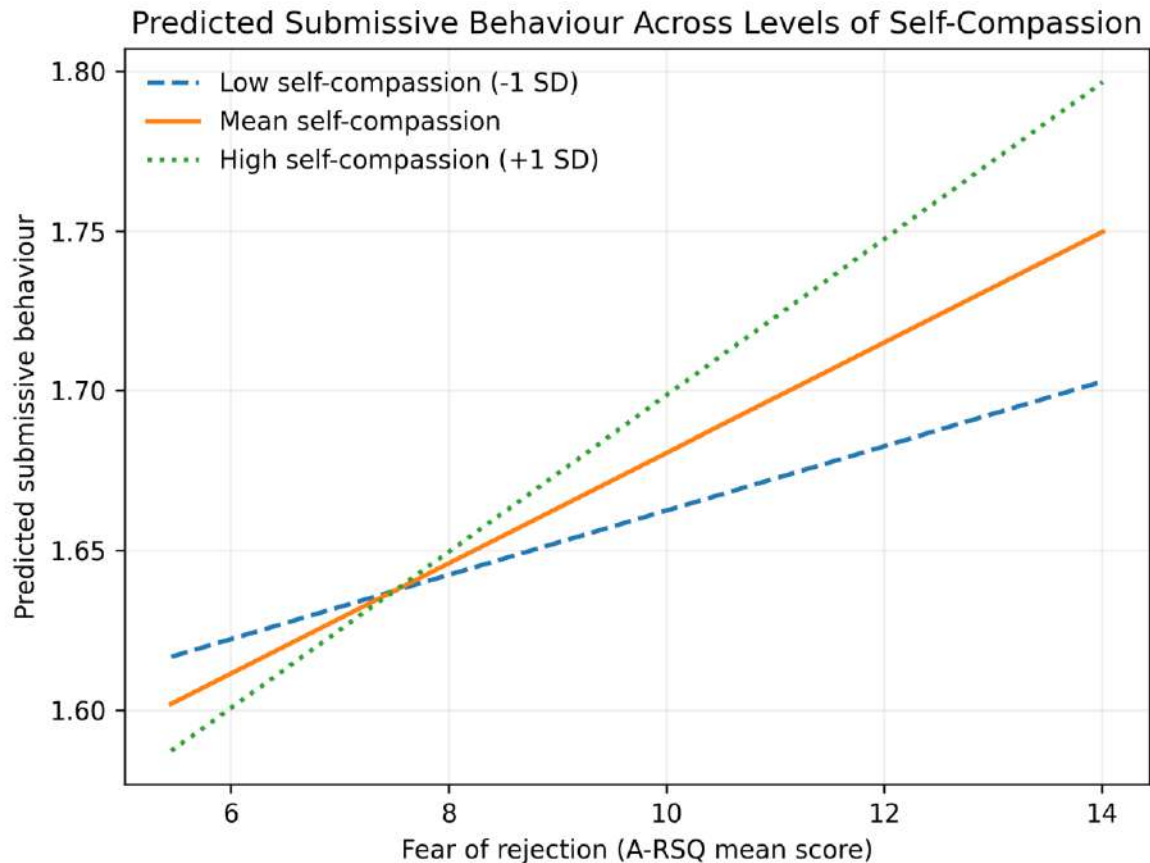
Moderation model: $R^2 = .008$, $F(3, 129) = 0.347$, $p = .792$. Predictors were mean centered in the moderation model.

Moderation Analysis

The full moderation model including centered fear of rejection, centered self-compassion, and their interaction was not statistically significant, $F(3, 129) = 0.347$, $p = .792$, $R^2 = .008$, adjusted $R^2 = .015$. Adding the interaction increased explained variance by only approximately .002. The fear of rejection by self-compassion interaction was non-significant, $B = .0153$, $SE = .0299$, $\beta = .050$, $t = 0.513$, $p = .609$, 95% CI [.044, .074]. The percentile bootstrap interval based on 5,000 resamples also included zero, approximately [.031, .106].

Figure 4

Predicted Submissive Behaviour at Three Levels of Self-Compassion



Note. Lines represent predicted values at 1 SD, the mean, and +1 SD of self-compassion. The interaction was not significant, $B = .0153$, $p = .609$.

Conditional slopes were small and non significant at low self-compassion, $B = .010$, $p = .661$; mean self-compassion, $B = .017$, $p = .367$; and high self-compassion, $B = .024$, $p = .318$. Figure 4 shows slightly different fitted slopes across the three levels, but these visual differences do not constitute evidence of moderation because the formal interaction term was non significant. Hypothesis 5 was therefore not supported.

Overall Hypothesis Decisions

None of the five directional hypotheses was supported in the observed participant sample. Importantly, these results do not demonstrate that the population effects are exactly zero. Rather, the study did not provide statistically reliable evidence for the proposed direct or moderating relationships under the present sampling, measurement, and cultural conditions.

Table 5

Summary of Hypothesis Decisions

Hypothesis	Prediction	Observed result	Decision
H1	Fear of rejection > submissive behaviour (+)	$r = .077$, $p = .378$	Not supported

Hypothesis	Prediction	Observed result	Decision
H2	Self-compassion > submissive behaviour ()	$r = .011, p = .904$	Not supported
H3	Fear of rejection unique predictor (+)	$B = .017, p = .383$	Not supported
H4	Self-compassion unique predictor ()	$B = .006, p = .956$	Not supported
H5	Fear x self-compassion interaction	$B = .015, p = .609$	Not supported

Note. Decisions are based on two tailed tests at $\alpha = .05$. 'Not supported' does not imply that the corresponding population effect is exactly zero.

Discussion

The present study tested a theoretically coherent model linking fear of rejection, self-compassion, and submissive behaviour among university students in Lahore. Contrary to the directional hypotheses, fear of rejection was not significantly associated with submissive behaviour, self-compassion was not significantly associated with submissive behaviour, and neither variable showed a significant unique contribution in simultaneous regression. Most importantly for the proposed protective model, self-compassion did not significantly moderate the relationship between fear of rejection and submissive behaviour. The empirical pattern therefore suggests that, in this sample, internal social evaluative threat and compassionate self-relating did not translate directly into the specific interpersonal problems captured by the Nonassertive and Exploitable CSIP items.

Fear of Rejection and Submissive Behaviour

The small fear of rejection correlation is noteworthy because rejection sensitivity theory does not require a single behavioural response. Downey and Feldman (1996) describe a system involving anxious expectation, perception, and reaction to rejection. The reaction can vary according to context, available coping strategies, relationship importance, and perceived power. A student who expects rejection may become quiet, but may also withdraw, ruminate, seek reassurance, become defensive, or attempt to improve performance. The absence of a statistically reliable direct fear submission association is therefore better interpreted as evidence against a simple one step pathway than as evidence that rejection sensitivity is irrelevant to student functioning.

This interpretation is consistent with broader evidence showing that rejection sensitivity is associated with multiple emotional outcomes rather than a single interpersonal behaviour (Gao et al., 2017; Minihan et al., 2023). The A-RSQ emphasizes anxious expectations embedded in interpersonal scenarios, whereas the CSIP outcome asks whether nonassertive or exploitable patterns are experienced as interpersonal problems. The measures may therefore capture different stages of a broader process: appraisal of social threat on one hand and perceived behavioural difficulty on the other.

Self-Compassion and Submissive Behaviour

Self-compassion was not directly related to submissive behaviour in the current sample. This finding does not negate evidence that self-compassion is beneficial for wellbeing. Research has consistently linked self-compassion with lower psychological distress and more adaptive emotional functioning (Neff, 2003; Chan et al., 2022). Brief interventions can also improve self-compassion and related outcomes among students (Smeets et al., 2014). The present result instead suggests that an internal style of responding kindly to distress may not be sufficient, by itself, to change interpersonal boundary setting or assertive behaviour.

This distinction has practical importance. A student can be relatively self-compassionate yet still find it difficult to say no to a dominant peer, challenge an unfair group work arrangement, or disagree with an authority figure. Conversely, a student can be self-critical but behaviourally assertive. Interpersonal agency is shaped by skills, power differences, social learning, role expectations, and perceived consequences. Thus, interventions intended to reduce maladaptive submission may need explicit components involving assertiveness, communication rehearsal, boundary setting, and social rank beliefs rather than relying on self-compassion alone.

Moderating Role of Self-Compassion

The moderation hypothesis predicted that self-compassion would weaken the positive association between fear of rejection and submissive behaviour. The interaction estimate was small and non significant, and the bootstrap interval included both buffering and amplifying values. Although the fitted lines differed slightly, formal moderation was not demonstrated. This is important because interaction plots can appear visually different even when the statistical evidence for different slopes is weak. Following conditional process principles, the interaction coefficient and its uncertainty provide the appropriate basis for interpretation (Hayes, 2022).

Several explanations are possible. First, self-compassion may operate after the interpersonal event rather than before the behavioural response. It may help students recover from embarrassment or criticism without necessarily altering whether they comply in the moment. Second, other variables may be more proximal moderators of the rejection submission pathway, including perceived social rank, shame, assertiveness self-efficacy, attachment, dependency, social support, or the authority of the other person. Third, the weak reliability of the predictor measures reduces sensitivity to small interaction effects.

Measurement Considerations

The psychometric results are among the most important findings of the study. The CSIP submissive behaviour composite demonstrated strong internal consistency, but the A-RSQ scenario products showed only modest reliability and the SCS-SF total showed relatively low reliability in the observed sample. Low reliability increases random measurement error and generally attenuates observed associations. It is especially consequential for moderation because the interaction combines error from both predictors.

The scoring structure also illustrates why reliability must be estimated for the variables actually used in analysis. The A-RSQ is not appropriately represented by treating its 18 concern

and expectancy responses as interchangeable items; the theory requires scenario products after acceptance expectancy has been reversed conceptually through the (7 expectancy) component (Berenson et al., 2009). Similarly, SCS-SF negatively keyed items must be reversed before the total score is calculated (Raes et al., 2011). A superficially higher reliability coefficient based on incorrectly oriented items would not compensate for invalid scoring.

Future Pakistani research should therefore include cognitive interviewing and pilot psychometric testing before large scale hypothesis testing. Participants may understand English language rejection scenarios, reverse keyed self-compassion statements, and the phrase "a problem" in the CSIP differently from the populations in which the measures were developed. Translation alone may not resolve these issues; conceptual equivalence and measurement invariance should be examined.

Cultural Interpretation of Submissive Behaviour

The meaning of submission is particularly sensitive to social context. In Pakistan, deference toward teachers, elders, or family members may be encouraged as respectful conduct and may not be experienced as a loss of agency. Students can also be expected to balance family obligations and group harmony against individual self-expression. The present CSIP outcome attempted to minimize pathologizing ordinary respect by asking about interpersonal patterns as problems. This may partly explain why fear of rejection did not map strongly onto the outcome: a student may behave deferentially without endorsing the behaviour as problematic, or may experience fear without displaying the specific nonassertive and exploitable patterns represented by the selected items.

Local work validating submissive behaviour measures in Urdu emphasizes the value of culturally responsive assessment (Mubashir & Batool, 2024). Qualitative interviews could further clarify when students view accommodation as chosen respect, strategic conflict management, or distress driven submission. Such work would strengthen the construct validity of future quantitative models.

Theoretical Implications

The findings favor a more differentiated theoretical model in which appraisal, emotional response, perceived rank, and interpersonal action are separated. Rejection sensitivity theory can explain why a student anticipates disapproval; social rank theory can explain why perceived low power may make yielding more likely; self-compassion theory can explain how the student responds internally to distress; and cognitive behavioural models can explain how safety behaviours are reinforced when they reduce immediate anxiety. The current data do not support collapsing these processes into a direct fear to submission pathway moderated by self-compassion.

A more complete model could test indirect mechanisms. Fear of rejection may increase shame or social anxiety, which may reduce assertiveness self-efficacy and then contribute to submission. Self-compassion may reduce rumination or self-criticism rather than directly changing the fear submission slope. Such models would require adequate sample sizes, reliable measures, and preferably longitudinal data to distinguish temporal processes.

Practical Implications

For university counselling and student support services, the results caution against assuming that a student who fears rejection will necessarily show submissive interpersonal behaviour. Rejection concerns, self-criticism, assertiveness problems, and boundary difficulties should be assessed separately. A student presenting with high rejection fear may benefit from work on interpretation of social cues, exposure to respectful disagreement, or reassurance seeking patterns, while a student presenting with exploitation or nonassertiveness may require direct skills practice and examination of power relationships.

Self-compassion can still be clinically valuable for distress, shame, and self-criticism, but the present results do not support presenting it as a stand alone method for reducing submissive behaviour. A combined approach integrating compassion based strategies with assertiveness training, boundary setting, communication practice, and context sensitive discussion of social rank may be more appropriate.

Limitations

Several limitations constrain interpretation. The cross sectional design cannot establish temporal order or causal direction. Convenience sampling limits representativeness, and the sample was weighted toward women, private university students, and participants aged 23-25. The final observed sample of 133 may be adequate for detecting moderate main effects but provides limited precision for small interaction effects.

All primary variables were self-reported within one questionnaire. Responses may have been influenced by social desirability, common response styles, differences in English language comprehension, and willingness to label culturally accepted accommodation as problematic. The A-RSQ and SCS-SF also showed lower reliability than desirable, which likely reduced the size and precision of observed coefficients.

The study specific submissive behaviour outcome combined the Nonassertive and Exploitable sectors of the CSIP. This composite had strong reliability and coherent interpersonal content, but it is not identical to other submissive behaviour scales used in previous research. Differences in construct coverage can therefore contribute to differences across studies.

Finally, the supplied workbook contained 48 synthetic rows created for analytic testing. These rows were clearly identified in the source materials and were excluded from the publication analyses reported here. This distinction is essential: synthetic records can be useful for checking workflows, but they cannot increase the empirical sample size or evidential strength of a human participant study. Future work should increase statistical power through additional ethically recruited participants rather than simulated observations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined whether fear of rejection and self-compassion were related to submissive behaviour and whether self-compassion buffered the expected fear submission relationship among university students in Lahore. Across the observed analytic sample of 133 participants, none of the five directional hypotheses was supported. Fear of rejection and self-compassion did not show statistically reliable associations with submissive behaviour, neither

predictor contributed uniquely in simultaneous regression, and self-compassion did not significantly moderate the relationship between fear of rejection and submission.

The findings do not establish that the relevant population effects are absent. Instead, they show that the proposed direct model was not detected with the present sample and measures. The pattern supports a more context sensitive view in which social evaluative threat, self-relating, perceived rank, and interpersonal action are related but distinct processes.

Future research should recruit larger, stratified samples across public and private universities and balance gender, discipline, year of study, and residential background. Sample size planning should be based on the smallest interaction effect considered practically meaningful and should allow for exclusions due to non completion. Local language and bilingual versions of the measures should be evaluated through cognitive interviews, pilot reliability analyses, factor structure testing, and measurement invariance procedures.

Longitudinal or daily diary designs would provide stronger tests of whether perceived rejection precedes submissive behaviour in real life situations and whether self-compassion predicts emotional recovery. Behavioural assertiveness tasks, peer reports, and qualitative interviews would reduce reliance on a single self-report method. Expanded models should test perceived social rank, shame, social anxiety, assertiveness self-efficacy, rumination, attachment, and social support as potential mediators or moderators. For practice, university counselling programs should assess rejection concerns and submissive interpersonal problems independently and should combine compassion focused strategies with explicit work on boundaries, assertiveness, and communication where clinically appropriate.

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