

## **PERCEIVED FATHER ACCEPTANCE-REJECTION IN CHILDHOOD AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT IN ADULTHOOD**

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### **Abstract**

*The present research aimed to determine the differences in psychological adjustment of adults who perceived their fathers as giving acceptance and rejection during their childhood. After a literature review, it was hypothesized that, "Psychological maladjustment mean score would be more for adults who perceived their fathers as rejecting in childhood than those adults who perceived their father as accepting in childhood". To test this hypothesis the sample of 206 subjects (103 males and 103 females) was selected from different universities of Karachi, Pakistan. To measure the level of perceived father's acceptance-rejection during childhood, Urdu version of Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire/Control: Father-Short Form was administered while their psychological adjustment was measured through Urdu version of the Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire. For statistical analysis of collected data a t-test was applied. Results point out that the hypothesis is statistically proved, indicating that those adults who perceived their fathers as providing rejection in their childhood, their psychological adjustment was poorer than those who were given acceptance.*

**Key Words:** Perceived, Father, Acceptance, Rejection, Childhood, Psychological Adjustment, Adulthood.

### **1. Introduction**

Parents may be warm and loving or hostile and rejecting. Each pattern of parental behavior effects the personality development of children. According to interpersonal theory given by Sullivan (1953) the self system that is a person's perception of self, is a significant component of personality, which develops through interaction with significant figures in the environment. In later life people respond according to this self system, whether people see the self as good or bad depends on their past perceptions.

Rohner gave his famous Parental acceptance-rejection theory, widely known as a theory of socialization which attempts to explain and predict the antecedents, correlations and consequences of parental acceptance and rejection throughout the glob. It focuses on four major issues, one of them is the behavioral, cognitive and emotional development of children and adult personality functioning. Every person has experienced the warmth and affection provided by someone important to him/her, who is called the parent not necessarily, mother and father. This warmth and affection is a range from a great deal to none, where one end is named parental acceptance while the other one is termed rejection (Rohner, 2000a). According to the findings of a study conducted over worldwide love sample and American sample, parental hostility was significantly related to certain personality dispositions including hostility, negative self esteem and self adequacy, emotional instability, negative world view and dependency (Rohner, 1975).

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Poor psychological adjustment was observed among children who perceived their parents as rejecting because physical punishment and corporal punishment resulted in psychological maladjustment (Rohner, Bourque, & Elordi, 1996). Similarly Veneziano and Rohner (1998) found that perceived paternal acceptance was significantly associated with the psychological adjustment of black and white children. The role of parental acceptance-rejection have been evidenced in different psychological problems including social and emotional development, these psychological problems range from infantile autism to chronic illnesses like schizophrenia (Rohner, 2000b).

Current attachment security in romantic relationships was observed to be related with depressive symptoms as an impact of early recollection of childhood rejection. Path analysis support that all three variables perceived parental rejection, physical abuse and insecure adult attachment were related to depressive symptoms. Adult insecurity was working as a mediational factor to link between perceived maternal rejection and depressive symptoms. On the other hand paternal rejection was significantly related to depressive symptoms (Oliver & Whiffen, 2003).

The father's lack of emotional support and acceptance in childhood appears to be related with emotional and behavioral problems and maladjustment in adult's life. Rohner (1998) reported that six types of studies showed that father's love explain as much or more in children's and adult's outcomes as mother's love. Father's love is specifically associated with specific aspects of offspring's development and adjustment. Both father and mother's involvements were related to offspring's happiness but father's involvement proved to be a significant contributor to the well being of adolescents. Additionally father's involvement has no discriminatory impacts on sons and daughters (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Veneziano (2000) also found that perceived paternal acceptance was significantly associated with self reported psychological adjustment of European American youths wherein African American families both perceived paternal and maternal acceptance was related to their self reported psychological adjustment. Mark (2006) found that high level of a child's well-being was related to higher levels of father-child relationships quality and paternal warmth. Kuterovac-Jagodic, and Kerestes, (1997) found that total aggression score of young adults was predicted by their father's undifferentiated rejection, whereas their extroversion was associated with father's warmth and affection and their verbal aggression was related with father's hostility and aggression. Difference in aggression and perceived parental rearing factors were observed between delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents. Aggression in both groups was related to rejecting rearing practices (Ruchkin, Eisemann, & Hagglof, 1998).

Correlational analysis, cross-sectional and longitudinal equation models indicated a significant association between fathers's and mother's aggression and child aggression as an indication of family socialization that is an interactive process (Carrasco, Holgado, Rodríguez, & Barrio, 2009). Adolescents who reported themselves as avoidantly or ambivalently attached to their parents exhibited high level of anger and hostility as compared to adolescents who perceived them as securely attached to their parents. Their perception of low emotional warmth and high level of rejection, control and inconsistency was related to high level of anger and hostility (Muris, Meesters, Morren, & Moorman, 2004).

It was concluded from the work of Erkman and Rohner (2006), that relationship between parental punishment and youth's psychological adjustment was mediated by their own perception of maternal and paternal acceptance regardless of youth's gender and age.

In Pakistani culture research conducted by Imam and Shaik (2005) to determine the effect of the presence and absence of father's love on personality development of the male and female child, indicates that the difference on personality assessment questionnaire was insignificant for girls but was significant for boys; it hints that those male children who experienced father's love have good psychological adjustment as compared to those male children who did not experience father's love. Furthermore there was a significant relationship between perceived parental acceptance-rejection and psychological adjustment of both genders. Munaf and Farhat (2004) found that adult's whose fathers were substance addict, have high level symptoms of depression and psychasthenia as compared to adults of non-addict fathers. In another study father's over protection was positively related with the high level of anxiety. Additionally high parental rejection group has high level of anxiety as compared to low parental rejection group (Shafi & Bhutto, 2006). Munaf and Sardar (2010) found that childhood parental rejection has significant positive correlation with depressive state in adulthood and parental emotional warmth during childhood has significant negative correlation with depressive symptoms in adulthood.

The above mentioned empirical studies showed that the perceived paternal acceptance-rejection plays a critical role in the development of personality, specifically that rejection in childhood leads to psychological maladjustment in adulthood. The major objective of this research was to find out the difference in psychological adjustment between those who perceived their father as accepting and those who perceived their father as rejecting during childhood in university students of city of Karachi, Pakistan. Although some researchers have been carried out in Pakistan on the concept of father's acceptance and rejection, there is still a need for more extensive work. The results of the present research would be beneficial for parents as it would provide knowledge to them about the importance of paternal attitude in childhood in the personality development of their children. Additionally it will be useful for mental health professionals to consider the importance of parenting while dealing with their clients.

On the basis of the above literature review the following hypothesis was formulated:

“Psychological maladjustment mean score would be more for adults who perceived their fathers as rejecting in childhood than those adults who perceived their father as accepting in childhood”.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Participants**

Participants included 206 adult students (103 males & 103 females) of different universities of Karachi, Pakistan. They were selected on the basis of convenient sampling technique. Their age range was between 18-38 years with mean age = 22.07, and SD=2.71. They were from Bachelor and Master Programs of faculties of science, arts, administrative, Islamic studies, education, commerce and computer science. Participants belonged to all three i.e. upper, middle and lower socio- economic classes.

### **2.2. Materials**

#### **2.2.1. Introduction to Participant and Informed Consent Form:**

It gave an introduction to the participants about the purpose of the research. They were also informed that all individual data would be kept confidential and collective data would be utilized for research purpose. Further they were also informed that they reserved the right to withdraw from the research at any time during administration of Questionnaires. Those participants who gave their verbal and written consent were requested to sign the consent form. Further they were also informed that they reserved the right to withdraw from the research at any time during administration of Questionnaires.

#### **2.2.2. Demographic Information Form:**

It gathered information related to the personal life of the participants for example, age, gender, academic qualification, number of siblings, birth order, family system etc.

#### **2.2.3. Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire/Control: Father-Short Form (Adult PARQ/Control: Father -Short Form, Rohner, 2005, Urdu translation by Munaf, Kamrani & Hussain 2009):**

It measures the adult's perception of father's acceptance-rejection in their childhood. This 29 items self reported questionnaire measures five dimensions of paternal behavior that are coldness/lack of affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, undifferentiated/rejection and control, that can be rated on four-point likert scale ranges from almost always true (4), sometimes true (3), rarely true (2) and almost never true (1). Its cumulative score indicates perceived father acceptance-rejection; score at or below the midpoint of test scores means acceptance while high score is indicative of rejection. According to Khaleque and Rohner (2002) it is an empirically validated instrument used by researcher and in clinical settings as reliable measures. In Pakistan Munaf et al reported .92 reliability coefficient of Urdu version.

#### **2.2.4. Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire (Adult PAQ, Rohner, 2005, Urdu translation by Munaf, Hussain & Kamrani, 2009):**

It measures psychological adjustment of adults through self reported questionnaire, which consists of 63 items grouped into seven subscales namely hostility/aggression, dependency, negative self esteem, negative self adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability and negative world view. It provides rating on four points rating scale ranges from almost always true (4), sometimes true (3), rarely true (2) and almost never true (1). Its collective score shows psychological mal/adjustment; scores at or above the test midpoint on the questionnaire indicate more overall maladjustment than adjustment. Test scores spread from a low of 63, reveals excellent psychological adjustment and high score of 252 is indicative of serious psychological maladjustment.

Reliability coefficients (alphas) of Adult PAQ ranged from .73 to .85 with a median reliability of .81. About the validity of PAQ excluding Emotional Unresponsiveness scale due to absence of validation scale, all other Adult PAQ scales significantly related ( $p < .001$ ) to their validation scales (Rohner & Khaleque 2005). In Pakistan Munaf et al found .96 reliability coefficient of Urdu version.

### 2.3. Procedure

After taking written and verbal consent of the participants, they were requested to fill demographic information form. Then their childhood perception of father's acceptance-rejection between the ages of 07-12 years was measured through Urdu version of Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire/Control: Father (Short Form) and their present psychological adjustment were assessed through Urdu version of Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire. After scoring participants were divided into two groups. Those scored high on PARQ i.e. between 50-120 were considered as Rejected group (those perceiving their fathers as rejecting them in childhood) and those who scored low on PARQ i.e. between 29-49 were considered as Accepted group (those perceiving their fathers as accepting them in childhood). Mean Maladjustment score of both the groups was compared through Independent t-test by using SPSS for Statistical Analysis.

### 3. Results

On the variable of interest as postulated in hypothesis, there is significant differences in psychological maladjustment between accepted and rejected group.

#### 3.1. Table 1

*Mean difference of Maladjustment of adults who perceived to be rejected and accepted by their fathers during their childhood*

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Rejected group	35	150	23.65	204	4.80	p<.000
Accepted group	171	132.20	19.13			

*Note.* Table shows that the mean score of rejected group is significantly higher as compared to accepted group on the measure of psychological maladjustment.

Table 1, indicates that those adults' who perceived high level of rejection from their father during childhood then their current level of psychological maladjustment is higher than those who perceived to be accepted by their father during their childhood.

Further analysis as shown in table 2 , revealed that adults who perceived to be rejected by their father during their childhood tend to have higher level of hostility/aggression, negative self esteem, negative self evaluation, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability and negative world views as compared to adults who perceived to be accepted by their father's during childhood.

**3.3. Table 2**

*Mean differences on sub-variables of psychological maladjustment of adults who perceived to be rejected and accepted by their fathers during their childhood*

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
1. Hostility/Aggression	Rejected group	35	21.12	4.91	204	2.39	p<.018
	Accepted group	171	18.52	6.03			
2. Dependency	Rejected Group	35	24.00	6.26	204	-.047	p>.05
	Accepted Group	171	24.04	5.14			
3. Negative Self Esteem	Rejected Group	35	21.08	5.03	204	4.62	p<.000
	Accepted Group	171	17.21	4.39			
4. Negative Self Adequacy	Rejected Group	35	20.26	5.00	204	5.74	p<.000
	Accepted Group	171	16.10	3.64			
5. Emotional Unresponsiveness	Rejected Group	35	20.71	4.09	204	3.52	p<.001
	Accepted Group	171	18.32	3.57			
6. Emotional Instability	Rejected Group	35	23.08	3.32	204	1.96	p<.05
	Accepted Group	171	21.45	4.57			
7. Negative World View	Rejected Group	35	19.74	5.39	204	3.21	p<.002
	Accepted Group	171	16.48	5.52			

*Note:* Table shows that the mean scores of rejected group on all sub-variables of psychological maladjustment except on the domain of dependency i.e. hostility/aggression, negative self esteem, negative self adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability and negative world view is higher than accepted group.

**4. Discussion**

This study attempts to explore the differences in adult's psychological adjustment between those who perceived their father as rejecting and those who perceived their father as accepting during their childhood. Our hypothesis that "Psychological maladjustment mean score would be more for adults who perceived their fathers as rejecting in childhood than those adults who perceived their father as accepting in childhood" was statistically proved (df = 204, t = 4.80, p<.000). Our findings are similar to findings of other researchers indicating early involvement of father and child's closeness to father is related to less emotional and behavioral problems during adolescence. Flouri and Buchanan (2002) found that in late adulthood their marital adjustment was indicative of good relationships with their parents and siblings during their adolescence. The results of retrospective study carried out by Conte, Plutchik, Picard, Buck, and Karasu (1996) shows that perceived parental behavior of adult psychiatric outpatients during childhood was related to their current level of self esteem. According to Campana, Henderson, Stolberg, and Schum (2008) children of at least one parent rated as authoritatively were healthier and this parenting style lessens the harmful effects of permissive and absent-disengaged parents. In contrast children of at least one parent rated as absent-disengaged and exhibited adjustment problems.

Now we would like to focus our discussion upon sub-variable of psychological maladjustment. As shown in table 2, participants of rejected group scored higher on hostility/aggression sub-scale of questionnaire than accepted group. The findings are consistent with research results reported by Nicholas and Bieber (1996).

According to their study young adults self report of emotionally abusing parenting was significantly related to their higher level of hostility and aggression for both men and women regardless of their gender and Lower support by father was significantly related to hostility. Self esteem is also significantly influenced by perceived paternal behavior. In our research study the rejected group's negative self esteem was higher than accepted group. likewise nurturing behavior of mothers and fathers was strongly related to the self esteem of junior high school students and it remained a robust predictor of self esteem during later years (Buri, Murphy, Richtsmeier & Komar, 1992).

A significant difference was also found in negative self adequacy between rejected and accepted group where the rejected group has higher level of negative self adequacy as compared to accepted group. Young and Parish (1977) also reported parallel findings that a significant difference in the feelings of insecurity and negative self evaluation exists between those college girls who had lost their fathers but their mothers did not remarry and those who had not lost their father or they had lost their father but their mothers had remarried. Coming to the variable of emotional unresponsiveness our rejected group scored higher than accepted group. Adults' emotional inhibition such as thought suppression avoidance from stress responses and ambivalence in emotional expression was best explained in relation to the history of childhood emotional invalidation that is parental punishment, psychological abuse and distress feelings to negative emotions. As a result the emotional inhibition was significantly related to psychological distress and other problems such as depression and anxiety (Krause, Mendelson & Lynch, 2003).

Concerning emotional instability, a wide pool of studies has demonstrated the long term impact of child maltreatment such as terrorizing, degrading, neglecting and isolation. Pervasive psychological disorders such as borderline personality disorder is characterized by emotional instability, one of the hallmark symptoms tends to have its roots in childhood experiences Research findings of Allen (2008) revealed that ignoring predicted depression and borderline personality features and degrading predicted features of borderline personality disorder only. In the same way in our study the rejected group has higher level of emotional instability and negative world view when compared to the accepted group. However on the sub-domain of dependency no differences were observed between both the groups. It may be a characteristic of our collectivistic society where family members are highly dependent on one another psychologically as well as physically.

Mackey (1998) drew our attention to the reality that for any growing child there are three basic necessities to develop, namely safety, adequate provision of food, shelter and clothes and psycho emotional development. The observance of father for his child enhances all these three conditions or otherwise lessens the availability of them. On the basis of our findings and other related evidences it can be concluded that perceived father's acceptance-rejection during childhood has an important impact upon psychological adjustment during adulthood. It may contribute in the development of major psychological problems too. Therefore care needs to be taken by parents to foster psychologically well adjusted offspring by providing them adequate acceptance and minimizing rejection through empathy, warmth, guidance, support and becoming good listener during their childhood period.

#### **4.1. Conclusion**

The present study measured perceived fathers acceptance-rejection and its impact upon psychological adjustment of university students. It is obvious from the results that those adults who perceived their fathers as giving acceptance in childhood were found to be more adjusted as compared to those adults who perceived their fathers as giving rejection in childhood. This indicates the importance of stage of childhood in later personality development and development of psychopathology.

#### **4.2. Clinical Implications**

Clinical psychologists may focus upon negative early childhood experiences of their patients as a causative factor of their current maladaptive behavior. Hence by knowing the proper etiology it is possible to apply interventions and interpretations of their behavior more appropriately, which can be beneficial for smooth functioning of their clients. It can also be beneficial for parents as through parental counseling they can become aware of the negative consequences of their negative behavior toward their children. This may help them to handle their children in much healthier way.

### 4.3. Limitation of the study and recommendations

Research was carried out only on university student and major segment of society was ignored, such as non student population, working man and women, jobless people, housewives, in /out patient of psychological clinics and mental hospital respectively. Therefore it is suggested to be cautious while generalizing the result upon other segments of population. It is further recommended to replicate the study with residence of different cities. This would help to generalize the results with high degree of reliability.

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