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PREDICTING INTERPERSONAL DIFFICULTIES IN YOUNG ADULTS: THE ROLES OF PARENTAL DISCORD, SEPARATION ANXIETY, AND PET ATTACHMENT

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to find out the relationship between Parental Discord, Separation Anxiety, Pet Attachment and Interpersonal difficulties in Young Adults. A sample of 300 respondents, with an equal number of males and females, was selected from both the public and private sectors to ensure equal representation, to minimize selection bias. The participants were young adults aged between 18-25 years currently owning a pet or owned one before. Key measures included the Adult Separation Anxiety Symptom Questionnaire ASA-27 – (Manicavasagar et al.,2003), the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale (Cromer & Barlow,2013), PALS, the Interpersonal Difficulties Scale for University Students, IDS (Saleem et al., 2014), and the Perceived Parental Disharmony Scale for Adolescents (Amjad & Saleem, 2014). Ethical considerations were attended to exceedingly well with informed consent and data confidentiality. Data was collected through in-person surveys with the simple random sampling method. The results showed a positive relationship between parental discord, separation anxiety and Interpersonal difficulties while pet attachment just showed a positive and significant relationship with separation anxiety. The implication will help mental health professionals to use pet therapy or animal-assisted intervention when treating young adults with separation anxiety and interpersonal problems caused by family issues.

Keywords: *Parental Discord, Separation Anxiety, Pet Attachment, Interpersonal difficulties, Young Adults*

Introduction

Young adulthood is such a crucial developmental phase that accompanies major transitions and challenges. Characterized by the period from ages 18 to 25, young adulthood is mostly witnessed to be marked by increased independence, exploration of identity, and establishment of personal and professional goals (Arnett, 2000). The young adult age bracket is usually considered to be between 18 and 25 years, though some definitions go as high as 30 years old (Matthews, 2019). In individualistic culture, young adults earn independence form parental control but collectivistic culture like Pakistan doesn't allow young adults to fly from their shelter. So young adults have to be in the same environment while learning that how to encompass other psychophysiological changes and adapt them selves with it.

Parenting is one of the fundamental bridges in a child's story. While some parents work hard for congenial environment, showing support to each other and adapting to life changes together some foster a environment which doesn't have this harmony. Parental discord refers to the presence of persistent, high-intensity, insignificant

disagreements in a relationship that remain unresolved. It is defined by continuous tension, quarreling, or other forms of disagreement that can have severe imposition on young adults's and young adults' psychological and emotional welfare (Amato & Cheadle, 2008). It may appear in the form of overt and covert conflicts, emotional distance, financial pressure. Parental conflict can manifest itself in many ways. Such disputes are characterized by visible and audible quarrels, frequent shouting, and verbal fights that often escalate into physical violence. These kinds of conflicts are indicative of a warlike environment that breeds anxiety and stress for young adults. Young adults may also feel fearful and insecure and alert due to the unpredictability of their parents' interactions (Johnson & Lee, 2023). Examples of subtle and indirect strategies for voicing discord include silent treatment, avoidance, refusal to talk, and passive-aggressive behaviors like sarcasm or intentional inefficiency. Such kinds of conflicts are less obvious but equally harmful because they set the tone for uncertainty and emotional abandonment (Jacobs & Kelly, 2023).

One of the most important effects of parental conflict is on attachment styles. It makes the child insecurely attached, since regular arguments and competitions between parents will break down the secure attachments and lead to emotional and relational problems(Grych et al., 2013). Bowlby claimed in 1988 that an anxiously or avoidantly insecurely attached child will have issues with emotion regulation and developing healthy relationships. Such irregularities in attachments can be carried into adult years, therefore being connected with interpersonal relationships and emotional well-being (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). The insecure attachment may bring along other difficulties with trusting people, fears of abandonment, and difficulties in building close, supportive relations. This can lead towards separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety is an excessive and developmentally inappropriate fear or anxiety concerning separation from a home or, in young adults, separation from attachment figures. This may be represented by recurrent distress in response to being separated from home or attachment figures; persistent worry about losing them or possible harm to them; reluctance to go out, sleep away from home, or physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches in young adults when faced with actual separation (APA, 2020). One experience fears of separation from attachment figures persistently accompanied by distress and impairment in daily functioning. Diagnosis most common during childhood years but can flow through to adulthood years if not tackled (Shear et al., 2006). Given the closeness of family members to each other and their interdependence in Pakistani culture, there might exist more separation anxiety. The liaisons between family members and the cohesion exhibited in society raise the level of fear of separation, which expresses the anxiety in a more severe form. Young adults are always attached to their parents and other family members; therefore, any detachment from them may be stressful for a child (Qadir et al., 2011). Keeping these dynamics, young adults now have started displacing the attachment to certain pet figures. In this way the lag from discord and anxiety is somehow compensated.

These are dogs, cats, and other pets that give emotional support and companionship to owners. At the same time, such animals show unconditional affection and non-judgmental acceptance; therefore, they provide a great deal of help to young adults from disharmonious families. Companion animals can be used to eliminate stress and anxiety due to provision of security sense to one and hence improve general well-being. pets can provide some sense of emotional stability to young adults and young adults who are dealing with the miseries of their parents(Hawkins et al, 2021). The relationship with pets makes up for the lack of emotional support at home. This may be an immense attachment in a highly collectivist Pakistani society where family harmony is valued greatly, but pets perform this service for young adults by bringing tranquility and continuity in times of family conflict (Javed & Sarwar, 2015). Pets often are considered to be part of the family and may take on an important emotional role in the lives of young adults and young adults.

Young adults and young adults will turn to pets for unconditional love and an accepting ear that may be absent due to family conflict. More and more, pets become confidantes and a method of emotional regulation that helps the child cope with stress and anxiety caused by parental conflict. Having a pet gives routine, responsibility, and companionship during periods when family life could seem tumultuous (Hawkins et al., 2021). Pet owners feel a sense of security, reduced stress, and companionship from having them around, hence maintaining good mental health and social interactions. Interacting with pets lowers the stress hormone cortisol and increases oxytocin related to a feeling of calmness and well-being in humans. Pets also curtail feelings of loneliness and isolation, hence better outlook (Gee et al., 2021)s. For young adults and young adults, owning a pet can be perceived as providing them with a purpose and boosting their social skills through engaging interactions with others.

Similarly, when all of these study variables intermix, they can have a close relationship with Interpersonal problems. Interpersonal problems are difficulties in communication, relationship-building, or lack of conflict resolution with others. Symptoms of problems related to this field are interpreted as difficulty in the expression of thoughts and feelings, lack of trust in others, and problems with intimacy (Tews, Michel, & Stafford, 2017). Interpersonal problems can affect social and emotional well-being.

They may lead to social isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Interpersonal difficulties also affect professional and personal relationships negatively, reducing job satisfaction and increasing turnover intentions. People who have problems in this area tend to get into a cycle of loneliness and emotional distress because they are not able to form and build meaningful relationships (Karamat et al., 2023).

Observing all of these variables it is crucial to study the relationship between these variables as excitement to have pets is gradually rising among Pakistani population. So it's important to study the relationship with its risk and protective factors to get a full picture in order to get facilitated by these dynamics and plan interventions accordingly.

Aim

The aim of the study was to find out relationship between Parental Discord, Separation Anxiety, Pet Attachment and Interpersonal difficulties in Young Adults. Predictors of interpersonal difficulties were also assessed.

Methodology

Research Design

The design of the research was correlation. A correlational study is a non-experimental method that aims to describe the statistical relation between two variables but without manipulation or control. In this design, the researcher measures variables occurring naturally and then calculates the strength and direction of their association. It does not try to establish cause-and-effect links but discovers the patterns of covariation between two variables (Cherry, 2022).

Sampling Strategy

300 participants were taken among which 150 were men and 150 were women. The data collection was done from both public and private sectors. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling which is a type of Simple Random Sampling. Simple random sampling is considered the most obvious and unbiased approach to probability sampling (Horton, 2022).

Inclusion criteria included:

- Participants were young adults aged 18-25 years, with an equal distribution of 150 men and 150 women.
- Participants must have currently owned a pet or have had a pet
- The pet could be any commonly owned animal such as a dog, cat, bird, etc.

While individuals having any Physical or psychological disability were excluded from data

Measures

Following were the measures that were used in research

Demographic Questionnaire

It included questions about age, gender, pet ownership history, type of pet owned, and any relevant demographic variables that could have

influenced the relationship with pets or interpersonal interactions.

Adult Separation Anxiety Symptom Questionnaire (ASA-27)

The Adult Separation Anxiety Symptom Questionnaire (ASA-27) by Manicavasagar et al. (2003), which is a self-report measure to assess symptoms of separation anxiety in adults aged 18 years and above. There are 27 items of the ASA-27 rated on a 4-point Likert scale from This never happens to This happens very often. This measure has a single-factor structure assessing the overall severity of symptoms of separation anxiety. The psychometric evaluations revealed strong internal consistency for the ASA-27, with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.92. The mean score on the measure is 34.9 (SD = 12.6), which shows that it gauges a wide range of severity of separation anxiety symptoms among adult populations.

Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale

The Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale (PALS) is a self-report measure of the emotional attachment and the effect of companion animals upon their human guardians, designed by Cromer and Barlow (2013). The PALS is a 27-item scale rated on a 4-point Likert scale from This never happens to This happens very often. The measure has four factors including Love, Regulation, Personal Growth, and Negative Impacts in the human-animal relationship. The scale has 4 factors including love, regulation, personal growth and negative impact .

Psychometric assessments have established a firm internal consistency for PALS, computing a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.92. The measure has also shown convergent validity with other scales already established for measuring pet attachment and social support.

Interpersonal Difficulties for University Students

Interpersonal Difficulties Scale for University students was develop by Sadia Saleem, Zubia Ihsan, and Zahid Mahmood (2014) to assess patterns of interpersonal problems being faced by university students in Pakistan. IDS is a 59 item scale with a 5-point likert scale with a response format of 0 (never) to 4 (always) to measure the 6 components of Interpersonal difficulties scale for University students. These factors include Dominated by Others, Low Self-confidence, Mistrust, Lack of Assertiveness, Lack of Boundaries and Unstable Relationships. The IDS exhibited high internal consistency (α = 0.92), convergent validity with the Student Problem Checklist and test-retest reliability.

Perceived Parental Disharmony (PPD)

The scale, Perceived Parental Disharmony Scale for Adolescents, was developed by Siham Amjad and Sadia Saleem (2014) to understand the perception of adolescents about disharmony and conflict between their parents. The instrument consists of 27 items with three factors: misunderstanding, economic problems, and distrust. It is a 4-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 3 (always), and it estimates parental disharmony among adolescents. The 4-point Likert scale provides a baseline for subtle frequency and seriousness in perceived parental disharmony. Psychometric evaluation of the scale shows that the internal consistency is strong, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 for the total scale. The mean score on the measure was 27.57 (SD = 13.91), showing it captures a range of perceived parental disharmony among adolescents.

Ethical Considerations

- Approval from the institutional research committee was obtained.
- Permission from the authors of the scales being used was sought.
- Approval from the private and government institutes from where data was collected was secured.
- Steps taken to ensure data confidentiality and participant anonymity was reassured. An outline of how data was securely stored and who will have access to it was provided.
- The informed consent process was explained, ensuring participants are fully aware of the study's scope and their rights.
- A debriefing session or document for participants was offered, providing more details

about the study's aims and acknowledging their crucial contribution. Contact information for mental health resources will be provided, especially for participants who might feel distressed by the survey topics.

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Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval and ensuring that all participants were well-informed and had consented to participate, the study was proceeded as follows: The distribution of surveys and data collection commenced. Researchers visited different private and government universities to collect data and chose a reliable online survey platform (e.g., Google Forms) that ensures participant anonymity and data security. Then, the survey link was sent out via email or through social media channels, along with instructions on how to complete it. A brief description of the study's purpose and its significance was included to encourage participation.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to provide an overview of the sample characteristics, including mean scores for attachment to pets, separation anxiety, parental discord, and interpersonal difficulties. The following statistical analysis were done on the data set:

- Pearson Correlation Analysis
- Regression

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 300)

Variables	*N*	%
Gender		
Boys	150	50
Girls	150	50
Birth Order		
1-3	167	55.7
4-9	133	44.3
Parental Dynamics		
Married	194	64.7
Divorced	47	15.7
Widow	59	19.7
Family Type		
Joint	140	46.7
Nuclear	160	53.3
Father Occupation		
Businessman	123	41
Job	177	59
Mothers Occupation		
Housewife	139	46.3
Working	161	53.7
Semester of Participants		
1-2	80	26.7
3-4	65	21.7
5-6	64	21.3
7-8	91	30.3
University of Participants		
Public	160	53.3

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Private	140	46.7
Marital Status of Participants		
Single	252	84
Married	43	14.3
Divorced	5	1.7
Ownership Duration		
1-5	218	72.7
5 Plus	82	27.3
Type of Pet		
Cat	136	45.3
Dog	103	34.3
Birds	60	20
Fathers Education		
Primary	74	24.7
Intermediate	84	28
University	142	47.3
Mothers Education		
Primary	86	28.7
Intermediate	94	31.3
University	120	40
No. of Siblings		
0-3	143	47.7
4-5	81	27
6-9	76	25.3

The table presented the demographic data of the 300 respondents. The statistical distribution by gender was equally divided and it included 50% boys and 50% girls. Most of them, were third-born (55%), belonged to nuclear family system (53%). Majority of the sample was not married.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Age (N = 300)

Variables	M	SD
Age	21.64	2.24

The average age of the sample was 21.64 years while standard deviation was 2.24 years.

Testing of Hypotheses

Correlation Analysis

Table 3

Correlation between Perceived Parental Disharmony, Pet Attachment and Life Expectancy Scale, Adult Separation Anxiety, Interpersonal Difficulty Scale in young adults (N=300)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. F1. Misunderstanding	-	0.60**	0.69**	0.89**	-0.21**	0.01	-0.10	0.32**	-0.07	0.23**	0.42**	0.36**	0.36**	0.00	0.28**	0.43**	0.45**
2. F2. Economic Problems		-	0.61**	0.83**	-0.11*	0.00	-0.01	0.28**	-0.01	0.24**	0.38**	0.30**	0.23**	0.08	0.21**	0.34**	0.36**

3. F3. Distrust	-	0.88**	-0.25**	-0.06	-0.10	0.34**	-0.12*	0.18**	0.43**	0.36**	0.32**	0.00	0.33**	0.42**	0.44**				
4. PPD Total		-	-0.22**	-0.02	-0.08	0.36**	-0.08	0.25**	0.47**	0.40**	0.36**	0.03	0.32**	0.46**	0.48**				
5. F1. Love			-	0.59**	0.55**	-0.33**	0.87**	0.01	-0.08	-0.08	-0.13*	0.15**	-0.09	-0.14*	-0.10				
6. F2. Regulation				-	0.59**	-0.12*	0.85**	0.19**	0.14*	0.12*	0.01	0.17**	0.03	0.008	0.112				
F3. Personal Growth					-	-0.20**	0.75**	0.09	-0.01	0.00	-0.02	0.19**	-0.03	-0.03	0.01				
F4. Negative Impact						-	-0.08	0.12*	0.25**	0.23**	0.16**	-0.13*	0.18**	0.32**	0.24**				
PALS Total							-	0.13*	0.05	0.04	-0.04	0.17**	-0.01	-0.02	0.03				
ASA Total								-	0.45**	0.38**	0.28**	0.31**	0.29**	0.30**	0.46**				
F1. Dominated By Others									-	0.66**	0.50**	0.36**	0.41**	0.54**	0.82**				
F2. Low Self Confidence										-	0.47**	0.39**	0.40**	0.53**	0.80**				
F3. Mistrust											-	0.22**	0.36**	0.44**	0.76**				
F4. Lack Of Assertiveness												-	0.20**	0.19**	0.51**				
F5. Lack Of Boundaries													-	0.44**	0.65**				
F6. Unstable Relationship														-	0.70**				
IDS total															-				
M	12.67	10.68	11.64	35	56.07	29.37	16.46	10.03	111.93	38.55	24.17	20.11	22.71	16.16	15.82	11.94	110.91		
SD	5.559	4.45	5.13	13.27	10.21	6.96	4.25	3.60	17.74	11.66	7.55	6.45	9.90	5.32	6.59	4.78	29.40		

In the research, the sample size was 300 young adults, and the correlation table was utilized to perceive the relationships among perceived parental disharmony, pet attachment and life satisfaction, adult separation anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties. The variables measured in the study were perceived parental

disharmony—misunderstanding, financial problems, and distrust; various dimensions of pet attachment, such as love, regulation, personal growth, and negative impact.

PPD strongly correlated with items on misunderstanding, r = 0.89; economic problems, r = 0.83; and distrust, r = 0.88—very vital constituents of overall disharmony perceived by the young adults. The relationships with pet attachment and other variables, for example, love and life satisfaction, were evaluated. As noted, regulation was strongly related to love, r = 0.59, and to personal growth, r = 0.55, which means that the higher regulation is, the higher both love and personal growth tend to be on a moderate level. The overall PAL score was significantly influenced by love, regulation, and personal growth with correlation values of r = 0.87, r = 0.85, and r = 0.75 respectively. A correlation of r = 0.87 indicates the high positive relationship between love and the overall PAL score, indicating that the more in this domain of love associated with pet attachment, the higher a corresponding increase in the overall PAL score occurs. Also, a correlation of r = 0.85 suggests that regulation is likewise very influential to the PAL score, about to the same degree as Love. A correlation of r = 0.75 indicates that Personal Growth goes with a high positive relationship to the PAL score but slightly less than that of Love and Regulation. On the other hand, negative impact was negatively related to love, r = -0.33, indicating that higher negative impacts are related to lower perceived love in attachment. Accordingly, in instances of high negative impacts, perceived love in pet attachment is likely to be less. This interpretation underlines how different factors—positive and negative—relate to pet attachment and further go on to influence life satisfaction.

The results further revealed that ASA positively correlated with interpersonal problems to dominated by others (r = 0.45), low self-confidence (r = 0.38), and unstable relationships (r = 0.29). This shows that higher relationship in separation anxiety correlate to greater problems interpersonally. Finally, the main drivers of interpersonal difficulties were feelings of being dominated with r = 0.82, low self-confidence with r = 0.80, mistrust with r = 0.76, and unstable relationships with r = 0.70. These components contributed majorly to the general interpersonal problems of young adults.

Regression

Table 4

Linear Regression Analysis for Interpersonal Difficulties (N = 300)

Variable	95% CI for B						
	B	LL	UL	*SEB*	*B*	R^2	ΔR^2
						0.40	0.37
Gender	1.13	-4.33	6.60	2.77	0.01		
Family Type	-7.25	-12.89	-1.61	2.86	-0.12**		
F1. Misunderstanding	0.85	0.13	1.56	0.36	0.16**		
F2. Economic Problems	0.10	-0.72	0.92	0.41	0.01		
F3. Distrust	1.24	0.46	2.02	0.39	0.21**		
F1. Love	-0.6	-0.42	0.30	0.18	-0.02		
F2. Regulation	0.35	-0.17	0.89	0.27	0.08		
F3. Personal Growth	0.01	-0.81	0.82	0.41	0.00		
F4. Negative Impact	0.35	-0.48	1.20	0.43	0.04		
Separation Anxiety Total	0.87	0.63	1.11	0.12	0.34***		

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; B =Unstandardized beta; SEB = Coefficients Standard error; *B* = Standardized Coefficients Beta; R^2 = R Square; ΔR^2 = Adjusted R Square
*p< 0.05, **p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001

This table revealed that separation anxiety was a strong predictor of interpersonal difficulties. Moreover, the distrust and misunderstanding were strong predictors of the interpersonal difficulties and joint family also depicted a significant relationship with interpersonal difficulties.

In this research, it was examined how parental discord is related to attachment to pets, separation anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties in young adults. Their results showed there were numerous significant correlations that helped gain an understanding of the variables.

The normality analysis showed that all variables had an acceptable level of skewness and kurtosis from which inference could be made about the near-normal distribution of data. The values for skewness were between -0.75 and 0.07 while those for kurtosis were -0.09 and 1.67 respectively showing no gross deviation from normality hence justifying parametric tests as suggested by Miller et.al,2022.

It was hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between parental discord, pet attachment, separation anxiety and interpersonal problems in young adults. Parental discord correlates moderately with Interpersonal Difficulties (0.48**). Lower parental perceived discord is closely associated with better and adaptive interpersonal skill of young adults. The adverse effects of parental discord can be explained by its impact on the young adult's interpersonal difficulty. Their interpersonal difficulties are also a product of their painful emotional and psychological strain imposed by their environment at home. Thus, the distressed young adults merely replicate in their own lives, patterns of interacting that they are forced to witness all the time in the home environment. According to current research, parental dispute throughout childhood has a substantial impact on young people's interpersonal skills. A study discovered a link between high degrees of parental discordand persistent interpersonal issues, such as difficulty building intimate relationships and greater psychological discomfort (Dick et al., 2008). Furthermore, research shows that parental dispute can disrupt parenting practices, increasing the difficulties by impeding the child's social and emotional development (Gerard et al., 2006). These findings demonstrate how family conflict influences young people's capacity to develop and sustain good relationships across time.

The factor of parental discord "Unstable Relationship" was found to be the highest, 0.70**. This means that if an individual has parents who have had a high degree of conflict, it is more likely that they will also develop unstable relationships. Young adults who have unstable relationships have trouble forming and maintaining consistent, healthy relationships with peers and adults. Instead, many of them live out the same dysregulation and instability at home every day, and apply the same struggle to relationships, including trouble with trust, emotional control and conflict resolution at each stage. The instability of their home interferes with healthy attachment and their ability to create stability and predictability both in relationships and in life. Recent empirical studies confirm this finding and show that adults from discordant families became more relational unstable and insecure. Further evidence comes from the aforementioned study by Anderson and McLanahan (2021), which found that young adults (aged 19-32 years) exposed to higher degrees of parental discordin their adolescence had a 35 per cent greater chance of experiencing relational instability during adolescence and adulthood. A recent study by Smith et. al, (2022) provided additional support to the notion that enriching parental discord promotes better relational outcomes for young adults.

The 0.03 correlation between pet attachment and interpersonal problems indicates that there is little association between the two. According to the study (McConnell et al., 2011), while pets can provide emotional support and companionship, they do not help with interpersonal challenges. As a result, recent research casts doubt on pet attachment's ability to lessen interpersonal conflict, despite the fact that it may improve human welfare. There was no significant correlation found between pet attachment and interpersonal difficulties.

The moderate correlation (0.46**) between interpersonal issues and separation anxiety is indicated to be having a moderate correlation indicating that those with greater degrees of

separation anxiety typically have significant challenges in their social relationships. This research suggests that separation anxiety can have a significant impact on an individual's capacity to establish and preserve good relationships, resulting in problems including increased reliance, fear of being abandoned, and challenges with trust and communication (Przeworski et al., 2011; Markowitz et al., 2020).

Separation anxiety and interpersonal difficulties were analyzed, and the results came out to be significant, indicating an effect of separation anxiety on young adults' social interactions. The total score for separation anxiety indicated the presence of strong positive correlations with different interpersonal difficulties: dominated by others, low self-confidence, and unstable relationships, with r = 0.45**, r = 0.38**, and r = 0.46**, respectively. From these findings, it follows those higher degrees of separation anxiety go with more serious interpersonal difficulties. The factor low self-confidence was most strongly related to separation anxiety, at r = 0.38**. This relationship indicates that higher degrees of separation anxiety in young adults are related to lower degrees of self-confidence, which impairs the ability for social interaction under distress. Separation anxiety, an excessive fear or anxiety about separation from attachment figures, undercuts an individual's self-esteem and confidence, and therefore makes them challenged in their interpersonal skills within social situations (García et al., 2020). This finding is also supported by a study carried out in 2016 by Erozkan, the results of which indicated that separation anxiety is linked to low self-esteem and social anxiety during adolescent years. In this regard, it can be stated that high separation anxiety puts an adolescent at an increased risk of low self-confidence, which might consequently define a person in the adult years of his life by impacting social interactions and relationships.

According to Allen et al. (2010), separation anxiety at young adult age has long-term consequences which, if not taken care of, usually lead to continuous social and emotional difficulties in young adult. The result in this study of these authors showed that adults who had high ratings of separation anxiety during their childhood years were most likely to say that they faced some challenges in maintaining stable relationships with others, and further indicated higher ratings in social anxiety and low self-confidence.

The connection between young adults' pet attachment and parental discord was only slightly negative (-0.08), implying that there may be a link between higher parental discord and lower degrees of pet attachment. This link suggests that, while parental discord may influence an individual's propensity to build attachments, it has a smaller impact on an individual's bond with their pets. According to this study, regardless of how well their relationships with their parents are going, young adults may turn to their pet for emotional support. According to research, owning a pet can provide emotional support and companionship, thereby alleviating stress caused by parental discord (Guo et al., 2024). The weak correlation means that other factors may have a greater influence on how these relationships develop, and that pets may be unable to entirely mitigate the negative consequences of parental discord on attachment.

A recent study discovered a weak link between parental discord and young adults' separation anxiety. More precisely, a 0.25 correlation has been found between elevated parental discord and heightened separation anxiety. The influence that family relationships can have on a person's mental health is demonstrated by this study. Separation anxiety might make it more difficult for young adults to build stable relationships and manage stress since it is more common in those who see frequent parental dispute aaccording to Davies and Lindsay (2024).

A correlation score of 0.05 indicates that there is a weak link between separation anxiety and pet attachment. This suggests that, while there is some association, it is not particularly significant. The low correlation value indicates that there may be no meaningful association between the presence of pets and the severity of separation anxiety. In line with this discovery, a study delves deeper into this link in order to determine the factors that cause separation anxiety. Pets can offer emotional support, but their mere presence does not greatly lessen the symptoms of separation anxiety, according to a study by Smith et al. (2023).

It was hypothesized to find the predictors of interpersonal difficulties. The joint family approach may have a great impact on interpersonal difficulties. Share in environment and collective lifestyles, often attributed to joint families, exert both positive as well as negative effects on individuals. On one hand, close bonding that exists in joint families can provide robust social support and strong interpersonal bonding. It can, on the other hand, also promote increased interpersonal conflicts because of the proximity and constant interactions. Recent research has studied these aspects and identified how living in a joint family might enhance interpersonal problems at times. A study showed that members of joint families reported higher degrees of interpersonal discord stress as compared to their counterparts in nuclear families. (Kumar et al., 2023). The research findings suggest that violation of privacy and lack of autonomy, coupled with high expectations from familial roles and responsibilities, might be some reasons behind increased interpersonal tensions. The findings bring out the complexity involved in the living arrangement of a joint family and its influence on interpersonal relationships.

The influence of distrust and misunderstandings with parents has a great impact since there is no trust, frequent misunderstandings in a parent-child relationship leading to strained interactions and emotional distance. This kind of negative dynamics often overflows to other relationships, deflating the person's capacity for forming and maintaining healthy interpersonal connections. This may further escalate feelings of isolation, anxiety, and difficulties in establishing trust. This view is supported by research that indicates most interpersonal problems emanate from parental distrust and misunderstandings. In this regard, one of the studies indicated that those reporting high degrees of distrust with their parents, plus frequent misunderstandings, had more problems interpersonally: difficulty in close relationships, increased social anxiety, and tendency to withdraw (Lee et al., 2023). The research, therefore, puts a premium on open and harmonious relations between parents and young adults to reduce these possible adverse impacts on interpersonal relationships.

Separation anxiety can be a deeply impacting disorder on interpersonal difficulties. Most people prone to separation anxiety suffer from strong fear and dread of being away from close ones, which may result in relational straining behavior. For example, extreme clinginess, trust issues, and over-sensitivity to feelings of abandonment are some of the major factors that can cause stress and discord in relationships and building healthy interpersonal relationships. Recent literature has reviewed this relationship between separation anxiety and interpersonal problems, ascertaining their interlinkage. It was discussed in one study that the high anxiety degree of separation showed more interpersonal problems, such as increased conflict, dependency problems, and lower relationship satisfaction (Martinez et al., 2023). These results suggest that this anxiety can lead to maladaptive relational patterns that impair the quality and stability of close relationships.

Conclusion

This study concludes that perceived parental disharmony significantly contributes to separation anxiety and interpersonal difficulties among young adults, with distrust, misunderstandings, and separation anxiety emerging as key predictors of interpersonal problems. Contrary to expectations, pet attachment showed only a weak association with parental disharmony and interpersonal difficulties, suggesting a limited buffering role. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of fostering healthy family relationships and addressing separation anxiety to promote better psychological well-being and interpersonal functioning in young adults.

Limitations

- The study only focused on the young adults in Lahore and thus might not truthfully explain the experiences and tests faced by young adults all over Pakistan.
- The research did not figure out the different types of pet attachments that might have shed light into the exact ways in which various types of pets may affect separation anxiety and interpersonal problems.

- One major limitation was the lack of information on individuals representing different socio-economic backgrounds, generalizing from a study.

Recommendations

- Future research should therefore be more representative by involving participants from different parts of Pakistan to generalize on a wider experience concerning parental discord, attachment to pets, separation anxiety, and interpersonal problems.
- It may also be interesting, therefore, to account for how different kinds of pets (e.g., dogs, cats, etc.) affect young adults regarding their emotional and psychological well-being.
- Longitudinal studies through which changes over time in the relationships of parental discord, pet attachment, separation anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties can be understood at a more profound level are needed nowadays among young adults. It may also involve qualitative methods—interviews or focus groups, for example—for collecting more detailed data on personal experiences and perceptions related to the variables under study.

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