

**PARENTAL MODELING AS PREDICTOR OF FILIAL
OBLIGATION IN YOUNG ADULTS**

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ABSTRACT

Filial obligation plays a vital role in family functioning and interaction with parents. The role of parental modeling as a factor contributing to filial obligation was explored in 200 men and women with an age range between 25 to 35 years with mean age of 28.27(\pm SD 2.38). It was hypothesized that parental modeling would predict filial obligation (i.e. Contact and Family Ritual, Conflict Avoidance, Assistance, Self-Sufficient and Personal Sharing). In addition, the gender differences on Filial Obligation were also examined. The Self-developed Parental Modeling Questionnaire (PMQ) and Felt Obligation Measure (FOM; Stein, 1992) along with a Structured Interview Schedule were used. The Linear Regression analysis and t-test were employed for statistical analysis of data. The results indicated that parental modeling is a significant predictor of filial obligation in young adults. Further, gender differences were observed on four domains of filial obligation except for Self-Sufficient sub-domain. The implications of results for healthy parent child interaction are discussed.

Keywords: Filial Obligation, Parenting Modeling, Young Adults, Predictor

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INTRODUCTION

Filial obligation refers to the duties, particular services, actions and attitudes which children must offer to their parents just because they are their parent's offspring (Encyclopedia of Aging, 2002). Schinkel (2012) simplifies it by asserting that filial obligations are the special obligations that children have towards their parents. However, Stein (1992) proposed the concept of filial obligation as a series of appropriate behaviors negotiated within the context of specific relationship with kin considered to be the glue between the generations. Singh and Mishra (2012) state filial obligation as a fundamental principle in theories of family functioning, informal help seeking and family care-giving. The term filial obligation and filial obligation have been used interchangeably in the research literature. Filial responsibility is defined as the attitude of adult children and their duties to fulfill the needs of their ageing parents (Blieszner & Mancini, 1987). Filial responsibility is a norm referring to the expectations of the sense of duty and the obligations that define the recognized social role of the adult child towards their elderly parents (Gans & Silverstein, 2006).

The roles among adult child relationship at mid-life had got attention of researchers recently. It is a universal phenomenon that as individuals progress through their mid-life to the elderly years they become dependent and frail. Owing to the increasing life expectancy and increasing number of elderly people the need to care for them and to serve them is rising. It often becomes a challenge for adult children to look after their elderly parents adequately. However, it is a feeling of being obligated to serve parents that constantly motivates the children to help and serve their elderly. In almost all cultures the filial responsibilities are either catered by the daughters or by the daughter in laws. The results of a research conducted by Stuifbergen and Delden (2011) revealed that females from both the generations younger and older have a higher sense of responsibility towards their parents. Girls consider it more important to assist their parents as compared to boys (Goodnow, 1988).

In our Pakistani culture the females stay at home so it all implies on them to look after the parents or the parents in laws. The religion, Islam, has given clear guidelines for children to take care of their parents in old age. There are numerous references in the Holy Quran that emphasize on the respect and care for parents throughout life. Since our religion has emphasized on the importance of serving to parents so children from our Pakistani culture have a greater sense of responsibility. However, the construct of filial obligation has not been well

Pakistan Journal of Psychology

researched indigenously and the present study is an attempt in this regard to fill in the gap.

A popular idea of why we have obligations towards our elderly parents is that of reciprocity (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007). This theory states that it is reciprocal children owe it to their parents. Their parents gave birth to them brought them to this world, provided them with all the facilities among which were the basic facilities to survive like food and shelter and provided them with a comfortable environment. In return the children have this responsibility to fulfill the needs of their elderly parents. The degree of reciprocity between the children and their ageing parents has effects on their relationship and well-being (Hamon, 1988). So far the existing research is conducted from viewpoint of reciprocity. However, certain key factors associated with the developmental phenomenon of individuals are rather overlooked for example, parenting styles, modeling, and developmental values to care for elderly.

Parental modeling plays a vital role in predicting in how their off-springs will take care of them. Since, the primary socialization agent in children's life is their parents. They will be more likely to follow their parents' legacy. As Bandura's social learning theory states that "*people are more likely to learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling*" (Bandura, 1977). As children grow up, they observe the attitudes and behavior of their parents towards their parents and are more likely to model and imitate their behaviors (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961) which may be true for filial obligation as well.

In the collectivistic culture family is considered as a unit and all the members are obligated to and interdependent on each other (Triandis, 1990). They rely on each other and the children view their parents as mentors and look up to their parents for the important decisions that they have to make in their life and for the solutions to their problems (Huang, 1994; Uba, 1994). Pakistani culture is an example of the collectivist culture. Most of the families are very closely knit and bond perfectly. They live together and are interdependent on each other. Modeling is one of the aspects that have a great impact on children in our society. Children see their parents looking after their grandparents and they similarly do the same when they grow up. Since most of the families in Pakistan live in a joint family system a lot of respect for the aging parents and grandparents can be seen. Similarly young adults in the Asian and Latin American families are obligated to look after their families and support their parents/families by contributing their earnings when their parents become old and

Khan, Jamil & Khalid

they are unable to look after themselves (Feldman, Mont-Reynaud, & Rosenthal, 1992; Zinn, 1994). The Asian and Latin American young adults take the responsibilities of their parents because they know that it will help them deal with the challenges of the society (Cooper, Baker, Polichar, & Welsh, 1993).

As afore stated, there is dearth of literature on parental modeling and filial obligation in our culture. Hence, this study is an attempt to examine the predictive association between parental modeling and filial obligation in young adults in Pakistani cultural context. The present study will look at filial obligation from the modeling perspective which means that children learn through observation and imitate the behaviors which are socially approved and reinforced. Parental modeling in this study will be referred to those parental behaviors that children had been observing in their parents while interacting with their parents. For example, children see their parents looking after their grandparents and consequently they model their behavior and look after their parents in old age. Additionally, gender differences were also observed on filial obligation as gender is an important variable in this connection particularly in our indigenous scenario.

Keeping in view the existing literature, following hypothesis was framed:

1. Parental modeling would predict filial obligation (i.e. Contact and Family Ritual, Conflict Avoidance, Assistance, Self-Sufficient and Personal Sharing) in young adults.

METHOD

Participants

The sample for the present study consisted of 200 participants (100 male & 100 female). Their age ranged from 25-35 years with mean age of 28.27 years ($\pm SD$ 2.38). The reason for including this age range was that the participants lied under the heading of young adults and they were a couple of years into their practical life and their responsibilities towards their parents had already started. Both married and unmarried belonging to nuclear and joint family systems were included in the sample Participants living with their parents were included in the sample. Moreover, only those among them were included who had observed their parents' interaction with their grandparents at some stage of their life. The demographic characteristics of participants are detailed in Table 1.

Measures

Structured Interview Schedule

Personal information of the participants was obtained through the self-constructed structured interview schedule. The items focused on participants' age, gender, educational qualifications, employment status, income, marital status, parents living, grandparents living and family system.

Parental Modeling Questionnaire

The Parental Modeling Questionnaire (PMQ) was developed for this study to assess the degree to which young adults imitated their parents' behaviors regarding filial obligation. It consisted of items asking the respondent to report as to what degree he/she has observed his/her parents lending support to their parents. According to social learning theory, children are likely to replicate behaviors of their parents when confronted with the similar situations as an adult (Bandura, 1977). This questionnaire consisted of 9 statements and responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1 =Rarely" to "5 =Very Often. For example item no. 3, "Did your parents always seem eager to help with the problems that your grandparents had to face"? The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained in the present study is .85 indicating suitable internal consistency (Table 2).

Felt Obligation Measure

The Felt Obligation Measure (FOM) was designed by Stein (1992) to measure filial obligation, i.e. adults' expectation related to appropriate interactions with parents. It is a 34-item self-report measure which consists of five domains: Item 1 to 8 looks at obligation for "contact and family ritual", e.g. visit on holidays; item 9 to 15 assess "conflict avoidance", e.g. keep peace in the family; item 16 to 21 indicates "assistance", e.g. do things to please them; item 22 to 29 is categorized as "self-sufficient" e.g. not ask for financial help; and item 30 to 34 indicates "personal sharing" in specific relationship, e.g. talk about their problems. Responses are recorded on a five point scale ranging from "1=Rarely" to "5=Very Often". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained in the present study for overall Felt Obligation Measure was .93 whereas for its five subscales is as such: contact and family ritual ($\alpha =.78$), conflict avoidance ($\alpha =.77$), assistance ($\alpha =.77$), self-sufficient ($\alpha =.71$), personal sharing ($\alpha =.66$). Hence, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Table 2).

Procedure

The researchers approached the participants in different setups. Participants fulfilling the inclusion criteria of research were briefed about the purpose of the study and were assured confidentiality of their personal information and data. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was taken prior to administration of questionnaires. The Parental Modeling Questionnaire and Felt Obligation Measure (Stein, 1992) along with Structured Interview Schedule were administered. It took approximately 15 minutes for each individual to complete the questionnaires. The participants were thanked for their time and cooperation at the end.

Scoring & Statistical Analysis

The standard scoring procedures were followed to score the measures. The linear regression analysis and *t*-test were employed to interpret the data in statistical terminology. Descriptive statistics was also utilized. All the statistical analysis was performed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 21).

RESULTS

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=200)

| Variables | Category | <i>f</i> | % |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Gender | Male | 100 | 50 |
| | Female | 100 | 50 |
| Family Structure | Joint | 94 | 47 |
| | Nuclear | 106 | 53 |
| Marital Status | Married | 82 | 41 |
| | Unmarried | 118 | 59 |
| | <i>M</i> | | <i>SD</i> |
| Age | 28.27 | | 2.38 |

Table 2
Mean, Standard Deviations, and Alpha Reliability Coefficients of Felt Obligation Measure and Parental Modeling Questionnaire (N=200)

| Variables | No of Items | Mean | SD | α |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Parental Modeling Questionnaire | 9 | 33.70 | 8.47 | .85 |
| Felt Obligation Measure | 34 | 111.62 | 30 | .93 |
| Contact and Family Ritual | 8 | 27.68 | 7.90 | .78 |
| Conflict Avoidance | 7 | 23.22 | 6.93 | .77 |
| Assistance | 6 | 17.36 | 6.84 | .77 |
| Self-Sufficient | 8 | 25.71 | 7.37 | .71 |
| Personal Sharing | 5 | 15.19 | 5.75 | .66 |

Khan, Jamil & Khalid

Table 3
Linear Regression Analysis with Parental Modeling as predictor of Contacts and Family Ritual, Conflict Avoidance, Assistance, Self-Sufficient and Personal Sharing in Young Adults (N= 200)

| Predictor | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | R ² | Adjusted R ² | F | Sig. |
|-----------|-----|-----------------------------|------|---------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|--------|---------|
| | | B | SE | β | | | | |
| Constant | CFR | 8.5 | 1.82 | | | | | |
| PM | | .56 | .05 | .61 | .37 | .37 | 117.46 | .000*** |
| Constant | CA | .971 | 1.75 | | | | | |
| PM | | .39 | .05 | .49 | .24 | .23 | 62.64 | .000*** |
| Constant | AST | 4.55 | 1.79 | | | | | |
| PM | | .37 | .05 | .46 | .21 | .20 | 53.68 | .000*** |
| Constant | SS | 9.31 | 1.78 | | | | | |
| PM | | .48 | .05 | .55 | .31 | .30 | 90.14 | .000*** |
| Constant | PS | 4.36 | 1.47 | | | | | |
| PM | | .32 | .04 | .47 | .22 | .22 | 57.12 | .000*** |

Note. CFR= Contacts and Family Ritual; CA= Conflict Avoidance; AST= Assistance; SS= Self-Sufficient; PS= Personal Sharing

*** $p < .001$; $df = 1, 199$

Table 4
Independent Samples t-test Comparing the Mean Scores of Men and Women regarding Contact and Family ritual, Conflict Avoidance, Assistance, Self-Sufficient and Personal Sharing (N=200)

| Filial Obligation | Men n = 100 | | Women n = 100 | | t | Sig. |
|----------------------|----------------|------|------------------|------|------|---------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | |
| CFR | 26.01 | 7.91 | 28.41 | 7.77 | 2.16 | .03* |
| CA | 21.48 | 6.92 | 24.93 | 6.44 | 3.45 | .000*** |
| AST | 16.11 | 7.68 | 18.02 | 6.03 | 2.01 | .04* |
| SS | 25.14 | 7.70 | 26.70 | 6.99 | 1.50 | .14 |
| PS | 14.32 | 5.84 | 16.11 | 5.53 | 2.22 | .03* |

Note. CFR= Contacts and Family Ritual; CA= Conflict Avoidance; AST=Assistance, SS=Self-Sufficient, PS=Personal Sharing
 * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$, $df = 198$

DISCUSSION

Empirical literature over the years has identified a plethora of factors that act as possible predisposing factors to filial obligation. The present study focused on parental modeling as predictor of filial obligation in young adults. Additionally gender differences were also observed regarding filial obligation. Key findings obtained in our study were as such: Parental modeling significantly predicted all of the domains of filial obligation, i.e. contact and family ritual, conflict avoidance, assistance, self-sufficient and personal sharing. It indicates that filial obligation is influenced by parents' behaviors towards their elders and parents.

Findings of the current study on the continuation of contact and family rituals provide further support for previous literature that posits that the ritual and contact initiation undertaken by an individual's parents, especially the same-sex

Khan, Jamil & Khalid

parent, had a significant impact on the likelihood of the young adults modeling that behavior in the future (Friedman & Weissbrod, 2004). Hence, children who had previously observed their parents look after elder relatives were more likely to incorporate these behaviors in their respective behavioral repertoire. Albert Bandura's (1977) theory of observational modeling explains how parents and elder siblings' models can eternally shape and change the behavior of any given individual in the first few formative, impressionable years. This phenomenon is further strengthened through vicarious reinforcement thereby encouraging an individual for fulfilling filial obligations. Similarly our religion and socio-cultural values reinforce these behaviors in an individual to become esteemed members of society.

The findings regarding gender differences on filial obligation reveals significant gender differences. Women scored significantly higher on contact and family ritual, conflict avoidance, assistance, and personal sharing than men whereas the insignificant difference is evident on self-sufficient domain of filial obligation (Table 4). Thus, our findings support the previous studies which have indicated that females have more sense of obligation towards their parents (e.g., Stein et al., 1998; Stuifbergen & Delden, 2011). One possible explanation for this could be the innate capacity for women to be more socially supportive across situations, in comparison to men. Tsutsui, Muramatsu, and Higashino (2014) demonstrated daughters appear to be overall more involved in filial obligation in comparison to other probable care givers such as husband, son, etc. Rosenthal (1985) posited that mothers were more likely to pass the kin-keeper position on their offspring as compared to the fathers which may be a possible explanation of higher filial obligation in young women. However, contrary to a popular belief trending in our society, males appear less likely to be obligated towards their parents, as is suggested by our results. Females are much more eager and take up an active role when caring for their parents. Furthermore, results from the current study also delineate that females are more likely to engage in conflict avoidance and assistance than males. These findings are in line with the prevalent notion of women being the peacemakers of the family.

However, significant gender differences were not observed in self-sufficient domain of filial obligation. It may be due to the fact that being part of a collectivist culture; this characteristic is not generally encouraged in familial relationships. Instead interdependence is promoted and encouraged. However, further research is needed to explore the veracity and applicability of this finding across varying situations and familial contexts.

Pakistan Journal of Psychology

In conclusion, the present study lucidly illustrates the predictive relationship between parental modeling and filial obligation in young adults. The current study also depicted that filial obligation is higher in females than males. The results hold significant implications for parents as to how they can raise their children and model behaviors through which they can get all kind of support in their elderly years. Present study is a stepping stone towards creating awareness among young adults in current globalization scenario in which social mores are changing through the process of acculturation. This study was limited in a number of aspects. Firstly, the sample was not diverse as most of the participants belonged to almost the same socio economic status. Secondly paternal and maternal felt obligation could have been measured discretely.

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Khan, Jamil & Khalid

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Pakistan Journal of Psychology

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