



The Role of Social Rejection Sensitivity in Perceived Social Connectedness and Belongingness among University Students

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Abstract: A student can be surrounded by people and still feel utterly alone. Feeling socially connected does not always translate into feeling a genuine sense of belonging. This paradox reflects the complexity of interpersonal relationships during early adulthood and highlights the need to better understand the psychological factors that shape students' social experiences. One such factor is social rejection sensitivity, the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to potential rejection. Although rejection sensitivity has been associated with a range of psychosocial outcomes, comparatively little research has explored how it relates simultaneously to perceived connectedness and belongingness. Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between social rejection sensitivity, perceived social connectedness, and belongingness among university students. A sample of 30 university students aged 18-25 years from Punjab, completed the Online and Offline Social Sensitivity Scale (O²S³), the Social Connectedness Scale (SCS), and the Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS-16). Results revealed a significant negative relationship between social rejection sensitivity and belongingness ($r = -0.364$, $p < .05$). Although social rejection sensitivity was negatively associated with perceived social connectedness, this relationship was not statistically significant ($r = -0.261$, $p > .05$). Perceived social connectedness and belongingness demonstrated a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.910$, $p < .001$). The findings underscore that being socially connected does not guarantee a sense of belonging. By distinguishing between these closely related social experiences, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of students' interpersonal functioning and provides a foundation for future research on social adjustment in higher education.

Keywords: *Social Rejection Sensitivity, Social Connectedness, Belongingness, University Students*

1. Introduction

Connection is why we're here. We are hardwired to connect with others, it's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering

~Brené Brown

From the moment we are born, our lives are shaped, by the relationships we form. Human beings possess an inherent need to connect with others, and these connections offer more than companionship. They become the people who bear witness to our lives, celebrate our achievements, and anchor us amidst the uncertainties of an ever-changing world. Through these relationships, individuals develop a sense of identity, foster emotional security, and purpose, making social connection a fundamental aspect of psychological well-being.

This need for connection becomes especially significant during university years. For many students, university marks the beginning of adulthood, a developmental period characterized by increasing independence, navigating new social environments, redefining their sense of self, and establishing relationships beyond the familiarity of family and childhood friendships. Yet, despite being surrounded by peers, many students continue to experience loneliness, uncertainty, and a persistent feeling that they do not truly belong. The contradiction is striking; we live in the digital age, where social interaction is plentiful but meaningful connection is not always guaranteed. Simply being part of a social environment does not necessarily mean that individuals feel socially connected or experience a genuine sense of belonging. Understanding why some students develop secure and fulfilling interpersonal relationships while others remain preoccupied with the possibility of rejection is therefore essential. This raises an important question: what psychological factors shape the way individuals perceive and experience their social relationships

Social Rejection Sensitivity

One psychological construct that offers insight into this question is social rejection sensitivity. Downey and Feldman (1996) defined social rejection sensitivity (SRS) as “the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and react intensely to cues of social rejection”. Subsequent research has expanded this definition by conceptualizing rejection sensitivity as a “cognitive- affective processing disposition, whereby individuals develop anxious expectations of rejection, become hypervigilant to potential rejection cues, and exhibit exaggerated emotional response when rejection is perceived (Shin, Han and Shin.,2024).” Similarly,

Downey & Feldman, (1996); Downey, Khouri & Feldman, (1997) further conceptualized rejection sensitivity as a “personality disposition characterized by oversensitivity to social rejection; individuals who are sensitive to social rejection tend to anxiously or angrily expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to it.” Rather than reflecting isolated experiences of rejection, rejection sensitivity is considered a relatively stable personality disposition that influences how individuals interpret and respond to social interactions.

Individuals with high rejection sensitivity often perceive ambiguous social situations as threatening and may interpret neutral interpersonal cues as signs of exclusion or disapproval. Such interpretations can shape emotional and behavioural responses, including anxiety, withdrawal, heightened self-consciousness, or excessive need to seek reassurance. These may ultimately interfere with the development and maintenance of healthy interpersonal relationships. Consequently, rejection sensitivity has been recognized as an important psychological factor influencing social adjustment and well-being.

Previous research has consistently demonstrated the adverse interpersonal consequences associated with rejection sensitivity. For instance, Lin and Fan (2022), in a study of 618 undergraduate students from the Zhejiang province of China reported that higher levels of rejection sensitivity were associated with greater social anxiety and loneliness. Similarly, in Yemen, 339 students were recruited by Zaid, Taresh, and Aljumaili (2023) to study the association between rejection sensitivity and social anxiety. Their results revealed a significant positive correlation between the variables. These findings suggest that individuals who anticipate rejection may experience greater psychological distress and difficulty navigating social interactions.

Beyond anxiety, rejection sensitivity has also been linked to broader aspects of psychosocial functioning. Saricam, Gencdogan and Erozkhan (2012) studying 1149 university students, found that individuals with higher rejection sensitivity reported greater loneliness and lower self-esteem, although the strength of these relationships differed across gender. Likewise, Bäck, Bäck, and Knapton (2015) demonstrated that social exclusion was a significantly contributing factor among individuals high in both rejection sensitivity and the need to belong. This highlighted the influence of rejection sensitivity on individuals’ motivation to seek social acceptance and avoid exclusion.

Collectively, these findings indicate that rejection sensitivity is associated with a range of negative interpersonal and psychological outcomes, including social anxiety, loneliness, and heightened sensitivity to exclusion. However, comparatively little research has examined how rejection sensitivity relates simultaneously to perceived social connectedness and

belongingness among university students. Exploring these relationships may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the social experiences that contribute to students' adjustment and well-being.

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness refers to more than simply being surrounded by other people. It encompasses the subjective experience of belonging and the psychological bond an individual experiences with other people and social groups. Haslam et al. (2015) describe social connectedness as the sense of belonging and subjective psychological bond that people experience in relation to individuals and groups. This perspective places emphasis not on the number of relationships an individual has, but on how those relationships are psychologically experienced. Similarly, Lee and Robbins (1995) conceptualised social connectedness in relation to an individual's perception of the self in relation to other people. Their Social Connectedness Scale was developed as a measure of belongingness and was found to be a reliable and unidimensional measure in their study of college students.

The subjective nature of social connectedness is particularly important when considering the social experiences of university students. A person may interact with peers regularly, participate in group activities, and be surrounded by people, yet still experience emotional distance from those around them. Social interaction, therefore, does not necessarily translate into a subjective sense of connection. Van Bel et al. (2009) similarly conceptualised social connectedness in terms of social experiences arising from recent interactions and the awareness individuals develop through these interactions. Such perspectives suggest that connectedness is shaped not simply by whether social contact occurs, but by how individuals perceive and experience that contact.

The importance of social connectedness extends beyond interpersonal satisfaction and has been associated with broader psychological well-being. Wickramaratne et al. (2022) conducted a scoping review of longitudinal research examining social connectedness and mental health. Across 66 studies, the review found substantial evidence that social support and connectedness led to more favourable mental health outcomes, while loneliness and smaller or less supportive social networks were associated with adverse outcomes. The authors concluded that social connectedness may have a protective role against depressive symptoms and disorders. These findings highlight that feeling connected to others may function as an important psychological resource rather than simply representing a desirable social experience.

This becomes particularly relevant during university, a period in which individuals often enter new social environments and develop relationships that may influence their

adjustment to campus life. Lee, Keough, and Sexton (2002) examined social connectedness, perceptions of the campus social environment, and perceived stress among 214 college students. Their findings demonstrated relationships between social connectedness and perceived stress, with some differences observed between men and women. The authors consequently emphasised the importance of assessing and promoting connectedness within university environments.

At the same time, social connectedness should not be understood as synonymous with the mere absence of social isolation. Social disconnection has been conceptualised in terms of inadequate social relationships, loneliness, and insufficient emotional or social interaction. Green et al., 2017; Holt-Lunstad, 2017; Necka et al., 2021). These experiences represent the negative end of a broader interpersonal continuum, whereas social connectedness focuses on the individual's perceived psychological relationship with others. Importantly, the presence of social relationships does not guarantee that an individual will experience those relationships as meaningful or psychologically fulfilling. This distinction helps explain why a student can appear socially engaged while simultaneously experiencing emotional distance from others. Among university students, Sashittal et al. (2012) found that elevated anxiety preceded feelings of social disconnection and powerlessness, which were associated with diminished student identification and willingness to attend college. Similarly, Poole et al. (2023) found that students with stable and supportive social networks experienced lower perceived stress than students experiencing social disconnection.

Social connectedness is also closely related to, but conceptually distinct from, belongingness. Both involve an individual's relationship with their social world, and the constructs may overlap substantially. However, connectedness primarily concerns the perceived psychological bond and sense of closeness with others, whereas belongingness places greater emphasis on feeling accepted, valued, and like an integral part of a social environment. Treating the constructs as interchangeable could therefore overlook meaningful differences in how individuals experience their social relationships.

Belongingness

Belongingness represents more than simply being present within a social environment; it concerns whether an individual experiences acceptance, being valued, and meaningfully connected to that environment. Rogers (1951) described belonging as a subjective experience involving the desire for interpersonal connection and positive regard. Hagerty et al. (1992) similarly conceptualised belonging as the feeling of being an integral part of one's surrounding systems, including family, friendships, educational environments, communities, and other

social settings. These perspectives emphasise that belonging is fundamentally subjective. An individual may participate in a social environment without necessarily experiencing themselves as a meaningful part of it.

The importance of belongingness becomes clearer through the ‘need to belong’ hypothesis proposed by Baumeister and Leary (1995). They argued that human beings possess a fundamental motivation to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships. These relationships are not merely desirable; the need for interpersonal attachment has implications for emotional and cognitive functioning, adjustment, and well-being. Thus, belongingness can be understood not simply as a positive social experience, but as a fundamental psychological need.

When this need is threatened, the consequences can extend beyond temporary disappointment. Baumeister et al. (2007) reviewed research on social exclusion and demonstrated that rejection and exclusion can interfere with emotional responses, self-regulation, cognitive functioning, and subsequent interpersonal behaviour. At the same time, excluded individuals may become motivated to seek new social relationships. This suggests that experiences of rejection are particularly significant because they threaten a basic psychological need. Consequently, the desire to belong may influence how individuals interpret and respond to their social environments, particularly when acceptance from others is uncertain.

Belongingness is particularly relevant among university students, who are simultaneously developing social identities, establishing new relationships, and adapting to changing interpersonal environments. Moeller, Seehuus, and Peisch (2020) examined belongingness and mental health among 2,094 undergraduate students and found that belongingness partially mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. Their findings were particularly notable for the role of perceived rejection, which demonstrated a strong association with poorer well-being. These findings suggest that students' perceptions of acceptance and rejection may be important in understanding their broader psychological functioning.

The relationship between belongingness and social connectedness is also important. Avcı (2023) examined these constructs among 456 college students following the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that a sense of belonging significantly predicted life satisfaction, while social connectedness had an indirect and significant influence on the relationship between belongingness and life satisfaction. These findings are particularly relevant to the

present study because they demonstrate that belongingness and social connectedness, although closely related, can be examined as distinct constructs within a university population.

This distinction is important because feeling connected and feeling that one belongs are not necessarily the same experience. Social connectedness concerns the perceived psychological bond an individual experiences with other people, whereas belongingness places greater emphasis on feeling accepted, valued, and integrated within a social environment. A student may therefore interact frequently with peers and perceive themselves as socially connected while still questioning whether they are genuinely accepted or valued within that group. Conversely, an individual may experience a strong sense of belonging within a particular relationship or community even without having an extensive social network.

Recent research further highlights the significance of belonging in higher education. A systematic review of twenty years of research described belonging as an important factor associated with university students' academic engagement, motivation, persistence, and achievement. This reinforces the idea that belongingness extends beyond interpersonal comfort and can influence how students experience and navigate university life.

Taken together, the literature suggests that belongingness is shaped by the quality and interpretation of interpersonal experiences. Acceptance can reinforce a sense of belonging, whereas perceived rejection may threaten it. This makes social rejection sensitivity particularly relevant to understanding belongingness. Individuals who are more sensitive to rejection may be especially attentive to cues suggesting that they are unwanted, excluded, or inadequately valued by others. Examining this relationship alongside social connectedness may therefore help clarify whether sensitivity to rejection is associated broadly with how connected students feel to others, or more specifically with whether they feel accepted and that they belong.

This distinction becomes particularly important in the university context, where students are continually navigating new social environments, forming relationships, and negotiating their place within them. The presence of social relationships alone may not be enough to create a sense of security within those relationships. How students perceive the possibility of rejection may shape whether interactions are experienced as meaningful connections or as reminders of their uncertainty about where they stand with others. Exploring these experiences together can therefore offer a clearer picture of the interpersonal processes underlying students' social lives.

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between social rejection sensitivity, perceived social connectedness, and belongingness among university students.

2. Methodology

2.1 Hypotheses

H1: Higher levels of social rejection sensitivity will be significantly associated with lower levels of perceived social connectedness among university students. Individuals who are more sensitive to social rejection are expected to report a weaker subjective sense of connection with others.

H2: Higher levels of social rejection sensitivity will be significantly associated with lower levels of belongingness among university students. Individuals who are more sensitive to rejection are expected to experience a weaker sense of being accepted, valued, and included within their social environment.

H3: Higher levels of perceived social connectedness will be significantly associated with higher levels of belongingness among university students. Students who experience a stronger psychological connection with others are expected to report a stronger sense of belonging.

2.2 Sample

A total sample of 30 university students aged 18-25 was collected from the city of Mohali, Punjab

2.3 Measure

Social Connectedness Scale (SCS): The Social Connectedness Scale was used to measure the extent to which participants felt connected to their surroundings. The self-report scale was developed by Lee and Robbins, (1995). The scale consists of 20 items, measuring 4 dimensions which were belongingness, closeness, support and satisfaction. These dimensions were measured on a 6-point Likert scale which included, Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat Disagree (3), Somewhat Agree (4), Agree (5) and Strongly Agree (6).

Sense of Belonging Scale (SBS-16): The Sense of Belonging Scale measured the feeling of belongingness of the participants and was developed by Mellinger et al., (2023). The scale consists of 16 items measuring 2 dimensions which were setting or domain of belonging and the timeframe within which belonging was being assessed. The participants responded to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale which included Strongly Disagree (1), Somewhat Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Somewhat agree (4), Strongly agree (5).

Online and Offline Social Sensitivity Scale (O²S³): The online and offline social sensitivity scale was used to measure social rejection sensitivity of the participants in both online and offline environments. It was developed by Andrews et al., (2022). The scale consists of 18 items which measures four dimensions including Worry about Approval, Online Social

Interaction, Social Investment and Social Risk Taking. The scale used a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Agree (3), Strongly Agree (4).

2.4 Procedure

All participants were first given an overview of the study's aims and objectives and were informed of their rights as participants, which includes the right to withdraw at any time, and an assurance of confidentiality and privacy of their responses. Informed consent was taken prior to the test starting and any queries and doubts that the participant may have were also clarified through the contact email listed on the form. Finally, the participants were instructed to read each question carefully, answer them honestly and not leave any item blank. The data was collected online via Google Forms using structured and standardized questionnaires to ensure both convenience and accessibility. The first section of the form collected the participants' demographic information such as age and gender. The three scales were then administered in the next section, measuring the participants' feeling of belonging, connectedness and social rejection sensitivity. After the completion of the test, the participants were thanked for their time effort and cooperation.

3. Results

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard Deviation*

	Belonging	Connectedness	Social Rejection Sensitivity
N	30	30	30
Mean	55.7	67.9	43.0
Standard deviation	11.3	10.3	12.0

Table 2: *Correlation between Belonging, Connectedness and Social Rejection Sensitivity*

	Belonging	Connectedness	Social Rejection Sensitivity
Belonging	—		
Connectedness	0.910***	—	
Social Rejection Sensitivity	-0.364*	-0.261	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

4. Discussion of Result

The main aim of this study was to examine the relationship between social rejection sensitivity, perceived social connectedness, and belongingness among university students. The

findings revealed a significant negative correlation between social rejection sensitivity and belongingness ($r = -.364, p < .05$). Perceived social connectedness was significantly positively correlated with belongingness ($r = .910, p < .001$).

The present study found a significant negative relationship between social rejection sensitivity and belongingness among university students ($r = -.364, p < .05$). This indicates that students who reported greater sensitivity to potential social rejection also tended to report a weaker sense of belonging. These results support the second hypothesis and are consistent with the understanding of rejection sensitivity as a tendency to anticipate and respond strongly to possible rejection. When acceptance from others becomes an important component of self, uncertainty about whether one is accepted may become particularly consequential for an individual's sense of belonging.

One possible explanation for this relationship is that rejection sensitivity may influence not only how individuals respond to actual rejection, but also how they interpret ambiguous social experiences. A student who is highly attentive to the possibility of rejection may be more likely to interpret a delayed response, lack of invitation, or subtle change in another person's behaviour as evidence of exclusion. Consequently, the objective presence of social relationships may not necessarily translate into a subjective sense of being accepted within those relationships. This distinction is particularly relevant to belongingness, which involves feeling valued, accepted, and like an integral part of one's social environment.

The present finding is also consistent with Watson and Nesdale's (2012) study of young adults, which found that rejection sensitivity was associated with social withdrawal and loneliness. Their findings further suggested that withdrawal motivated by the desire to avoid possible rejection played a role in the relationship between rejection sensitivity and loneliness. Although loneliness and belongingness are not identical constructs, these findings provide a possible explanation for the negative association observed in the present study. Individuals who anticipate rejection may become more cautious in their social interactions or withdraw from situations in which the possibility of rejection is apparent. Over time, reduced engagement may limit opportunities to develop the reciprocal and meaningful relationships that contribute to a sense of belonging. This interpretation, however, remains tentative because social withdrawal was not directly measured in the present study.

Recent research among university students also provides support for considering rejection sensitivity alongside broader interpersonal experiences. Baig et al., (2025), for example, examined interpersonal rejection sensitivity, social connectedness, and withdrawal among 330 university students aged 18–25. Their findings identified significant associations

among these variables and found rejection sensitivity to be a significant predictor of withdrawal tendencies. Although their study examined a different outcome from the present study, it reinforces the importance of considering rejection sensitivity within the broader social functioning of university students.

The association observed in the present study can therefore be understood through the fundamental human need for meaningful interpersonal acceptance. Belongingness is not simply a matter of being surrounded by people; it depends partly on whether individuals perceive themselves as wanted, valued, and securely included. For students who are particularly sensitive to rejection, social interactions may therefore carry an additional layer of uncertainty. Rather than simply asking whether they have people around them, they may also be concerned with whether those people genuinely accept them. The significant negative association found in the present study suggests that this distinction may be important when understanding students' experiences of belonging in university settings.

Contrary to the first hypothesis, the present study did not find a statistically significant relationship between social rejection sensitivity and perceived social connectedness among university students ($r = -.261, p > .05$). The direction of the relationship was negative, suggesting that students with higher levels of social rejection sensitivity tended to report somewhat lower perceived social connectedness; however, the association was not strong enough to reach statistical significance in the present sample. This finding is important because it suggests that sensitivity to rejection may not necessarily correspond to a general perception of being socially connected.

One possible explanation lies in the distinction between feeling connected to others and feeling accepted by others. Social connectedness reflects a broader subjective sense of psychological connection with people and one's social environment. An individual may therefore perceive themselves as having meaningful relationships and being connected to others while simultaneously experiencing uncertainty about how those others perceive them. A student may have friends, participate in social activities, and identify with a peer group, yet remain highly concerned about whether they are genuinely accepted within that group. In this sense, rejection sensitivity may influence the quality and interpretation of social experiences without necessarily diminishing the overall perception of being connected.

This interpretation is particularly relevant when considering the findings of Watson and Nesdale (2012), who reported relationships between rejection sensitivity, social withdrawal, and loneliness in young adults. Their findings suggest that the consequences of rejection sensitivity may become more apparent when sensitivity translates into behavioural avoidance

or withdrawal. The present study, however, did not directly assess social withdrawal. It is therefore possible that some participants with elevated rejection sensitivity continued to maintain active social relationships despite their concerns about rejection. Their perceived connectedness could consequently remain relatively intact even when they experienced greater uncertainty about acceptance.

Recent research also demonstrates that the relationship between rejection sensitivity and social connectedness can occur within a broader network of psychological and social factors. A recent study by Yan et al., (2026), involving 1,152 college students found a significant negative association between rejection sensitivity and social connectedness, with social connectedness also functioning as a mediator in the relationship between rejection sensitivity and negative outcomes. The difference in results reflect variations in sample size, measurement, and the broader variables examined. The much larger sample in the 2026 study provides greater statistical power than the sample in the present study, however the observed correlation was nonetheless in the expected negative direction. Therefore, establishing an association between the variables that should be explored further. Future research could also examine whether factors such as social withdrawal, social anxiety, loneliness, or perceived acceptance influence this relationship.

Another possible explanation is that rejection sensitivity does not necessarily prevent individuals from maintaining social connections. Students who are highly sensitive to rejection may instead become particularly attentive to preserving their existing relationships and may adapt their behaviour in ways that help them avoid exclusion. Thus, a student may continue to feel socially connected while simultaneously experiencing uncertainty about whether they are genuinely accepted within those relationships. Perceived Social Connectedness and Belongingness

The strongest relationship observed in the present study was between perceived social connectedness and belongingness. The two variables demonstrated a very strong positive correlation ($r = .910, p < .001$), supporting the third hypothesis. This indicates that students who reported a stronger subjective sense of connection with others also tended to report a stronger sense of belonging. The strength of this association is notable because, although social connectedness and belongingness represent conceptually distinct experiences, they appear to be closely intertwined in how university students experience their social worlds.

This finding is consistent with Avcı's (2023) study of 456 college students, which examined the relationship between university belonging, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. The study found that social connectedness played a significant role in the

relationship between belongingness and life satisfaction, highlighting the close relationship between students' perceptions of connection and their sense of belonging. Similarly, research examining social connectedness among 464 university students found that participation in campus organisations was associated with differences in students' levels of social connectedness. This suggests that opportunities for interpersonal involvement may contribute to students' perceptions of connection within the university environment.

The strong correlation observed in the present study may be understood through the conceptual overlap between the two constructs. Social connectedness refers to the subjective psychological bond individuals experience with other people and groups, whereas belongingness involves the perception that one is accepted, valued, and an integral part of a social environment. These experiences are not identical. A person may, for example, interact frequently with others without feeling that they truly belong. Nevertheless, genuine social connection may provide an important foundation from which belongingness develops. When students feel psychologically connected to their peers and social surroundings, they may be more likely to perceive themselves as accepted members of those social groups.

The university environment makes this relationship particularly relevant. University students are often required to establish new relationships while simultaneously adjusting to unfamiliar social and academic environments. Social connections can emerge through friendships, classrooms, residential settings, extracurricular activities, and student organisations. Bariyyah et al., (2024) administered the Social Connectedness Scale to 464 university students similarly emphasising the role of participation in campus organisations in students' social connectedness. These opportunities may provide students with repeated interpersonal experiences through which they develop both a sense of connection and a perception that they have a place within their social environment.

At the same time, the magnitude of the correlation in the present study warrants careful consideration. The results reveal a very substantial proportion of their variance. This may reflect a genuine overlap in students' subjective experiences, but it may also partly arise from similarities in how the constructs are operationalised. Both the Social Connectedness Scale and the Sense of Belonging Scale rely on self-reported perceptions of interpersonal inclusion and connection. Consequently, participants who generally evaluate their social experiences positively may be inclined to score highly on both measures. The finding should therefore not be interpreted as suggesting that social connectedness and belongingness are interchangeable constructs.

Instead, the result may point toward an important distinction between conceptual separateness and lived experience. Although connectedness and belongingness can be distinguished theoretically, university students may experience them as closely connected aspects of the same interpersonal reality. Feeling connected may answer the question, “Do I feel psychologically connected to other people?” whereas belongingness may answer, “Do I feel that I have a place among them?” The present findings suggest that, for these students, the two experiences were strongly aligned.

This distinction also helps contextualise the other findings of the study. Social rejection sensitivity was significantly related to belongingness but was not significantly related to perceived social connectedness. This pattern suggests that belongingness may be more closely tied to concerns about acceptance than connectedness alone. The exceptionally strong relationship between connectedness and belongingness does not therefore eliminate the distinction between the constructs; rather, it highlights how closely they can be experienced while potentially responding differently to social rejection sensitivity.

5. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between social rejection sensitivity, perceived social connectedness, and belongingness among university students. The findings revealed that greater social rejection sensitivity was significantly associated with lower belongingness, while its relationship with perceived social connectedness did not reach statistical significance. In contrast, perceived social connectedness and belongingness demonstrated a very strong positive relationship.

These findings suggest that being socially connected and feeling that one belongs, although closely related, may represent different aspects of students' interpersonal experiences. A student can maintain social relationships and perceive themselves as connected to others while still experiencing uncertainty about whether they are genuinely accepted. Social rejection sensitivity is therefore particularly relevant to the question of whether students feel that they belong, rather than simply whether they feel connected. Understanding this distinction may be valuable when examining the social experiences of university students, particularly within environments where relationships and perceptions of acceptance continue to develop. Despite the results found there were certain limitations. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample of 30 university students. Although the sample was sufficient for the correlational analysis conducted, the limited sample size reduces the statistical power of the study and restricts the generalisability of the findings. Future studies involving larger samples may

provide more reliable estimates of the relationships between social rejection sensitivity, social connectedness, and belongingness. Second, participants were recruited through convenience sampling from university students in Punjab. The sample therefore may not adequately represent students from different geographical, cultural, or educational backgrounds. Differences in university environments and social norms may influence how students experience acceptance, connection, and rejection.

Future research could address these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples of university students across different regions and institutional settings. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable in determining how social rejection sensitivity, social connectedness, and belongingness influence one another over time. Such research could clarify whether heightened rejection sensitivity precedes reductions in belongingness or whether difficulties with belonging contribute to increased sensitivity to rejection.

Future studies could also examine the processes underlying these relationships. Examining the possibility of factors like social anxiety, loneliness, self-esteem, and perceived social support acting as mediators could provide greater insight into the pathway between rejection sensitivity and belongingness.

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