

BETWEEN TWO GENERATIONS: HOW CARING FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN AFFECTS MIDLIFE HAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

Middle adulthood represents a significant developmental stage characterized by diverse psychological, social, and familial responsibilities that influence overall well-being. During this period, individuals are often referred to as the "sandwich generation" because they occupy a central position within the family, balancing responsibilities toward both their aging parents and their children simultaneously. Therefore, the present study examined the relationships among filial piety, intergenerational contact and life satisfaction among middle adults in Pakistan. A cross-sectional correlational research design was employed, and data were collected from 100 middle adults aged 35 to 55 years residing in Lahore using purposive sampling. Participants completed the Filial Piety Scale, the Intergenerational Contact Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Pearson correlation and regression analyses were performed using SPSS. The results showed that filial piety towards parents was positively related with life satisfaction. Intergenerational contact with children was also positively related to life satisfaction. The findings emphasize the unique role of the "sandwich generation" in Pakistan, highlighting how fulfilling cultural duties toward parents while maintaining strong bonds with children promotes psychological well-being and life satisfaction during middle adulthood.

Keywords: Middle adults, sandwich generation, intergenerational contact, filial piety, life satisfaction, psychological well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Middle adulthood is a critical and multidimensional developmental stage characterized by unique familial, psychological, and social responsibilities that influence an individual's overall well-being. Individuals in this phase are often referred to as the "sandwich generation" because they occupy a central role in the family hierarchy, simultaneously balancing obligations toward two different generations: their aging parents and their growing children. As middle adults navigate career peaks, household

management, and their own early aging transitions, maintaining psychological well-being becomes crucial. Among the indicators of psychological well-being, life satisfaction is considered one of the most important because it reflects an individual's overall evaluation of their life based on personal goals, expectations, and experiences (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Higher life satisfaction has consistently been associated with better mental health, greater

resilience, and successful navigation of family responsibilities.

One of the strongest predictors of life satisfaction during middle adulthood is the quality of intergenerational relationships within the family. Middle-aged adults increasingly prioritize emotionally meaningful bonds that provide a sense of purpose, identity, and shared support. Regular interaction with their children and fulfilling duties toward their aging parents help middle adults remain grounded, reduce caregiver stress, and promote emotional well-being. Therefore, successfully managing these dual family roles is considered essential for enhancing life satisfaction among middle adults.

A key aspect of these family dynamics is intergenerational contact, which refers to the frequency and quality of interactions between middle adults and their younger family members, specifically their young adult children. Such interactions may include face-to-face visits, telephone conversations, shared activities, emotional exchanges, and practical assistance (Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2011; Hooker, Turner, Jarrott, & Geldhof, 2021). Previous studies have consistently shown that both frequent and meaningful intergenerational contact with children contributes to better psychological health, greater emotional support, and higher life satisfaction among parents (Fingerman et al., 2011; Wang & Silverstein, 2006). These interactions foster feelings of legacy, continuity, and belonging, enabling middle adults to feel validated in their parenting roles.

However, the well-being of middle adults depends not only on how they interact with the younger generation but also on how they fulfill their cultural and emotional duties toward the older generation. This is where the concept of filial piety becomes central. Filial piety refers to traditional values and behaviors rooted in respect, caregiving, obedience, and financial or emotional support toward one's parents (Yeh & Bedford, 2003). In collectivist societies like Pakistan, values such as respect for parents, caregiving, emotional closeness, and family obligation are deeply embedded. Fulfilling filial piety demands includes emotional care, physical assistance during parental

illness, and general respect, all of which contribute to a middle adult's moral identity, self-worth, and internal satisfaction (Ho & Fung, 1994; Sung, 1995). When middle adults actively value and practice these responsibilities, they experience higher emotional security and life satisfaction.

Growing evidence suggests that a middle adult's life satisfaction is a collective outcome of how they balance being a child to their parents and a parent to their children. Actively practicing filial piety provides a sense of moral fulfillment, while frequent, positive contact with their own young adult children provides emotional feedback and reassurance for the future (Hooker et al., 2021). Therefore, examining both filial piety and intergenerational contact together provides a comprehensive view of how middle-aged individuals evaluate their lives while managing dual generational demands.

Despite these dynamics, important gaps remain in the literature. Most previous studies on family dynamics have isolated these variables, focusing either solely on how older adults receive care, or how young parents deal with toddlers. Relatively few studies have investigated the middle adults, the "sandwich generation" who are actively giving care to aging parents while maintaining contact with their young adult children within the Pakistani context. Cultural values, family structures, and expectations regarding parental care differ across societies, making it vital to examine how balancing these two generational directions influences life satisfaction in a South Asian, collectivist framework.

Significance of the Study

The present study is significant because it enhances understanding of the psychosocial factors that contribute to life satisfaction among middle adults, a population facing dense family responsibilities. By examining the roles of filial piety toward parents and intergenerational contact with children, this study provides insight into how dual-role management influences psychological well-being. The findings contribute to the existing literature by extending evidence from the Pakistani context, where research on the sandwich generation remains highly limited despite the

strong influence of joint and extended family structures. The results of this study may also inform family counselors, psychologists, and social practitioners in designing interventions that help middle-aged adults reduce stress, balance filial duties, and foster positive communication across generations (United Nations, 2023; World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between filial piety towards parents and life satisfaction among middle adults.
2. To assess the association between intergenerational contact with young adult children and life satisfaction among middle adults.
3. To explore how filial piety towards parents and intergenerational contact with children collectively predict life satisfaction in middle adults.

Hypotheses

1. The filial piety towards parents is likely to be related with greater life satisfaction in middle adults.
2. The greater intergenerational contact with young adult children is related with higher life satisfaction in middle adults.
3. Filial piety towards parents and intergenerational contact with children is likely to significantly and positively predict life satisfaction among middle adults.

Method

Research Design and Participants

A cross-sectional correlational research design was used to examine the relationships among filial piety, intergenerational contact and life satisfaction among middle adults in Pakistan. A correlational design was considered appropriate because it enabled the examination of associations among the study variables without manipulating them. The study was conducted with 100 middle adults aged between 35 and 55 years residing in Lahore, Pakistan. Participants were recruited from urban communities and private households using purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling technique was considered appropriate because it enabled the selection of individuals who

fulfilled the specific characteristics required for the study (Shaughnessy et al., 2021). Participants were eligible to participate if they were between 35 and 55 years of age, had at least one living parent, and had at least one young adult child aged between 18 and 39 years with whom they maintained regular contact. These criteria ensured that all participants occupied the dual role of caring for aging parents while maintaining relationships with their own adult children, which characterizes the sandwich generation. Individuals who were unmarried without children, had no living parents, or reported severe physical or psychiatric illnesses that could interfere with participation were excluded from the study.

The mean age of the participants was 46.50 years ($SD = 5.20$). Of the total sample, 55% were male and 45% were female. Most participants were married (77%), whereas 15% were widowed and 8% were divorced. The majority belonged to the middle socioeconomic class (77%), while 13% represented the upper socioeconomic group and 10% belonged to the lower socioeconomic group. Regarding family structure, 55% resided in nuclear families and 45% lived in joint family systems. This demographic diversity provided an appropriate representation of middle adults experiencing varying family responsibilities and socioeconomic backgrounds within the Pakistani context.

Assessment Measures

Filial Piety Scale

Filial piety was assessed using the Filial Piety Scale (FPS), developed on the basis of the Dual Filial Piety Model proposed by Yeh and Bedford (2003). The scale measures individuals' attitudes and behaviours toward their parents by assessing values such as respect, emotional support, caregiving, gratitude, and family obligation. It comprises two dimensions: reciprocal filial piety, which reflects affection-based support and mutual care, and authoritarian filial piety, which reflects role-based obligation and obedience. Responses are recorded on a Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of filial piety values. Previous studies have demonstrated satisfactory

reliability and construct validity for the instrument across collectivist cultures.

Intergenerational Contact Scale

Intergenerational contact with young adult children was measured using the Intergenerational Contact Measure developed by Hooker et al. (2021). The scale assesses both the frequency and quality of interactions between middle adults and their young adult children. It includes indicators such as face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations, electronic communication, shared activities, and perceptions of emotional closeness during these interactions. Participants responded using a Likert-type response format, with higher scores representing more frequent and positive intergenerational contact. Previous research has reported satisfactory psychometric properties for the measure.

Satisfaction with Life Scale

Life satisfaction was assessed using the Urdu version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985). The SWLS is a widely used self-report instrument consisting of five items that measure individuals' global cognitive evaluation of their lives. Responses are rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher total scores indicating greater life satisfaction. The scale has demonstrated excellent reliability and validity across different cultural settings and age groups.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to use, adapt, and translate the study instruments into Urdu through Mappi Guidelines was obtained from the original authors through email correspondence. The translated versions of the scales were subsequently pilot tested with 30 middle adults who met the study's inclusion criteria. The pilot

study was conducted to evaluate the clarity, comprehensibility, and cultural appropriateness of the translated items. Based on participants' feedback, minor linguistic modifications were made to improve readability while preserving the conceptual equivalence of the original instruments. Following completion of the pilot study, the finalized questionnaires were administered to the main sample of 100 participants recruited through purposive sampling. Potential participants were approached in their communities and informed about the objectives and procedures of the study. Individuals who met the eligibility criteria were invited to participate after receiving a detailed explanation of the research. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential and that participation was entirely voluntary. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. No financial or material incentives were offered for participation. The questionnaires were completed individually, and all completed forms were screened for completeness before statistical analysis.

Results

In order to examine the relationships between the key variables of the study, inferential statistical analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient. This analysis helps determine the strength and direction of linear associations between variables. The significance level was set at $p < .05$ to determine statistical significance. The results of the correlation analysis are presented below, providing insight into the interrelationships among the main constructs under investigation.

Table 01 Pearson Correlations Among Age, Intergenerational Contact, Filial Piety and Life Satisfaction

Variable	1	2	3	4	M	SD
Age	----				60.82	6.62
Intergenerational Contact	.38**	----			54.64	6.86
Perceived Filial Piety	-.06	.08**	----		38.43	3.43
Life Satisfaction	.13	.10*	.21*	----	26.11	3.24

Note. $N = 100$. Values represent Pearson correlation coefficients, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Age showed a significant positive correlation with intergenerational contact ($r = .38$, $p < .01$), indicating that older participants reported greater levels of interaction with younger family members. However, age was not significantly related to perceived filial piety ($r = -.06$) or life satisfaction ($r = .13$), suggesting that increasing age alone does not necessarily influence perceptions of filial behavior or overall life satisfaction. Intergenerational contact was positively and significantly associated with perceived filial piety ($r = .08$, $p < .01$), indicating that greater interaction with younger family members is linked with stronger perceptions of respect, care, and support from children. Intergenerational contact also

showed a significant positive correlation with life satisfaction ($r = .10$, $p < .05$), suggesting that older adults who engage more frequently with younger family members tend to report higher life satisfaction. Perceived filial piety demonstrated a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction ($r = .21$, $p < .05$), indicating that older adults who perceive higher levels of filial respect and support from their children experience greater satisfaction with life. Overall, the correlation findings support the view that intergenerational contact and perceived filial piety are important psychosocial correlates of life satisfaction, whereas age itself plays a limited role.

Table 02 Regression of the variables age, intergenerational contact mediator, Filial Piety as predictors on Life Satisfaction of Individuals ($N=100$).

Model Variables		Life Satisfaction	
		β	ΔR^2
1	Age	.13	.20
2	Age	.11	.43
	Intergenerational Contact	.31*	
3	Age	.09	.70
	Intergenerational contact	.34**	
	Perceived Filial Piety	-.22*	

In Model 1, age was entered as the sole predictor of life satisfaction. The results indicated that age positively predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = .13$), accounting for 20% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = .20$).

In Model 2, intergenerational contact was added to the model while controlling for age. The findings showed that intergenerational contact emerged as a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction ($\beta = .31$, $p < .05$), whereas the predictive effect of age decreased slightly ($\beta = .11$). Together, the variables explained 43% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = .43$), indicating

that intergenerational contact contributed additional explanatory power beyond age.

In Model 3, perceived filial piety was added to the regression model. The results revealed that intergenerational contact remained a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction ($\beta = .34$, $p < .01$), while perceived filial piety emerged as a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .05$).

The effect of age further decreased ($\beta = .09$). The final model explained 70% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = .70$), suggesting that the combined effects of age, intergenerational contact, and perceived filial piety substantially predicted life satisfaction among middle adults.

Overall, the regression analysis indicates that life satisfaction in middle adults is influenced by a combination of age-related factors, intergenerational contact, and filial behavior towards parents, with intergenerational contact showing a relatively consistent positive contribution.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationships among filial piety toward parents, intergenerational contact with young adult children, and life satisfaction among middle adults belonging to the sandwich generation in Pakistan. Specifically, it investigated whether fulfilling filial responsibilities toward aging parents and maintaining meaningful relationships with young adult children contribute to greater life satisfaction during middle adulthood. Overall, the findings supported the proposed hypotheses by demonstrating that both filial piety and intergenerational contact were positively associated with life satisfaction. Furthermore, intergenerational contact remained a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction after controlling for age, whereas filial piety demonstrated a more complex relationship when examined alongside the other predictor. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of family relationships and intergenerational bonds in promoting psychological well-being among middle adults who simultaneously navigate responsibilities toward both older and younger generations.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, the study found that filial piety toward parents was positively associated with life satisfaction among middle adults. Participants who reported greater respect, care, emotional support, and responsibility toward their aging parents also reported higher levels of life satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted in collectivist

societies, which has consistently demonstrated that fulfilling filial responsibilities contributes to psychological well-being, emotional fulfillment, and stronger family cohesion (Ho & Fung, 1994; Sung, 1995; Yeh & Bedford, 2003). These findings suggest that caring for aging parents extends beyond the fulfillment of social obligations and represents an important source of personal meaning and emotional satisfaction during middle adulthood.

The positive association between filial piety and life satisfaction can also be understood through the Dual Filial Piety Model (Yeh & Bedford, 2003), which distinguishes between reciprocal and authoritarian dimensions of filial piety. Reciprocal filial piety is characterized by genuine affection, gratitude, and emotional closeness toward parents, whereas authoritarian filial piety reflects obedience and role-based obligation. Contemporary collectivist societies increasingly emphasize reciprocal rather than authoritarian forms of filial behavior, as relationships between parents and adult children become more emotionally supportive and mutually respectful. Consequently, middle adults who willingly care for and maintain close emotional relationships with their parents are likely to experience greater psychological well-being because these behaviors satisfy both emotional needs and culturally valued family responsibilities.

The findings may also be interpreted within the cultural and religious context of Pakistan, where respect for parents remains a deeply embedded social value. Despite increasing urbanization and changing family structures, Pakistani families continue to place considerable importance on caring for older parents and maintaining strong intergenerational relationships. Furthermore, Islamic teachings emphasize kindness, compassion, and respect toward parents as fundamental moral responsibilities. The Qur'an repeatedly encourages believers to treat parents with humility and compassion, particularly during old age (Qur'an 17:23–24; 31:14). Therefore, middle adults who actively fulfill these responsibilities may derive psychological satisfaction not only from maintaining harmonious family relationships but also from

acting in accordance with their cultural and religious beliefs. This alignment between personal values and socially endorsed behaviors may strengthen self-worth, reinforce moral identity, and ultimately contribute to greater life satisfaction.

The findings also supported the second hypothesis, demonstrating a significant positive relationship between intergenerational contact with young adult children and life satisfaction. Middle adults who reported more frequent and meaningful interactions with their children experienced higher levels of life satisfaction than those who reported less frequent contact. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that positive relationships between parents and adult children contribute to emotional well-being, psychological resilience, and successful aging (Fingerman et al., 2011; Wang & Silverstein, 2006). Regular communication, shared activities, and emotional support from adult children reinforce parental identity, provide reassurance regarding children's well-being, and foster feelings of continuity and family connectedness, all of which contribute positively to life satisfaction.

These findings are further supported by the Convoy Model of Social Relations (Antonucci et al., 2014), which proposes that close family relationships serve as stable sources of emotional and instrumental support across the lifespan. During middle adulthood, individuals frequently balance occupational demands, caregiving responsibilities, and changing family roles. Maintaining supportive relationships with adult children may therefore function as an important psychosocial resource that buffers stress associated with these multiple responsibilities. Emotional support received through regular intergenerational contact may reduce feelings of burden, strengthen perceptions of social connectedness, and enhance overall psychological well-being.

The present findings are particularly meaningful within the Pakistani sociocultural context. Although urbanization, migration, and economic pressures have contributed to the increasing prevalence of nuclear family systems, close

intergenerational relationships continue to characterize family life. Advances in communication technologies, including mobile phones and digital media, enable middle adults to maintain frequent contact with their children even when they live separately. Consequently, emotional closeness is increasingly maintained through regular communication rather than solely through co-residence. These findings suggest that while the structure of Pakistani families may be evolving, the emotional significance of intergenerational relationships remains remarkably stable. The ability to maintain meaningful contact with adult children therefore appears to be an important contributor to psychological well-being among middle adults despite ongoing social and demographic changes. Finally, the positive associations observed for both filial piety and intergenerational contact highlight the distinctive position occupied by middle adults within the sandwich generation. Unlike younger or older adults, middle-aged individuals simultaneously occupy the roles of caregivers, parents, and adult children. Successfully maintaining supportive relationships in both directions of the family network may therefore provide emotional rewards that extend beyond individual relationships, reinforcing a sense of purpose, belonging, and family continuity. These findings suggest that life satisfaction during middle adulthood is shaped not only by personal characteristics but also by the quality of intergenerational relationships that connect individuals across multiple generations.

Beyond the individual relationships of filial piety and intergenerational contact with life satisfaction, the present study also demonstrated a positive association between these two family-related constructs. Middle adults who maintained more frequent and meaningful contact with their young adult children also tended to report stronger filial piety toward their aging parents. Although the magnitude of this relationship was relatively modest, it suggests that family relationships may operate as interconnected rather than isolated processes. Individuals who value emotional closeness, mutual support, and family responsibility in one intergenerational

relationship may be more likely to extend these values across other family relationships. This finding supports the notion that family functioning within collectivist societies is characterized by reciprocity and continuity, whereby values and caregiving behaviors are transmitted across generations.

This finding is consistent with the concept of intergenerational solidarity, which proposes that emotional closeness, frequent interaction, shared values, and reciprocal support strengthen relationships between family members across generations (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). In collectivist societies such as Pakistan, family members are expected to maintain strong emotional bonds and provide mutual support throughout the lifespan. Consequently, middle adults who actively fulfill their responsibilities toward aging parents may also be more invested in nurturing meaningful relationships with their own children. These reciprocal family interactions reinforce feelings of belonging, strengthen family cohesion, and contribute to greater psychological well-being.

The regression analysis provided further insight into the relative contribution of the study variables to life satisfaction. After controlling for age, intergenerational contact remained a significant positive predictor of life satisfaction, indicating that maintaining supportive relationships with young adult children contributes uniquely to psychological well-being during middle adulthood. This finding suggests that the emotional support, companionship, and sense of continuity derived from regular interaction with adult children remain important even when other family-related factors are considered. Frequent communication and positive parent-child relationships may help middle adults cope more effectively with the multiple responsibilities associated with the sandwich generation, thereby enhancing overall life satisfaction.

In contrast, filial piety demonstrated a more complex pattern within the regression analysis. Although filial piety was positively correlated with life satisfaction, its regression coefficient became negative after intergenerational contact was included in the model. This finding should not be

interpreted as evidence that filial piety reduces life satisfaction. Rather, it is more likely to reflect statistical suppression or shared variance between the predictor variables. Because filial piety and intergenerational contact are conceptually related aspects of family functioning, they may explain overlapping portions of variance in life satisfaction. Consequently, the unique contribution of filial piety may appear weaker or change direction when both variables are examined simultaneously.

An alternative explanation may relate to the unique circumstances of middle adults within the sandwich generation. Individuals who strongly endorse filial obligations often assume substantial caregiving responsibilities for aging parents while simultaneously supporting their own children. Although fulfilling these responsibilities may provide emotional fulfillment and reinforce cultural values, the cumulative demands of caregiving may also create psychological strain, emotional exhaustion, and role conflict. Previous studies have demonstrated that caregiving can generate both positive and negative psychological outcomes depending on the availability of personal, social, and financial resources (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2003). Accordingly, middle adults who experience greater caregiving demands may report lower life satisfaction despite strongly endorsing filial values.

The Dual Filial Piety Model (Yeh & Bedford, 2003) provides another useful explanation for this finding. The model distinguishes between reciprocal filial piety, which arises from affection, gratitude, and emotional closeness, and authoritarian filial piety, which is motivated primarily by obligation, obedience, and social expectations. Reciprocal filial piety has consistently been associated with positive psychological outcomes because caregiving behaviors are perceived as voluntary expressions of love and appreciation. In contrast, authoritarian filial piety may become psychologically burdensome when individuals experience caregiving primarily as a moral duty or social obligation. Because the Filial Piety Scale incorporates both reciprocal and authoritarian dimensions, the overall score may reflect both

rewarding and demanding aspects of caregiving. This may explain why filial piety showed a positive bivariate association with life satisfaction but a weaker unique contribution within the regression model.

The findings also indicated that chronological age was not a significant predictor of life satisfaction among middle adults. Although participants at the upper end of the age range reported somewhat greater intergenerational contact, age itself did not substantially influence overall life satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that subjective well-being is determined less by chronological age than by the quality of interpersonal relationships, perceived social support, successful adaptation to changing life roles, and psychological resilience (Diener et al., 1999). Within the relatively narrow age range of the present study (35–55 years), differences in family relationships and social resources may therefore play a more important role in shaping life satisfaction than age alone.

Taken together, these findings indicate that life satisfaction among middle adults is influenced primarily by the quality of their intergenerational relationships rather than by demographic characteristics. While age and family structure may provide important contextual information, the emotional quality of relationships with both aging parents and young adult children appears to be a more meaningful determinant of psychological well-being. This highlights the importance of considering family relationships as dynamic psychosocial resources that promote resilience during one of the most demanding stages of the lifespan.

The findings of the present study should also be interpreted within the broader sociocultural context of Pakistan. Traditionally, Pakistani society has been characterized by collectivist values, strong kinship networks, and multigenerational family systems in which caregiving and mutual support are regarded as shared family responsibilities. Although rapid urbanization, economic pressures, migration, and globalization have gradually shifted many families from joint to nuclear household structures, cultural expectations regarding respect for parents

and commitment to family relationships remain deeply embedded. The present findings suggest that these cultural values continue to influence the psychological well-being of middle adults despite ongoing social and demographic changes. Rather than weakening family bonds, changing family structures may have transformed the ways in which family members maintain emotional closeness, with frequent communication and reciprocal support continuing across separate households.

The present findings also highlight the distinctive position of middle adults within the sandwich generation. Unlike younger adults, who are primarily establishing careers and families, or older adults, who are more likely to receive support from younger generations, middle adults simultaneously occupy the roles of caregivers, parents, and adult children. Balancing these multiple responsibilities often requires considerable emotional, financial, and practical investment. Nevertheless, the positive associations observed in the present study suggest that successfully maintaining supportive relationships with both aging parents and young adult children may provide important psychological rewards. Fulfilling these dual family roles appears to strengthen feelings of purpose, continuity, and connectedness, thereby enhancing overall life satisfaction.

The findings further contribute to the growing literature on intergenerational relationships by demonstrating that psychological well-being among middle adults is influenced not only by relationships with one generation but by the combined quality of relationships across multiple generations. Previous research has typically examined either adult children's caregiving for older parents or parent-child relationships independently. By simultaneously examining filial piety toward parents and intergenerational contact with young adult children, the present study provides a more comprehensive understanding of family functioning among middle adults. This integrated perspective is particularly relevant in collectivist societies, where family members remain interconnected throughout the lifespan and where responsibilities toward different generations frequently coexist.

From a practical perspective, the findings have important implications for mental health professionals, family counsellors, and policymakers. Interventions designed to promote psychological well-being among middle adults should recognize the central role of family relationships in shaping life satisfaction. Counselling programmes may benefit from encouraging healthy communication between generations, strengthening emotional support within families, and assisting middle adults in managing the competing demands associated with caring for aging parents while maintaining relationships with their children. Community-based programmes that provide caregiver education, stress management strategies, and social support may further reduce caregiver burden and enhance psychological well-being among individuals belonging to the sandwich generation.

The findings also have implications for public policy. As Pakistan continues to experience demographic ageing and changing family structures, greater attention should be given to developing policies that support family caregivers. Flexible workplace arrangements, caregiver support services, and community resources that facilitate intergenerational interaction may help middle adults balance their multiple family responsibilities more effectively. Such initiatives may not only improve individual well-being but also strengthen family functioning and social cohesion within the broader community.

Several strengths of the present study should also be acknowledged. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is among the first studies conducted in Pakistan to examine filial piety toward parents, intergenerational contact with young adult children, and life satisfaction simultaneously within the context of the sandwich generation. By integrating these variables within a single conceptual framework, the study extends existing knowledge regarding family relationships and psychological well-being in a collectivist cultural context. The findings therefore contribute to the growing international literature by providing evidence from a population that has received relatively limited empirical attention.

Despite these contributions, the findings should be interpreted cautiously. The cross-sectional design limits conclusions regarding causality, and future longitudinal research is needed to examine how family relationships and life satisfaction evolve over time. Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling and recruitment from a single metropolitan city may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions of Pakistan. Future studies should include more diverse samples representing rural and urban communities as well as different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Researchers may also benefit from examining reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety separately to better understand their unique contributions to psychological well-being.

Overall, the present study demonstrates that meaningful intergenerational relationships constitute an important psychosocial resource during middle adulthood. Both maintaining supportive contact with young adult children and fulfilling responsibilities toward aging parents appear to contribute positively to life satisfaction, highlighting the enduring importance of family relationships within Pakistani society. Although changing social conditions continue to reshape family structures, the findings suggest that emotional connectedness, mutual support, and intergenerational responsibility remain central determinants of psychological well-being. Collectively, these findings reinforce the view that strengthening family relationships across generations may represent an important pathway for promoting life satisfaction and healthy ageing among middle adults belonging to the sandwich generation.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the growing literature on family relationships and psychological well-being by highlighting the importance of filial piety toward parents and intergenerational contact with children in promoting life satisfaction among middle adults in Pakistan. The findings demonstrate that individuals who maintain stronger relationships with their young adult children and endorse stronger filial values toward their aging parents

report greater life satisfaction. Although filial piety showed a complex pattern within the regression analysis, the overall findings emphasize the significant role of family relationships in shaping psychological well-being during middle adulthood. As members of the sandwich generation continue to balance responsibilities toward both older and younger family members, strengthening supportive intergenerational relationships and promoting culturally meaningful caregiving practices may enhance life satisfaction and contribute to healthier family functioning.

Limitation and Suggestions

The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations of the relationships among variables. The study did not differentiate between reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety in the mediation analysis. Thus, future studies should employ longitudinal designs to examine changes in intergenerational relationships and well-being over time. Researchers should examine different dimensions of filial piety separately, particularly reciprocal versus authoritarian forms. Moreover, qualitative approaches may provide deeper insight into older adults' subjective experiences and expectations.

Implications

1. Filial piety and intergenerational contact is an important factor in promoting life satisfaction among middle adults.
2. To enhance psychological well-being there is a need to strengthen family relationships and intergenerational communication.
3. The study provides evidence for family counsellors and psychologists to incorporate family-based interventions when working with middle adults in the sandwich generation.
4. The findings can help policymakers and community organizations develop support programs for middle adults managing responsibilities toward both aging parents and young adult children.
5. The study contributes to the limited Pakistani literature on filial piety, intergenerational contact, and life satisfaction, providing a foundation for future research.

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