

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WHO FAILED MDCAT

Aiza Muhammad Imtiaz and Hidna Iqbal Shah. aizamuhammad96@gmail.com
Centre for Clinical Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Objectives: The current study aimed to assess the relationship between Perceived Parental Expectations and Mental Health of University students who failed MDCAT.

Design of the study: This research employed a correlational study design.

Place and Duration of the study: The study was done via electronic means from February 2020 to August 2020 from all over Pakistan.

Sample and Method: Purposive sampling and snowball sampling technique was employed to recruit 175 participants based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Due to Covid-19, data was collected through social media or google forms. Participants who appeared in MDCAT but failed to secure a seat, enrolled in fields other than MBBS, and those studying in second, third, fourth or fifth semesters were included in the study. The data was collected through Living-Up-to Parental Expectation Inventory and Mental Health Inventory. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS.22.0. Pearson Moment Correlation was run to identify the relationship between Perceived Parental Expectations and Mental Health.

Results and conclusion: The results of the study indicated a positive relationship between Perceived Parental Expectations and Mental Health of the students.

Keywords: Perceived Parental Expectations, Mental Health, MDCAT

INTRODUCTION

Medicine is a high-status career and one of the most applied for careers among university applications around the world. (Griffin & Hu, 2019) Students put a lot of effort into achieving success in terms of getting admission in their desired field. Science and the arts are Pakistan's two main communities. The fact that doctors and other specialists in the sciences are accorded a great deal of prestige, power, and respect shows how important society is. (Mahroon et al., 2018)

If a career in medical is opted, then the student must take an exam to secure a seat, which in Pakistan is called Medical and Dental College Admissions Test (MDCAT). (Irfan et al., 2018) Many students opt for this career path based on their parent's approval. (Almroth et al., 2019) 61900 students registered for the MDCAT in 2018, but there were only 3,000 seats available, according to the University of Health Sciences. (Fatima et al., 2021)

Students studying for a medical degree must work harder because their subject is so demanding. They experience numerous psychological and academic strains. (Bilal & Riaz, 2020) Inability to achieve the expected results affects their mental health, especially if the test scores are defining pathway towards the chosen future pathway (Irfan et al., 2018)

University students are one of the most vulnerable groups towards mental health problems. World Mental Health Surveys indicated 20 % of the student population having DSM-4 disorders (majorly anxiety, mood, behavioral and substance disorders) on the entrance in the University, thus affecting their future performance. (Auerbach et al., 2018) Poor mental wellbeing results in interpersonal conflict, sleep disorders and decreased academic performance in their health. (Irfan et al., 2018) Enhanced health and well-being, in effect, contribute to more positive feelings and affective mental states, further elevating health and well-being status. (Curran & Hill, 2022)

Parental expectations and influence plays an important role, negative and positive, in the selection of careers for their children. (Khanam et al., 2022) Positive parental guidance allows children to make decisions freely, which aids students in developing their abilities and maintaining motivation to meet their goals. On the other hand, children who are restricted from making their own career decisions and must adhere to their parents' wishes may experience

depressive symptoms as a result of falling short of their parents' high expectations. (Bhutto et al., 2019)

Parents' expectations are the belief parents place on their children concerning the potential accomplishments of their children. As parents are the primary guides of their children through their academics, parental influence can affect their academic motivation, achievement and engagement (Zhang et al., 2022) Parental academic pressure and support considerably affect the academic stress. Hence, for the children to be able to excel and pursue their academic aspirations, parents and the children need to have a mutual agreement on their academic expectations (Ringeisen & Raufelder, 2015)

The Self- Discrepancy model (Higgins, 1987a) suggests that when the expectations and performance of the student (i.e., actual / self) do not conform to their perceived parental expectations (i.e., ideal or ought / other), discrepancies arise which are elevated in the university environment by academic and social indications. Hence leading to the constant tuning of negative thoughts that results in poor mental health. Moreover, parental expectations along with creating dilemmas and distress for the student also tend to provide support and emotional reinforcement (Zhang et al., 2022) Children recognize their parental expectations depending on their perception of relationships with their parents (Fukuoka, 2017)

In Asian cultures, there is a strong emphasis on fulfilling one's family obligations in order to succeed academically and professionally.(Suh & Flores, 2023) Asian students tend to recognize academic success as a moral obligation towards their parents. The high expectations prove to be destructive for the child's psychological health if they are unable to achieve the expected target. Emotional support from parents has been reported to be a protective factor against academic stress and anxiety levels of students with lower levels of depressive thought processes and a healthy self-concept of the student. (Guan et al., 2016) Moreover, student's mental health is negatively affected due to the discrepancies between parents and their offspring's' expectation. (Auerbach et al., 2018) Thus, parental expectations and self-performance on them are important contributors to a student's mental well-being.

Parental involvement is necessary and can lead to better academic achievement. When parents and children maintain a healthy relation, children take their parental expectations as a motivation to work on and show progress (Fukuoka, 2017) With elevated motivation and need to fulfil parental standards, children adapt to their parental expectations. Therefore, children often imply

behavioral strategies to reach closer to their parent's expectations and aspirations from them. (Ma et al., 2018)

This study aims to explore the relationship between parental expectations, mental health as this area has not been thoroughly explored, especially in Pakistan where medical is a prestigious and most opted career path. Professionals can use this research to better understand the issues they are dealing with and the appropriate treatments to use. Parents can get better insight of the effects of their expectations on the mental health of their children. Thus in light of the previous research current study aims at exploring the following objective

To assess the relationship between Perceived Parental Expectations, and Mental Health in students who appeared in MDCAT examination and unable to clear the exam.

METHOD

Participants

Samples of 175 individuals were recruited using purposive sampling and snowball sampling technique. There were 86 males and 89 females with a mean age of 21.

Participants who appeared in the MDCAT exam but failed to secure the aggregate for MBBS, and those now enrolled in clinical science majors (i.e., Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, Doctor of Physiological Sciences, Doctor of Nutritional Sciences), and social sciences in their second year of bachelors were included in the study. Participants pursuing fine arts, fashion designing, architecture, and commerce as their majors or having any psychological or physical illness were excluded.

Measures

Demographic Information Sheet

A self-developed demographic information sheet was used to collect information on the demographics of the participant, i.e. age, gender, university, department, family system, family relationship, family income, parental education, parental occupation, current semester, satisfaction with majors, parental satisfaction with majors, self and parental satisfaction with CGPA, year

and no. of MDCAT attempts, current and previous hours of study, area of life affected by MDCAT preparations, willingness to appear in MDCAT, personal and parental feeling after the MDCAT result.

Living-Up-to Parental Expectation Inventory (Wang & Heppner, 2002)

The 32 items that make up the LPEI are broken down into three categories: dating concerns, academic achievement, and personal maturity. Every item receives two responses from respondents. For the current study, the PEP and its two scales (personal maturity and academic achievement) had Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .90, .89, and .86, while the PSP and its two scales had .90, .90, and .74. The items from the scale's "Dating Concerns" factors were not used in the current study because of Pakistan's unique cultural perspective.

Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983)

Veit and Ware (1983) developed the Mental Health Inventory, which assesses mental health in terms of psychological distress based on depression, anxiety, and loss of behavioral/interpersonal control, as well as psychological well-being based on overall positive impact, interpersonal relationships, and life satisfaction. 38 items make up the scale, some of which have reversible scores. For the current study, the Psychological Distress, Psychological Wellbeing, and Mental Health Inventory each had a Cronbach alpha of .89, .90, and .87.

Procedure

A correlational research design was used. The research was conducted after approval from the corresponding committee and approval from authors of scales used. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data was obtained from different means of social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook using google forms. The importance of the study was explained to the participants and consent was taken.

Scoring & Statistical Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 22.0 by utilization of 4 statistical analysis procedures. Reliability analysis was run on each scale to obtain its respective Cronbach's alpha value. Pearson correlation was conducted to assess relationships among the study variables.

RESULTS

Table 1

Demographic Information of the sample and demographics related to study

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
1.Age		
18-20	64	36.6
21-23	99	56.6
24-25	12	6.90
2. Gender		
Male	86	49.1
Female	89	50.9
3.Major		
Bio-Sciences	77	44.0
Social sciences	26	14.9
Engineering	11	6.3
Army	4	2.3
Business	23	13.1
Arts	9	5.1
Computer	9	5.1
BDS, DPT, DND, DVM	14	8.0
Lab technology	2	1.1
1. Parental support of your following whatever path(major/career/occupation)	107	61.1
Yes	68	38.9
No		
2. MDCAT attempts	105	60.0
Once	62	35.4
Twice	8	4.6
Thrice		
3. Why did you appear in MDCAT?		
Fulfillment of self-dream	46	26.3
Fulfillment of parents dream	129	73.7

4. How did you feel when your marks were less than the aggregate for MBBS?

	30	17.1
Stressed	19	10.9
Anxious	78	44.6
Depressed	31	17.7
Guilty	3	1.7
Satisfied	14	8.0
Felt-nothing		

5. What was your parent's reaction to your result?

Disappointed	67	38.3
Angry	23	13.1
Desire to try again	39	22.3
Left career decision to the child	46	26.3

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis for Study Variables (N=175)

Scales	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>Range</i>	
					<i>Potential</i>	<i>Actual</i>
<i>LPEI</i>	-3.60	1.63	48	.91	0-143	-7.44-58
<i>PPE</i>	7.91	1.08	24	.90	24-144	4.93-9.60
Personal Maturity	5.14	.64	15	.89	1-6	1.13-3.60
Academic Achievement	2.76	.60	09	.86	1-6	3.20-6.00
<i>PSP</i>	11.50	1.64	24	.90	24-144	5.00-15.7
Personal Maturity	7.47	1.08	15	.90	1-6	3-10
Academic Achievement	4.03	.76	09	.74	1-6	2-5.78
Mental Health Inventory	130.18	23.67	38	.87	38-226	58-215
Psychological distress	85.29	11.95	25	.89	24-142	32-134
Psychological wellbeing	47.00	17.2	14	.90	14-84	22-75

Note: α = reliability coefficient, k = no. of items in scale and subscale, M = mean, SD = standard deviation, $LPEI$ = living up to parental expectations, PSP = perceived self- performance, PPE = perceived parental expectations

Table 3*Showing Pearson Product Moment Correlation*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r.f</i>	<i>M.E</i>	<i>S.S</i>	<i>P.S</i>	<i>PPE.PM</i>	<i>PPE.AA</i>	<i>PSP.PM</i>	<i>PSP.AA</i>	<i>PPE</i>	<i>PSP</i>	<i>M.H</i>	<i>ENG</i>
<i>r.f</i>	2.15	.97	-	-.11	.41**	.49**	-.13	-.44**	.30**	.09	-.33**	.24**	.32**	.40**
<i>M.E</i>	4.56	1.35	-	-	-.11	-.18*	.26**	.19**	.07	.10	.26**	.09	-.04	-.01
<i>Self.sat</i>	1.39	.49	-	-	-	.44**	-.18*	-.23**	.06	.04	-.24**	.06	.33**	.29**
<i>Pare.sat</i>	1.46	.50	-	-	-	-	-.15*	-.43**	.17*	.07	-.33**	.15	.37**	.41**
<i>PPE.PM</i>	5.14	.64	-	-	-	-	-	.50**	.51**	.26**	.87**	.46**	.19*	.04
<i>PPE.AA</i>	2.7	.60	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.02	.25**	.85**	.10	-.35**	-.30**
<i>PSP.PM</i>	7.4	1.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.53**	.29**	.91**	.20**	.40**
<i>PSP.AA</i>	4.0	.76	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.30*	.82**	.23**	.35**
<i>PPE</i>	7.9	1.08	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.33**	-.31**	-.14*
<i>PSP</i>	11.5	1.63	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.24**	.43**
<i>M.H</i>	130.1	23.67	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.42**

Note; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001, R. F=relationship with family, M. E=mother's education, SS=self-satisfaction with CGPA, P. S=parental satisfaction with CGPA, M.H= mental Health, ENG= academic engagement, PSP=perceived self- performance, PPE= perceived parental expectations, PM=personal maturity, AA=academic achievement.

DISCUSSION

In Pakistan, on an average of approximately 80,000 candidates, with 50,000 being females and 30,000 males give MDCAT each year for about 4000 Medical and Dental seats. (Fatima et al., 2021). This number of applicants for these seats mostly leads the students to re-appear in MDCAT or changing their fields. The primary purpose of this research was to obtain an understanding of the relationship between Perceived Parental Expectations and Perceived Self Performance, and Mental Health of students.

The demographics of this study (Table 1) found that students re-appeared twice (35%) or thrice (5%) for the MDCAT. It also showed that 70% of the population in the current research, attempted MDCAT to fulfil their parental dreams of becoming a doctor and approximately 70% reported that their parents' reaction to their failure was "disappointed". These results (Table 3) prove the hypothesis of the study that perceived parental expectations cause a negative perception of self-performance and poor mental health. These results can be seen in accordance with the self-discrepancy theory by (Higgins, 1987) which suggests that perception of parental expectations and the urge to comply to them with one's behavior affects the mental health of students negatively. Similarly, in another study, the disparity in academic achievement perceptions of students, for oneself, and from one's parents indicates that the student does not appear to be satisfied with their academic performance in comparison to perceived parental academic wishes, which has a negative impact on their mental health. (Kanter Agliata et al., 2009)

Differences in perceptions of meeting familial expectations and their relation to psychological distress exist across different ethnicities and races. Asian parents place greater academic achievement pressure on their children than other ethnic groups. Asian students typically have higher values and expectations in terms of their obligation to support and respect their families. In the current study, students who reported their perceived parental expectations higher than their performance, scored low on mental health, which shows their tendency to be psychologically distressed because of the discrepancy between their standards and parental wishes. Findings of the study also indicate disappointment and aggression of the parents as a result of failure in MDCAT subsequently leading to stress, anxiety, depression and guilt (17%, 11%, 47% and 18% respectively) in the students (Table 1). Similarly, in a previous study conducted by Meija et al, Asians were found to have the strongest negative association with meeting familial expectations regarding personal responsibility and psychological

distress. Additionally, living up to familial academic expectations was positively associated with positive self-image and negatively associated with negative self-image.(Mejia et al., 2022)

The students who fail the MDCAT opt for other fields. Those included in this study self-reported parental satisfaction with CGPA approximately 45% in comparison to their satisfaction of 60%, hence a negative correlation exists between the MDCAT student's satisfaction with CGPA and their parental expectations. Furthermore, current research sample showed 61% of parental support for current major. These results are in accordance with a previous study conducted that reported the students showing less satisfaction with their majors when parental expectations, satisfaction and support was low. (Naumann et al., 2012)

This proves that a satisfactory family relationship leads to positive emotions of encouragement, as with greater satisfaction, parental academic expectations are engrossed as motivation instead of the burden of wishes (Fukuoka, 2017) and it is guaranteed that the child perceives expectations for oneself and from one's parents in accordance. (Almroth et al., 2019)

Limitation and Future Implication

The data was collected online due to the pandemic state during COVID-19, hence the access to the sample population was restricted. Furthermore, the state and seriousness of fulfilling the form was not ensured in the sample. It is suggested that manual research be carried out in the future. The sample size was considerably small and the data collected had geographical variations due to its online availability. All the tools were self-reported, hence qualitative research should be organized to get in-depth information regarding the experiences and psychological issue of the students who could not achieve aggregate for Medical.

Current research findings may aid the Education Policy Makers to pay head to negative effects caused by MDCAT and hence form certain interventions to lower the intensity and pressure over the students for the exam. Certain psychological orientation and seminars can be arranged for MDCAT students who could not succeed in their goals, to bring optimism and enhance their positive outlook towards life. Social media campaigns and certain programs can also be formulated to make parents aware of their parenting styles and their effects on their children's life. In light of the current study, future studies on MDCAT student populations should be organized. The gender differences in

Academic Engagement and Perceived Parental Expectations should be further studied and worked on. Universities should also have counselling services for new coming students to ensure their satisfactory Mental Health and creative programs should be launched so that their initial days in the new major provide them with light and positive energy.

REFERENCES

- Almroth, M., László, K. D., Kosidou, K., & Galanti, M. R. J. J. o. A. H. (2019). Academic expectations and mental health in adolescence: a longitudinal study involving parents' and their children's perspectives. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 64(6), 783-789.
- Auerbach, R. P., Mortier, P., Bruffaerts, R., Alonso, J., Benjet, C., Cuijpers, P., . . . Hasking, P. (2018). WHO world mental health surveys international college student project: prevalence and distribution of mental disorders. *Journal of abnormal psychology*, 127(7), 623.
- Bhutto, M., Bhayo, N. H., Dong, J., Umar, M., & Akram, H. J. B. J. o. E. (2019). Understanding Students' Psychological Stress: A Case of Sukkur Iba University. *British Journal of Education*, 7(6), 38-52.
- Bilal, A., & Riaz, A. J. P. J. o. P. (2020). Academic stress and suicidal ideation in MDCAT repeating candidates: mediating role of depression and moderating role of age and gender. *Pakistan Journal of Physiology*, 16(3), 7-10.
- Curran, T., & Hill, A. P. J. P. B. (2022). Young people's perceptions of their parents' expectations and criticism are increasing over time: Implications for perfectionism. *Psychological Bulletin*, 148(1-2), 107.
- Fatima, I., Nadeem, M., Naeem, M. W., Raza, H. M. Z. J. W. J. o. A. R., & Reviews. (2021). Impact of MDCAT scores on pessimism, loneliness, and depressive symptoms: Moderating role of coping strategies. *World Journal of Advanced Research*, 12(2), 354-364.
- Fukuoka, Y. J. K. j. o. m. w. (2017). Effects of trust in parents, expectations from parents, and perception of parents' expectations on university students' achievement motivation. *Kawasaki journal of medical welfare*, 22(2), 61-76.

- Griffin, B., & Hu, W. J. M. e. (2019). Parental career expectations: effect on medical students' career attitudes over time. *Medical Education*, 53(6), 584-592.
- Guan, P., Capezio, A., Restubog, S. L. D., Read, S., Lajom, J. A. L., & Li, M. J. J. o. V. B. (2016). The role of traditionality in the relationships among parental support, career decision-making self-efficacy and career adaptability. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 94, 114-123.
- Higgins, E. T. J. P. r. (1987a). Self-discrepancy: a theory relating self and affect. *Psychological review*, 94(3), 319.
- Higgins, E. T. J. P. r. (1987b). Self-discrepancy: a theory relating self and affect. 94(3), 319.
- Irfan, M., Sethi, M. R., Abdullah, A. S., Saleem, U., & Khan, D. J. J. T. J. o. t. P. M. A. (2018). Psychological distress in students appearing for the medical school entrance examination in Peshawar. *The Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association*, 68(11), 1603-1607.
- Kanter Agliata, A., Renk, K. J. J. o. C., & Studies, F. (2009). College students' affective distress: The role of expectation discrepancies and communication. *Journal of Child Family Studies*, 18(4), 396-411.
- Khanam, L., Akram, H., & Kamran, M. J. P. J. o. S. S. (2022). Parental Expectations and Students' Academic Interests: A Case Study of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 42(1), 61-70.
- Ma, Y., Siu, A., & Tse, W. S. J. J. o. f. i. (2018). The role of high parental expectations in adolescents' academic performance and depression in Hong Kong. *Journal of family issues*, 39(9), 2505-2522.
- Mahroon, Z. A., Borgan, S. M., Kamel, C., Maddison, W., Royston, M., & Donnellan, C. J. A. P. (2018). Factors associated with depression and anxiety symptoms among medical students in Bahrain. *Academic Psychiatry*, 42, 31-40.
- Mejia, Y., Supple, A. J., Plunkett, S. W., Kulish, A. L., & Stein, G. L. J. E. A. (2022). The role of perceived familial expectations on depressive

symptoms and self-esteem in emerging adulthood: A cultural analysis. *Emerging Adulthood*, 10(4), 971-977.

Naumann, L. P., Guillaume, E. M., & Funder, D. C. J. J. o. C.-C. P. (2012). The correlates of high parental academic expectations: An Asian-Latino comparison. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 43(4), 515-520.

Ringeisen, T., & Raufelder, D. J. J. o. a. (2015). The interplay of parental support, parental pressure and test anxiety–gender differences in adolescents. *Journal of adolescence*, 45, 67-79.

Suh, H. N., & Flores, L. Y. J. A. A. J. o. P. (2023). Role of perfectionism in the career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations of Asian American college students. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 14(3), 274.

Veit, C. T., & Ware, J. E. J. P. A. (1983). Mental health inventory. *Psychological Assessment*.

Wang, L.-F., & Heppner, P. P. J. T. C. P. (2002). Assessing the impact of parental expectations and psychological distress on Taiwanese college students. *Psychological Assessment*, 30(4), 582-608.

Zhang, C., Shi, L., Tian, T., Zhou, Z., Peng, X., Shen, Y., . . . Management, B. (2022). Associations between academic stress and depressive symptoms mediated by anxiety symptoms and hopelessness among Chinese college students. *Psychology Research Behavior Management*, 547-556.