

Parental Rejection and Psychological Adjustment among Adolescents: Does the Peer Rejection Mediate?

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The study examined the mediating role of peer rejection in direct relationship of parental rejection and psychological adjustment among adolescents. Researchers used self-report measures e.g., Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ), Children Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (CRSQ), and Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) to assess perception of parent-peer rejection, psychological adjustment among adolescents (14-18 years). Findings revealed that peer rejection did not mediate the parental rejection and psychological adjustment whereas parental rejection emerged as strong predictor when demographic variables were statistically controlled. On average, girls were psychologically less adjusted than that of boys. Despite of equal perception of peer rejection, girls more anxiously anticipated peer rejection than did the boys. It is suggested that peer influence on adolescents, specifically girls, should not be underestimated.

Keywords: Peer relationships, parental perception, Psychological adjustment.

The transition from childhood to adolescence accompanies several physical, emotional, social, and psychological changes. Early adolescents shift their sphere of interaction from parents to peers and mostly their behaviours are determined through peer interaction or influence. Peer pressure becomes an impetus in determining adolescent's positive or negative activities and peer group demands unquestioned conformity to peer group thinking, no matter, whether right or wrong. Peer group may compel adolescents to show acceptance of group activities if they wish to stay in the group or to be accepted by the peers (Larkin, 1979).

Peer groups thus, either vicariously or directly facilitate the adolescent transition into the larger social environmental world (Brown, Pokhrel, Ashmore, & Sussman, 1986). Peer rejection has been recognized as a serious threat to socio-emotional development of children and adolescents and it has been found to be associated with several psychological disorders namely conduct disorders, anxiety disorder, schizoid personality disorder, and attention deficit disorder (APA, 2013). Studies demonstrate that poor peer relationship was significantly associated to delinquent behaviour,

learning problems, and mental health problems (Bierman, 1989). Adolescents' relationship with peer has appeared as strongest predictor of psychological adjustment, academic achievement, and interpersonal conflicts. Further, peer rejection leads towards negative developmental outcomes (Ladd, 2005). Some developmental trends continue to transfer from childhood to adolescents. Adolescents begin to be influenced by peer more than that of parents (Ferguson, Muñoz, Garza, & Galindo, 2014; Tillfors, Persson, Willén, & Burk, 2012; Chaplin, & John, 2010). Researchers have elucidated the role of parents in psychological adjustment of adolescents. Specifically, mother's negative emotional responses contribute in developing sensitivity to negative emotional responses which, in turn, deteriorate the perception of positive emotion and reduce the capability of expecting positive emotional responsiveness in societal interactions (Sheeber, Hops, & Davis, 2001; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). A study conducted on children demonstrates that maternal warmth and acceptance acts as protective shield against peer rejection. Children experiencing peer rejection whose mothers show warmth and

acceptance have fewer behavioural problems compared to those peer rejected children whose mothers show cold behaviour and rejection (Patterson, Cohn, & Kao, 1989). On the contrary, peer acceptance is likely to buffer against parental rejection (Cotterell, 1992). Studies largely emphasize the protective role of parental acceptance in relationship of peer rejection and negative emotional outcomes like aggression and delinquent behaviour (Steele, Steele, & Johansson, 2002; Liu, 2006).

Putting together, a study reflects that parents and peers significantly contribute in psychological development of male and female adolescents. This study reports that school, home, and family significantly contribute to psychological states of adolescents (Dwairy, 2011). Parental role has been rigorously investigated as Rigby (2007) reports two styles of parenting, warm and cold parenting. Adolescents experiencing warm parental relationship are more likely to enjoy security and confidence in relationship while those treated with cold parenting style are more likely to be victimized. Smokowski and Kopasz, (2005) reports that victimized adolescents later become bullies. Researchers further argue that warm parental relationship reinforces the children to monitor the interpersonal and social relationship (Knafo, Zahn-Waxler, Van Hulle, Robinson, & Rhee, 2008).

Bowlby (1988) asserts that early parent-child attachment helps the children to develop internal working model of positive affective interaction which further guide them to establish and maintain peer relationships in adolescence. Despite of extended relationship with peers, parents remain an important source of support and emotional stability in adolescence. Researchers revealed that although both parents and peer relationships significantly predict but secure parental attachment more likely to account for adolescents' life satisfaction (Nickerson & Nagle, 2004). Specifically children remain more strongly attached to their mother than their fathers (Haigler, Day, & Marshall, 1995; Freeman & Brown, 2001). Another study supported that adolescents are more securely attached to their mothers than fathers (Ma, & Huebner, 2008). Undoubtedly, parents continue to be an important source of security

and aspiration in adolescents' life satisfaction even when they begin to shift their interest and activities towards peer relationship (Lieberman et al., 1999) but peer influence in adolescents' life cannot be underestimated. Researchers highlighted the mediating role of peer attachment in relationship of parental attachment and quality of peer experiences (Cassidy, Kirsch, Scolton, & Parke, 1996). Only few studies have attempted to investigate mediating role of peer attachment including Ma and Huebner (2008). They reported that peer attachment partially mediated the relationship between parental attachment and life satisfaction for females but not for the males. On the similar lines, researchers found that poor parenting practice significantly correlates with adolescents' drug abuse through the mediating role of peer pressure (Kung & Farrell, 2000).

Research literature on parent and peer attachments reveals differential gender role in perception about parental or peer attachment. Girls are more likely to be attached with parents and peers than boys (Hay & Ashman, 2003). Depending on different relationship patterns, girls attach value to relatedness and connectedness in their relationship and boys give more importance to independence (Cross & Madson, 1997; DeGoede, Branje, Delsing, & Meeus, 2009).

Although plenty of research has been conducted in identifying predictive value of parental and peer attachment for psychological adjustment and life satisfaction of adolescents, yet no systematic effort has been made to investigate mediating role of peer rejection in relationship of parental rejection and psychological adjustment among adolescents. Previous mediation researches (Cassidy, Kirsch, Scolton, & Parke, 1996; Ma & Huebner, 2008) provide mild support to mediational role of peer acceptance that may not be generalized in collectivistic culture like Pakistan where children remain emotionally attached with their parents over the life span and they keep on looking back to parents in the time of emotional calamity. Despite of strong parent-child emotional bond, role of extended relationships like peer relationships cannot be ignored.

Based on existing literature, the present study aimed to explore mediating role of peer

rejection between the relationship of parental rejection and psychological adjustment among adolescents when different demographic variables are statistically controlled. Additionally, gender differences in perception of parental and peer rejection were also focused.

It was anticipated that peer rejection would mediate the relationship between parental rejection and psychological adjustment when demographic variables (child age, child gender, child grade, father education, mother education, family income) are statistically controlled. Furthermore, girls would likely to perceive parents and peer more rejecting than boys.

Method

Participants:

The sample comprised 14-18 years ($M = 16.4$, $SD = 1.24$) old adolescents ($N = 300$) were drawn from public and private schools and colleges of Lahore and Sargodha. Students from 8th to 12th grade participated in the study. Twenty eight percent mothers were illiterate as compared to fifteen percent fathers whereas 8% fathers attained university level education compared to 4% mothers. On average, participants belonged to lower middle (36%) and middle (35 %) socioeconomic classes.

Measures:

Child Parent Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Mother & Father Urdu version): Mother and father versions of Child PARQ are same in every respect. Both versions contain 60 items and four subscales named as warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect and undifferentiated rejection. Respondents complete the Child PARQ (mother version) on the bases of perception about mother's acceptance-rejection whereas Child PARQ (father version) is completed on the bases of perception about father's acceptance-rejection. Respondents rate both versions of Child PARQ on same four point likert type rating scale i.e., Almost always true (1), sometimes true (2), rarely true (3), almost never true (4). Sample items include "Said nice things about me" (Warmth/affection), "Ridiculed and made fun of me" (Hostility/ aggression), "Paid no attention to me as long as I did nothing to bother

her" (Indifferent/neglect), and "Saw me as a big nuisance" (Undifferentiated rejection).

Child PARQ (Mother/father) contains strong psychometric properties. Alpha reliability was computed for the current study that ranged from .64 (Undifferentiated rejection) to .88 (warmth/affection) for Child PARQ (Mother version) and from .70 (Undifferentiated rejection) to .90 (warmth/affection) for Child PARQ (Father version). The overall alpha reliability of Child PARQ_M and Child PARQ_F remained .92 and .94 respectively. A study conducted in Pakistan also reported unacceptable alpha reliability of control subscale of PARQ_F ($\alpha = .56$) and of PARQ_M ($\alpha = .58$) respectively (Malik & Rohner, 2012). Hence, control scales were excluded from Child PARQ (Mother and Father Version).

Child Personality Assessment Questionnaire (Child PAQ; Urdu version): Child PAQ is considered as valid and reliable self report measure for assessing psychological adjustment of 7-18 years old children and adolescents. It comprised 42 items covering seven personality domains namely Hostility/aggression, self-esteem, self-adequacy, dependency, emotional responsiveness, emotional stability, and worldview. For the current study, alpha reliability ($\alpha = .82$) was found satisfactory. Moreover, Rohner & Khaleque, (2008) reported alpha reliability coefficient ranging from .73 (Hostility/aggression) to .85 (Worldview).

Children Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (CRSQ): This measure contained 12 vignettes followed by three questions each. Six vignettes were measuring sensitivity related to teacher rejection and rest of the six vignettes specifically related to peer's rejection. This study exclusively focused on measuring intensity of peer rejection through six vignettes of CRSQ. Factor analysis culminated three subscales i.e. Angry expectations of rejection (AER), Angry reaction to ambiguously intentioned rejection (ARAIR), and Feeling disliked (FD). Respondents rated on six point likert type scale and higher score reflected higher level of rejection sensitivity and peer rejection (Downey, Lebolt, Rincon, & Freitas, 1998). This scale was translated into Urdu for current study using standardized back translation procedure and reliability coefficients ranged from .74-.85.

Procedure:

In order to follow strict adherence to ethical rules, formal written informed consent was sought from participants in which nature and purpose of research was clearly communicated. Informed consent further included potential benefits and risks, legal and moral rights of participants, assurance about confidentiality of data and privacy of information, and all necessary details regarding current study. To approach respondents, different private and public schools and colleges in Lahore and Sargodha were visited and formal permission was sought from authorities of respective institutions. A set of scales was administered on students. Uniform instructions regarding completion of scales were given and data were collected in group of 20-25 students. Students took 30-45 minutes in completion of scales and faced no problem in understanding language because all the scales including instructions were in Urdu. All the queries of respondents were satisfactorily answered. On the completion of data, principals of schools and colleges, teachers, students, and support staff were thanked for their cooperation.

Results

The obtained data were subjected to statistical analyses in order to get initial picture of the data, simple descriptive analyses were used e.g., mean and standard deviation.

Table 1 shows that on average, adolescents perceived their mothers and fathers as equally accepting and found to be psychologically adjusted. Additionally, scores on peer rejection measure reflect that adolescents perceived slightly higher peer rejection than average in comparison to other two domains of peer rejection. Means and standard deviation of control variables (child age, child gender, child grade, fathers' education, mothers' education, and socioeconomic status) were also computed.

Data were further categorized to investigate gender differences on psychological adjustment, maternal rejection, paternal rejection, and peer rejection. For this purpose, independent sample t-tests were conducted. The results demonstrate that girls perceived both mothers and fathers slightly more rejecting than did the boys but this difference was not

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics showing Sample Characteristics (N=300)

Variables	M (SD)	α	Cut-offs
PAQ	90.2(13.3)	.81	105
PARQ_M	99.4(22.2)	.92	130
PARQ_F	98.0(24.7)	.94	130
			Median
AER	18.5(6.6)	.70	18
ARAIR	17.2(6.8)	.70	17
FD	14.3(5.7)	.60	13
Control variables			
Child Age	16.46(1.24)		
Child Gender	1.5(.49)		
Child Grade	10.55(1.04)		
Father education	2.28(.82)		
Mother education	2.0(.82)		
SES	2.16(.75)		

Note. PA=Psychological adjustment; PARQ_M =parental acceptance rejection questionnaire (Mother form); PARQ_F =parental acceptance rejection questionnaire (Father form); AER= Angry expectation of rejection; ARAIR= Angry expectation of ambiguously intentioned rejection; FD=Feeling disliked

Note. Scores above the cut-offs reflect maternal and paternal rejection and psychological maladjustment and vice versa

enough to be claimed significant. Importantly, significant gender differences were found on psychological adjustment ($t(298) = -2.8, p < .01$) and two dimensions of peer rejection i.e., angry expectations of rejection ($t(298) = -4.92, p < .001$) and angry reactions to ambiguously intentioned rejection ($t(298) = -4.14, p < .01$). On average, girls were more psychologically maladjusted, had the higher level of angry expectations of peer rejection, and angry reactions to ambiguously intentioned peer rejection. No gender difference was found in overall peer rejection.

Baron and Kenny (1986) approach was used to test mediating role of peer rejection between the relationship of parental rejection and psychological adjustment among adolescents. Before calculating mediating effect of peer rejection, it was essential to test whether three criteria were met. These criteria include a)

whether predictor variables significantly correlate with outcome variable b) whether predictors significantly correlate with mediator c) whether mediator significantly correlate with outcome variable. To test these criteria, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression showing Predicting Value of Parental Rejection for PAQ (N=300)

Predictors	R2	ΔR2	β
Step 1 Control Variables	.04	.02	
Step 2 Parental variables	.30	.27	
Paternal rejection			.20*
Maternal rejection			.37*
Total R2	.34		

*p<.001.

To test the first criterion (whether predictor variables significantly correlate with outcome variable), psychological adjustment was regressed on maternal and paternal rejection. In the first step, demographic variables were included as control variables and in the second step, maternal and paternal rejection was included as predictors in the model. Because of significant contribution of child gender and father's education, control variables accounted for 2% of variance in addition to maternal and paternal rejection which accounted for 27% variance in the model. Maternal rejection

emerged as more significant predictor than paternal rejection

Second level of hierarchical regression analyses was conducted to test whether maternal and paternal rejection (predictors) significantly predicted three indices of peer rejection (mediator). For this purpose, control variables were included in the first step and predictors were included in the second step. Three separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to estimate predictive significance of maternal and paternal rejection for three indices of peer rejection. Only maternal rejection emerged as significant predictor of angry reaction to ambiguously intentioned rejection (ARAIR ;β = .16, p<.01). Second level hierarchical regression analyses reveal that second criterion of Baron and Kenny (1986) was not met except maternal prediction of ARAIR (one of the indices of peer rejection). Because of one significant outcome as shown in Table 3, third level hierarchical regression analysis was performed.

Table 4 demonstrates that control variables accounted for 2% variance whereas maternal and paternal rejection accounted for 27% variance in explaining psychological adjustment among adolescents. Indices of peer rejection were included in the third step but did not contribute in existing 27% variance which parental rejection contributed in step 2. Peer rejection did not mediate the relationship between parental rejection and psychological adjustment among adolescents.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression showing Parental Rejection as Predictors of Peer Rejection Variables (N=300)

Predictors	Peer Rejection								
	AER			ARAIR			FD		
	R ²	ΔR ²	β	R ²	ΔR ²	B	R ²	ΔR ²	β
Step 1	.13	.11		.09	.07		.04	.02	
Control variables									
Step 2	.13	.11		.12	.09		.04	.02	
Parental Variables									
Maternal rejection			.04			.16*			-.001
Paternal rejection			.02			.009			.09

*p<.01. Note. AER=Angry expectations of rejection; ARAIR= Angry reaction to ambiguously intentioned rejection; FD=Feeling disliked

Table 4. Hierarchical regression showing Predicting Value of Parental Rejection and Mediating Value of Peer Rejection for PAQ (N=300)

Predictors	R ²	ΔR ²	β
Step 1 Control Variables	.04	.02	
Step 2 Parental variables	.30	.27	
Paternal rejection			.20*
Maternal rejection			.37*
Step 3 Peer Variables	.30	.27	
AER			.05
ARAIR			-.01
FD			.07

*p<.001.

Note. AER=Angry expectations of rejection; ARAIR= Angry reaction to ambiguously intentioned rejection; FD=Feeling rejected

Discussion

The current study intended to investigate the mediating role of peer rejection in relationship of parental rejection and psychological adjustment of adolescents. Findings continued to support results of existing research e.g., Nickerson & Nagle, (2004) that parental rejection more significantly predicted adolescents' life satisfaction than other interpersonal relationships. Especially, mothers' rejection emerged as stronger predictor of psychological adjustment in adolescents than that of fathers' level of attachment. These findings are consistent with a study which claimed that mothers' attachment more strongly correlated with adolescents' life satisfaction (Freeman & Brown, 2001). The plausible explanation can be that children remain more securely attached with mothers from the infancy through the childhood, adolescence, and even the whole life span because mothers act as mentor and help them, especially, during the transition phase of adolescents. From the humanistic point of view, children desire for unconditional positive regard (Roger, 1951;1961) and mothers are likely to be more empathetic and give unconditional positive regard to their children. In return, children

develop more secure attachment with mothers. Because of such secure attachment, maternal acceptance or rejection more significantly contributes to psychological adjustment of adolescents than that of fathers.

The findings of current study further revealed that peer rejection did not mediate between parental rejection and psychological adjustment of adolescents. These findings are inconsistent with findings of study conducted by Ma and Huebner (2008) which reported peer attachment as partial mediator in relationship of parental attachment and adolescents' life satisfaction. Similarly, another study reported mediating role of peer attachment in relationship of parental attachment and quality of peer experiences (Cassidy, Kirsch, Scolton, & Parke, 1996). The contradictory findings of current study provide evidence that despite of extended relationship with peers in adolescence, parental influence on psychological adjustment of adolescents remain stronger than peers' influence. Parents continue to provide help and support to their children even in times of extreme emotional instability.

Generally, the analyses of obtained data set indicate that adolescents perceived their both mothers and fathers as equally accepting but gender-wise comparison revealed that girls perceived their mothers slightly less accepting than boys did and girls were psychologically more maladjusted than boys. These results can be explained in light of existing research findings that girls are more emotionally attached with their mothers and give more value to quality of peer relationship (Cross & Madson, 1997; DeGoede, Branje, Delsing, & Meeus, 2009). Current study also found that girls perceive their mothers as more rejecting, show greater psychological maladjustment, more angrily expect peer rejection, and place more value to mild or even non-rejection cues than did the boys (see Table 2). These findings may be attributed to girls' stronger attachment and connectedness with their relationships and they turn to be more possessive in their relationship. The effect of maternal rejection and angry expectation of peer rejection may exacerbate each other. Despite of gender-wise differential angry expectation of rejection and acute detection of mild or even non-rejection cues, boys and girls perceived

their parents and peers as less rejecting (see Table 1). From the cultural perspective, parents, especially mothers, play very important role in early socialization of children and they train their children not to perceive their parents as rejecting. The strict and authoritarian parenting style is considered as constructive aspect of socialization rather than sign of rejection, disgrace or emotional coldness. Secondly, as children step into adolescence and they begin to expand their social circle to older adults, peers or other relationships, parents guide them in developing and maintaining constructive relationship.

The findings of current study provide strong support for significance of parental mentorship (especially mothers) and add knowledge regarding adolescents' gender differences on perception of maternal and paternal rejection. These findings can be very helpful for counsellors and clinical psychologists who can devise strategies and training programs for parents to enhance their parenting skills including decision making skills, communication skills, problem solving skills etc. Despite of practical significance of this study, some limitations restricted external validity of findings like data were collected through self-reported measure which poses the danger of common method variance. Secondly, sample was confined to private and public schools of two cities. To rule out these limitations, it is suggested that researchers can conduct longitudinal study to explore the change in maternal perception of adolescents over the longer period of time and to obtain data from multiple informants. The span of study may be extended to other cultures across Pakistan and the world. Researchers may conduct qualitative study to explore factors that hinder the mediating role of peer rejection in direct relationship of parental rejection and psychological adjustment among adolescents.

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