

Predictors of Neglect among Adolescents

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Abstract

Neglect among adolescents might be a key reason behind various issues faced by them that even tend to persist in their adulthood. The study aimed to uncover the predictors of neglect among adolescents (ages 13-18 years) living in the urban area of Lahore, Pakistan. A purposive sample of 207 adolescents studying in public and private schools (classes 8 - 10) and colleges (classes 11- 12) of Lahore, screened for neglect, using the 'Neglect Scale for Adolescents' was included in the study. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to establish predictors of neglect. The results showed that qualification of mothers, socio economic status and age of the adolescents were found to be the predictors of neglect in this study.

Keywords: Neglect, Adolescents, Demographic Variables, Predictors.

Introduction

Neglect has been studied as a type of maltreatment that children of all ages experience (Rees et al., 2011) but more importance has been given to neglect in younger children by the researchers. The 'neglect of neglect' (Wolock & Horowitz, 1984) has been redressed but more with reference to the young children. The neglect in adolescents has not been given due importance by the researchers. It has now come to the surface through research findings that neglect has devastating impacts on adolescents (ages 11-17) highlighting the need to study this age group and understand them. If researchers care for the health, well-being and future of adolescents (Hicks & Stein, 2010) then it should be the duty of all the researchers to study adolescent neglect if they want to safeguard this age group and future adults consequently (Raws, 2019).

Defining neglect has been a difficult task. The current study defines neglect as 'a form of maltreatment which is linked with indifference to the well-being of adolescents resulting in ignoring and not fulfilling the needs of adolescents at the hands of parents and caretakers.' Maltreatment of children and adolescents have been referred to as 'global issue' which has been effected by personality characteristics of a child, parental background, structure of the family and financial status. Neglect and maltreatment of children and adolescents is given importance worldwide as it has dangerous effects on the development of a child in various stages of life till a child becomes adult and even after that (Lakhdar et al., 2021).

The role of parenting is found to be strongly associated with adolescents in different developmental stages of life (Krauss et.al.,2014) The maltreatment by parents effects a child's psychological and physical health overall (Jawaid 2007; Mandelli et al., 2015). Neglect can cause depression, suicidal tendencies, aggression and antisocial behavior in adolescents (Lakhdir et al., 2021).

The adolescents aged 11 – 17 years required emotional support, supervision largely from parents and also from their educational institutions. Identifying neglect in adolescents is quite a challenging task as the dimensions of neglect are multifaceted. In the United Kingdom the children who are referred to 'child protection plan' face neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. Out of all four, neglect is the most common form of maltreatment in children aged 10 - 15 years old in UK (Rees et al., 2011).

The purpose of the study is to find out various demographic factors that might contribute in causing neglect among adolescents and provide statistical findings in this regard. A number of studies have been done on issues related to neglect in various stages of life (Phillips et al.,2005). It is also important to mention that most of the work is done in the developed countries of the west (Charak & Koot, 2014). There was a need to do such a research in Pakistan to put its own contribution from the developing countries of the east. This gap needed to be filled by the current study highlighting the findings from Pakistan.

Objectives

- To explore the differences in neglect between younger and older adults.
- To discover the effect of neglect in both the genders.
- To find out the effect of fathers' and mothers' qualification on neglect of adolescents.
- To identify the role of socioeconomic status on neglect among adolescents.
- To determine the effect of family system on neglect among adolescents.

Literature Review

A number of research work is done on neglect among children and adolescents but most of them are conducted in developed countries however some work has been taken up in developing countries. India is one of those countries where child abuse and neglect is identified as a major worry, but studies are quite less. There has been a research conducted in Jammu, India where the factors behind neglect were studied in order to highlight the predictors of neglect and their preventions. Gender, family system and level of parents' education were found to be strong predictors of neglect. The study indicated that there was more neglect to male gender as compared to female. The adolescents living in nuclear families suffered from neglect more as compared to individuals residing in joint family system. The children of mothers with high education level were less neglected as compared to the children whose mothers had low education level (Charak & Koot, 2014).

A research was conducted to uncover the connection between the factors related to the adolescents individually, familial factors and extra familial factors behind neglect of adolescents. 1411 participants of 'Chicago Longitudinal Study' who were maltreated and their records were taken and verified were kept as the sample of the study. The results showed that mothers' age, single parent family and parents' interest in school life of adolescents were some of various factors which were associated with neglect but the most significant predictor of neglect was mother's education (Mersky et l., 2009).

A study was carried out to investigate effect of parental neglect on social network addiction and its further impact on emotional health of the adolescents. 185 adolescents participated from south of India. The results indicated that parental neglect was positively and significantly associated with social network addiction. Social network addiction was negatively associated with emotional wellbeing. Gender worked as a moderator between parental neglect and emotional wellbeing. The study concluded that parents need to

supervise adolescents so that they do not indulge in ‘social network addiction’ (Chidambaram, Shammugam & Parayitam, 2022).

A study containing a sample of 5852 adolescents from five provinces of China showed that adolescent neglect can lead to the risk of committing suicide in them. There was a mediating impact of stressful circumstances for example discriminatory attitude by others and bad results in exams on inclination towards suicide whereas resilience was the moderating factor that decreased the desire to commit suicide (Chang & Shi, 2022).

800 adolescents became participants of survey research in Karachi, Pakistan. Data was collected using structured questionnaire. Multiple linear regression was conducted to find out the factors connected with adolescents’ maltreatment. Gender, age, sibling abuse, fights in family, socio economic status, parents’ education and age of mother were found to be the predictors of adolescents’ maltreatment. The study concluded that the adolescents should be screened for maltreatment and the factors that can be controlled or which can be modified can help bring decrease in maltreatment or neglect (Lakhdir et al., 2021).

Finland has given quite a lot of importance to maltreatment faced by children and adolescents over the last thirty years due to which there has been a decrease in a various forms of maltreatment in Finland. Finnish School Health Promotion Study Data from the year 2019 was utilized. The research yielded the results that maltreatment includes physical, mental, sexual neglect and domestic violence (Fredricks et al., 2004, Skinner et al., 2009). The maltreatment (faced by adolescents) and adolescents’ school participation and their connectivity was studied using linear regression analysis. Maltreatment was independent whereas school participation was dependent variable. The ones who faced maltreatment became more impulsive, lagged behind in studies and showed less participation in school. The education system of Finland is worldwide acknowledged as one of the best education systems of the world. It is quite important that participation at school level is associated with improved learning, better health and wellbeing of adolescents. Thus impacts the overall progress of society (Mielityinen et l., 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Blumenthal (2015) believed one single model cannot explain neglect. He described that the interaction between three models such as parental deficit model (parents are responsible for the brought up of children), environmental deficit model (environmental factors such as socio economic status effect neglect) and ecological transection model (interaction between family factors and environmental factors) can help explain neglect (Avdibegović & Brkić ,2020).

Another theory on which the current study is based on is ‘Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems theory’ developed initially in 1979. The theory’s focus of attention is five distinctive features of the environment. The theory explains that the interaction between social environment and child effects the developmental process of children. There are five systems in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model namely Microsystem (most immediate environment settings such as family, school, health services, peers, neighborhood playground, religious organization, daycare facility), Mesosystem (the relationship between microsystems), Exosystem (the people or places that a child does not connect directly but has impact on the development of the child such as extended family, neighbors, school board, government agencies, social services and health care, mass media, parents, economic situation), Macro system (more remote social and cultural factors such as attitudes and ideologies of the culture) and Chronosystem (the environmental changes that occur over the lifetime including major transitions and historical events such as starting school, parents getting divorced, moving to new house etc.). Bronfenbrenner views the development of a child as a complex system of different levels of surrounding environment. From immediate family setting and school to broad cultural values and traditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

Materials and Methods

The sample was taken from public and private school and college students of classes 8-12 of urban area of Lahore, Pakistan. The neglected adolescents were screened out using the Neglect Scale for Adolescents. The mean score of the neglected adolescents was 80.86. The students scoring more than mean score i.e., 81 were having higher neglect and students scoring less than mean score were having lower neglect.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristics	n	%
Age		
13-14	65	31.4
15-16	62	30.0
17-18	80	38.6
Gender of Adolescents		
Boys	105	50.7
Girls	102	49.3
No of Siblings		
1-3	103	49.8
4-9	104	50.2
Class		
Middle School & Secondary School	115	55.6
Higher Secondary School	92	44.4
School/College Status		
Public Sector	100	48.3
Private Sector	107	51.7
Father's Qualification		
Under Matric	33	15.9
Matriculation	60	29.0
Intermediate	50	24.2
Graduation	51	24.6
Masters/Post-Graduate	13	6.3
Mother's Qualification		
Under Matric	24	11.6
Matriculation	44	21.3
Intermediate	52	25.1
Graduation	65	31.4
Masters/Post-Graduate	22	10.6
Marital Status of Parents		
Single Parent	18	8.7
Both Parents	189	91.3
Family System		
Joint	110	53.1
Nuclear	97	46.9
Socio-Economics-Status		
Low	90	43.5
Middle	76	36.7
High	41	19.8

The demographic variables such as age, gender, number of siblings, class/grade, school status, father's qualification, mother's qualification, marital status of parents, family system and socio economic were

recorded in the data sheet of SPSS 26 from the demographic information of the Neglect Scale for Adolescents questionnaire. The connection between the demographics factors and neglect among adolescents was studied through multiple regression in which the independent variables were the demographic variables and dependent variable was neglect among adolescents.

Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the demographic variables as predictors of neglect in adolescents. See Table 1 for the detailed information about demographic variables and Table 2 for details regarding statistical analysis and results.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Results for Neglect

Variable	B	95.0% CI for B		SE.B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LL	UL				
(Constant)	82.79****	72.62	92.96	5.15		.37	.33****
Age	-2.12*	-4.17	-.07	1.03	-.19		
Gender	2.59*	.33	4.84	1.14	.14		
No. of Siblings	-.39	-2.58	1.79	1.11	-.02		
School/College Status	-1.47	-3.73	.79	1.14	-.08		
Class	2.56	-.87	6.00	1.74	.14		
Father's Qualification	-1.86**	-3.08	-.65	.61	-.23		
Mother's Qualification	-2.99****	-4.17	-1.81	.59	-.38		
Marital Status of Parents	.46	-3.36	4.29	1.94	.01		
Socio Economic Status	4.35****	2.80	5.91	.78	.35		
Family System	2.40*	.20	4.60	1.11	.13		

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0005$

Multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the demographic characteristics as predictor of neglect in adolescents. All the demographic variables including age, gender, number of siblings, class, school status, father's qualification, mother's qualification, marital status of parents, socio economic status and family system were entered as predictors by enter method. The total score of neglect was entered as dependent variable. Results of regression analysis revealed that age, gender, father's qualification, mother's qualification, socio economic status and family system were significant predictors of neglect in adolescents. Whereas, other variables including school status, class, number of siblings and marital status of parents were not significant predictors of neglect. The overall regression model was a good fit for data. The table showed that the independent variables statistically significantly predict the dependent variable $F(10, 196) = 11.26$; $p < .0005$ and explained 3.7% of variance for neglect.

Discussion

Adolescents face many challenges in this phase of life. Neglect among adolescents might play a vital role in their development and overall progress. The study aimed to find out the predictors of neglect among adolescents particularly considering the demographic variables so the connectivity of each variable with neglect is the topic of discussion. The results indicate that there was more neglect in younger adolescents in the three age groups i.e., 13-14, 15-16 and 17-18. The reason might be the fact that young adolescents who just started their teens life might be going through teen age crisis which becomes difficult for parents to handle but the situation improves along with the growing age. Anu and Acquah (2021) unfolded the challenges faced by adolescents of various age groups in secondary schools in Ghana. The 376 students

from public high schools participated in the study based on cross sectional survey design. The study indicated that the vulnerable group of adolescents were female adolescents in their early adolescence who were staying in hostels and were studying in the final year. Those were prone to experience social challenges as compared to other groups.

Gender is also the strong predictor of neglect. The results showed that the girls were more neglected as compared to boys. The reason might be the societal norm that the boys are given more importance and privileges in society than girls. The boys are considered to be the bread winners and the future heads of a family that is why they might get more attention as compared to girls. Another reason might be the fact that the boys are generally rough and need to be corrected and guided more often by parents and as a result acquire more attention and time of parents. Girls who are generally calm and peaceful demanding less time and effort that is why parents tend to neglect them. Another reason might be an overall feeling felt by girls that they are not treated equally as compared to boys might also be the reason that this gender manifested neglect. Another reason might also be overall more sensitiveness of girls that make them feel that they are neglected as compared to boys who are generally found to be rough and tough. Hagborg et al. (2017) investigated the emotional maltreatment on both the genders. Swedish 12-13 years of 1134 boys and girls participants in the study. The results showed that the girls reported compromised psychological health at lower level of emotional maltreatment as compared to boys who showed lower level of psychological health with increased level of emotional maltreatment.

Father's qualification was found to be a significant predictor of neglect. The result of the study showed that those adolescents manifested more neglect whose fathers were less educated. As the father's qualification increased their neglect decreased. The reason for such result might be the fact that the fathers in Pakistani families take major decisions with reference to the needs of children and their overall families. The awareness education gave might have helped them in taking care of their adolescents in a better way as a result minimizing the neglect in their adolescents. Bluth, Park & Lathrew (2020) conducted a study to find out whether the qualification level of parents was linked with 'self-compassion' (a trait linked with a person's strong mental health with low anxiety and stress). There were 1057 adolescents from grade 7-12 of public and private schools who answered survey questionnaire. Father's education was found to be associated with self-compassion instead of mother's education.

No one can deny the fact that a mother plays a pivotal role in a family. Mother's qualification is also a strong predictor of neglect. The adolescents whose mothers had less education were found to be more neglected as compared to those whose qualification level was high. The mothers who are more educated are more equipped to take care of adolescents in a better way. The less educated mothers might not prove to be equal to educated mothers with reference to brought up of adolescents. Awan & Kauser (2015) conducted a study to assess the effect of the qualification level of mothers on the academic performance of their adolescents studying in schools. A sample of 200 students was included from the public school of Lodhran, Pakistan. Correlation was used to establish the relationship between the mothers' education and students' achievement. As the qualification level of mothers increased, the performance of students also improved. The children of educated mothers performed far better than those whose mothers were moderately educated, less educated or uneducated.

There was an interesting finding that the rise in socio economic status of parents gave rise to neglect among adolescents. Adolescents with high socio economic status manifested more neglect as compared to adolescents with low socio economic status. There might be different reasons for this result. The parents might become busier in life and had less time for adolescents when they had high socio economic status. They might have relied on tutors and had no time to keep a check on their progress in education. Mothers might become more social and active keeping their prime duty of being a mother aside. Both the parents might have relied on servants where they needed to play an active role themselves. In families with low socio economic status the parents might have played an active role as they considered the future of their children the only hope of prosperity in the family. Masud et al., (2019) studied the effects of demographic

factors on academic performance of 456 adolescents studying in public and private institutions of Peshawar. The findings of regression analysis showed that high socio economic status, fathers' education level and fathers' care scores were predictors of good performance in exams.

Generally, there are two family systems (joint and nuclear) in Pakistan. In joint families immediate and extended family live together under one roof and in nuclear family system only immediate family lives in a house. The results showed that the adolescents living in nuclear family system manifested more neglect as compared to those living in joint family system. In joint family system there are more people to keep an eye on adolescents and to take care of their needs. In nuclear families when one parent is out the other takes the responsibility of the adolescent but when both are out for work or for any other reason they need to rely on servants or adolescents are left on their own resulting in neglect among adolescents living in nuclear family system. Larrivee and Trocme (2008) highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of family structures. Crowder and Teachman (2004) explained that family structure whether joint or nuclear effects the personality of children, success in academics and self-efficacy of teens. Loury (2006) pointed out the importance of extended family and its positive role in the development of children in a household. Baig , Rehman and Mobeen (2014) impressed upon the role of family and its structure in the development of teenagers. The teenagers living in joint family have more social interaction with their cousins and other members of the family where as in nuclear families teenagers have more emotional attachment with their friends. The friends sometimes have bad habits like drinking "sheesha" and the teenagers also develop this habit. The parents in nuclear family system have to remain more alert with reference to the activities of the teenagers outside home. The teenagers living in nuclear family system are more prone to develop bad habits and get effected negatively.

The variables such as school status, class/grade, number of siblings and marital status were not found to be significant predictors of neglect. The institutions that were approached in the study were public and private sector schools and colleges. Generally, in Pakistan public sector institutions have students from lower socio economic status and private sector institutions have students from mediocre or rich family background. The private sector institutions which were visited were local private institutions which were not the educational institutions of the elite class. The both public and private sector institutions did not play a major role in predicting neglect. The study system or the impact of the teaching in public and private sector institution might not have marked difference that is why it did not prove to be a predictor of neglect. The students who participated in the study were from classes 8-12 which were further divided as middle, secondary and higher secondary. The class/grade of adolescents did not predict neglect. The reason might be that a student of any grade might predict neglect regardless of their class/grade. If an adolescent's needs like educational, physical health, psychological, supervisory etc. are met then he/she might not manifest neglect regardless of their class/grade. The students who became part of this study had different number of siblings. The number of siblings were divided into two categories i.e., 1-3 and 4 and above. The number of siblings did not predict neglect. It is assumed that families where number of siblings is less they are better taken care of. But at the same time the families with the large number of siblings might have elder brothers or sisters who take care of them well. It might be the reason that number of siblings did not predict neglect. Marital status of parents also did not prove to be a predictor of neglect among adolescents. It seems to be quite an obvious fact that the children of single parent whether father or mother might be more neglected as compared to those whose parents are together. The reason that it did not prove to be a strong predictor of neglect might be the unequal statistical representation of single parent or parents living together ratio in the sample. But still at the same time the sample of this study reflects the correct representation of our society where the parents despite of all conflicts and clashes tend to stay together. It is difficult to get more or less equal representation of single and together living parents in a small sample like this. Another study might be conducted in which a purposive sample from the adolescents of single and together living parents might be collected in equal ratio.

In order to sum up, a female, young adolescent with a father and mother with less qualification from a high socio economic status living in a nuclear family is the most prone to be neglected according to this study.

Conclusion

The young adolescents (ages 13-15) are in the critical most period of their life i.e., teen age. This age requires a lot of attention and supervision on parents' part. If the brought up in this phase of life goes well then the adolescents might remain safe from different adversities such as poor performance in school, keeping bad company, misuse of social media, indulging in immoral activities etc. Parents need to pay more attention to adolescents in this phase of life otherwise there is a chance that they might get neglected. As they grow old and move towards late adolescents (ages 16-18) they become comparatively stable to meet the challenges of this teen age.

Both the genders need to be given equal importance and priority. No society can prove to be conducive and successful without the participation of both the genders. If one gender will be neglected, the other will not be able to perform well in the various fields of life. Girls are found to be more neglected as compared to boys in the sample of current study which accurately depicts the present scenario of our society. It is the need of the time to say it loud and clear that female gender should get equal rights and access to the facilities that are provided to the male gender. Every girl is a potential mother and if we are raising girls who are neglected how will we save the next generation from getting neglected.

Educated parents bring up their children in all stages of life in a better way. An educated parent will have more awareness about the equal rights of both the genders and its consequences if not done so. A well-educated parent will understand the importance of education, recreation, moral and ethical development, in time medical attention, good family environment etc., in comparison with those who are less educated or not educated at all. According to the current study the less educated or uneducated mothers and fathers tend to neglect their kids more in comparison with educated mothers and fathers. The adolescents whose parents are educated have an advantage over those whose parents are not educated or less educated. The culture of education for both genders should be promoted and government should take strict measures in this regard so that our literacy rate improves and our future generations do not suffer in this regard.

The economic condition of a family leaves a deep impact on the brought up of the children in a family. According to the results of the current study, the adolescents from high socio economic status are more neglected. The families that earn less have minimal access to facilities like internet, different gadgets, mobile phones etc. In such families, adolescents play with their peers and communicate more to their family members in their free time and enjoy their life in their closely knitted family. Where as in economically stable families or with high socio economic status might have more access to facilities but might not have free leisure time that allows close connection with the family. More access to gadgets, mobiles and devices keep adolescents away from social connectivity at home and even sometimes they fall prey to evils present on internet. Economically stable families might make better provisions for adolescents but along with that keeping away from the perils that economic abundance brings, must be tackled well.

The family system in Pakistan is firstly joint family system where parents, children and extended family members live together and secondly nuclear family system where parents and children live in a home as a separate unit. In joint family system, there is more support of all sorts available for parents that helps in brought up of children. The adolescents living in joint family system have more people around to share their feelings with, are well supervised, have moral and ethical guidance by their grand-parents or other elders and over all might have a broader view of the world. Where as in nuclear family system, children enjoy the environment of a separate home under the supervision of their parents. In nuclear family system, the house support staff is generally the need of the family if both the parents are working. Generally, adolescents are looked after by complete strangers who have no emotional connectivity with them. Even if one parent stays home he/she is too busy to look after and supervise the adolescent who is back from school/college. When the parents in nuclear families have conflicts then there are no elders around who can help in solution of the problems and in this way adolescents get ignored in the time of emotional turmoil of parents. What so ever the family system is, parents need to ensure proper brought up of adolescents.

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