Research Paper

Childhood Neglect, Rejection Sensitivity and Relational Patterns among Indian Adults

Alisha Sara Shibu[1]*, Soumya Simon[2]

ABSTRACT

Understanding the relationship and the impact of Childhood Neglect (CN) on Rejection Sensitivity and thus formed and already established Relational Patterns can help us modify the same in a better way and deal with it in a healthier manner. The study examined the relationship of Rejection Sensitivity across subtypes of Childhood Neglect and Relational Patterns. The study was conducted on (n = 220) adults falling between the age group of 18-40 years. Data was collected through google forms using the tools The Multidimensional Neglectful Behaviour Scale, Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, Adult version, Relationship Scales Questionnaire. Correlation analysis between the study variables showed significant positive and negative relationship between variables. t-test showed that there is significant differences in males and females with respect to emotional neglect and that males faced more emotional neglect. Regression analysis helped understand the percentage impact of Childhood Neglect and Fearful Relational Pattern on Rejection Sensitivity. The research robustly establishes a correlation between childhood neglect, particularly emotional neglect, and rejection sensitivity in Indian adults. This insight sheds light on the lasting imprint of CN on individuals' interpersonal relationships. The study also underscores the importance of addressing emotional needs during childhood to foster healthier and secure attachment styles in adulthood.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory posits that attachment involves forming emotional bonds with caregivers, which exert a lasting impact on an individual's life. This early connection is crucial for survival and plays a pivotal role in shaping social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. Child neglect (CN) is linked to a range of negative consequences, impacting cognitive development, regulation of emotion, and the establishment of attachment connections (Font & Berger, 2014). The profound effects of child maltreatment extend to mental health outcomes, aggressive or delinquent behaviour, maladaptive traits, and impulsivity (Teisl & Cicchetti, 2007). Comprehensive research

[1]Student, MSc. Clinical Psychology, Dept. of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College. Affiliated to Bengaluru North University, Bengaluru
[2]Assistant professor, Dept. of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College, Affiliated to Bengaluru North University, Bengaluru
*Corresponding Author

reveals that early-life maltreatment serves as a significant risk factor for difficulties in social relationships and an increased likelihood of mental health issues in adulthood.

Childhood neglect (CN) can be defined as neglectful behavior by a caregiver, where the caregiver fails to meet culturally and societally defined responsibilities necessary for ensuring the child's developmental needs are met (Strauss and Kantor, 2005). Diverse manifestations of childhood neglect include physical neglect (PN), emotional neglect (EN), cognitive neglect (CN) and supervisory neglect (SN).

This understanding underscore crucial aspects, including universally recognized caregiver duties and cultural implications within the context of child rearing and childcare. Moreover, CN highlights how these omissions wield equal or even greater influence over our adult selves compared to events that took place and are remembered (Webb, 2014).

Physical neglect (PN) pertains to the omission of fulfilling fundamental requirements, including the provision of food, clothing, shelter, medical attention, and proper care. Cognitive (CN) and educational neglect encompass aspects like not investing in academics, lacking a supportive academic environment at home, not engaging in reading activities, neglecting assistance with homework, and not supporting a child with learning disability (Strauss, Kinnard, & Williams, The Neglect Scale, 1997). Supervisory neglect (SN) encompasses a lack of attention to the child, an inability to set appropriate boundaries, failure to shield the child from challenging situations or individuals, lack of awareness regarding the child's location, and similar behaviors (Coohey, 2003). The term "childhood emotional neglect" (CEN) describes a number of behaviours that children experience: not meeting their basic emotional needs; not showing empathy for their suffering; not considering their social needs; and expecting them to handle situations that are beyond their developmental stage or level of comfort (Teicher and Samson, 2013).

In India, especially in less urbanized regions, a range of challenges for children, including neglect, socioeconomic disparities are associated with various physical and mental health difficulties in later years (Hughes et al., 2017). These challenges can be traced back to a predominantly patriarchal culture that normalizes the use of punishment, spanking, and reprimands for children (Nijhara, Bhatia, & Unnikrishnan, 2017).

As was already said, these different types of CN can cause a great deal of behavioural and emotional problems down the road. In any relationship, these can have a big effect on how individuals see themselves. Those who experienced neglect as children are more likely to dread rejection in social situations and relationships, which is a carryover from their early experiences.

According to Downey and Feldman (1996), Rejection Sensitivity (RS) is typically defined as a cognitive emotional behaviour that is predisposed to predict overly sensitively, quickly perceive, and react intensely to perceived rejection by others. Studies have shown that RS has negative effects in addition to real rejection experiences (Sandstrom et al., 2003). The attribution and attachment theories of behavioural relationships gave rise to the RS model. The basic tenet of it is that people who have experienced rejection in the past begin to anticipate being rejected in the future and to experience normal anxiety about the possibility of being rejected before they are rejected (Downey, Khouri, & Feldman, 1997). According to the Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection (IPAR) Theory, experiencing perceived parental

rejection in childhood is likely to give rise to specific socioemotional challenges and poor relational patterns as adults (ROHNER et al., 2005).

RS inhibits and restricts a person to varying extents. As social beings, humans inherently seek acceptance and validation from those around them. Studies indicate that individuals who have experienced CN often perceive RS anxiously. The persistent perception of rejection in one's environment can alter how individuals are perceived by those around them, often resulting in maladaptive relational patterns. Each person's expectation, anticipation, and acceptance of rejection vary in ways and intensities, forming the basis of rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

Studies show that adults' memories of their early experiences of being accepted or rejected by both parents influence how sensitive they are to rejection as adults (Ibrahim et al., 2015). As a result, these people's behavioural patterns frequently centre on making sure they secure acceptance and avoid rejection in any manner possible (Feldman & Downey, 1996).

Since attachment is an explicit behaviour used to maintain intimacy and engagement with others, attachment styles play a critical role in the evolution of RS in individuals. The various attachment styles forecast an individual's level of sensitivity to rejection and how it will affect other people.

Attachment theory, formulated by John Bowlby and delves into the intricacies of interpersonal relationships and the enduring impact of early attachments on individuals' emotional and social development. Four primary attachment styles emerge from this framework. Secure attachment characterizes individuals who, having experienced reliable caregiving during infancy, confidently explore the world while using their caregivers as a secure base. Those with anxious-preoccupied attachment, on the other hand, harbor concerns about caregiver availability, seeking constant reassurance and displaying a fear of abandonment. Dismissive-avoidant attachment manifests in individuals who downplay relationship significance, valuing independence and struggling with emotional intimacy. Meanwhile, fearful-avoidant (or disorganized) attachment involves conflicting emotions toward relationships, oscillating between a desire for closeness and a fear of it. Attachment styles, though not fixed, can shape adult relationships, influencing trust, communication, and emotional intimacy. Recognizing one's attachment style is crucial for personal growth to cultivate healthier connections. Therapeutic interventions provide avenues for individuals to explore and address these patterns, fostering more fulfilling relationships. CN with its negative consequences on relational patterns as adults, can induce fear, hindering individuals from forming relationships as adults. This fear may stem from concerns about reliving similar feelings or worries about the automatic reflection of trauma onto partners and children. According to a study, having an anxious attachment increases one's risk of developing melancholy and anxiety (Set, 2019). Study states that, a higher score in anxious attachment patterns is linked to higher levels of worry and a heightened RS (Khoshkam et al., 2012).

Early adulthood, especially is a time when we take up a lot of social roles, be independent, start our careers and so on. Understanding the impact of childhood neglect on rejection sensitivity and thus formed and already established relational patterns can help us modify the same in a better way and deal with it in a healthier manner.

There has been conflicting research on the gender disparities in child neglect. Males are more prone than females to be neglected as children, according to certain research. Some have discovered no difference, while others have discovered that women are more likely to be on the same. This study's assessment of gender disparities may help to clarify previous findings. Empirical studies indicate that individuals with elevated RS in children and adults are susceptible to a range of internalizing issues, such as social anxiety, withdrawal, loneliness, and depressive symptoms. These issues may arise from maladaptive coping mechanisms that compromise social connections and relational patterns. If we have a deeper comprehension of the fundamental relationship between these variables, we will be able to effectively address these challenges.

Research into the relationships between CN and adult sensitivity to rejection can be a helpful tool in creating awareness and educational programs for parents of young children, helping to mitigate the detrimental effects of such a childhood. If the study's findings are confirmed, they can be utilized to develop corrective and preventive actions for homes and schools, as well as to assist mental health professionals in their work with vulnerable groups.

Gerard and Stephen (2001) asserted that young adults displaying attachment nervousness and avoidant behavior often have negative childhood attachment-related experiences. In a study by Erozkan (2016), it was found that all attachment styles significantly influenced RS. Individuals with a secure attachment style exhibited lower RS levels compared to those with preoccupied and fearful attachment styles. Khoshkam, Bahrami, Ahmadi, Fatehizade, and Etemadi (2012) discovered that self-esteem plays a mediating role in the relationship between preoccupied and fearful attachment styles and the level of rejection sensitivity. Attachment styles play a pivotal role in the development of RS in individuals, as attachment represents explicit behaviour through which a person seeks to maintain intimacy and interaction with others. The various attachment styles are predictive of individuals' RS levels and their influence on interpersonal dynamics.

Objectives
- To assess the relationship between Childhood Neglect and Rejection Sensitivity.
- To assess the relationship between Sub-types of Childhood Neglect and Rejection Sensitivity.
- To assess the relationship between Emotional Neglect and Fearful Relational Patterns.
- To assess the relationship between Rejection Sensitivity and Fearful and Pre-occupied Relational Pattern.
- To study the impact of Emotional Neglect and Relational Patterns on Rejection Sensitivity.
- To examine the gender differences of Childhood Neglect among males and females.
- To examine the gender differences of Rejection Sensitivity among males and females.

Hypothesis
- H1: There is a significant relationship between Childhood Neglect and Rejective Sensitivity.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between Subtypes of Childhood Neglect and Rejection Sensitivity.

- H3: There is a significant relationship between Emotional Neglect and Fearful Relational Patterns
- H4: There is a significant relationship between Rejection Sensitivity and Fearful and Pre-occupied Relational Pattern.
- H5: There is an impact of Emotional Neglect and Relational Patterns on Rejection Sensitivity.
- H6: There is a significant difference in Childhood Neglect among males and females.
- H7: There is a significant difference in Rejection Sensitivity among males and females.

METHOD

Research Design and Sample
The research design that was employed for the study was Correlational Research Design and the sample size was 220. The study was conducted on Indian Adults up to age 40. The sample included both males and females (n=105,115 respectively) and included college going as well as working and non-working participants. Convenience Sampling was used to collect the data for the purpose of study.

Measures
- **Socio-Demographic details through Google Forms:** The Multidimensional Neglectful Behaviour Scale (MNBS): Designed to assess the neglect of four fundamental developmental needs, this self-administered questionnaire targets: (1) neglect of physical needs, (2) neglect of emotional needs, (3) neglect of supervisory needs, and (4) neglect of cognitive needs, such as reading to the child and providing explanations. The questionnaire is a brief comprising 20 items evaluated on a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 4 (Strongly Disagree). The reliability of the scale was determined to be 0.72.
- **Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, Adult version (A-RSQ):** The RS-Adult questionnaire (A-RSQ) is a modified version of the RSQ (Downey & Feldman, 1996) designed to evaluate Rejection Sensitivity in adults. This self-administered questionnaire comprises 9 items, utilizing a 6-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Very unconcerned) to 6 (Very concerned). The reliability of the scale has been determined to be 0.78.
- **Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994):** The RSQ is comprised of 30 concise statements derived from Hazan and Shaver's (1987) attachment measure, Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire, and Collins and Read's (1990) Adult Attachment Scale. Using a 5-point scale, participants assess the degree to which each statement reflects their characteristic style in close relationships, with ratings ranging from Not at all (1) to Very Much (5). Higher scores within each style indicate a more pronounced manifestation of that attachment style. The reliability of the assessment falls within the range of .41 to .71, with certain items being reversed scored for accuracy.

Procedure
A total of 220 Indian adult participants between the age group of 18-40 were recruited for the present study. A proper informed consent was sought from each participant. Before the google form was shared with the participants, a proper instruction was given regarding the study and what was expected of the participant. The google form was self-administered. The data was collected through google forms that was circulated through social media platforms

like WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn. The responses were recorded directly in the google form.

Analysis

The study focusses on finding out the relationship between the study variables, gender differences about the variables in the study as well as the impact of CN on RS. The analysis employed for the same was Pearsons Correlational Analysis to assess the relationship between CN, RS and Relational Patterns, t-test was done to analyze the gender differences in the variables and regression analysis was done to understand the impact between the dependent variable and the independent variables.

Ethical Concern

All ethical considerations were followed during the process of the study. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and an informed consent was sought. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the data was only used for the purpose of the study.

RESULTS

Table 1: Showing the Socio-Demographic details in the study

Socio-Demographic	n	%
Male	105	47.72
Female	115	52.27

The table 1 shows the socio-demographic detail (gender) that has been considered for the study. The number of males in the study was 105 which accounts for 47.72% and females were 115 which accounts for 52.27%.

Table 2: Showing the Descriptives and the Correlational Analysis between Sub-Types of Childhood Neglect, Rejection Sensitivity and Sub-Types of Relational Patterns

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Rejection Sensitivity	220	9.91	3.272	-							
Childhood neglect	220			-.271**	-						
Emotional Neglect	220	14.35	3.118	-.249**	.821**	-					
Cognitive Neglect	220	14.93	3.118	-.240**	.864**	.720**	-				
Supervision Neglect	220	14.93	2.533	-.170*	.787**	.414**	.529**	-			
Physical Neglect	220	17.45	2.735	-.229**	.837**	.518**	.560**	.743**	-		
Fearful RP	220	13.12	3.389	.225**	-.099	-.135*	-.148*	-.017	.006	-	
Pre-occupied RP	200	12.10	2.910	.133**	.091	.077	.078	.052	.094	.241**	-

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*
. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Mean value for EN, CN, SN, PN, RS, Fearful RP and Pre-occupied RP is 14.35, 14.93, 16.40, 17.45, 9.91, 13.12 and 12.10 respectively which represents the centre of the data. SD value for EN, CN, SN, PN, RS, Fearful RP and Pre-occupied RP is 3.118, 3.118, 2.533, 2.735, 3.272, 3.389, 2.910 indicating the spread of the data.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between the variables CN and RS as well as the linear relationship between the subtypes of CN and RS. Table 2 shows that there is a significant negative correlation between CN and RS where r (220) = -.271**, p=<0.01. It is significant to note that a low score on CN suggests a stronger experience of neglect, whereas a high score indicates a lower experience of neglect, in accordance with the scoring and interpretation standards followed meaning that the degree of RS in adulthood tends to rise in tandem with the experience of CN.

Table 2 shows that a significant negative correlation exists between EN and RS where r (220) = -.249**, p=<0.01, CN and RS where r(220)=-.240**, p=<0.01, SN and RS where r(220)=-.170*, p=<0.05 and PN and RS where r(220)= -.229**, p=<0.01.

Table 2 also shows the Pearsons Correlation between EN (CN subtype) and the Fearful Relational Pattern and it indicates a negative correlation where r(220) = -.135*, p=<0.05. The negative connection that was found between EN (CN subtype) and the Fearful Relational Pattern would be inverted, meaning that the degree of Fearful Relational Pattern in adulthood tends to rise in higher with the experience of CEN.

Table 2 shows the Pearsons Correlation between RS and the Fearful and Pre-occupied Relational Patterns. The results indicate a significant positive correlation between RS and the Fearful Relational Patterns where r (220) = .225**, p=<0.01 and between RS and the Pre-occupied Relational Patterns where r (220) = .133**, p=<0.05. This indicates that as RS increases in Indian adults, there will be a simultaneous increase and significant change in their relational patterns as well.

Table 3: Showing the Regression Analysis: EN and Fearful Relational Pattern on RS

Predictor Variables	Std. Beta Value	T	Model Summary
Emotional Neglect	-.223	-3.432	R=.315
			R^2=.100
Fearful Relational Pattern	.195	2.998	Adjusted R^2=.091
			F=11.989
			p=0.000

Linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the impact of EN and Fearful relational pattern on RS. The standardized beta coefficient of EN was -.223, t (220) =-3.432 and for Fearful Relational Pattern was .195, t (220) = 2.998, F (220) =11.989, p= .000. The model accounted for 10 percent of the variance in the variables.

Table 4: Showing the Independent sample t-test for CN and RS in Males and Females

Logistic Parameter		n	M	SD	t	p
Childhood Neglect	Males	115	62.37	9.429	1.228	0.735
	Females	105	63.95	9.629		
Emotional Neglect	Males	115	14.37	2.587	-.139	0.008
	Females	105	14.31	3.625		
Supervision Neglect	Males	115	16.13	2.745	1.674	0.030
	Females	105	16.70	2.254		
Rejection Sensitivity	Males	115	9.72	2.865	0.889	0.085
	Females	105	10.12	3.670		

Table 4 shows the results of gender differences in the variables CN and RS. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare CN among males and females. There was no significant difference in the scores for males (M= 62.37, SD = 9.429) and females (M = 63.95, SD = 9.629); t = 1.228, p = 0.735. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare RS among males and females. There was no significant difference in the scores for males (M=9.72, SD = 2.865) and females (M =10.12, SD = 3.670); t = 0.889, p = 0.085. But it can be noted that when taking subtypes of CN, it is observed that EN shows a significant difference in scores among males and females and males show a higher EN (M= 14.37, SD = 2.587); t -.139, p = 0.008. SN also shows a significant difference in scores among males and females show a higher SN (M = 16.70, SD = 2.254); t=1.674, p = 0.030.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the relationship between CN, RS and Relational Patterns among Indian Adults.

As shown above in the results, Pearsons's correlation analysis revealed significant negative relationships between CN and RS. As per norms, the interpretation should be made based on description given under the results. This finding is consistent with the fact that, in addition to the fear of rejection itself, children who perceive their parents as uncaring and unaccepting are likely to anticipate rejection from other important people as well, like the rejection they already experience from their parents. The results also aligned with an earlier study that suggested that exposure to parental rejection during childhood results in the development of RS that may persist throughout adulthood (Ibrahim et al., 2015). The correlation between the subtypes of CN and RS also shows negative correlation. EN was found to have the greatest associated with RS across all the subtypes of CN. Then came SN, PN and CN, in that order. This showed that Indian adults' RS is most negatively correlated with emotional maltreatment throughout childhood. A study stated that specific correlations exist between emotional maltreatment and neglect and RS (Euteneuer et al., 2024).

Looking at the tables, it can also be concluded that there is a significant negative correlation between EN and Fearful relational patterns. In a study carried out in Turkey, it was discovered that the subdimensions of childhood trauma, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as physical and emotional neglect, exhibited positive correlations with fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing attachment styles (Erozkan, 2016).

The results also signify that there exists a significant positive correlation between RS and two styles of relational patters, which are Fearful and Pre-occupied relational patterns. Prior research has demonstrated the strong correlation between attachment types and RS. According to literature, there is a substantial positive link between RS and anxious attachment types (preoccupied and fearful) in people (Khoshkam et al., 2012).

The results of the independent sample t-test shows that there was no significant difference in the means of males and females with respect to CN. Thus, it can be concluded that in the current population taken for study, the population did not show any significant difference in how males and females perceived CN as a whole and can be because the particular age group perceive childhood neglect differently or because of social desirability and culture. There is a significant difference in the means of males and females with respect to CEN with males experiencing more EN and a significant difference in the means of males and females in the case of Childhood SN where females experienced it more than males. Studies have found that gender significantly influences all subscales of childhood maltreatment, and this

finding was extensively validated. According to the results, boys were more likely than girls to have been abused as children (Khan et al., 2021).

Since there was a correlation found between EN and Fearful Relational pattern with RS, regression analysis was done to predict the impact. It delved deeper into the impact of EN and Fearful relational pattern on RS. Specifically, higher levels of RS were attributed to higher levels of CEN and Fearful relational patterns. These findings underscore the importance of catering to CN as well as fearful relational patterns. CEN may lead to difficulties in regulating emotions. Addressing these issues helps individuals develop effective emotional regulation strategies, reducing the emotional intensity associated with RS. Similarly, Fearful relational patterns can hinder effective communication. Studies and literature indicate that EN in childhood has the strongest significant negative correlation, which according to interpretation can be converted to positive correlation (Bhutani et al.,2023).

The findings of the study mentioned above have shed new light on the frequently studied factors of CN, RS and relational patterns. These findings have been in uncovering novel and previously unexplored dimensions, connections, and impacts within these variables. Notably, this study has filled a gap by investigating associations among variables, including sub-types of CN and relational patterns, with a unique focus on the Indian population, an aspect that had not been previously addressed.

Implications

Exploring the connections between CN and adult sensitivity to rejection holds significant implications for comprehending the intricacies of parent-child relationships. It can also serve as a valuable resource in developing awareness and educational initiatives for parents of young children. The aim is to proactively prevent the adverse consequences associated with a neglected childhood. There is a need to educate the upcoming adults about the prevalence of impaired relational patterns in adulthood due to CN so that they can be aware of the possible reasons of an impaired relationship and healthy ways to deal effectively with the same. Research can act as a medium to bring more awareness on the same. Information from study can be utilized to develop preventive and corrective interventions in both household and educational settings. Future research endeavors could delve deeper into these aspects, considering other demographics and variables for a more comprehensive exploration. Additionally, these insights can serve to assist mental health professionals in their efforts with vulnerable populations.

Limitations

The study has certain limitations. Firstly, the research sample size was relatively small, and generally, studies on sensitive aspects with significant implications would gain advantages from a larger sample to enhance the strength of results. The study did not account for additional demographics such as age and socio-economic status. The study relied on self-reported measures for assessment, which may not consistently elicit honest responses, particularly considering the highly personal nature of the variables under investigation and it also did not incorporate controls for additional extraneous variables that might influence the experiences of rejection sensitivity and relational patterns in adulthood.

CONCLUSION

This study delved into the intricate connections between CN, RS, and relational patterns among Indian adults. The research robustly establishes a correlation between childhood

neglect, particularly EN, and RS in Indian adults. The formative years characterized by seem to lay the foundation for heightened sensitivity to rejection in adulthood. This finding underscores the enduring impact of early-life experiences on individuals' emotional responsiveness. A noteworthy discovery is the correlation between EN and specific relational patterns, particularly the fearful and pre-occupied attachment styles. Individuals who experienced EN during childhood appear to manifest relational behaviours marked by fear of rejection or preoccupation with interpersonal dynamics. This insight sheds light on the lasting imprint of EN on individuals' interpersonal relationships. The study also underscores the importance of addressing emotional needs during childhood to foster healthier and more secure attachment styles in adulthood. Understanding and meeting emotional needs may play a crucial role in preventing the development of maladaptive relational patterns.

The findings of this research have practical implications for mental health interventions in India. Recognizing the impact of CN on RS and relational patterns can guide therapeutic approaches. Tailoring interventions to address early EN and enhance emotional regulation may prove beneficial in mitigating RS and fostering more adaptive relational patterns.

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