Parental relationship with children during COVID-19 lockdown in Punjab Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVE: The Western studies had reported a change in parent child relationship during COVID-19 lockdown. The present study was conducted to assess the parental relationship with children during COVID-19 lockdown in Punjab province of Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY: The study involved correlational research design. 529 parents from the Punjab province were recruited using a Google Form based questionnaire, which also contained information about the nature of the study and informed consent. The study was conducted from March 2020 to May 2020. The study was duly approved by Research Ethics Committee at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur vide No. REC/B/G-3/2020-S. The participants were required to give their consent for participation in the online study. The Child Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS) was appended to a single questionnaire to collect the data. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 25, was used for statistical analysis. The correlation analysis, t-test, and analysis of variance were used to compute results.

RESULTS: The study found a statistically significant positive correlation between closeness and dependence and a positive significant but weak correlation of conflict with both closeness and dependence. The mothers had more closeness and dependence with their children as compared to fathers. There were found no age wise differences in a parental relationship for conflicts, closeness, and dependence.

CONCLUSION: The study concluded that mothers had more closeness and dependence with their children as compared to fathers. Moreover, the age of parents had no effect on their relationship with children.


INTRODUCTION

The world witnessed a new disease Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Corona Virus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), in late 2019, abbreviated as Corona Virus disease 2019 or simply COVID-19[1]. The WHO imposed a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30th January 2020 and declared COVID-19 a pandemic on 30th March 2020[2]. As a result, many countries around the world imposed partial or complete lockdown to control the spread of the disease through social interaction[3]. The COVID-19 affected normal family routines[4], and the lockdown and social distancing affected families and parent child relationships as well[5]. The parents experienced a multitude of stressors including different roles in family including supervision of children and homeschooling of children[6] changing work dynamics and uncertainty about future[7]. These challenges have resulted in increased parental stress leading to disturbance in parental child relationships[8]. As a result, parents relationship with their children was likely to be impacted, as documented by a number of studies[8,9].

A study done in Western Saudi Arabia with 377 parents revealed that COVID-19 quarantine decreased conflict between parents and children, especially mothers who spent more time with their children[5]. There was no gender difference in closeness during the COVID-19 lockdown period between parents and children[5].

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Recently, another study was conducted with 355 parents living in Lahore to assess the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on parental stress and parent child relationship.
The results reported that around 93% of parents spent more time with their children, and 67% parents reported being close to their children during period of lockdown. On the other hand, parents also reported more than usual use of disciplinary activities such as 72% of parents shouted, or yelled at their children, 58% took away children’ privileges, and around 35% of parents spanked or slapped their children at least once during the past 1 month. Although, studies are being conducted to explore the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on parent child relationships, there is still a considerable gap in the literature on parent child relationship during COVID-19 related lockdown. This is so as the majority of studies had been conducted in Western countries. The Pakistani parents have cultural differences from their Western counterparts, so indigenous studies are needed to understand the parent child relationship during COVID-19 lockdown in Pakistan. At present, there had been found only 1 study conducted with Pakistani parents living in Lahore. Therefore, the present study was designed with an aim to find out the fathers and mothers relationship with their children during COVID-19 lockdown in Punjab province of Pakistan. Moreover, the study aimed to find out the gender differences in parent child relationship and the impact of parents’ age on their relationship with children.

### METHODOLOGY

The correlational research design was used in this study. The study was conducted from March 2020 to May 2020 at Bahawalpur. The data was collected by using Google Forms which was distributed all over Punjab through social media platforms. Five hundred and twenty-nine parents instead of 385 parents were included in the sample because of cultural reasons. A significant increase had been observed in father children relationship recently apart from the traditional mother child relationship, so fathers were also included in the study. A low number of mothers could be included in the sample because of cultural reasons. The written informed consent was appended to the Google Form giving information about the nature of study. The participants were required to read and agree to the Informed Consent before filling the questionnaire. The parents living in Punjab province who had internet access were included in the study, while parents from other provinces of Pakistan or those having no internet access were excluded from the study. The parents living in the Punjab province who had internet access were included in the study as the Punjab province is the most populated province of Pakistan, and there was the first wave of COVID-19 lockdown in Pakistan, so the data collection through physical interaction was not feasible.

The Child Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS) was appended to a single questionnaire containing informed consent to collect the data. Each participant was required to fill the whole questionnaire in 35 minutes. The CPRS is a 30 item likert type scale that measures the 3 aspects of child parent relationships, namely conflicts, closeness, and dependence on a likert scale of 1 (definitely does not apply) to 5 (definitely applies). Higher scores on the scale represent a high score on that particular aspect. The scale has Cronbach Alpha reliability of .83, .72, and .50 for conflict, closeness, and dependence subscales, respectively. The study was duly approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Applied Psychology at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur vide No. REC/BG/3-2020-S. The data was analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, v 25. The skew and kurtosis values for the data were normally distributed so parametric statistics were used to analyze data. The data was analyzed by correlation analysis, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The value of p<.05 was taken as significant.

### RESULTS

There are 529 participating parents in the study. Around 491 (93%) are fathers, while only 7 (7%) are mothers. The majority, 405 (77%) parents, were from the age group of 31-40 years, followed by 67 (13%) were of or below 30 years and 57 (11%) from the age group of 41-50 years.

The table-I gives the correlation among conflict, closeness, and dependence (n=529).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Conflicts</th>
<th>Closeness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts</td>
<td>r</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
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<td>p-value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependence</td>
<td>r</td>
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<td>0.53**</td>
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<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
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**p<0.001

The table-I gives the correlation among conflict, closeness, and dependence. The closeness was statistically significantly correlated with dependence (r(527)=53, p<0.001). There is a weak positive significant correlation of conflicts with closeness (r(527)=18, p<0.001) and dependence (r(527)=26, p<0.001).

Table-II provides results of t-test computed to find out gender based differences in parents for conflicts, closeness, and dependence. The results are statistically significant for both closeness and dependence. There are significant differences in mothers and fathers on closeness and dependence (t(44.67)=-8.89, p<.05); and t(527)=5.51, p<.05).

The mothers scored high on both variables (M=42.47, SD=6.45 vs M=32.70, SD=7.30); and (M=16.13, SD=2.83 vs M=13.41, SD=2.92) respectively.
The present study was conducted with an aim to find out the parental relationship with children during times of COVID-19 related lockdown in Punjab province of Pakistan. The results revealed that mothers were high on both closeness and dependence as compared to fathers. It is understandable and in line with the common practice in our culture where children usually spend more time with their mothers and mothers care for the children more often as compared to fathers. The present study showed the positive side of COVID-19 related lockdown. The earlier study conducted with Pakistani parents living in Lahore also reported the positive impact of COVID-19 lockdown [11] whereas the previous studies only focused on the negative consequences of COVID-19 related lockdown [18,19].

A study by Gambin et al., found that COVID-19 quarantine and social isolation brought closeness between parents and their children. It may be due to spending more time together or focusing parents on their children's needs during times of crisis [9]. This study also validated the role of mothers in bringing positive experiences and closeness. It is because children in our culture generally spent more time with their mothers and mothers are generally characterized by more empathy and parenting self efficacy, which directly contributed to positive experiences and closeness with the children [9].

On the other hand, there was found no significant difference in conflicts between fathers and mothers. Both parental figures were found to show conflicts equally with their children. Moreover, there were found a positive relationship between closeness and dependence whereas there was also staying at home and spending more time with children not only strengthened closeness and dependence ties between parents and children but it also increased conflicts [5, 11]. The present study did not find any significant difference in conflicts, closeness, and dependence across all age groups (F(2)=1.62, p>.05); (F(2)=2.04, p>.05); and (F(2)=2.56, p>.05) respectively.

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Table-III gives the results of analysis of variance (ANOVA) computed to find out age wise differences in conflicts, closeness, and dependence. The results are not statistically significant for all variables so there are no significant differences in conflicts, closeness and dependence across all age groups of parents. No age group was found significantly vulnerable to have more conflicts, closeness, and dependence with their children. All age groups of parents experienced similar levels of conflicts, closeness, and dependence. This is in line with the results of Uzun et al. which reported that age did not predict parent child relationship for fathers [20].

The present study concludes that mothers had high levels of closeness and dependence with their children compared to fathers. The age of the parents had no effect on parent child relationship during COVID-19 lockdown.

**DISCUSSION**

Staying at home and spending more time with children not only strengthened closeness and dependence ties between parents and children but it also increased conflicts [5, 11]. The present study did not find any significant difference in conflicts, closeness, and dependence across all age groups of parents. No age group was found significantly vulnerable to have more conflicts, closeness, and dependence with their children. All age groups of parents experienced similar levels of conflicts, closeness, and dependence. This is in line with the results of Uzun et al. which reported that age did not predict parent child relationship for fathers [20].

**CONCLUSION**

The present study concludes that mothers had high levels of closeness and dependence with their children compared to fathers. The age of the parents had no effect on parent child relationship during COVID-19 lockdown.

**LIMITATIONS:**

The study sampled only those parents who had internet access and were living in Punjab province. Thus, the study’s results are not generalizable throughout Pakistan. Moreover, the present study did not include children in the sample.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The study can be furthered by including parents from all over Pakistan. The analysis of the parent child relationship can be enriched by including relevant demographic variables.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST:
All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author’s Contribution:
Ahmad Bilal: Conception and design, revising it critically for intellectual content..
Saba Nawaz: Acquisition of data, interpretation of data, final approval.
Shakeela Altaf: Acquisition of data, Analysis of data and drafting the article.