

## IMPACT OF VERBAL ABUSE OF PARENTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF REACTIVE AGGRESSION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**Abstract****Background:**

One of the significant adverse childhood experiences that contribute to aggressive behaviors in later life is parental verbal abuse. Social learning theory says that when children are exposed to verbal abuse, aggressive responses are developed through internalization and observation of harmful interactions. The current study aimed to investigate the association between parental verbal abuse and reactive aggression among university students

**Objective:**

The current study examined the association between verbal abuse of parents and development of reactive aggression. Along with this, the study also aimed to examine the predictive role of parental verbal abuse on reactive aggression. Furthermore, the study explores the gender differences in reactive aggression among university students

**Methods:**

The study was conducted using a sample of 270 university students. The research design that was employed for this study is a cross-sectional correlational design. The instruments that were used for measuring variables are, Verbal Abuse Scale and Reactive proactive aggression scale. For testing the hypothesis of the study, correlation, independent t test and regression analysis were run.

**Results:**

For the study, a sample of 270 university students were taken, while 138 (51.1%) were females and 132 (48.9%) were male participants. The mean score on the Verbal Abuse was (62.5) whereas, on reactive aggression it was (31.7). The Pearson correlation analysis showed a statistically weak and non significant relationship between the two variables  $r(270) = .106$ ,  $p = .106$ . Furthermore, the regression analysis found that parental verbal abuse didn't significantly predict reactive aggression among university students ( $R^2 = .01$ ,  $F(1,267) = 2.64$ ,  $p = .106$ ). Where as independent sample t test revealed female scores higher on parental verbal abuse ( $M = 63.8$ ,  $SD = 6.5$ ) than males ( $M = 61.1$ ,  $SD = 7.6$ ,  $t(270) = -3.17$ ,  $p = .002$ ). While no gender differences were found for reactive aggression  $t(263.4) = 1.82$ ,  $p = .070$ .

**Conclusion:**

The outcomes suggest that verbal from parents shares no significant connection with reactive aggression in the present sample. Furthermore, parental verbal abuse did not predict reactive aggression, and reactive aggression did not differ by gender. These results indicate that other factors may play a more substantial role in explaining reactive aggression among university student

## INTRODUCTION

It has long been known that physical abuse is nearly always accompanied by psychological hostility, and that this combination has detrimental repercussions on the kid (Claussen & Crittenden, 1991). Numerous researchers have documented the following effects: decreased persistence, zeal, and focus (Egeland, Sroufe, & Erickson, 1983), anxiety and aggressive conduct (Green, 1983), behavioral issues (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995), low self-esteem (Briere and Runtz, 1988, Gross and Keller, 1992, Wodarsky et al., 1990), anger, depression, and dependency (Briere & Runtz, 1988).

Parental verbal abuse refers to humiliating, insulting, scolding, criticizing, threatening and rejecting a child through verbal communication. Psychologically verbal abuse can affect deeply a child's emotional wellbeing. However, unlike physical abuse, verbal abuse does not have visible scars. This emotional maltreatment can have long lasting behavioral and psychological consequences for children (Teicher et al., 2006). Research has shown that children with verbal hostile environment can have aggressive behavioral patterns and maladaptive emotional regulation.

Whereas reactive aggression is a term used for emotionally driven aggression pattern that occurs due to perceived threats, frustration and provocation (Dodge & Coie, 1987). Children that had faced harsh parental verbal interaction may become more sensitive to frustration, rejection, hostility and anger in a stressful situation. Children pick up behaviors by watching and copying important role models, especially parents, according to Bandura's (1977), Social Learning Theory. Children may internalize anger as a legitimate means of expressing their emotions and resolving conflicts if their parents verbally abuse them on a regular basis.

Özdoğan and Cenkseven-Önder (2018), investigated the connection between teenage reactive-proactive aggressiveness and parental emotional availability. Higher levels of reactive aggression were found to be strongly predicted by emotionally harsh encounters and low parental emotional support. Emotional regulation difficulties mediated this association,

which suggests that adolescence capacity to successfully control their irritation and anger is hindered by emotionally invalidating behaviours' of parents.

A study that aimed to investigate the association between children's self regulation and emotional expressiveness in abusive household was carried out by Valiente et al. (2018). The study found that poorer emotional regulation in children is due to upbringing in verbally harsh and emotionally negative environments. This increase the risk of emotional outburst and aggressive behaviors.

The longitudinal research explored that ongoing conflict in families and harsh parenting increases the chances to establish patterns of reactive aggressiveness among children. The study further showed that , these unfavorable family relationships increases aggressiveness through out adolescence (Girard et al. 2019).

Kingsbury et al. (2020), explored the long term impact of strict parenting on teenage behaviours and mental issues. The findings of the study revealed the strong correlation among social aggression, emotional issues and physical aggression among teenagers and harsh parenting styles like criticism, verbal hostility and yelling.

The results showed that harsh and abusive parenting tactics can lead to reactive aggression tendencies among adolescence.

Another study by Wang et al. (2022), explored that teenagers maladaptive emotional reactivity and emotional dysregulation were strongly associated with harsh parenting tactics. The study explored the association between emotional dysregulation, strict parenting and adolescent psychological functioning. The study further explore the findings that negative parental relationships interfere with proper emotional regulation and social adjustment.

Wang et al. (2019), investigated the mediating role of effortful control between adolescent aggression and harsh parenting. The results indicated that strict parenting was a strong predictor of violent behavior in teenagers through impairment of emotional self-control and behavioral regulation. The study also discovered that while hostile parenting practices increased the risk of reactive violence in teens,

warm parenting could buffer the adverse effects of harsh parenting.

Valcan et al. (2018), conducted a meta-analytic review to investigate the association between parenting practices and aggression in children and adolescents. The findings indicated that parenting behaviors of harshness, rejection and verbal aggression were significantly related to reactive aggression in children. The researchers concluded that negative parental communication patterns are associated with emotional dysregulation and aggressive behavioral outcomes.

The effect of early life stress on childhood aggression was examined by Winiarski et al. (2018). Their results showed that children's aggressive behavioral inclinations were linked to stressful and negative familial situations, such as verbal abuse and emotional abuse. Chronic emotional stress raises emotional reactivity and violent reactions, according to the study.

There is a growing body of international literature on verbal abuse and aggression by parents, but little empirical research has been done in the cultural setting of Pakistan. In Pakistan, verbally abusive parenting techniques are frequently accepted as socially acceptable forms of discipline. Without considering the possible psychological repercussions, parents often use yelling, scolding, criticism, and degrading words to regulate their children's conduct. Parental verbal violence is still underreported and understudied in Pakistani research settings because of cultural acceptance and a lack of knowledge about emotional abuse. Furthermore, relatively little attention has been paid specifically to parental verbal abuse and its role in the development of reactive aggression in children, whereas the majority of prior Pakistani studies have concentrated on physical punishment, academic stress, depression, anxiety, or general behavioral issues among teenagers.

In Pakistan, family structures, disciplinary standards and parenting practices differ significantly while many earlier researchers concentrated on western cultures, limiting the generalizability of findings. This study aimed to fill this gap. Children's perceptions and reactions to verbal abuse may be influenced by cultural beliefs that place a strong emphasis on

obedience, respect for elders, and parental authority. Research that is culturally appropriate is therefore necessary to comprehend the psychological effects of verbal abuse by parents in Pakistani households.

By investigating the effects of verbal abuse by parents on the emergence of reactive aggressiveness in Pakistani children, the current study seeks to fill these gaps. By raising awareness of emotional abuse and its behavioral repercussions, the results of this study may add to the body of existing material. The study may also assist parents, educators, psychologists, and counselors in creating intervention programs and better parenting techniques that enhance kids' mental health and lessen violent behavior.

### Hypothesis and Objectives

Based on the above literature, the objectives that were made for the study is It first sought to investigate the connection between university students' reactive aggressiveness and verbal abuse from their parents. The second goal was to ascertain whether verbal abuse by parents is a major predictor of reactive hostility. Third, the study's goal was to look into how university students' reactive hostility varied by gender.

It was anticipated based on these goals that reactive aggression among college students would be positively correlated with verbal abuse from parents. Additionally, it was expected that reactive violence would be strongly predicted by verbal abuse from parents. Lastly, it was anticipated that the degrees of reactive hostility among male and female college students would range considerably.

Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated: (a) parental verbal abuse would be positively related to reactive aggression among university students, (b) parental verbal abuse would significantly predict reactive aggression, and (c) reactive aggression would significantly differ across gender among university students.

### Research design

A cross-sectional correlational research design was used for the study.

### Sample

The Convenient sampling method was used for the study, Data was collected from different

universities to ensure cultural diversity. The sample consisted of 270 university students, 132 males (48.9%) and 138 females (51.1%). The age group with the highest percentage of participants was between 18 and 23 years (46.7%) followed by between 24 and 29 years (41.5%). The 30–35 years age group made up 6.3% of the sample, while those aged 36–40 years were 5.5%. Regarding the educational level, most of the participants were enrolled in BS programs (71.5%), followed by MPhil/MS programs (25.6%), while only 3.0% were PhD students. The majority of the participants were unmarried (71.9%), whereas 28.1% were married. Regarding monthly family income, the highest percentage of participants reported a family income of PKR 150,000 to 300,000 (45.9%). Participants with a monthly family income of PKR 300,000-1,000,000 were 27.0% followed by Furthermore, 15.6% of the participants belonged to a family income of PKR 50,000 and 150,000, and 9.6% of the participants had an income of more than PKR 1,000,000. Less than 1.9% of participants had a family monthly income of less than PKR 50,000.

### Sampling technique

The sample was collected by using a convenient sampling technique. The demographic information of participants was collected with their informed consent. The age group taken under study was of university students from 18 to 40 years. After data collection was completed, the data was analyzed using statistical software to test the proposed hypotheses.

### Assessment Measures

Parental verbal abuse was assessed using the Verbal Abuse Scale (VAS), originally developed by Bumseok jeong et al., (2015), designed to measure individuals' experiences of verbal abuse from parents or caregivers. The scale evaluates various forms of verbally abusive behaviors, including criticism, humiliation, rejection, yelling, and threatening language. Participants respond to 15 items on a Likert-type scale indicating the frequency of such experiences. Higher scores on the scale reflect

greater exposure to parental verbal abuse. Previous studies have demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity of the scale in assessing verbally abusive parental behaviors (Bumseok jeong et al., 2015).

Reactive and proactive aggression were measured by Reactive-Proactive Aggression Questionnaire (RPQ), developed by Raine et al. (2006). It is a 23 items standardized self-report instrument designed to assess two dimensions of aggression: reactive aggression and proactive aggression. Participants rate each item according to the frequency of their aggressive behaviors on a Likert-type scale. Higher scores indicate higher levels of reactive and proactive aggression. The RPQ has demonstrated good reliability and validity across adolescent and young adult populations.

### Ethical Considerations

Before collecting data, participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study and their role in it. Their consent was obtained, and participation was completely voluntary. They were also informed that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. To protect privacy, participants' identities remained anonymous, and their responses were kept confidential. All collected information was used only for academic purposes. Since the study involved sensitive topics such as cyberbullying experiences, participants were allowed to skip any question that made them uncomfortable or stop participating whenever they wished.

Throughout the research process, honesty, respect, and participants' well-being were prioritized.

### RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of parental verbal abuse and reactive aggression among university students. Data was analysed using IBM SPSS 23. Descriptive statistics, psychometric properties, reliability coefficients, correlational analysis, regression and independent sample t test was conducted. Normality was assessed via skewness and kurtosis.

Psychometric Properties

Table 1

Variables	N	M	$\alpha$	Skewness	Kurtosis
VAS	270	62.5	.79	-.78	6.1
RPAS	270	31.7	.75	-1.9	10.2

Note: N= total number of participants, M= mean,  $\alpha$ = reliability, VAS = Verbal abuse scale, RPAS=Reactive proactive aggression scale

Table 4.2 presents the psychometric properties of the Verbal Abuse Scale (VAS) and the Reactive-Proactive Aggression Scale (RPAS) among 270 university students. The VAS demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and the RPAS demonstrated satisfactory reliability ( $\alpha = .75$ ) which suggested both instruments had adequate internal consistency for the current sample. The mean score on the verbal abuse scale was 62.5 and the mean score on the reactive aggression scale was 31.7. Distributional characteristics were

examined and both scales were found to be negatively skewed (Parental verbal abuse scale skewness =  $-0.78$ , reactive aggression scale skewness =  $-1.90$ ), suggesting participants tended to score relatively higher on these measures. The kurtosis value of the verbal abuse (6.1) and aggression (10.2) were also leptokurtic distributions i.e. the scores were more peaked than a normal distribution. There was some deviation from normality, but the reliability coefficients indicated that both measures were reliable enough for further statistical analyses.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2

Variables	Parental Verbal abuse	Reactive aggression
Parental verbal abuse	-	.099
Reactive aggression	.099	-

Note:  $p = .106$

A Pearson correlation was performed to investigate the relationship between parental verbal abuse and reactive aggression. Results suggested a weak positive correlation between parental verbal abuse and reactive aggression,

but this correlation was not statistically significant,  $r(270) = .10$ ,  $p = .106$ . In the present sample, parental verbal abuse was not significantly associated with reactive aggression

Regression Analysis Table 3

Predictor	B	T	P	R <sup>2</sup>	F
Parental Verbal abuse	.099	1.62	.106	.010	2.63

Note:  $\beta$ =Beta, T= t-statistics, P= significant value

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether parental verbal abuse predicted reactive aggression among university students. The regression model was not statistically significant,  $F(1, 267) = 2.64$ ,  $p = .106$ , accounting for 1% of the variance in

reactive aggression ( $R^2 = .01$ ). Furthermore, parental verbal abuse was not a significant predictor of reactive aggression,  $\beta = .099$ ,  $t(267) = 1.62$ ,  $p = .106$ . Therefore, the hypothesis that parental verbal abuse would significantly predict reactive aggression was not supported.

Independent Sample t test

Table 4

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>P</i>
Parental Verbal abuse	Male	132	61.1	7.6	-3.17	268	.002**
	Female	138	63.8	6.5			
Reactive aggression	Male	132	30.6	5.42	1.82	263.4	.070
	Female	138	29.3	6.41			

Note: N= total number of participants, M= mean, SD= St. deviation, DF= degrees of freedom,

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in parental verbal abuse and reactive aggression among university students. For parental verbal abuse, results indicated a statistically significant gender difference. Female participants (M = 63.8, SD = 6.5) reported higher levels of parental verbal abuse compared to male participants (M = 61.1, SD = 7.6),  $t(270) = -3.17, p = .002$ . For reactive aggression, no statistically significant gender difference was found. Male participants (M = 30.6, SD = 5.42) and female participants (M = 29.3, SD = 6.41) did not differ significantly in reactive aggression scores,  $t(263.4) = 1.82, p = .070$ .

**DISCUSSION**

The present study examined the relationship between parental verbal abuse and reactive aggression among university students, along with gender differences in reactive aggression, using a sample of two hundred and seventy participants. Overall, the findings did not provide support for the proposed hypotheses. According to the first hypothesis, parental verbal abuse and reactive violence would be significantly positively correlated. This assumption was refuted by the data, which showed a weak and statistically insignificant link between the two variables. This suggests that in the current sample of university students, verbal abuse by parents was not significantly linked to reactive aggressiveness. According to the second hypothesis, reactive hostility would be strongly predicted by verbal abuse from parents. This hypothesis was not supported by the regression analysis's results since parental verbal abuse did not show up as a significant predictor of reactive aggressiveness and the model as a whole was not statistically significant. In this sample, parental verbal abuse

had a minor predictive value, as evidenced by the very little amount of variance explained in reactive aggressiveness.

According to the third hypothesis, reactive hostility among university students would differ significantly by gender. Since there was no statistically significant difference in reactive hostility between male and female students, the results did not support this hypothesis. The group's mean score didn't differ significantly.

**Limitations**

The present study has several limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. First while using a cross sectional research design, the study limits the ability to find a causal relationship between parental verbal abuse and reactive aggression. Due to which direction of influence can not be determined. Second the collection of data through self report questionnaire creates desirability bias and inaccurate recall of past experiences. Third, the generalizability of the findings limits by using a sample of university students . Additionally weak distributional characteristics and psychometric properties were observed in some variables , affecting the strength of the relationship among the study constructs'

**Recommendations**

Addressing the limitations by using experimental and longitudinal research design can better understand the causal relationship between parental verbal Abuse and reactive aggression .In order to enhance generalizability of the findings it is recommended that researchers should take diverse samples from different educational backgrounds, cultural contexts and different age groups . To gain data

accuracy and limiting response bias, research should combine behavioral and observational methods with self report measures. Further studies may also explore by adding more variables like , peer influence, family environment factors and emotional regulation to get the better understanding of reactive aggression. Ensuring balanced item distribution and strengthening measurement tools' may further improve the validity and reliability of findings.

**Conclusion**

The study concluded that, parental verbal abuse has no association with university students and also it does not predict reactive aggression. Furthermore it is revealed that reactive aggression has nothing to do with gender. The findings suggest that there are many environmental, psychological and social factors that were not covered in the current study.

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