

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PARENTAL OVERPROTECTION AND BULLYING VICTIMIZATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The current paper sought to examine the association between perceived parental overprotection and bullying victimization among university students in Pakistan. Bullying is an increasing concern among young adults, and parenting styles, particularly overprotection, may have a substantial impact on students' social and emotional wellbeing. The overall sample consisted of 300 university students (50% men, 50% women) aged 18 to 25 years ($M = 22.41$, $SD = 2.81$), selected using a stratified random sampling procedure. Data were gathered using two standardized measures: the Egnä Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran - Adult Version (EMBU-A; Perris, Jacobsson, Lindström, von Knorring, & Perris, 1980) for assessing perceived parental overprotection and the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (Khan & Khurshid, 2023) for measuring bullying victimization, both of which were administered in Urdu-translated versions. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the variables. The findings showed that perceived parental overprotection (maternal) has a strong positive with dominance and control, aggression, and bullying victimization among university students.

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood which includes university life, is a crucial period of development during which individuals manage newfound freedom, learn essential life skills, and adjust to constant shifts in their academic, social, and personal lives (Majoka et al., 2022). This period is often spent developing a distinct personality, building meaningful relationships, and preparing for future commitments within the cultural and societal norms (Peel & Ward, 2022). The period of life between the ages of 18 and 29 is known as young adulthood, and it signifies the transition from childhood to adulthood with a variety of biological, psychological, cognitive, and social

changes (Fabio et al., 2021; Stehlik & Thomas, 2018; Hakami, 2018). A person's workload and responsibilities such as those related to their education shifting from school, colleges to university, employment, marriage, and families, rise as they mature and take on adult roles (Higley, 2019). The conflict in adulthood, according to Erick Erikson's 1950 theory of psychosocial development, is "intimacy versus isolation." At this stage, the primary focus is on developing personal and intimate relationships with others. University students in our culture suffer various academic, social, and mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression (Jibeen,

2016). As a result of these hurdles, they are at risk of acquiring mental health issues (Irfan et al., 2023). Several studies on university students investigated the frequency of mental health concerns in this population. The need for students to receive counseling services for various developmental and mental health difficulties has become increasingly evident over time, as reported by university and college counseling facilities (Negash, 2021; Gallagher et al., 2000).

Parental overprotection, a kind of parenting in which caregivers exert excessive control and limit personal freedom, is particularly common in collectivist countries like Pakistan (Mansab & Mohsin, 2012). In Pakistan, where strong family ties and the concept of family honor influence parenting approaches, parents frequently intervene significantly in their children's lives, particularly in friendships, academic pursuits, and lifestyle choices (Batool and Bond, 2014). This style of parenting aims to protect children from perceived dangers while maintaining family values. However, it may unintentionally prevent children from developing crucial social and problem-solving abilities, as well as necessary social skills, leading to reliance and low self-esteem (Zulfiqar et al., 2024).

Bullying victimization is most commonly defined as being subjected to negative actions from one or more people repeatedly and over time, with a power imbalance between the perpetrator(s) and the victim (Moore et al., 2017), whereas bullying is generally defined as aggressive behavior characterized by intentionality, repetition, and a power imbalance between bullies and bullied victims (Smith, 2016).

Bullying takes many forms & types, each having its unique impact on people (Khalf, 2020). Physical bullying comprises aggressive behaviors including shoving, hitting, and causing property damage (Casper, 2020). Hamidsyukrie et al. (2022) define verbal bullying as harsh words, mockery, name-calling, and threats. Social or relational bullying occurs when someone purposefully excludes someone from social groups or spreads rumors about them. Cyberbullying occurs when people harass others on social media by posting objectionable content or sending abusive communications (Mitsu & Dawood, 2022). Any of these types of bullying can harm the victim's mental and emotional well-being, causing feelings of hurt,

loneliness, and low self-esteem (Stephen & Soni, 2023).

Bullying remains a worldwide concern, affecting people of all ages and expressing itself differently across genders. According to research, the frequency of bullying varies widely among countries and cultural contexts, but it is most prevalent among children and adolescents in educational institutions. Men are typically reported to encounter more physical forms of bullying, such as striking or pushing, whereas girls are more likely to experience relational or verbal bullying, such as exclusion and rumor-spreading (Craig et al., 2009). Additionally, while cyberbullying affects both male and female young adults and university students, some research suggests that girls may be particularly sensitive to online harassment because of the relational nature of bullying practices utilized online and via technological mediums (Campbell & Bouman, 2018).

In recent years, psychological and social researchers have focused heavily on the role of social media in influencing bullying experiences and victimization. The increased use of digital platforms has opened up new possibilities for engagement, but it has also led to cyberbullying, in which aggressive actions are carried out via online channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Saharan, 2023). According to research, exposure to violent or unpleasant internet content can normalize aggressive traits, increasing the possibility of bullying and being a victim (Sobkin & Fedotova, 2021). Social media allows for ongoing contact, which can intensify the emotional and psychological effects of bullying by spreading victimization beyond physical settings and into digital environments. University students, in particular, are extremely vulnerable because of their active social media presence and developmental stage, making them more likely to suffer negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem when targeted online (Daudu et al., 2023).

Furthermore, studies have shown that boys are more likely to encounter physical bullying, but girls are more likely to experience relational and cyberbullying, typically via social media (Gomes et al., 2022). Cyberbullying is on the rise around the world, and it is intimately linked to social media use. Problematic use increases both victimization and perpetration risks. Gender disparities in cyberbullying show that

women are frequently more targeted, adding to stress and anxiety (Foody et al., 2019). Moreover, according to recent study (Javed et al., 2023), bullying is becoming more prevalent in Pakistan and other nations, particularly among university students and young people. According to research, both offline and online forms of bullying are common, with cyberbullying increasing as internet availability grows. Social bullying, including rumors and exclusion, is prevalent in university settings and can negatively impact mental health, including despair, anxiety, and even suicide ideation (Siddiqui & Schultze-Krumbholz, 2023). Furthermore, a poll in Pakistan reveals that adults and young people are increasingly victims of online harassment and cyberbullying, with impacts that continue beyond university years (Khan, 2024).

Additionally, recent research has found that bullying has a strong, detrimental influence on students' mental health and academic performance, impairing their capacity to focus and excel in their studies (Nadeem & Usman, 2022). Bullying has profound effects beyond academic failure; it can seriously harm students' self-esteem and cause anxiety and depression. University students who are bullied are more likely to suffer from emotional discomfort, which can lead to long-term mental health problems (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

In context of bullying victimization, parental overprotection may put young adults, particularly university students, at risk. Overprotected people may lack the confidence needed to confront bullying situations, making them ideal targets for bullies (Nocentini et al., 2019). In Pakistan, where university students experience demands from both their families and the academic environment, overprotected students may struggle with boundaries, making them more prone to bullying, especially in highly competitive or group-dominated situations. This sensitivity, combined with inadequate exposure to independent problem-solving, increases the chance of being bullied (Javed et al., 2023).

Due to Pakistan's increasing socio-demographic circumstances, university students are more exposed to social and emotional issues that have an impact on their mental health and academic experiences (Lin et al., 2022). Existing scales from other countries do not adequately reflect the cultural complexity of bullying

within Pakistani universities. This highlights the necessity for a culturally relevant assessment tool that incorporates these specific dynamics (Ashfaq et al., 2018; Saleem et al., 2017).

Furthermore, there is little local research on bullying victimization in university settings, as much of the previous research focuses on aggression or stressors rather than what causes bullying or what leads to a person becoming a victim of bullying or the university population (Gardella et al., 2019). Internationally utilized tests and scales, such as the Peer Victimization Scale (Joseph & Stockton, 2018), address a variety of bullying experiences but are not contextually relevant to Pakistani students of university. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine how bullying appears in universities academic settings and look into the psychological, social and familial aspects that are linked to bullying victims. The study also looked at the link between bullying victimization and perceived parental overprotection. Given the lack of research on adult bullying at Pakistani universities, this study attempts to fill a critical gap in the literature.

Rationale

Apparently, mainly researches on bullying victimization in our culture are conducted on school children and adolescents and bullying researches on adults are conducted on just cyber-bullying. Moreover, the topic of adult bullying is apparently not much explored in our culture especially in the context of a university setting. So, the rationale of the current study was to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the phenomenology of the manifestation of bullying victimization in university setting alongside investigating the familial and other intra and interpersonal etiological factors related to it. Additionally, to study the relationship of bullying with perceived parental overprotection in our culture.

Research Question

1. What is the relationship between perceived parental overprotection and bullying victimization in university students?

Hypotheses

1. It is hypothesized that perceived maternal overprotection would have a significant positive

relationship with bullying victimization in university students.

2. It is hypothesized that perceived paternal overprotection would have significant positive relationship with bullying victimization in university students.

Method

Research Design

A cross-sectional study was carried out to determine the relationship between perceived parental overprotection and bullying victimization among university students.

Sample & Participants

The study includes 300 university students (50% males and 50% females) aged 18 to 25 ($M = 22.41$, $SD = 2.81$), drawn from several departments at a public institution in Pakistan. The sample consisted of undergraduate (BA/BS) and graduate (MA/MS) academic backgrounds.

Sampling Strategy

Stratified random sampling strategy was used in which different strata were made on the basis of demographics. The first strata were based on gender and the sub-strata were made according to academic years i.e., BS 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th year and MS/M.Phil. 1st and 2nd year.

Participants

G3 method was used to determine the sample size. Total number of participants was $N=300$ (150 male and 150 females) from undergraduate and postgraduate, having the following criteria.

Inclusion Criteria. Undergraduate and postgraduate university students with the age range 18 to 25 were part of the study.

Exclusion Criteria. Participants taking any medication or treatment of anxiety were excluded from the study. Furthermore, participants with physical disability were excluded from the study.

Measures

Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (Khan & Khurshid, 2023).

A four-point rating system (0= Never, 1= Often, 2= Mostly, and 3= Always) in Urdu (Pakistan's national language) was developed to collect information

regarding bullying victims from university students. It has three subscales and factors: dominance and control (F1), mocking (F2), and aggression (F3). The Bullying Victimization Scale had a Cronbach alpha of .93, indicating high internal consistency and reliability. The scoring range was from 0 to 96. Higher scores indicate a higher level of bullying victimization among university students.

Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran (EMBU-A, Perris, Jacobsson, Lindström, von Knorring, and Perris, 1980).

This test originally was created in Spanish to assess memories of how parents brought up their children. Senior authors and a skilled translator later translated it into English under the title "Early Memories of Upbringing". Three subscales comprise its 27 items: Over-protection (6 items), Rejection (6 items), and Emotional Warmth (15 items). The Cronbach's alpha of the three subscales for EMBU-A are (Over Protection $\alpha=.79$; Rejection $\alpha=.76$; Emotional Warmth $\alpha=.81$). The current study used only the Mother Parental Overprotection (6 items) subscale. This subscale consisted of four response options: 0 (never), 1 (sometimes), 2 (often), and 3 (always).

Ethical Considerations

First of all, permission was taken from institutes for collecting the data and they were informed the rationale of the study along with discussing the confidentiality with the participants. After getting the permission, informed consent was taken from the participants before collecting data. They were informed the purpose of the study and that they have the right to withdraw from research at any point without any consequences of withdrawal. Furthermore, research participants were told that the protection of the privacy and confidentiality of research participants would be ensured. They were told that their data and personal information was remain confidential and was used for research purpose and participants weren't subjected to harm in any way. Their respect and dignity of the participants prioritized.

Procedure

The study explores at the association between perceived parental overprotection and bullying victimization in university students. Various

universities in Lahore were chosen for data collection. After obtaining institutional approval, university administrators were assured that the collected data would be secure and anonymous. Throughout each session, the researcher introduced himself to the participants and explained the purpose of the study. Participants who accepted to participate received the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students

(BVSU) and the Early Memories of Upbringing Scale Adult Version (EMBU-A). Participants were assured anonymity and autonomy throughout. Each participant took approximately 20-25 minutes and was delivered either individually or in small groups. After completing the assessment, participants had a few minutes to answer any remaining questions or give feedback.

Results

Table 1

Summary of Inter-Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations of Perceived Parental Over-Protection & Bullying Victimization in University Students (N = 300)

Variables	1	2	4	5	6	7
1. EMBU-M	-	.73***	.13*	.03	.13*	.12*
2. EMBU-F	-	-	.02	-.03	-.01	-.01
4. BV-F1	-	-	-	.70***	.70***	.95***
5. BV-F2	-	-	-	-	.58***	.84***
6. BV-F3	-	-	-	-	-	.84***
7. BVSU	-	-	-	-	-	-
M	9.02	8.09	6.51	3.44	2.34	12.57
SD	3.36	3.34	7.29	4.12	3.46	13.60

Note. EMBU-M = Perceived Parental Over-protection (Mother), EMBU-F = Perceived Parental Over-protection (Father), BV-F1 = Dominance & Control, BV-F2 = Mocking, BV-F3 = Aggression, BVSU= Bullying Victimization, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.

The correlation analysis found that maternal perceived overprotection (EMBU-M) had a small but significant positive relationship with Dominance & Control (BV-F1) ($r = .13, p < .05$), Aggression (BV-F3) ($r = .13, p < .05$), and overall bullying victimization (BVSU) ($r = .12, p < .05$). Maternal and paternal overprotection were significantly and positively linked ($r = .73, p < .001$). Dominance & Control was positively associated with Mocking (BV-F2) ($r = .70, p < .001$) and Aggression (BV-F3) ($r = .70, p < .001$), whereas Mocking also had a substantial positive association with Aggression ($r = .58, p < .001$). Overall bullying victimization (BVSU) was highly and positively associated to all three bullying subscales: dominance and control ($r = .95, p < .001$), mocking ($r = .84, p < .001$), and aggression ($r = .84, p < .001$). Perceived Paternal overprotection (EMBU-F) had no significant relationships with bullying victimization or its subscales. There was a significant positive association ($r = .73, p < .001$) between maternal and paternal overprotection, suggesting that students who

perceived one parent as overprotective were likely to perceive the other similarly.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship among university students' perceptions of parental overprotection and bullying victimization. The main goal was to comprehend how students' experiences of bullying and psychological health are impacted by overprotective parenting, especially in Pakistani collectivistic settings. Excessive control from parents and overprotection frequently influence children's emotional development and social relationships because collectivistic societies place a high value on family values, interdependence, and social reputation. By examining the signs and effects of bullying victimization in connection with parental overprotection, the study sheds light on the difficulties experienced by university students and suggests possible cultural variations in the manifestation and outcomes of these issues. Through examining the ways in which bullying victimization

and parental overprotection develop and affect university students, the study sheds light on the difficulties they encounter and suggests that there may be cultural variations in how these issues manifest and manifest

The results of this study reveal that exposure to bullying that is characterized by dominance and control bullies who aim at exercising power and authority over others is positively correlated with higher perceived parental overprotection. This suggests that bullies are motivated by social dominance (Jonkmann et al., 2009). According to social dominance theory, bullies use force to construct power hierarchies to maintain their superiority, frequently targeting underprivileged or vulnerable groups to perpetuate inequality (Pratto & Stewart, 2011; Kumari & Subedi, 2020). Pakistan is a collectivistic culture in such collectivistic cultures, social cohesion, and familial relationships are strongly valued, causing people to prioritize communal goals over personal ones. This cultural orientation encourages close familial relationships and communal support, but it can also generate conditions that emphasize social hierarchy and deference to authority, thus suppressing individual assertiveness (Javed et al., 2023). Bullies in such a culture may use these dynamics to manipulate and

dominate their victims, enforcing social hierarchies and asserting power (Siddiqui & Schultze-Krumbholz, 2023). Moreover, the bully's mocking behavior. The components describe the phenomenon of bullies insulting others. Mocking is the act of ridiculing or making fun of someone or something, sometimes simply by taunting, but more usually by constructing an image that professes to copy while emphasizing negative characteristics (Haugh, 2010). According to Robson (2022), bullies frequently mock and make fun others to humiliate them. They bully the victim by imitating and mimicking them. As a result, such actions and deeds may have an unpleasant effect on the victim, including feelings of shame, embarrassment, and humiliation. As previously said, Pakistan is a collectivistic society, and research indicates that bullying increases in collectivistic societies such as Pakistan, where a high emphasis is placed on family cohesiveness and dependency. Bullying behaviors frequently emerge as mocking and

ridiculing in these civilizations, since people are closely tied to their familial networks (Smith & Robinson, 2019). Bullies use sarcasm and disparaging remarks to assert their power and cement social hierarchies. Bullies use mocking behavior to obtain power or social status by targeting people they view as powerless, strengthening their sense of superiority in group settings (Mushtaq, 2020).

Bullying frequently involves aggressive behaviors, such as verbal or physical actions aimed at harming, controlling, or intimidating others (Liu et al., 2010). Bullies can use aggression to build dominance and increase their sense of power by yelling, taunting, pushing, or humiliating peers. They generally target people they consider to be weaker or less capable of defending themselves, which reinforces the bully's sense of superiority while decreasing the victim's self-esteem. According to Russo (2021) and Roland and Idsøe (2001), aggressive behavior can stem from insecurity or a desire for social influence and authority.

Furthermore, bullying victimization is significantly positively associated with parental overprotection. These findings are consistent with previous study that found a link between parental overprotection and an increased risk of being bullied (Lereya et al, 2013). The study indicated that male university students reported higher incidence of bullying victimization compared to females. These findings are consistent with prior research, which discovered that males are more commonly bullied than females, especially physically (Iossi Silva, 2013).

The research results of this study focused on how bullying victimization presents itself among university students in Pakistan's cultural setting, resulting in a better understanding of bullying in collectivistic societies. Using the Bullying Victimization Scale, we may determine which qualities increase or reduce the probability of being bullied. Addressing these concerns can help minimize bullying and protect students from its negative consequences. We can also provide workshops for parents to assist them realize how ignoring their child's emotional needs can have harmful consequences and motivate them to provide better care for their children.

Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for understanding the relationship between perceived parental overprotection and bullying victimization among university students in Pakistani culture. The findings indicate that higher levels of maternal and paternal overprotection are associated with increased bullying experiences, emphasizing the importance of parenting styles in students' social and emotional adjustment. These findings can help university counselors, psychologists, and educators develop focused intervention programs that promote healthy family dynamics and improve students' coping strategies. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of raising parental knowledge about the potentially harmful impacts of excessive control on students' peer connections and sensitivity to bullying.

Limitations and Suggestions

Despite its substantial contributions, the current study has certain drawbacks. First, the study was solely conducted on university students in Lahore, limiting the findings' generalizability to a larger community, while hostel residents were added to increase sample variety. Future research should include participants from various Pakistani cities and provinces, as well as comparative analyses across cultural and demographic groups, in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between perceived parental overprotection (both maternal and paternal) and bullying victimization. Furthermore, the study depended on self-report measures, which may have been influenced by personal biases; thus, future research should include numerous data collection to improve the accuracy of findings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study shows a strong positive association between perceived parental overprotection and bullying victimization among university students. The findings indicate that higher levels of parental overprotection may contribute to stronger feelings of dominance, control, and violence in peer interactions, raising the probability of bullying victimization. These findings highlight the importance of taking family dynamics, particularly overprotective parental practices, into account when dealing with bullying among young people in

Pakistan's collectivistic cultural environment. Understanding this relationship can help drive the development of tailored counseling services, awareness campaigns, and prevention efforts that consider both parental and cultural impacts. Finally, the study adds to the current literature by presenting data from a Pakistani university student population and lays the foundation for future cross-cultural research on the relationship between parenting methods and bullying experiences.

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