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Perceived Parenting Styles and Social Anxiety in University Students: A Cross-Sectional Study from Pakistan.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study aimed at investigating the relationships between perceived parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive) and social anxiety among university learners, and analyzing the gender differences in the expression of social anxiety.

Method: The cross-sectional correlational research design was used. The sample consisted of 300 university students (142 males, 158 females) recruited in the University of Gujrat, Pakistan, through stratified sampling methods in terms of gender. The participants were administered the questionnaires Parenting Styles Questionnaire (20 items) (Robinson et al., 1995) and Social Anxiety Questionnaire (30 items) (Caballo et al., 2010), which are designed to assess parenting styles and social anxiety in adults, respectively. The analysis of data was performed using bivariate correlation test, multiple linear regression analysis, and independent group comparison test.

Results: The findings showed that authoritarian parenting had a significant direct correlation with social anxiety symptoms ($r = -.48, p < .01$), whereas authoritative parenting had a significant negative correlation with social anxiety symptoms ($r = -.35, p < .01$). There was an insignificant relationship between permissive parenting and the manifestation of social anxiety ($r = -.09, p > .05$). The regression analysis showed that authoritarian parenting was the most significant direct predictor of social anxiety symptoms ($b = -.42, p < .001$), and authoritative parenting was the most significant inverse predictor of social anxiety symptoms ($b = -.28, p < .001$), which together explained 26% of the variation in social anxiety symptoms. Moreover, female participants ($M = 71.38, SD = 12.45$) showed significantly greater social anxiety expression in comparison to male participants ($M = 65.12, SD = 11.89, t(298) = -3.56, p < .001$).

Conclusion: Authoritarian parenting was perceived as a significant vulnerability factor and authoritative parenting as a mitigating factor in relation to social anxiety in Pakistani university students. Girls showed increased social anxiety as compared to boys. These findings highlight the need to develop university-based intervention programs to students



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who have a background of authoritarian parenting.

Keywords: Parenting styles, social anxiety, authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting, university students, gender differences, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Social anxiety disorder is one of the most prevalent psychiatric disorders in the world, and involves an irrational, excessive fear of being assessed or judged unfavorably by others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This emotional reaction significantly affects the functioning in different areas of life and is not commensurate with the real nature of the social interaction (Khuda et al., 2024). Social anxiety typically onsets during the adolescent and transition to adulthood, making university-enrolled individuals vulnerable to the development of social anxiety (Khuda et al., 2024). Recent studies in Saudi Arabia found that 47.5% of nursing students experienced social anxiety, indicating the vulnerability of tertiary education students (Almutairi et al., 2024). Social anxieties are found in a hidden pattern in Pakistan as the prevalence of very severe anxiety symptoms increased significantly from 5.98% in 2021 to 52.94% in 2023, reflecting a 47.06% rise in the overall population of students (Khuda et al., 2024). These alarming prevalence rates call for a need to address the underlying determinants associated with manifestation of social anxiety in Pakistani university students.

Parenting Styles and Social Anxiety: Baumrind (1971) identified three major parenting styles that have received much research attention: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. The authoritative approach involves providing support, guidance, and love to children, while setting clear rules and boundaries, fostering trust, and actively engaging with them in a nurturing way (Baumrind, 1971). The children of such parents are likely to exhibit high self-esteem and curiosity compared to their peers (Almutairi et al., 2024). On the other hand, authoritarian parents set up a high level of control over their children, give strict instructions and reduce opportunities for their children to make decisions (Baumrind, 1971). Children raised by authoritarian parents feel compelled to comply with their parents' orders, limiting their ability to develop independence and leading to low self-esteem, social isolation, and unhealthy thinking habits (Almutairi et al., 2024). Permissive caregivers, on the other hand, show little control and high sensitivity towards their offspring, but fail to provide adequate structure and guidance, which may lead to emotional lability and limited self-control skills (Almutairi et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2024).

As per the cognitive theory of social anxiety proposed by Clark & Wells (1995), negative self- and social-conceptualizations are maladaptive and lead to social anxiety, with the social anxiety often stemming from early parenting experiences. Empirical studies have consistently confirmed that overprotective and restrictive parenting behaviors lead to behavioral suppression in children and contribute to the emergence of social anxiety in later stages of the child's life (Ismail et al., 2024).

International Research on Parenting Styles and Social Anxiety: A systematic literature review of the past 20 years revealed significant variations in the effect of parenting styles on emotional and psychological functioning across different cultures, with authoritative parenting consistently linked to better psychological flexibility and emotion regulation among adolescents, while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles correlated with less favorable behaviors (Yang et al., 2024). However, this correlation had some differential effects in non-Western cultural contexts, where authoritarian parenting sometimes showed positive correlations with emotional intelligence, emphasizing the importance of cultural contexts in understanding such relationships (Yang et al., 2024).



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Through a meta-analytic investigation using meta-analytic structural equation modeling (MASEM), the current study found that warmth from both mother and father showed small but comparable effects on adolescent social anxiety manifestations, which were diminished. Interestingly, maternal control was significantly associated with increased symptomatology, while paternal control was not (Aaron et al., 2024). These findings shed light on the unique role of maternal and paternal parenting in the development of social anxiety in adolescents and the methodological benefits of MASEM for identifying unique parenting influences on developmental trajectories (Aaron et al., 2024). This evidence aligns with theories suggesting that fathers are more likely to have a greater impact in the development of social anxiety than mothers, even though there are conflicting findings in the empirical literature (Aaron et al., 2024).

Almutairi et al. (2024) demonstrated that strict parenting practices implemented by both parents were correlated with a reduction in the prevalence of social anxiety manifestations among nursing students, whereas controlling parenting from the father was associated with an elevation in the likelihood of symptom occurrence. Similarly, an Iranian investigation indicated that controlling parenting styles demonstrated a substantial and direct correlation with students' social anxiety ($p < .001$) and accounted for 18% of the fluctuation in social anxiety outcomes (Iranian Study, 2025). Additionally, the Iranian investigation demonstrated that strict parenting practices functioned as a significant inverse predictor of social anxiety ($P < 0.01$), whereas lenient and controlling parenting approaches served as substantial positive predictors of social anxiety ($P < 0.01$) (Navadian, 2023).

Parenting and Social Anxiety in the Pakistani Cultural Context: Parenting styles and social anxiety require an exploration of cultural contexts. In Pakistani society, the maternal figures are expected to be warm and permissive, while the paternal figures are expected to be authoritative and disciplining (Hafeez et al., 2024). Pakistan's collectivist orientation emphasizes on communal beliefs, norms, and values, and places the family as the basic unit, and members of the family are interdependent and rely on each other (Keshf & Nadeem, 2024). In such societies, it is normative that parents be the one to make important decisions concerning their children's future; this authority is maintained through the developmental stages (Dwairy, 2004). Collectivist cultures value obedience, conforming to norms, and following the guidance of parents and family (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Triandis & Suh, 2002; Wang & Leichtman, 2000).

Although limited research has been conducted on parenting styles and social anxiety in Pakistan, it has been suggested that authoritarian parenting style has been positively correlated with social anxiety among the adolescent population (Hafeez et al., 2024). Hafeez et al., (2024) found authoritarian parenting to be a significant construct in the social anxiety of Pakistani adolescents and self-esteem and introversion to be moderating constructs. Similarly, in parallel study, Khurshid and Rapheal (2023) found that authoritarian parenting had significant positive prediction on social anxiety among students of university enrolled in Rawalpindi & Islamabad while authoritarian parenting had significant negative prediction on social anxiety with academic performance as intervening variable. According to intergenerational transmission model, social anxiety can be transmitted intergenerationally and from family interaction styles and parenting practices (Mohammadi & Dehghani, 2025). The results of a comprehensive review of the research conducted over the last decade showed a positive correlation between authoritarian and punitive parenting techniques in terms of the rise in social anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents and a negative correlation between authoritative and responsive parenting in relation to the decrease in social anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents (Mohammadi & Dehghani, 2025).



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Rationale and Significance of the Study: While there is much literature available internationally concerning the relationship between parenting styles and social anxiety, there are certain gaps in the academic literature in Pakistan. In particular, the role of different parenting styles (strict, balanced, and lenient) as key determinants in the manifestation of social anxiety among students attending the Pakistani University is not sufficiently explored. Additionally, previous studies have mostly focused on the adolescent age group, and there hasn't been much research on young adult groups seeking higher education (Khurshid & Rapheal, 2023). The continued rise in the prevalence of social anxiety among Pakistani tertiary students since the advent of COVID-19 (Khuda et al., 2024) highlights the need to explore the underlying causes of social anxiety. In addition, although some studies have been undertaken on child rearing styles and social anxiety in the context of Pakistan, there are few studies on the three dimensions of child rearing approaches and thoroughly validated measurement tools.

This study aims to fill the gap in literature and establish the correlation between perceived parenting styles and social anxiety symptoms in Pakistani University students and provide relevant data to the University counseling services, mental health professionals, and parents on the importance of parenting in the development of social anxiety. The results could help develop specific strategies to prevent the development of rigid parenting.

Hypotheses

Based on theory and the existing empirical literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting and social anxiety that is statistically significant.

H2: There is a statistically significant negative correlation between the presence of social anxiety and authoritative parenting practices.

H3: There is a positive correlation that can be considered statistically significant between parental permissive parenting and the emergence of social anxiety.

The authoritarian parenting is a positive predictor of social anxiety, while the authoritative parenting is a negative predictor of social anxiety.

H5: There is a statistically significant difference between male and female students in terms of social anxiety, with females being more anxious than males.

Method

Research Design: A cross-sectional correlational research design was employed to examine the relationship between perceived parenting styles and social anxiety among university students (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants: A sample of 300 university students of the University of Guajrat, Pakistan was used in the research. The sampling strategy adopted was a stratified sampling where the stratification variable was gender to ensure that there was fair representation. Each stratum had a convenience sampling strategy.

The research sample comprised 142 male participants (47.3%) and 158 female participants (52.7%), with ages spanning from 18 to 26 years ($M = 21.34$, $SD = 2.15$). All respondents maintained active enrollment in either undergraduate or postgraduate academic programs. The study employed a voluntary recruitment approach, with informed consent obtained in written form from each participant prior to commencing data collection.

Instruments

Following instruments were used to collect data:

Parenting Styles Questionnaire: Parenting approaches were evaluated using a 20-item adaptation of the Parenting Styles Questionnaire (1995) developed by Robinson. This instrument assesses three parenting constructs—Authoritarian, Authoritative, and



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Permissive—through participant responses on a five-point rating continuum spanning from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The instrument demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, yielding Cronbachs α coefficients of .82 for the Authoritarian construct, .79 for the Authoritative construct, and .74 for the Permissive construct.

Social Anxiety Questionnaire: The SAQ-A30 (Caballo et al., 2012) was used to assess the symptoms of social anxiety. This tool was initially designed by Caballo et al. (2010) and it has proven to have strong cross-cultural validity in 20 countries (Caballo et al., 2012). The measure evaluates cognitive, behavioral, and physiological aspects related to social anxiety presentations. Respondents rated each of the items on a 5-point scale between not at all and extremely. In this study, the instrument had good internal consistency with a Cronbach 4 coefficient of .88.

Demographic Information Sheet: A concise demographic questionnaire was created to gather data regarding participants' age, gender, and socioeconomic background.

Procedure: Institutional ethical clearance was obtained from the administrative authorities of the University of Gujrat before starting the process of data collection. The subjects were approached in class and given information about the purpose of the study. All participants gave written consent after all details were fully disclosed and the protection of their privacy and maintaining their anonymity throughout the research was assured. The instrument package was given in hardcopy format, and took about 10-15 minutes to complete. Data collection was done for four weeks.

Ethical Considerations: This investigation followed accepted ethical procedures and all subjects were informed and gave their consent to participate, and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time during the investigation. There was no collection of personally identifiable data and all information obtained was kept in a secure manner.

Data Analysis Plan: Statistical analysis was done by means of computational statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). The basic statistical summaries and internal reliability test (Cronbach alpha) were the basic analytical steps. Paired correlations were used to test the relationships between variables. Regression model that included multiple predictors was applied to assess the relative importance of parenting styles in predicting manifestations of social anxiety. An independent samples t-test was used to test the differences between gender in the expression of social anxiety. A level of statistical significance was set at less than .05.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participant (N = 300)

Variable	Statistics
Gender, n (%)	Male: 142 (47.3%) Female: 158 (52.7%)
Age (years)	$M = 21.34$, $SD = 2.15$ Range = 18-26

Note. N = total sample size; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the study participants. A total of 300 university students were investigated, with 142 (47.3%) being male and 158 (52.7%) female. The age distribution of participants spanned from 18 to 26 years, with a mean age of 21.34 years ($SD = 2.15$), suggesting that the sample consisted predominantly of individuals in early adulthood.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alpha for Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	Items	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's α
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Authoritarian Parenting	7	22.14	5.23	0.12	-0.45	.82
Authoritative Parenting	7	24.56	4.98	-0.08	-0.32	.79
Permissive Parenting	6	15.87	4.11	0.21	-0.18	.74
Social Anxiety	30	68.42	12.37	0.15	-0.56	.88

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha. All skewness and kurtosis values are within ± 2 , indicating univariate normality. All Cronbach's alpha values exceed .70, indicating good internal consistency.

Table 2 shows the internal consistency reliability measures and descriptive statistics for all of the constructs analyzed in this study. All Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above the .70 level, which is regarded as an acceptable internal consistency level: Authoritarian Parenting ($\alpha = .82$), Authoritative Parenting ($\alpha = .79$), Permissive Parenting ($\alpha = .74$), and Social Anxiety ($\alpha = .88$). The skewness coefficients varied from -0.08 to 0.21 while the kurtosis coefficients varied from -0.56 to -0.18; both of which were within the acceptable limits of ± 2 . These results showed that distribution of data was close to normal in all variables (see Table 2).

Table 3

Inter-Correlations among Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Authoritarian	—			
2. Authoritative	-.28**	—		
3. Permissive	.15*	.10	—	
4. Social Anxiety	.48**	-.35**	.09	—

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

The relationships between parenting styles and social anxiety symptoms were explored using a Pearson correlation analysis and are summarized below in Table 2. A large positive correlation was found between Authoritarian Parenting and Social Anxiety, $r^*(298) = .48$, $p < .01$. By contrast, Authoritative Parenting had a large negative relationship with Social Anxiety, $r(298) = -.35$, $p < .01$. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between Permissive Parenting and Social Anxiety, $r^*(298) = .09$, $p > .05$. In addition, there was a significant negative correlation between Authoritarian and Authoritative Parenting styles, $r^*(298) = -.28$, $p < .01$.

Table 4

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Social Anxiety (N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)
(Constant)	45.23	5.67		7.98	< .001	34.05	56.41
Authoritarian	0.89	0.11	.42	8.09	< .001	0.67	1.11



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Authoritative	-0.64	0.12	-	-	<	-0.88	-0.40
			.28	5.33	.001		
Permissive	0.18	0.14	.06	1.29	.198	-0.10	0.46

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. Model summary: $R = .52$, $R^2 = .27$, Adjusted $R^2 = .26$, $F(3, 296) = 36.45$, $*p < .001$.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the unique predictive ability of each parenting style for Social Anxiety (Table 3). The comprehensive model was statistically significant, $F(3, 296) = 36.45$, $*p < .001$, accounting for about 26% of the variance in the data for Social Anxiety (Adjusted $R^2 = .26$). Specifically, the individual predictors, Authoritarian Parenting, was the strongest positive predictor of Social Anxiety ($\beta = .42$, $*p < .001$, 95% CI: 0.67 to 1.11). Authoritative Parenting was a strong negative predictor ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .001$, 95% CI: -0.88, -0.40). Permissive Parenting was not a significant predictor of Social Anxiety ($\beta = .06$, $p = .198$, 95% CI: -0.10, 0.46).

Table 5***Gender Differences in Social Anxiety (N = 300)***

Gender	*n*	M	SD	*t*	df	*p*
Male	142	65.12	11.89	-3.56	298	<.001
Female	158	71.38	12.45	—	—	—

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Independent samples t-test showed significantly higher social anxiety scores among female students compared to male students.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to investigate gender-related disparities in Social Anxiety, as presented in Table 4. The results demonstrated that female participants ($M = 71.38$, $SD = 12.45$) exhibited substantially elevated social anxiety scores relative to their male counterparts ($M = 65.12$, $SD = 11.89$), $t(298) = -3.56$, $*p < .001$. This outcome reflects a statistically significant differentiation between genders, wherein females obtained approximately 6.26 points higher on the Social Anxiety scale relative to males.

Discussion

In the present study, the relationships between parental rearing styles and psychological distress related to social situations were explored in a sample of college-enrolled students, as well as any sex differences in social anxiety. Evidence provided weak support for the theoretical hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 was supported by empirical validation: that is, strict and controlling parental rearing showed a statistically significant positive relationship with social anxiety ($r = .48$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 2 was confirmed: indulgent parenting was found to be statistically significantly negatively correlated with social anxiety ($r = -.35$, $p < .01$). There was no validation for hypothesis 3 either because there was no statistically significant correlation between accommodating parental rearing and social anxiety ($r = .09$, $p > .05$). Hypothesis 4 was validated, with strict and controlling parenting being a noteworthy favorable determinant ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) and indulgent parenting being a noteworthy unfavorable determinant ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$) of social anxiety. Proposition 5 achieved confirmation, as female respondents ($M = 71.38$, $SD = 12.45$) demonstrated markedly heightened social anxiety measurements relative to male respondents ($M = 65.12$, $SD = 11.89$), $t(298) = 3.56$, $p < .001$.

Authoritarian Parenting and Social Anxiety: The observation that authoritarian parenting emerged as the most robust positive predictor of social anxiety, is in line with the existing literature within Pakistan and international settings. In a systematic review, Ilyas et al. (2024) found that authoritarian parenting is directly associated with social anxiety disorder in Asian adolescents, and empirical studies in Pakistan even indicated that



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controlling and demanding parenting behavior is directly linked to social withdrawal and low self-confidence. Similarly, Khurshid and Rapheal (2023) revealed that authoritarian parenting has a significant and positive impact on social anxiety in the university samples from Rawalpindi and Islamabad while social anxiety negatively affects the social performance in university students.

Dong, et al. (2024) conducted an extensive meta-analysis of 53 investigations that included 26,024 Chinese students and concluded that there was a low positive correlation between negative parenting behaviours and adolescent social anxiety. Importantly, the results of the synthesis suggested that gender acted as a moderating variable, meaning that the relationship between parental practices and social anxiety might be different between males and females. In a parallel meta-analysis of 85 studies, Lei (2023) found that adverse parenting styles were significantly associated with social anxiety in adolescents ($r = 0.186$, $p < .0001$), and that the strength of the association was higher for East Asian studies compared to European or American studies. This cultural observation is relevant to the Pakistani context where collectivist orientation and hierarchical family system are more dominant.

Theoretical understanding of this association is based on Baumrind's (1971) concept of authoritarian parenting. Authoritarian parents have a high level of authority over their children, set strict rules for behavior and limit opportunities for self-direction. People raised in these circumstances feel a pressure to behave according to the parents' wishes without thinking, limiting their ability to develop independence and self-esteem and leading them to develop negative schemas. In line with the cognitive conceptualization of social anxiety (Clark & Wells, 1995), the self-referential and environmental beliefs that are characteristic of social anxiety are etiological mechanisms, and often trace back to formative parent-child interactions.

Authoritative Parenting and Social Anxiety: The finding that authoritative parenting was a significant negative predictor of social anxiety is in line with the theories and existing literature. Studies with the Pakistani population of universities have shown that authoritative parenting (combining proper parental control and affection) is associated with reduced anxiety symptoms, thus supporting the authoritative parenting conceptualization (Ijaz & Mahmood, 2009).

Authoritative parenting is a buffering model that is based on its influence on the psychological maturity of the offspring. Authoritative parents create a balance of control and warmth, allowing kids to develop independence while maintaining a loving and supportive relationship. In this way, parenting can help develop self-worth, affective management, and interpersonal competence, which are protective factors in the development of social anxiety. Dong et al. (2024) also found a small negative correlation between 'constructive parenting methods' and social anxiety in their systematic review, which further supports the evidence of the protective factors of authoritative parenting.

Permissive Parenting and Social Anxiety: No significant correlation was found between permissive parenting and social anxiety, which was contrary to the expected results and some previous studies. Permissive parenting was found to significantly and negatively predict academic performance and its relationship with social anxiety was not clear (Khurshid and Rapheal, 2023). Culture may be a factor in explaining the non-significant finding of the present study. In a culture like Pakistan where collectivistic values prevail and family is the most important entity and parents' influence on children is traditional (Rudy & Grusec, 2006), permissive parenting might be less common or might take different forms than those seen in Western cultures. Moreover, there is a possibility that the impact of permissive parenting on social anxiety will be mediated by other variables



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like self-esteem or emotional intelligence, which were not examined in the current study.

Gender Differences in Social Anxiety: A significant number of previous studies have found that female students had significantly higher scores on social anxiety than male students. Hayat et al. (2023) found that the female university students have significantly higher social anxiety than male students. This gender gap has been supported by studies that were done in Pakistani universities where females have got higher scores on social anxiety measures (Irfan et al., 2023), and a further study has confirmed that gender differences in social anxiety are a significant issue among undergraduate students in Pakistan (Maaz & Hayee, 2025). The replication of these results across various Pakistani cohorts suggests that female students might be more likely to experience heightened fear of social judgement, and normative cultural pressures that can exacerbate social anxiety symptoms.

On the other hand, Gazo et al., (2024) conducted a study with 699 undergraduate students at Jordanian universities, which showed moderate levels of interpersonal unease and found that interpersonal unease was significantly positively correlated with apprehension of favorable judgment (FPE) and apprehension of unfavorable judgment (FNE). Notably, this investigation diverged from numerous preceding inquiries and revealed no statistically meaningful distinctions in the trajectory of social unease across gender categories. These findings propose that gender-based variations in interpersonal discomfort might demonstrate heterogeneity contingent upon sociocultural circumstances. A parallel investigation executed by Khalid and Akhtar (2025) in Pakistan demonstrated that a constructive connection exists among perceived authoritarian child-rearing approaches and interpersonal unease within the juvenile demographic, and that both the perceived authoritarian child-rearing approaches and affective management capacity functioned as consequential determinants of interpersonal unease. This investigation enhances comprehension regarding the mechanisms through which particular child-rearing methodologies may generate differentiated consequences for male and female offspring.

The gender gap found in the present study can be explained by different theories. In particular, modesty, obedience, and social conformity is likely to be more important for women in the Pakistani cultural context, making them even more vulnerable to social judgement issues. Females, later on, might be more prone to mull over negative social interactions and absorb social failures, exacerbating the signs of anxiety. Moreover, Dell'Osso et al. (2015) reported that females had higher rates of items related to "Performance fears" which supports the DSM-5 category of "Performance only" while males had higher rates of items related to "behavioral inhibition. The investigation also showed that females in the lower severity group had significantly higher total scores and higher scores on the "Specific anxieties and phobic features" and "Interpersonal sensitivity" domains, while males in the higher severity group had higher scores on the "Social phobic traits during childhood and adolescence" and "Behavioral inhibition and somatic symptoms" domains. These results indicate that there may be different phenotypic expressions of social anxiety in the two gender groups.

Implications

The findings of this investigation have many practical applications in several areas. First, the counselling centres in Pakistani Universities should include systematic evaluation process for learners who have been subjected to authoritarian parenting style, as they are more prone to have symptoms of social anxiety. CBT-based treatments focusing on dysfunctional cognitions and social anxiety might be particularly effective with this population (Clark & Wells, 1995). In turn, educational programs focused on parental behaviors should emphasize the relative benefits of being an emotionally responsive and



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judicious "authoritative" parent as opposed to being an "authoritarian" parent. In a society that is basically collectivistic, such activities in the education system have to be culturally sensitive, respecting the norms of the society and discouraging the use of coercive disciplinary practices. Lastly, healthcare professionals involved in mental health care delivery should consider sex-specific vulnerability factors when assessing social anxiety presentations. Specific treatments may be more beneficial for female learners with a focus on preoccupation with social appraisal and culturally based behavioral norms, while other treatments may be more effective for male learners in which they focus on self-regard development and introverted personality characteristics.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a number of interesting aspects that are important to note when considering this investigation. A methodological approach that is based on the cross section does not automatically allow causal relationships to be drawn, but requires a longitudinal approach to clarify such relationships. Some potential confounds are the use of self-reported data (social desirability bias and recall inaccuracy) and future studies would be strengthened by using multiple perspectives (e.g., parent and teacher) and observational methods. The study's participants were limited to a single institution in Pakistan, limiting the generalizability of the results. Future research needs to include the participation of students from different education institutions and geographical settings.

Moreover, this study did not explore potential mediating and moderating factors. Future research should investigate the mediating or moderating effects of other variables such as self-esteem, emotional intelligence and core self-evaluation in the observed relationship. The meta-analysis conducted by Dong et al. (2024) revealed gender as an important moderator, suggesting that future studies should aim to explore the mechanisms in greater detail for the gender-specific subpopulations. Also, there was no differentiation between mothers' and fathers' parenting styles. Given the potential role of differentiated functions of mothers and fathers in Pakistani family systems (Hafeez et al., 2024), future research ought to identify the specific roles that can be attributed to each parent. Finally, no formal clinical evaluation of social anxiety disorder was done in the study; future research should use structured clinical interviews to determine if the results have clinical relevance and significance.

Conclusion

This investigation examined the connection between parenting approaches and anxiety symptoms in social settings among 300 undergraduate students in Pakistan. The results showed that controlling parenting was the strongest predictor of social anxiety symptoms while demanding parenting was significantly negatively associated with social anxiety symptoms. There was no statistically significant relationship between indulgent parenting and social anxiety. In addition, females had significantly higher social anxiety scores than males. The study highlights the significance of parental behavior in the formation of social anxiety and the need for culturally responsive therapeutic interventions and support systems for vulnerable population groups within the framework of parent control of parenting behaviors. The empirical results support the inclusion of these in the structure of intervention for mental health support services and parental assistance programs in the university settings to reduce the escalating social anxiety concerns of the university population in Pakistan.

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