



Gendered Morality and Familial Authority: Socio-Cultural Correlates of Parenting and Moral Identity in Pakistan

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Article Details:

Received on 22 Aug 2025

Accepted on 24 Sept 2025

Published on 25 Sept 2025

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Abstract

The stage of emerging adulthood is culturally-constructed, but there is a relative lack in research on how this stage is influenced by socio-cultural systems such as gender roles and family systems in collectivist societies. With its powerful collectivist culture, Pakistan is an ideal environment to examine these associations. This study examined the influence of gender, family structure (nuclear vs. joint) and parental education on the perceived parenting styles, family communication styles and internalization and symbolization of moral identity among emerging adults in Pakistan. A cross sectional sample of 500 university students at Faisalabad, Pakistan (266 females, 234 males; Mage = 21.4) and self-report measures were filled. Independent samples t-tests and ANOVA were used to analyze data. Analysis found that males reported greater authoritarian and permissive parenting, and greater moral symbolization, whereas females reported greater internalized moral identity. Joint family participants also reported significantly greater authoritarian parenting, conformity-oriented communication, and moral symbolization compared to nuclear family participants. Parental education showed minimal significant effects. The results highlight an essential role of traditional socio-cultural scripts in comparison with socioeconomic determinants in the formation of family interactions and the sense of moral self in Pakistan. This highlights the essential requirement of culturally-based models of developmental psychology and practice.

Keywords: Parenting Styles, Moral Identity, Family Communication, Emerging Adulthood, Pakistan, Gender Differences, Collectivist Culture.



1. INTRODUCTION

The Cultural Context of Development

It is considered the mature phase of life when individuals are in their emerging adulthood (18-25) and experience identity exploration, instability, and self-interest (Arnett, 2015). Nevertheless, this stage of development is not universal, this stage is heavily influenced by the overall socio-cultural influences within which it is integrated (Shweder et al., 2006). Pathways to adulthood are a cultural construct in that the values, expectations, and social structures of a society determine the norms, challenges, and opportunities which define this phase of life. Pakistan is an intriguing case study in studying these culturally-specific pathways. It offers a unique developmental setting due to its powerful collectivist culture, in which familial dependency and group solidarity are valued more than individual autonomy (Saleem et al., 2017). In this context, conventional institutions like the multi-generational joint family structure and rigidly defined gender roles are strong socializing forces, which (probably) shape the experience of emergent adulthood in a much more non-Western and individualistic way.

Parenting Styles: Universal Typologies, Cultural Meanings

The early research by Baumrind (1966) and its elaboration by Maccoby and Martin (1983) has given a universal typology of parenting styles based on dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness-authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Although such a framework is powerful, there is a substantial amount of cross-cultural research that questions the applicability of this framework, proving that similar parenting behaviours have different meanings, and are linked with different outcomes in different cultural settings (Dwairy & Achoui, 2010). An example would be authoritarian parenting (high demandingness, low responsiveness), which is typically associated with adverse psychosocial outcomes in Western communities, but can be viewed and experienced differently in collectivist environments. In such a setting as Pakistan, being strict can be viewed not as a sign of rejection and hostility to a child but as a care and concern that such children need to be obedient and successful in life, thus protecting the honor of the family (Chao, 1994; Hasbullah et al., 2024). Such cultural relativism requires a study of the parenting that goes beyond style to take into consideration the culturally-specific sense of the parental actions.

Moral Identity: The Internal and the External

One of the central developmental processes of emerging adulthood is the consolidation of a moral identity, meaning the degree to which moral qualities (e.g. compassionate, fair) are central to an individual self-concept (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). Aquino and Reed (2002) made a very important distinction between two dimensions of moral identity Internalization (the subjective significance of moral characteristics to his or her self-image) and Symbolization (the externality of these characteristics through the actions of others). This difference is essential in a collectivist culture, since it creates one of the most important questions: does the cultural background make a difference in the way the morality is developed either as a personal value system, with internal standards, or as a social appearance, with social norms and family reputation? The motivation behind prosocial and moral behavior in various cultural contexts can be understood by understanding this possible difference.

Family Communication: Regulating Conformity and Conversation

Transmission of cultural values and negotiation of identities are done through the family communication environment which is the daily medium through which these are passed



on. Theory of Family Communication Patterns (FCP) by Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) identifies two basic dimensions defining this environment: Conversation Orientation (degree to which families promote open and frequent discussion of wide variety of topics) and Conformity Orientation (degree to which families promote homogeneity of attitudes, values and beliefs and respect of the parents). The theorized high conformity orientation emphasizing harmony and obedience is also believed to be strictly associated with the hierarchical family structures that are common in collectivist societies (Schrodt et al., 2008). Therefore, it is not only the style of family communication, but a process of cultural socialization, strengthening certain values and defining how members perceive themselves in connection to the group.

The Pakistani Socio-Cultural Milieu

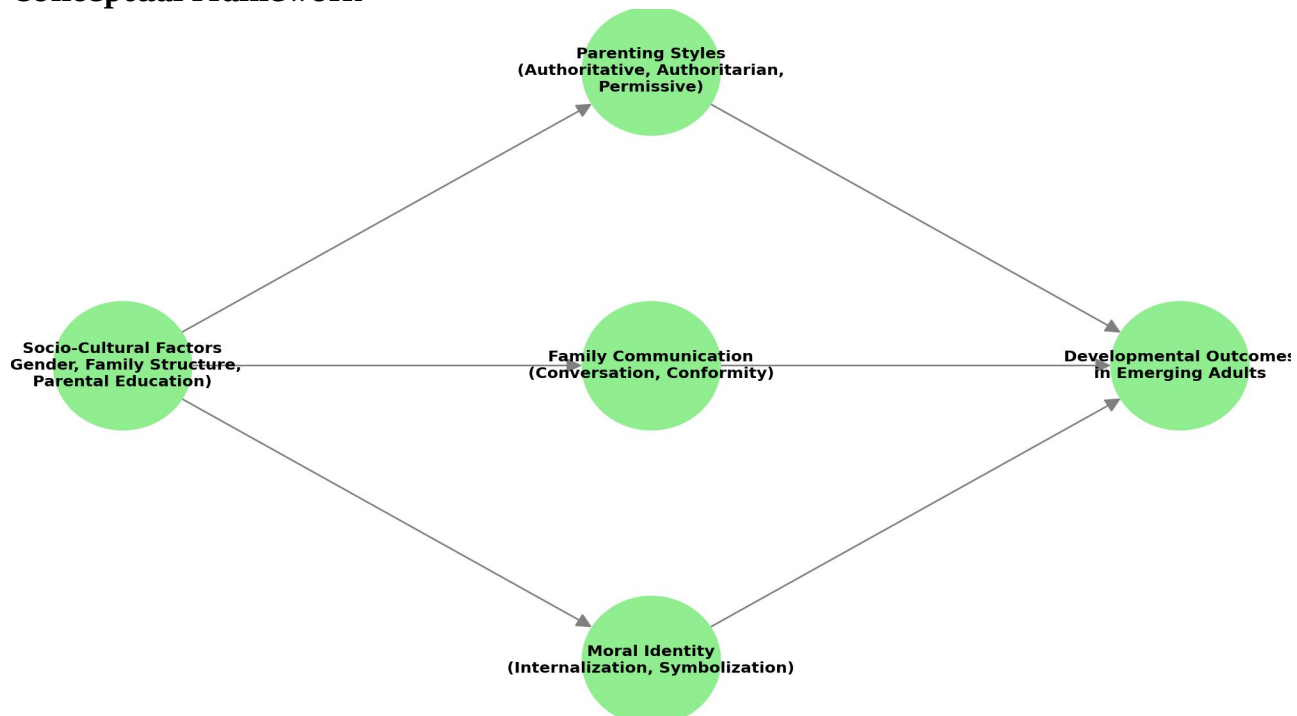
Gender Roles: Pakistan is a traditional society whose gender roles are clearly defined. Sons are typically conditioned into being aggressive, economically responsible, and as the principal family honor providers (izzat), and it may be accompanied by a harsher parental control in a bid to oblige and perform. Daughter, on the other hand, are socialized to be emphatic, relational, and caring (Carlo et al., 2023; Fatima et al., 2020). This implies that they will take different directions in their moral development: Hypothesis 1 (H₁): Male emerging adults will report experiencing higher levels of authoritarian parenting and will have a higher score on the external symbolization of moral identity. Female emerging adults will report higher levels of internalized moral identity.

Family Structure: The hierarchical multi-generational structure of the traditional Pakistani joint family demands a high level of respect towards the elderly and obedience to family values to ensure a strong sense of harmony within the family (Raza & Murad, 2018). Conversely, the nuclear family arrangement that is becoming the norm might be more egalitarian in communication and more individual in expression. Hypothesis 2 (H₂): Emerging adults from joint families will report significantly higher levels of authoritarian parenting, greater conformity orientation in family communication and a greater emphasis on moral symbolization than nuclear families.

Parental Education: Parental education, although often a solid proxy to describe socioeconomic status and exposure to modern and often westernized parenting concepts (Wong et al., 2021), may not have such sharp impacts in a culture with strong and traditional scripts. Strongly established norms about parental authority and gender roles can dwarf the impact of education. Hypothesis 3 (H₃): Parental education will have weak or non-significant associations with parenting styles, family communication patterns and moral identity, which means that cultural norms are a more influential factor in these three processes in the family than the socioeconomic factor.



Conceptual Framework



2. METHOD

Participants and Procedure

In Faisalabad, Pakistan, 500 students of the university were recruited into the sample. There were 266 females (53.2%), and 234 males (46.8), aged between 18 and 25 years ($M = 21.4$, $SD = 1.8$), which falls within the age range of emerging adulthood. The sample consisted of all unmarried and undergraduate or graduate degree students. Stratified convenience sampling method was used so that there is a representation of different academic disciplines (e.g., natural sciences, social sciences, medical sciences and humanities). Faculty was first stratified and classes within each faculty were then chosen to invite participation. This method meant that a very broad range of educational backgrounds in the Pakistani context were represented in the sample. Data collection proceeded following official permission of the Institutional Review Board. The study sample was approached in classes, and informed consent was taken in writing, explaining the goal of the study. It was underlined that the participation was voluntary and anonymous and that their answers would remain confidential. The self-report questionnaires were administered in groups and researchers were present to resolve any questions. The methodology used in this data collection was culturally competent in that it was comfortable and trusted within an educational setting.

Measures

The measures were very established self-report measures. The Perceived Parenting Styles Scale (PPSS) by Divya and Manikandan (2013) was employed. This scale has 30 items and is used to assess how an individual remembers the parental child-rearing behavior of their parents on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). It consists of three subscales, with 10 items each Authoritative Parenting (e.g., "My parents would like me to be independent; $\alpha = .74$), which is characterized by high warmth and rational direction Authoritarian Parenting (e.g., "My parents expect me to obey without question; $\alpha = .78$), which is characterized by high control and low responsiveness; Permissive Parenting



(e.g., "My parents give in to my demands easily; $\alpha = .83$), which is characterized by high warmth and lack of structure and demands. The higher the score in any subscale the higher the perception of the particular parenting style.

Moral Identity Questionnaire (MIQ; Black, 2016; Reynolds, 2016) was used to measure the centrality of moral qualities to the self-concept. It is a 20-item scale that measures the centrality of moral characteristics to the individual self-concept on 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). It scores two different subscales, the Moral Self (8 items; e.g., "Being a person with these qualities is important to me; $\alpha = .70$), an internalization dimension (captured by the former), and the Moral integrity (12 items; including reverse-scored items; $\alpha = .81$), a symbolization dimension (the expression of morality traits). The greater the overall score ($\alpha = .78$), the more centralized and strong moral identity.

The communicative environment of the family was measured by Family Communication Patterns Scale: Revised (FCP-R; Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002). This is a 26-item scale designed to measure the nature of the normal communication situation in a family, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). It consists of two dimensions, namely the Conversation Orientation (15 items; e.g., My parents tend to consult me when making family decisions; $\alpha = .88$) assessing how supportive families are in allowing family communication to be open and frequent, and Conformity Orientation (11 items; e.g., In our family it is essential to be similar; $\alpha = .80$), quantifies the extent to which families value compliance and conformity to the family authority. It was also a global indicator of the family communication climate with a total score ($\alpha = .83$).

Data Analysis Plan

IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23.0) were used in the analysis of the data. All variables of the study were computed using descriptive statistics. Comparative analyses were performed in order to test the hypotheses. Differences were analyzed using independent samples t-tests that compared differences between males and female and between nuclear and joint family structure in the main study variables (parenting styles, and moral identity subscales and family communication patterns). Moreover, two separate one-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) have been done to examine how the paternal and maternal level of education (measured as Low, Medium, High) affect the same outcome variables. All of the statistical tests were performed with a significance level of $p < .05$.

3. RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and standard reliability coefficients of all major variables in the study are presented in Table 1. The skewness and kurtosis values of all variables were within the acceptable range (between -2 and +2), so the data were normally distributed to make a parametric test. Each of the scales was found to have good to excellent internal consistency with the Cronbach coefficients of alpha (α) ranging between 0.70 and 0.88.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables (N=500)

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
Parenting Styles							
Authoritative	38.35	6.39	10	50	-0.83	1.07	.74
Authoritarian	27.28	7.43	10	46	0.26	-0.43	.78
Permissive	26.49	8.44	10	48	0.14	-0.63	.83



Moral Identity							
MIQ Scale	72.59	10.27	43	97	-0.12	-0.44	.78
Moral S							
(Internalization)	32.39	4.35	15	40	1.38	18.26	.70
Moral I (Symbolization)	40.21	8.84	12	58	0.51	-0.01	.81
Family Communication							
FCP Scale	92.11	13.24	37	128	-0.32	0.59	.83
Conversation							
Orientation	54.03	10.78	18	75	-0.69	0.47	.88
Conformity Orientation	38.09	7.20	14	55	-0.25	0.14	.80

Note: MIQ: Moral Identity Questionnaire Scale, Moral S = Moral Self, Moral I = Moral Integrity, FCP: Family Communication Patterns Scale, only variables with significant differences are shown

Gender Differences

The *t*-tests of independent samples were applied to the male and female groups regarding the most significant variables of the study. As shown in Table 2 and Fig 1, there was a significant difference in gender regarding a number of constructs. Male participants reported significantly higher levels of both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles compare to female ones. Males were significantly more conformity oriented in terms of family communication. In the case of moral identity, a difference tendency was observed, with female respondents reported a significantly higher overall moral identity score and the male respondents reported a significantly higher on the Moral Integrity subscale, an external symbolization of moral character. There was no significant difference in gender with regard to authoritative parenting, prosocial behavior, conversation orientation, or subscale of Moral Self.

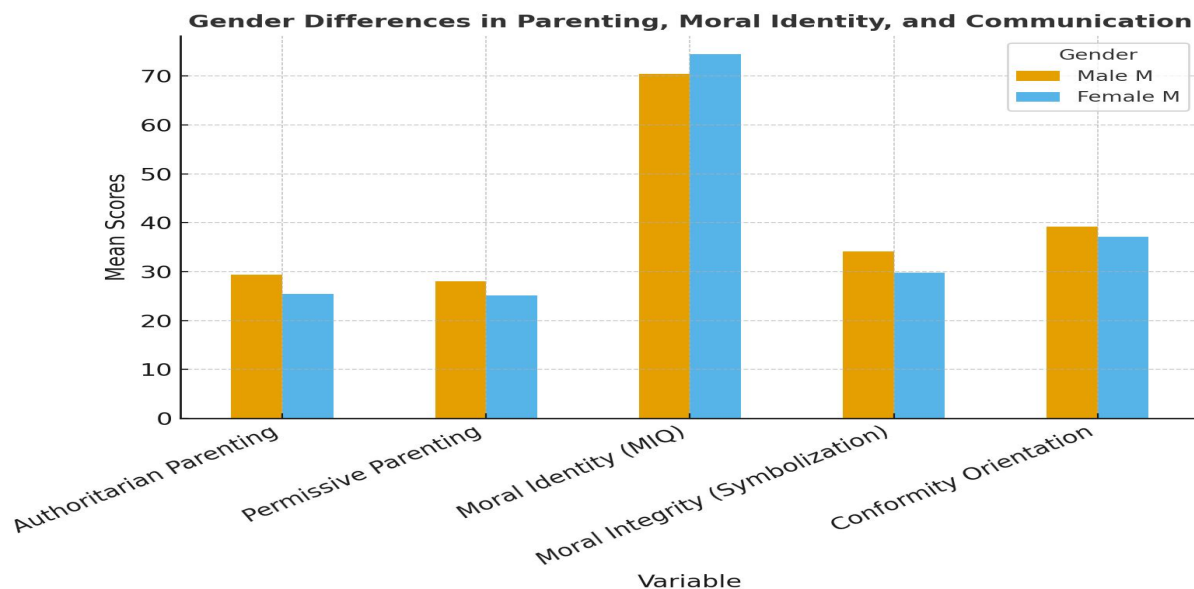
Table 2: *Independent Sample t-test Results for Gender Differences*

	Male		Female		<i>t</i> (498)	<i>P</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
	(n = 234)		(n = 266)				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Parenting Styles							
Authoritarian	29.34	7.26	25.47	7.12	6.02	.001	0.54
Permissive	28.02	8.57	25.14	8.11	3.85	.001	0.35
Moral Identity							
MIQ Scale	70.43	9.86	74.50	10.26	-4.51	.001	-0.40
Moral I	34.11	9.03	29.76	8.16	5.66	.001	0.51
Family Communication							
Conformity							
Orientation	39.20	6.45	37.11	7.69	3.26	.001	0.29

Note: MIQ: Moral Identity Questionnaire



Figure 1. Gender Differences



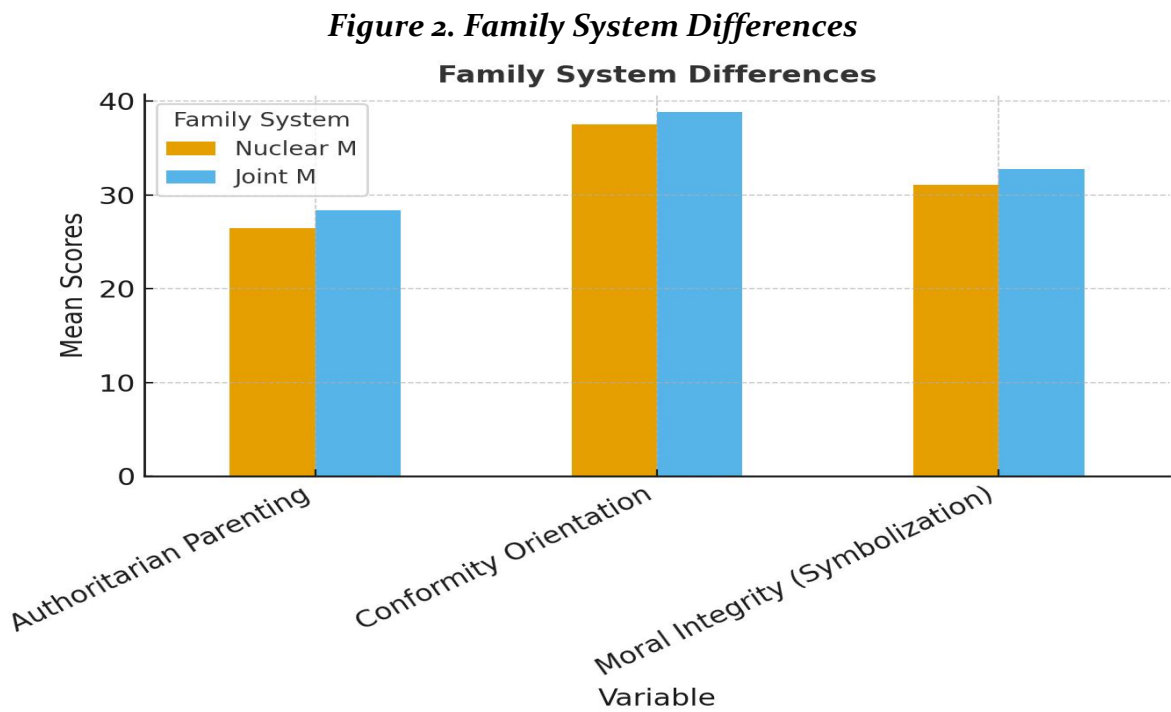
Family System Differences

Independent samples t-tests was used to compare the individuals in nuclear and joint family systems. As shown in Table 3 and Fig 2, joint family surveyed participants reported significantly higher levels of authoritarian parenting. They also reported significantly stronger conformity orientation in family communication and higher scores on the Moral Integrity subscale of moral identity. The authoritative parenting, permissive parenting, prosocial behavior, and conversation orientation showed no significant differences between the family systems, nor the general MIQ total score.

Table 3: *Independent Sample t-test Results for Family System Differences*

	Nuclear (n = 288)		Joint (n = 212)		t(df=498)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Parenting Style							
Authoritarian	26.48	7.24	28.37	7.57	-2.84	.005	-0.25
FCP S							
Conformity	37.53	7.21	38.85	7.14	-2.03	.042	-0.18
Orientation							
MIQ Scale							
Moral Intergrity	31.06	8.59	32.80	9.08	-2.19	.029	-0.20

Note: MIQ: Moral Identity Questionnaire, FCP S: Family Communication Patterns Scale. Only variables with significant differences are shown



Parental Education Differences

Two separate one-way ANOVAs were conducted to test the impact of education of the father and mother (Low, Medium, High). As shown in Table 4 and Fig 3, parental education had minimal significant impact on the outcome variables. The education of father was found to have a significant main effect on conformity orientation, $F(2, 466) = 3.04, p = .049$. When these tests were conducted, post-hoc comparisons with Tukey HSD indicated that the medium education group ($M = 39.13, SD = 6.94$) was significantly higher than both low ($M = 37.79, SD = 7.05$) and high ($M = 37.16, SD = 7.62$) education groups.

In the case of mother education, authoritarian parenting had a significant main effect, $F(2, 394) = 3.19, p = .042$. Post-hoc tests indicated that low education group ($M = 27.68, SD = 7.07$) had significantly higher levels of authoritarian parenting than the medium education group ($M = 25.80, SD = 7.32$). The rest of the variables of study did not have any significant parental education effects.

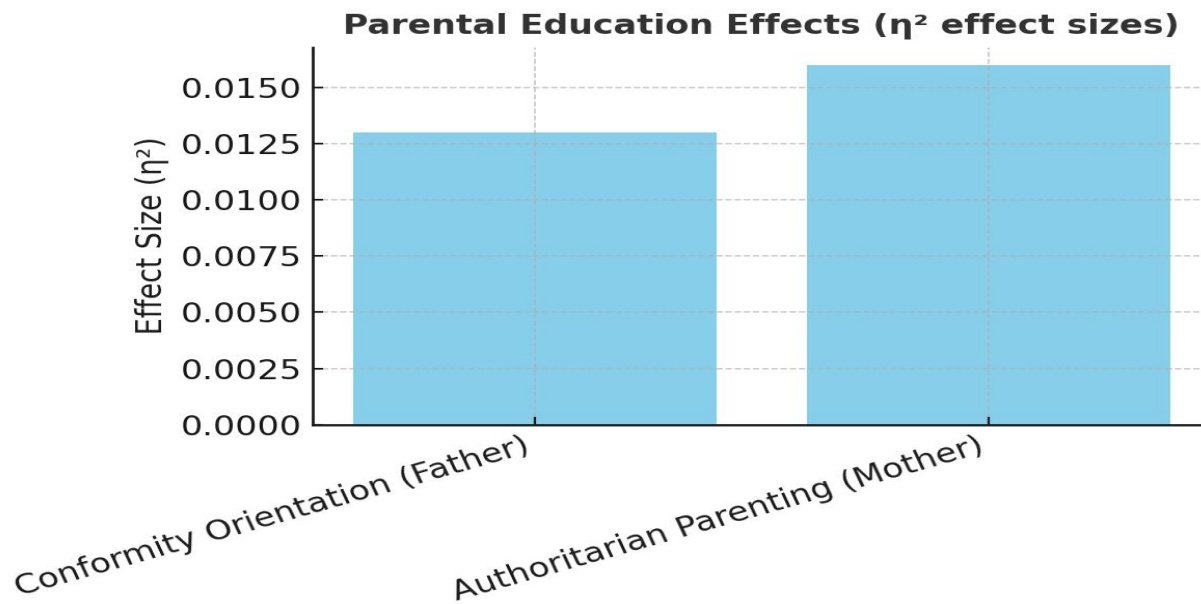
Table 4: ANOVA Results for Significant Effects of Parental education

Variables	Parent	F (df)	P	η^2	Post-Hoc
FCP S					
Conformity Orientation	Father	3.04 (2,466)	.049*	.013	Medium > Low, High
Parenting Style					
Authoritarian	Mother	3.19 (2,394)	.042*	.016	Low > Medium

Note: Family Communication Patterns Scale; η^2 = eta squared (effect size).



Figure 3. Parental Education Effects



4. DISCUSSION

This research explored the socio-cultural correlates of the parenting styles, moral identity, and family communication patterns among the Pakistani emerging adults. The findings were rather apparent in the sense that traditional socio-cultural systems of gender and family type played a significant role in shaping developmental experiences. As hypothesized, gender differences were significant, with males reporting more authoritarian and permissive parenting and a more external symbolization-focused morality, and females a more internalized moral identity. On the same note, joint-family participants revealed much more authoritarian parenting, conformity-oriented communication and moral symbolization, relative to nuclear-family participants. Importantly, and quite consistent with the third hypothesis of our study, parental education showed little to no significant impacts, indicating that ingrained cultural norms dominate over socioeconomic conditions in influencing these familial and psychological processes in Pakistan.

Gendered Building of Morality

The strong gender dichotomy aligns with the traditional socialization scripts of Pakistani collectivism. The conclusion that males are exposed to greater degrees of authoritarian parenting may be viewed as a measure of socializing sons into their designated roles of assertive upholders of family honor (izzat) and providers of economic support (Dwairy and Achoui, 2010). The commensurate increase in moral symbolization (Moral Integrity) indicates that among young men morality is frequently practiced as a kind of performance, as a sequence of deeds that reflect honor, discharge obligation, and uphold the family reputation in the community domain. In contrast, the higher internalized moral identity (Moral Self) found among females corresponds to a more emphatic, caring, and relational harmony socialization process (Carlo et al., 2023). This is consistent with the ethic of care proposed by Gilligan (1982), suggesting that young women in Pakistan create a sense of private morality, in which moral qualities are internalized within the private self-concept and subsequently governs action by an inner orientation as opposed to an outer one. This



divergence underscores that morality is not a unitary phenomenon but is gendered in its construction.

Joint Families as Crucibles of Conformity

These findings are in strong support of the description of the traditional joint family as an institution that aims at ensuring collective harmony over personal expression. Multi-generational and hierarchical nature of joint families requires well-defined forms of social control to be effective (Raza & Murad, 2018). This is exactly the role of authoritarian parenting styles and a communication style with high conformity orientation, as respect to elders and following family norms to maintain solidarity (Schrodt et al., 2008). In this kind of environment, moral growth is also geared towards the common good. The increased emphasis on moral symbolization of joint family members signifies that moral behavior is motivated and judged in terms of its observable role in family harmony and status. This fosters an outward-focused morality in which the consequences of one's actions for the family unit are paramount, possibly at the expense of critical individual moral reasoning.

The Muted Voice of Modernity

The findings are perhaps best summed up by the overall insignificance of parental education. It is normally a strong indicator of socioeconomic status and exposure to modern and, in many cases, individualistic ideology (Wong et al., 2021), so its muted influence here is strong support of how strong traditional cultural norms are. It looks like deep seated scripts regarding parental authority, gender roles, and gender hierarchy are so strong in the Pakistani context that they largely override the impact of educational attainment (Hasbullah et al., 2024). The two minor significant effects, medium father education forecasts higher conformity and low mother education forecasts higher authoritarianism are exceptions that prove the rule. They propose that education does not have a linear effect on encouraging more egalitarian behavior; rather, its effects are subtle and probably interact with cultural expectations in complicated manners. In the end, culture proved a much better predictor of family dynamics than SES.

5. Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Theoretical Implications: This study presents a strong case that culturally-informed developmental psychology is needed. It shows that universal models miss important details, including the difference between the internalization and symbolization of moral identity. Theories of the future must consider such dimensions in order to gain a proper insight into moral development in different cultural contexts.

Practical Implications: The results provide useful information to practitioners. To learn more about the values and motivations of clients, clinicians should evaluate family structure and patterns of socialization by gender. Teachers will have the ability to design programs that consider the various ethical motivations to promote internalization in every student. Parenting interventions should be designed to meet cultural values, not to clash with them; in other words, it is better to help parents achieve culturally-desired outcomes of respect and family honor through more authoritative practices, instead of dismissing parental authority altogether.

Limitations: There are a few limitations in this study. It is cross-sectional, which means it cannot be causally inferred. The sample of a university student does not provide opportunity to relate to non-university students and rural people. Moreover, the use of self-report data brings the possibility of social desirability bias.



Further Research: Longitudinal research is required to follow how these socio-cultural factors play out over time. A qualitative study would be invaluable to extensively investigate the lived experience of moral identity construction in joint and nuclear families. More diverse samples such as rural and non-student emerging adults should also be included in future work to confirm and generalize these results.

SUMMARY

This study investigated the significant influence of the socio-cultural factors such as gender, family structure, and parental education on the growth experiences of Pakistani emerging adults. We concluded that in 500 university students, traditional norms had a significant effect on family dynamics and self-concept. The findings showed an evident trend of gendered socialization: young men reported that they were more subjected to authoritarian and permissive parenting and displayed a morality identity based around external symbolization (public representation of moral traits). On the contrary, young women reported that their identity was more moral with a more internalized moral identity (private importance of moral values).

Also, the traditional joint family system turned out to be a differentiated system that is characterized by greater authoritarian parenting, conformity-oriented communication, and outward-oriented morality than nuclear families. More importantly, the role of parental education was insignificant and deep-rooted cultural scripts on gender roles and family authority seem to be more influential factors than socioeconomic status.

The study concludes that there is not adequate application of Western developmental models. Explaining development within a situation such as Pakistan demands the application of a culturally-conscious approach that can recognize the way that socio-cultural systems sculpt all aspects, including parenting styles, to the very architecture of the moral self. These results have significant implications for clinical, educational, and policy implications and challenge clinicians, educators, and policy-makers to devise interventions that are sensitive to these potent cultural currents.

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