

Changes in Social Control Standards and Their Relationship to Psychological Adjustment Among University Students (A Field Study)

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Received:2/9/2025 Accepted:28/12/2024 Published:30/12/2025

Abstract: This research paper explores the psychological challenges faced by students transitioning from their traditional societal environment, characterized by rigid social control standards encompassing education, morals, customs, and values, to the novel and divergent normative structure of university life. This shift often creates significant internal and external pressures, compelling students to frequently assimilate these new social control standards. Consequently, this process disrupts their pre-existing psychological equilibrium, leading to a state of conflict and maladjustment.

The study specifically addresses the following questions: Does this alteration in social control standards impact the psychological compatibility of university students? Are there differences in this compatibility based on gender, economic status, or place of residence?

Keywords: standards - social control - psychological compatibility - university students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social norms and values, along with upbringing, traditions, and customs, play a crucial role in maintaining social order. These standards help regulate individual behavior within society by shaping morals, manners, and conventions to align with collective expectations. However, when individuals attempt to alter these norms, they may struggle to adapt to new standards, leading to maladjustment and a deviation from societal traditions. This conflict between old and new norms can trigger psychological distress, disrupting personal harmony.

2. Problem Statement:

Amidst the rapid social and cultural transformations experienced by modern societies, social control standards have become increasingly subject to fluctuation and change. Individuals, particularly university students, now find themselves caught between the values, customs, and traditions instilled in them through upbringing, and the emerging societal norms imposed by contemporary changes, which may often conflict with those original standards. Education, values, and customs form the fundamental core of the social control system, playing a vital role in regulating individual behavior and aligning personal conduct with the prevailing culture of the society. However, when a disconnect or contradiction arises between these traditional norms and the newly emerging ones, individuals—especially within the university student demographic—may experience internal conflict, negatively affecting their psychological and social adjustment.

In this regard, a study by Salim (1985), titled *Islam and Social Control*, revealed that the absence or weakening of traditional social control leads to a rise in negative behaviors among youth. This increase is attributed to the absence of a value-driven compass that guides behavior, ultimately destabilizing psychological well-being and increasing levels of anxiety and stress (Salim, 1985, p.87). Furthermore, Shazly (2001), in his research *Mental Health and Personality Psychology*, highlighted that disruptions in psychological adjustment are linked to the gap between traditional social norms and the newly adopted standards by university students. His findings indicated that students with weaker adherence to social control norms tend to suffer more significantly from psychological adjustment issues (Shazly, 2001, p.134).

Based on the foregoing, the main problem addressed by this study is encapsulated in the following research question:

- Is there a relationship between the changes in social control standards and the psychological adjustment of university students?

3. General Framework of the Study:

3.1 Research Questions:

Based on the main research question, the following sub-questions were formulated:

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- Does the shift in social control standards affect the psychological adjustment of university students?
- Are there differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on gender?
- Are there differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on economic status?
- Are there differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on place of residence?

3.2 Study Hypotheses:

- Changes in social control standards influence the psychological adjustment of university students.
- There are differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on gender.
- There are differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on economic status.
- There are differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on place of residence.

3.3 Study Objectives:

This study aimed to:

- Examine the impact of changing social control standards on the psychological adjustment of university students.
- Identify differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on gender.
- Identify differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on economic status.
- Identify differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on place of residence.

3.4 Significance of the Study:

- This study is among the first locally (to the researcher's knowledge) to explore the relationship between shifts in social control standards and the psychological adjustment of university students.
- It provides insights and recommendations that may contribute to enhancing the psychological well-being of university students.

4. Theoretical Framework:

4.1. Concept of Social Control:

Émile Durkheim defined social control as: "Any factor that influences human behavior is considered a controlling factor. Control does not stem from the individual themselves nor is it externally imposed, but rather is part of the broader context in which actions occur." (Abdul Hameed et al., 2015, p. 44).

Durkheim's concept of social control contributed to his theory of anomie and social deviance, leading to studies exploring the relationship between control mechanisms and deviant behavior.

William Graham Sumner, in his renowned work *Folkways*, described social control as "the influence exerted by customs and traditions on society."

Similarly, Cohen (1966) defined social control as "the social processes and structures aimed at preventing or limiting deviance." (Ritzer, 2015).

Hollingshead argued that the essence of social control lies not in societal mechanisms designed to manage crises or shape personality but rather in the organization of society through binding norms and values that regulate relationships between individuals, groups, classes, and society as a whole (Al-Saleh, 2004, p. 23).

4.2. Mechanisms of Social Control:

To achieve its objectives, social control relies on various formal and informal mechanisms that maintain order, ensure group cohesion, and balance individual behavior within society.

4.2.1. Informal Social Control Mechanisms:

- Social Stratification

Social stratification, which includes class, economic, and sectarian divisions, creates a hierarchical structure where each group adheres to distinct norms. These divisions influence income, wealth, power, prestige, culture, and living standards, reinforcing societal stability.

The most effective social controls within stratification are deprivation, punishment, humiliation, and economic sanctions, which vary across classes. These mechanisms translate group values into customary laws, with violators facing social condemnation (Khalil, 2006, p 115).

- Social Movements

Social movements emerge as influential agents of control when new cultural models clash with prevailing societal norms. They often arise in unstable conditions, driven by reform-minded individuals who seek institutional change. Over time, these movements evolve into organized pressure groups advocating for social reform.

- Pressure Groups

Pressure groups consist of individuals united by shared interests, exerting influence through lobbying, advocacy, media campaigns, or direct government engagement. They function as a form of moral enforcement, compelling conformity through collective disapproval or criticism (Khalil, 2006, p. 122).

- Socialization

Socialization is the process through which individuals learn societal norms, values, and roles. As James Drever defined it, "the process by which an *individual adapts to their social environment, becoming a recognized and cooperative member.*" (Hassan, 2005, p. 149).

Socialization is fundamental to social control, as it internalizes behavioral norms, reducing the need for constant external supervision. Parents, for instance, cannot monitor their children at all times but instill self-regulation through upbringing (Khalil, 2006, p. 126).

4.2.2. Formal Social Control Mechanisms

- Religion

Religion is one of the most powerful formal control mechanisms, shaping moral conduct and societal stability. Salwa Ali Salim argues that religion, particularly in Islamic societies, serves as a comprehensive social system guiding behavior, governance, and ethics (Salim, 1985, p. 61).

Its primary role is to foster respect for laws, ensure social cohesion, and provide psychological comfort through moral and intellectual development.

- Authority

Sociologists view authority as legitimate power backed by law, structured hierarchically to regulate behavior. It relies on two key

factors: **compliance** (obedience) and **belief** (acceptance of legitimacy).

Agburn and Nimkoff emphasized that sustainable authority depends on public consent rather than coercion, as forced control is ineffective in the long term (Al-Aqdahi, 2010, p. 483).

Thus, leadership and delegated responsibilities play a crucial role in maintaining discipline and organizational stability.

4.2. Psychological Adjustment:

4.2.1. Definition and Concept:

Salah Makhaimer defines psychological adjustment as "accepting an unchangeable reality (which reflects rigidity and passivity) while actively modifying what can be changed (demonstrating flexibility, positivity, and creativity)." He argues that the process of adjustment either requires sacrificing one's individuality or imposing it on the external world—failure leads to neurosis, while success may result in genius (Zahran, 2005, p. 29).

Psychological adjustment refers to an individual's ability to manage anxiety, achieve emotional security, and maintain inner stability free from fear and tension (Zahran, 2005, p. 84).

Researcher Hamed Zahran (1994) describes psychological adjustment as synonymous with personal adjustment, encompassing self-contentment, fulfillment of innate and acquired motives, and inner peace. It also involves adapting to developmental demands across different life stages (p. 19).

According to Ijhal Sari, psychological adjustment is "*a dynamic, ongoing process where an individual modifies their behavior and environment (both natural and social) while accepting unchangeable aspects to achieve balance and harmony.*"

4.2.2. Adjustment Mechanisms:

Individuals strive to satisfy their needs through socially acceptable means, fostering personality balance and psychological adjustment. When faced with obstacles, people employ different coping strategies—some confront challenges directly, while others use indirect or alternative methods.

Abdul Munim Al-Meligi and Helmy Al-Meligi (1970) classify adjustment strategies as follows:

- **Direct Confrontation** – Actively addressing obstacles.

- **Positive Substitution** – Replacing unattainable goals with feasible alternatives.
- **Passive Avoidance** – Withdrawal or neglect of the problem.

Successful adjustment strengthens the ego and enhances self-worth, preparing individuals for future challenges. However, avoidance mechanisms weaken problem-solving abilities.

4.2.3. Direct Adjustment Strategies:

- **Increased Effort & Persistence** – Overcoming frustration through determination (Ashwi, 1999).
- **Method Modification** – Changing ineffective approaches (e.g., students altering study techniques).
- **Behavioral Adaptation** – Adjusting actions when direct solutions fail.
- **Skill Development** – Acquiring new competencies to manage frustration (e.g., parents learning child psychology).
- **Reinterpreting Situations** – Correcting misjudgments (e.g., understanding adolescent behavior as a phase).
- **Cooperation & Participation** – Enhancing social engagement to avoid isolation or aggression.
- **Goal Substitution** – Switching to more attainable objectives (e.g., changing academic majors after repeated failure).
- **Delayed Gratification** – Temporarily postponing desires when immediate fulfillment is impossible.

4.2.4. Indirect Adjustment Strategies (Defense Mechanisms):

When direct solutions are unfeasible, individuals may resort to unconscious coping mechanisms:

- Aggressive Mechanisms

- **Aggression** – Displaced hostility (e.g., verbal attacks, rebellion, or self-harm).
- **Projection** – Attributing one's flaws to others (e.g., criticizing others to avoid self-awareness).

- Defensive Mechanisms

- **Rationalization** – Justifying failures with plausible excuses (unconsciously deceiving oneself) (Zahran, 1997).
- **Identification** – Adopting admired traits from others (e.g., children mimicking parental behavior).
- **Overcompensation** – Masking weaknesses with exaggerated strengths (e.g., a stutterer becoming an eloquent speaker).

- Escapist Mechanisms

- **Withdrawal** – Avoiding anxiety-inducing situations (physically or emotionally).
- **Regression** – Reverting to immature behaviors under stress (e.g., escapism through fantasy).

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- **Daydreaming** – Fulfilling unmet desires in imagination (common in adolescence).
- **Forgetting** – Subconsciously suppressing distressing memories (distinct from repression, which is deeper).

- Repression & Somatization

- **Repression** – Freudian concept of burying traumatic thoughts in the unconscious (Ashwi, 1999).
- **Psychosomatic Illness** – Unconsciously using illness to evade responsibilities (a blend of escape and justification).

5. Study Methodology and Procedures

5.1. Study Limitations The study was bound by the following constraints:

The scope of the present investigation was defined by the following parameters:

- **Conceptual Framework:** The research was specifically designed to examine how evolving norms of social regulation influence the psychological adaptation of university students.
- **Population Scope:** Participation was restricted to a randomly selected cohort of students from Mouloud Mammeri University, Tizi Ouzou.
- **Geographical Scope:** The study was exclusively conducted within the premises of Mouloud Mammeri University, Tizi Ouzou.
- **Temporal Scope:** All empirical data were gathered during September 2025.

5.2. Research Design: The study adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, which, according to Lamoureux (1995), enables researchers to:

"Accurately depict phenomena as they exist in reality, establish relationships between their elements, and analyze data to derive conclusions that improve real-world conditions." (Maamari & Ben Zahi, 2014, p. 50).

5.3. Study Sample: The sample comprised 23 students of Mouloud Mammeri University, Tizi Ouzou

5.4. Sample Characteristics:

5.4.1. Gender Distribution:

Table 1. Gender breakdown of participants.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
females	20	86.95%
males	3	13.05%
the total	23	100%

Source Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

Table (1) reveals that the majority of the sample participants were female, constituting 86.95% of the total, while males accounted for 13.05%

5.4.2. Economic Status Distribution:

Table 2. Economic status of participants.

Economic Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low Income	00	-
Middle Income	17	73.91 %
High Income	06	26.09 %
Total	23	100%

Source Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

Based on the data presented in Table 2, the distribution reveals that a significant majority of the sample population (73.91%, equivalent to 17 individuals) falls within the medium socioeconomic category. Meanwhile, 6 cases (26.09%) were classified in the favorable economic category, while no participants were recorded in the low socioeconomic tier. This distribution pattern indicates considerable disparity in responses, with evaluation outcomes predominantly clustered around the intermediate level.

5.4.3. Distribution of sample members by educational level:

Table 3. Shows the distribution of sample members by place of residence.

place of residence.	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	03	.1304 %
The village	17	73.91 %
The city	03	66.66%
Total	23	.1304 %

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

Table 3 displays the residential distribution characteristics of the study cohort. The findings indicate that a predominant portion of participants (73.91%, representing 17 individuals) reside in rural villages, while an equal distribution of 13.04% (3 individuals each) inhabit both urban and rural areas. This configuration demonstrates a substantial concentration of respondents in village settings, highlighting the predominantly rural composition of the sample population.

5.5. Study Instrument:

- This research employed a survey instrument originally developed by American psychologist Julian Rotter in 1966. The measurement tool comprises 10 items, each featuring three response options: "Agree," "Neutral," and "Disagree," adapted from a tripartite Likert-scale structure. A scoring system ranging from 1 to 3 points was implemented, where "Disagree" corresponds to 1 point, "Neutral" to 2 points, and "Agree" to 3

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points, with these values being inverted for negatively phrased statements. The total scores on this instrument range from 10 to 30, with a midpoint value of 20 (10×2) indicating the average level of change in social regulatory standards.

-This research employed Carl Rogers' (1961) psychological adjustment inventory as its foundational assessment tool. The instrument comprises ten items utilizing a tripartite response structure with the options: "Agree," "Neutral," and "Disagree," adapted from a three-point Likert-scale model. A numerical scoring system from 1 to 3 points was implemented, assigning 1 point to "Disagree," 2 points to "Neutral," and 3 points to "Agree," with reverse scoring applied to negatively phrased statements. The total achievable scores range from 10 to 30 points, with a scale midpoint of 20 (derived from 10×2) indicating the average psychological adaptation level.

5.6. Statistical Methods Used:

To address the research inquiries and validate the proposed hypotheses, both descriptive and inferential statistical approaches were utilized. Data encoding and processing were conducted utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. The following analytical procedures were implemented:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Employed to characterize the study cohort and delineate its attributes, incorporating measures of central tendency and dispersion including arithmetic means and standard deviations.
- **Linear Regression Analysis:** Conducted to assess the model's validity and investigate the predictive relationship between the independent variable (shifting social regulation standards) and the dependent variable (psychological adaptation).
- **Independent Samples t-test:** Administered to examine significant differences in psychological adaptation levels across gender and residential location categories.
- **One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):** Performed to identify statistically significant variations in psychological adaptation based on socioeconomic status.

6. Presentation and Analysis of Study Results:

6.1. First Hypothesis:

-This hypothesis proposes that changes in social control standards influence the psychological adjustment of university students.

To verify this, a regression analysis between the two variables was conducted.

Testing the Correlation Between the Independent and Dependent Variables:

Table 6. Shows the correlation coefficient between the two variables

Correlation Coefficient (R)	Accuracy in Predicting the Dependent Variable
0.48	0.23

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

Table 7. Displays the linear regression analysis

	B Value	Significance Level (Sig)
Regression Intercept (B0)	10.08	0.019
Regression Slope (B1)	0.67	

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

Employing linear regression analysis and correlation assessment through SPSS at a significance threshold of 0.05, with the independent variable operationalized as "shifts in social regulation standards" and the dependent variable as "psychological adaptation," Table (6) reveals a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.48. This value indicates a moderate positive relationship between variables. The predictive accuracy for the dependent variable reaches 0.23, suggesting that approximately 23% of the variance in psychological adaptation can be attributed to changes in social regulation standards.

Furthermore, Table (7) demonstrates that the regression constant (B0) is 10.08, corresponding to the intercept in the linear equation $Y = B0 + B1X$. The regression slope (B1) for the independent variable (changes in social regulation standards) is 0.67, with a significance value of 0.019. As this value falls below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, confirming a statistically significant relationship.

Consequently, the regression equation can be formulated as: $Y = 10.08 + 0.67X$. These analytical outcomes validate the initial hypothesis proposing that modifications in social regulation standards exert influence on university students' psychological adaptation. It can therefore be concluded that alterations in social regulation standards demonstrate statistically significant effects on the psychological adaptation of university students.

6.2. Presentation and Discussion of the Second Hypothesis:

- The second hypothesis suggested that there are differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on gender.

To verify this, the statistical significance of differences in psychological adjustment between male and female students was calculated using the (t) test for differences between two independent and unequal groups. The results were as follows:

Table 8. Shows the means and standard deviations of psychological adjustment among university students by gender

Gender and Sample Size	Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (S)
Males (3)	29	1
Females (20)	26	3.83

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

From Table (8), we observe that the mean score for males is 29, which is nearly equal to the mean score for females, which is 26, despite the sample size of males (3) being smaller than that of females (20).

The key question remains: are these differences statistically significant?

The following table answers this question:

Table 9. Significance of the differences (t) in psychological adjustment
by gender

t Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Sample Means		Significance (Sig)
		First	second	
1.32	21	29	26	0.20

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

From Table (9) and the test results, the significance level is 0.20 (20 %), which exceeds the conventional threshold of 5%. This leads us to accept the null hypothesis, which states that there are no statistically significant differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on gender. Therefore, the second hypothesis is not supported.

6.3. Presentation and Discussion of the Third Hypothesis:

- The third hypothesis stated that differences in psychological adjustment among university students are attributable to their economic status.

To verify this, a one-way ANOVA was conducted, with the following results:

Table 10. Means and standard deviations of psychological adjustment
by economic status

Economic Level	Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (S)
Middle Income	26.80	0.83
High Income	26.29	4.34

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

Table (10) reveals minimal variation in psychological adaptation scores across economic strata. The middle-income cohort demonstrated a mean score of 26.80, while the high-income group registered a comparable mean of 26.29.

This narrow differential prompts investigation into whether these observed variations reach statistical significance.

Table 11. Significance of differences (t) in psychological adjustment
according to economic status

t Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Sample Means		Significance (Sig)
		First	second	
0.45	19.07	29	26	0.65

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

Table (11) and the corresponding test results indicate a significance level of 0.65 (65%), which exceeds the conventional 5% threshold. This outcome necessitates acceptance of the null hypothesis, confirming the absence of statistically significant differences in psychological adaptation among university students across economic backgrounds. Consequently, the second hypothesis lacks empirical support.

6.4. Presentation and Discussion of the Fourth Hypothesis:

The fourth hypothesis proposed that there are differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on their place of residence. To

test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was applied with the following results:

Table 12. Means and standard deviations of psychological adjustment by place of residence

place of residence.	Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (S)
Rural	27.66	0.57
The village	25.94	4.23
The city	27.66	1.52

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

Table (12) demonstrates marginal variations in mean scores across residential categories. Both rural and urban residential groups recorded identical mean scores of 27.66, followed by the village cohort with a mean of 25.94.

To ascertain whether these observed differentials reach statistical significance, reference must be made to the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test outcomes.

Table 13. One-way ANOVA analysis of psychological adjustment by place of residence

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance (Sig)
Between Groups	13.20	2	6.60	0.45	0.64
Within Groups	292.27	20	14.61		
Total	305.47	22			

Source: Student preparation based on SPSS outputs

In Table (13) shows an F-value of 0.45 and a significance level of 0.64 (64%), which exceeds the 5% threshold. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis, confirming no statistically significant differences in psychological adjustment among university students based on place of residence. The fourth hypothesis is thus rejected.

7. CONCLUSION:

The absence of parental and social monitoring has weakened social control mechanisms, leading to a transformation from traditional social norms to more liberal standards. This shift has fostered compensatory behaviors, often in negative forms, adversely affecting students' psychological well-being and social adjustment. It is therefore essential to implement corrective measures to curb this deterioration in social norms, aligning them as closely as possible with societal values.

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