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Perceived Paternal Rejection, Psychological Manipulation, And Mental Health Problems in Married Men

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Abstract

The present study aimed to find out the relationship of psychological manipulation as a mediator between perceived paternal rejection and mental health problems among married men. The sample was consisted of 153 married men aged between 25-40 years ($M = 32.29$, $SD = 4.38$). The study was formulated on cross sectional research design. The measures used in the study were My Memories of Up-Bringing - Adult Version (EMBU-A) (Gerlsma et al., 1991), Victim of Psychological Manipulation Scale (VPMS) (Khalid & Karamat, 2023), and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) (Lovibond, 1995). Correlation and mediation analysis were done to explore the results. According to the results perceived parenting (father's rejection), and psychological manipulation were positively correlated with mental health problems. Results also showed the mediating role of the psychological manipulation between perceived parenting (father's rejection) and mental health problems. The findings of the study can play significant role in the mental health interventions targeted at married men, emphasizing the need for programs that focus on positive parenting, conflict resolution, and emotional well-being.

Keywords: perceived parenting, psychological manipulation, mental health problems, married men.



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Introduction

Current research aims to study the relationship between perceived parenting, psychological manipulation, and mental health problems in married men. The cultural context in Pakistan significantly shapes the perceived parenting styles of individuals as parents often prioritize the collective welfare of the family unit over individual needs which ultimately impacts the well-being of children as adults (Saleem et.al., 2017). Understanding how these cultural values impact the way individuals perceive their parents' parenting styles is crucial for comprehending the intricate relationship between perceived parenting and mental health (Saleem et.al., 2015). These cultural values may add up in increasing the likelihood of developing psychological disorders later in life, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, it can also induce feelings of despondency, distress, and mental harm (Bressert, 2020).

Certain categories of relationships in these families are especially susceptible to the adverse consequences of psychological manipulation, namely those characterized by one member displaying authoritarian inclinations and engaging in emotional manipulation of those with less authority (Stroud & Eaton, 2018). At the same time, if the immediate partner along with family also exerts emotional pressure it has the potential to exert a detrimental impact on the mental well-being of married men (Baker & Carreo, 2018). Various factors, such as cultural norms, societal demands, and personal experiences, can significantly impact the developmental trajectory of men during the middle stages of life in Eastern societies as the concept of family and community holds significant importance in Pakistan's cultural fabric (Gunkel et al., 2016). Married men are often expected to fulfill the roles of breadwinners, protectors, and providers while simultaneously maintaining harmonious domestic environments (Ahmed & Qureshi, 2019).

In addition, the concept of respecting elders and the feeling of filial piety are important in Pakistan. that can have a great deal of influence on the roles and interactions of people in extended families (Nazir & Mukhtar, 2017). It is difficult to break from the cycle of poverty. Webs of responsibility that involve caring for older adults, younger adults, and for the future, Taking care of their own immediate families. The interaction of these cultural values and family dynamics



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can be a factor in the development of stress and emotional health issues (Khan et al., 2018).

The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between life satisfaction level at midlife and perceived parental favoritism experiences in childhood (Liu et al., 2017). Adults who believed that their parents' nurturing was inconsistent were more likely to report problems with their relationships. (Fuentes et al., 2022). The degree of parental warmth or support shown towards their child's needs is an indication of the degree of parental warmth and support shown, and individuals who expressed this when in their twenties were more likely to be correct (Lopez et al., 2019).

Parental rejection refers to the degree of criticism, hostility and rejection a child feels from parents. This is an illustration of how parenting styles can be linked to a wide range of possible risks for children, both parental and non-parental psychopathology (depression and anxiety) (Chua et al., 2017). As observed, there are various views about parenting, especially when considering cultural and ethnic groups, which supports the hypothesis that cultural issues have a role to play in parenting (Wang et al., 2015).

Psychological manipulation encompasses any form of controlling conduct aimed at exerting influence over an individual's thoughts or behaviors without their explicit consent (Cameron & Rogders, 2018). The aforementioned conduct, however, does not only occur within the professional environment, but may also be observed within family relationships and intimate relationships that are structured in a power position of one person over another (Schacter et al., 2023). The hypothesis Chen et al. (2024) suggested was that a person's susceptibility to psychological manipulation is related to his or her perception of parental parenting style. Those who remembered that their parents disciplined them stringently and emotionally neglected them had higher levels of coercive control (Browne et al., 2016). Those who had been manipulated psychologically (gaslighting & emotional blackmail) had higher scores on anxiety and depression as it affected the individual's sense of self and self worth making them more susceptible to mental health issues (Ahmed et al., 2022).

With regard to parents, men with a perception of excessive control and criticism were more likely to have depressive symptoms in adulthood (Haq &



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Zaman, 2017). Economic stressors, such as unemployment and financial difficulties, are pervasive stressors that can lead to mental health issues among married men in Pakistan and economic stress is a significant predictor of depression in this population (Nisar et al., 2019). Low socio-economic status is associated with a higher prevalence of mental health disorders in middle age (Schurer et al., 2018). Mentally healthy people in the middle age group who had strong social network scores had a lower rate of depression and anxiety than individuals with weaker social network scores (Kupferberg & Hasler, 2023).

Individuals who have experienced psychological manipulation in their familial or marital relationships are more likely to report symptoms of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Akhtar & Hussain, 2022). In the cultural context, where collectivism is highly prized, parents often emphasize obedience and respect for authority, where parenting practices can influence how individuals perceive their upbringing and, subsequently, their mental health (Sawitri & Creed, 2016). Based on research evidence, it is demonstrated that perceived parenting (father's rejection) is related to psychological manipulation and mental health problems in married men. No comprehensive study has investigated the association of these variables. The present research is, therefore, a unique attempt to identify the association between perceived parenting (father's rejection) and mental health problems with the mediating role of psychological manipulation.

Objectives

The current study addressed the following objectives:

- To investigate the association between perceived parenting (father's Rejection), psychological manipulation and mental health problems in married men.
- To identify the mediating role of psychological manipulation between perceived parenting and mental health problems in married men.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the current study are phrased as follows:

- It was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between perceived parenting (father's rejection), psychological manipulation, and mental health problems in married men.



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- It was hypothesized that psychological manipulation would mediate the relationship between perceived parenting and mental health problems in married men.

Method

Participants

A cross-sectional research design was used in the study and data was gathered from married men. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit 153 participants. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 40 years ($M = 32.29$, $SD = 4.38$). Inclusion and exclusion criteria were set to gather data which included only participants who are married with at least one year of marriage were included in the research. Participants with any physical and psychological disabilities were excluded and those not fulfilling the inclusion criteria were excluded from the research

Measures

The following measures were used in the current research.

My Memories of Up-Bringing- Adult Version (Gerlsma et al., 1991)

The Egena Minnen Betrand Uppfostran (My Memories of Up-Bringing- Adult Version) scale, also known as EMBU-A. This scale consists of 27 items and assesses three factors for each parent: emotional warmth, rejection, and overprotection. The scale is a Likert-type scale, with each item having four response options ranging from (1) *never*, (2) *sometimes*, (3) *often*, and (4) *always*. The scores ranging from 27 to 108, higher scores in each sub-scale indicated increased severity of warmth, rejection, or overprotection. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency with Cronbach values of Rejection and Emotional Warmth as $\alpha = .86$ and $\alpha = .88$ respectively for both father and mother while values of Overprotection were $\alpha = .62$ for the father and $\alpha = .60$ for the mother.

Victim of Psychological Manipulation Scale (VPMS) (Khalid & Karamat, 2023)

The VPMS consists of 34 items and measures psychological manipulation on three subscales: control criticism, and dominance. The scale used a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) *not at all*, (2) *sometimes*, (3) *often*, and (4) *more often*, to record responses. Scores range from 34 to 136 where higher scores on



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each sub-scale indicated more severe symptoms of psychological manipulation. The VPMS demonstrated good internal consistency with Cronbach alpha value of subscales: control, criticism, and dominance as $\alpha = .91$, $\alpha = .90$, and $\alpha = .89$ respectively.

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) (Lovibond,1995)

The scale was used to evaluate the severity of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms among university students. The scale used a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) not at all to (4) most of the time, to record responses. Scores range from 21 to 84 with higher scores on each sub-scale indicating more severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. It has good internal consistency with Cronbach alpha value of depression, anxiety, and stress as $\alpha = .81$, $\alpha = .89$, and $\alpha = .78$ respectively.

Procedure

Research started with finding and selecting a research question or topic to study while keeping in mind the FOU (feasibility, originality, and uniqueness) criteria. The research proposal was presented in DGC and the topic was approved by the IRB (Institute of Research Board). After that, the researcher got approval from the authorities, and consent was gained from participants who were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Before giving the questionnaires to the participants, the researcher introduced herself and briefly explained the research purpose to them. Those participants who agreed to participate in the research were given a set of questionnaires which included the EMBU-A, Victim of Psychological Manipulation Scale. and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) from 153 participants. Data was collected from married men by following ethical considerations. The confidentiality of participants and the ability to withdraw from the study without any harm were assured to the participants. On average, each participant took 20 to 25 minutes to fill out the research form. The information that they submitted was never utilized for anything other than academic purposes. Participants were debriefed after the data collection regarding the research purpose and implications.

Statistical Analysis

The Pearson product-moment correlation method was used to demonstrate the relationship between perceived parenting (father's rejection), psychological



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manipulation, and mental health problems. Afterward, Hayes (2018) bootstrapping approach was used to identify that psychological manipulation mediates the association between perceived parenting (father’s rejection), and mental health problems in married men.

Results

A sample of (N=153) married men was taken from Lahore, Pakistan with a purposive sampling technique. To achieve the objectives of the study, an array of analyses was run using the SPSS-22. The analysis of the current study was correlation and mediation analysis. The association among perceived parenting (father’s rejection), psychological manipulation, and mental health problems in married men was explored through the Pearson product-moment correlation. Table 1 shows a significant positive association among perceived parenting (father’s rejection), psychological manipulation, and mental health problems.

Table 1

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Perceived Parenting (Father’s Rejection), Psychological Manipulation, and Mental Health Problems

Variables	M	SD	PP (F.R.)	PM	DASS
PP (F.R.)	10.10	4.23	-	4.99**	4.38**
PM	73.78	21.29	-	-	5.88**
DASS	44.83	11.86	-	-	-

Note. N = 153, PP (F.R.) = Perceived Parenting (Father’s Rejection); PM = Psychological Manipulation; DASS = Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

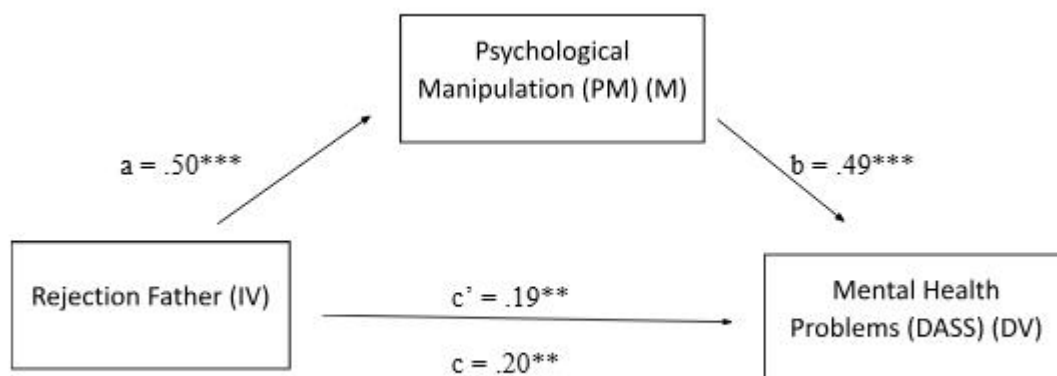
Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was carried out to measure the mediating role of psychological manipulation between perceived parenting and mental health problems in married men. The Pearson product-moment correlation indicated a significant relationship among perceived parenting (father’s rejection), psychological manipulation, and mental health problems. Hence, the mediating role of psychological manipulation in the relationship between perceived parenting (father’s rejection), and mental health problems was explored.



Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Simple Mediation Analysis



Perceived parenting (rejection) was used as an independent predictor, furthermore, psychological manipulation (PM) played a mediating role that affected mental health problems (DASS) in married men. In this regard, Hayes's (2018) bootstrapping approach was used to identify whether the psychological manipulation mediates the association (Table 2).

Table 2

Regression Coefficient, Standard Error, and Model Summary for the Perceived Parenting, Psychological Manipulation, and Mental Health Problems (N=153)

Antecedent:	Model (PM)			Criterion (DASS)		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
PP (F.R.) (IV)	.50	.35	.001	.19	.21	.01
PM (M)				.49	.04	.001
Constant	48.43	3.88	.001	19.15	2.82	.001
	$R^2 = .25$			$R^2 = .37$		
	$F = 50.01, p = .001$			$F = 44.80, p = .001$		

Note. β = Beta, SE = Standard Error, PP (F.R.) = Perceived Parenting (Father's Rejection), PM = Psychological Manipulation, DASS = Depression Anxiety Stress Scale

Table 2 represents the effects of the independent variable Perceived Parenting (Father's Rejection) on the dependent variable (DASS) through the mediator (PM). The analysis revealed that rejection by the father has a significant effect on



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DASS.

Table 3

Indirect Effects of Perceived Parenting (Father’s Rejection) on DASS through PM

Effects	Product		of Bootstrapping		95%	BCa
	Coefficients		Confidence Interval			
	Point	SE	Lower	Upper		
	Estimates					
Total Indirect Effects	.69	.15	.42	1.01		
PP (F.R.) à PM à DASS	.25	.05	.15	.35		

Note. PP (F.R.) = Percieved Parenting (Father’s Rejection); PM = Psychological Manipulation; DASS = Depression Anxiety Stress Scale; *SE* = Standard Error

Indirect effects within the model presented in the current study were also examined over 5000 bootstrap samples by taking estimates at a 95 percent confidence interval. The bias-corrected and accelerated confidence interval (BCa CI) findings are described in Table 9. The analysis delves into the indirect effects of PM. The total indirect effect (PP (F.R.) -> PM -> DASS) is .69, and this effect is statistically significant. It demonstrates that the association between rejection by the father and DASS is mediated by PM.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation found a link between Rejection by father, PM, and DASS. Thus further, the mediating role of PM within the relationship between rejection by father and DASS was discovered. For this context, Rockwood and Hayes (2020) used a bootstrapping approach to determine whether PM mediated the relationship between rejection by the father and DASS or not. The overall effect of rejection by the father on DASS is significant ($\beta = .19$, $SE = .21$, $p < .05$). Further, there are significant direct effects of father’s rejection on PM ($\beta = .50$, $SE = .35$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of the mediating variable PM on DASS ($\beta = .49$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$) was significant indicating that psychological manipulation mediated the relationship between father’s rejection and mental health problems in married men.

Discussion

This study provides valuable information about intricate connection involving perceived parenting styles, psychological manipulation, and the mental health



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problems of married men. It postulated that there is a significant association between perceived father rejection and psychological manipulation in married men. Individuals who experienced higher levels of parental warmth during childhood tended to exhibit lower levels of psychological manipulation in adulthood (Guo et al., 2021). Moreover, it is evident that parental rejection can contribute to increased psychological manipulation tendencies in adulthood (Khaleque et al., 2019). The current study sought to shed some light on the parental dynamics that help an individual's propensity for psychological manipulation. A study found an inverse relationship between fathers' warmth and rejection, corresponding with established theories that positive parent-child relationships in childhood help more good adult mental health outcomes (Li & Meier, 2017; Saleem, 2015). Overall, the findings show a long-lasting, positive impact of a nurturing and supportive father-child relationship on a man's mental well-being.

The study also hypothesized that a father's rejection could be a contributor to mental health issues in married men. Parental rejection was positively related to mental health problems in men. This was supported by findings from Garcia et al. (2020b) that people who perceived their parents as warm and supportive during childhood had fewer mental health issues in adulthood. Similarly, according to the Sahle et al., (2021), there is an enduring impact of early experiences on mental well-being that align with current findings of positive association between parental rejection and mental health problems. These findings highlight the important role that perceived parenting styles play in the mental health of married men. Further, given the complexity of the relationship between these perceptions and the problems faced by this group, it appears that there are many factors at play.

Parental warmth from both fathers and mothers was associated with reduced mental health problems and parental rejection from both fathers and mothers was associated with increased risk of mental health problems. These findings are largely consistent with other research that has found adverse effects of childhood rejection and neglect on adult mental health outcomes (Merrick et al., 2017). Despite the emotional scars from their parents' abandonment, these men may benefit from therapy as it could alleviate their struggles. Also,



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psychological manipulation was significantly correlated with increased mental health issues. Due to the high risk of toxic interactions, these married men require emotional support and couples therapy (Dalglish et al., 2014). Indeed, a significant relationship between perceived parenting, psychological manipulation and mental health problems was found. This paper aimed to determine whether psychological manipulation mediates the relationship between perceived father's rejection and mental health problems in married men.

The mediation analysis revealed that psychological manipulation act as a mediator between father's rejection and mental health problems in married men. It is evident that early family dynamics plays very important role in individual's mental health which suggested that a lack of emotional support and rejection from a parent can lead to psychological manipulation in childhood, which, in turn, may result in long-term mental health issues in adulthood (Wang et al., 2013). The mediating role of psychological manipulation is consistent with attachment theory (Bowlby, 2015). This theory posits that early caregiving experiences significantly influence an individual's emotional well-being throughout their life. Children who are at risk of being rejected by their parents may develop insecure attachment styles that are observable as attempts at psychological control, which in turn predict mental health issues. The mediation of control refers to the fact that when emotional warmth is lacking, people may use controlling behaviors as a coping mechanism for the absence of emotional support, which can lead to negative outcomes such as depression.

Limitations

- This study used a cross-sectional research design, which limits causal inferences between perceived rejection, psychological manipulation, and mental health.
- The mediation analysis revealed significant indirect effects, but because temporal precedence between variables could not be determined, the results should be interpreted cautiously.
- Since the sample is limited to married men from a particular geographic and cultural context, the findings may not be applicable to other populations.



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- A single mediator was only examined, so other possible mediating mechanisms for the relationship between paternal rejection and mental health problems remain unknown.

Recommendations

- To strengthen the interpretation of mediation effects, future studies should employ longitudinal or prospective designs.
- The impact of paternal rejection can be mitigated by identifying potential moderators, such as resilience, social support, coping strategies, and marital satisfaction.
- In order to enhance the generalizability of the results, we recommend repeating the study using a larger and more diverse sample from different regions and cultures.
- For a more comprehensive understanding of parental influences on adult mental health, maternal and paternal parenting dimensions should be considered in future studies.
- To prevent long-term psychological problems, parenting programs should emphasize emotional warmth, acceptance, and supportive parent-child interactions.
- Multi-mediator mediation models are needed in the future to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how perception of parenting influences mental health issues.

Conclusion

In this study, married men perceived paternal rejection was associated with greater psychological manipulation and mental health problems. Moreover, the mediation analysis suggests that psychological manipulation plays a significant role in paternal rejection contributing to depression, anxiety, and stress. It is evident from these findings that childhood parenting experiences have lasting psychological effects and that it is important for mental health interventions to address manipulative interpersonal patterns.



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