

Risk and vulnerability factors of breakup distress in young adults

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Objective: To identify the risk and protective factors in young adults experiencing breakup distress in Lahore, Pakistan.

Methodology: It was a quantitative study with correlational research design and included 142 participants (75 women; 67 men) who experienced romantic relationship breakup and were studying in university. They were selected through purposive sampling with the mean age of 21.12 ($SD=2.49$). All participants were given the protocol comprising Romantic Relationship Breakup; EMBU_A (My Memories of Upbringing) and demographic variables.

Results: Paternal Rejection and Overprotection

were found to be highly significant for increasing the risks of distress associated with romantic relationship breakup in young adults. Also, the women are more vulnerable to experience psychosocial distress after romantic relationships breakup.

Conclusion: The breakup distress variation is determined by numerous risk and protective factors particularly parental practices. Thus, it's imperative to identify those factors to reduce the distress associated with breakup in adults. (Rawal Med J 202;45:890-893).

Keywords: Distress, psycho-emotional, multidimensional.

INTRODUCTION

Relationships are imperative for wide range of reasons like psycho-emotional growth and stability, having somebody to rely on and trust in the midst of hardship and somebody to vent to when face difficulties.^{1,2} With growing age, the need to build and maintain relationships become more vital and unrelenting because of higher dependence of survival of an individual on three dimensions of relationships: with family, significant others and society at large.³ In this regard, family and parents significance play important roles. The emotional bond between a child and his parents keep influencing the person till adulthood either in positive or negative ways.⁴ These parenting practices have significant importance for bio psychosocial and spiritual growth and development of the individual.⁵ The role of parenting is usually addressed as multidimensional attitude where parents are exhibiting both warmth and control towards their children that eventually impacts the growth and development of the children till their adulthood.⁶ Whereas, the distant parenting enhances the individual's level of anxiety, hostility, aggression, poor self-image, worthlessness and interpersonal difficulties.⁷ For example, parental rejection can make the child vulnerable for hostile behavior,

feloniousness and mental health problems and even suicide when they turned adults.⁸⁻¹⁰ Overprotective parental practices also increase the vulnerability for different socio-emotional and psychological problems like lack of self-care and indecisiveness.¹¹ It also fosters a gigantic amount of social anxiety in the adults.¹² Cutting the long into short no room of a person's life left untouched by the effects of parenting and it strongly predict the course of individual's life and determine roles at stages of transitions.

Among the stages of transition '*adulthood*' is one of the most influential in an individual's life which hit a person on psychosocial and socio-emotional grounds.¹³ In this crucial life stage, the young adults are peculiarly derived by the desire to win the war of intimacy against isolation or simply to make a romantic relationship.¹⁴ At this phase of life, the parental practices with whom the adults have gone through set the patterns for the triumph or defeat of intimate war and determine the later consequences.¹⁵ If the individual had memories of distant relationship with his parents, he truly cannot relate himself with his romantic partner because he had not acquired the skill to do so.¹⁶ The parent child relationship does not let the person originate the initiative steps for building romantic relationships, or getting close to someone crushed on, so and so forth which

ultimately ends on psychosocial distress.¹⁷

In Pakistan, there are difficulties in understanding themselves and in developing relationships.¹⁸ The intimacy and romantic relationships in Pakistani culture are not considered as an acceptable easily as the choice of selecting a spouse is the responsibility of parents.¹⁹ The trend is changing in last few years but they experience difficulty in managing the intricacies of intimate relationships therefore, they experience breakup which effects the mental health of the young adults.²⁰ The current study was carried out to see what role does the parental practices play to increase or decrease the distress associated with romantic relationship breakups.

METHODOLOGY

The study included 142 young adults who were selected from both private and government universities that were selected through purposive sampling strategy. The inclusion criteria consisted that the participants must have had experienced romantic relationship once in life and that relationship got terminated by any mean other than death. In order to collect the demographic information of the participants a demographic Performa was designed including the information about gender, class and family system of the participants.

Romantic Relationship Breakup Scale (RRBS).

An unpublished scale RRBS was used for measuring the distress after romantic relationship breakup.

This scale consisted on 34 items and three factors named as Withdrawal, Diffuse Anger and Negative Self Image with 4-point Likert scale¹. This scale was psychometrically sound with total $\alpha = .85$.

My memories of upbringing scale _Adult version (EMBU-A). Another scale used for measuring parental rearing practices (separate for mother and father) was an Urdu version of *My Memories of Upbringing* (EMBU-A²). The scale has 27 statements with 3 factors named as Rejection, Overprotection and Emotional warmth or supportiveness with 4-point Likert scale. As the first step two government and private universities were selected conveniently to collect the data. After formal consent from the authorized personal those students were selected who have experienced at least one romantic relationship which got terminated due to any mean other than death.

Statistical Analysis: Data were analyzed with protocol comprising Romantic Relationship Breakup; EMBU_A (My Memories of Upbringing) and demographic variables.^{1,2}

RESULTS

The Table 1 and 2 show that certain parenting practices played a vital role for increasing the risks of breakup distress in young adults. For example, it is indicated that more a father practices overprotective and rejecting patterns of rearing the more breakup distress is perceived by young adults.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation and Inter Correlation of the Scales of EMBU_A and RRBS.

Factors	FW	FR	FOP	MW	MR	MOP	W	DA	NSI
FW	---	.06	-.09	.72***	-.21*	.43***	.03	.04	.03
FR	---	---	.68***	.10	.01	.04	.87***	.67***	.64***
FOP	---	---	---	-.08	.14	.01	.77***	.64***	.87***
MW	---	---	---	---	-.37***	.51***	.12	.02	-.07
MR	---	---	---	---	---	.13	-.02	.15	.22*
MOP	---	---	---	---	---	---	.06	.11	.04
W	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	.72***	.66***
DA	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	.67***
NSI	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
M	26.51	9.67	8.52	27.63	4.52	9.51	25.22	17.07	10.13
SD	9.68	4.23	4.42	8.55	3.54	3.26	10.02	8.37	6.24

Note. EMBU_A = My Memories of Upbringing for Adults, FW= Father Warmth, FR= Father Rejection, FOP= Father Overprotection, MW= Mother warmth, MR= Mother Rejection, MOP= Mother overprotection, RRBS_W= Withdrawal, RRBS_DA= Diffuse anger, RRBS_NSI= Negative self-image.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, t and p values, lower and upper limits and cohen's d values of gender groups on RRSB factors.

Factors	Gender	M	SD	T	p<	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Withdrawal	Men	22.61	10.81					
				3.01	.003**	-8.17	-1.69	-0.50
	Women	27.55	8.69					
Diffuse anger	Men	14.85	8.16					
				3.07	.003**	-6.90	-1.50	-0.51
	Women	19.05	8.10					
Negative self-image	Men	8.24	6					
				3.58	.001***	-19.75	-5.69	-0.60
	Women	11.83	6.01					

Dissimilarly, mothers on the same rearing behavior i.e. rejection and overprotection didn't cast any effect for the risks or vulnerability of breakup distress. It's highlighted that gender of the young adults contributed toward fluctuation the level of breakup distress. Women young adults are at more risk to develop breakup distress than males. As shown in the Tables that females significantly experience more negative self-image, socially withdraw them and express their anger in a diffused manner, in comparison to men.

DISCUSSION

Making and maintaining the intimacy is one of the basic needs of humans and they strive to fulfill this need.¹³ Various studies on adolescence highlight the gender difference where women are more prone to develop psychosocial adjustment problems as compared to men and these issues starts from early years of development and stays till the adulthood period.^{10,11} While talking about the reason being aforementioned results it can be said that the examples of making relationships and keeping up or not keeping up them are established in the older strings of a man's association with guardians or other parental figures which later turns for making an inner working model of relationships.²¹

Therefore, the relationship of a person with parents establish his patterns and nature of relationships with others that's why a few college students readily and positively address their breakups and had much less psychosocial reactions whereas some do on its vice versa based on that internal working model of relationship. The explanation that women are more vulnerable for breakups and psychosocial reactions of

breakup because the expression of emotion, women are found to be extra expressive than do men.²²

These dispositional tendencies of sharing compel them to share their romantic relationships either for seeking solutions to develop or to maintain them. Unfortunately, if their romantic relationship goes through some conflicts or crisis, the aware ones will truly ask about that. In result to this the women faced two problems at a same time one the conflict of relationship and second the pressure of others that's why they had more psychosocial reactions of romantic relationship breakup. This study is only focusing on the young adult population whereas, this can be experienced in the adolescence period and therefore, in future this population also needs to be taken into consideration.

CONCLUSION

The breakup distress variation is determined by numerous risk and protective factors particularly parental practices. Thus, it's imperative to identify those factors to reduce the distress associated with breakup in adults.

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Conflict of Interest: None declared
Rec. Date: Feb 10, 2020 Revision Rec. Date: Jul 24, 2020 Accept Date: Oct 15, 2020

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