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Relationship between Emotional and behavioral Problems and School Performance of Adolescents

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The current research aimed to explore the impact of emotional and behavioral problems on the school performance of adolescents. 1571 participants (49% boys and 51% girls) were selected through multistage sampling technique from the mainstream schools of Lahore. The School Children Problems Scale (SCPS, Saleem & Mahmood, 2011) was given to assess emotional and behavioral problems and the school performance was measured in terms of percentage marks obtained in the recent examination. Regression analysis revealed that emotional and behavioral problems were a strong predictor of poor school performance ($p < 0.001$). Feelings of Rejection contributed most significantly towards poor school performance followed by Academic problems and Withdrawal. Quite interestingly, Aggression found to be unrelated to school performance. Results are discussed in terms of implications of the findings in school setting and counseling services.

Keywords: adolescents, school performance, emotional and behavioral problems

Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood life, heavily influenced by genetic, biological, physical, cognitive, emotional, temperamental and socio-cultural changes (Al- Gelban, 2007; Nicolson & Ayers, 1997). This period of an individual's life is very critical and great expectations and demands are placed and the adolescent has to face many challenges including changing physical demands, developing mental abilities and pressure of social relationship including family, peer and society as a whole (Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart, & Halfon, 1996; Rowling, 2006; Steinberg, 2001). Yet adolescent period is also recognized as a period of opportunities, where an individual learns new social skill to interact with people around that ultimately help in adult years (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2000). New pressures, ever changing social and emotional demands may place adolescents at a greater risk than ever before for developing emotional and behavioral problems (Caspi, Taylor, Moffitt, & Plomin, 2000; Dhuria, Sharma, Taneja, Kumar, & Ingle, 2009).

Problems faced by adolescents can be of different type; physical, emotional, social, academic or physical. Usually these problems are transitory in nature and tend to fade away in time (Last, Perrin, Hersen, & Kazdin, 1996). Still, some adolescents are unable to handle these continuous pressures and demands and develop emotional and behavioral problems which ultimately interfering in their normal intellectual, academic and psychosocial functioning. If these problems are not identified early enough or not handled properly, they may lead to serious negative consequences and later psychopathology in adult years (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003; Ferdinand, Stijnen,

Verhulst, & Van der Reijden, 1999; Myer et al., 2009; Saluja et al., 2004; Slemming et al., 2010).

One of the most important domains of an adolescent's life is academic. Educational activity has both intellectual and emotional aspects that are associated with success and failure in educational achievement (Cullinan & Saborine, 2004). Mental health problems can have a long lasting impact on school performance and academic attainment of the child in later years. A plethora of research evidence suggests that emotional and behavioral problems may lead to poor school performance (e.g. Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993; Byrd, Weitzman, & Auinger, 1997; de Jong, 1997; DeShazo, Lyman, & Klinger, 2002; DeSocio & Hootman, 2004; Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, & Wehby, 2008; Prior, Virasinghe & Smart, 2005; Stoep, Weiss, Kuo, Cheney, & Cohen, 2003), school refusal (e.g. Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003), higher rate of absentees from school (Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006). Other found that emotional and behavioral problems are associated with reading problems (Morgan, Farkas, Tufis, & Sperling, 2008; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004). In a study by Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, and Epstein (2005) it was found that children with emotional and behavioral problems, 73% were suspended or expelled from school as compared with 22% in the general population.

Trout, Nordness, Pierce, and Epstein (2003) reviewed the literature from 1961- 2000 to study the academic status of children suffering from emotional and behavioral problems. Beside the limitations they found in these studies, the fact remained that emotional and behavioral problems and academic success has a strong negative association. Later, a meta-analytical study (Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004) was aimed to determine the academic status and success of children and adolescents with emotional and

behavioral problems. The authors reviewed 26 different studies included 2486 participants with emotional and behavioral problems. The prevalence rates of behavioral and academic problems vary considerably ranging from 25% to 95%. The overall findings suggest that children suffering from serious emotional and behavioral disturbances had a significant deficit in academic achievement as compared to same age peers without emotional and behavioral problems.

Examining the relationship between internalizing or externalizing problems with poor school performance, Abikoff et al. (2002) identified that ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Problems were found to be more common than other psychiatric disorders. It was also found that externalizing problems were more associated with academic performance than internalizing problems (e.g. Lane, Gresham, MacMillan, & Bocian, 2001; Loona, 2002; Nelson et al., 2004). Other line of research supports that most internalizing problems are associated with poor school performance (e.g. Jalongo, Edlesohn, Werthamer-Larsson, Crockett, & Kellam, 1995; Stringer & Heath, 2006; Von Ameringen, Mancini, & Fervolden, 2003). In another study, Hughes, Lourea-Waddell, and Kendall (2008) found that anxiety disorders were strongly associated with poor school performance, underachievement and high dropout rates in schools. Hughes and colleagues conclude that somatic problems were also found to be associated with poor school attendance and school refusal behaviors. Bernstein, Massie, Thuras, Perwien, Borchardt, and Crosby (1997) also identified that the higher frequency of somatic complaints in children with anxiety disorders are related to school refusals and poor school attendance.

Researchers have also examined the relationship of emotional and behavioral problems and academic progress over time. Breslau et al. (2009) carried out a longitudinal study to investigate the impact of early behavioral problems on academic attainment. Participants were tested at 6 years of age and again at 17. Teachers were used as informants for behavioral disturbances. The results revealed that according to teachers' report, internalizing, attention and externalizing problems were strong predictors of poor achievement in Mathematics and Reading. Breslau, Lane, Sampson and Kessler (2008) investigated the impact of mental disorders on the later academic attainment in a US sample. Results showed that mental disorders were found to be associated with the premature discontinuation of education and dropping out of school. Literature has also revealed that emotional and behavioral problems lead to poor academic attainment in later life (McLeod & Kaiser, 2004; Myer et al., 2009; Kessler, Foster, Saunders, & Stang, 1995; Woodward & Fergusson, 2001) and that in the long run children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems are likely to remain underemployed or unemployed (e.g. Zigmond, 2006).

To sum up, a rich literature emanating from the West revealed a strong association between emotional and

behavioral problems and low academic achievement which may persist over time. However, a similar study in a collectivistic culture like Pakistan where the basic education is neither free nor universal, without national standards the mode of education is based on rote learning needed to be carried out. This current research focuses on investigating the relationship between an indigenously standardized self-report measure of emotional and behavioral problems and school performance in a government school sample of Lahore. It is clear that emotional and behavioral problems are negatively related to the poor school performance. Yet it would be more interesting to find out the specific pattern of problems and their relationship with school performance. In a study, a phenomenological approach was used to explore the experience and expression of emotional and behavioral among school children (Saleem & Mahmood, 2011). The findings showed that unlike western studies, children in a traditional collectivistic culture like Pakistan tend to report more internalizing problems such as anxiousness, social withdrawal, feelings of rejection and somatic problems than externalizing problems. Quite interestingly there was only one externalizing problems that is aggression. The pattern of aggression is also different and denoted to a conduct that is offensive and irritating towards others around. The manifestation of aggression in schools is different from Western cultures both in intensity and frequency (e.g. YSR, Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). In Pakistan suppression of anger and aggression is more valued than expression. This is a hallmark of any traditional collectivistic society, where obedience and conformity is the social mode.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that children falling into four categories of problems will be different on percentage marks obtained in schools

Method

Setting

The current research was carried out in the city of Lahore, second largest city of Pakistan. Lahore is the provisional capital of Punjab. There are three parallel educational systems prevails in Pakistan comprising government run schools, private schools and lastly *madrassa* system (attached to mosques, where formal education accompanied with religious education). In order to maintain the homogeneity of the sample, only the government schools were selected for the current study. These schools are run by the government, and the majority of population attends these mainstream schools and the classroom size is usually very large. These schools follow the same curriculum, examination system, time table, exam schedule and medium of instruction.

Participants

A multistage sampling technique was used to select 1571 participants. In the first stage, stratified sampling technique was used to divide the sample of government schools into two main strata including boys and girls of government

schools of Lahore. In the second stage, two main strata were further divided into three sub strata according to grade including 8th, 9th and 10th. The sample consisted of 1571 participants, 49% were boys and 51% were girls with the age range of 13-17 years. The mean age of the sample was 14.40 (*SD* 1.25). The sample was collected from 24 mainstream Government schools of Lahore (11 boys and 13 girls).

Measures

Following research instruments were used in this current study.

Demographic performa was developed to obtain some of the basic information about the participants such as age, gender and the class.

School Children's Problems Scale (SCPS, Saleem & Mahmood, 2011) is a self report measure consists of 88 problems experienced and expressed by school children. A 4 point rating scale (0-3) was used to rate each problem, options "Never, Rarely, Sometimes, and Often" respectively. SCPS comprises six factors namely; Anxiousness, Academic Problems, Aggression, Social Withdrawal, Feelings of Rejection and finally, Psychosomatic Problems. This scale was found to have acceptable psychometric properties with high internal consistency.

School performance, In order to assess the academic performance of the school children of grade 8-10, the marks of September tests were obtained. September tests were the closest exams held after three month summer vacations in Government schools.

Procedure

Initially, 30 schools were contacted and brief description of the aims of the current research was sent to them. 24 schools responded positively. All school authorities were informed about the aims and the objectives of the research and they were assured that all the information would be kept confidential and only be used for research purposes. 24 schools were further made the necessary arrangements and data was collected from these 24 schools (11 boys and 13 girls). Children of each class were tested in group settings with the average 30 children in each class. All the participants were given the choice whether they want to participate in the present study or not. All those who agreed to participate were assured that this was not an exam and there was no right and wrong answers. Participants were also assured that their information would be kept confidential and it was nothing to do with their school authorities.

All the participants then provided the final protocol for testing comprised demographic information and SCPS. The instructions were given in Urdu. It took about 20 minutes to complete the protocol. Each school was visited at least three times to collect data and school performance in terms of September test results. The school performance was

obtained in raw marks which were transformed into percentages for further analysis.

All data were collated and recorded with special considerations given to privacy and confidentiality of the research participants. All the protocols were assigned a number to refer for. A spreadsheet was made on SPSS (15 Version) for the data entry. All the data were entered into SPSS and 20% data were rechecked and verified for its accuracy by an independent expert. This expert had master degree in Psychology with two years of research experience.

Results

Table 1
Frequencies of Percentages of the Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N= 1571)

Variables	Boys	Girls	Total
	%	%	%
Gender	49	51	100
Class			
8 th	32	34	33
9 th	41	33	37
10 th	27	33	30
Age Groups(Year)			
14 or less	45	66	55
15 or more	55	34	45

Table 1 suggests that there was almost equal number of boys and girl, slightly more girls (51%) than boys (49%). The above table also indicates that there were predominantly more participants from 9th grade (37%) than from 8th and 10th grades. The age groups were derived on the basis of mean and SD of the participants, it was found that there were more participants in 14 or less category (55%) than 15 or more group (45%).

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis of School Performance and six factors and Total Problem Score of SCPS (N=1571)

Factors	B	SEB	β	t	p<
School Performance					
Anxiousness	-.34	.04	-.29	3.31	.001***
Academic	-.31	.07	-.43	3.78	.001***
Aggression	.13	.07	.05	1.81	.071 (ns)
Withdrawal	-.31	.06	-.43	4.74	.001***
Rejection	-.66	.11	-.71	4.79	.001***
Somatic	-.35	.17	-.39	3.07	.001***
SCPS Total	-.22	.07	-.42	3.22	.001***

*** $p < 0.001$

Using the Enter Method, a significant model emerged ($p < 0.001$). Regression analysis revealed that Anxiousness, Academic problems, Withdrawal, Rejection, Somatic problems and Total Problems Score were strong negative predictor of poor school performance ($p < 0.001$) with R^2 value of 0.69. Multiple Regression analysis also showed that Aggression factor was not found to be a strong predictor of poor school performance ($p > 0.05$). If we look at the β values

closely, we can see that Rejection factor (-.71), Withdrawal factor (-.43) and Academic problems (-.43) contributed significantly to prediction of poor school performance.

Mean Difference of Percentage Marks and Four Categories of SCPS

In order to determine that emotional and behavioral problems have a significant inverse relationship with school performance, an alternate approach was also used. In this, mean difference of school performance of children in terms of percentage marks were also compared across the four categories of SCPS including "Mild", "Moderate", "Severe" and "Very Severe".

In order to test the hypothesis, One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried out. The results are given in Table 3.

Table 3

One Way Analysis of Variance of Marks Obtained by Each of the Categories of SCPS Scores (N=1571)

Categories	N	M	SD	F	Sig
Mild	258	55.09	16.04	31.89	.001***
Moderate	576	51.36	17.69		
Severe	485	48.36	19.33		
Very Severe	252	39.80	12.52		

*** $p < 0.001$ between groups $df=3$; within group $df=1567$; groups total $df=1570$

As presented in Table 3 that children who falling in four categories of total problems score on SCPS were found to be significantly different on percentage marks obtained in terms of school performance. Post Hoc analysis showed that children who fall in the "Mild" category obtained significantly higher marks as compared to those children who fall in "Server" or "Very Severe" categories ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, one can say that as the overall score on emotional and behavioral problems increases, the percentage marks decreases.

Discussion

As childhood has attained greater attention from the society than ever before, schooling became one of the most important learning and training places for adolescents. The school is viewed as more than just an educational venue for academic achievement. School experiences are now recognized to be a catalyst for child's growth and development and healthy emotional and social functioning (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008). A greater awareness of mental health of children and adolescents and the importance of school experiences has led experts to view the school as an important venue for studying emotional and behavioral problems of children, promoting mental health and providing counselling services (Massey, Armstrong, Boroughs, Henson, & McCashs, 2005; Vernberg et al., 2006; Weare & Markham, 2005).

The results of the present study showed that in line with other studies emotional and behavioral problems were found to be the strong predictor of poor school performance (e.g. DeShazo et al., 2002; Lane et al., 2008; Stoep et al., 2003). Some studies have postulated that internalizing problems were particularly associated with poor school performance (e.g. Lalongo, et al., 1995; Stringer & Heath, 2006). As it has been reported elsewhere (see Saleem & Mahmood, 2011) that in our culture internalizing behavior was far more pervasive (comprising anxiousness, social withdrawal, rejection and somatic problems) than externalizing behavior (indicated by aggression). These differences can be explained by the variation in the types of cultures, Individualistic/liberal culture of the West and the collectivistic/ conforming culture prevailing in Pakistan. In the latter scenario the child is still, by and large, preferred to be *seen and not heard*. Moreover, there are many important differences in the systems of education between the Western countries and Pakistan. Here education for the majority of population is through state run schools is not free, universal or compulsory nor is there a national curriculum or standards of achievement. The mode of education is rigid, prescriptive based on rote learning with fear of punishment being the main means of discipline both at home and schools. Consequently, children are more likely to internalize emotional problems, remain out of the limelight, to avoid the possibility of being "found out" than children brought in the more liberal atmosphere in the Western culture where children are encouraged to achieve a high profile in all walks of life (Wang & Ollendick, 2001).

The state schools, where 90% of children go, usually have large classes (ranging from 40-60) majority in a class prefers to remain out of sight of the teacher. Withdrawal perhaps used as a coping mechanism "to stay out of trouble". Parents usually do not take an active interest in child education leaving the responsibility mainly to schools. Accepting poor efficacy of the state schooling system, a culture of remedial or extra tuition in the form of after-school "academies" has sprouted. Since these academies are effectively replicating the day schooling system by usually the same staff children's education remain unaffected. The child may still suffer emotionally "silently" also feeling isolated both at home and in schools (see Saleem & Mahmood, 2011). Aggression emerges as the only Externalizing factor. Although aggression is much less in intensity than in the schools in the Western countries it still has a negative impact on academic performance of the child.

In the current study, regression analysis revealed that Feelings of being Rejected contribute largely to poor school performance along with the Withdrawal, Academic and Somatic problems. While Aggression was found to be unrelated to poor school performance which is not consistent to some studies (e.g. Abikoff et al., 2002; Lane et al., 2001; Nelson et al., 2004).

In the traditional Asian cultures like Pakistan the childhood period is somewhat prolonged, dependence on parents is encouraged (Chao, 1994). Children of traditional societies are more likely to regress under pressure and stressful situations than those of the Western children. In such a cultural scenario, a child perception of belongingness and affection from the family plays a significant role not only in the personal and social life but also the academic life of the child. Therefore, when child perceive parental and social rejection, his emotional and academic functioning declines. Moreover, as the somatic problems are the hallmark of distress, anxiety and means to avoiding stressful and anxiety provoking situations such as going to school, participating in class room activities (Hughes, Lourea-Waddell, & Kendall, 2008). It was found that as the severity and intensity of emotional and behavioral problems increases the school performance decreases. Therefore, one can say that emotional and behavioral problems have a significant negative impact on academic achievement of adolescents.

Conclusions

The current research provides a clearer understanding of the relationship between emotional and behavioral problems and academic achievement. The findings will help in generating appropriate assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies for at-risk youth. Moreover, adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems should be provided additional and remedial academic instructions. Future research might focus on investigating causal factors related to academic underachievement, and academic performance within specific subject. From school counselors' and teachers' perspective, the findings of this research suggest the need of early and timely identification of adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems so that adverse consequences can be avoided. Lastly, there is a need for establishing school counselling services in mainstream schools that provide the scientific methods to assess, manage and monitor the academic performance and outcomes at every stage of development of children and adolescents.

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GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

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