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**Dr. Satnam Kaur Johal**  
Assistant Professor, Khalsa  
College of Education, Ranjit  
Avenue, Amritsar, Punjab,  
India

## Psychological hardiness and mental health of secondary school students: A correlational study

**Dr. Satnam Kaur Johal**

### Abstract

**Background:** Psychological Hardiness is a defensive personality characteristic against life stresses that plays a major role in improving one's ability to cope with various pressures. It is an inner resource that may moderate the effects of stress on physical and mental health.

**Aim:** The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between psychological hardiness and mental health of secondary school students.

**Methodology:** A sample of 200 students (Boys; N=100 and Girls: N=100) from XI standard was randomly selected from the secondary schools of Amritsar City, affiliated to Punjab School Education Board. Data were collected using Hardiness Scale and Mental Health Battery.

**Results:** The data analysis showed a significant positive correlation between components of Hardiness (Commitment and Challenge) and Mental Health (Intelligence and Self concept) in case of boys. On the contrary, in case of girls, a significant negative correlation was found between components of Hardiness (Control & Commitment) and Mental Health (Intelligence & Self-Concept).

**Conclusion:** These findings can be useful in planning efficient interventions and paving the way for taking preventive measures to put off students from poor mental health and helping them in becoming a hardy personality.

**Keywords:** Psychological hardiness, mental health, commitment, challenge, control and self concept

### 1. Introduction

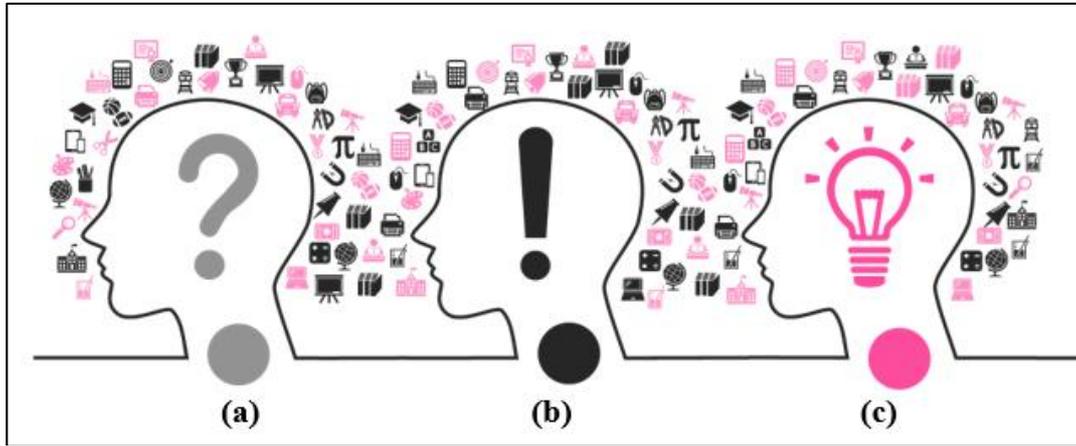
What kind of individuals do we want our children should become? Everyone say respectful, empathetic, able to make right decisions, able to form healthy relationships, confident, have solid self-esteem, disciplined, responsible, goal directed, life-long learners, honest and above all to have faith in themselves to face any crisis of life tactfully. But do we preparing them to develop the above mentioned characteristics, I afraid not. The children all over the world face situations that are undoubtedly, unpleasant and least expected. Some face stresses such as failure or illness while others confront catastrophe-war, poverty, disease, famine, floods etc. Whether such experiences crush or strengthen an individual child, depends in part on his or her personality traits. While outside help is essential in times of trouble, but insufficient. Along with good food and shelter, children need love and trust, hope and autonomy. Along with safe refuges, they need safe relationships that can foster friendships and commitment. They need the warm support and self-confidence, the faith in themselves and their world, all of which builds resilience. The manner in which an individual responds to adversity is based on the interrelatedness of several factors. Adversity itself describes several factors and its effects on students. With hardiness, children can triumph over trauma; without it, trauma (adversity) triumphs.

#### 1.1 Psychological Hardiness

Hardiness is a generalized personality style first introduced by Kobasa (1979)<sup>[10]</sup>, which explored the influence of stressful events on physical illness and found that individuals who scored high on measures of hardiness were less likely to become ill than those highly stressed individuals who manifested lower hardiness scores. Hardiness on the other hand also referred to as psychological hardiness, personality hardiness, or cognitive hardiness.

#### Correspondence

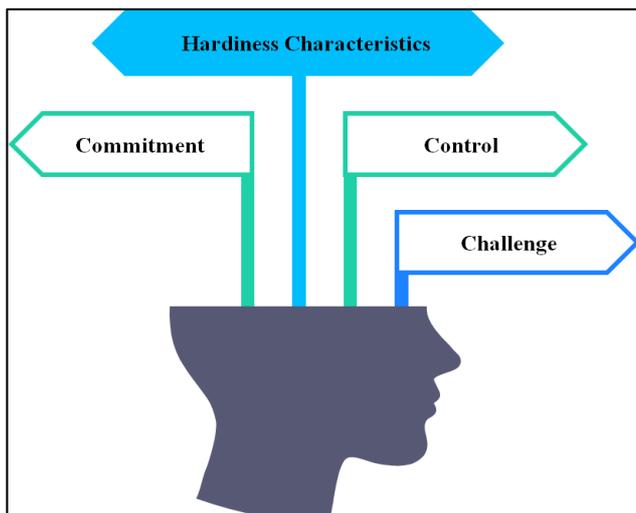
**Dr. Satnam Kaur Johal**  
Assistant Professor, Khalsa  
College of Education, Ranjit  
Avenue, Amritsar, Punjab,  
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**Fig 1:** Hardiness also referred to as (a) Psychological hardiness, (b) Personality hardiness, or (c) Cognitive hardiness

The key of hardiness is not luck and is not genetics but is a learned approach to stress (Havighurst, 1952) [6]. Hardiness is characterized by three components *commitment*, *control* and *challenge* that functions as resistance resources to encounter stressful conditions (Kobasa, 1979, Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn 1982) [10, 11, 12]. The first component *commitment* is defined as a tendency to involve oneself in the activities in life, having a genuine interest and curiosity about surrounding world and being committed to a goal that helps us to overcome occasional losses of motivation and remain steadfast in our efforts. King (1998) [14] showed that people with hardiness evaluate unpleasant situations in a challenging manner than threatening one and have more commitment to themselves and their works and experience more sense of control in their lives. The second component *control* is defined as a tendency to believe and act as if one can influence the events taking place around oneself through one’s own efforts. The third component *challenge* is defined as the belief that changes, rather than stability, is the normal mode of life and constitutes motivating opportunities for personal growth rather than threats to security (Hannah & Morrissey, 1986) [5].

set of beliefs about oneself and world. Hardy people understand the meaning, value, importance, and purpose of themselves, their job, family, and life in general. They give more credence to effort and action than chance and believe they can manipulate life events. They possess internal resistance resources and consider the positive and negative events of life as the consequence of their actions. For hardy people change and transformation is a fixed law of life and changes are opportunities for learning and growth rather than a threat to their safety (Ghorbani, 1995; Kiamarsi *et al.*, 1998) [15]. Hardy individuals do not appraise events as risky, but positive and controllable (Ghorbani, 1995; Anshel, 2001) [2]. Seligman (1995) [19] noted that it is essential to praise children contingent on success only. The children who experience praise and reinforcement in the absence of a behavior begin to realize that their actions, good or bad, have no predictable outcome in the environment, but children who suffer from learned helplessness, or the belief that bad events are uncontrollable and thus, inescapable. In addition to reinforcement contingent upon success, it is also critical to provide clear warning and safety signals to children when bad events loom. Chemers (2001) found that psychological hardy and motivated students could be expected to evaluate their learning experiences more positively than other students. Pengilly (1997), Kaur (2004) and Maddi (2006) [17] found a significant inverse relationship between academic stress and academic hardiness. Hardiness is a better predictor of mental health than physical health. Hardiness acts as a buffer to major life stressors (Maddi, 2006) [17]. High hardiness is associated with lower psychological distress and higher quality of life (Hoge, Austin, & Pollack, 2007) [7]. Christopher (2018) suggested that hardiness is better conceptualized as a personality style that contributes to psychological well-being.



**Fig 2:** Hardiness is characterized by three components (a) Commitment, (b) Control and (c) Challenge.

Hardiness is a psychological style associated with resilience, good health and good performance under range of stressful conditions and is potentially a valuable personality style for highly demanding situations (Abedi, 1993) [1]. Hardiness is

**1.2 Mental Health**

Mental health is a level of psychological well-being or in other words an absence of a mental disorder. It is a state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioral adjustment. According to positive psychology or holism, mental health may include an individual’s ability to enjoy life and create a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. According to World Health Organization (WHO) mental health includes “subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence and self-actualization of one’s intellectual and

emotional potential among others”. The well-being of an individual is encompassed in the realization of their abilities, coping with normal stresses of life, productive work and contributes to their community. Mental wellness is generally sighted as a positive attribute. Whereas good mental health can enhance one’s life, while poor mental health can prevent someone from living an enriching life. According to Richards, Campania and Burke (2010) “There is growing evidence that is showing emotional abilities are associated with pro-social behaviors such as stress management and physical health”. The individuals possessing high hardiness are hypothesized to be better able to withstand the negative effects of life stressors and consequently are less likely than individuals low in hardiness to become ill. Their resistance to illness presumably results from perceiving life changes as less stressful (Kobasa, 1979) <sup>[10]</sup> or from having more resources at their disposal to cope with life changes (Kobasa, 1982) <sup>[11, 12]</sup>. Some individuals undergoing life change or facing traumatic events exhibit no psychological disturbances rather they appear well adjusted despite enduring tremendous stress or immense hardship. In addition to moderating the experience of physical health and depression, psychological hardiness also moderates the experience of other psychological disturbance. Today, about 450 million people suffer from a mental or behavioural disorders. According to WHO’s Global Burden of Disease 2001, 33% of the years lived with disability (YLD) are due to neuropsychiatric disorders, a further 2.1% to intentional injuries (Fig. 3). Unipolar depressive disorders alone lead to 12.15% of years lived with disability, and rank as the third leading contributor to the global burden of

diseases. Four of the six leading causes of years lived with disability are due to neuropsychiatric disorders (depression, alcohol-use disorders, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder). Neuropsychiatric conditions account for 13% of disability adjusted life years (DALYs), intentional injuries for 3.3% and HIV/AIDS for another 6% (Fig. 4). These latter two have a behavioural component linked to mental health. Moreover, behind these oft-repeated figures lies enormous human suffering.

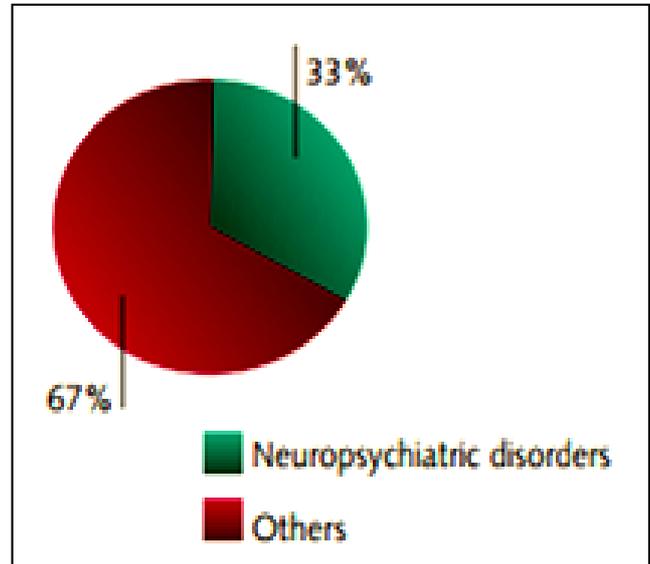


Fig 3: Years lived with disability (YLD): World (Source: WHR, 2002).

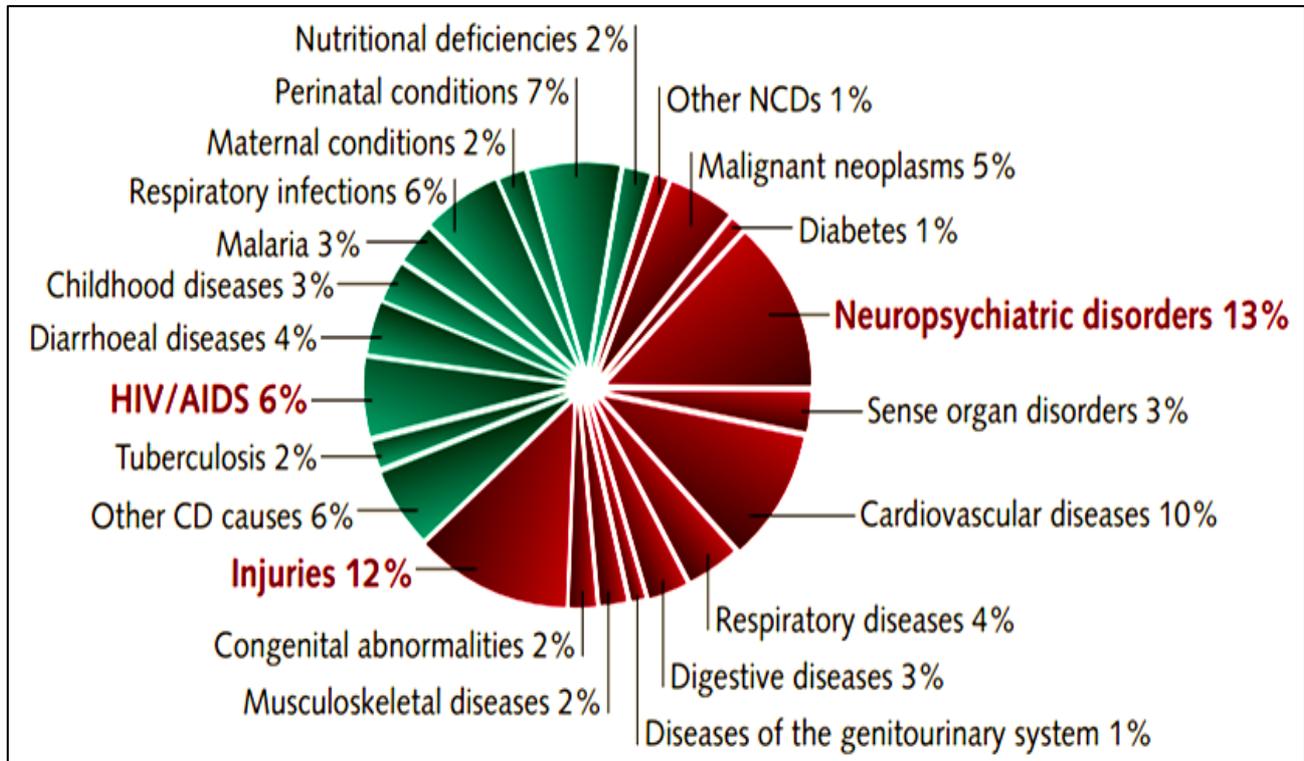


Fig 4: Burden of diseases worldwide: Disability adjusted life years (DALYs), 2001 (Source: WHR, 2002).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Sample

The present study is a co-relational study which falls under the category of interrelationship studies of descriptive

domain as it intends to study relationship of Psychological Hardiness with Mental Health of Secondary School Students. The sample for present study was selected randomly from 11<sup>th</sup> standard of the Secondary Schools of

Amritsar city affiliated to Punjab School Education Board. The sample consisted of 200 students (Boys: 100 & Girls: 100) and all the students were in the age range of 14 to 16 years.

## 2.2 Assessment Tools

Following assessment tools were used to collect relevant data for the study:

**2.2.1. Hardiness Scale (Yamauchi, 1995):** The scale was used to measure the attributes of Psychological Hardiness. The present short hardiness scale was originally a 53 item scale used by Maddi and Kobassa (1985). By adding new items and eliminating poor ones, a new 50 item scale was developed for use by Bartone in 1989. Then this short hardiness scale was revised by Yamauchi in 1995 and total items in this scale are 12. This 12 item scale includes positive and negative key items covering the three conceptually important Hardiness facets *commitment*, *control* and *challenge*. The scale has test-retest reliability of 0.52, Cronbach alpha coefficient for the total hardiness measure is 0.83, and for the facets 0.77 for commitment, 0.71 for control and 0.70 for challenge. Same type of internal consistency coefficients are seen with other samples.

**2.2.2. Mental Health Battery (Singh & Sengupta, 2008):** The battery was used to assess Mental Health of the students. The battery intends to assess the status of mental health of persons in the age range of 13-22 years. The battery consists of 130 items which are distributed under six

popular indices of mental health; emotional stability, overall adjustment, autonomy, security-insecurity, self-concept and intelligence. The scale has test-retest reliability and internal reliability ranging from 0.77 to 0.88 and 0.73 to 0.87 respectively.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The data obtained for this investigation has been analyzed and discussed under following headings:

1. Comparison of Means
2. Co-relational Analysis

### 3.1 Comparison of Means (Gender Differences)

#### Psychological Hardiness

A significant gender difference at 0.05 level was observed in Psychological Hardiness of secondary school students. The girls scored significantly higher on Psychological Hardiness than boys (Girls:  $M = 3.24$ , Boys:  $M = 2.17$ ,  $t = 2.06$ ). It means in comparison to boys, girls have shown more hardy personality. Therefore it may be concluded that gender plays a significant role in determining the psychological hardiness among adolescent boys and girls.

Hannah, Edward and Morsey (1986) [5] conducted a study on hardy personality and reported the same results that women are harder than men. Bartone and Priest (2000) also found that hardiness is significantly higher in females than males although they report more health problems. Kaur (2017) [8] revealed a significant difference between mean scores of private and government school adolescents on the variable psychological hardiness.

**Table 1:** Means and Standard Deviations of Boys and Girls on Psychological Hardiness and components of Mental Health along with t-ratios and Level of Significance

Variable	Boys		Girls		't' ratio	Significance level
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Psychological Hardiness	2.17	3.46	3.24	3.84	2.06*	0.05
Emotional Stability	5.18	3.02	6.00	2.48	2.09*	0.03
Overall Adjustment	16.91	5.26	17.73	5.38	1.08	NS
Autonomy	7.73	1.83	8.09	1.72	1.42	NS
Security Insecurity	8.01	1.73	8.16	1.71	0.616	NS
Self-Concept	9.01	3.02	10.03	3.50	2.20*	0.02
Intelligence	14.69	4.99	17.49	5.12	3.91**	0.00
Socio-Economic Status	13.66	1.34	14.05	1.45	1.96*	0.05

(Boys:  $N = 100$  and Girls:  $N = 100$ )

\*Significance value at 0.01 = 2.57 \*\* Significance value at 0.05 = 1.96

#### Mental Health

It is evident from the results reported in the Table 1 that there are significant gender differences on four dimensions of Mental Health i.e. Emotional Stability, Self Concept, Intelligence and Socio-Economic Status among Secondary School Students. The girls have scored significantly higher on Emotional Stability, (Girls:  $M = 6.00$ , Boys:  $M = 5.18$ ;  $t = 2.09$   $p < 0.05$ ), Self Concept (Girls:  $M = 10.03$ , Boys:  $M = 9.01$ ,  $t = 2.20$   $p < 0.02$ ), Intelligence (Girls:  $M = 17.49$ , Boys:

$M = 14.69$ ,  $t = 3.91$   $p < 0.001$ ) and Socio-Economic Status (Girls:  $M = 14.05$ , Boys:  $M = 13.66$ ,  $t = 1.96$   $p < 0.05$ ) than boys.

It means that girls of secondary schools are more emotionally stable, intelligent and have positive self concept as compared to boys. Kumar and Reddy (2007) in their study reported significant differences between genders, locality and level of education in Mental Health Status of students.

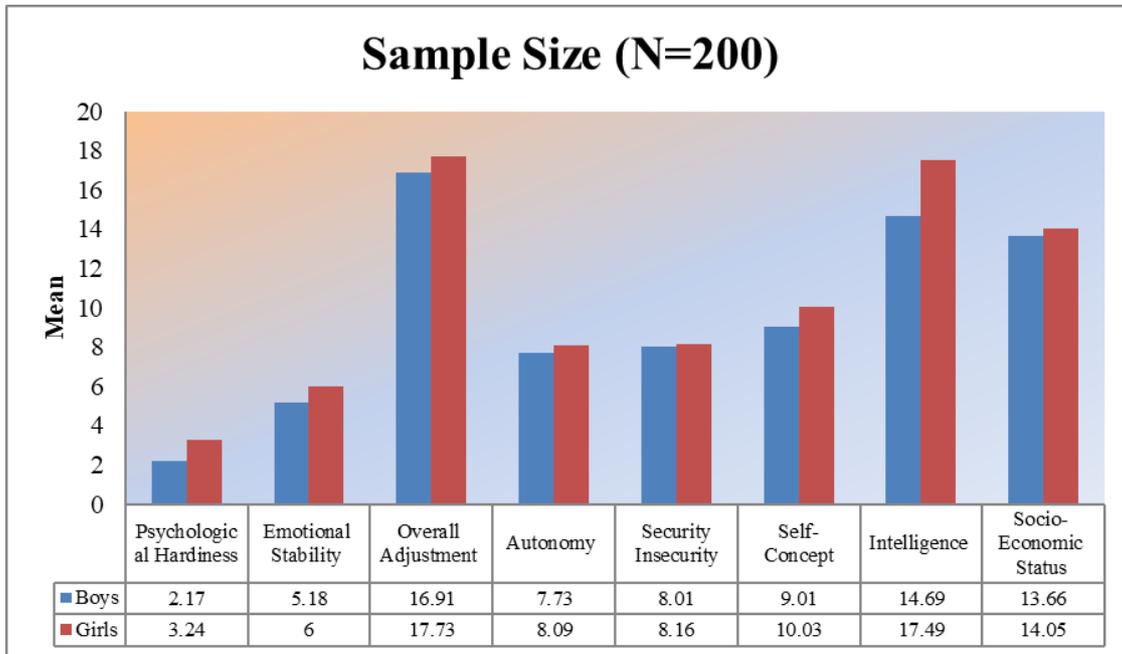


Fig 5: Comparison of Means of Boys and Girls on Psychological Hardiness and Mental Health

**3.2 Co-relational Analysis**

Keeping in mind the nature of the study and reviewing the previous researches and with the aim of investigating the extent of relationships between the different dimensions of Psychological Hardiness and Mental Health of secondary school students, the parametric test of Pearson Product Moment correlation was used. A negative correlation between Psychological Hardiness and Mental Health indicates that higher the score of a subject in psychological hardiness test, the lower his score will be in the test of Mental Health. According to the meaningfulness of the relationship, it can be said with a 95% confidence that there is an inverse relationship between psychological hardiness and mental health. On the other hand positive correlation between psychological hardiness and mental health means that the higher the score of a subject in test of psychological hardiness, the higher his/her score will be on the test of mental health. According to the meaningful correlation, it can be discussed with the 95% confidence that there is a

direct relationship between psychological hardiness and mental health.

▪ **Secondary School Boys**

The notable findings indicate with a 95% confidence that there is a significant positive correlation between Commitment component of Psychological Hardiness and Intelligence component of Mental Health ( $r = 0.241$ ) in case of secondary school boys. Also there is a significant positive correlation between Challenge component of Psychological Hardiness and Self-concept component of Mental Health ( $r = 0.22$ ). It means secondary school boys who are committed have better general mental abilities which help them in thinking rationally and behaving purposefully in their environment. The secondary school students who accept challenges develop better self-concept. It means that students must face challenges and they must get the opportunity to learn that how to overcome those challenges.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix showing Correlations between different components Psychological Hardiness and Mental Health of Secondary School Students

Psychological Hardiness	Variables	Control	Commitment	Challenge	Emotional Stability	Over All Adjustment	Autonomy	Security-in Security	Self-Concept	Intelligence	Socio-Economic Status
	Control										
	Commitment	0.55**									
	Challenge	0.38**	0.41**								
Mental Health	Emotional Stability	0.15	0.18	0.001							
	Overall Adjustment	0.11	0.10	0.08	0.31**						
	Autonomy	0.12	0.02	-0.05	0.24*	0.27**					
	Security in Security	0.07	0.18	-0.02	0.023	0.15	0.04				
	Self Concept	0.04	0.09	0.22*	-0.32**	-0.13	-0.07	0.08			
	Intelligence	0.10	0.24*	0.08	0.19	0.10	-0.06	-0.05	0.24*		
	Socio-Economic Status	-0.06	0.02	0.03	-0.04	0.006	0.02	-0.07	0.03	-0.07	

\*\* Significant at .05/.01 level  
(Boys: N=100)

**Table 3:** Correlation Matrix showing Correlation between different components of Psychological Hardiness and Mental Health of Secondary School Students

Psychological Hardiness	Variables	Control	Commitment	Challenge	Emotional Stability	Over All Adjustment	Autonomy	Security in Security	Self Concept	Intelligence	Socio-Economic Status
	Control										
	Commitment	0.35**									
	Challenge	0.22*	0.26**								
Mental Health	Emotional Stability	0.20	-0.02	-0.06							
	Overall Adjustment	0.15	0.09	-0.01	0.40**						
	Autonomy	0.03	0.20	0.06	0.31**	0.37**					
	Security in Security	-0.01	0.03	0.03	-0.03	0.13	0.08				
	Self Concept	-0.27**	-0.18	-0.12	-0.51**	0.40**	0.37**	0.17			
	Intelligence	-0.21*	-0.21*	-0.18	-0.20*	-0.28**	-0.19	0.14	0.59**		
	Socio-Economic Status	-0.04	-0.04	0.10	-0.05	0.003	0.04	0.09	0.53**	0.08	

\*/\*\* Significant at .05/.01 level

(Girls: N=100)

#### ▪ Secondary School Girls

In case of secondary school girls there is a significant negative correlation between control and self concept ( $r = -0.27$ ) components of Psychological Hardiness and Mental Health respectively. The results indicate that girls who have self knowledge and able to evaluate their achievements have do not much control over themselves and prone to stress. The results also revealed that in case of girls, intelligence component of mental health has negative significant correlation with control ( $r = -0.21$ ) and commitment ( $r = -0.21$ ) components of Psychological Hardiness. It means more intelligent girls are more prone to stress and perceive problems or stresses as negative challenges and barrier. The study by Maddi (2012) <sup>[18]</sup> supports the findings of the current study that there is significant relationship between psychological hardiness and mental health among college students. The findings of the present study are in line with the study done by Azarian, Farokhzadian and Habibi (2016) <sup>[3]</sup> that showed that there is a negative correlation between psychological hardiness and the components of depression, anxiety and anger and there is a direct correlation between psychological hardiness and the index of positive affect. Singh (2016) <sup>[20]</sup> reported that stress among school going adolescents found to be significantly negatively correlated with the psychological hardiness.

The significant correlations between the different components of Psychological Hardiness and Mental health among boys and girls indicate that all the components are measuring the same thing.

#### 4. Conclusion

The results of the study discovered the importance of psychological hardiness in maintaining mental health. A significant but reverse correlation between psychological hardiness and mental health was found. Psychological hardiness is an inner confrontation source which decreases the undesirable effects of stress and prevents the development of physical and mental disorders. Consequently, it is suggested that necessary steps be taken in order to improve and strengthen student's coping mechanisms and psychological skills. These findings clearly indicate the need for more attention to the mental health of students. Hardy personality and good mental health help the

students to deal with stressful situations. Good mental health would inspire students to perform any academic or non-academic task efficiently. Hardy personality, if it will be properly developed then it would prove helpful for students to face any difficulty. Psychological hardiness develops the skills among students. Multi activity task, co-curricular activities and healthy school environment is valuable in inspiring the school students to maintain their good mental health and hardy personality.

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