

Childhood Trauma and Its Impact on Adult Interpersonal Relationships in Individuals Diagnosed with Anxiety and Depression in Pakistan

Abstract–This research investigates the profound impact of childhood trauma on adult interpersonal relationships within the cultural context of Pakistan. Utilizing a qualitative design the study conducted in-depth, semi structured interviews with 23 young adults, aged 20 to 35, who were clinically diagnosed with anxiety, depression, or both. Participants, recruited through purposive sampling from various mental health clinics in Islamabad, shared lived experiences of prolonged trauma and poly-victimization, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Thematic analysis revealed seven major themes: poly-victimization, parental emotional neglect, chronic emotional distress, impaired self-concept, attachment insecurity, avoidant coping patterns, and paths towards healing. Findings indicate that early onset and continuous exposure to traumatic environments, characterized by emotional unavailability and invalidating caregiving result in significant affective dysregulation and hypervigilance. These traumatic experiences foster deep-seated attachment insecurities, such as chronic distrust and fear of intimacy, which manifest as social withdrawal and relational distancing in adulthood. Furthermore, the study highlights how cultural taboos and emotional suppression in Pakistan exacerbate these relational dysfunctions. This research underscores the necessity of a culturally sensitive, trauma-informed interventions to support psychological well-being and facilitate healthier interpersonal connections among survivors of childhood adversity. Consequently, these results provide a crucial foundation for future psychological frameworks.

Keywords–Childhood Trauma, Interpersonal Relationships, Poly-victimization, Attachment Insecurity, Qualitative Research, Trauma-Informed Care.