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Verbal Abuse as a Predictor of Emotional Stability and Personal Growth among Young Adults

Malaika Urooj*

Student, Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha

Email: uroojrouhe@gmail.com

Samreen Umar

Lecturer, Department of Psychology UOL-Sargodha Campus

Email: samreenumar53@gmail.com & ORCID- 0009-0000-6465-7368)

Muhammad Asim

PhD Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha

Email: m.asimuni@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the impact of verbal abuse on emotional stability and personal growth among young adults. Experiences of verbal abuse can strongly influence how young adults manage their emotions and how they grow as individuals. When people are repeatedly speaking in hurtful or insulting ways, it may weaken their emotional balance and limit their ability to develop confidence, resilience, and personal growth. A correlational survey design with convenience sampling was employed. The sample consisted of 300 male and female students aged 16 to 26 years. Data were collected using the Verbal Abuse Scale by Manderin and Banton (1994), It also has an Urdu translation that Rabia and Razar (2017) relied on in their research. The Emotional Stability subscale of the NEO-FFI by Costa and McCrae (1992), and the Personal Growth Scale by Robitshek (1998). Results indicated that verbal abuse was negatively correlated with both Emotional Stability and Personal Growth. Linear regression analyses further showed that Verbal Abuse significantly predicted lower levels of Emotional Stability and Personal Growth. Additionally, independent samples t-test results revealed significant gender differences among the study variables. Limitations, future recommendations, and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Key Words: Verbal Abuse, Emotional Stability, Personal Growth, Young Adults

Introduction

Adolescence is a serious life period when a child passes the borderline between childhood and adulthood. This is a period of life whereby various physical, emotional, and psychological transformations occur very fast. At this stage, a young person struggles with identity testing, emotional vulnerability, and gets extremely vulnerable to outside forces (Steinberg, 2017). This is the time that teenagers encounter various problems such as peer acceptance, family conflict, and career expectations, which may affect their psychological health. Being accompanied by various risk factors that disrupt the development of adolescents, the verbal abuse has become a particularly widely discussed topic because of its disastrous and long-term outcomes (Wright et al., 2019). It has been found that a significant percentage of teenagers are always criticized, told an



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embarrassing comment, or verbally harassed, which leads to the widespread development of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Shumba, 2019).

The adolescence period predetermines the future psychological well-being and the formation of personality, and thus the verbal abuse concerning personal development and emotional balance should be studied. The current research is therefore based on the fact that there is an urgent need to research the effects of verbal abuse on adolescents by addressing two important psychological constructs, the emotional stability and the personal growth. Verbal abuse is simply when one uses words to hurt or humiliate another person. It includes abusive language, criticism, calling names, insults, or any other negative remark directed to a target individual (Follingstad, 2018). It turns out to be more prevalent than physical violence in such locations as homes, schools, and among peers, and people tend not to realize it as abuse (McPherson, 2017). Studies indicate that verbal abuse is particularly damaging at adolescent age since this is the period when we establish self-worth and our identity (Smith and Thompson, 2016). Verbal abuse is associated with mental health issues risk of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and symptoms of PTSD (Liu et al., 2020).

Verbal bullying and cyber-harassment by peers are becoming a concern in school. Research indicates that there is a very close association between verbal victimization and low self-esteem (Gomez-Ortiz et al., 2020). Emotional stability is a fact of an individual to either control or manage the feeling and to be composed and have a psychological balance to face adversity during the stress. In addition, verbal abuse by teachers and parents puts oneself in a state of incompetence that results in the impossibility of coping with stress. There is strong empirical evidence on a relationship between Verbal Abuse and emotional instability. Young people who experienced verbal aggression have a high risk of depression, emotional regulation and low resilience (Wright et al., 2019).

Verbal victimization Repeat victimization leads to social withdrawal and adaptive coping problems (Johnson & Blom, 2021). This implies that emotional stability is not only a personality based phenomenon but also an external relational phenomenon particularly communication patterns with in families and peer groups. During adolescence, emotional instability carries other consequences with regard to the long-term psychological health. The long-term effects of Verbal abuse with the high risk of generalized anxiety disorder, borderline personality features or chronic symptoms of the depressive disorder (Nguyen et al., 2018). Moreover, it is also important to share the level of emotional instability linked with verbal abuse due to cultural and contextual factors. In collectivist cultures, where achieving social respect and harmony comes first, the teens are more emotionally affected in case they are verbally humiliated before the society and their peers (Shumba, 2019). In society that was more individualistic, the Verbal criticism might lead to rebellious behavior, which brought instability, albeit in other aspects. To sum it up, emotional stability is a very important element of psychology in the adolescent stage.

Personal development can be seen as the process of developing our skills, learning ourselves, emotion control, and improving our mental state in general. It is a matter of mental, emotional, behavioral and social benefits that enable us to work and pursue meaningful objectives (Kumar, 2016). The healthy personal development trajectory contributes to resilience, independence, and problem-solving, whereas an untransformed or interrupted one may lead to confusion with identity, emotional lows and highs, and dysfunctional coping strategies (Sharma and Singh, 2018). We teens literally begin to construct our growth mentality through the acknowledgment we obtain through the family, professors, and friends, as well as obstacles. The backing of the people enhances self-reflection, inner-driving, and adapting habits that stretch growth (Reed et al., 2020).



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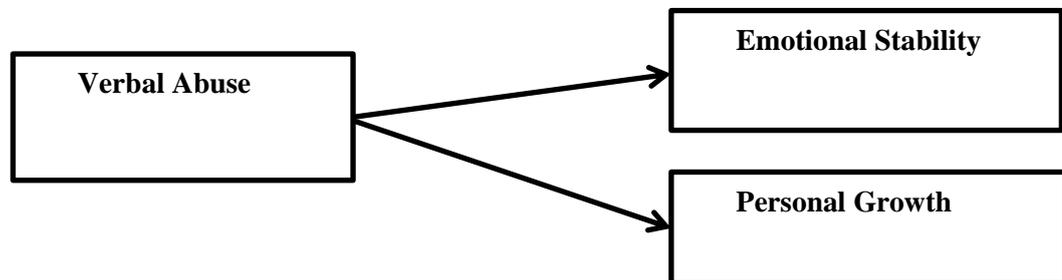
However, it may kill our confidence and suffocate our goal-setting when we are received with negativity or even drastic criticism (Liu & Perrewé, 2020). Being older does not simply mean that you are taller but is a process of discovery of yourself. The more we begin to think abstractly and contemplate our values, the more we continue to shape our desired identity. In the event that teachers and peers in fact proving us with the opportunity to think independently, this mental dexterity can drive us to maturity and responsibility and independent study (Harter, 2015).

The culture is a significant influence on our perception of individual development. Personal development, in collectivist cultures, is typically linked to creating harmony in the family and meeting the expectations of a group (Chen & Farruggia, 2018). Individualistic cultures, on the other hand, are centered on independence, individual accomplishments and finding out what makes you different. When we are made to believe that we are not good enough, or we do not measure up to expectations in either situation, it can demotivate and increase pressure on identity and decrease the prospect of what we believe we are capable of becoming (Johnsen & Bloom, 2021). When those failures occur at tender age, they may get to be with us even in our adult years. Individuals who never got a chance to develop during their youth are usually incapable of controlling emotions, are not confident, struggle with setting goals, and tend to be generally less satisfied with life (Orth & Robins, 2019).

Rationale of the Study

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage marked by identity formation, emotional regulation, and the development of self-worth. During this period, exposure to verbal abuse can have profound and lasting psychological consequences. Unlike physical abuse, verbal aggression is often minimized or normalized within families, schools, and peer groups, allowing its harmful effects to remain largely invisible (McLafferty et al., 2018). Empirical evidence indicates that adolescents who experience verbal abuse are more likely to develop anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and emotional instability (Afifi et al., 2019). Persistent criticism, humiliation, and insults interfere with healthy emotional development by disrupting supportive feedback and secure interpersonal relationships that are essential for growth (Lereya & Wolke, 2016).

Despite its seriousness, verbal abuse has received limited independent attention in research, as most studies focus on child abuse as a broad construct rather than examining verbal abuse as a distinct phenomenon. In South Asian cultures, particularly in Pakistan, harsh verbal discipline is often socially accepted and perceived as a legitimate method of teaching discipline rather than abuse (Ali & Saeed, 2020). In semi-urban areas such as Sargodha, adolescents are exposed to both traditional family hierarchies and school environments where scolding and public humiliation are commonly used to maintain control (Malik & Rizvi, 2018; Arif & Rafi, 2019). This normalization leads many teenagers to internalize verbal abuse as necessary or deserved. Given the growing mental health concerns among adolescents, focused research is essential to understand how verbal abuse affects emotional stability and self-image within the local cultural context and to inform prevention and intervention efforts.



Objectives

The research is structured in terms of a couple of objectives;

To determine the relationship between verbal abuse, emotional stability and personal growth among adolescents

To test the impact of verbal abuse on emotional stability and personal growth of teens

Hypotheses

H1: There would be significant relationship between verbal abuse, **emotional stability and personal growth among adolescents.**

H2: Verbal abuse will be a **significant and negative predictor** of both emotional stability and personal growth among adolescents.

H3: There would be significant mean differences among study variables in terms of gender

Material and Method

Sampling

Correlational survey research design and purposive sampling technique were utilized to collect the data from adolescents (N = 300) with an age range of 16 to 26 years. To observe the point at which verbal abuse strikes the emotional balance and self-image.

Instruments

Verbal Abuse Questionnaire

To counted the type of verbal abuse experienced by people with the help of the Verbal Abuse Scale by Manderin and Banton (1994) and that provided by Jeong et al.(2015). This scale consists of 15 items and it referred to a 9-point Likert response (0 7 = every day, 0 8 = never). The entire questionnaire reliability is good (0.92). It also has an Urdu translation that Rabia and Razar (2017) relied on in their research.

Emotional Stability Scale

To achieve emotional stability, the neuroticism sub-scale of the NEO-FFI (McCray, 1992) was used. Since it was interested in having the scores that would indicate how emotionally stable a person is, than used the opposite, the neuroticism items, which are the other end of the continuum. The nineteen items that were reversed were 1, 4, 7, and 10, having a rating of yes/no 1/0.

Personal Growth

The measure is a 9-item one that examines the extent of the motivation of the individual to develop as a person, such as a desire to change and better oneself. The respondents



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crossed a 6-point Likert scale of 1=Strongly Disagree to 6=Strongly Agree. The objective behind the study was to determine the impact of verbal abuse on emotional stability and personal development in adolescents. The statistics were released, emotional stability was lower and personal growth reduced in relation to the higher verbal abuse. These results support the hypotheses of the study and point to verbal abuse as a severe risk factor at one of the most significant periods of development.

Procedure and Ethical Consideration

Before collecting any data, the consent was obtained from the institution authority and the supervisor. After obtaining approval the participants provided informed consent to ensuring confidentiality. They completed self-report questionnaires in private settings which too approximately 10-15 minutes. After completing, participants were thanked. Participants completed a brief background questionnaire which included gender, age, family type, and the living status of parents before the main survey. That data assists in placing the psychological findings into the proper context and also allows us to subdivide the data by primary groups. Subsequently, the collected data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS-26. This analysis elaborates the meaningful insight and identification of potential relationships among variables under investigation.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of participants (N=300)

Demographic variable	f	%
Gender		
Male	148	49.3
Female	152	50.7
Family System		
Neuclear	195	65.0
Joint	105	35.0
Age		
16-20	191	63.7
21-26	109	36.3

In Table 1, the sample of N=300 adolescents was nearly equal in gender (Female 50.7%, Male 49.3%). The majority were from Nuclear families (65.0%) and in the 16-20 age group (63.7%).

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Study Scales (N = 300)

Scales	M	SD	α	Range
VAQ	33.25	7.31	.88	15–75
ESS	40.62	6.02	.83	12–60
PGIS	61.28	8.04	.86	16–80

Note. VAQ = verbal abuse questionnaire, ESS = emotional stability scale, PGIS = personal growth inventory scale

In Table 2, the three study scales (VAQ, ESS, PGIS) demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .83 to .88. The highest mean score was observed for PGIS (M = 61.28), while VAQ had the lowest mean (M = 33.25).



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Table 3

Pearson Correlation among Study Variables (N = 300)

Variables	1	2	3
VA	-	-.42**	-.57**
ES		-	-.90
PG			-

Note. VA = verbal abuse, ES = emotional stability, PG = personal growth

**p < .01

Verbal Abuse (VA) showed a significant negative correlation with both Emotional Stability (ES) and Personal Growth (PG) at $p < .01$. The strongest relationship was between VA and PG ($r = -.57$), followed by VA and ES ($r = -.42$).

Table 4

Regression Coefficient of Verbal Abuse on Emotional Stability (N =300)

Variables	Emotional Stability			Personal Growth		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	6.04***		.42	36.14***		1.28
Verbal Abuse	-.08	-.41	.02	-.11*	-.56	.04
R ²	.18			.32		

***p < .001, *p < .05

Table shows the prediction of Verbal abuse for emotional stability. Verbal Abuse cause the 18% variance in the outcome variable. Verbal abuse didn't predict Emotional Stability ($\beta = -.41$, $p > .05$).

Furthermore, Verbal Abuse significantly predicted Personal Growth, accounting for 32%. The verbal abuse was significant predictor of personal growth relationship was strongly negative ($\beta = -.56$, $p < .05$).

Table 5

Mean Standard Deviation and T-Value for Male and Female among Study Variables (N = 300)

Variables	Male (n = 150)		Female (n = 150)		t(298)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
VA	31.62	7.15	34.89	7.42	2.87	.004	4.96	10.10	0.45
ES	42.31	6.12	39.08	5.87	3.14	.002	1.12	.470	0.54
PG	63.45	8.21	59.12	7.94	2.98	.003	2.67	3.17	0.54

Note. VA = verbal abuse, ES = emotional stability, PG = personal growth

Table 5 shows that Female participants reported significantly higher verbal abuse than males, $t(298) = 2.87$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.45$. Males showed higher emotional stability, $t(298) = 3.14$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.54$, and personal growth, $t(298) = 2.98$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.54$.

Table 6

Mean Standard Deviation and T-Value for family system amon Study Variables (N = 300)



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Variables	Nuclear (n = 195)		Joint (n = 105)		t(298)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
VA	33.05	12.06	28.91	11.18	2.86	.004	1.277	6.883	0.35
ES	5.79	3.55	6.91	3.33	-2.65	.008	1.948	-2.91	-0.32
PG	31.78	13.39	33.55	11.72	1.14	.893	4.831	1.285	-0.14

Note. VA = verbal abuse, ES = emotional stability, PG = personal growth

Table 6 indicated that Participants from nuclear families had higher verbal abuse than joint families, $t(298) = 2.86$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.35$. Emotional stability was higher in joint families, $t(298) = 2.65$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.32$. Non-significant difference was observed for personal growth, $t(298) = 1.14$, $p > .05$, $d = -0.14$.

Discussion

It is well-known that adolescence is the time of emotional sensitivity and psychological vulnerability, when people gain skills of emotional regulation, formation of self and future-oriented aspirations (Steinberg, 2014). The findings of the current investigation suggest that verbal abuse at this stage interferes with the emotional balance of adolescents and thus adolescents find it hard to manage their emotions properly. The high level of variation in the scores of emotional stability observed between verbal abuse levels within the results chapter indicates that the adolescents who are prone to verbal abuse characterized by frequent criticism, humiliation, and inappropriate verbal reactions have higher chances of experiencing mood instability, emotional reactivity, and psychological distress. Such results are in line with previous studies that verbal abuse affects emotional regulation by strengthening negative self-conceptions and emotional insecurity (Glaser, 2002; Margolin & Gordis, 2000).

Cognitively, verbal abuse that is repeated will lead to the formation of maladaptive cognitions and negative core beliefs including worthlessness and inadequacy (Beck, 1995). In cases where the adolescents are exposed to demeaning or critical messages on several occasions, chances are high that the adolescents would absorb the messages, which has a negative impact on their emotional reactions and coping skills. This explanation is supported by the results of the current study where the adolescents who had a higher verbal abuse had less emotional stability in the analysis chapter. This implies that verbal abuse does not just result in a short-term emotional discomfort, but it also results in longer-term emotional dysregulation, which can make a person more susceptible to anxiety, depression, and interpersonal problems. Besides emotional stability, it is also shown in the present research that verbal abuse has a great detrimental effect on the personal development of adolescents. In the results chapter, the authors demonstrate that the adolescents who were more exposed to verbal abuse reported lower levels of personal development, which suggests low levels of motivation, self-confidence, and self-initiative related to personal development.

Personal growth Various psychological models can be utilized to support the results of the current research. During a lesson, we were taught that the attachment theory is the reason why the secure attachment can be weakened by the exposure to the emotionally hostile/ invalidating communication, which will result in the development of emotional instability and decrease resilience (Bowlby, 1988). Our psychology course covered social learning theory, according to which adolescents can acquire verbally abusive patterns of communication via observational and reinforcement mechanisms, and such patterns can



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adversely affect the emotional control and patterns of interaction (Bandura, 1977). Another theory that we have discussed is the humanistic theory, which also contributes to the results and highlights how a person needs to develop in an environment with properties of acceptance, empathy, and positive regard which is not present in verbally abusive environments (Rogers, 1961). Altogether, the results discussion suggests that verbal abuse affects the emotional stability of adolescents and their personal development on a multidimensional level. This is because the findings were quite consistent in all the analyses and signify the validity of the study and the fact that verbal abuse is not such a minor and transitory problem but a serious development threat. The paper demonstrates how there is an urgent requirement to develop preventive measures, education, and early interventions to minimize verbal abuse within family and in schools. With the help of positive communication and emotional supportive settings, one can improve emotional control of adolescents and lead them to personal growth and healthier psychological development.

Conclusion

The current research was aimed at exploring the effect of verbal abuse on emotional and personal development in adolescents and the results are a good and reliable piece of empirical evidence that verbal abuse is a very important and a detrimental psychological phenomenon in adolescence. This research shows that verbal abuse at such a delicate age interferes with the emotional stability and attainment of development in adolescents. The adolescents who reported more verbal abuse were more emotionally unstable and had limitations in emotional coping, emotional reactivity, and a decrease in psychological resilience. These results are in line with previous studies that have shown that verbally hostile communication like criticism, humiliation and continuous negative labelling of individuals interfere with emotional regulation and lead to the long-run emotional problems (Glaser, 2002; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Beck, 1995). Comprehensively, this paper is a valuable addition to the existing literature since it offers empirical data of the emotional and developmental outcomes of verbal abuse among adolescents. It strengthens the need to establish emotionally supportive and psychologically safe spaces to facilitate positive emotional regulation and growth of a person. The study must be longitudinal in nature to examine the long-term effects, the effectiveness of interventions and protective factors that may offset the adverse effect of verbal abuse including social support and resiliency. Verbal abuse on a personal and systemic level should be tackled to attain more healthy developmental paths and provide emotional and personal safety to adolescents.

Limitations and Future Recommendation

The research design used in the study was a cross-sectional design of research, which allows to study the relationships between variables but not to make conclusions about causality regarding the influence of verbal abuse on the emotional stability and personal development. It can be said that there was the potential of the use of self-report questionnaires to cause bias of response since adolescents could under report or over report their experiences as a result of social desirability or recall problems. The sample was also narrowed down in terms of a particular cultural and geographical setting, and it might not be possible to generalize the results to the adolescents of other origins. The research was limited to verbal abuse alone and did not consider other factors that might have influenced the outcomes, which include the peer relations, socioeconomic status and exposure to other types of abuse. The etiology of verbal abuse was not distinguished,



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and it might have a connection to how severe and psychological its effect can be. On a family level, parents and caregivers ought to be sensitized to the psychological impact of the verbal abuse and taught good communication skills, emotional validation, and positive disciplining, especially in joint family systems where the adolescents may experience more verbal conflict. Educational institutions can identify and respond to verbal abuse by actively training teachers, counseling them on how to recognize and manage emotional instability, emotional resilience, self-esteem, and assertiveness. It has been suggested to have community- and culture-awareness campaigns that could challenge the socialization of verbal abuse, promote healthy communication, and destigmatize seeking psychological help. Longitudinal research designs should be adopted in future research to investigate causal consequences of verbal abuse and incorporation of other variables including peer relationships, socioeconomic, mental health of parents and exposure to other types of abuse.

Implications of the Study

The results of the given research have valuable implications to theory, practice, policy, and future research and can be applied in various settings.

This study enhances the existing knowledge on adolescent developments through offering empirical evidence on the attachment theory, social learning theory, and humanistic approaches. The findings show that verbal abuse has severe effects on emotional stability and personal development showing that the negative communication in the environment may lead to the emotional regulation and self-directed development being disrupted (Bowlby, 1988; Bandura, 1977; Rogers, 1961). The findings add to the current body of research by highlighting the interaction of environmental, relational and individual influences to psychological development of adolescence.

The study highlights the need of interventions that can lead to the mitigation of verbal abuse and ensure good development among adolescents. Parents and caregivers should be sensitized on negative impacts of verbal abuse and taught on positive communication, emotional validation, and positive discipline especially in joint family systems where the adolescents would be more susceptible. In the school context, teacher training, counseling interventions, and resilience-building interventions must be adopted to advance emotional regulation, self-esteem and personal development. Verbal abuse adolescents in clinical or mental health care facilities need to be assessed regularly and early interventions implemented to develop coping mechanisms, enhance emotional stability, and restore self-efficacy. Women awareness campaigns, workshops, and media programs should be used in the community setting to enhance healthy communication, challenge the normalization of verbal abuse, and reduce the stigma surrounding the need to obtain psychological support.

The research identifies the necessity of the educational and governmental policies aimed at the prevention of verbal abuse and a positive influence on adolescent well-being. Verbal abuse awareness ought to be incorporated in parenting education programs, teacher education community education programs, school policies and regulations, in order to provide emotionally safe schools and settings that promote the developmental needs of the adolescents.

The results also indicate the way forward on future research. The longitudinal research is required to investigate the long-term consequences of verbal abuse on emotional stability and personal development. Additional factors, including peer relationships, socioeconomic factors, mental health of parents and exposure to other forms of abuse, should be studied in future researches in order to give a holistic picture of adolescent



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development. Further clarification of its effects can be achieved through the investigation of protective factors such as social support, resilience, and coping strategies and the distinction between sources of verbal abuse, such as parents, teachers, siblings, or peers. Developed statistical tests, such as mediation and moderation models, can offer information on how the complex interrelationships between verbal abuse and outcomes of development are more profound.

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