

**PERCEPTION OF PARENTS AND DEPRESSION IN  
PAKISTANI ADOLESCENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The objective of the present study was to investigate the predictive relationship of perception of parents (i.e. mother involvement, mother autonomy support, father involvement, and father autonomy support) with depression in adolescents. A sample of 758 adolescents (383 boys & 375 girls) was selected from different secondary schools situated in different areas of Karachi, Pakistan. The age range of sample was from 12 to 16 years with mean age of 13.57(SD=1.24). Their education level was from grade 6 to 10. Personal Information Form, Perception of Parents- Child Scale (POPS) (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991), and Center for Epidemiological Studies - Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC) (Weissman, Orvaschel, & Padian, 1980) were administered on participants. The results of regression analyses revealed significant impact of maternal involvement and autonomy support on depression in adolescents; however paternal involvement and autonomy support do not predict depression in adolescents. Limitations and implications of findings were discussed.*

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**Keywords:** *Perception of Parents, Adolescents' Depression, Involvement, Autonomy Support*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Adolescents experience countless problems as they grow older. This transitional period between childhood and adulthood is a crucial one. They go through emotional, social, and physical changes. They start developing an identity, a social life, and experience an emotional change occurring. This entire transitional period marks fundamental emotional changes intrinsically and extrinsically (Martin-Krumm et al., 2016).

Adolescents learn to develop interpersonal relationships and experience social adjustments, which helps to develop their own identity and personality. These experiences contribute to their development of self, preferably a positive one. Young adolescents who are unable to develop a positive self-image and healthy social relationships are often at high risk of developing emotional problems as well as having academic difficulties. Their environment plays an important role in their development. Both environmental and individual factors contribute to positive development and growth of adolescents. Extrinsic factors like school environment, social support, and perception of parents have a significant impact on the adolescent growth (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997).

The way parents deal with their children creates a perception of parents in their minds. Parental involvement has a considerable impact on children's coping behavior. Perceived parental relationships have an impact on children's academics and social life but also affect the possibility of developing psychopathology. Due to a negative self-image, a child's adolescence can be a highly worrying span of life. Depressed children depict less secure parental attachment as compared to non-depressed children (Armsden, McCauley, Greenberg, Burke, & Mitchell, 1990). Furthermore, insecure parent attachments are associated with depression in adolescents. Early adolescents tend to be more affected by perceived relationship with parents. Thus, children in their early teens are more vulnerable towards developing depression than older adolescents and young adults (Greenberger & Chen, 1996).

Adolescent life constantly needs support, guidance, involvement of parents, and friendly relations to grow towards a healthy life. When the required parental support, involvement, and autonomy support is absent, mental health issues can arise like depression and the behavioral manifestations of the emotional problems. In their study, Phares, Kamboukos, and Fields (2008), found that mothers spend more time with young adolescents as compared to fathers.

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Moreover, there is a beneficial impact of fathers' involvement in children's psychological well-being (Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998). Therefore, a significant quantity and quality of involvement from both parents is necessary.

In addition, maternal and paternal autonomy support affects the emotional functioning of children. Previous findings reveal that a higher level of psychological control by fathers leads to an increase in internalizing and externalizing problems in adolescents (Lansford, Laird, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2014). Children tend to incorporate parental standards in their daily life. Such introjection of parental attitudes formulates children's own personality. Moreover, both father involvement and mother involvement contribute to adolescents' psychological well-being, specifically their happiness (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Parental support extends to the support of autonomy in the adolescent ages. Previous research indicates that providing autonomy and parental support negatively predicts depression in adolescents (Inguglia, Ingoglia, Liga, Coco, & Cricchio, 2014). Thus, parental involvement has a crucial predictive impact on the mental health of adolescents.

Perception of parents inculcates positive psychological well-being in adolescents. With an unhealthy perception of parents come maladaptive behavioral outcomes. In a study conducted by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014), they found that parental involvement is negatively linked to adolescent depression. Similarly, parental autonomy support has an association with depression in adolescence. They further found in their study that parental involvement significantly predicts adolescent depression. High parental support acts as a coping mechanism for depression (Young, Berenson, Cohen, & Garcia, 2005). Therefore, support for autonomy from parents affects all aspects of adolescent functioning (Eccles, Early, Fraser, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997).

Parental involvement and autonomy support, thus plays a crucial element in adolescent functioning. Both mothers and fathers have significant roles in the lives of adolescents. Adequate parenting can bring about healthy mental functioning in adolescents. Likewise, problems in parental involvement and autonomy support can lead towards depression. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of perception of parents on depression in adolescents. The understanding of this phenomenon will help determine the emerging problems of adolescents in the Pakistani culture. With this knowledge, various parental interventions can be derived to overcome adolescent emotional problems. Moreover, the findings of this study will contribute in the mental health field of

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Pakistan. Psychologists, counselors, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals will be able to identify adolescent problems associated with their parents. They can work with adolescents and their parents in order to overcome adolescent depression. It would further help in the improvement of parent-child relationships.

Based on our literature review, following research hypotheses were established:

1. There would be a predictive relationship between perception of parents (i.e. mother involvement, mother autonomy support, father involvement, and father autonomy support) with depression in adolescents.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

The sample of this study comprised of 758 secondary school students. Participants belonged to grades 6 to 10, with an age range of 12 to 16 years ( $M = 13.57$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ). There were 383 boys (50.5%) and 375 girls (49.5%). Out of the total sample, 66.4% belonged to the nuclear family system and 32.6% belonged to the joint family system. In order to avoid sampling error, those participants were excluded from the sample who did not complete the questionnaires, who were not living with their parents/guardians, whose parents were single, separated, or divorced, whose parents had died, and who had a pre-existing physical disability and/or mental illness. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

### ***Measures***

#### **Personal Information Form**

The Personal Information Form consisted of information regarding the participants, such as age, gender, current educational level, school name, number of siblings, birth order, family structure, socioeconomic status, and any physical or mental illness at home.

### **Perception of Parents Scales-Child Scale**

Perception of parents was studied using the Perception of Parents Scales – Child Scale (POPS; Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1991). This scale measures the degree to which parents provide an optimal parenting environment to the children (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997). The POPS is a self-report measure filled by adolescents. It is applicable from age 8 to adolescence. On every item in the scale, the participants are required to circle one of the four given options describing as closest to their mother or father. The POPS consists of 22 items with the first 11 items for mother and the last 11 items for father. The scores provide four subscales: mother involvement (MI), mother autonomy support (MAS), father involvement (FI), and father autonomy support (FAS). Grolnick, Deci, and Ryan (1991) found good internal consistency for the subscales; Cronbach's alpha was .56 for maternal involvement, .53 for maternal autonomy support, .64 for paternal involvement and .67 for paternal autonomy support. The Urdu version of POPS was used in the present study, which had good internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha was .59 for mother involvement, .77 for mother autonomy support, .65 for father involvement, and .71 for father autonomy support (Khan & Shahzad, 2019). Furthermore, the Urdu version of POPS has strong test retest reliability for the subscales (i.e.,  $r = .80$ ,  $r = .79$ ,  $r = .87$ , and  $r = .84$ ) and good discriminant and convergent validity.

### **Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children**

In order to study depression, the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC; Weissman, Orvaschel, & Padian, 1980) was used. This is a self-report questionnaire applicable from 6 years to 17 years. CES-DC consists of 20 items answered on a 4-point ordinal scale: 0 = *not at all*, 1 = *a little*, 2 = *some*, 4 = *a lot*. A total sum is calculated including the reverse coded items to derive a total score. A score of 15 or above indicates depression (Fendrich, Weissman, & Warner, 1990). The CES-DC has good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and satisfactory test retest reliability ( $r = .57$ ). For this study, CES-DC was translated into Urdu language, which also revealed good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

### ***Procedure***

In order to conduct this research, approval was sought from the Board of Advanced Studies and Research (BASR) and this study was conducted as a part of PhD dissertation. The research was conducted in group settings in various

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secondary schools of Karachi. Permission was sought from school authorities and administration of questionnaire was done in classrooms during school hours. Participants were explained regarding the aim of the study and they were briefed about informed consent. The contents of the Consent Form were explained at length including voluntary participation, confidentiality and right to withdraw. Once they understood the consent form and agreed to participate, they were provided with the Personal Information Form. After completing the form, they were guided to fill the Perception of Parents Scales-Child Scale and Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children one by one. The instructions were explained to participants and they were helped by the researcher to complete the entire questionnaires. Researcher was present during the entire administration and explained the details stepwise. Any queries were responded to during the administration. At the end, participants and respective authorities were thanked for their cooperation.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

The statistical analysis was conducted through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, v.20). Standard multiple regression analysis were computed to test the hypotheses of the present study. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages) were also computed for the demographic variables of the study.

## RESULTS

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 758)*

Characteristic	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	383	50.5
Female	375	49.5
Birth Order		
First Born	244	32.2
Middle Born	217	28.6
Last Born	267	35.2
Only Child	30	4
Family System		
Nuclear	509	67.2
Joint	247	32.8
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	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	13.57	1.24

Table 2

*Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis with Perception of Parents as Predictor of Depression in Adolescents*

Predictor	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>ΔR</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Perception of Parents	.07	.06	10.31	.00*

\**p* < .05

Table 3  
*Coefficients of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis with Perception of Parents as Predictors of Depression in Adolescents*

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	1.64	.17		9.67	.00*
P-MI	-.03	.01	-.13	-2.64	.01*
P-MAS	-.09	.04	-.74	-2.18	.03*
P-FI	.10	.08	.66	1.28	.20
P-FAS	-.01	.04	-.10	-.34	.74

*Note:* P-MI = Perception of Mother Involvement; P-MAS = Perception of Mother Autonomy Support; P-FI = Perception of Father Involvement; P-FAS = Perception of Father Autonomy Support

## DISCUSSION

Adolescent lives are surrounded by parental support in the form of parental involvement and promotion of autonomy. Positive perception of parents can help adolescents cope with stressors and, therefore, reduce their chances of becoming depressed. The present study examined if perception of parents (i.e. perception of maternal involvement, perception of maternal autonomy support, perception of father involvement, and perception of father autonomy support) predicted depression in adolescents. The results of the study indicate that the four predictors explained 7% variation in the scores of depression (Table 2). The analysis found that adolescent's perception of maternal involvement and maternal autonomy support predicted depression (Table 3). In addition, the perception of father involvement and father autonomy support didn't predict depression (Table 3). Hence, these findings depict that maternal involvement and autonomy support are linked with lower levels of depression.

These findings are consistent with previous researches which have displayed that parental involvement is negatively associated with depression in



adolescents (Harris & Marmer, 1996; Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996). One possible reason behind these findings may be that being involved in children's lives is a characteristic of authoritative parents (Matejevic, Jovanovic, & Jovanovic, 2014). Authoritative parenting is a form of healthy parenting towards children as these parents are available for their adolescent children and are responsive towards their emotional needs. As being available, responsiveness, and involved in children's lives encourages their belief that parents empathize with them. High parental empathy leads to a higher level of attachment with parents, feeling secure, and having emotional openness with parents (Stern, Borelli, & Smiley, 2014). When adolescents have a sense of security that their parents are available for them and play an important role in their lives, it promotes psychological well-being and lowers chances of depression (Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996).

The results of this study extend towards predicting depression from mother involvement and mother autonomy support. Previous literature supports these results. Emotional support from mothers can be an effective protective factor for adolescents. In the long term, maternal support can predict a lower likelihood of depression in adolescents (Desjardins & Leadbeater, 2010). The reason as to why maternal involvement and autonomy support predicts depression is due to the rearing practices used by mothers. Mothers tend to use authoritative parenting, which fosters the psychological well-being of adolescents (Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter, & Keehn, 2006). There is significant importance of the way parents are involved and supportive in their adolescent children's lives. Autonomy supportive mothers tend to be less controlling and restrictive of their children. They allow freedom with appropriate limits. Literature reveals that adolescents view their mothers as using more psychological control than their fathers (Lansford et al., 2014). They also perceive their mothers as having more knowledge than their fathers. This is consistent with the current research findings which indicate that maternal involvement and autonomy support is more significant than paternal involvement and autonomy support. Findings are consistent with the role theory, which asserts that society expects mothers to be the primary caregivers. Mothers are expected to be responsible for providing warmth and be involved in the children's lives. On the contrary, fathers are expected to be the financial providers and less involved in the children's lives (Garcia & Guzman, 2017). Hence, adolescents tend to be closer to their mothers. This could be the reason that the research findings indicate significance of maternal involvement and autonomy support and not paternal.

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The plausible explanation as to why paternal involvement and autonomy support did not predict depression in adolescents could be due to the role of fathers in collectivist cultures. In the Pakistani culture, mothers tend to have a closer relationship with adolescents than fathers. Research evidence indicates that Pakistani children have higher maternal acceptance (Rohner et al., 2008). Hence, adolescents in the collectivist cultures are more accepting of their mothers. Paternal relations in the collectivist cultures tend to be distant. Therefore, the current study's findings are consistent with the parenting styles and role of fathers in the Pakistani cultures.

The overall results of the study revealed significant impact of perception of mothers' involvement and autonomy support on depression in adolescents. These findings are crucial since they provide insight into the cultural impact on the relationship between perception of parents and depression. This information can be utilized by mental health professionals, parents, and educationists to spread awareness regarding the importance of parental relationships, support, and involvement in adolescent lives and its link with depression. As findings have revealed that paternal involvement and autonomy support did not predict depression in adolescents, it is crucial for parents in the Pakistani society to incorporate fathers in adolescent lives. Furthermore, a limitation of this study was that it was conducted with adolescents only; gathering information from parents and assessing their perspective could provide greater insight into the parent-child relationship issues.

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