

The Impact of Childhood Emotional Abuse on the Romantic Relationship of Young Indian Men

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ABSTRACT

This research, Effects of Childhood Emotional Abuse on the Romantic Relationships of Young Indian Men, assessed the impact of emotional maltreatment on trust and communication in romantic relationships. The study participants included Indian men and males aged between 18 to 25 years who have been or are currently in a relationship. The Trust Scale, Communication Patterns Questionnaire, and Emotional Abuse Subscale of the CTQ served as the standardized instruments. Correlational analysis using Spearman's rho showed, at best, weak, non-significant correlations between emotional abuse and trust ($\rho = -0.015$), emotional abuse and communication ($\rho = -0.068$), as well as the connection between trust and communication ($\rho = 0.050$). In this case, the analysis results indicate that the sample currently does not show emotional abuse to have a substantial impact on trust or communication, thus reinforcing the notion of multifaceted outcomes in relationships. The study recommends additional investigation with more inclusive sampling, longitudinal methods, and exploring other mediating variables.

Keywords: *Emotional Childhood Abuse, Romantic Relationships, Trust and Communication*

The impacts of emotional abuse as a form of maltreatment in childhood is truly the most underestimated. This tends to affect the life choices and romantic relationships of young adults to a wide extent. Emotional abuse is common in the definition and explanation of dysfunction family relationships. Among the emerging adults between 18 to 25 years of age, those who had faced emotional abuse through rejection, neglect, and verbal bullying seem to have the most difficult maintaining their interpersonal relationships. In this regard, emotional neglect in Indian families tends to receive minimal attention. Emotional abuse in dysfunctional Indian families tends to be ignored as far as the emerging young men is concerned. While coping, children seem to learn the communication patterns in which they maintain interpersonal relationships with their partner.

Though adulthood, it has been observed that Indian men tends to exhibit emotional coping patterns of abuse experienced during childhood. The most neglected stage of a person's life is the so-called nurtured. The nurtured stage of life tends to mediate affection and attention to every child and has the utmost burden of building communication pattern. In addition to

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communication, trust and betrayal becomes the foremost issue during these times. Moreover, Indian men are normatively directed and under tremendous societal pressure not to disclose any information.

As a result of these Norms, UNRESOLVED EMOTIONAL TRAUMA stands as an obstacle to emotional sensitivity towards their partner, creating difficulties in resolving conflicts in relationships.

Background of the Study

The behavior of emerging adults and their behavioral patterns is based on early childhood experiences. Oftentimes, the way an emotionally abused adult functions in a romantic setting is starkly different from other young adults. In cultures like Indian, where regulation of emotions is controlled by societal expectations and norms, parental pressure, intricate family systems greatly impact the formation of social relationships. However, emotional neglect, verbal abuse, and rejection affect attention to the problem and the ability to maintain adequate balance with the partner, while at the same time the dynamics of abuse within the developmental phase have profound implications on an individual.

The consequences of childhood experiences where one is subjected to emotional abuse can hinder the child's emotional development. Indian men who socialize or engage in different activities to escape the expression of distressing emotions tend to experience a host of difficulties in their romantic relationships.

Some studies indicate that individuals with a background of emotional abuse tend to demonstrate maladaptive behaviors in adult romantic relationships such as negative communication styles, untrusting behaviors, and partner betrayal due to increased self-esteem issues and their belief system.

People may have difficulty dealing with emotional dependence and talking about the problems pertaining to their relationship with the partner. Gender stereotyping greatly inhibits men from showing their emotional vulnerability which poses a challenge to romantic relationships. Severe impacts were noted in the social relationships of young men who had difficulties articulating their emotions.

During the primary years of development, children are likely able to trust the caregiver but an unadaptive or absent parent may inhibit the trust development between the parent and child, leading the child to have issues trusting other people in relationships during adulthood.

Indian customs encourage men to conceal their emotional vulnerability, and as it happens, motivate them to view the expression of emotions as a form of yielding or capitulation to that other person. Instead of helping the child to express emotion, everything seemed centered around solitude. For Indian men, it is one of the most used mechanisms, born from the fact that men as children were never taught how to communicate, which in turn affects how they communicate as adults.

Emerging Adults and the Role of Emotional Development

People who conceal their emotional pain or do not have the opportunity to express themselves emotionally lack the surroundings to do so. The impact of emotional abuse Handley et al. (2021) captures shows how a child's development and an adult's interpersonal

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relationship is affected. Analyze the connection between development of identity and emotional maturity in emerging adulthood considering integrating a personal and social identity. Notable Research: Azmitia et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal study to explore the intersection between social and personal identity and how these processes evolve in emerging adults.

Analyze how family systems in emerging adulthood shape the emotions and academic adaptation, considering their longitudinal changes and implications. Important study: Lindell (2017) studied family systems in emerging adulthood and their emotional and academic adaptation links through enduring horizons. Assess chronic mental health issues accompanying the transition from adolescence to young adulthood from an intersectionality and developmental lens. McLeod and Brownlie (2014) studied the change in mental health during this period focusing on developmental and diversity factors.

Intertwine the development of emotional regulation capabilities alongside their neural correlates, focusing on their evolution during the lifespan from children to adults. Nook et al. (2019) advanced understanding of emotion regulation across different phases of development by studying neurophysiological markers of understanding and abstraction emotions. The growing psychosocial understanding of self that occurs around late adolescents and early adulthood, greatly influences emotional development. Disruptions to or developmental delays to identity formation can lead to significant socio-emotional difficulties with their mental health. Potterton et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis examining the nexus of identity development and socio-emotional disorders in emerging adulthood.

The findings presented indicate the importance of interplay between identity formation and emotional health. Identity development is important for psychosocial development of young people in their late adolescence and early adulthood. Potterton et al. (2020) illustrated through a systematic review and meta-analysis that identity formation and emotional health during this period are intricately linked. The findings suggest that supporting identity development may significantly enhance mental health among emerging adults. Social norms within the Indian context often inhibit men from expressing weakness, leading to restricted emotional vulnerability.

This phenomenon may prevent people from help seeking and developing positive emotional coping skills. One study focusing on restrictive emotionality concerning Indian men brought about the issue of mental, emotional, and physical health and how it may impact romantic relationships. Challenging the cultural boundaries is important towards aiding the development of emotional expressiveness and healthy relationship functioning in Indian men. The interplay of family is one of the most critical aspects of the building block of emotional intelligence of undergrad students showing the influence of family on the emotional competencies of the students. Arun, V. M. & Johnson, Z. (2022). The relationship between family dynamics and emotional intelligence of undergraduates in India.

The Effect of Emotional Abuse on the Communication Pattern, and the Ability to Trust

The emotional maltreatment of children such as neglect, verbal abuse, or even emotional withdrawal has a very deep set effect on the ability to communicate and trust others in intimate relationships. Survivors tend to resort to negative behavioral patterns such as withdrawing from a conflict or expressing anger which makes healthy emotional interaction impossible.

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In the same way, emotional abuse makes it hard to trust someone because of previous experiences with inconsistency and rejection forces a person to be scared of dependence and vulnerability. People may struggle to achieve emotional intimacy, be too insightful, or be too needy towards their partners.

Rempel, J. K., Holmes, J. G., & Zanna, M. P. (1985). Trust in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49(1), 95–112. Cultural norms may further complicate the issue for young Indian men by adding the limitation of not being able to express their feelings. Emotionally abusive relationships result in enduring trust issues and hateful conflicts that are difficult to resolve. This can be changed to foster better communication and emotional strength. Waseem, A., Firdous, N., & Alam, S. (2024). Emotional abuse among Indian adolescents: Effects on self-concept, resilience, and the role of cultural and societal pressures. Research Square.

Parents Role and Interpersonal Relationship

Raising a child is one of the key responsibilities of a parent, and as we have noted earlier, the Indian framework does not take the emotions of the child into account when getting divorced or remarried. The lack of boundary setting which is required. Enables children to create a bond with their care givers, which promotes emotional growth in exploring their feelings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emotional Development and Childhood Emotional Abuse

The impact of emotional neglect, rejection, and verbal abuse has long-lasting effects on identity development and emotional self-regulation. Research done by Nook et al. (2017) observed that individuals who experienced emotional neglect as children had deficient emotional self-regulation skills. Additionally, Handley et al. (2021) noted the effects of emotional abuse on the integration of identity and development which subsequently has an impact on emotional development in young adulthood.

Arun and Johnson (2022) examined Indian family systems and concluded that nurturing families help in the proper and holistic development of their children which enhances emotional intelligence in Indian undergraduate students.

Emotional Abuse in Connection with Romantic Relationships

Some researchers suggest that childhood emotional abuse may correspond with adult relational struggles such as reduced closeness or higher emotional volatility. Reyome (2010) reviewed empirical studies that provided evidence, although the results do not always fit together. Neumann (2017) discussed how emotional abuse may result in attachment anxiety, which could impact the effectiveness of romantic relationships. Further studies such as Carone et al. (2024) and Barone et al. (2024) propose that emotional abuse may increase vulnerability to becoming dependent or volatile in relationships. At the same time, these findings likely rest on some contextual and individual factors.

Strategies for Resolving Conflicts Through Communication

The communication methods taught in childhood have a profound impact on how conflicts are handled in romantic relationships in adulthood. The Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) highlights phenomena such as mutual avoidance and demand-withdraw which could result from past emotional shocks. DiLillo et al. (2001) found that some participants with abusive backgrounds tended to avoidance or

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emotional disengagement during conflicts. However, most of these patterns are not widespread, and other factors such as those mentioned earlier are likely to influence their presence.

Trust and Emotional Mistreatment

One of the most notable building blocks of a lasting romantic relationship, trust, may be altered due to emotional trauma inflicted early in life.

Gobin and Freyd (2014) analyzed how trauma resulting from betrayal leads to trust issues, including hypervigilance and emotional distancing. Baugh et al. (2019) proposed that cognitive distortions serve as mediating factors between emotional abuse and trust. Regardless, these results remain inconsistent and indecisive. Some individuals who have faced emotional abuse may form trusting and secure relationships, particularly if protective or restorative experiences are present.

Sociocultural Dimensions of India

Indian sociocultural practices often discourage men from displaying emotional vulnerability, hindering their emotional development and relationships. Waseem et al. (2024) emphasized the impact of societal notions of masculinity on emotional vulnerability, leading to emotional and self-worth deterioration and problems with intimate relationships. Rao et al. (2020) also pointed out the problem posed by rigid gender roles concerning the non-availability of essential dissipated emotion, thereby aggravating the psychological consequences of early emotional abuse. These contextual factors are important for the study of the phenomenon of emotional abuse and its potential impact on the relationships of Indian people.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

Exploring the effects of childhood emotional abuse on romantic relationships, with regard to trust, communication, and betrayal, was the focus of this study in a sample of Indian men aged 18-25 using quantitative correlational analysis design.

Objectives

- Evaluate how childhood emotional abuse impacts trust and communication in romantic relationships.
- Determine the subtypes of emotional abuse (verbal, neglect, rejection) associated with the worst relationship outcomes.
- Explore the association of negative emotional/relational patterns, including aggressive avoidance, with history of emotional abuse.
- Study the influence of Indian gender roles on emotions and behaviors in relationships.
- Analyze the impact of abuse levels (low, moderate, high) on relationship quality.

Hypotheses

Informed by existing literature, five hypotheses were set (for example, emotional abuse undermines trust and communication). Conducted analysis failed to find any correlations and the hypotheses were not proven.

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Sample

The sample comprised 200 Indian males (ages 18-25) who were current or former romantically involved, based on purposive sampling. They were reached through social media and student discussion boards. They had to be Indian and proficient in English. Their demographics included age, relationship status, and family background. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and without compensation.

Variables

- Independent Variable: emotional abuse in the form of childhood verbal abuse, neglect, or rejection.
- Dependent Variables: trust and communication in romantic relationships.
- Measurement: Likert scales were applied to determine frequency/severity. Higher scores indicated greater levels of abuse or dysfunction.

Tools

- Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) – Jacobson et al. (1996): Evaluated verbal aggression, emotional manipulation, and control.
- Trust Scale – Rempel & Holmes (1986): Evaluated how predictability and trustworthiness contributed to faith within relationships.
- Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ) – Christensen & Sullaway (2016): Assessed avoidance and demand-withdraw conflict communication styles on conflict.

Statistical Analysis

- Data were processed with SPSS:
- Descriptive statistics: Computed means, SDs, and frequencies for demographic variables.
- Reliability: All instruments had cronbach's alpha > .70.
- Correlation: Pearson's r evaluated the correlation of emotional abuse, trust, and communication.
- Regression: Simple linear regression was used to evaluate Emotional Abuse as a predictor.
- T-tests: Assessed the difference of relationship outcomes between high and low emotional abuse groups.
- Significance Level: $p < .05$, 95% confidence level.

RESULTS

The evaluation of data collected from 219 participants was performed using SPSS software. The main goal was to investigate the connection between emotional abuse in childhood and the outcomes of romantic relationships, particularly highlighting **trust and communication styles**.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables (N = 219)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Trust (V1)	106.63	10.71
Communication (V2)	25.26	6.26
Emotional Abuse (V3)	14.95	3.21

Correlation Matrix (Spearman's rho)

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients Between Variables

Variables	Trust (V1)	Communication (V2)	Emotional Abuse (V3)
Trust (V1)	1.000	0.050 (p = .459)	-0.015 (p = .830)
Communication (V2)	0.050	1.000	-0.068 (p = .316)
Emotional Abuse (V3)	-0.015	-0.068	1.000

Note: All correlations are non-significant (p > 0.05), indicating weak or no association between the variables.

Regression Analysis

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression – Emotional Abuse as a Predictor of Trust

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β (Beta)	t	p
Emotional Abuse (V3)	-0.13	0.62	-0.015	-0.22	.830

Note: The regression model was not statistically significant, indicating that emotional abuse is not a significant predictor of trust in this sample.

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression – Emotional Abuse as a Predictor of Communication

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β (Beta)	t	p
Emotional Abuse (V3)	-0.23	0.23	-0.068	-1.00	.316

Note: Emotional abuse also did not significantly predict communication patterns.

Independent Samples t-Test

To evaluate differences in trust and communication based on **high vs. low emotional abuse levels**, participants were split into two groups based on a median split of emotional abuse scores.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-Test – Group Differences by Emotional Abuse Level

Dependent Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Trust	Low Abuse	109	106.79	10.54	0.28	.779
	High Abuse	110	106.47	10.92		
Communication	Low Abuse	109	25.56	6.35	0.66	.508
	High Abuse	110	24.97	6.18		

Note: No statistically significant differences were found between the groups for either trust or communication.

Summary of Inferential Findings

- **No significant correlations** were found among emotional abuse, trust, and communication.
- **Emotional abuse was not a significant predictor** of trust or communication in regression analyses.
- **T-tests showed no significant group differences** based on abuse levels for trust or communication.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the impact of emotional abuse in childhood on the romantic relationships of young Indian men, focusing on trust and communication patterns. Results aligned with the study’s hypotheses and earlier studies, demonstrating the psychological impact of emotional abuse at an earlier stage in life.

Trust and Emotional Abuse

As noted in other studies, the childhood emotional abuse is associated with low trust and poor communication (e.g. DiLillo et al. 2001; Spertus et al., 2003). However, the current study did not find any remarkable relationships that stood out. One possible explanation could be the coping mechanisms developed in adulthood. It is also possible that some mediating factors, such as attachment style, current mental health status, or other elements, may lessen the impact of early abuse.

Emotional Neglect and Patterns of Communication

The social and cultural norms of India regarding the treatment of men as unemotional humans may affect how men tell stories and deal with the abuse they have experienced. Participants may have minimized emotional abuse for social desirability reasons or stigma. Trust and communication are affected by lack of emotion expression or suppression, revealing mask alive relationships, hence making the detection of critical relationships challenging.

Implication

The findings highlight the need to account for this abuse in relationship trauma by integrating multiple contextual factors. Psychologists should be careful with the level of emotion restraint in male clients which might cause overlooking sensitive traumatic experience assessment tools reflecting culture. More complex forms of research such as longitudinal mixed methods are recommended to explore the complex consequences of relationships on an integrated perspective.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between childhood emotional abuse and trust, and communication in romantic relationships of young Indian men. In spite of that, the sample did not present any statistically significant results. There is no relationship between emotional abuse and trust, or communication patterns of a person.

The results from the studies conducted emphasize the contradictions posed by previously existing literature, highlighting the depth and the dynamic nature of emotional development. Other studies should seek out broader sample groups which in turn should focus on testing unexplored moderator variables such as attachment styles, or emotional control and regulation.

Longitudinal studies and qualitative methods might illuminate how precisely childhood trauma impacts an individual's later romantic relationships.

Such findings highlight the need for more research on Indian men's emotional experiences and culturally sensitive, gender-inclusive frameworks that are relevant to them.

Limitations

This research is useful in understanding the impact of childhood emotional abuse on trust and communication in romantic relationships with young Indian men, but it also has noticeable limitations. First of all, the study did not yield statistically significant correlation results among variables even after standardized tools were implemented. This suggests some peculiar issue with the sample or the sample's contextual factors or insensitivity to certain variables may be too high.

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Alongside the sensitive nature of childhood emotional abuse, some participants may have underreported these experiences or exaggerated how relationally active they were. Such factors suggest social desirability or even memory errors in self-reporting tools were at play.

The ability to make causal conclusions is limited due to the cross-sectional design. There is a need for more research on how current relationships with romantic partners evolve as time passes in conjunction with childhood experiences.

A rough feedback the provided literature review is that even though the sample size was sufficient (N=219), it was predominantly urban, educated, and English-speaking which does not capture the multi-socio cultural aspects of India.

Additionally, attachment style, emotional regulation, and current mental health status were left out as potential clarifying or reinforcing mediators or moderators of relationships which the study explored.

Outline recommendations for further study result

- Incorporate a qualitative longitudinal approach to track the progression of individuals from childhood to adulthood.
- Integrate qualitative interviews to document experiences of emotional abuse and the complexity of relationships.
- Explore attachment style, resilience, and emotion regulation as factors.
- Include participants from diverse socioeconomic, linguistic, and geographic regions to enhance representational diversity of the sample.
- Assess the impact of culturally sensitive approaches aimed at promoting the expression of emotions, particularly among Indian males.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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