

Parental Psychological Control and Aggression Among Adolescents: Mediating Role of Emotional Dysregulation

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The present research examined the relationship between parental psychological control, emotional dysregulation, and aggression among adolescents. It was also intended to determine the mediating role of emotional dysregulation in the relationship between parental psychological control and aggression. It was a correlational study and purposive sample of 350 ($n = 176$ girls, $n = 174$ boys) students from school and college aged between 13 to 18 years ($M = 15.77$; $SD = 1.37$) were included in the present study. Dependency Oriented and Achievement Oriented Psychological Control Scales (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Luyten, 2010), Peer Conflict Scale-Youth version (Marsee & Frick, 2007), and Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004) were administered to measure the constructs under study. Results revealed significant relationship among variables. Mediation analysis revealed that emotional dysregulation significantly mediated the relationship between parental psychological control and aggression among adolescents. The results were discussed in the context of previous literature and culture of Pakistan.

Keywords. Parental psychological control, emotional dysregulation, aggression, adolescents

Adolescence is an important phase of life and a major turning time period in any individual's life. Entering in this age, individual experiences many rapid physical changes (John & Viginia, 1969). Adolescence is not only manifested by physical change but people in this age also experience interpersonal, social or emotional and cognitive changes as well (Frank, 1994). As adolescents develop and

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grow, they got effect by external or environmental factors, like their school, culture, media, environment, and the religion. Although these changes are perceived differently by every individual due to their personality, interests and dislikes or likes. Among other rapid changes adolescents also experience changes in their emotional regulation (Steinberg, 2011). They experience a host of emotions at this stage of life. All these emotions are different for every adolescent; however, they experience anger, hostility, hate, resentment more in this age as compared to any other stage of life (Greene, 2006). Therefore, some authors have termed this as stormy period of life (Smetana, 1988). Another important change in this life period is in interpersonal relationships. Before this time period they have close bond with parents and their family members (Lempers, 1992). However, in this age they tend to more oriented to their friends circle. They find interest in spending time and gossiping with friends. They start sharing with their friends as compared to their parents or siblings (Kevin, McHale, Osgood, & Gronter, 2006). So, they perceive their parental involvement in different ways at this stage of life (Lempers, 1992).

Psychological control is one example of a parenting behavior that parents may view as successful, but in actuality, may be insensitive to the child's needs and inhibit the development of autonomy and independence. Rather than controlling behaviors directly, parents are attempting to change the child's opinions, emotions, and thinking patterns (Barber, 1996). Psychological control is most often a destructive form of parental control. It can be explained in terms of parents who handle their children's behavior through controlling their children's emotions, by invading their children's personal independence, or limiting their children's ambit of experiences. The types of parental psychological control have been accurately represented as Dependency Psychological Control and Achievement Psychological Control (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Duriez, & Goossens, 2006).

Dependency oriented psychological control can be defined as the parents use of their psychological control to put their children close to them by regulating their emotional and physical boundaries by themselves and giving little or no autonomy to the child (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Luyten, 2010). Achievement oriented psychological control can be defined as the parents use of their psychological control to put their children in such a state that they to abide by the standard of their parents set for them in order to be considered lovable (Soenens et al., 2010; Tu, Lee, Chen, & Kao, 2014). It has been demonstrated that both dependency psychological control and

achievement psychological control make visible positive correlations with destructive consequences, such as depression, perception of low emotional support from parents, and aggressive behavior in adolescents (Cacioppo, Pace, & Zappulla, 2013). Parental psychological control disturb the adolescent's autonomy and their sense of self as high parental psychological control contributes to the lower level of self-esteem and increase problems such as aggression (Barber, 1996).

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) suggested that people have innate motivations for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and achieving those three goals is impeded by psychological control (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Parents do not let children decide and act on their own (autonomy), belittle children's capacity (competence), and conditionally love them only when they do what parents want them to do (relatedness). Frustration of the pursuit of these important needs can result in anger and aggression (Lapre, 2015; Nanda, Kotchick, & Groven, 2012).

Emotion dysregulation can be defined as when an individual does not know how to apply the strategies to efficaciously regulate his or her emotions or when the strategies are not utilized properly, they go wrong, or when those strategies are over utilized, emotion regulation patterns may intervene with adolescents being able to accomplish their end results which can be anything like getting along with friends or dealing with an academic stress (Cole, Michel, & O'Donnell, 1994; Nanda, 2015). In accordance with developmental antecedents of emotion dysregulation, it is of great significance to understand that emotion regulation does not consist of only a single step but it is composed of many elements (Betts, Gullone, & Allen, 2009). The first element included in the emotional regulation's succession of stages is the adolescent's perception of alterations in his or her environment. Then the sensory stimuli that are present in the external environment are being perceived, refined, classified through the visual and auditory aids, and conveyed to the brain (Cacioppo et al., 2013; Hughes, Gullone, Dudley, & Tonge, 2010). Early perceptual appraisal helps in evaluating whether the input is positive or negative and what type of environmental alteration is being desired by the adolescent. Emotion dysregulation may come about during the first step if adolescents have the filter of a specific bias in processing the information being perceived. For example, some adolescents have the tendency to take notice of negative stimuli more easily but take more time to notice positive stimuli. Successively, this can impact the enacting of behavioral responses. This can be explained as if an adolescent might decide to involve in a situation because he or she perceive it as

positive rather than avoid it or vice versa, contingent upon on the bias in the information processing pattern (Hughes et al., 2010).

After processing the stimulus, the individual will bring forth an emotional response and attach a valence to those stimuli which is categorizing if it is positive or negative. This difficult step includes facets of emotional, associative learning, memory, and reward processing. After a stimulus is perceived it will be classified, with the identification of others' emotional states being fundamental to operate in the social environment. Perceptual appraisals with the developmental stages make an aggregation of stored connections and memories that give significance and incite behavior. This associative learning consists of a simple stimulus and response relationship, in which an individual connects particular emotion-affiliated discriminative stimulus with definite consequences (Jaffe, Gullone, & Hughes, 2010; Kunz & Grych, 2013). In the third step of emotion regulation the behavioral response is being enacted. This involves chiefly executive roles like controlling the restrictive actions. During the period of adolescence, individual's behavioral responses are in a dynamic state that will become increasingly adaptable at both adjusting and restricting responses established on occurrences in the environment. Memory also functions in molding this element of emotion regulation, as an adolescent trusts on his or her knowledge that is being increased about the chances of winning or failing in specific response options that are established on the experiences of past (Gratz, Rosenthal, Tull, Lejuez, & Gunderson, 2006; Jabeen, Riaz, & Haq, 2013). When a peer provoke, an aggressive adolescent will deduce violent intention and will respond aggressively. Aggressive adolescent also face a problem in altering to a novel response if the first has not given a favorable outcome. As, if an aggressive adolescent wants to win a game, he may shout at another child and keep on becoming irritated, instead of thinking of another behavioral responses such as politely asking for a turn or asking an adult to step in (Gross, 2002). There are many parents who don't have any knowledge about their children's emotions, they do not mark the emotions in conversations, and they try to dominate their children's emotion instead of teaching them effective emotional regulation strategies (Hilt, Hanson, & Pollak, 2011).

Aggression can be defined as the type of control or seeking control over a fellow by making damage either psychologically or physically. It has been showed that aggression has different kinds and uses. Aggression can be made explicit by physical ways, through which a child uses physical force or strength such as pulling away, hitting or the threat of using physical force to make damage (Marsee

& Frick, 2007). It has been showed that aggressive behavior has harmful outcomes for children's emotional and psychological development and is connected with a partner of long-run dysfunctional problems (Marsee et al., 2011). Aggression is usually differentiated into subtypes in accordance with the shape that the behavior turn into, and it has also been showed that this kind of aggression may have other causal factors and ways of developing (Mushtaq & Kayani, 2013).

Physical aggression or overt aggression consists of causing harm to another person by using physical force or giving the threat of using physical force, and it also consists of actions like punching, biting and pushing away or taking the things by using physical force (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). Relational aggression is regarded as a devious influence being used for one's own advantage in social relationships to cause damage to the other person and it consists of behaviors like propagating rumors or secrets and making threats to terminate friendships (Dodge et al., 2006). Proactive aggression, on the other hand, is displayed to reach a goal, whether that goal involves material or territorial gain or social dominance. Reactive aggression is defensive, retaliatory, and in response to real or perceived provocation. Lapre (2015) investigated the association between psychological control and youth aggression, machiavellianism, and dysregulation. The results revealed that machiavellianism partially mediated the link between parental psychological control and aggression, whereas, dysregulation also partially mediated the link between psychological control and aggression. It was also revealed that parental psychological control and dysregulation were more significantly correlated with reactive than proactive aggression. As a matter of fact, it has been supported that some children who show early signs of physical aggression can later exhibit relational aggression, either replacing or adding the physical aggression. The coinciding between physical and relational aggression entail some common vulnerability components within both kinds that demands more investigation of these kinds (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). By taking account of this, emotionally dysregulated children with psychologically controlling parents may be at an increased vulnerability for displaying aggressive behavior. Particularly for girls this may be definitely true when taking view of relational aggression, as for boys the impression may be more noticeable when taking view of physical aggression (Little & Seay, 2014).

Adolescents whose parents use guilt induction strategies and control behavior emotionally have the high vulnerability of showing

aggressive behavior, and this influence may be compounded when there is also an inability to regulate emotions effectively. When children experience emotional dysregulation, pronounced by lack of ability to recognize emotions and efficaciously interact with other people, they at the same time show difficulty in controlling their behaviors and respond in a maladaptive way to their environment (Robertson, Daffern, & Bucks, 2012). Hence, when in an environment in which parents are manipulating emotions of their children, and there is dysfunctional emotional regulation, aggression and other acting out behaviors are more probable to occur. In addition, psychologically controlling parenting may have less impact on those who can effectively regulate their emotions as they have the ability to easily convey their emotional needs to others (Snider, 2013).

Pakistan is a collectivistic culture where children are raised under strict parental control and are preferred to be dependent and follow the commands of their parents and this style of upbringing children is well appreciated in almost all Asian cultures and is more in practice, so in the present study it has been highlighted that parental psychological control is a different construct which goes beyond the normal control of the parents and do more harm than good as the children of those parents face difficulty in regulating their emotions properly and they eventually show destructive behaviors such as the use of overt and relational aggression (Barber, Bean, & Erickson, 2002; Batool, 2013; Jabeen et al., 2013; Khan, 2006).

The objective of the present study was to examine the relationship between parental psychological control, emotional dysregulation, and aggression in adolescents. In addition, it was also intended to investigate the role of emotional dysregulation as a mediator between parental psychological control and aggression.

Hypotheses

1. There is positive relationship between parental psychological control, emotional dysregulation, and aggression among adolescents.
2. Emotional dysregulation is likely to mediate in the relationship between parental psychological control and aggression among adolescents.

Method

Sample

In the present study, the total sample ($N = 350$) included boys ($n = 174$) and girls ($n = 176$) with aged between 13 to 18 years ($M = 15.77$; $SD = 1.37$) and was selected from four government and three private schools and two government and two private colleges. The sample size was determined through G-power analysis by keeping $p = .05$ with medium effect size of 317. The participants were studying in 8th class (21%), 9th class (24%), 10th class (25%), 1st year (15%) and 2nd year (16%). Half of the boy's participants (51%) lived in nuclear family system, whereas, half of the girl's participants (52%) lived in joint family system. Majority of the boys' (95%) and girls' (94%) mothers were self-employed. Also, 58% of the male participants and 61% of the female participants' fathers were employed. Furthermore following inclusion and exclusion criteria was followed for sample selection:

Inclusion criteria. Adolescents of 13 to 18 years of age and who were studying in any government or private school were included in the present study.

Exclusion criteria. Adolescents having single parent, those whose parents were divorced and who had done Hafiz-e-Quran were excluded from the present study.

Measures

The research protocol included the following assessment measures for the study:

Demographic sheet. Demographic sheet was constituted to acquire information about the participant's age, education, religion, number of siblings, birth order, relationship with siblings and parents, parent's education age, occupation, and type of family system.

Dependency Oriented and Achievement Oriented Psychological Control Scale (DAPCS; Soenens et al., 2010). The DAPCS was administered to assess adolescent's perceived

psychological control of their parents. The scale consisted of 20 items comprised of two subscales with 10 items each Dependency-Oriented Psychological Control (DPC) and Achievement-Oriented Psychological Control (APC). The participants were asked to answer on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The higher score indicated adolescent's perception of higher levels of dependency oriented and achievement oriented psychological control. Total score was calculated by computing the cumulative scores on both subscales. The Cronbach's alpha of the English version of the tool was reported to be .82 for DPC and .89 for APC (Cacioppo et al., 2013). The Cronbach's alpha of the Urdu version that was translated by the researcher of DPC was found to be .98 and .97 of DPC and APC; respectively, for the present study.

Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2013). DERS is a self-report measure used to assess clinically relevant difficulties in emotion regulation, to evaluate emotion dysregulation. It consisted of 36 items having six subscales namely Non-acceptance (6 items), Goals (5 items), Impulse (6 items), Awareness (6 items), Strategies (8 items), and Clarity (5 items). The participants marked their responses on a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). Total score was calculated by computing the cumulative scores on six subscales and higher scores indicated greater difficulty with emotion regulation. The Chronbach's alpha of the English version of the scale was .93 (Gratz & Roemer, 2004); while, Cronbach's alpha of the Urdu version that was translated by the researcher of the scale was found to be .87 for the present study.

Peer Conflict Scale (PCS; Marsee & Frick, 2007). PCS was used in the present study to assess the different types of aggression in adolescents. It consisted of 40 items and is a self-report measure including subscales of Reactive Overt Aggression (10 items), Reactive Relational Aggression (10 items), Proactive Overt Aggression (10 items), and Proactive Relational Aggression (10 items). The items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 = *not at all* to 3 = *definitely true*. Total score was calculated by computing the cumulative scores on four subscales and higher scores indicated the presence of more aggression in the adolescent. The Cronbach's alpha of the English version of the scale was reported as .78 (Marsee et al., 2011); whereas, alpha coefficient of .80 was achieved for the Urdu version that was translated by the researcher in the present study.

Procedure

Firstly, written permission for the use of assessment measures were taken from the original authors before starting the data collection. Formal written permissions were sought from the authorities of government and private schools and colleges. Prior to start of research, the purpose and nature of the study was explained to the participants through participant information sheet. Written informed consent was taken from the participants as an ethical obligation of the researcher and they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. It was made clear to them that the information would be used only for academic and research purposes. After getting informed consent, the questionnaires were administered to the participants. And they were also guided where they found any difficulty during administration. Average completion time for scales was 25 minutes. Participants were thanked for their co-operation at the end of data collection. Total 377 number of forms were distributed and out of which 6 participants (1.6%) did not fulfill the criteria and 21 forms (5.6%) were discarded as they were uncompleted. The overall return rate was 92%. Hence, in the end 350 forms were made part of data analysis after data screening and cleaning process to exclude random responses and incomplete questionnaires.

Results

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to find out the relationship between parental psychological control, emotional dysregulation, and aggression. The results are given in Table 1.

The results showed a significant positive relationship between parental psychological control, emotional dysregulation, and aggression. It gives the impression that those adolescents who experience more psychological control from their parents are likely to be more emotionally dysregulated and have the higher tendency to display aggression.

The results also revealed that there is a significant positive relationship of dependency oriented psychological control and achievement oriented psychological control with reactive overt, proactive overt, reactive relational, proactive relational aggression, non-acceptance, goals, impulse, strategies, clarity and awareness.

Table 1
Correlation Matrix for All Study Variables ($N=350$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.DAPC	-	.84**	.87**	.71**	.70**	.78**	.77**	.76**	.84**	.86**	.87**	.55**	.67**	.67**	.74**	5.37	2.77
2.DPC		-	.86**	.77**	.87**	.72**	.71**	.67**	.84**	.88**	.88**	.86**	.87**	.86**	.87**	2.73	1.43
3.APC			-	.87**	.67**	.78**	.86**	.86**	.87**	.87**	.86**	.87**	.88**	.87**	.87**	2.64	1.35
4.PCS				-	.80**	.67**	.62**	.53**	.86**	.86**	.86**	.87**	.87**	.86**	.86**	38.13	14.44
5.RO					-	.77**	-.73**	-.74**	.52**	.68**	.57**	.46**	.78**	.84**	.75**	9.24	10.10
6.PO						-	.52**	.54**	.60**	.76**	.29**	.76**	.61**	.86**	.85**	9.20	10.01
7.RR							-	.42**	.76**	.50**	.67**	.40**	.77**	.80**	.72**	9.88	10.54
8.PR								-	.76**	.50**	.65**	.40**	.57**	.80**	.72**	9.81	10.44
9.DERS									-	.88**	.88**	.88**	.66**	.88**	.85**	16.02	49.37
10.NA										-	.86**	.86**	.87**	.86**	.86**	16.24	7.92
11.GO											-	.86**	.87**	.76**	.85**	14.60	7.04
12.IM												-	.85**	.76**	.86**	17.33	8.42
13.ST													-	.82**	.87**	22.64	10.82
14.CL														-	.82**	15.29	7.17
15.AW															-	19.79	8.79

Note. DAPC = Dependency Oriented And Achievement Oriented Psychological Control; APC = Achievement Oriented Psychological Control; DPC = Dependency Oriented Psychological Control; RO = Reactive Overt; PO = Proactive Overt; RR = Reactive Relational; PR = Proactive Relational; DER = Difficulties In Emotional Regulation; NA = Non-Acceptance; ST = Strategies; AW = Awareness; CL = Clarity; GO = Goals; IM = Impulse.

* $p < .01$.

Mediation analysis is conducted to determine the role of emotional dysregulation as a mediator between parental psychological control and aggression. The results of the mediation analysis are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Mediation Analysis Showing Emotional Dysregulation as Mediator Between Parental Psychological Control and Aggression (N = 350)

		<i>M</i> (ED)			<i>Y</i> (A)			
Predictor		β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>		β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>X</i> (PPC)	<i>a</i>	17.63	0.13	.01	<i>c'</i>	1.18	0.40	.01
					<i>ab</i>	5.07	0.06	.01
<i>M</i> (ED)		-	-	-	<i>b</i>	.22	0.02	.01
Constant	<i>iM</i>	0.92	0.76	.01	<i>iY</i>	2.01	1.32	.01
				$R^2 = .98$				
				$F(1,348) = 12.44$				

empirical literature which narrates that parental psychological control had strong positive correlation with aggression (Cui, Morris, Criss, & Silk, 2014; Kuppens, Gritens, Onghens, & Michiels, 2009). Empirical literature also revealed that harsh parenting by involving psychological control tactics is linked with high adolescent aggression (Chang et al., 2003; Rathert, Fite, & Gartner, 2011). Moreover it has been found that viewing one's parents as restrictive and psychological controlling is associated with more behavioral (delinquency and aggression) and emotional problems in regulating emotions effectively (Finkenauer, Engels, & Bauemeista, 2005; Nanda, 2015). Marsee and Frick (2007) found that emotional dysregulation is positively associated with reactive overt, proactive overt, reactive relational, and proactive relational aggression among youth. In contrary to this, research also suggested that psychologically controlling parenting strategies contribute to increased relational and decreased physical aggression among emotionally well regulated adolescents. Whereas, in emotionally dysregulated adolescents, increased physical aggression and decreased relational aggression is also found (Blossom, Fite, Frazer, Cooley, & Evans, 2016; Rathert et al., 2011).

According to Islamic teachings respect for parents is greatly emphasized in Pakistani culture and obeying them is an obligation for children as well as adults. But psychological control used by parents on their children to get compliance is not something in accordance with Islam as this religion has given its teachings on proper upbringing of children. However, it can be explained as a Pakistani cultural trend because children's high dependency on their parents is seen as a positive thing and parents use psychologically controlling tactics to gain that dependency. Similarly, as the modern trend is getting more and more popularity; competitive parents want their children to be successful but neglecting other important aspects required for the healthy development of children. Moreover, in Pakistani culture the acknowledgement of emotions is not being taught and suppression of them is expected so the resultant emotions after experiencing psychological control of parents were not then regulated appropriately and eventually the behavioral problems in those children such as expression of aggression arise which is a destructive side of behavior (Obeid, 1988; Saleem, Mahmood, & Subhan, 2015).

Results of present study further revealed that emotional dysregulation significantly mediated the association between psychological control and forms of aggression. In other words as per findings of empirical literature emotionally dysregulated youth with psychologically controlling parents are at increased risk for aggressive

behavior (Blossom et al., 2016). Buckholdt et al. (2014) found that the association between parent's invalidation of emotions, a psychologically controlling strategy and youth's internalizing and externalizing behaviors was mediated by emotion dysregulation. Furthermore, studies also found that adolescent's emotional dysregulation partially mediated the association between mother's psychological control and adolescent's behavioral problems (Luebke, Bump, Fussner, & Rulon, 2013). In previous literature it has also been demonstrated that the association of psychological control with adolescent aggressive behavior and depressive symptoms are indirect through adolescent's emotional dysregulation (Cui et al., 2014).

Present study findings are of prime in link with the cultural setup of collectivistic cultures such as Pakistani culture tends to be less emotionally expressive and emotions are not something to be emphasized on. Asian cultures specifically the collectivist tradition holder societies gives much weight on fulfilling societal demands and accommodating others therefore, persons in these setups practice emotional suppression more than emotional expression and thus it can be counted as a reason for adolescents to be found as emotionally dysregulated (Ramzan & Amjad, 2017). Furthermore, Pakistan is an oriental and religious society, where both parents play a crucial and distinctive role in the growth of their children therefore parenting practices become even more important. However, when the maladaptive parenting practices are in practice then harmful and devastating results for children became obvious such as the excessive use of parental psychological control results in increase of aggressive behavior among adolescents (Saleem et al., 2015). It can be concluded that adolescents who perceive that they experience more parental psychological control are emotionally dysregulated and because of that emotional dysregulation they display reactive, proactive, overt and relational aggression.

Limitations and Suggestions

1. In the present study, as the aggression was self-reported by the students so the multiple information sources of the adolescent's aggressive behavior should be taken such as from parents and teachers of the students.
2. All measures utilized in the present study were based on rating scale data which increased the risk of common method variance so in order to reduce that qualitative research techniques (e.g., interviewing) should be used so that data collected could give more authenticity.

3. As the parental psychological control was measured from the perspective of the participants so information from individual parents should also be taken.

Implications

In the light of the present study certain interventions can be proposed such as programs should be arranged for parents to assist them in developing appropriate disciplinary skills such as appropriate behavioral control by parents. These interventions may produce change in parental psychological control and will provide an appropriate model for adolescent's as well as parental behavior. Also, seminars should be arranged by psychologists to help adolescents develop emotional regulation strategies that will eventually help them to identify and label emotions and develop coping strategies when encountering any negative emotional experiences. However, more researches should be conducted on the parental psychological control, emotional dysregulation and aggression in adolescents who are not enrolled in any school as well as with different age groups. Moreover, counselling sessions should be arranged for students having behavioral problems and those who were facing extreme emotional distress.

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Received 4th November, 2017

Revision received 5th April, 2019