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Authoritarian Parenting, Emotional Invalidation, and Self-Doubt in Pakistani Collectivist Families: An Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

Fear-based parenting practices, including emotional invalidation, guilt induction, and authoritarian control, are normalized within collectivist family structures across South Asia, yet the pathways linking such practices to self-doubt and emotional dysregulation in Pakistani young adults remain underexamined. This paper presents an explanatory sequential mixed-methods exemplar modeling how 250 young adults (aged 18–30) in Pakistan might be assessed using the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire, the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. The illustrative results depict authoritarian parenting as significantly correlated with emotional dysregulation ($r = .52$), trait anxiety ($r = .47$), and self-doubt ($r = .49$), all $p < .001$; a hypothetical regression model in which authoritarian parenting predicts self-doubt ($\beta = .44$, $R^2 = .38$); and a mediation model in which emotional invalidation substantially mediates this relationship (indirect $\beta = .31$). A corresponding hypothetical qualitative phase ($n = 20$ interviews) generates four themes: obedience through fear, emotional silence as survival strategy, guilt as emotional control, and internalized self-criticism. The integrated illustrative findings model how the cultural scaffolding of fear-based discipline in Pakistani households might be examined and reported, with implications for culturally sensitive clinical and educational practice discussed as a demonstration of genre rather than as evidence-based recommendations.

Keywords: authoritarian parenting, collectivism, emotional dysregulation, self-doubt, Pakistan, mixed methods, anxiety, emotional invalidation



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INTRODUCTION

Parenting is among the most powerful socializing forces in human development, shaping cognitive schemas, emotional competence, and self-perception across the lifespan (Baumrind, 1991; Bowlby, 1982). In collectivist societies such as Pakistan, parenting unfolds within extended family systems and hierarchical authority structures rather than as an individual–child dyad (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Fear-based disciplinary strategies, including conditional approval, guilt induction, and emotional invalidation, are frequently normalized as culturally appropriate mechanisms for securing obedience and preserving family honor (Chao, 1994; Rudy & Grusec, 2006).

Authoritarian parenting is consistently linked to anxiety, low self-esteem, and impaired emotion regulation (Baumrind, 1991; Barber, 1996; Gross, 2002), yet the specific pathways through which fear-based parenting fosters chronic self-doubt remain underexamined outside Western contexts. Pakistan, with its patrilineal family structures, religious framing of parental authority, and collectivist norms, offers an ecological context in which these mechanisms may operate differently from WEIRD samples (Henrich et al., 2010), and in which fear-based parenting may be efficacious as short-term compliance behavior while carrying long-term psychological costs.

Despite rising recognition of anxiety, depression, and trauma-related difficulties among Pakistani youth (Mirza & Jenkins, 2004), the contribution of early parenting experiences to these outcomes has rarely been examined using designs that capture both statistical association and lived experience. This exemplar models an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) integrating illustrative quantitative data from 250 Pakistani young adults with illustrative qualitative interviews from 20 participants, demonstrating how such a design could quantify relationships among fear-based parenting, emotional dysregulation, and self-doubt while generating culturally situated accounts of how these dynamics are experienced.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Baumrind's (1966, 1991) typology of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting anchors the present framework. Authoritarian parenting combines high demandingness, low responsiveness, and power assertion that suppresses child autonomy. Chao (1994) and Rudy and Grusec (2006) caution against assuming cross-cultural equivalence, noting that authoritarian-like practices carry different cultural meanings in collectivist settings than in individualist Western ones.

Bowlby's (1969/1982) attachment theory proposes that early caregiving generates internal working models guiding later emotional functioning; fear-based parenting, through unpredictability and conditional regard, is theorized to generate insecure models in which the self is construed as unworthy. Mikulincer (1995) linked insecure attachment to ruminative self-doubt and evaluative anxiety. Linehan's (1993) biosocial theory adds that chronic emotional invalidation interacts with biological vulnerability to produce pervasive difficulties in emotion regulation, a mechanism directly relevant to the dysregulation pathway modeled here. Bandura's (1977, 1997) social learning theory explains how critical, unpredictable parenting undermines self-efficacy through mastery, modeling, and physiological channels, while also accounting for intergenerational transmission of fear-based parenting as children later replicate the discipline they received. Intergenerational trauma frameworks extend this transmission logic, suggesting that fear-based parenting patterns, once embedded in family systems, are reproduced across generations partly outside conscious awareness.

Integrating these perspectives, the present exemplar models a conceptual pathway in which authoritarian parenting predicts emotional invalidation, which in turn predicts



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emotional dysregulation and, through this route, chronic self-doubt. The following hypotheses guided the design.

H1: Authoritarian parenting is positively associated with emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and self-doubt.

H2: Authoritarian parenting significantly predicts self-doubt.

H3: Emotional invalidation mediates the relationship between authoritarian parenting and self-doubt.

H4: Emotional dysregulation is positively associated with self-doubt.

H5: Trait anxiety is positively associated with self-doubt.

H6: Authoritarian parenting predicts emotional dysregulation independent of demographic covariates.

H7: Qualitative themes will converge with, and elaborate on, the statistical pathways identified in H1–H3.

RQ1 (Qualitative): How do Pakistani young adults describe the subjective experience of fear-based parenting in their families of origin?

Method

Research Design

This exemplar models an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which a quantitative phase would be analyzed first to identify patterns for deeper qualitative exploration, with integration occurring at the interpretation stage.

Participants and Sampling

The illustrative quantitative phase models 250 Pakistani young adults (131 women, 119 men) aged 18–30 ($M = 23.6$, $SD = 3.4$), recruited via purposive and snowball sampling across Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, and Peshawar, with education ranging from secondary schooling to postgraduate study. The illustrative qualitative subsample models 20 individuals (11 women, 9 men) drawn from participants scoring in the upper tertile on authoritarian parenting, selected to vary by gender, region, and education, with saturation modeled at the eighteenth interview.

Measures

Authoritarian parenting would be assessed with the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson et al., 2001), a 32-item measure with a 13-item authoritarian subscale (modeled $\alpha = .89$). Emotion dysregulation would be assessed with the 36-item Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004; modeled $\alpha = .93$). Trait anxiety would be assessed with the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, Trait form (STAI-T; Spielberger et al., 1983; modeled $\alpha = .91$). Self-doubt would be operationalized as a composite of reverse-scored General Self-Efficacy Scale items (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) and metacognitive-uncertainty items (modeled $\alpha = .82$).

Procedure

As stated in the notice preceding the Abstract, no data were collected; the procedure below describes the protocol a real implementation would follow. Ethical approval would be obtained prior to data collection. Quantitative data would be gathered through anonymous bilingual (English/Urdu) online questionnaires with back-translation; qualitative interviews would be conducted via secure video-conferencing, audio-recorded, transcribed, and pseudonymized.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis would use Pearson correlations (H1), hierarchical regression (H2), and PROCESS mediation (Hayes, 2018, Model 4; H3). Qualitative data would be analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis, with



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trustworthiness supported through member checking and an audit trail. Integration would follow a convergent narrative approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Results

Quantitative Findings

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Illustrative Sample (N = 245)

Characteristic	n	%	M (SD)
GenderWomen	128	52.2	23.6 (3.4)
GenderMen	117	47.8	
Age (years)			
CityLahore	76	31.0	
CityKarachi	71	29.0	
CityIslamabad	60	24.5	
CityPeshawar	38	15.5	
EducationSecondary	35	14.3	
EducationUndergraduate	132	53.9	
EducationPostgraduate	78	31.8	

Note. N = 245 reflects exclusion of 5 cases at preliminary screening. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

The illustrative sample is balanced by gender and spans four major urban centers, with most participants holding at least an undergraduate qualification, consistent with the intended recruitment frame.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Range	α
Authoritarian Parenting	38.4	8.1	13–65	.89
Emotional Invalidation	29.7	6.8	10–50	.87
Emotional Dysregulation	94.2	18.5	36–180	.93
Trait Anxiety (STAI-T)	47.6	9.3	20–80	.91
Self-Doubt	31.5	7.2	12–60	.82

Note. All scales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > .80$).

Mean scores fall in the moderate range across variables, with no evidence of floor or ceiling effects, supporting the use of parametric statistics in subsequent analyses.

Table 3

Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Authoritarian Parenting					
2. Emotional Invalidation	.61***				
3. Emotional Dysregulation	.52***	.57***			
4. Trait Anxiety	.47***	.49***	.58***		
5. Self-Doubt	.49***	.55***	.53***	.61***	

Note. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

All study variables were significantly and positively intercorrelated at moderate-to-large magnitudes (Cohen, 1988), supporting H1 and indicating a shared underlying vulnerability pathway linking authoritarian parenting to emotional and self-evaluative difficulties.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Self-Doubt



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Predictor	B	SE	B	t	p
Step 1: Age	0.11	0.09	.07	1.22	.224
Step 1: Gender	0.84	0.61	.08	1.38	.169
Step 2: Authoritarian Parenting	0.39	0.05	.44	8.37	< .001

Note. Step 1: $R^2 = .03$, $F(2, 242) = 3.72$, $p = .025$. Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = .35$, $R^2 = .38$, $F(3, 241) = 49.24$, $p < .001$.

Authoritarian parenting remained a significant positive predictor of self-doubt after controlling for age and gender, accounting for 38% of total variance, supporting H2.

Table 5

Mediation Analysis: Emotional Invalidation as Mediator of Authoritarian Parenting on Self-Doubt

Effect	β	SE	95% BCa CI	p
Direct effect	.13	.06	[.02, .25]	.042
Indirect effect	.31	.04	[.24, .38]	< .01
Total effect	.44	.05	[.34, .54]	< .001

Note. X = Authoritarian Parenting; M = Emotional Invalidation; Y = Self-Doubt. PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2018), 10,000 bootstrap resamples.

Emotional invalidation significantly mediated the relationship between authoritarian parenting and self-doubt, transmitting approximately 70% of the total effect and indicating partial mediation, supporting H3.

Qualitative Findings

A thematic analysis modeled on Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach generated four themes from a hypothetical set of 20 interview transcripts. Quotations below are invented composites illustrating plausible interview content; names are fictional.

Theme 1: Obedience Through Fear

Sana, 24, Lahore: "I never knew what I actually wanted, because I always did what they wanted before I could find out. Fear was faster than desire."

Compliance was secured through anticipated punitive consequences rather than competence-based confidence, consistent with Bandura's (1977) account of suppressed autonomous motivation and with the disorganized-attachment dynamic in which a parent functions as both secure base and threat (Bowlby, 1982). This theme illuminates the strong correlation between authoritarian parenting and self-doubt ($r = .49$, Table 3).

Theme 2: Emotional Silence as Survival Strategy

Tariq, 27, Karachi: "Every time I cried, he would say, 'I will give you something to cry about.' So I stopped crying. Emotions become dangerous things that you hide."

Suppression-based emotion regulation (Gross, 1998, 2002) was learned as a relational necessity rather than a maladaptive choice, reinforced by cultural norms of sabr (patience). This theme corresponds to the mediation pathway through emotional invalidation (indirect $\beta = .31$, Table 5).

Theme 3: Guilt as Emotional Control

Aisha, 22, Islamabad: "She would never shout. She would just go quiet and look at the floor. And you knew. You had failed her, failed Allah, failed everything."

Guilt induction operates as psychological control (Barber, 1996) that targets self-concept rather than behavior, compounded in Pakistani households by the intertwining of religious obligation and communal reputation (izzat). This theme provides a qualitative



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mechanism for the statistical mediation pathway.

Theme 4: Internalized Self-Criticism

Hamid, 29, Peshawar: "Even when I moved to another city for university, my father came with me not physically, but in my head. Every time I was about to take a decision, I would hear him saying 'you'll fail.'"

An internalized critical voice persisting independently of parental contact reflects Bowlby's (1969/1982) internalized working models and ruminative self-doubt documented in insecure-attachment research (Mikulincer, 1995). This theme animates the correlation between authoritarian parenting and self-doubt ($r = .49$) and its partial mediation (indirect $\beta = .31$).

Mixed Methods Integration

Table 6

Joint Display: Quantitative Findings and Qualitative Themes

Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Theme	Integrated Interpretation
Authoritarian parenting $\rightarrow$ self-doubt ($\beta = .44$, $R^2 = .38$)	Obedience Through Fear	Fear-based compliance forecloses competence-based confidence, constructing the psychological infrastructure of self-doubt.
Emotional invalidation mediates 70% of total effect (indirect $\beta = .31$)	Emotional Silence as Survival Strategy	Suppression, learned as relational necessity, is the lived mechanism behind the statistical mediation pathway.
Authoritarian parenting–self-doubt correlation ($r = .49$)	Guilt as Emotional Control	Guilt operates as an internalized, multidimensional regulator that is harder to resolve than direct punishment, intensifying self-doubt.
Self-doubt correlates strongly with anxiety ($r = .61$) and dysregulation ($r = .53$)	Internalized Self-Criticism	A persistent internal critical voice generalizes across domains, plausibly accounting for self-doubt's strong covariation with anxiety and dysregulation.

Across all four comparisons, qualitative themes provide candidate explanatory mechanisms for statistically significant quantitative pathways, illustrating convergence consistent with H7.

Discussion

This exemplar models how authoritarian, fear-based parenting within Pakistani collectivist family systems might relate to self-doubt, emotional dysregulation, and anxiety in young adulthood. The hypothesized correlations (H1) are broadly consistent with international authoritarian-parenting literature (Baumrind, 1991; Barber, 1996) and with South Asian and Pakistani scholarship emphasizing collectivist family hierarchy (Rudy & Grusec, 2006), while the modeled regression and mediation findings (H2, H3) suggest that emotional invalidation, rather than behavioral restriction alone, may be the more proximal mechanism linking authoritarian parenting to self-doubt a distinction with direct implications for intervention design.

Cultural contextualization remains essential: fear-based parenting in Pakistan is rarely experienced by parents as harmful, but rather as an expression of care embedded in religious framing of parental authority and communal reputation (izzat) (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). The qualitative themes situate this pattern within Attachment Theory (Bowlby,



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1982), Linehan's (1993) biosocial model of emotional invalidation, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and intergenerational trauma frameworks, jointly suggesting that fear-based parenting is transmitted across generations through modeled coping, insecure relational templates, and biologically primed emotional sensitivity. Collectivist parenting should not be read as uniformly harmful; rather, the findings as modeled point specifically to the affective coercion components in invalidation, guilt, and conditional regard as the operative risk factors, independent of the broader collectivist value system in which they are embedded.

Clinically, these illustrative pathways suggest that emotion-validation approaches such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (Linehan, 1993) may be particularly relevant for Pakistani young adults presenting with chronic self-doubt, and that culturally adapted interventions should integrate religious and collectivist values (e.g., *rahma*, *shafaqat*) rather than import individualist frameworks wholesale.

Practical Implications

If supported by real data, these findings would inform parent psychoeducation programs reframing warm, responsive parenting as consistent with Islamic values; family counseling models that address guilt induction and emotional invalidation directly; university and school-based emotional-literacy curricula building self-compassion and self-advocacy; and training for university mental health services to screen for early parenting experiences when assessing anxiety and self-doubt in Pakistani young adults.

Limitations

As an illustrative exemplar, this manuscript has no empirical limitations of its own; however, a real implementation of this design would face a cross-sectional structure precluding causal inference, reliance on retrospective self-report measures susceptible to memory reconstruction, and an urban sampling frame that would limit generalizability to rural Pakistani populations.

Future Directions

Future empirical work should pursue longitudinal designs capable of testing causal sequencing, extend sampling to rural populations to test generalizability, and recruit clinical samples to examine whether the modeled pathways are amplified among individuals presenting with diagnosed anxiety or mood disorders.

Conclusion

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods exemplar illustrates how fear-based, authoritarian parenting within Pakistani collectivist family systems might be modeled as significantly associated with self-doubt, emotional dysregulation, and anxiety, with emotional invalidation as a candidate mediating pathway. The qualitative themes of obedience through fear, emotional silence, guilt-based control, and internalized self-criticism demonstrate how such mechanisms might be reported as culturally situated and psychologically costly, pending confirmation through an actual empirical study. This exemplar is offered to model study design, analysis, and reporting conventions, and underscores the value of conducting the real investigation it only simulates.

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