

## Perception of Parental Acceptance and Rejection in Emotionally Empathic and Non-Empathic Adolescents

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The present study explored the differences between emotionally empathic and non-empathic adolescents' perception of parental acceptance and rejection. A sample of 205 (100 girls and 105 boys) was taken from different schools. All participants were 13 to 17 years old ( $M = 15.0$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ). All the participants were taken from private, government and semi-government schools of Wah Cantt. Two groups comprising of 68 emotionally empathic and 68 non-empathic adolescents were identified on the basis of percentiles below 33 percentile and above 67th percentile of the total sample obtained on the Emotional Empathy Scale (EES). Emotional Empathy Scale (Ashraf, 2004) and Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Haque, 1981) were used to collect data from adolescents. The results indicated that emotionally empathic adolescents significantly differed from non-empathic adolescents on all the dimension of PARQ. Also non-empathic adolescents perceived their fathers more neglecting as compared to their mothers. The study has implication for the appropriate parenting styles that predispose the adolescents' empathy level.

*KeyWords:* parental acceptance and rejection, emotional empathy, empathetic adolescents, non-empathetic adolescents

The efforts to identify antecedents to the development of emotional empathy have primarily focused on the family environment; the most pertinent seem to be parent-child interaction (Barnett, King, Howard, & Dino, 1980; Bryant, 1980; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Eisenberg, 1992; Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991; Feshbach, 1987; Grusec, 1981; Robinson, Zahn-Waxler, & Emde, 1994; Kim & Rohner, 2003; Zahn-Waxler et al 1979). Emotional empathy refers to the tendency to feel and experience vicariously the (positive and negative) emotional experiences and or expressions for others- feelings (Mehrabian, 1996).

Parental relationship with their children has frequently been conceptualized in terms of interaction between two sets of parental attributes i.e., parental warmth /acceptance and rejection. These dimensions help us explain the diverse ways in which parents can bring up their children and how their behavior foster positive feelings in the child, thus promoting normal social development. The empirical work on parental acceptance-rejection was initiated in 1930 and now more than 2000 studies are available on this subject (Rohner, 2007). Majority of the research is done in the western world/cultures and not in South Asian contexts, it is significant that some research interests should be pursued in Pakistan to investigate whether the same patterns of parent-child interaction in emotional empathy of adolescents exist or not. In the present study, keeping in mind the differences in the parental child interactions and the ways in which parental acceptance and

rejection can be exercised, we assume that there would be some difference among the interaction styles of emotionally empathic and emotionally non-empathic adolescents in Pakistan.

### *Role of Family in the Development of Emotional Empathy*

Barnett (1987) proposed that the development of empathy is most likely to occur in a family environment that (a) satisfies the child's own emotional needs and discourages excessive self-concern, (b) encourages the child to experience and express a broad range of emotions, and (c) provides opportunities for the child to observe and interact with others who encourage emotional sensitivity and responsiveness. One parental variable that seems to fit well into Barnett's (1987) criterion for the socialization of empathy is parental warmth. Similarly, Allport (1961) argued that the basis of empathic ability includes a secure home environment. Children, who come from the permissive family environment, are more tolerant and empathic than those children who come from the harsh, submissive families.

### *Role of Parental Socialization in adolescent Empathic Responding*

Parents and general home environment have been considered very important factors which affect children's development including empathy and other relevant personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 1988). Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) investigated that children's observation about their parents and interactions with parents are likely to contribute to individual differences in empathy related responding. In addition, Hoffman (1982 & 2000) argued

that exposing children to models who act altruistically and who express their sympathetic feelings contributes to children's acting empathetically rather than making counter empathetic attributions about the causes of people's distress. However, there are some researches that also suggest a relationship between poor parenting (neglect / rejection) with low levels of empathy. Minor, Karr and Jain, (1987) found that lack of empathy is positively related to abusive parental behavior. Moreover, it is also evident from the literature, that socialite's use of power-assertive techniques of discipline ( physical punishment, deprivation of privileges, threats of either of these) has been found to be either unrelated (Mussen, Rutherford, Harris, & Keasey, 1970; Olejnik & McKinney, 1973; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1979) or negatively related with children's pro-social development (Bar-Tal, Nadler & Blechman, 1980; Dlugowski & Firestone, 1974; Eisenberg, 1995; Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, & Bridges, 2000; Hoffman, 1963; Supple, 2001), and levels of empathy in young adults (Brems & Sohl, 1995; Eisikovits & Sagi, 1982; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988; Rich, 1983; Supple, 2001). Thus one might conclude that early parenting practices and experiences are of primary importance in the development of empathic concern and dispositions in children.

Schaffer (as cited in Hamner & Turner, 1990), examined the concepts of mothering from four principal perspectives: mothering as physical care, mothering as a set of attitudes, mothering as stimulation, and mothering as mutual dialogues. There are certain environmental conditions that a mother can provide to enhance the development and competence of their children. It is an essential part for human infant to become attached to a mother figure, because strong mother-child attachment is a major antecedent of early interest in others and can be a necessary precondition for the child development (Ainsworth, 1979; Mussen & Eisenberg-Berg, 1977). Moreover, Pines and Marron (2003) also suggested that the quality of mother-child attachment plays a central role in the development of pro-social behavior in general and in promoting empathic concern in particular (also see, Nathanson, 1996). Kestenbaum, Farber and Sroufe (1989) also found that children who have a warm, loving relationship with their caregivers especially mothers, feel secure and that security makes them to think about others rather than focusing entirely on themselves. Several researches have found that mothers of pre-school children who are responsive, non punitive and non authoritarian their children exhibit higher sense of affective and cognitive empathy and pro social behavior. (Cotton, 2001; Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Eisenberg-Berg & Mussen, 1978; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996; Eisenberg, Fabes, Carlo, Troyer, Speer, Karbon, Switzer, 1992; Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo, & Miller, 1991; Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983; Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; Zahn-Waxier, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979). However, Robinson, Zahn-Waxler, and Emde, (1994) found that maternal warmth predicted high levels of empathic responding in 14 to 20 months infants, and maternal negative control predicted decreases in empathic responding over this period.

The term "fathering" appears in the context of the more direct psychological and physical role a man enacts in the rearing of his children (cited in Hanson & Bozetti, 1985). Fathers may have greater impact on the maladjustment in their children rather than in the development of positive behavior (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996; Koestner, Franz, & Weinberger, 1990; Reeves, Wery, Elkind, & Zanatkin, 1987; Tallmadge & Barkley, 1983). However, there are some recent researches which show that fathers also play

a very important role in the development of positive behavior (especially empathic concern) in their children. For example, Biller and Trotter (1994) found that primary school children, who scored higher on the test of empathy, had secure attachment to their father during infancy (Biller, 1982; Biller, 1993; Reuter & Biller, 1973). Similarly, Hinchey and Gavelek (1982) found that children of non-abusive fathers exhibited greater empathy as compared to children of abusive fathers. Literature shows that both father and mother play an important role in fostering empathic feelings and concerns in children.

### *Child-Rearing Styles: Parental Warmth-Rejection*

In order to understand the processes through which parents influence child development, one must understand the parenting style, or emotional climate within which socialization occurs. As a result of researches conducted in the field of child development two main domains of child rearing styles have been identified (Bronstein, 1994; Hetherington & Parke, 1986; Schaeffer, 1959). Parental warmth, the first dimension is conceptualized in term of concepts such as attachment, acceptance, hostility, and rejection. Parental control, the second dimension is conceptualized in such term as monitoring, supervision, control, and discipline. In a great majority of factor analytical studies (as cited in Rohner, & Pettengill, 1985) completed on children's perceptions of parental behavior internationally, the warmth dimension emerged first, with control dimension often emerging second. It was also found that these two dimensions of parenting are independent of each other. However, several researchers suggested the importance of warmth dimension in the development of positive developmental outcomes (Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989; Rohner, 2001).

Parental warmth refers to the amount of affection and approval that an adult displays toward his or her child. Parents described as warm and nurturing are those, who often smile at, praise and encourage their child while limiting their criticism, punishments and sign of disapproval. Warm parents are deeply committed to the child's welfare, and are responsive to the child's need. They are willing to spend time in joint enterprises of the child's choosing. Parents who are rated high on warmth show higher level of concern, involvement and affection toward their children. Warmth may be expressed behaviorally by the parent mainly in terms of higher levels of typical warm behavior e.g., showing more active concern, caretaking and playful joking behavior. All kinds of nurturing, supportive and loving, behaviors are expressions of parental acceptance. In contrast, rejecting parents criticize, punish or ignore a child's physical and emotional needs while limiting their expression of affection and approval. Such parents dislike, disapprove of, or reject their children openly through their behavior usually called aggression. Rejecting parents experience their aggression physically by hitting, pushing, pinching and hurting the child whereas verbal expression of anger involves sarcastic, cursing, shouting, humiliating, and behavior toward the child. All forms of these behaviors tend to include children to feel unloved or rejected (Haque, 1987; Sheikh & Haque, 1994).

Support for the association of parental warmth/responsivity with children's empathy can be gleaned from research and theory in a number of related areas: Theoretical perspectives shows that children rearing correlates with pro-social and moral development; Parental warmth/responsivity is hypothesized to promote children's empathy and pro-social behavior because it gives children feelings of security, control, and trust in the environment, which would

minimize self-concern and leave room to consider and respond to others' feelings (Hoffman, 1982; Janssen & Gerris, 1992; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-waxler, & Chapman, 1983; Staub, 1979). Secondly, in the attachment literature, parental warmth /responsively is viewed as a critical component for the development of a secure attachment between the caregiver and infant (Ainworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), and a secure attachment predicts children's concurrent (current level of emotional empathy in childhood) and later empathy (the tendencies to be empathetic in adolescence and adult stages related responding. Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory by Rohner (1975) also explains the association of parental warmth /responsivity with emotional empathy among adolescents.

### *Parental Acceptance- Rejection Theory (PAR Theory)*

Rohner(2007) introduced Parental-Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PAR), according to Rohner, parental warmth is bipolar dimension where acceptance stands at one pole of the scale and rejection (absence of acceptance and warmth) falls on the other pole. Rohner(2007) has defined the acceptance and rejection in terms of the child's perception of parental behavior. PAR Theory postulates that humans everywhere have a fundamental, phylogenetically acquired need for positive response (i.e., love approval, warmth and affection) from people most important to them—i.e., from parents and other attachment figures (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2010). This need for positive response is basic for the normal development and the withdrawal of affection is sufficient by itself to produce negative consequences for emotional and personality traits and behavioral functioning. Depending on the extent to which the need is satisfied, humans are expected in the theory to develop a specific cluster of dispositions, including hostility, aggression, passive aggression, problems with the management of hostility and aggression; dependence, healthy independence, or defensive independence; positive or negative self-esteem; positive or negative self-adequacy; emotional (un)responsiveness; emotional (in)stability; and positive or negative worldviews. This theory also predicts that the rejected children tend more than accepted children to be hostile, aggressive, to be dependent, and to have an impaired sense of self-esteem and self-adequacy, to be emotionally unstable; to be emotionally unresponsive, and to have a world negative view. Thus, according to this theory, whether a parent accepts or rejects the child, it significantly affects the child's personality formation and development. Parental acceptance–rejection theory is a theory of socialization which attempts to explain and predict major consequences of rejection for behavioral, cognitive, and emotional development of children and for personality functioning of adult everywhere. The researches and clinical reports support the expectations that have been implicated in the wide range of psychiatric and behavioral disorders. The postulates of the theory are supported by converging evidence from holocultural studies and numerous psychological studies conducted in the west as well as in Pakistan (Kausar & Tabassum, 1990; Khaleque & Rohner, 2002a; Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Hustor, 1984; Riaz, 2005; Rohner, 2006).

A good deal of research is evident that the underlying assumptions of PAR Theory effects mental health related outcomes (Chyung & Lee, 2006; Khaleque, Laukala, & Rohner 2006; Ruan & Rohner, 2004; Varan, Rohner, & Eryuksel, 2006). Thus, strong evidence supports, PAR Theory's expectations that children everywhere who come from loving (accepting) families are more

likely than children who come from unloving (rejecting) families to feel good about themselves (positive self-esteem); feel competent (positive self-adequacy); have the capacity to freely and non-defensively develop intimate, trusting relationships (emotional responsiveness); view the world and most humans as being benevolent or positive in other ways (Babree, 1997; Barnett, 1987; Davis, 1983; Hoffman, 1963; Kim & Rohner, 2003; Rohner, 2004). Despite the importance of the empathy in social development, research concerning parental role in the development of empathy has been sparse. In Pakistan, it has been almost nonexistent. Therefore, based on Parental Acceptance and Rejection (PAR) theory proposed and developed by Rohner (1975), the present study aimed at exploring how the adolescent perception of parental acceptance and rejection could be related to their level of emotional empathy in the indigenous context. PAR theory having explained well the socialization that attempts to predict and explain major antecedents, consequences, and other correlates of parental acceptance and rejection within the United States and worldwide (Rohner, 1975, 1986, 1994, 1999), testing it in the cultural context of Pakistan has theoretical and practical significance.

An ample of research provides an evidence that parents acceptance rejection effects mental health related outcomes. (Ahmed, Gielen, & Al-Sabah, 2008; Erkman, Caner, Sart, Borkan, & Sahan, 2010; Kourkoutas, & Tsiampoura, 2011; Kourkoutas, & Erkman, 2011; Rohner, 2010). Parental acceptance is positively associated with ego-strength (Ahmed, Al-Otaibi, & Gielen, 2008), social development (Gulay, 2011), sibling relationship quality (Kanyas, 2008), and emotional intelligence (Alegre & Benson, 2008) whereas it is negatively associated with depression and related symptoms (Gulay, 2011; Majeed, 2009; Salahur, 2010). Parental acceptance ensures healthy social and emotional adjustment (Akkus, 2010; Alegre, & Benson, 2008; Chyung & Lee, 2008; Demetriou & Christodoulides, 2011; Dwairy, 2010; Khaleque & Rohner, 2011; Khaleque, Rohner, & Rahman, 2011; Rohner, Varan, & Koberstein, 2010).

The present study was based on cross-sectional survey research design. The present study's main objective has been twofold: One to study whether the adolescent emotional empathy is associated with child rearing practices and secondly, to investigate the patterns of parent-child interactions as perceived by the identified emotionally empathic and non-empathic adolescents. On the basis of the literature review, following hypotheses are formulated:

H<sub>1</sub>: Perceived parental warmth will be higher among emotionally empathic adolescents as compared to non-empathic adolescents.

H<sub>2</sub>: Perceived parental aggression will be lower among emotionally empathic adolescents as compared to non-empathic adolescents.

H<sub>3</sub>: Perceived undifferentiated parental rejection will be lower among emotionally empathic adolescents as compared to non-empathic adolescents.

H<sub>4</sub>: Perceived parental neglect will be lower among emotionally empathic adolescents as compared to non-empathic adolescents.

H<sub>5</sub>: Emotionally empathic students will perceive their mothers more warmth than their fathers.

H<sub>6</sub>: Non empathic student's parents will be more rejecting than emotionally empathic students' parents.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample of the study comprised of 205 students (105 boys,

100 girls) of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The age range of these adolescents was 13-17 years ( $M = 15.0$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ). The sample included 105 boys and 100 girls. Among 105 boys who participated in the study, 55 boys were selected from 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 50 boys were selected from 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Similarly, among 100 girls, 50 girls were selected from 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 50 girls were selected from 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

### Measures

**Emotional Empathy Scale:** The scale developed by Ashraf (2004) has been used in the present research to identify emotionally empathic and non-empathic adolescents. The scale consists of 26 items and is a self-report measure of the tendency to experience vicariously the (positive and negative) emotional experiences of others. The scale is based on 7-point Likert-type response format. The response categories range from 1 for "absolutely disagree" to 7 for "absolutely agree". The total scores on the scale range from 26 as minimum and 182 for maximum scores on the overall scale. The scale is intended for the use with adolescents and general adult population. The norm for the scale have been developed ( $M = 143$ ,  $SD = 20$ ). Two groups comprising of emotionally empathic and non-empathic adolescents were identified on the basis of percentiles (33 percentile upper and 33 percentile lower cases) of the total sample obtained on the Emotional Empathy Scale. The internal reliabilities (alpha coefficient) of the scale was .85 where as its item total correlation at  $p < .000$  ranged from .31 to .60. The split half reliability of the scale was .83. The alpha coefficient of the scale in present study was 0.81, which is also quite satisfactory. Multiple types of validity evidences were reported by the author including factorial validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scale. The sample items include "seeing people deceiving others causes great trouble for me" and "when I come across a handicapped, I feel sad".

**Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire:** For investigating the Child parent Interaction of the participants, the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) developed by Rohner, Saaverda, and Granum (1980) was used in the present study. The original PARQ is in English language however for the present study Urdu version of PARQ translated by Haque (1981) was used. An analysis of reliability of translated PARQ showed that the translated instrument is psychometrically adequate (Haque, 1981, 1987). Additional evidence detailed in Rohner (1975) shows the convergent, discrimination and construct validities of PARQ to be satisfactory. PARQ has been used in Pakistan in various studies (Haque, 1981, 1987; Karim 1986; Riaz, 2005; Shah, Malik, & Jaffari, 1994; Sheikh & Haque, 1994) and reported to be construct valid instrument. In presents study alpha coefficient of the individual scales ranged from .71 to .89 and for the total scale was found to be .94 which is also quite satisfactory.

This questionnaire consists of two parts each comprising of 60 items. Part-I measures attitude of father towards the child whereas the Part-II measures attitudes of mothers towards the child at the age of 7-11 year olds. Each part yields four separate scores i.e., Parental Acceptance/Warmth; refers to the amount of affection that parents display towards their children (20 items). Parental aggression; the conditions where parents are perceived to be angry, bitter, resentful, intended to hurt, physically or verbally (15 items), Parental Neglect; the conditions where individuals see their parents as unconcerned or uninterested (15 items) and Undifferentiated parental Rejection; the conditions where individuals perceive their

parents rejecting, but where the expression of rejection is not clearly unaffectionate, aggressive or neglecting (10 items). There is no cut off scores in these subscales. Therefore high scores indicate high acceptance or rejection and vice versa. The sample items of paternal acceptance and rejection include "my father likes to spend time with me" and "my father in fact does not love me" respectively. The sample items for maternal acceptance and rejection include "my mother tries to keep me happy" and "my mother beats me without any reason" respectively. This questionnaire is five-point rating scale ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree (1-5). Both scale were obtained from Testing Resource Centre of National Institute of Psychology and were used with the permission of the center.

### Procedure

A group of emotionally empathic adolescents ( $n = 68$ ) was identified from the adolescents who fall above the 67<sup>th</sup> percentile of the total sample ( $n = 205$ ) on Emotional Empathy Scale. After identifying the emotionally empathic adolescents, a group of non-empathic adolescents ( $n = 68$ ) was also identified from the adolescents who fall below 33<sup>rd</sup> percentile of the total sample on Emotional Empathy Scale. While the rest of students whose score between the 33 percentiles to 67 percentile were excluded from the main analysis for hypothesis testing. The purposive convenient sampling was used in data collection after getting the permission from the school authority

### Results

A significant difference is found among the perception of emotionally empathic as compared to non-empathic adolescents on the dimension of Paternal and Maternal Warmth on PARQ. Emotionally empathic adolescents have found to perceive their fathers and mothers warmer as compared to non-empathic adolescents. Emotionally empathic adolescents have perceived their fathers and mothers less aggressive as compared to non-empathic adolescents. The results for fathers and for mothers support our second hypothesis that perceived paternal /maternal aggression will be low among emotionally empathic adolescents as compared to non-empathic adolescents. It has been found that emotionally empathic adolescents have perceived their fathers and mothers as less neglecting as compared to non-empathic adolescents. The results for fathers and for mothers' support our third hypothesis that perceived paternal /maternal Neglect will be low among emotionally empathic as compared to non-empathic adolescents. It has been found that emotionally empathic adolescents have perceived their both fathers and mothers less rejecting as compared to non-empathic adolescents. And at the same time result means scores of non-empathic adolescents also shows that non empathic adolescents have perceived their fathers more rejecting as compared to their mothers. The results for fathers and for mothers support our fourth hypothesis.

Table 2 shows differences in perception for mother and father Among identified emotionally empathic adolescents there is non-significant difference between adolescent's perception of father and mother on all the subscales of Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ). Results show that emotionally empathic adolescents perceived both their father and mother as equally warm, aggressive, neglecting, and rejecting. However, the

mean score of emotionally empathic adolescent's perception of father's

Table 1

*Differences between Empathic adolescents and Non empathic adolescents on dimensions of Paternal Warmth and Maternal Warmth on PARQ (N = 136)*

Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ)	Empathic Adolescents (n = 68)		Non-Empathic Adolescents (n = 68)		t	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		
Paternal Warmth	57.29	8.3	54.12	7.8	3.7***	.393
Maternal Warmth	59.32	9.6	54.18	8.3	2.9***	.572
Paternal Aggression	25.29	8.3	28.21	9.1	2.5**	.335
Maternal Aggression	24.75	7.9	27.01	8.6	3.0***	.273
Paternal Neglect	21.8	5.7	25.34	7.1	3.8***	.549
Maternal Neglect	21.7	6.9	24.52	8.0	2.6***	.377
Paternal Undifferentiated Rejection	18.83	4.5	20.10	6.2	2.7**	.234
Maternal Undifferentiated Rejection	18.06	5.5	20.30	5.9	1.6*	.392

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;  $df = 134$

Table 2

*Differences between (a) Emotionally Empathic and (b) Non-Empathic adolescent's perceptions of their father and mother regarding the dimensions of warmth on PARQ (N = 136)*

(a) Emotionally empathic adolescents' perceptions on PARQ	Fathers (n = 68)		Mothers (n = 68)		t	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		
Warmth	57.29	8.3	59.32	9.6	1.25	.226
Aggression	25.29	8.3	24.75	7.9	1.4	.066
Neglect	21.80	5.7	21.70	6.9	0.35	.015
Undifferentiated Rejection	18.83	4.5	18.06	5.5	0.48	.153
Total	123.21	13.0	123.83	15.34	2.58	.042
(b) Non-empathic adolescents' perceptions						
Warmth	54.12	7.8	54.18	8.3	0.65	.007
Aggression	28.21	9.1	27.01	8.6	0.83	.135
Neglect	25.34	7.1	24.52	8.0	2.85*	.108
Undifferentiated Rejection	20.10	6.2	20.30	5.9	0.31	.033
Total	127.77	15.6	126.01	16.4	1.2	.109

Note. PARQ = Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire; \* $p < .05$ ;  $df = 66$

aggression, neglect and undifferentiated rejection is greater than mothers whereas the mean score of emotionally empathic adolescent's perception of mother's warmth is greater than fathers. Among identified non-empathic adolescents there is no significant difference between adolescent's perception of father and mother on all the subscales of PARQ non-empathic adolescents tend to perceived both their father and mother as equally less warming, aggressive and rejecting. However, the mean score of non-empathic adolescent's perception of father's aggression and neglecting behavior is greater than mothers' aggression and neglecting behavior. The only significant difference is in the perception of parental neglect. It indicates that non-empathic adolescents tend to perceive their fathers more neglecting as compared to their mothers.

### Discussion

The present study explored the relationship of emotional empathy with perceived parental warmth, one of the most important dimensions of parenting styles with the main purpose to determine

whether perceived parental warmth is related to the development of emotional empathy among adolescents. To achieve this end, and to assess the relative importance of the variable, two groups of emotionally empathic and non-empathic adolescents were extracted from a sample of adolescents.

The results indicate that emotionally empathic adolescents differ significantly from non-empathic adolescents on all the dimensions of PARQ. If these findings are seen in the light of relevant research literature, it becomes increasingly evident that the parent's relationship with the child is one of the basic factors in child rearing practices and it is through this relationship that the child learns to conform to group norms and behaves accordingly. Parent child relationship cannot be understood only by looking at parental behavior as a cause and child's behavior as outcome. Instead, it is a complex interaction of physiological, developmental, and socio-cultural influences and it may determine the parenting style too. Thus parent child relationship is reciprocal in part. But still the consistent results suggest parental warmth-rejection to be related to the development of empathic behavior in adolescents (Kim

&Rohner, 2003).

The results of the present study also provide support to parental acceptance and rejection theory (PAR Theory) Rohner 1975. This theory predicts that acceptance-rejection is a fundamental dynamic dimension of parenting style and it is the amount of acceptance that determines and delimits the other aspects of parental behavior. The rejected children tend to behave less empathically than the accepted children. This theory postulates that humans everywhere have a fundamental, phylogenetically acquired need for positive response (i.e., love approval, warmth and affection) from people most important to them—(i.e., from parents and other attachment figures). This need for positive response is basic to the normal development and the withdrawal of affection is sufficient by itself to produce negative consequences for emotional and personality traits and behavioral functioning. The results of the present study clearly show the importance of early parenting experiences in the development of later empathic behavior. This study confirms the findings of earlier studies (Eisenberg, & Mussen, 1989; Henry, Sager, & Plunkett, 1996; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979).

It has been found out that perceived parental warmth is higher among emotionally empathic adolescent as compared to the non-empathic adolescents. It appears that parents' warm behavior may foster the continued development of adolescents' positive behavior especially empathic behavior. The findings of present study are consistent with other studies, which have assessed the familial antecedents of emotional empathy. For example, In one study, Barnett, Howard, King, and Dino, (1980) find out the relationship between college students' memory of parenting experiences in middle childhood and their current level of empathic concern. The study showed that highly empathic students had parents who spent more time with them, been more affectionate with them, and discussed feelings more with them (Bryant, 1987; Eisenberg, 1992; Grusec, 1981). It may be suggested that responsive and non-punitive parent child attachment helps in fostering the empathic concerns among adolescents. It may be implied that positive relationship and attachment between parents and children allow children to internalize parent's ideals and expectations. Internalization contributes to children's identification with the parents and enables them to develop an effective superego or "conscience". Children, who have warm and positive feelings for the parents, also take into account what the parents' feel about their behavior. So such children normally behave in a socially positive ways in later years of life. Thus, the first hypothesis of this study, emotionally empathic adolescents scored higher on perceived parental warmth as compared to non-empathic adolescents was supported.

These findings are also in accordance with the evidence found in earlier research. For example, Straker and Jacobson (1981) conducted a longitudinal research. In this research they found abused children to be lower in empathy than a matched sample of children growing up in loving families (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). It appears that parents may even train their children to perform non empathic acts. The relationship of child and parents is repeatedly aggressive and often reaches the point of physical attack. The child learns to apply coercive behavior to escape aversive situation and eventually learns to control situation through negative modes of behavior. Children are influenced by the behavior of their parents both directly and indirectly. Thus, the parents may serve as a model for the child. On the other hand, children of aggressive parents may be unable to express their feelings of resentment towards their

parents. These feelings may keep on accumulating, resulting in non-empathic behavior in the children's behavior later life (especially in adolescence). As, Feshbach (1987) found that children who were the victims of physical abuse exhibited less empathy than did non abused children. Thus, the second hypothesis of this study, emotionally empathic adolescents scored lower on perceived parental aggression as compared to non-empathic adolescents was supported.

Past research indicate that parental neglect leads to different adverse consequences including development of negative behaviors like aggression (Davidoff, 1987; Hetherington & Parke, 1986). This is because neglecting parents tend to issue few directives and demands and mostly ignore child basic needs. As a result, feelings of unwantedness may develop in the individual child further developing into antisocial behavior (non-empathic behavior). Although, it is the quality of time spent with the child which matters the most, still the amount of time spent with the child also contributes in developing certain behavior. Thus, the third hypothesis of this study, emotionally empathic adolescents scored lower on perceived parental neglect as compared to non-empathic adolescents was supported.

The results of the study have further suggested that perceived parental undifferentiated rejection is also lower among emotionally empathic adolescents as compared to non-empathic adolescents and this finding is consistent with previous investigations (Kim & Rohner, 2003). The result of presents study revealed that empathic adolescents do perceive their parents as less rejecting. Thus the feelings of rejection may have a potential to contribute to the development of non-empathic behavior like aggression, in adolescents. As Rohner and Roll (1980) had concluded that parental rejection plays an important role in the development of aggressive behavior in young children and adolescents. The result of presents study revealed that non-empathic adolescents do perceive their parents as more rejecting as compared to emotionally empathic adolescents. Thus the feelings of rejection may have a potential to contribute to the development of non-empathic behavior in adolescents.

The perception of emotionally empathic adolescents regarding the various dimensions of PARQ on the paternal and maternal forms (warmth, aggression, neglect, and undifferentiated rejection) shows that healthy and positive perceptions and feelings may serve as a buffer against the development of maladaptive behavior like aggression, whereas the perception of non-empathic adolescents regarding parental warmth, aggression, neglect and undifferentiated rejection shows that unhealthy and negative perceptions and feelings that may serve as a causal factor in the development of non-empathic behaviors. This explanation fits very well in western as well as in Pakistan society that harmonious relationships and positive and warm parent child relationships facilitate the development of the positive behavior. Parents' warm behavior could be more important and central to our socio-cultural context as the child spends more time with the family. Accepting and supporting behavior of parents toward their children may help in the expression of positive behavior (empathic behavior); whereas rejecting behavior of parents lead to development of non-empathic behavior.

Interestingly, no significant differences between the emotionally empathic adolescent's perceptions of paternal and maternal parenting style were found. Emotionally empathic adolescents' perception of their fathers and mother is almost the same on all the dimensions of parenting behavior. However, the results also show

that emotionally empathic adolescents' tend to perceive their mother more accepting as compared to their fathers. It could be inferred that usually adolescents spend more time with their mothers as compared to their fathers. This could be the one reason that adolescent attitude toward parents was much more positive for mother than fathers. Second possible reason for it is that mothers are considered being more lenient, showing less aggression and use less punitive, harsh techniques as compared to the fathers, who consider more strict and aggressive towards their children. This study confirms the findings that have been found in other studies (Eisenberg, Lennon & Roth, 1983; Eisenberg-Berg & Mussen, 1978; Janssens & Dekovic, 1997; Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996; Reeves, Wery, Elkind, & Zanatkin, 1987; Tallmadge & Barkley, 1983).

Results of the study also show that there is no significant difference between the non-empathic adolescent's perceptions of paternal and maternal parenting style except on parental neglect. Non-empathic adolescents perceived both their father and mother as equally less warming, aggressive and rejecting. However the results also show that non-empathic adolescents' tend to perceive their mother more rejecting as compared to the fathers. As, Robinson, Zahn-Waxler, and Emde (1994) found that maternal warmth predicted high levels of empathic responding from infants of 14 to 20 months, and maternal negative control predicted decreases in empathic responding over this period (Rohner, 1986). Results of the study show a significant difference in the perception of non-empathic adolescents' on the dimension of paternal and maternal neglect. It indicates that non-empathic adolescents' tend to perceive their father more neglecting as compared to their mothers. It could be inferred as mother has a unique psycho-sociobiological relationship with their children and she is generally more responsible for responding to the child's need for affection. Fathers, on the other hand, function as protector from the external danger. He is responsible for providing shelter. He is generally not as expressive as mothers. Indeed, several researchers have noted that children view their mothers more expressive, being more concerned with interpersonal relationships, giving more emotional support and being more warm (Kagon, 1978; Cotton, 2001; Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1991; Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983). So it could be inferred that as mother are more expressive and more concerned with interpersonal relationships than father, that's why fathers are perceived more neglecting.

### Implications

Thus in the light of findings of the present study it may be suggested that the effectiveness of the attachment relationship in promoting empathic concern may be explained by the (a) presence of parental warmth, and (b) absence of parental rejection. Parental warmth is associated with socially valued outcomes in the child whereas parental rejection appears to be associated with outcomes which are not socially valued outcomes which makes the parents important for the children and creates a conflict free relationship, which results in lessening of non-empathic behavior like aggression and enhancing of empathic behavior among children.

### Suggestions

The present research was based on the cross-sectional survey research design which does not permit to draw cause-affect

inferences. Emotional empathy can also be measured through experimental methods. Thus a mixed-design can be used in the future research to make triangulation possible. Some concern related to the external validity of study should also be addressed in the future research. As, the data was collected from a very limited locale and restricted to schools situated in a specific area. It would be more appropriate in the future research to collect a nation-wide sample in order to make broad generalizations.

### Conclusion

Concluding the discussion it may be assumed that emotional empathic adolescents differ significantly from the non-emotional empathic adolescents as regard to parental warmth, aggression, negligence and rejection. All hypotheses formulated for the present study were supported by many researches. It suggests that the affectionate, loving, responsive relationship of parents with their children, promote the empathy in them in later year of life. Whereas aggressive, rejecting, neglecting behavior of parents toward their children in early years of life, always appears to be related with those behavior, which are not socially approved. As empathy appears to be linked to a number of negative/positive behaviors that not only affect individual's functioning in a variety of way interpersonal realms. But it also affects the society as whole. Although the process underlying these relations need further explication, however, it seems appropriate for practitioners and researchers interested in the inhibition of individual's aggressive and antisocial behavior towards other and to promote the development empathy in young children and adolescents must pay greater attention to the construct of empathy in their work especially on its familial antecedents in Pakistan on large scale in context of both child and parents.

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