

## **Perceived Parental Rearing Practices, Interpersonal Relationships and Psychological Problems in College Students**

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The need of belongingness is said to be one of the basic human need. The quality of parent-child relationship provides a base to develop long term, intimate and deep emotional bonds among individuals. The current study is aimed to explore the predictive relationship of perception of parental practices and quality of interpersonal relationship with psychological problems among college students. In a quantitative correlation survey research design, 321 participants (54 % boys & 46% girls) from different colleges of Lahore were selected through stratified random sampling. The age range of the participants was 15-20 years ( $M=17.32$ ;  $SD=1.00$ ). Three scales Egna Minnen Beträffanda Uppdostran – A (EMBU-A; Gerlsma, Arrindell, Veen, & Emmelkamp, 1991), Interpersonal Difficulties Scale (Saleem, Ihsan, & Mahmood, 2014) and General Health Questionnaire-30 (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) and a demographic form were given to participants. Findings of the study showed that perceived parental rejection and interpersonal problems are the significant predictors of psychological problems in college students. Results are discussed in terms of counseling and cultural perspectives.

*Keywords:* Perceived parental rearing practices, interpersonal relationships, psychological problems, college students

College is an important venue for education, learning of new social and emotional skills, developing unique thinking patterns and a time for having a sense of independence (Arnett, 2000). Yet this crucial period also brings various challenges related to the changing environment, biological maturity, a sense of

independence and autonomy from family, personal identity, new relationships, academic pressure, and career choices (Gore & Metz, 2008). Despite of many new learning and social opportunities, adjustment with changing expectations and demands, college years may result into serious mental and psychological concerns including anxiety, depression, hopelessness, suicidal ideation, and instable interpersonal relationships that might result into disruption in psychosocial and academic functioning (Rice, Leever, Christopher & Porter, 2006; Saleem, Mahmood & Naz, 2013; Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John & Gross, 2009). To reduce alarming increase in the mental health problems, it is important to identify risk factors so that growing adults can be prevented from the adverse future consequences. Among many other important risk factors, early-parent-child bond and social relationship are the focus of the current research.

Early parent-child relationship is the fundamental and most crucial emotional bond that continuously influences human functioning throughout the life span (Bowlby, 1982). According to the attachment theory, the quality of child and the caregiver relationship remains stable overtime and becomes a template for future interpersonal and romantic relationships (Pascuzzo, Cyr & Moss, 2013). Parent-child relationship has been studied from different perspectives including Baumrind's (1966) prototype of four distinct parenting styles i.e. authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglecting parenting. Another way is perceived parental rearing practices i.e. overprotection, warmth, rejection and favoring subjects (Muris, Meesters, Merckelbach & Hülsenbeck, 2000).

A rich research evidence demonstrates that a supportive, emotionally available and warmth parenting is associated with positive academic outcomes, higher self-esteem, and better adjustment in college years (Peña, 2000; Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009). Parental acceptance, supportive attitude and balance between care and discipline also perpetuate emotional regulation, social competence, learning of social skills, and improved social

and interpersonal interactions (Ebrahimi, Kharbou, Ahadi & Hatami, 2015; Saleem, Asghar, Subhan & Mahmood, 2019). Likewise, controlling, rejecting, and punitive parenting results into serious mental health concerns, such as feeling distant, isolated, lonely, an having unstable interpersonal relationship, and lack of social skills (Aquilino & Supple, 2001; Barber & Harmon, 2002).

In college years, since the social experience expands tremendously, an individual's need to develop and maintain social relationship also increases. Healthy interpersonal relationship provide a base for social support that consequently help an individual to deal effectively with the adversities and stresses of life, feel accepted and have better psychological adjustment (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2010; Raboteg-Saric & Sakic, 2014). Interpersonal problems are quite common in college students and consequently lead to other mental health problems such as depression, suicide, self-injurious behaviors and so on (Adrian, Zeman, Erdley, Lisa & Sim, 2011; Sweeting, Young, West & Der, 2006; Trull, Tomko, Brown & Scheiderer, 2010).

To sum up the above literature, it is evident that college period is a transition from adolescence to adulthood and an individual may experience challenges and stress that can lead to mental health problems (Cleary, Walter & Jackson, 2011). Most of these problems are transitional but if they are not handled properly, they may result into serious disruption in academic, emotional, social, and personal domains (Vázquez, Otero & Díaz, 2012). To avoid serious consequences, researchers are now focusing on identifying the risk factors that may become the leading cause of mental health problems. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to identify the interaction of familial factor such as parental practices and social domain such as interpersonal problems on mental functioning of college students. It is also important to note that Pakistan is a collectivistic culture where parents are considered very important and crucial in the shaping of personal, moral, and emotional development of an individual (Saleem, Mahmood & Subhan, 2015). In this cultural context, it would be

very important to see the role of parental rearing practices as a risk or protective factor along with interpersonal relationship in understanding and preventing individuals from psychological problems. Therefore, current research aimed to identify the predictive relationship among parental rearing practices, interpersonal problems, and psychological problems in a sample of college students. We hypothesized that parental emotional warmth and parental overprotection would be negatively associated with interpersonal relationship and psychological problems. Moreover, parental emotional warmth would negatively predict and difficulties in interpersonal relationships would positively predict psychological problems in college students.

## Method

### Research design

A quantitative correlational survey research design was used in the present study.

### Participants

A sample of 321 participants (54 % boys & 46% girls) from two academic classes 1<sup>st</sup> year (54%) and 2<sup>nd</sup> year (46%) was selected from different colleges of Lahore through stratified sampling technique. The sample was divided into strata according to academic class and gender. The age range of the participants was between 15-20 years ( $M=17.32$ ;  $SD=1.00$ ). The details of the participants are given below in the Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Description of the Participants (N=321)*

Demographic variable	Boys <i>f</i> (%)	Girls <i>f</i> (%)	Total <i>f</i> (%)
<b>Gender</b>	174(54)	147 (46)	321(100)
<b>Class</b>			
1 <sup>st</sup> year	92(55)	75(45)	167(52)
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	82(53)	72(47)	154(48)

<b>Father's Education</b>			
Under Matric	84(62)	51(38)	135(42)
College or above	90(48)	96(52)	186(58)
<b>Mother's Education</b>			
Under Matric	115(62)	71(38)	186(36)
College or above	59(44)	76(56)	135(42)
<b>Family System</b>			
Nuclear	68(41)	97(59)	165(51)
Joint	106(68)	50(32)	156(49)

Table 1 indicates the demographic characteristics of the participants such as educational class, parental education, and family system across gender.

## Measures

Following measures were used in the current study:

### *Demographic Sheet*

It was developed to obtain basic information from the participants regarding their age, class, gender, parental education, and family system.

### *Egna Minnen Beträffanda Uppdostran (EMBU-A)*

It was used for measuring perceived parental rearing practices. EMBU-A (My Memories of Upbringing) consists of two separate scales for mother and father. The total items of the scales are 27 with three sub factors: Emotional Warmth ( $\alpha = .83$ ), Rejection ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and Overprotection ( $\alpha = .73$ ). The factor of Emotional Warmth has 15 items and the factor of Rejection consists of 6 items and same is Overprotection. Items were scored on 0 to 3-point liker type rating scale for mother and father separately. The response options were *Never=0*, *Sometimes=1*, *Often=2* and *Always=3* (Gerlsma et al., 1991). The scale was translated by using the standard procedure of translation and back translation. Two lingual experts and two experienced clinical psychologists examined the cultural and linguistic equivalence of EMBU-A.

### ***Interpersonal Difficulties Scales***

It was used to assess the interpersonal problems of the participants. The scale consisted of 59 items (Saleem, Ihsan & Mahmood, 2014) with six dimensions of Proneness to Passivity, Low Self-confidence, Lack of Social Support, Lack of Assertiveness, Lack of Boundaries and Unstable Relations. The response options were (0) *Never*, (1) *Rarely*, (2) *Sometimes*, (3) *Often*, and (4) *Always* and high score indicated more interpersonal problems. The reliability of ODS for the current study was  $\alpha=.89$ , showing a satisfactory internal consistency of the scale.

### ***General Health Questionnaire-30***

General Health Questionnaire was the self-administration questionnaire to screen out the non-psychotic psychiatric illness. A person with high GHQ score reflected to have high level of psychological distress like anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric illness. It consists of 30 items indicating most severe problems (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). The reliability of the scale was shown in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93 (Dale, Soderhamn, & Soderhamn, 2012).

### **Procedure**

Ethical committee of the Institute of Clinical Psychology approved the current research for any ethical concern. A summary of research project was sent to various colleges of Lahore and an official permission was obtained from the college authorities for data collection. College authorities were assured about the confidentiality and anonymity of the institutions. An informed consent was obtained from the participants and they were assured about the confidentiality and anonymity. Also, they were given the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Testing was carried out in group and the average time taken was 25 minutes. A debriefing session was also carried out for any questions and feedback. The original sample comprised of 330 participants, but 9 research protocols were discarded due to incomplete information. The final analysis was carried out on 321 participants.



ID															
<i>M</i>	29.11	3.15	8.70	30.80	3.10	9.20	18.33	15.16	15.14	16.04	12.63	9.33	84.60	29.56	
<i>SD</i>	9.60	3.23	3.30	8.83	3.11	3.17	8.39	6.26	6.60	5.88	4.52	4.73	26.60	13.44	

*Note.* V= Variables, EWF= Emotional Warmth Father, RF= Rejection Father, OF= Overprotection Father, EWM= Emotional Warmth Mother, RM= Rejection Mother, OPM= Over Protection Mother, PTP=Proneness to Passivity, LSC=Lack of self-confidence, LSS=Lack of Social Support, LA=Lack of Assertiveness, LB=Lack of Boundaries, UR= Unstable Relationships, PP=Psychological Problems, ID= Interpersonal Difficulties

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Table 2 indicates that parental emotional warmth has a significant week negative and parental rejection has a significant positive relationship with factors of interpersonal difficulties and psychological problems. Parental overprotection has significant positive relationship with psychological problems but has no relationship with difficulties in interpersonal relationship.

### Predictors of Psychological Problems

Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis was carried out to identify the significant predictors of psychological problems in college students. A correlation matrix revealed a significant relationship of factors Perceived Parental Practices of Mother and Father (Parental Over-protection & Rejection) and Interpersonal Difficulties with Psychological Problems. For Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis, variables were entered in terms of models. In model I, all the personal demographic characteristics were entered such as gender, age, class. In model II, familial characteristics were included such as family system and parental education. In model III and IV, Over-protection and Rejection of mother and father were entered and in model V factors of Interpersonal Difficulties (Proneness to Passivity, Low Self-Confidence & Lack of Social Support) and Psychological Problems were entered as dependent variable.



**Table 3**

*Multiple Hierarchical Regression Analysis showing the Impact of Demographic Characteristics, Perceived Parental Rearing, & Interpersonal Difficulties on Psychological Problems (N=321)*

Model	SEB	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Step I (R=.11, $\Delta R^2$ =.04)				
Gender	1.56	.12	2.19	.03
Step II (R=.03, $\Delta R^2$ =.02)				
Father's Education	1.65	-.14	2.23	.02
Family System	1.51	.12	2.09	.03
Step III (R=.09, $\Delta R^2$ =.06)				
Overprotection Father	.26	.12	1.99	.04
Step IV(R=.12, $\Delta R^2$ =.09)				
Rejection Mother	.35	.18	2.16	.03
Step V(R=.29, $\Delta R^2$ =.25)				
Proneness to Passivity	.11	.15	2.13	.03
Low Self-Confidence	.11	.15	.24	.00
Lack of Social Support	.14	.14	2.00	.04

*Note.* Only significant predictors are presented in step I, II, III, IV, V. Step I,  $F(2,320)=3.72$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Step II,  $F(5,320)=2.07$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Step III,  $F(8,320)=3.44$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Step IV,  $F(11,320)=3.69$ ,  $p<0.001$ , Step V,  $F(17,320)=6.93$ ,  $p<0.001$

Table 3 indicates that in Step I and II, gender, fathers' education and family system were found to be the significant predictors of psychological problems. Results revealed that gender, and family system were positive, and fathers' education was negative predictor of mental health problems in college students. In other words, being a female, higher level of fathers' education and joint family system tend to predict more psychological concerns in college students. In step III fathers' over-protection positively predicted mental health problems. In step IV and V, maternal rejection and proneness to passivity, low self-confidence and lack of social support were found to be positive predictor of mental health problems in college students.

## Discussion

College years are supposed to be a time of many opportunities and choices, yet they bring challenges and continuous adjustment with ever changing environment (Srivastava, et al., 2009) that may lead to different adjustment problems, interpersonal difficulties and psychological concerns including anxiety, social rejection, isolation, poor academic performance, early drop out, several emotional disorders, low self-esteem and negative self-concept and so on (Bernstein, Bernat, Davis, & Layne, 2008; Saleem, Mahmood & Naz, 2013). Therefore, the recent focus is on identifying those factors that may increase the burden of ever-changing demands on college students. One of the factors is quality of parenting; a positive and secure parenting empowers an individual to face all these challenges effectively and efficiently and develop healthy social relationships (Turner, Chandler & Heffer, 2009). Moreover, increased social interaction and expanding social world is also one of the challenges of college years and poor interpersonal and social skills strongly influence an individual's functioning and it also may become a risk factor for developing mental health problems (Carter, Kelly, & Norwood, 2012).

The results of current study found that personal, familial, and social factors play a vital role in the mental health functioning of college students. The findings of the current research are in line with literature yet there are some highlights which are very interesting in relation to risk or protective factors of the psychological problems in college students. As discussed earlier, perceived parental rearing practices have a strong relationship with different aspects of growth and development of human behavior. Parenting practices are also influenced by cultural context. In individualistic cultures, parents promote autonomy and independence, self-actualization is supported, and self-reliance is cultivated (Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000). In traditional cultures, like Pakistan, dependency, obedience, family cohesion and conformity to familial and social norms is promoted and appreciated (Triandis, 2001). Consequently, these cultural

difference in parenting practices influence differently on mental health functioning of an individual (Wang & Ollendick, 2001).

The current study found that both parents tend to play a distinct and different role in psycho-social and emotional domains of college students (Bögels & Phares, 2008). In traditional cultures like Pakistan, both parents share different responsibilities of upbringing of their children; fathers are usually responsible for providing financial support to the family and mothers mainly look after household responsibilities and indulge more in caretaking, providing more emotional warmth and nurturance. The current study revealed that Father's emotional warmth, care and support predicts positive outcomes in college students. This is because college years are supposed to be very stressful, and if father is there to guide and help them in major life decisions, it might protect college students from developing different mental health problems.

It is also interesting to note that if father is overprotective, exerts control and shows less emotional warmth, it may lead to anxiety and social withdrawal in children (Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Wei-Chin, & Chu, 2003). The reason behind this relationship is that over protection from parents sometimes denote to over-involvement and interference which hampers normal functioning and an individual is unable to learn coping skills to handle adverse and stressful events. As a result, whenever they experience novel and difficult situation, individuals would perceive it as more threatening, stressful and feel less autonomous to handle the situation (Kane, Braunstein, Ollendick, & Muris, 2015). Similarly, mother's role in a collectivistic society is said to be a central role in the family and if an individual perceives rejection and distance from mother, it may result into low self-worth, feeling of being unloved, and anxiety and depression (Yap & Jorm, 2015). In other words, lack of supportive parenting, and feelings of being unloved foster inappropriate coping skills, emotion regulation and social antiquates and valued may increase the vulnerability of psychological problems.

Among the other dimensions, interpersonal relationship is also one of the important aspects of human development. As individual grows, his social world expands and he tends to learn new skill to develop, maintain and manage interpersonal skills. If an individual is unable to meet the demands and pressures of social world, he might experience social isolation, feelings of rejection and low self-worth that might lead to depression (Adrian et al., 2011). The current research revealed the consistent findings that a person who tends to be passive, have negative evaluation of self and perceives less support in his interpersonal relationship experience more mental health problems. As far as the demographic variables are concerned, gender, low level of fathers' education and joint family system positively predict mental health in college students. These findings are consistent with literature (Saleem, Mahmood & Naz, 2013; Saleem et al., 2019)

### **Conclusion**

The current study has unique contribution in the understanding of risk and protective factors of mental health functioning of college students. Parental rearing practices and difficulties in interpersonal relationships significantly contribute in the development and maintenance of mental health problems. In the current research, parental emotional warmth was found to be a protective factor and maternal rejection and interpersonal difficulties as risk factors for developing mental health problems in college students. To prevent college students from mental health problems, counseling services can be provided, and awareness programs can be planned for parents and students.

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