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Threads of Connection: Exploring The Impact of Parent-Child Bonding on Psychological Well-Being in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate how the quality of the parentchild relationship affects the psychological well-being of children, with particular attention to gender-based attachment patterns. The study also explored how children perceive their parents' emotional support, affection, attentiveness, and involvement in everyday life. A correlational research design was adopted, and data were gathered using standardized psychological instruments from a sample of school-aged participants. The results revealed a meaningful positive association between strong parental bonds and improved psychological well-being among children, highlighting the critical role of secure and supportive parenting. While both boys and girls reported comparable experiences of parental boys demonstrated marginally higher levels psychological well-being linked to perceived warmth and support from parents. These findings underscore the significance of nurturing parenting in fostering mental health in youth. The study offers insights for developing parent-focused interventions and child mental health programs.

INTRODUCTION

Parent-child bonding can occur in many different ways, including emotional closeness, communication, and interactions that are supportive. Parents or caregivers who are emotional available and attachment figure for their child support the potential to develop healthy self-esteem, emotional regulation, and resilience in their child (Weeland et al., 2023). If we refer to attachment theory, secure attachments are developed through consistent and sensitive care-giving that support the eventual internalized working models of relationships for the child, which may contribute to

their future interpersonal functioning. Secure attachments can develop through overwhelming biological attachments, however, it is important to note that these bonds develop through sustained positive interactions over time as a safe base for the child to explore the outside world.

Parenting style has a widespread escalatory effect on the parent-child relationship. Baumrind's (1967) three typologies of parenting (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) and their consequences for parenting continue to provide a framework for understanding the effects of parenting. Authoritative parenting, in which the parents are warm, responsive, and structured has been consistently correlated with positive child psychological outcomes, including greater self-regulation, academic achievement, and emotional competence (Pinquart, 2017; Garbacz et al., 2020), while authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting has been associated with behavioral issues for children and adolescents and low self-esteem, low emotional regulation, and emotional distress.

Family dynamics is not only defined by parenting style affiria. Family dynamics or interaction patterns may predict adolescent's mental health after consideration or even independent from individual parenting styles. The overall family climate: cohesion, adaptability, communication, and quality are considered to be significant predestined factors for adolescent mental health (Lansford et al., 2021). Adolescents from families with emotional connectedness not only portray an increased perceived life satisfaction, but the authors did also find a stronger development of identity along with fewer internalizing or externalizing problems. Whereas high family conflict and emotional disconnection were related to poor psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and a lack of resilience (Repetti et al., 2021).

Family climate and relationships, notably between parents, can also affect developmental trajectories. Research indicates that inter-parental support and coparenting processes facilitate positive parenting approaches and develop feelings of feeling emotionally secured (Altenburger, 2020). If parents experience conflict or a poor relationship, it may diminish effective care-giving, exposing children to emotional disturbance and maladaptive behaviors (Vidal-Ribas et al., 2022). So, the emotional strength individuals can offer through their quality and security in their relationships is an important contributor to developmental outcomes.

When children feel secure with their caregiver, they develop psychological resilience. Children who were not insecurely attached obviously demonstrated greater levels of confidence, autonomy, and emotion regulation (Groh et al., 2021). Insecure attachments, through inconsistent, rejecting or neglectful care giving, are related to maladaptive outcomes, including aggression, socially withdrawn behaviors, and mental health issues (Fearon & Roisman, 2017). Research suggests that these attachment patterns developed in early life persist into adolescence and adulthood and may shape how individuals connect with others relationally and psychologically (Schore, 2021).

Psychological well-being, comprising emotional, cognitive, and social aspects, is not only the absence of mental illness; it is the presence of positive functioning. Ryff (1989) proposed a multidimensional model that describes psychological well-being based on self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose of life, and positive relations, and it is still widely recognized today. Recent research indicates that psychological well-being in children is associated with parental nurturance, consistent discipline and boundaries, and emotional availability (Lemos et al., 2020; Moreno-Manso et al., 2022). Children with psychological well-being

perform better, are more engaged in school, are more competent in peer relationships, and regulate their emotions.

When it comes to mental health issues, parental involvement, may be a protective factor, shielding youth from psychological distress. High level of parental warmth, monitoring, and responsiveness were found to buffer the effects of life stressors and supported positive self-concept, academic motivation, and social skills (Trentacosta et al., 2023). Evidently, youth who have experienced emotional unavailability, neglect, or rejection from parents were more likely to develop depression, anxiety, and problem behaviors (McLanahan et al., 2022). Adolescents' perceived parental support mediated the relationship between family environment and mental health outcomes.

Given that parent-child relationships are central to a child's psychological development, it is essential to explore how children perceive their parents' care, involvement, and emotional support. These perceptions play a crucial role in shaping their mental and emotional well-being. Gaining insight into how children interpret their relationship with their parents can guide the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies aimed at fostering healthier family dynamics. Therefore, the present study focuses on examining the influence of the parent-child relationship on children's psychological well-being, with particular attention to how children perceive parental care and involvement as key contributors to their overall development.

Literature Review

Parent-child bonding is foundational to a child's emotional and psychological development. Parent-child bonding exemplifies the emotional closeness, mutual trust, and attunement created through a sustained relationship between parents and children, as well as consistent parental involvement, responsiveness, and affection (Bowlby, 1988; Allen et al., 2022). Many studies have established the relationship between secure attachment between parent-child relationships and children's psychological well-being, with secure attachment leading to reduced anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems (Khaleque & Rohner, 2021). Children who feel emotionally bonded with their parents develop a secure sense of identity, emotional regulation, and self-esteem; this bond continues to influence these same kids into adolescence and adulthood, which paints a compelling picture of how early bonding impacts psychological and emotional well-being.

In children, psychological well-being is often predicated by the quality of attachment with their parents. Attachment theory is based on the premise that when parents are emotionally available and attuned to the child's needs, this provides safety and a foundation of psychological resilience (Muris et al., 2023). Conversely, parental neglect, rejection, or inability to emotionally provide may be associated with internalizing and externalizing difficulties in children. Recent cross-cultural research has shown that the bond children have with their parents contributes significantly to conditional variables of psychological well-being, including life satisfaction, positive affect, and academic engagement (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies examining parental bonding, particularly middle childhood and adolescent bonding, have been associated with mitigating impacts of external stressors, such as peer rejection or academic pressures, furthermore a protective and resourcing factor in relation to mental health.

Gender differences in parental attachment and its effects on psychological well-being has been studied. Research findings suggest that girls tend to be generally more emotionally expressive and report greater perceived closeness and emotional

communication with their parents than boys (Scharf et al., 2020). Boys are more likely to form attachment-related bonds that are driven by activity or action-based engagement, and this may influence how boys engage with their emotional needs (and receive benefits). A comparative study by Rinaldi and Howe (2022) suggests that where girls experience internalizing type symptomatology under low parental bonding, boys showed more externalizing behaviors. It is important to recognize these gender differences to appropriately examine attachment through a gendered lens in terms of well-being. Children's perceptions of their parent's warmth, care, and involvement shape their psychological development. While the parent's behaviors certainly matter, it is actually how children attribute meaning to those behaviors that will ultimately affect their emotional outcomes (Lansford et al, 2021). For example, children that perceived their relationship with their parents as warm and supportive were more likely to display a secure attachment style and higher levels of psychological adjustment (Pinquart, 2022). Children lacking involvement and/or showing inconsistent care may find themselves feeling neglected and insecure, which would put them more at risk of developing unhealthy coping mechanisms under stress. Research by Yeo et al. (2023) found that children's perceived emotional availability of both mother and father to them positively correlated to emotional competence and intelligence, peer relationships, and self-concept.

Furthermore, these results also indicate that parental care and responsiveness establishes safety and trust for children, which is foundational for developing the ability to form healthy connections and coping skills for relationships. Hosokawa and Katsura (2020) conducted a study that found that warmth from parents was a significant predictor of school-aged children's resilience and life satisfaction, even when controlling for socioeconomic status and parental education level. In situations where children experience both emotional and instrumental support from parents, children experience lower levels of loneliness and depressive symptoms (Zarra-Nezhad et al., 2021). This further illustrates the concept that parent involvement by children is integral to emotional and psychological outcomes.

To conclude, the literature highlights that a child's bonding with parents, through warmth, care (emotional support) and involvement determines a corner stone of psychological wellbeing for a child. There are gender differences in the way children form and descriptively show bond of attachment, and children's subjective perceptions about their parent's behaviors act to mediate psychological outcomes. We highlight the importance of developing responsive, affectionate and consistent parenting practices that suit children's emotional needs across genders. This literature suggests that developing healthy parent-child relationships may equally correlate with greater psychological outcomes for children over time.

Method

Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

- 1. To investigate the relationship between attachment and psychological well-being of adolescents.
- 2. To examine the difference in boys and girls' attachment to their parents and their psychological well-being.
- 3. To evaluate children's perception of their parents' support, warmth, care and involvement.

Hypotheses

1. There is a positive relationship between parent-child bonding and the psychological well-being of the child.

- 2. Children with strong bonding with their parents will score high on the psychological well-being scale (PWS) and parental bonding instrument (PBI).
- 3. Boys with strong bonding with their parents will score high on the psychological well-being scale (PWS) and parental bonding instrument (PBI).
- 4. Girls with strong bonding with their parents will score high on the psychological well-being scale (PWS) and parental bonding instrument (PBI).
- 5. Boy will score higher on the psychological well-being scale (PWS) and parental bonding instrument (PBI) compared to girls.

Sample

The total sample consisted of 200 secondary school students (N = 200) consisting of 100 girls (n=100), and 100 boys (n=100) from (9th & 10th class) age range of 14-17 years. A total 200 subjects were approached from different public and private schools. Data for this study was collected from a sample of 40 subjects from a total of the four different cities of Peshawar, Muzaffarabad, Bagh and Rawalpindi.

Inclusion criteria

The sample consisted of 9th &10th class students with both parents alive aged between 14-17 years,

Exclusion criteria

Students whose parents were divorced, separated or deceased and who are physically handicapped and are receiving psychiatric treatment were not included in the study.

Instruments

Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale RPWS (Ryff & Keyes, 1995)

Ryff's psychological wellbeing scale. (PWB) consists of 42 items for which six options from 1 to 6 are provided for each item, indicating varying degrees of disagreement (1) or agreement (6). It is divided into six sub-scales: Self-Acceptance, Purpose in Life, and Positive Relations with Others, Personal Growth, Environmental Mastery and Autonomy. It is used to evaluate the eight dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, quality of relationships with others, autonomy in thought and action, the ability to manage complex thinking, purpose and meaningful goals in life, the concept of meaning and purpose in life, and personal growth. (Tricia & Seifert, 2005). Reported reliability of RPWS is .82 indicating a high level of internal consistency for all age groups on all scales (Bayani et al., 2008).

Parental Bonding Instrument PBI (Parker et al., 1979)

The Parental Bonding Instrument is a four point likert scale, 50 items; first 25 items are for the Mother (PB) scale, second 25 items are for the Father (PB) scale. It consists of two dimensional scales: maternal care and over-protection, paternal care and over-protection. The concept of care represents parental empathy, warmth and affection. The over-protection items measure parental support and involvement. The PBI is designed to measure what the child perceives and the parental care, support and involvement throughout their childhood. Reported reliability is .65 to .67 (Favaretto et al., 2001).

Results

Table 1: Internal Consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) of the Parental Bonding Instrument Based on a Sample of 200 Participants

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Parental Bonding Instrument(PBI)	50	.604
Rhyff's Psychological Wellbeing scale (PWS)	50	.703

Table 1 displays an alpha reliability coefficient of the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) is .604 which indicates that the scale is reliable to ascertain the present sample of the study. It also depicts an alpha reliability coefficient of Ryff's Psychological Well-being scale (RPWS) is .703 which indicates that the scale is highly reliable to ascertain the present sample of the study.

Table 2 Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables on the Parental Bonding Instrument and Psychological Well-Being Scale (N = 200)

Frequency		Percent Valid percent		Cumulative	
_	-			-	Percent
Gender	Boys	100		50	50
	Girls	100		50	100
	Total	200		100	
	15	121		60.5	60.5
	16	62		31.0	91.5
Age	17	17		8.5	100
	Total	200		100	
Education	9th	60		30	30
	10th	140		70	100
	Total	200		100	

Table 2 presents the total sample of respondents (N = 200), comprising 100 boys (n = 100) and 100 girls (n = 100). The frequency for the age 15 respondents is 121 which is 60% of the total sample. The frequency for the age 16 respondents is 62 which is 31% of the total sample. The frequency for the age 17 respondents is for 17 respondents, or 8% of the total sample. It also presents the distribution of participants based on their educational level (class). A total of 60 respondents were from class 9th, accounting for 30% of the overall sample, while 140 respondents were from class 10^{th} representing 70% of the total sample.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation Between Scores of Boys and Girls on the Parental Bonding Instrument and Psychological Well-Being Scale (N=200)

, 8	Pbi.total	Rpws.total
Pearson Correlation	1	.153*
Pbi.total Sig. (2-tailed)		.03
N	200	200
Pearson Correlation	.15*	1
Rpws.total Sig. (2-tailed)	.03	
N	200	200

^{*}correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 presents the correlation between boys' and girls' scores on the Parental Bonding Instrument and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (N=200). The findings reveal a significant positive correlation (r = .153*, p < .05), indicating that stronger parent-child bonding is associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing among children.

Table 4

Association between Parental Bonding and Psychological Well-Being among Boys and Girls as Measured by the Parental Bonding Instrument and Psychological Well-Being Scale (N=200)

Predictor: PBI	Beta (β)	R square (R ²) Sig		
Pbi.total	.153*	.023	.031	

^{*}P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether PBI (Parental Behavioral Involvement) significantly predicts the outcome variable. The results indicated that PBI was a significant positive predictor of the dependent variable, $\beta = .153$, p = .031, explaining approximately 2.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .023$).

Table 5

Association between parental bonding and psychological well-being among boys based on the Parental Bonding Instrument and Psychological Well-Being Scale (n=100)

Predictor: PBI	Beta (β)	R square (R2)	Sig
Pbi.total	.310	.096	.002

^{*}P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

Table 5 displays the beta regression coefficient (.310) and significance level (.002). The standardized beta value of .310, which is statistically significant at p = .002, suggests that a one-unit increase in parent-child bonding predicts a 31% improvement in the child's psychological well-being.

Table 6

Association between parental bonding and psychological well-being among girls based on scores from the Parental Bonding Instrument and Psychological Well-Being Scale (n = 100)

Predictor:PBI	Beta (β)	R square (R ²)	Sig
Pbi.total	.003	.000	.974

^{*}P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

Table 6 displays the beta regression coefficient (.003) with a significance level of .974. The standardized beta value of .003, along with a p-value greater than .05, indicates that the result is statistically insignificant. This suggests that there is no meaningful relationship between parental bonding and psychological well-being among girls in the sample.

Table 7 Mean, standard deviation, and t-test values for boys and girls on the Parental Bonding Instrument and Psychological Well-Being Scale (N = 200)

	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df
	Boys	100	2.86	.24	1.46	198
PBI	Girls	100	2.81	.21	1.46	195.90
	Boys	100	4.34	.49	-3.23	198
PWS	Girls	100	4.54	.39	-3.23	188.41

Table 7 indicates that there is no significant difference between boys and girls on the Parental Bonding Instrument, with both groups showing similar mean scores (M = 2.86 for boys and M = 2.81 for girls; SD = .24 and .21, respectively). However, on the Psychological Well-Being Scale, girls scored higher (M = 4.54; SD = .39) compared to boys.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study supported the first hypothesis, in which the relationship between parent-child bonding and the psychological well-being of children was positively significant (r = .153, p < .05). This aligns with existing literature which

posits that involvement, warmth, support, and sensitivity on the part of a parent may help develop the psychological function of children and adolescents (Amato, 1994; Buchanan & Flouri, 2003). Positive parental involvement is said to improve emotional availability and stability which in turn can lead to psychological well-being outcomes related to self-efficacy, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Mickiio & Caskey, 2009).

The second hypothesis predicted that children who reported stronger parent-child bonding would report greater scores on the Psychological Well-being Scale (PWS) and the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) both supported the second hypothesis (β = .153, p < .05). These results support the expectation that greater levels of parental warmth, care, and involvement offer positively to a child's sense of autonomy, life purpose, and emotional regulation (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Yeo et al., 2023) as children with parental relationships that are perceived positively have also indicated they experience fewer psychological problems and greater resilience to life's stressors.

The third hypothesis was also supported, proposing that boys with stronger parental bonding, would demonstrate more favourable psychological well-being (β = .310, p < .05). Therefore, it is possible that the greater relationship in boys arises from the traditional gendered climate in Pakistani culture, where boys are traditionally parented with more involvement. With this being said, the literature identifies that parental behavioral involvement can have more of an impact on boys' emotional well-being and self-worth (Barnett et al., 1992; Wenk, 1994; Suldo & Fefer, 2013).

Additionally, the fourth hypothesis predicting that girls with strong parental bonding would score higher on psychological well-being was not supported (β = .003, p > .05). The literature does recognize that girls often report greater and more consistent emotional ties with parents (Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Buist et al., 2001). However, the lack of significant findings may have been a result of transitional stress throughout adolescence, perceptions of parental bias towards the boys and loss of emotional support temporarily affecting girls' perception of bonding and overall well-being - especially in a patriarchal context.

Hypothesis five did not receive support. It was hypothesized that boys would score higher than girls on both parental bonding and psychological well-being. There was no significant difference in bonding (t = 1.469, p > .05), however girls' scores in well-being were slightly higher, although not statistically significant (t = -3.237, p > .05). These results are consistent with the extant literature, which presents inconsistent support for absolute differences in parental bonding and well-being (Kenny, 1994; Wel et al., 2000; Cross & Madson, 1997). The differences in parental expectations, socialization, and emotional expressivity based on gender may contribute to boys' and girls' variance in accepting and internalizing paternal support.

To summarize, findings from the study provide further support for the importance of positive parent-child bonding in contributing to psychological well-being in adolescents, with important differences by gender. Intervention efforts to increase patterns of parental engagement and responsiveness to their children, particularly for daughters, is an important step towards equitable emotional developmental for both genders.

Conclusion

This study underscores the salient role of parent-child relationship in the psychological well-being of adolescents. The results noted the overall positive relationship between parental bonding and psychological well-being. This strong warm, supportive parenting and interested involvement by the parents enhances emotional, social and personal functioning in their child. Boys had a stronger

association between parental bonding and well-being compared to girls, which may be due to gender differences in parental inputs and expectations, and norms of their cultural context. The overall level of parental bonding was not significantly different for boys to girls but the results regarding psychological well-being specifically indicate that girls and boys experience gendered parenting differences. These findings support the importance of promoting positive parent-child relationships for youth's emotional stability, self-worth, and satisfaction with life.

Limitations and Suggestions

The study has limitations despite its strengths. The ability to make causal inferences between parental bonding and psychological well-being in this paper is limited by the cross-sectional approach. The sample population comprised of participants from one age group and geographical location may limit the generalizability of the findings. Also, there is possible social desirability due to self-reported measures. Future research should be face longitudinal studies and include diverse populations to better understand developmental trajectories and the influence of culture. Future research should also examine individual parenting style and view parenting from both parents and children to better understand the family as a whole and their experience of psychological effects.

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