

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL REJECTION
AND SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG YOUTH**

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study was to explore the relationship of parental rejection with suicidal ideation among youth. Additionally, it examined gender differences in parental rejection and suicidal ideation among young adults—the sample comprised of 1229 university students aged 19-26 years. Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002) and Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (Beck et al., 1979) were used. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient reveal parental rejection from father and mother to have a significant positive correlation with suicidal ideation. The Multiple Regression Analysis reveals that parental rejection is a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among youth. The t-test reveals significant gender differences in the variable of suicidal ideation; however, insignificant differences in parental rejection are observed. This study provides empirical support for parental rejection as a risk factor for suicidal ideation and male gender as being more prone to suicidal ideation. The study has significant implications for psychologists, educators, and those involved in Pakistan's healthcare system.

Keywords: Suicidal Ideation, Gender, Parental Rejection, Youth

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INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a complicated, grave global public health concern that is generally thought to be preventable (Brodowicz, 2024). Suicide has also emerged as a serious problem in Pakistani society, yet no one knows the exact number of suicide cases, as they are not recorded. However, the evidence that is currently available indicates that suicide and self-harm cases have worsened in recent years (Khan, 2024). Suicidal ideation is the phenomenon that occurs when a person considers taking their own life, even if there isn't a clear suicide plan in their mind. Nevertheless, the idea of eliminating his/her life is strong (Harmer et al., 2024). Suicidal ideation is defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition, text revision (DSM-5-TR) as thoughts of self-harm, including deliberate contemplation or planning of different ways to end one's own life (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Suicidal ideation involves contemplating or planning suicide. While suicidal thoughts and actions are often considered together, they actually exist on a continuum ranging from passive thoughts to active planning and, ultimately, suicidal behavior (Klonsky & May, 2015). A useful analogy is an iceberg, where suicidal ideation represents the larger, hidden portion beneath the surface, while suicide itself is the apparent tip. This highlights the importance of early detection and intervention to prevent suicidal thoughts from escalating into action (Harmer et al., 2024).

Multiple theorists have elaborated on the construct of suicide. For example, the Interpersonal Psychological Theory of Suicide (IPTS) states that repeated exposure to physically uncomfortable and/or frightening circumstances may cause opponent processes and learnt conduct to take hold and eventually give rise to the ability for suicidal behaviour. "Perceived burdensomeness" (to others) and "thwarted belongingness" (from others) are the two psychological states that give rise to the wish to die (Joiner 2005). The IPTS is unable to accurately anticipate the steps that suicidal individuals take to get from desiring to die to trying to commit suicide and/or dying in that way (Robison, 2024). Literature supports the notion that social support or acceptance from near ones, such as parents, serves as a barrier to suicidal ideation. If support is absent or turns into some rejection or dismissal, the consequences may occur in the form of suicidal ideation or an extreme situation of suicide (Nugraheni & Febriyana, 2024; Rashid et al., 2018).

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Parental Acceptance-Rejection (PAR) Theory characterises and predicts the primary causes and outcomes of parental acceptance and rejection at national and global levels (Rohner, 2001). Parental acceptance refers to the emotions and behaviours parents exhibit toward their children, including love, affection, support, and nurturing. Parental rejection refers to the unavailability of or cessation of love/warmth/or affection of parents with their offspring. According to PAR Theory, parental rejection continuously negatively affects the psychological adjustment and behavioural functioning of adults and children worldwide (Rohner, 2001). A meta-analysis by Yang et. al. (2021) concluded that youths scored high on suicidal ideation while experiencing the worst quality of attachment with their parents. Existing evidence suggests that parental rejection is a risk factor linked to suicidal ideation in youth (Singh et. al., 2024; Sobrinho et al., 2016). Parental acceptance or affection is believed to be a protective factor against suicidal ideation among youth (Rashid et al., 2018; Reyes et al., 2015).

In a nutshell, the number of suicide cases in Pakistan has significantly increased. According to data from the country, about 24% of people live below the national poverty level, and 38.8% are impoverished on a multidimensional basis. This can result in several distressing and dismal circumstances, including family conflicts and premature death. Due to the lack of necessary registers for suicidal deaths, Pakistan's suicide death toll is imprecise (Asif et al., 2024). Therefore, to ensure that the tragedy of suicide does not continue to claim lives and impact millions of individuals via the death of loved ones or suicide attempts, a thorough and coordinated approach to suicide prevention is essential. Educators, policymakers and clinicians must work together to develop suitable solutions due to the diverse and multifaceted social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to suicide in Pakistan. The review of the above-stated existing studies provides evidence for parental rejection as one of the risk factors for suicidal ideation; however, so far, no prior study with university students who had experienced suicidal ideation in relation to parental rejection has been done in the Pakistani cultural context, particularly in Punjab province. To fill in the gap, grounded on Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory, the objective of the present study was to investigate the relationship of parental rejection with suicidal ideation among young adults. Additionally, it examined the gender differences in the variables of parental rejection from father and mother and suicidal ideation among young adults.

METHOD

Participants

For this correlational study, purposive sampling was used to select participants from multiple universities within the Punjab province of Pakistan. The sample comprised 1229 students aged 19-26 years, of whom 713 were female, and 588 were male. All the students were day scholars studying in graduate and post-graduate programs.

Measures

Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire

The Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) – Short version was developed by Khaleque and Rohner (2002) to assess participants' recall of early experiences with parental acceptance or rejection. It has two separate forms, one for the father and the other for the mother. In both forms, the questions are the same; however, one concerns experiences of mother acceptance and rejection, whereas the other concerns experiences of father acceptance and rejection. In each form, there are twenty-four items divided into four subscales: undifferentiated rejection, hostility/aggression, warmth/affection, and neglect/indifference. Every item is assessed as "*almost always true*" (4 points), "*sometimes true*" (3 points), "*rarely true*" (2 points), and "*almost never true*" (1 point) on a 4-point Likert-type scale. On each continuum, higher values indicate children's greater perceived rejection from parents. The internal consistency coefficients for the original scale's subscales exceeded .81, and confirmatory factor analysis supported the 4-factor structure.

Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation

The 19-item Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (BSSI) (Beck et al., 1979) was employed to assess the degree to which the participants' particular attitudes, behaviours, and suicidal thoughts are present at the moment. The response format was anchored on a 3-point scale from 0 to 2. Only participants who express a wish to make an aggressive (item no. 4) or passive (item no. 5) suicide attempt are scored on items no. 6-19. The first five items are used to screen for attitudes towards life and dying. Authors reported the inter-judge reliability of BSSI as .83 and its internal consistency (Cronbach's coefficient alpha) as .89 (Ayub, 2008).

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Procedure

Before administering the scales, the researcher contacted institutional authorities and, after obtaining formal permission, approached students and provided them with clear information about the study's aims and objectives. In accordance with the Helsinki Declaration, oral and written informed consent were obtained for volunteer participation in the study. Participants who agreed to participate were provided with instructions and encouraged to ask any questions. Followed by, the questionnaires were handed to participants, and they were instructed to read the instructions for completing them carefully. The average duration for completion of questionnaires was 25-30 minutes. Participants were informed that there was no risk associated with their participation in the study and that their identities would be kept confidential during the publication of the research results. After administering the research questionnaires, gratitude was expressed to participants for their cooperation and for taking the time to participate in the current study.

Statistical Analysis

The data was analysed through SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the demographic characteristics. The intercorrelation among the study variables was computed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The assumptions of the present study were tested using Multiple regression analysis and an independent t-test.

RESULTS

Table 1
Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (N = 1229)

Variables	No. of Items	α	1	2	3
1. PAR-F	24	.79	1.00		
2. PAR-M	24	.78	.62*	1.00	
3 SI	19	.96	.18*	.19*	1.00

Note. PAR-F = Parental Acceptance Rejection-Father; PAR-M = Parental Acceptance Rejection-Mother; SI = Suicidal Ideation. * $p < .05$

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Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=1229)

Variables	f	%
Gender		
Male	559	45.5
Female	670	54.5
Family system		
Joint	528	43
Nuclear	701	57
Age		
17-22year	699	56.9
23-30year	530	44.3
Overall Sample	1229	100

Table 3
Multiple Regression Analysis for Parental Rejection as Predictor of Suicidal Ideation (N = 1229)

Predictors	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
PAR-F	.17	.06	.11*	2.95	.00
PAR-M	.22	.05	.13*	3.69	.00
$R^2 = .05$					
$\Delta R^2 = .05$					
$F = 31.63***$					

Note. PAR-F = Parental Acceptance Rejection-Father; PAR-M = Parental Acceptance Rejection-Mother; SI = Suicidal Ideation.

* $p < .05$

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Table 4
Gender Differences on Parental Rejection and Suicidal Ideation (N = 1229)

Variables	Female (n=713)		Male (n=588)		<i>t</i> (1298)	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
PAR-F	53.93	9.60	54.05	10.62	-.207	.84	-1.21	.99	.01
PAR-M	53.44	9.58	53.74	11.08	-.513	.61	-1.41	.83	.02
SI	27.68	16.38	30.84	15.84	-3.41	.00	-4.97	-1.34	.19

Note. PAR-F = Parental Acceptance Rejection-Father; PAR-MF = Parental Acceptance Rejection-Mother; SI = Suicidal Ideation.

DISCUSSION

The present study intended to examine the relationship of parental rejection with suicidal ideation among youth. Additionally, it examined gender differences in parental rejection (from both father and mother) and suicidal ideation among youth. The results reveal a significant association between parental rejection from father and mother and suicidal ideation (Table 1). The results were consistent with the existing literature: Sajid and Shah (2021) conducted a study in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and concluded that teenagers who perceived rejection from their parents might be psychologically maladjusted, characterised by emotional instability and hostility/aggression. This could further lead them towards suicidal ideation if these feelings remain unresolved. Another study conducted by Ghazal et al. (2020) in northern Pakistan concluded that poor parenting practices, including minimal nurturing, guidance, and limited attention from parents and neglecting children, leave children with no choice but suicide.

Further, results reveal that parental rejection explained 5% variance in suicidal ideation. Overall, the model was significant. Both parental rejection from father and mother were significant predictors of suicidal ideation (Table 3). These findings are consistent with the findings from the previous studies that have established a direct negative relationship between family functioning and suicidal thoughts. For instance, a study reveals that youth whose parents rejected them showed inclination towards suicidal behaviours (Jiang et al., 2024). Several other studies have unveiled parental rejection factors to be positively linked with suicidal

thinking and acts among adolescents (Cruz et al., 2013; Yadegarfard et al., 2014). According to Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory, every person has a universal need to feel warmth and acceptance from their parents or other significant figures. The perception of parents as rejecting can lead to emotional instability in children. It has been seen that poor regulation of emotions is associated almost directly with the presence of thought and behaviour with suicidal intent, as rejected children internalize negative messages and develop maladaptive coping mechanisms like self-criticism and isolation, which greatly increase vulnerability to depression and eventually suicidal thoughts as they grow (Baker, 2005; Campos et al., 2013).

Concerning gender differences, the results reveal significant differences between male and female youth on the variable of suicidal ideation. In contrast, no significant gender differences in parental rejection from fathers and mothers were observed (Table 4). The present study found contrary results, as males were high on suicidal ideation in comparison to females. Perhaps the reason is a patriarchal society, which poses more pressure on males than on females. The empirical studies, though, showed significant gender differences in suicidal ideation, yet their findings showed females to be high on suicidal ideation. As Qin et al. (2003) highlighted, female young adults had higher suicidal ideation than male young adults. Park et al. (2021) explored that family maltreatment based on gender might provoke females to a negative perception of their parents' warmth, contrary to their desire. These perceptions of discrimination may further lead to suicidal ideation (Qin et al., 2003). Gender inequality was associated with a higher level of depression among females, which made them vulnerable towards suicidal ideation (Ibrahim et al., 2017).

In conclusion, the present study signifies parental rejection as a significant risk factor for suicidal ideation among Pakistani youth. Further, it also highlights that males had a higher ratio of suicidal ideation as compared to females. The study has certain limitations which must be considered when interpreting these findings. Only university students were included in the study sample; those without formal education were excluded. Future research should focus on young people in the same age range as those in the current study who lack formal education. In addition, both community and clinical samples should be used in future research to provide broader representation of the population.

Despite the limitation, the study offers significant implications. This study aimed to close the gaps in the literature on suicidal ideation. It provides empirical support for the needful connection between mental health service access for youth

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struggling with suicidal ideation and improper parenting. Additionally, these results would benefit mental health professionals, family psychologists, educators, and community policymakers involved in ensuring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan.

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