

## **Assessing Emotional Neglect in Adolescents: A Scale Development and Psychometric Properties in Pakistani Adolescents**

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Emotional neglect is said to be a risk factor for long lasting mental health problems in adolescents. This study aims to explore the experience and manifestation of emotional neglect in adolescents. Initially, 29 items were generated through open-ended interview approach from 25 participants (13 boys & 12 girls) aged 10-19 years. After content validation, a pilot study was carried out on a self-report measure of emotional neglect on a sample of 10 participants (5 boys and 5 girls). Lastly, a sample of 350 participants (boys = 45%, girls = 55%) aged 10-19 years ( $M=17.23$ ;  $SD=1.02$ ) were tested for psychometric properties of Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS) along with a Depressive Symptomatology Scale. Exploratory Factor Analysis generated two factors of Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS) *dominance and control* and *lack of attention*. ENS showed sound reliability and validity. The scale found to have good internal consistency, construct validity and reliability. Findings are discussed in the light of factorial structure in Pakistani cultural context.

*Keywords:* Emotional neglect, depressive symptomatology, adolescents, validity, reliability, adolescents

Adolescence is an important developmental phase in human life, during which individuals become independent from their families (Santrock, 2014) and acquires new skills to adjustment with a continuous change (Dar & Tali, 2014). Adolescents have to face multiple physical, emotional and social challenges, including changing physical growth, parental expectations, identity issues and becoming the member of society (Lata & Devi, 2016). These challenges and issues can make adolescents more vulnerable to mental health problems which further leads to adverse consequences including poor school performance and adjustment, high dropout rate, low self-esteem, social incompetence, feelings of loneliness, interpersonal problems and lack of well-being in later life (Siddique, 2017). A number of researchers explored that several key factors which protect adolescents from mental health issues (Van Loon, et al., 2015). Parenting is one of the most prominent protective factors during this challenging period that play a significant role in growth and development of adolescents (Chu, et al., 2015).

Parenting refers to the ways and strategies parents use to treat their children which influence their psychosocial, emotional and personal functioning throughout the life (Sanavi, et al., 2013). Positive parenting (parental support regarding future orientation & education) is linked with fewer mental health issues, well-being, high self-esteem, optimism, academic achievement and school satisfaction in adolescents (Smokowski, et al., 2015). However, if parents are over controlling and demanding the child is unable to develop the strong bond with the parents and has long term psychological damage (Cooper, 2015). These kinds of parents pretend that they are

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good parents because they are fulfilling all the needs of the child but they missed to attend child's feelings and emotions (Siegel & Hartzell, 2013).

The child emotional neglect is defined as an inability to fulfill the emotional wants of a child by a caregiver who is emotionally occupied, avoidant, and impassive to a child's requirements or emotionally maltreating acts of absence (Egeland, 2009). A rich research evidence has demonstrated that emotional neglect have several long lasting adverse effects on adolescents' psychosocial, academic and emotional functioning such as poor academic performance and achievement, confidence issues, low self-esteem, problems in handling criticism, overwhelm, loneliness, unable to ask for help, anger, depression, anxiety, substance use and several other mental health issues (Cohen, et al., 2017; Hadland et al., 2020; Jessar, et al., 2017). Furthermore, literature also suggested that there are significant gender differences in emotional neglect among adolescents. Boys tend to perceive greater emotional neglect than girls (Hagborg, et al., 2017).

The phenomenon of emotional neglect is postulated by attachment theoretical framework (Bowlby, 1973) which highlighted the childhood traumatic experiences of emotional abuse and neglect across different generations (Riggs, 2010). It explains that if a child experience emotional abuse and neglect by attachment figures tend to develop an insecure attachment pattern which become a lifelong template for the interpretation of self and for future interpersonal relationship (Bowlby, 1973). Insecure attachment leads to poor emotion regulation, interpersonal problems, low self-esteem, poor coping and risk factor for serious psychological problems (Riggs & Kaminski, 2010; Shubs, 2020 ; Yoo, et al., 2014).

Culture plays an important role in shaping and maintaining human behavior. Individualistic cultures posit more emphasize on individuality, self-reliance, individual growth, personal identity, self-actualization and self-reliance (Phinney, et al., 2000; Saleem, et al., 2015). On the other hand, in the collectivistic cultures, individual experiences interdependence, social support, a sense of belongingness and lack of boundaries in relation to others (Dwairy, 2010; Lee & Ciftci, 2014; Triandis, 2001). Families have a central role and emphasis on common goals over individualistic (Raj & Raval, 2013). As Pakistan is a collectivistic culture where parents have a lot of responsibilities and roles due to which they are unable to give proper care, attention and love to their children and children perceive them as neglected (Hughes, 2006). In these kinds of society's people live in group and have a great influence on each other life (Saleem, et al., 2015).

Due to changing socio-demographic picture of Pakistan where more and more parents are dual-earner, increased parental conflict, social emotional stressors, lack of awareness and education may lead to inability to nurture and care children (Rizvi & Najam, 2014; Saleem, et al., 2017; Yousaf, et al., 2018). Therefore, in view of several adverse effects of emotional neglect and cross-cultural variations, it is important to study the expression and manifestation of emotional neglect in a Pakistani collectivistic cultural context. Furthermore, there is a dearth of local literature on emotional neglect. Previous researches explored the impact of physical abuse and sexual abuse (Malik, 2012) and there was limited research evidence on emotional neglect. Different scales of child maltreatment were used to measure emotional neglect like Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale (MNBS; Straus, 2006), Psychological Maltreatment Rating Scales (PMRS; Briere, et al., 2012), which covered all types of maltreatment or abuse but

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there was no specific local scale which measure only emotional neglect's dimensions. Therefore, the current study was firstly aimed to explore the pattern of emotional neglect reported by adolescents. Secondly to develop a psychometrically sound scale of emotional neglect for adolescents.

### Method

This study was conducted into four phases i.e. item generation, expert validation, pilot study and psychometric properties.

#### Phase I: Item Generation.

The aim of this phase was to explore nature, experience and manifestation of emotional neglect in adolescence. The emotional neglect was operationally defined as "*perceived absence of love, nurturance, care, protection and sense of isolation*". The open-ended approach was used to explore the construct of emotional neglect with the participant's on individual level. After getting permission from Institutional Review Board, different colleges of Lahore were contacted and with the brief description of the aims and objectives of the current research.

After permission was granted, a sample of 25 adolescents (13 boys & 12 girls) aged 10-19years recruited randomly from 11 and 12 class. Participants were provided the operational definition of EN and were asked to describe the characteristic features of emotional neglect as experienced by them. Further open-ended questions were asked to clear ambiguities reported by participants and it took 20 to 25 minutes to complete an interview.

After successful completion of interviews, all interviews were transcribed by the researcher and sentences were transformed into phrases. Initially a list of 40 items was generated. However, after omitting vague, dubious and overlapping items, a list of 29 items was generated, given the name of Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS).

#### Phase II: Expert Validation

This phase aimed to establish content validity of the ENS. Nine experts, having minimum two years' work experience of working as a school counsellor, reviewed the items in order to guarantee the content validity of the ENS. Experts were given the operational definition of emotional neglect and they were asked to rate the items of the scale on five-point rating scale, 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*not relevant*). Item selection criteria was 50% agreement from the experts. All items received 50% agreement from the experts. In this way no item was excluded during this phase. At the end of this phase a final list of 29 items was transformed into self-report measure titled as Emotional Neglect Scales (ENS).

#### Phase III: Pilot Study.

After the expert validation, the pilot study was done on 10 participants (five boys and five girls) from first year and second year classes to check the readability and layout of the scale. The participants were asked to rate the ENS on four-point rating scale 0(*not at all*), 1 (*seldom*), 2(*often*) and 3 (*more often*). The participants took 10 to 15 minutes to complete the scale. Participants reported no difficulty regarding any aspect of the scale.

#### **Phase IV: Psychometric Properties.**

The aim of this phase was established psychometric proprieties of the Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS).

##### ***Participants***

Data were collected from 350 students (158 boys and 192 girls) of first year and second year's studying in different collages of Lahore. The age of participants was between 10 to 19 years ( $M = 17.23$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). The multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the study sample. The participants were divided into two subgroups on the base of private and government schools, further divided on the basis of gender and educational class comprising 180 (51%) from first year, 170 (49%) from second year with 158 (45%) boys and 192 (55%) girls selected from three government (189 [54%]) and three private (161 [46%]) sector colleges.

##### ***Measures***

**Emotional neglect scale (ENS).** Scale developed on emotional neglect in phase I was used to measure emotional neglect of the participants. It has 29 items measured on 4-point rating scale and response options were 0 (*not at all*), 1 (*seldom*), 2 (*often*) and 3 (*more often*). The participants were asked to rate statements that were related to parent's attitude. Possible scores ranged from 0 to 87 with higher scores mean more emotional neglect an individual experience.

**Depressive Symptomatology Scale (DSA).** As literature indicated that emotional neglect in adolescents is significantly positively associated with depression (Jessar et al., 2017; Yousaf, et al., 2018). Therefore, Depressive Symptomatology Scale (Saleem, et al., 2014) was used to establish construct validity of the ENS. The scale is consisted of 4 factors which included sadness, indecisiveness, irritability and psychosomatic symptoms. It is comprised of 27 items measured on 4-point rating scale 0 (*not at all*), 1 (*rarely*), 2 (*sometimes*) and 3 (*often*). Possible scores ranged from 0 to 81 with higher scores means higher level of depressive symptomatology. Cronbach alpha for Depressive Symptomatology Scale for current research was ( $\alpha = .89$ ) indicating good internal consistency of the scale.

##### ***Procedure***

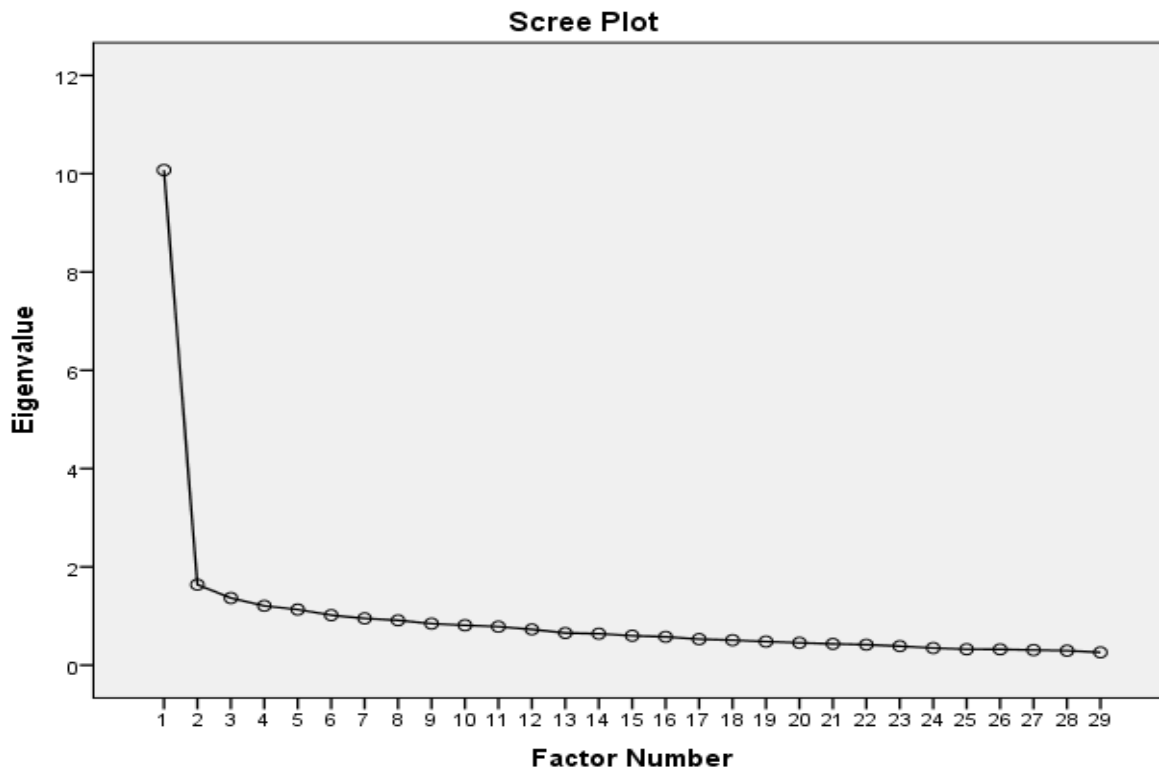
After getting permission from Institutional Review Board (IRB), researcher contacted with different colleges of Lahore and briefly described the aims of the research. Once the permission obtained, college authorities were assured about the confidentiality and anonymity of the research data. Students from each class were tested in group settings with an average of 20 students in each group. First, researcher introduced herself and informed the participants about the aims of the research. The participants who were agreed to fill the protocol were provided the final testing material comprises of Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS) and Depressive Symptomatology Scale (DSA). Participants were also assured about confidentiality and privacy of information taken from them. It was taking about 20 minutes to complete the research material. After completion, each participant was given few minutes for any query and feedback.

## Results

To find out the underlying factor structure of Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS), the Principal Axis Factor (PFA) with Promax rotation was performed. Initially, appropriateness of the current data for factor analysis was checked. Initial Cronbach alpha for ENS was found to be .91, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .93 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also significant ( $p < .001$ ) indicating that current data is suitable for factor analysis (Field, 2013). Number of factors for ENS was determined on the basis of Eigen value greater than 1 and factor loading greater than .35 on that particular factor (Kaiser, 1974; Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013). Scree plot showing the Eigen values of each factor is given in Figure 1. Afterward, factor analysis was conducted with four, three and two factor solutions. The two-factor solution was found to be the best as it has minimum dubious items and most interpretable factor structure. Therefore, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Promax rotation was conducted on 29 items of ENS with two factor solution. 5 items having factor loadings less than .35 were omitted. The factor loadings of 24 items are given in Table 1. The results given in Table 1 indicated that 24 items of ENS could be lumped under two key factors which were given label as: *dominance and control* and *lack of attention* by the researcher.

**Figure 1**

*Scree plot showed extraction of factors for Emotional Neglect Scale (N=350)*



**Table.1***Factor Structure of 24 Items of ENS on Adolescence with Rotated Component Matrix*

| Items | F1         | F2   | Items        | F1         | F2         |
|-------|------------|------|--------------|------------|------------|
| 8     | <b>.52</b> | .19  | 26           | <b>.81</b> | -.16       |
| 11    | <b>.56</b> | .12  | 28           | <b>.45</b> | .19        |
| 12    | <b>.39</b> | .29  | 29           | <b>.55</b> | .10        |
| 13    | <b>.38</b> | .12  | 2            | -.04       | <b>.47</b> |
| 14    | <b>.51</b> | .07  | 3            | -.18       | <b>.71</b> |
| 15    | <b>.53</b> | .16  | 4            | .20        | <b>.49</b> |
| 17    | <b>.63</b> | .03  | 10           | .24        | <b>.37</b> |
| 20    | <b>.60</b> | -.02 | 16           | .32        | <b>.41</b> |
| 21    | <b>.43</b> | .20  | 18           | -.09       | <b>.70</b> |
| 22    | <b>.64</b> | .01  | 19           | .07        | <b>.37</b> |
| 23    | <b>.58</b> | .14  | 27           | -.10       | <b>.78</b> |
| 24    | <b>.83</b> | -.34 | Eigen Value  | 9.47       | 1.02       |
| 25    | <b>.72</b> | .00  | Cumulative % | 32.66      | 36.20      |

*Note: factor loading >.35 was boldfaced.*

On the basis of commonalities in items, the label was given to each factor. Details about all factors is given below.

#### ***Factor 1: Dominance and control***

The first factor consisted of 16 items explain different problems related to feelings of dominancy by parents. Examples include, getting scold without any reason, feeling ignored, favoring sibling's harsh treatment, abusive, hindrance, giving orders, not caring about child likes and dislikes, not listening, giving no time, proving child wrong, feeling angry without any reason, not trusting.

#### ***Factor 2: Lack of attention***

The second factor comprised 8 items that denotes to a sense of rejection and attention from parents. The sample items include not fulfilling basic needs, not attending child's needs giving no time to study, giving no attention, not interested in child study, not teaching moral values.

Construct validity of Emotional Neglect Scale was established by using Depressive Symptomatology Scale (Saleem, et al., 2014). The positive correlation between Depressive Symptomatology Scale and Emotional Neglect Scale ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ) was found providing the evidence that scale has good construct validity.

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**Table 2**

*Summary of Inter Correlations, Internal Consistency Means and Standard Deviations on ENS (N = 350)*

| Factors                   | F1    | F2     | EN Total |
|---------------------------|-------|--------|----------|
| F1: Dominance and Control | -     | .70*** | .96***   |
| F2: Lack of Attention     |       | -      | .85***   |
| ENTotal                   | 10.65 |        | -        |
| <i>M</i>                  | 9.21  | 3.66   | 14.31    |
| <i>SD</i>                 | .91   | 4.37   | 12.67    |
| $\alpha$                  |       | .77    | .92      |

*Note.* EN =Emotional neglect  
 $df = 349, p < .001$ \*\*\*

Table 2 indicated that dominance and control significantly positively correlated with lack of attention ( $r = .70, p < .001$ ). The 24 items of ENS were subjected to correlation with the total items score of ENS. The item total score was obtained by adding all the 24 items. The item total correlations for each item of ENS ranged from .19 to .70 ( $p < .001$ ).

Odd-Even method was used to determine the split-half reliability of the ENS by dividing the scale into two equal halves, one containing all Odd items and other comprising of all Even items. The correlation coefficient between two halves was found statistically significant ( $r = .88, p < .001$ ). Result indicted significant gender differences in emotional neglect. Boys ( $M = 17.73, SD = 14.54$ ) reported greater level of emotional neglect than girls ( $M = 11.51, SD = 10.10$ ).

### Discussion

Parenting plays a significant role in growth and development of adolescents by providing support for survival in the world. If parents are unable to fulfill emotional needs of child or adolescents, it develops a sense of emotional neglect in them which has severe consequences for adolescents like poor school performance and adjustment, lower level of well-being, quality of life and self-esteem, loneliness and higher level of mental health issues (Rees, 2008). One of the most significant factors that form emotional neglect is culture. Concept of emotional neglect may be universal but its expression and manifestation varies from culture to culture and is determined by cultural orientation (Kim, 2005). Therefore, keeping in view of adverse effects of emotional neglect on adolescents and cross-cultural variations the purpose of current study was to explore the experience, manifestation and expression of emotional neglect in adolescent of Pakistani collectivistic society. In current study, the culturally specific expression and manifestation of emotional neglect was collected, and transformed into 4-point rating scale given the name of Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS). Exploratory Factor Analysis of ENS yielded two factors of ENS namely *dominance and control* and *lack of attention*.

The dominance and control represented the adolescent's perception that parents are controlling and dominant from many behaviors like disappointment, getting scold without any reason, feeling ignored, comparison of parents with their children, treating harshly, abusive, hindrance, giving orders, not caring about child likes and dislikes, not listening, giving no time, comparing child with other children, proving child wrong, feeling angry, not trusting and

differentiating siblings. Adolescence is a stage at which many emotional, behavioral and social changes occurred that caused identity and role related issues (Crocetti, 2017). This factor is related to the authoritarian parenting style described in parenting style theory given by Baumrind (1971). This style is characterized by controlling, adherence to authority, very demanding, and low responsiveness, expressive to warmth, behave harshly, did not provide any choices, and did not trust on child (Georgiou, et al., 2013). Adolescents perceived their parents as critical, dominating, aggressive and demanding. At this age, individuals required independence, liberty and autonomy from the parents therefore they perceived parents as demanding and controlling (Muris et al., 2006). The controlling behavior of parents was considered as universal aspect of parenting (Stewart et al., 1999). Furthermore, as Pakistan is a collectivistic culture in which parents have a great importance and value in nurturing child and make them responsible citizens. Therefore, parents had a right to take decisions of adolescent's life and control them according to the need. In our culture control was taken as a part of training the child by parents (Saleem et al., 2015). Therefore, this factor dominated the factor structure of Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS).

The second factor denoted to a sense of rejection and attention from parents. Adolescents perceived that parents are not fulfilling their basic needs, giving no importance to study, proving them wrong, paying no attention, and not teaching moral values and feeling jealousy. The factor lack of attention was linked with uninvolved parenting which is also known as neglectful parenting (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019) that is characterized by unresponsiveness to child's needs, poor emotional bond between parent and child, involved in their own matters and lack of interest in child's life (Pinquart, 2017). As discussed earlier that in Pakistani collectivistic society, parents have to play several roles such as son and daughter, brother and sister and husband and wife. So, they are occupied with several responsibilities that's why they are unable to pay attention to adolescent's emotional needs but only try to fulfill their basic needs like food, clothing and education (Webb, 2012).

As far as validity of the ENS is concerned, the current findings indicated that emotional neglect is significantly positively associated with depressive symptomatology. These findings are in line with previous literature that suggested that emotional neglect is positively associated with depressive symptoms (Jessar et al., 2017; Rizvi & Najam, 2014; Yousaf, et al., 2018). Additionally, results of current study also revealed that boys reported higher level of emotional neglect as compared to girls. These findings are also consistent with previous literature (Hagborg et al., 2017) that also suggested that boys have greater level of emotional neglect than girls.

The findings of this study highlighted the expression and manifestation of emotional neglect in Pakistani cultural context, therefore, giving the true picture of emotional neglect in collectivistic cultures. By utilizing this scale we can also identify the risk and protective factors of emotional neglect in Pakistan and by with these factors we can reduce the prevalence of emotional neglect and prevent the adolescents from adverse outcomes of emotional neglect. Furthermore, we can also conduct workshops for parents to reduce the emotional neglect by high lightening the negative outcomes associated with it.

## **Conclusion**

The current study is a ground breaking work to understand emotional neglect in adolescents in collectivistic Pakistani cultural context as the concept of emotional neglect is



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universal but its manifestation and expression is different from culture to culture. A reliable and valid tool was developed in this study to assess the emotional neglect in adolescents. This research will further help in understanding the complex phenomenon of emotional neglect.

### Limitations and Future suggestions

Despite several implications, the current study has some limitations also. First, it was carried out on just Lahore students of intermediate classes therefore, limiting the generalizability of the study. Furthermore, a comparative study can be carried out on emotional neglect construct among different subcultures of Pakistan. Moreover, as this study was a preliminary validation of newly developed Emotional Neglect Scale (ENS), therefore, only construct validity was established. In future discriminant and concurrent validity should be also be explored while validating this scale.

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