



**Impact of Physical Abuse, Psychological Abuse, and Neglect on Emotional and Psychological Well-Being of Pakistani Youth**

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Mental Health, Childhood Abuse, Parental Abuse, Mental Well-being, Emotional Well-being	<p>The parent-child relationship is a crucial predictor of an individual's mental well-being. Not every child enjoys a healthy and secure relationship with their parents. Parental abuse includes verbal insults, directing violence towards them, and neglecting the basic needs of children. This can lead to destructive outcomes. This study aims to explore the impact of parental maltreatment and neglect on emotional, social, and psychological well-being. This study employs a quantitative approach to research. Data was collected from students from various government and private sector universities in Lahore. IMB Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22) was used to run analyses. Results of the study show that maltreatment has a negative relationship with mental well-being. Psychological abuse has a negative relationship with emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being. Whereas, physical abuse was found to have a significant negative relationship with only emotional well-being. Also, neglect has a negative relationship with all three types of mental well-being. Lastly, males are more likely to experience physical maltreatment and females are more likely to be the victim of psychological abuse. The findings highlight the critical role of parental behavior in shaping the mental health of young adults, with different forms of maltreatment impacting various aspects of well-being. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions to address both psychological and physical abuse in order to promote emotional, psychological, and social resilience.</p>
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## 1.0 Introduction

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR) defines child maltreatment as acts by parents that can cause harm to the child, physically as well as mentally. It is divided into four types physical abuse, psychological abuse (also referred to as emotional abuse), sexual abuse, and neglect. Directing violence toward children is considered physical abuse. It may lead to bruises and fractures. Psychological abuse involves intentional, verbal insults which cause mental distress to the child. Neglect involves depriving a child of age-appropriate needs (APA, 2022). Worldwide neglect is the most prevalent and damaging type of abuse. Whereas emotional abuse is consistently increasing in first-world countries (James & Byard, 2023).

A study conducted during the lockdown of COVID-19 established that the frequency and intensity of all types of child maltreatment increase during holidays. Children living in dysfunctional families are more likely to be abused when all the family members spend more time with each other (Caron et al., 2020). Physical abuse is strongly correlated with externalizing behavior problems, delinquency, and substance abuse. Neglect during childhood may lead to having multiple sexual partners, substance abuse, and hallucinations. Lastly, Emotional abuse is associated with symptoms of psychosis (Strathearn et al., 2020).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the state of mental well-being empowers people to get through stressful situations, acknowledge their potential, and contribute to their society. Mental well-being is a much broader aspect than just the absence of mental disorders (WHO, 2022). Emotional well-being (EWB) involves experiencing positive emotions, satisfaction with life, and a sense of achievement. How well an individual manages their feelings and cope with stressful situations depends upon their EWB (Park et al., 2022). Psychological well-being (PWB) involves positive cognitions one holds about oneself and their life, the quality of their interpersonal relationships, personal growth, independence, and environmental mastery. Psychological well-being (PWB) involves functioning effectively in life and realizing one's true potential (Anglim et al., 2020). Lastly, Social well-being (SWB) involves possessing supportive and healthy relationships where an individual has a sense of belonging (Cicognani, 2014).

Child abuse and neglect not only cause impairment in a child's current life but also extends to a child's later development resulting in impairment in their social life (Camilo et al., 2020). Adverse childhood experiences are positively correlated with mental disorders as well as suicidal thinking. Individuals who experience any type of maltreatment are at high risk of developing anxiety and other internalizing disorders (Sahle et al., 2021)

Limited studies are exploring parental child maltreatment as maltreatment by parents is not acknowledged as abuse. It is common to use harsh methods to discipline children in Asian countries, but the difference between abuse and punishment is often overlooked. Previous

literature exploring parental abuse uses archival and qualitative methods of research (Iqbal et al., 2021). This study adopts a quantitative approach to research. Also, no study explicitly explores the impact of each type of parental maltreatment on each type of mental well-being. This study explores the effects of all the types of maltreatment (physical and psychological maltreatment and neglect) except sexual abuse as it is not a common phenomenon in our culture.

### 1.1 Objectives

- Explore the impact of physical and psychological maltreatment and neglect upon emotional, psychological, and social well-being.
- Explore the gender differences among the types of maltreatment.

### 2.0 Literature Review

According to psychodynamic theory, the personality of an individual is shaped by their early experiences (particularly those with family), emotions, and unconscious mind. It influences the development of personality and psychological functioning. It also presumes that psychological problems arise from emotional problems in the unconscious mind. The root of these problems can be traced back to early childhood. A child's earliest interaction is with his parents which is the most crucial predictor of mental health (Breuer & Freud, 1957). This study is based on psychodynamic theory.

Abuse and loneliness are suggested to have a strong negative correlation with emotional well-being. Abuse of any type and occurring at any age is stressful and affects mental as well as physical health (Yunus et al., 2022). A study conducted on the psychological well-being of college students revealed that students go through various difficulties throughout their college life, which may also result in symptoms of depression anxiety, and other mental problems which might require clinical attention. However, the effect of such issues can be reduced with the help of familial support (Yu et al., 2020). Another study conducted on the psychological well-being of students in social isolation revealed that familial support is the major predictor of psychological well-being (Lukács, 2021). Familial support is reported to have a moderating role in stress and mental well-being (Park & Lee, 2022). Childhood maltreatment is positively correlated with the symptoms of numerous mental disorders especially major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder (Struck et al., 2020).

H1: Based on the above literature it was hypothesized that all types of maltreatment would have a negative relationship with all types of mental well-being.

It has been established that males are more likely to experience physical abuse as compared to females. As for psychological abuse, females were more likely to suffer from it as compared to males (Salem et al., 2020). Another study established that females are more likely to suffer from emotional abuse as compared to males (Moody et al., 2018). A meta-analysis also

replicates these findings that males are more likely to experience physical abuse (Gallo et al., 2018).

H2: Based on the above literature it was hypothesized that males are more likely to experience physical maltreatment as compared to females. Whereas females are more likely to experience psychological maltreatment.

### 3.0 Methodology

A cross-sectional, quantitative research methodology was employed, surveying a representative sample of young adults including males and females who were subjected to physical abuse, psychological abuse, and neglect by their parents. Participants were recruited by several private and government sector universities of Lahore. Data was collected from 150 participants. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section one provided information about the purpose of the study to the participants and their consent was obtained. It also included the contact information of the primary researcher. Lastly, it contained all the necessary demographic information of the participants. The second section consisted of the tools measuring the variables of the study. The Comprehensive Child Maltreatment Scale (CCMS) was used to assess maltreatment experienced by participants during their childhood. It is a self-report, 20-item questionnaire. Items of the scale are scored on a 5-point Likert scale. It assesses physical and psychological maltreatment, sexual maltreatment, and neglect by parents (Higgins & McCabe, 2001). However, the section inquiring about sexual abuse was excluded with the permission of the measure's author. 11 items regarding sexual abuse were excluded. This measure was also used as a screening tool and the individuals who scored low on this measure were excluded from the study.

The short form of the Mental Health Continuum (MHC-SF) was used to assess mental well-being. It is a 14-item Likert scale. It further has three sub-scales in which three items of scale measure emotional well-being. Six items assess psychological well-being and five items measure social well-being (Lamers et al., 2010). IMB Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22) was used to analyze the collected data.

### 4.0 Findings and Results

The following table shows descriptive statistics of the participants.

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Participants (n=150)**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Female	70	46.7
Male	80	53.3
Age		
Below 20	37	24.6
20 and above	113	75.4

Level of Education		
Bachelors	115	76.7
Masters	35	23.3
Institute		
Private Sector	100	66.7
Government Sector	50	33.3
Family system		
Nuclear	95	63.3
Joint	55	36.7
Number of Siblings		
1	29	17.6
2	52	34.7
3	43	29.5
4 and above	26	18.2
Birth Order		
Eldest	50	34.1
Middle	72	49.2
Youngest	28	16.7
Perceived Socio-Economic Status		
Upper Class	12	7.1
Upper Middle Class	45	30.2
Middle Class	77	52.4
Lower Middle Class	16	10.3

*Note.* Gender (M = 1.47, SD = .57) Age (M = 22.27, SD = 2.23), Education (M = 1.23, SD = .42), Institute (M = 1.33, SD = .47), Family system (M = 1.37, SD = .48), Number of siblings (M = 1.76, SD = 1.1), Birth order (M = 1.98, SD = .80), Perceived Socio-economic status (M = 2.68, SD = .74).

The reliability of all the measures used in the study was greater than 0.70. The following table shows the original reliability of all the measures used in the study.

**Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Comprehensive Childhood Maltreatment (CCMS), Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ), Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) and Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF)**

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	No. of items
Comprehensive Childhood Maltreatment Scale (CCMS)	0.75	9
Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF)	0.86	14

*Note.*  $\alpha > 0.8$  Good Internal Consistency,  $\alpha > 0.7$  = Acceptable Internal Consistency.

To find out the correlation among the variables, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted. Table 3 shows the correlation between types of parental maltreatment and mental well-being.

**Table 3 Correlation between study variables (n = 150)**

Sr. No	Variables	N	M	S	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Psychological maltreatment	15	12.	4.	-					
2	Physical maltreatment	15	18.	3.	.26**	-				
3	Neglect	15	13.	4.	.13	.21	-			
4	EWB	15	9.0	3.	-.16*	-.15*	-.14*	-		
5	PWB	15	14.	5.	-.13*	-.11	-.27**	.54	-	
6	SWB	15	18.	6.	-.14*	-.14	-.12*	.62	.49	-

*Note.* EWB = Emotional well-being, PWB = Psychological well-being, SWB = Social well-being, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Psychological maltreatment had a negative relationship with EWB ( $r = -0.16^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), PWB ( $r = -0.13^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and SWB ( $r = -0.14^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Physical maltreatment has a significant negative relationship with EWB ( $r = -0.15^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Neglect was found to negatively correlate with EWB ( $r = -0.14^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), PWB ( $r = -0.27^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and SWB ( $r = -0.12^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

It was also found that EWB is positively associated with PWB ( $r = 0.54^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and SWB ( $r = 0.62^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Also, PWB was positively correlated with SWB ( $r = 0.49^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 4: Gender Differences among physical maltreatment, psychological maltreatment, and neglect**

Variable	Male		Female		t(150)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Psychological maltreatment	18.82	3.81	18.87	3.68	1.76	.04	.13
Physical maltreatment	12.21	4.64	12.89	5.15	.87	.03	.11
Neglect	12.88	4.84	13.44	5.02	1.21	.12	.12

Note.  $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows the gender difference between psychological maltreatment, physical maltreatment, and neglect. There was a significant difference between the psychological maltreatment among males and females and the effect size was small ( $t(150) = 2.03$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.13$ ).

A significant difference was also observed between physical maltreatment among males and females and the effect size was small ( $t(150) = 2.32$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.11$ ).

### 5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

According to descriptive statistics, 46.7% of the participants were female and 53.3% were male. Major participants were currently enrolled in Bachelors (76.7%) and several were either enrolled in or had completed Masters (23.3%). 66.7% of the participants were from private sector universities while 33.3% of individuals were enrolled in government sector universities. 63.3% of individuals were living in a nuclear family system while 36.7% of participants were living in a joint family system.

Childhood maltreatment is associated with negative outcomes in adult life for both men and women. Individuals who experienced any type of maltreatment are at greater risk of experiencing interpersonal problems with their spouses, siblings, and other relatives (Fitzgerald et al., 2020).

Parents are seen as supportive figures and are expected to nurture and encourage their offspring but if the parents fail to provide a protective environment to children their view of the world might not develop healthily. They might view the world as hostile. As a result, they would have a low psychological well-being. Also, individuals who were maltreated find it hard to trust others and form healthy relationships. This may lead to problems with interpersonal skills which impacts their social well-being. These results align with the findings of previous studies. A study conducted on child maltreatment and post-traumatic growth found that maltreatment perpetrated by an individual's unhealthy relationship with his parents is a significant predictor of low mental well-being (Jankovic et al., 2022). Another study investigating the relationship between childhood maltreatment and psychological well-being established that neglect and abuse directed by the mother have a negative relationship with psychological well-being (Kong et al., 2020). Physical abuse, psychological abuse, and neglect are all correlated with quality of life. The higher the frequency of the abuse, the quality of life will deteriorate (Sun, 2020). A study conducted on college students found that psychological maltreatment predicts the social well-being of an individual (Arslan, 2021). Child maltreatment is also associated with impaired mental health. Maltreated individuals are at higher risk of developing severe mental disorders including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder (Rafiq et al., 2018). It is also associated with mood disorders and suicidal attempts (Lippard & Nemeroff, 2023). Individuals with highly adverse childhood experiences report having high levels of stress and social withdrawal (Karatekin & Ahluwalia, 2016). Physical abuse is directly associated with problematic behaviors among children which persist into adulthood. Also, psychological maltreatment is found to have a direct relationship with depressive symptoms (Zhou & Zhen, 2022).

As it is also established that males are more likely to experience physical abuse and females are more likely to experience psychological maltreatment. Males might be subjected to more harsh treatment physically as they are expected to be tough which may lead towards more severe physical punishments as compared to females. Whereas, females are more likely to experience psychological maltreatment as females in Asian countries are expected to be obedient and submissive. If females fail to meet these expectations, they will likely experience psychological and emotional abuse by their parents and family. Also, females in our culture are soft targets to displace one's frustrations, as a result, parents would likely displace their frustration by psychologically abusing their daughters. Previous literature also supports these findings. Child maltreatment is associated with increased social isolation and withdrawal among those children. The problem of social dysfunction persists into adulthood. Maltreated individuals are also reported to be less liked by their peers as compared to individuals who were not maltreated. Such individuals have a negative perception of their romantic relationships, higher rates of separation, divorce, and problematic parenting behaviors (Pfaltz



et al., 2022). A comparative study established that males experience physical maltreatment more than females (Khan et al., 2021). Another study exploring gender differences among abuse replicates this finding. Most men are the victims of physical abuse (Haro et al., 2023). A study exploring outcomes of childhood adversities established that females are more likely to report emotional abuse than males (Pedersen et al., 2020). Another study established that females report higher psychological well-being as compared to males (Geng & He, 2021).

### 5.1 Conclusion

The findings of our study seek to call attention to a common but overlooked phenomenon in our society; the impact of parental maltreatment. Children are the future of every country they should be raised in a healthy environment so that they develop a healthy mental well-being and reach their maximum potential. The findings of the study may also lead to the development of educational programs that raise awareness about the impact of maltreatment and promote healthier parenting practices. This study will also contribute towards reducing the stigma around the topic of parental maltreatment which promotes empathy towards victims of parental abuse.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

The data for this study was collected from various educational institutes in Lahore. Hence, this study cannot be generalized to a large geographical area. Also, this study did not explore the impact of parental sexual abuse as it is not a common phenomenon in this culture. It is recommended to future researchers that they explore parental sexual abuse.

#### Contributions

**Ushna Seher:** Problem Identification, Literature search

**Ayesha Manzoor:** Drafting and data analysis, proofreading and editing

#### Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest w.r.t this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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