

ROLE OF PARENTING STYLES IN GUILT AND SHAME PRONENESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The parent-child relationship has a significant impact on the physical, moral, and psychological development of the child. This study was designed to examine the role of parenting styles in two important moral emotions, i.e., guilt and shame, and gender differences in this respect. A quantitative cross-sectional study design was employed. A sample (N = 300, Age=12-19 years) were selected from institutions of the city of Bagh (Azad Kashmir). Two Self-report measures, i.e. Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) and Guilt-and Shame-Proneness Scale (GASP), were used for data collection. The 2-factor structure of PBI was adopted after Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The analysis of the Mann-Whitney U test depicted that females have a significantly higher level of both guilt and shame. This study also explored that the care of both parents has a significant positive association with guilt among their children; on the other hand, parental control is significantly associated with shame among adolescents. Findings of this study suggest that parenting styles play a crucial role in the guilt and shame proneness of adolescents, and females are more prone to develop guilt and shame. This study can be used as baseline information in the development of counselling and training programs for parents in Pakistan.

Keywords: parenting styles, shame proneness, guilt proneness, parental care, parental control.

INTRODUCTION

Guilt and shame are important self-conscious and moral emotions which regulate the behavior of an individual (Shen, 2018; Tangney, 2003). Guilt refers to the emotion of a person concerning his/her behavior, on the other hand, shame arises when one's center of evaluation is his/her self rather than behavior (Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005). A person with an appropriate level of guilt and shame will feel embarrassed after any transgression and will avoid any other transgression in the near future (Stuewig et al.,

2010). On the other hand, if these emotions are dysregulated, they can serve as a risk factor for behavioral and mental abnormalities such as delinquent behavior, drug abuse, depression and low self-esteem (Hendriks et. al., 2022; Stuewig et. al., 2005).

According to Erik Erikson, guilt and shame arise in the second and third stages of psychosocial development of a child, i.e. initial 1.5-5 years (Fleming, 2004). It is also believed that these emotions are shaped by the proximal family

(Tangney & Dearing, 2002), and parents are the most significant figures among all the family members who shape these emotions (Harrison, 2012; Istianti et. al., 2023). Parents use certain socialising practices which include the global aspects of parenting (care & control) and specific parenting practices (criticising, encouraging, teaching and emotional reactions) which play a key role in the guilt and shame proneness of adolescents (Denham et. al., 2007).

As indicated by previous research, basic parenting dimensions of care and control are associated with these emotions. As different parenting styles have different levels of care and control, they differentially influence the level of proneness to guilt and shame. Research has shown that nurturing, warm and moderately authoritarian parenting results in healthier moral, cognitive and emotional development of children (Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005). Shame is an outcome of parental neglect, i.e. lack of care and control (Bennett et al., 2010), while parental overprotection/ control is associated with shame in males and guilt in females (Woien et al., 2003). It was also noticed that people with feminine gender roles are more prone to guilt and shame than masculine gender roles (Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik, 2005).

Due to the limited research available on parenting styles and their emotional correlates within the Pakistani community, this study was specifically designed to examine the relationship between perceived parenting styles and adolescents' proneness to guilt and shame in this cultural context. The study was also aimed at contributing to the cross-cultural understanding of parenting, drawing on existing literature that highlights differences in parenting practices across cultures.

The primary aim of this research was to explore how parental care and control, as perceived by adolescents, are related to guilt and shame proneness, and to investigate potential gender differences in the expression of these self-conscious emotions. Based on existing literature, it was hypothesised that females would exhibit higher levels of guilt and shame compared to males. Furthermore, it was proposed that parental care would be positively associated with guilt proneness, whereas parental control would be linked to shame proneness among adolescents.

These hypotheses are grounded in the developmental attachment perspective, which suggests that emotional and psychological development occurs primarily through interpersonal interactions with caregivers and significant others (Bowlby, 1973). Within this framework, parents are considered key figures in shaping the emotional lives of children and adolescents (Bokhorst et al., 2010), making it essential to investigate their influence on emotions like guilt and shame during adolescence.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional study was conducted using a quantitative approach to measure the variables of parenting styles, guilt and shame. Data consists of 300 adolescents (12-19 years; 144 males, 156 females) from 4 schools and colleges of Bagh (Azad Kashmir). Participants responded to self-report questionnaires of guilt and shame proneness (Cohen et al., 2011) and parental bonding instrument (Parker et al., 1979). Questionnaires were completed during one class session, and participants were included with their consent.

Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) is considered the most stable measure of parental bonding (Murphy et al., 2010). It has separate forms for the parenting style of father (PBI-father) and mother (PBI-mother), with 23 items each. In this study shorter version of PBI (PBI-16 items) adopted by Kendler (1996) was used in Urdu translation (Qadir et al., 2005). PBI-16 used a three-dimensional model of parenting styles, i.e. warmth, protectiveness and authoritarianism. Reliability of these subscales in the present study was quite low; therefore, Principal Component Analysis was run to extract more reliable factors using oblique (direct oblimin) rotation. 2 factors were extracted for both PBI-father and PBI-mother, i.e. care and control, with Cronbach's alpha reliability of .61 and .68 for PBI-father; .68 and .63 for PBI-mother, respectively.

The Guilt and Shame Proneness scale (GASP) was used in the present study (Cohen et al., 2011) to measure individual differences in the propensity to experience guilt and shame across a range of personal transgressions. Urdu translation was done using Brislin's back translation method (Brislin, 1970). The GASP contains four 4-item subscales with a benchmark

of $\alpha = .60$: Guilt-Negative-Behaviour-Evaluation (NBE), Guilt-Repair, Shame-Negative-Self-Evaluation (NSE) and Shame-Withdraw. The current study used both subscales of guilt as one

factor measure of guilt and both subscales of shame as one factor measure of shame. Reliability measured in the present study for guilt was $\alpha = .74$ and for shame, $\alpha = .58$.

RESULTS

Table 1.

Association of parenting styles (care and control) of both father and mother as measured by PBI (Parental Bonding Instrument) with guilt and shame proneness, which was measured by GASP (Guilt and Shame Proneness) scale (N=300)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. FPBI-Care	-	-.08	.45**	.05	.27**	-.06
2. FPBI-Control	-	-	-.03	.71**	.02	.12*
3. MPBI-Care	-	-	-	-.04	.32**	-.08
4. MPBI-Control	-	-	-	-	.11	.14*
5. Guilt Proneness	-	-	-	-	-	.36**
6. Shame Proneness	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. **= $p < .01$ (2-tailed), * = $p < .05$ (2-tailed), FPBI = Parental Bonding Instrument- father form, MPBI= Parental Bonding Instrument- mother form

As shown by correlation table (see table 1) father's care as well as mother's has positive significant association with guilt proneness among

adolescents ($r = .27, p < .01$; $r = .32, p < .01$). On the other hand, parental control for both father and mother is significantly associated with shame proneness among adolescents ($r = .12, p < .05$; $r = .14, p < .05$).

Table 2.

Mann-Whitney U test showing mean difference across gender on Guilt and Shame Proneness (N=300)

Variables	Mean Rank		Z(p)
	Males (144)	Females (156)	
Guilt Proneness	112.93	185.18	-7.22(.000)
Shame Proneness	139.24	160.89	-2.16 (.031)

Note. p = Asymptotic Significance (2-tailed)

The Mann-Whitney U test (as shown in Table 2) indicated that guilt proneness is higher in females (185.18) than males (112.93), $U = 5822.50, z = -7.22, p < .001$. Females also ranked high on shame proneness (160.89) than males (139.24), $U = 9611.00, z = -2.16, p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

Results of this study depicted that for both parents, care has a positive and significant association with guilt as hypothesized. It is common practice in Pakistan that parents show care in terms of continuously telling them what to do and not to do. In this situation, children usually develop high moral standards and a very discrete super-ego (Fleming, 2004), and a very minor transgression will lead them to a higher level of guilt. If strict moral standards imposed

by parents are in contrast with the actions of adolescents, it produces guilt proneness among them.

Parental control (of both parents) is found to be associated with shame proneness among adolescents. As Bowlby (1979) explained, the optimal parental relationship in the theory of attachment is that parents should be both available and responsive to the child as a secure base and at the same time allow children to distance themselves from the secure base to experience the world and gain autonomy and social competency. In contrast, if parents are unresponsive or overprotective, they develop emotional problems in adolescence. So, due to overcontrol of parents, adolescents might be prone to a higher level of shame because they do not get enough autonomy and social

competency to cope with other people. Resultantly, they tend to withdraw from the public and negatively evaluate themselves. With respect to gender differences in guilt and shame proneness, it was hypothesized that female adolescents are more prone to develop guilt and shame compared to males. Findings of the present study indicated that females ranked high in proneness to guilt and shame. These findings are consistent with the previous study of Benetti-McQuoid and Bursik (2005) conducted on the European population. One possibility of higher proportion of guilt and shame in females is that parents use to be more overprotective of their daughters than sons because they think that their daughters need protection and this overprotection could be the possible reason of higher level of shame proneness among female adolescents (Endendijk et. al., 2016; Stephens, 2009). Besides this, it has been proven that girls used to be more powerfully attached to their parents, so they are more affected by poor parenting than boys (Del Giudice, 2019; Svensson, 2004), and especially a father's authority has more influence on girls than boys (Harrison, 2012). So it can also be a contributing reason for a higher level of guilt and shame among female adolescents.

Another reason in Pakistani context is that girls face more strictness (Ahmad, 2010; Aslam, 2006) and may avail restricted choices in life (Alcaide, 2025; Siddique et al., 2011) and this thing can make them more guilt and shame prone because according to Freudian perspective shame arises when a person can't do what he aspires to do and guilt arises when one does something against his moral standards (Teroni & Deonna, 2008; Todoreeva & Asenova, 2022). So, due to strictness and limited choices, girls in Pakistan can't do what they want to do, and it is a source of shame proneness.

Keeping in view of above results, it is suggested that parents should be responsive to the optimal level but encourage autonomy at the same time to reduce guilt and shame proneness among adolescents. They also play a very significant role in shaping internal working models and attachment styles that influence all future relationships of a person. So, parents should behave in a very healthy manner during the

childhood and adolescence of their kids because it will last forever with them.

To conclude, this study highlights the significant influence of parenting styles, specifically parental care and control, on adolescents' proneness to guilt and shame, with notable gender differences showing that females are more affected. By establishing clear associations between parenting behaviours and moral emotions in a Pakistani adolescent sample, the findings provide important baseline data for developing culturally relevant counselling and parenting programs. Despite limitations in culturally specific literature, this research offers a valuable foundation for future studies and interventions aimed at fostering healthier parent-child relationships within the Pakistani context.

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