

Childhood Parental Conflict and Its Impact on Marital Relationships and Emotional Well-Being among Married Daughters in District Peshawar

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of childhood parental conflict on the marital relationships and emotional well-being of married daughters in District Peshawar, Pakistan. Parental conflict generates emotional instability in the family and can have long-term psychological and relationship impacts on children, especially daughters. This study was conducted to explore the effects of parental conflict on emotional experiences, marital relations, communication, emotional security and coping of married daughters. A qualitative research design and case study approach were used to obtain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with married daughters who had experienced parental conflict during childhood. The participants were selected through purposive sampling and the thematic analysis was used to identify the main themes and patterns in the data. The results indicated that the childhood emotional experiences of frequent parental arguments, domestic tension, emotional neglect and fear had a significant impact on participants' emotional development and marital adjustment in adulthood. The participants expressed anxiety, emotional insecurity, lack of trust, communication difficulty, fear of conflict and emotional withdrawal in their marriages. The study also revealed that many participants used coping mechanisms to cope with psychological distress, including silence, avoidance, religious coping and emotional resilience. The study also finds that the parental conflict during childhood can affect the emotional and marital outcomes of married daughters, and that counselling, emotional support, and family intervention programmes have an impact on better family relationships and psychological well-being. The results also highlight the importance of premarital counseling, parenting awareness initiatives and accessible mental health support services for women across the country.

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Introduction

Parental conflict is a commonly known factor that impacts negatively on children's emotional, psychological, and social growth in the family. The family is the first institution where the child is provided with emotional security, socialization, affection and psychological stability. However, persistent conflict, hostility, and tension between parents may create an emotionally unstable and psychologically distressing environment for children. Parental conflict is typically characterized by frequent disagreements, verbal aggression, emotional aggression, poor communication, and unresolved conflicts between parents, which have a negative impact on the emotional atmosphere

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of the home. These can manifest openly with frequent quarrels and aggression or be more subtle, such as emotional neglect, domestic tension and silent hostility. Exposure to family conflict in childhood has been found to have negative consequences on children's emotional security and psychosocial development in numerous studies (Cummings & Davies, 2010).

Childhood exposure to inter-parental conflict has been well documented as related to negative emotional/behavioral outcomes for children. Children who are frequently exposed to parental conflicts tend to have anxiety, fear, dependence, emotional insecurity and psychological uneasiness. The home can actually serve as a place of emotional distress and conflict, rather than a safe haven. Studies indicate that children who are exposed to conflicted parents are less likely to feel trustful, more likely to feel alienated and out of place, and less likely to have a sense of emotional control, which has been shown to shape personality development and future interpersonal relationships (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Emotional sensitivity, social withdrawal and low self-esteem are risk factors that are especially important for girls growing up in high-conflict families, because their emotional attachment and identity formation are closely linked to family experiences and parental relationships.

Parental interaction and relationships during childhood have a profound impact on the emotional and psychological growth of daughters. Parents serve as role models for children, teaching them communication styles, emotional reactions and relationship expectations. Daughters who repeatedly experience hostility, aggression, emotional neglect or marital difficulties learn to internalize those experiences and to develop insecure emotional attachment patterns. This can have a harmful impact on emotional well-being, self-esteem and developing trust with others in adulthood. Moreover, childhood experience of family conflict has been associated with later life psychological consequences, such as depression, anxiety, emotional distress, and relationship insecurity among women (Amato & Afifi, 2006). The impact of these emotional effects can extend into adulthood and impact marital relationships, intimacy, communication patterns, and conflict resolution strategies within their own families.

The family environment is a significant influence on future marital relationships and relationships between daughters. A family environment that is stable and supportive promotes healthy emotional development, positive communication and positive attitudes towards relationships (World Health Organization, 2009). On the other hand, frequent parental conflict can have a negative impact on attitudes toward marriage, emotional closeness, and family life. Married daughters who experienced parental conflict during childhood may struggle with communication difficulties, emotional withdrawal, fear of separation, mistrust, and anxiety within their marital relationships. In some cases, they might try to avoid conflict altogether, while others may unconsciously engage in unhelpful interaction patterns they observed in childhood. Social and developmental theories predict that early family experiences have a significant impact on adult marital adjustment and emotional function (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Thus, the link between childhood parental conflict and subsequent marital experiences of married daughters is still a significant sociological and psychological issue.

Within the sociocultural context of Pakistan, particularly in District Peshawar, family structure, gender norms, and cultural expectations strongly influence women's emotional experiences and marital relationships. In traditional family dynamics women are not encouraged to express their emotional distress or talk about domestic issues openly and publicly. Married daughters are generally expected to keep the peace in the family, endure hardships, and do what's best for the

family's honor. For this reason, many women also suffer the emotional effects of family dynamics during childhood, which they often bring into their marriage. Although the issue of childhood parental conflict has profound implications, there is limited research that has specifically investigated the long-term consequences of childhood parental conflict on the marital relationships and emotional state of married daughters in the cultural context of Peshawar. Most of the literature has concentrated on children and adolescents broadly, and fewer studies have focused on married women who have emotional reactions to parental conflict in adulthood.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of childhood parental conflict on the marital relationships and emotional well-being of married daughters in District Peshawar. The study specifically aims to explore how early exposure to family conflict shapes emotional experiences, communication patterns, marital interactions, and psychological well-being in adult life. By focusing on married daughters, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intergenerational consequences of parental conflict within Pakistani society. Furthermore, the research holds academic and practical significance, as its findings may assist researchers, mental health professionals, counselors, policymakers, and family welfare organizations in developing effective interventions, counseling programs, and support mechanisms to reduce the long-term emotional and relational effects of parental conflict on women and families.

Literature Review

Parental conflict is widely recognized as a major factor influencing the emotional, psychological, and social development of children within the family environment. Hostility, disagreements, emotional strain, and low levels of communication in family relationships can have a negative impact on the emotional security and psychological health of children, leading to an unstable family environment. Researchers have focused on the importance of parental conflict not just as a marital disagreement, but as a way of influencing the emotional environment within the family, and therefore the developmental outcomes of the children (Harold & Sellers, 2018). Conflict can manifest itself in different ways between parents, such as verbal aggression, emotional detachment, silent hostility, psychological manipulation, and physical aggression. Overt and covert conflicts are typical forms of these conflicts. Overt conflict is when hostility is expressed directly using shouting, verbal abuse or physical aggression, while covert conflict is when hostility is expressed indirectly, through avoidance, the silent treatment or lack of communication between parents. Covert conflict can seem less obvious, but it can lead to long-lasting emotional anxiety and insecurity for children. Children's beliefs about relationships, emotional regulation and interpersonal trust can be strongly impacted by repeated exposure to such destructive family dynamics.

Family conflict in childhood has been linked to emotional neglect, psychological trauma and emotional distress in children in the long term. Although the family environment is a child's first place of emotional security and support, repeated exposure to parental hostility and domestic instability can lead children to feel vulnerable, powerless, sad and insecure (Davies et al., 2002). Emotional neglect is when the parents become emotionally unavailable because of the conflict going on and they cannot give the children any affection, attention and emotional support. Chronic exposure to these conditions can lead to chronic psychological stress and have detrimental impacts on emotional regulation and mental health functioning. Children who witness chronic interparental

conflict appear to be at risk of developing anxiety, depression, emotional withdrawal, and low self-esteem in later childhood and adolescence (Evans et al., 2008). Furthermore, children can absorb parental conflicts and feel responsible for the family's dysfunction, worsening their psychological stress and emotional toll.

The family context also influences personality growth, interpersonal relationships, as well as future relationships between daughters and their husbands. Children usually watch and learn from parents how to communicate, how to feel, and how to interact with each other at home. As a result, the daughters raised in conflictual families can adopt unhealthy communication styles and attitudes about emotional relationships. These experiences can have a negative impact on one's self-confidence, emotional stability, trust, and social adjustment in adulthood. Studies have revealed that parents' destructive conflict is correlated with interpersonal relationship problems and marital communication problems (Cui et al, 2010). A daughter raised in an emotionally charged family environment may be sensitive to conflict and have difficulties with emotional connection, trust, and conflict resolution in their marriage. They may sometimes choose not to engage in conflict in order to preserve the peace, or they may unwittingly repeat patterns of negative interaction that they observed in childhood.

Childhood experiences of parental conflict also strongly impact emotional well-being of married daughters. Emotional well-being is the psychological stability, emotional security, stress management and overall functioning of the mental health of an individual. The emotional impact of parental conflict on children may persist into adulthood, triggering emotional pain, anxiety, depression, insecurity and psychological fragility. Childhood experiences of family instability can lead to fears of rejection and abandonment, emotional separation, and relationship insecurity in marriage (Babad et al., 2022). These emotional issues can impact marital relationship fulfillment, communication with spouses, and family functioning overall. Nevertheless, some married daughters learn healthy coping mechanisms and emotional resilience to deal with the impact of childhood conflict in adulthood. Coping strategies can involve emotional suppression, avoiding confrontations, finding social or religious support, and actively trying to establish peaceful family environments for themselves in their own households. Emotional resilience helps people cope positively when facing emotional or psychological challenges (Masten, 2014). Thus, the impact of parental conflict is not only immediate, but can also influence emotional functioning and relationships throughout the adult life.

There has been extensive research on parental conflict and children's emotional adjustment, but there are many gaps in the literature. The majority of previous research has concentrated on children and adolescents, and less attention has been paid to married daughters who continue to be impacted by the long-term emotional and relational consequences of parental conflict in adulthood. In addition, much of the current research is quantitative and frequently does not reflect women's experiences, emotional understandings, and interpersonal realities caused by childhood family conflict. A few qualitative studies have been conducted in the Pakistani context especially in District Peshawar, which failed to account for the role of parental conflict on marital relationships and emotional health of married daughters. While women's emotional experience and coping mechanisms have been studied, they have not been sufficiently understood in the light of cultural norms, gender norms and traditional family structures that are present in Pakistani society. Thus,

the present study aims to fill this void by offering a deeper qualitative insight into the influence of childhood parental conflict on the marital relationships and emotions of married daughters in the context of the sociocultural landscape of Peshawar.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Attachment Theory introduced by Bowlby (1980) that the emotional experiences in childhood affect interpersonal relationships and emotional health during adulthood. According to the theory, children develop emotional attachment patterns through their interactions with parents and caregivers. A family climate characterized by stability and support fosters a sense of security and attachment to the family, while a family context of frequent conflict, hostility, and emotional neglect can result in insecure attachment patterns. Children who witness parental conflict frequently develop fear, emotional insecurity, and anxiety that carry over into adulthood and can impact their capacity to form healthy emotional relationships. As a result, married daughters who had parent-child conflicts as children may encounter challenges with trust, emotional closeness, and marital adjustment in their own marriages. Another significant aspect of Attachment Theory is that early family emotional relationships influence future relationship patterns and feelings. As a result, the negative childhood experiences of parental conflict can impact emotional stability, communication, and relationship expectations in the adult marriage relationship.

Family Systems Theory developed by Murray Bowen (1916-1995) is also used in guiding the study, as it considers the family as an interconnected emotional system in which the behavior of a family member impacts the other family members. According to this theory, parental conflict creates emotional tension within the household that influences children's emotional and psychological development. Continuous exposure to dysfunctional communication, hostility, and unresolved conflict may shape children's emotional responses, coping behaviors, and interpersonal interaction patterns. Family Systems Theory further explains that emotional instability experienced within the family environment may continue to influence individuals' behavior and relationships throughout adulthood. The theory also highlights that unresolved emotional tension within families may negatively affect family cohesion, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being among children. As a result, daughters raised in conflict-ridden families may carry emotional distress and dysfunctional communication patterns into their own marital and family relationships.

Both theories provide an important framework for understanding how childhood parental conflict influences the marital relationships and emotional well-being of married daughters. Attachment Theory explains the development of emotional insecurity and relationship difficulties resulting from unstable childhood experiences, while Family Systems Theory highlights the intergenerational transmission of dysfunctional family interaction patterns and emotional tension. These theories together contribute in a way to explain how early exposure to parental conflict can influence the level of trust, communication, emotional intimacy and marital satisfaction of married daughters in the sociocultural context of District Peshawar. These theoretical perspectives also help to explain the long-term emotional impact of conflict between parents on women's psychological adjustment and interpersonal functioning. Moreover, the integration of these theories can offer a fuller picture

of how family experiences in childhood can be carried through generations and impact on emotional health and marital relationships.

Research Methodology

The present study used a qualitative research design to investigate the effects of childhood parental conflict on marital relationship and emotional distress among married daughters in District Peshawar. Studies that aim to gain in-depth understanding of individuals' lived experiences, emotional perceptions, social reality, and personal interpretations are deemed suitable for the use of qualitative research (Fossey et al., 2002). Qualitative approach was chosen for the present study as it allowed the in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in their socio-cultural context, given that the study was focused on the emotional experiences, psychological effects and marital perceptions of married daughters who were exposed to parental conflict during childhood. The qualitative design also helped the researcher to explore complex emotional and interpersonal issues that quantitative methods alone would not serve to fully understand. Moreover, this method enabled the participants to express freely their experiences, feelings, and personal stories about family conflicts and their impact on the adult lives.

A case study approach was used to allow an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within the social and cultural context of reality. The case study method is especially appropriate for the study of complex human experiences and social issues within a particular context (Mabry, 2008). The study area selected for this study is District Peshawar because of its unique sociocultural context, having a traditional family structure and high-strong traditional family values which have a significant impact on women's emotional experiences and marital relationships. The study concentrated specifically on married daughters who had witnessed a conflict between their parents as children because they were deemed most relevant to the aims of the research. The case study approach enabled the researcher to delve deeper and more extensively into the emotional experiences, family relationships and marital processes of the participants.

The sampling technique employed in the study was purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique is frequently used in qualitative research to secure individuals who have firsthand and personal experience with the phenomenon of interest (Tajik, Golzar, & Noor, 2025). Married daughters who lived in District Peshawar and were exposed to parental conflict during childhood were involved in the study. The participants were selected based on their willingness to participate, their relevance to the research objectives and sufficient information about their experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection, thus providing flexibility in conducting interviews without losing focus of the research purpose. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to freely and fully express their emotional experiences, family environment, marital relationships and psychological wellbeing. The method also allowed the researcher to go deeper with the participants, and obtain good qualitative data.

Thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the collected data which is widely adopted qualitative research method for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns and themes in textual data. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to systematically analyze the responses from the participants and identify themes that emerged across the responses pertaining to childhood parental conflict, emotional well-being, marital relationship and coping experiences. The analysis process involved careful transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation of interview data

to develop meaningful themes aligned with the objectives of the study. Ethical considerations were also strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting interviews, and participants were fully informed about the purpose and nature of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect participants' identities and personal information, while voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage were ensured to uphold ethical research standards.

Findings and Analysis

Theme 1: Childhood Experiences of Parental Conflict

The study concluded that a majority of the participants reported experiencing frequent parental conflict during their childhood, which had a significant impact on their emotional stability and psychological well-being. Family environments were characterized by emotional stress and instability, with frequent arguments, hostility, and tension between parents, as described by participants. It was reported that there were a lot of conflicts between parents in the family and that parents often argued in front of the children which led to fear and uncertainty in the family. Many respondents shared their experiences of feeling unsafe and emotionally supported in the context of the ongoing conflicts between parents that occurred when they were children. Someone said, *"My parents were fighting every day, and I didn't feel safe at home and even as a child I was always wondering when the next fight would be."* Another person commented, *"My parents always fought in front of me, and I felt helpless and emotionally disturbed."* These experiences left them with feelings of sadness, confusion and emotional exhaustion, all of which carried over into their adult lives. The participants also noted that the constant conflict had an impact on family relations and reduced emotional connection and communication among family members. The research also revealed that parental conflict in childhood had significant impact on domestic tension and emotional instability. It was revealed that parents' hostility created an unstable and emotionally uncomfortable environment, frequently resulting in a lack of emotional peace, love, and psychological support at the home. When there was no overt conflict, some participants discussed emotional hostility and emotional distancing and no communication between parents, which constituted a constant emotional stress in the family. One of them commented, *"My parents were never actually fighting, but it was always quiet and heavy in the house."* Another replied, *"I grew up in an emotionally imbalanced environment, and it remained that way because my parents' relationship was not a normal one."* It was a challenging environment that negatively affected participants' emotional development and their feeling of loneliness and emotional neglect. Many participants reported being emotionally sensitive and psychologically vulnerable as a result of their childhood experiences in their families. The findings indicate that family conflict has a significant effect on children's emotional adjustment and overall psychology.

A major result that came from the data is that participants felt fear and helplessness in their childhood. Many participants reported feeling fear when there was fighting between their parents, particularly when verbal fights and emotional confrontations occurred. Participants described a sense of powerlessness that led to a lack of ability to intervene or make things better in the family, intensifying emotional insecurity and helplessness. *"When parents were fighting in the house, I would go to my room and feared and was disturbed emotionally, as a kid,"* said one. Likewise,

another participant said, *"My fear all along my life was that my parents would get separated one day."* Others said they had always feared separation from their families, domestic violence or any further increase of conflict between their parents, which caused them to experience emotional pressure and psychological anxiety. These experiences had a negative emotional impact in adulthood that affected participants' emotional reactions and interpersonal relationships. The findings suggest that early childhood exposure to parental conflict has profound emotional impacts that can last a lifetime and affect psychological functioning and emotional regulation.

Theme 2: Emotional and Psychological Consequences

The findings suggest that religion and social support play an important role in the emotional stability and psychological coping of young married girls in the presence of parental conflict. The other major finding of the study was regarding the emotional resilience and adaptation of participants. Some of the participants reported that they became hyper-emotional and easily upset during conflicts in their own marriages because of their experiences as children that heightened their fears of emotional instability. One participant commented, *"If I get into an argument with my husband, I feel nervous because all my memories go back to my parents arguing."* One participant has said, *"I do feel emotionally triggered by loud arguments as they remind me of my childhood."* Results indicated that child exposure to parental conflict could have adverse effects on emotional regulation and psychological adjustment among married daughters.

A major issue identified by participants was the lack of emotional security resulting from childhood family conflict. A significant number of participants reported not feeling emotionally supported, loved, or mentally secure as children because of the ongoing conflict in the home. Consequently, in adulthood they had feelings of insecurity, fear of abandonment, and emotional vulnerability. One participant said, *"I never felt emotionally secure in my childhood, and even after marriage, I was always afraid to lose emotional support."* Another said, *"My parents had a lot of trouble in their relationship so I always have a hard time believing that relationships can stay at peace and stable."* Participants said that these emotional insecurities impacted their marital relationships, communication with spouses, and trust for others. Others also reported that they were emotionally reserved in their romantic relationship in fear of going through the same emotional turmoil and heartache they had seen in their childhood. The results suggest that parental conflict could have a substantial impact on daughters' emotional security and psychological confidence.

This study also revealed that those who experienced parental conflict during childhood had low levels of self-confidence and trust. Several participants explained that growing up in a conflict-ridden family environment negatively affected their self-esteem, emotional confidence, and interpersonal trust. Participants noted that they had a hard time showing their emotions freely and forming emotionally safe relationships with others. Some participants explained that they were emotionally withdrawn and did not trust others because they were afraid of being disappointed, rejected, or betrayed. A participant said, *"I have had to do without expressing my emotions for the fear of being hurt or misunderstood."* One of the participants said: *"It's hard for me to trust people for sure because of my childhood experience, I felt insecure."* Emotional openness and communication issues were especially noticeable in relations between spouses, as people were not always willing to share their emotions. The results showed that the emotional impact of parental conflict does not stop in childhood and that it can impact on self-perception, emotional coping and relational functioning into adulthood.

Theme 3: Effect on Marital Relationships.

Results of the research showed that childhood family conflict had a significant impact on the interpersonal relationships with the spouse and marital relationships of the participants. The majority of those participants indicated that they have been facing communication problems in marriage as a result of negative communication style they had seen in their childhood. Participants said that living in families that were conflictual made it difficult for them to be expressive and communicate with their partners. Some respondents reported that they would rather stay quiet and not discuss sensitive issues in their relationships, as they were afraid of arguments and emotional conflict. One person commented, *"I don't like to talk about issues with my husband because I don't want him to turn into a dragon like my parents."* Another said, *"I didn't get taught how to communicate in a healthy way in my family so sometimes I find it hard to communicate with my husband in a healthy way."* The results of this study suggest that childhood exposure to destructive family communication styles could negatively impact emotional expression, conflict management and interpersonal understanding in adult marriages.

Another major concern among the participants was that there is an ongoing fear of conflict and separation in their marriage. Participants described how it was difficult to overcome anxieties about a lack of stability and breakdown caused by witnessing a conflictual relationship within the family during childhood. Many participants indicated they grew emotionally aroused when conflicts arose with their spouses because it reminded them of conflicts they had within their families as children. *"The first time I get into an argument at home, I am automatically afraid that my marriage will become like my parents' marriage,"* said one participant. Likewise, said another participant, *"I have been concerned about separation because I have seen conflict and emotional instability between my parents all of my life."* A few participants also reported that they became overly sensitive to their partners' differences and that they often tried to tune out their emotions to not confront their partners. The results indicate that childhood conflict with parents can have long-term effects on the daughters' marital uncertainty, emotional rejection, and fear of family separation.

The study also found that emotional pullback and insecurity were frequent emotional reactions that occurred in the participants' marriages. Some participants reported that they were emotionally wary and hesitant to make a full emotional commitment because of the fear of disappointment, betrayal or emotional hurt. Childhood trauma and unstable emotions were cited as factors that negatively affected the participants' trust and emotional self-confidence in their intimate relationships. One said, *"I make sure not to show my emotions because I don't want to be hurt like I was as a k"* Avoiding emotional stress and disappointment in relationships was often a protective strategy for emotional withdrawal. The study results suggest that the emotional intimacy, trust, and marital adjustment of adults may continue to be impacted by unresolved emotional trauma stemming from parental conflict during childhood.

Theme 4: Coping Mechanisms and Emotional Adjustment

The results of the study showed that participants used different strategies to cope with the emotional impact of childhood family conflict and to regulate their marital relationships. Silence and avoidance were one of the most common coping strategies found among the participants. Numerous participants described avoiding arguments and emotional interactions in order to keep peace in the family. The participants mentioned the following to avoid escalating disagreements: suppressing emotions, remaining silent during disagreements, and withdrawing from emotionally stressful situations. One said, *"I would rather keep my mouth shut when there is conflict so that my kids don't face the same environment that I had in my childhood."* Another commented, *"I don't like conflict*

at all because it causes me to feel anxious and is a reminder of my parents' arguments." Some participants recognized that, while avoiding or remaining silent may lower the immediate emotional stress, this emotional suppression also created a psychological burden and emotional stress within themselves.

Another finding of the study was that religious and social coping were important for participants to deal with emotional stress and psychological problems. The participants had shared their experiences that religion is a source of emotional support, patience and psychological strength during hard times. Prayer, religious practices, and spiritual beliefs were commonly used by participants to cope with emotional pain and marital stress. One of the participants said, *"Whenever I feel disturbed emotionally I pray and take comfort by religion as it gives me inner peace."* Participants used religious coping as well as emotional support from close family, friends, and spouses to manage their stress and emotional isolation. Based on the results of this study, religion and social support play an important role in enhancing the emotional stability and psychological coping of young married girls facing parental conflict.

The other major results of this study was the emotional strength and adaptability of the participants. Although many participants had a history of emotional problems and psychological stress, they all showed a willingness to make their family lives peaceful and not repeat past negative experiences in their own marriage. Children's experiences motivated participants to be emotionally supportive spouses and caring mothers, they explained. One said, *"I always try to keep peace in my household, I don't want my children to suffer emotionally how I suffered when I was a child."* A different participant commented, *"I found that my difficult childhood has made me emotionally stronger and taught me the value of love and understanding in family relationships."* The participants also reported on their experiences of becoming more aware of and better able to regulate their emotions as a result of their experiences and responsibilities in marriage. These results suggest that childhood parental conflict lead to enduring emotional problems, but some married daughters find ways to be resilient, to adapt positively, and to foster healthier family relationships despite the difficult circumstances in their childhoods.

Discussion

The findings of the present study strongly support the assumptions of Attachment Theory proposed by John Bowlby and Family Systems Theory developed by Murray Bowen. Attachment Theory describes how emotional experiences in childhood and the relationship with parents can have a profound impact on an individual's emotional security, interpersonal relationships, and adult relationships. The results showed that frequent parental conflict during childhood led to emotional insecurity, fear, anxiety and trust issues that carried into the marital period. Participants' relationship with their parents during childhood has shaped their communication issues, lack of intimacy, and marital adjustment difficulties. Likewise, Family Systems Theory suggests that family conflict impacts the emotional dynamics of every family member and that family patterns of conflict are passed down across generations. According to the results of the study, parental conflicts had an impact on emotional instability and dysfunctional interaction patterns, which persisted into adulthood and affected participants' emotional behavior and relationships with their spouse.

The intergenerational impact of family conflict on emotional functioning and marital relationship was also emphasized in the study. The participants often commented on how the environment they grew up in, with hostility, emotional instability and relationship issues, influenced their own national family's conflictual dynamics. Some participants made conscious attempts to avoid repeating

negative parenting behaviors and others were unconsciously engaged in avoidance, silence and fear-based parenting styles that resembled their own childhood parenting styles. In the light of these findings, it is suggested that unprocessed emotional experiences and acquired family patterns can be passed down through generations, impacting marital relationships, parenting styles, and emotional health. Thus, the results lend support to the hypothesis that childhood experiences within the family are important factors in adult emotional functioning and interpersonal relationships.

The findings of the present study are also consistent with previous literature examining the effects of parental conflict on children's emotional and relational development. Previous research has found that children who witness parental conflict tend to suffer emotional problems, anxiety, low self-esteem, and interpersonal conflicts in adulthood (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Likewise, previous studies have shown that the impact of parental conflict on the emotional security, communication, and marital satisfaction of adult children is negative (Davies & Cummings, 1994). The findings of the present study corroborate this, finding that daughters who are married and whose parents have conflict were emotionally insecure, were afraid of conflict, experienced communication challenges and lacked confidence in their marriage relationship. In addition, these results are consistent with studies that have focused on the potential impact of childhood emotional trauma on adult psychological functioning and functioning in relationships.

The study also offers significant cultural perspective within the context of Pakistani culture, as traditional family configuration, gender expectations and cultural norms have a profound impact on women's emotional life and marital roles, especially in District Peshawar. In Pakistan, it is generally believed that women need to keep a balance in family, have to accept emotional hardship and not talk about family problems openly or family psychology problems. Consequently, many of the participants reported suppressing their emotions, not expressing their emotions during conflicts, and focusing on stability in the family rather than emotional expression. Married daughters who have not resolved their childhood emotions may also feel emotional stress because of cultural expectations to keep marriage and family intact. Moreover, low social norms for psychological counseling and emotional support, among traditional communities, may prevent women from openly discussing emotional suffering experienced due to family conflict during childhood. Thus, these sociocultural factors have a significant influence on emotional coping and marital adjustment of women in the context of Pakistani society.

The findings also highlight other significant aspects, such as how unresolved childhood trauma negatively affects married daughters' emotions. Long-term emotional challenges that were reported as a result of the childhood exposure to parental conflict were anxiety, fear of abandonment, emotional withdrawal, low self-confidence, and psychological distress. This emotional impact was not just limited to childhood, but persisted into adulthood affecting the participants' marital relationships, emotional regulation, and interpersonal trust. The results suggest that unaddressed childhood trauma can lead to lifelong emotional fragility and a detrimental impact on mental health. Some participants exhibited emotional resilience by making a conscious effort to create peaceful family environments and not perpetuating negative childhood experiences in their own family. Results suggest that early childhood parental conflict has a lasting emotional impact, while emotional awareness, social support and adaptive coping may facilitate emotional adaptation and more positive relationships over time.

The results indicate that parental conflict in childhood can have long-term emotional effects, but emotional awareness, social support, and adaptive coping can help individuals adapt emotionally and develop healthier relationships over time.

Conclusion

In the present study, an effort was made to discuss the influence of childhood parental conflict on marital relationship and emotional status of married daughters in District Peshawar. The results indicated that poor emotional development and mental health status of participants were significantly associated with frequent parent fights, family tension, emotional instability, and dysfunction in childhood family relationships.

Most participants reported experiencing fear, helplessness, emotional insecurity, anxiety, and psychological distress due to continuous exposure to parental conflict during childhood. These emotional experiences continued into adulthood and influenced participants' marital relationships, communication patterns, emotional intimacy, and interpersonal trust. The study also found that a significant number of participants experienced communication issues, fear of conflict, emotional issues, and insecurity in their marriages stemming from childhood experiences.

The study also revealed the long-term emotional and marital consequences of parental conflict on married daughters. The participants experienced negative effects on emotional stability and self-confidence and relationship adjustment when a hostile family environment was present during childhood. Many participants said that they became hyper sensitive to their parents' conflict and worried about relationship instability because of the emotional distress caused by marital conflict as children. Furthermore, such emotional insecurity and communication dysfunctions from parent to child typically persisted into adulthood and impacted the marital dynamics of the participants. Regardless of these emotional struggles, some of the participants demonstrated resilience and healthy coping strategies, seeking emotional support and actively striving for peaceful family relationships in their personal lives.

From a sociocultural point of view, the study is a significant contribution to the literature in the field of family and gender studies by providing in-depth qualitative data regarding the enduring effects of parental conflict on married daughters in Pakistan. The current study focused specifically on the lived experiences of married women who experienced parental conflict but were still emotionally affected when they were adults, as opposed to many studies that have investigated children and adolescents.

The findings also provide new insights into the literature as they shed light on the emotions experienced by women and coping mechanisms in Pakistani society due to cultural expectations, gender norms and family structures. Moreover, the study highlights the role of emotional support, family counselling and understanding of healthy family relationships in mitigating the psychological and relational consequences of parental conflict on women and families in the long-term.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The present study findings demonstrate the significance of promoting the family counseling services in Pakistani society, especially in the region where family conflicts are not being discussed and reported, and emotional crises are not being addressed sufficiently. The study showed that these emotional and psychological effects resulting from childhood exposure to parents' conflict persist through adulthood for married daughters. Hence, family counseling, which is easily accessible and affordable, should be created to assist in resolving marital conflicts, enhance communication styles, and minimize emotional damage to children. . Some counselling approaches can also help parents

to understand the negative psychological consequences of children's emotional development and future relationships to the unresolved conflict. Further, professional counselling in schools, health facilities and community welfare agencies could be utilized to improve family relationships, well-being and emotional health among women and children.

The study also emphasizes the importance of premarital counselling programs to prepare individuals for healthy marriages and to help them solve their conflicts effectively. Many reported having negative childhood experiences, resulting in difficulties in communication, insecurity and fear of conflict in marriage. Premarital counseling programs have the potential to foster the growth of emotional awareness, communication, emotional regulation and constructive conflict resolution prior to marriage. These programs can also help establish awareness of the impact of parental conflict on children and future family relationships. Moreover, a special mental health facility for women should be established to address emotional distress, anxiety, depression and childhood trauma experiences of married daughters. Women can be given psychological support, therapy and emotional counselling to help them develop new coping mechanisms and to adjust to marriage and family life positively.

The results also suggest a need for parenting awareness programs and family intervention programs in community settings to foster healthy family functioning and parenting practices. The parents should be informed about the impact of negative conflict on children's emotional and psychological well-being. Constructional communication, emotional support, peaceful conflict resolution in families may be promoted by awareness campaigns, workshops and education programs. Community based intervention programs which involve religious leaders, social workers, educational institutions and local welfare organizations can also help to reduce family conflict and instill emotional support in society. These are especially relevant in the context of traditional communities where emotional problems and family conflicts are seen as private affairs and go unaddressed. So, in the long term, promoting mental health, emotional well-being and healthy family relationships could reduce the emotional effects of conflict on future generations.

Limitations and future research

The present study has its own limitations that must be taken into consideration while interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted in district Peshawar so that generalization of the findings to other geographical and cultural areas of Pakistan could be limited. The experiences of married daughters may vary in different social contexts, as family structures, gender norms, and sociocultural values may vary across regions. Secondly, the study utilized a qualitative research design to explore participants' lived experiences and feelings in detail. Although qualitative research provides rich and detailed insights, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population due to the relatively smaller sample size and context-specific nature of the study.

Despite these limitations, the study provides important insights into the emotional and marital consequences of childhood parental conflict among married daughters. The sample size can be extended in terms of geography to include participants from various cities, provinces and cultural backgrounds in Pakistan for a wider understanding of the issue. Comparative studies that focus on differences between rural and urban family environments or between family-life for different socio-economic groups can provide valuable insights into the effects of sociocultural factors on emotional well-being and on marital relations. Moreover, future researchers can use mixed-methods research designs, such as linking qualitative and quantitative, to further increase the depth, validity, and generalizability of findings. Longitudinal studies can also provide insights into the consequences of

childhood exposure to parental conflict on emotional functioning, marital adjustment, and family functioning at different stages of adulthood.

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