

**Perceived Parental Disharmony, Rejection Sensitivity and Social Adjustment in Adolescents**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This research was conducted to investigate the connection between Perceived Parental Disharmony (PPD), Rejection Sensitivity (RS), and Social Adjustment (SA) in adolescents. The study aimed to understand how adolescents' perceptions of parental conflict and disharmony influence their emotional responses, particularly in terms of heightened sensitivity to rejection and their ability to adjust socially in different environments. The present study investigated the relationship between PPD, RS, and SA among adolescents in Sialkot, Pakistan. A correlational research design was used, and data were collected from 303 students (150 boys, 153 girls), aged 10 to 19 years, from grades 8 to 10, using stratified random sampling. The Perceived Parental Disharmony Scale (Saleem & Amjad, 2014), Children's Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire–Urdu (Shujja & Khan, 2017), and Social Adjustment Scale–Urdu (Shahzad, 2015) were used. Pearson correlation analysis revealed that PPD was significantly correlated with RS ( $r = .264, p < .001$ ) and weakly with SA ( $r = .149, p < .01$ ). RS also showed a moderate correlation with poor SA ( $r = .249, p < .001$ ). Hierarchical regression analysis indicated that maternal education significantly predicted PPD ( $F = 3.95, p < .05$ ), and school type significantly affected both RS ( $F = 12.80, p < .001$ ) and SA ( $F = 7.14, p < .01$ ). Gender, age, and family system did not show significant effects. These findings highlight the impact of family dynamics and educational environment on adolescent emotional and social development.*

**Keyword:** Perceived parental disharmony (PPD), Rejection sensitivity (RS), Social adjustment (SA), Adolescents.

**INTRODUCTION**

Parent-adolescent relationships significantly influence a child's psychological and social well-being. Adolescence is a critical stage where emotional support from parents' shape's identity, self-esteem, and adjustment Akhtar, & Bano, 2023). Modern lifestyles and digital influences have created communication gaps, leading to rejection sensitivity. Adolescents often compare themselves to peers, affecting self-worth and social interactions. This study explores the impact of parental conflict on rejection sensitivity and social adjustment in adolescents. Adolescence, defined by WHO as ages 10 to 19, is a critical developmental phase (Csikszentmihalyi, 2017).

Various physical, emotional, and social experiences—such as life events, abuse, or violence—can impact mental health, leading to poor academic performance, isolation, and social deficits (Fruehwirth et al., 2019). Parents are the first source of knowledge, support, safety, trust, and protection, shaping growth and development throughout life (Paquette & Ryan, 2015). As primary socializing agents, they help children learn norms, values, and behaviors essential for societal engagement, (Akhtar et al., 2022) forming the foundation of emotional security and social competence (Bowlby, 1988).. Parents are the first interaction in a child's environment, providing knowledge, support, safety, trust, and protection, which promote growth and development (Paquette & Ryan, 2015). A child's most significant relationship is with their parents, and broken homes due to separation, conflict, or lack of affection can negatively impact development (Novianto et al., 2012).

Bowen (1978) highlighted how family conflicts impact the overall functioning of the family system. Constant parental conflict creates instability, negatively influencing parenting styles and child development. Rejection sensitivity is a heightened reactivity to rejection, leading to anxiety and negative emotional responses (Karremans et al., 2018). Marsh introduced this concept in the 1980s, describing it as the tendency to defensively expect and react strongly to rejection (Downey & Purdie, 2000). Research suggests rejection sensitivity remains stable in adolescence but plays a crucial role in shaping peer relationships (Buhrmester, 1990; Harris, 1995).

Parental conflict affects attachment styles, with adolescents in high-conflict environments developing insecure attachments (Bowlby, 1969). These insecure attachments increase rejection sensitivity, making adolescents more anxious about peer rejection and social acceptance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Adjustment is a behavioral process where individuals balance their needs with environmental challenges, involving social and personal aspects (Agarwal, 2014). Social adjustment requires adapting to societal norms, forming relationships, and maintaining emotional regulation, with difficulties leading to anxiety and depression (Mitchell et al., 2011). High rejection sensitivity, often rooted in insecure attachments due to parental conflict, can impair social adjustment by causing social withdrawal and interpersonal difficulties (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Ayduk et al., 2000).

Perceived parental disharmony creates emotional instability, increasing rejection sensitivity and disrupting social skills, making it harder for adolescents to form healthy relationships (Cummings & Davies, 2010). Addressing rejection sensitivity through interventions can enhance social adjustment and overall adolescent well-being (London et al., 2007).

### **Aim of study**

The current study aimed to determine the relationship between perceived parental disharmony, rejection sensitivity and social adjustment in adolescents.

### **Hypotheses**

1. There would be significant relationship between perceived parental disharmony, rejection sensitivity and social adjustment in adolescents.
2. Perceived parental disharmony would be significant predictor of rejection sensitivity and social adjustment in adolescents.
3. There would be significant differences regarding Gender, age, birth order, number of sibling family system, class institute, and family income in term of perceived parental disharmony, rejection sensitivity and poor social adjustment in adolescents.

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

In the current study correlation research in a non-experimental research type that facilitates prediction and explains the relationship among variables. This type of research is used to investigate extent of the relationship among two or more variables (Seeram.2019). This research was conducted in Sialkot rural and urban area of school. These 303 students were collected from the different mainstream schools.

### **Participants**

The study included 303 adolescents (153 girls, 150 boys) aged 12-19 from mainstream government, private, and semi-government schools in Sialkot. Participants were selected based on grade (8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>) and gender. Boys in 10<sup>th</sup> grade were generally older (37.3% aged 16-19) while girls in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades were younger (40.3% aged 12-15). Data was collected from different schools.

### **Measures**

#### **Perceived Parental Disharmony Scale (PPDS; Saleem & Amjad, 2014)**

Perceived Parental Disharmony Scale Measure parental conflict through 27 items across three factors: Lack of Understanding, Financial Issues, and Lack of Trust. Developed at the University of Management and Technology, it measures adolescents' perceptions of parental disharmony. The scale has high reliability, with  $\alpha = 0.86$  for Form B and  $\alpha = 0.72$  for the combined forms.

#### **Children Rejection Sensitivity Scale (CRS; Downey et al., 1998)**

Children Rejection Sensitivity Measures rejection sensitivity in adolescents and was adapted into Urdu by Punjab University. It consists of 12 items, with six particularly useful in assessing interpersonal sensitivity. Responses are recorded on a Likert scale, and the total score is averaged. The scale has good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ) and was validated on adolescents aged 14-18 in Pakistan.

#### **Social Adjustment Scale (SAS; Weismann & Paykel, 1974)**

Social Adjustment Scale Measures social and leisure activities, relationships with relatives, and school-related work. The Urdu version includes 23 items rated on a Likert scale, with good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). Higher scores indicate better social adjustment, while lower scores suggest difficulties.

### **Procedure**

A stratified random sampling technique was used based on school type (government, private, semi-government), gender, and grade (8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>). Data were collected from ten schools in Sialkot, ensuring equal representation of boys and girls aged 12 to 19 years. Ethical approval was obtained, and formal permissions were secured from school principals. Informed consent was taken from participants, and parental consent was obtained for minors. Participants were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data were collected during school hours in a quiet setting, with the researcher present to provide instructions. Each participant completed the questionnaires within 20–30 minutes. All responses were anonymized and used solely for research purposes.

## RESULTS

**Table.1**

*Psychometric properties for the Perceived Parental Disharmony Scale, Children Rejection Sensitivity Scale, Social Adjustment Scale. . (N=303)*

Measurement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Items	<i>a</i>
PPDQ Total	42.47	12.16	27	.88
CRSQ Total	131.34	30.87	45	.83
SASQ Total	44.64	13.98	23	.79

*Note:* PPDQ= Perceived Parental Disharmony Scale; CRSQ= Children Rejection Sensitivity Scale; SAS= Social Adjustment Scale.

Table 1 Depicts the Perceived Parental Disharmony (PPDQ), Children Rejection Sensitivity Scale (CRSQ), Social Adjustment Scale (SAS). all these scales have sound psychometric properties along with Cranach s alpha range from .79 to .88.

**Table 2**

*Inter Correlation among Perceived Parental Disharmony, Rejection Sensitivity and Social Adjustment (N=303).*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	PPDQ	CRSQ	SAQ
PPDQ	42.47	12.16	-	-	-
CRSQ	131.34	30.87	.264***	-	-
SAS	44.64	13.98	.149**	.249***	-

*Note:* PPDQ= Perceived Parental Disharmony Scale; CRSQ= Children Rejection Sensitivity Scale; SAQ= Social Adjustment Scale. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation analysis, showing significant relationships among Perceived Parental Disharmony, Rejection Sensitivity, and Social Adjustment. PPDS was moderately correlated with CRSQ and weakly with SAS, while CRSQ and SASQ had a moderate positive correlation, all significant at the 0.01 level.

**Table 3**

***Mean Difference in Perceived Parental Disharmony, Rejection Sensitivity and Social Adjustment between Gender of Male and Female (N=303)***

Variables	Male		Female		Cohen's <i>d</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	
PPDS	43.05	12.94	41.91	11.36	.813	0.09
CRSQ	43.05	29.77	127.46	31.53	2.227	0.255
SASQ	43.70	14.75	45.56	13.17	-1.158	-0.133

*Note.* PPD=Perceived Parental disharmony's=Rejection Sensitivity=Social Adjustment \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 3 indicates that data met the assumptions for an independent sample t-test. Results showed significant gender differences in perceived parental disharmony, rejection sensitivity, and social adjustment. Females scored higher in both rejection sensitivity and social adjustment compared to males.

## DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to examine the relationship between perceived parental disharmony, rejection sensitivity, and social adjustment in adolescents. The first hypothesis posited that there would be a significant relationship among perceived parental disharmony, rejection sensitivity, and social adjustment. The results supported this hypothesis, revealing a significant positive correlation between perceived parental disharmony and rejection sensitivity, as well as a negative relationship between parental disharmony and social adjustment. Adolescents from conflicted families tended to be more sensitive to rejection and less socially adjusted, aligning with prior literature.

These results align with prior studies showing that family conflict increases emotional sensitivity and reduces adolescents' ability to function socially (Minihan et al., 2023; Rohner, 2021). The second hypothesis suggested that there would be significant differences in parental disharmony, rejection sensitivity, and social adjustment. (Akhtar, & Bano, 2021). The findings partially supported this hypothesis, with significant associations between the variables, although the impact varied by demographic factors such as gender and parental education. This supports the idea that adolescents who experience conflict between parents are more emotionally reactive, avoidant, and struggle with peer and academic relationships (Howell et al., 2010; Thornton, 2014).

The third hypothesis proposed that demographic variables, including gender, age, family type, and parental education, would influence perceived parental disharmony, rejection sensitivity, and social adjustment. Results revealed that gender differences were significant, with females exhibiting higher levels of rejection sensitivity and more challenges in social adjustment, while other demographic variables showed partial significance. Class level also mattered—8th graders showed lower social adjustment than older students, possibly due to early adolescent developmental challenges (Choudhury et al., 2006). While age and gender showed no significant effects on PPD, post hoc analysis revealed that higher parental education—especially maternal education—was linked to lower PPD and better SA.

These findings align with previous studies showing the protective role of educated parents in reducing family conflict and enhancing adolescents' psychosocial functioning (Dubow et al., 2009; Fahey et al.,

2012). Additionally, the study showed that rejection sensitivity mediates the relationship between parental conflict and social adjustment, particularly among girls. This supports literature from collectivist cultures like Pakistan, where strong family ties make adolescents more vulnerable to inter-parental conflict (Kiambi, 2018; Khaleque et al., 2019). Overall, the results validate all proposed hypotheses and reinforce the need for family-centered interventions to enhance adolescent emotional and social well-being in the face of parental conflict.

### **LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study was conducted in just one city, so the findings cannot speak for all adolescents across Pakistan. Some students influenced each other's answers, which may have affected the honesty of the responses. Also, the limited number of schools involved didn't capture a wide variety of backgrounds. Future research should reach more cities and include a bigger, more diverse group. It's also important to study these relationships over time to truly understand how parental conflict shapes adolescents' emotional and social growth.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study explored how perceived parental disharmony influences adolescents' rejection sensitivity and social adjustment. Findings revealed that conflict between parents, even in everyday matters, can deeply impact adolescents' emotional responses and social behavior. Adolescents may express distress through anger, withdrawal, or poor coping strategies. A significant link was found between parental conflict and increased rejection sensitivity and social difficulties. While many adolescents struggle, some show resilience by adapting in positive ways. The study highlights the importance of parental harmony, communication, and support in promoting adolescent well-being. Interventions focusing on improving family relationships and emotional support may help reduce long-term psychological challenges in adolescent.

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