

Research Article

**Emotional and Behavioral Problems among Secondary High School Children of District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan**

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**Abstract**

Childhood is the most important and decisive period of human life, and a healthy childhood is crucial for future growth and development. The current study is aimed to investigate the behavioural and emotional problems of secondary high school children. The study also investigated the role of demographic variables in emotional and behavioral problems among secondary school children. The current study used cross-sectional and co-relational research design was used in current study to test the study hypothesis. Following Sloven's formula, a sample of 406 students was taken by using Sloven's formula. The data was taken from four government and four private secondary high schools in the district Peshawar, KPK, with an age range of 13-18 years. The Problem with School Children Scale (PWSCS) Urdu version was used for the purpose of data collection. Multiple regression and independent t-tests were used to analyze the data. The result showed that secondary high school students exhibited higher emotional problems as compared to behavioral problems. The study revealed that private school students face higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems as compared to government school students. This study also revealed that demographic variables such as socioeconomic status and family structure do not significantly positively predict emotional and behavioral problems, while demographic variables (gender, medical illness, and school type) do not significantly negatively predict emotional and behavioral problems among secondary high school students. This study showed that institutions play a crucial role in the development of emotional and behavioral problems in school children. The study further revealed that demographic variables such as socioeconomic status and family structure are positively associated with emotional and behavioral problems.

**Keywords:** *Emotional Problems, Behavioral Problems, Demographic Factors, School Students,*

**Introduction**

The future of every civilized and advanced society depends on the proper growth and development of children<sup>1</sup>. Over the past few decades, children and adolescents have acquired a new and a very unique status in the world. Increased interest and awareness of children's welfare and rights have opened new doors to look at children's growth and development<sup>2</sup>. Parents usually use strict discipline and forceful measures to adjust the children to the rules and regulations. Strict discipline was considered to be the normal and proper method of handling children<sup>3</sup>. Children were inducted into forced labour, made to work for long hours in dangerous conditions for low wages and with no legal rights. Society's concerns for the physical and mental well-being of the young were almost contradictory. There were no medical facilities available for children either<sup>4</sup>.

Childhood is the most important and decisive period of human life, and a healthy childhood is crucial for future growth and development. Alongside developmental changes, the periods of childhood and adolescence are under the influence of social, emotional, physical, and biological factors which also make it nerve-racking, and thus, make the children more susceptible to developing behavioural and emotional problems. Alongside developmental changes, the periods of childhood and adolescence are under the influence of social, emotional, physical, and biological factors which also make it nerve-racking, and thus, make the children more susceptible to developing behavioral, psychological, and emotional problems<sup>4</sup>.

Children's rights are recognised throughout the world. Many voluntary and state-run organizations have started work to secure children's rights. The economic and industrial revolution in the West and the advancement in medical science were the main factors responsible for creating awareness about children and adolescents. Modern technology, better communication, continuous research development, and more community awareness have made children and adolescents a very important part of the society<sup>5</sup>. Even so, with growing interest and expanded knowledge, children's and adolescents' psychology has received serious attention in the last 20-30 years. Recently, researchers addressed the major and important issue of mental health problems in children and adolescents<sup>6</sup>. Various studies have been carried out on emotional and behavioral problems<sup>7</sup>. It is alarming to note that in some schools in Pakistan, emotional and behavioral problems have been reported to be higher than in other countries, as concluded by a study in private and community schools of Karachi<sup>8</sup>.

The current study is conducted based on multiple theoretical backgrounds of emotional and behaviour problems among school children.

According to the biophysical model, problems first arise from biological and physical factors, and for this reason, problem behaviour can be traced back to physical illness, especially the disorder of the central nervous system. A direct relationship between physical disorder and problem behaviour is an obvious supporter of this model's belief that behavior is an outcome of an inner, physical problem<sup>9</sup>. The cause of behavioral and emotional problems is treated as constitutive in nature, which means that the behavioral problem neither arises from the body of the learner and does nor evolves from the environment of the learner<sup>10</sup>.

According to the developmental theory, some learners who show behaviour and emotional problems have not developed their nervous system according to the age concerned. Developmental theorist formulated that delays in learner development can be a reason as constituting at risk factor initiating behavioral and emotional problems<sup>11</sup>. Different parts of development can be shown to have delays, i.e., sensory integration, neurological organization etc. Stage theorists suggest that a

learner must complete earlier stages of development properly before meeting the challenges of subsequent phases of development. Those learners, who are showing poor social skills or learning problems, need to improve their lower developmental skills<sup>9</sup>.

The psychodynamic theory, with the support of psychoanalytic and intrapsychic theories as well as humanistic psychology, points out that all behavioural problems are caused by inner forces<sup>12</sup>. According to this model, emotional disturbances are caused by inner life and uncertainty. Bad experiences in the past and conflict in the unconscious mind also act as determining factors of behavior problem<sup>13</sup>. Individuals with behavioral problems must be assisted to gain an insight into the past experience. The teacher counselor also needs to develop interpersonal relationships to discuss with him/her past experience and explore his/her experience.

Sociologists try to focus on the functioning of people within groups to determine the impact of society on a learner or child. Their focus is not on individual psychological and learning differences, but on other theories that have been developed. Sociologist interprets behavioral problems in term of concept, rule violations and the relationship between learners who violate rules or who keep to the rules or as termed the 'enforces'<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, behavioral problems originate from a failure or violation of the establishment of social norms<sup>15</sup>.

The fact remains that even in a single classroom belonging to different cultures learners are not readily socialized to conform to one single set of norms. Capsi et al., (2010)<sup>16</sup> alerted the teacher that attempts to socialize learners from such diverse group of culture, using a single social norm may increase the condition of deviation cause behavior problem.

Researchers formulated many psycho-social factors that become risk factors for developing behavior problem of children<sup>17</sup>. There are different factors that contribute to the mental health problems of children, and there are so many other factors that directly influence the development of child behavior. According to research, there are different psycho-social factors that are largely supported by research evidence as being risk factors for behavioral problem<sup>18</sup>.

## **Literature Review**

Many researchers said that the children emotional and behavioral problems are closely related to parental and family factors. In Saudi Male children parental education was connected with high risk of emotional and behavioral problems<sup>19</sup>. In another research study of Verhulst (2012), examined that demographic characteristics of children and their family risk and factors result behavioral and emotional problems.

It was examined that unemployment, divorce, and separation were considered to be major factors in the risk of emotional and behavioural problems. However parental occupation and age was not considered as a high risk of these problems<sup>21</sup>.

The analyses of Connell and Goodman (2012)<sup>22</sup>, suggested that internalizing problem of children were more connected with parents mental health problems but using with mother mental health as compared to father, whereas externalizing behavior problems were more associated with father mental health.

Many studies suggest that socioeconomic status is also connected to emotional and behavioural problems<sup>20</sup>. Other studies by Angold and Costello (2009)<sup>24</sup>, examined the impact of

poverty on child behavior and found that poverty has a great connection with psychopathology in white children. In another study by Wadsworth (2015)<sup>25</sup>, also found a connection between socioeconomic status and depressed behavior, somatic complaints, and thought problems. The result of the research found that low economic status is a risk factor for emotional and behavioral problems in children.

The identified relationship between perceived parental styles and children's internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems. It was investigated that children who perceived their rear and rejecting parental style had more psychological problems. Many research studies have found a positive connection between authoritative parents and children with emotional and behavioral problems children<sup>26</sup>.

A study conducted by Syed, Hussein, and Haidry (2008)<sup>8</sup>, on children enrolled in schools in Karachi, found 18.3% of emotional and 35.8% of behavioural issues that were rated by their teachers. Another study was carried out in Pakistan on school children with emotional and behavioral problems using Rutter rating scales. Results of another study using the Rutter behavioral scale conducted in India, on 957 school children showed that behavioral problems existed in around 45.6% of children, of which 36.5% of those children had major behavioral problems<sup>27</sup>.

Children of Hope, (2013)<sup>28</sup> formulated that emotional problems can be identified as learners whose emotions do not guide their behaviour correctly, learners whose emotional responses are too deep, and learners whose emotional responses are so weak. When their peers and elders mistreat or abuse them, they show resentment but not enough to do anything but rise up and protest about the treatments. The learners who experience incorrect emotions hold a mistaken view, e.g. they worry about things which will not happen in reality, when other children's pets or animals suffer pain, and they laugh and get involved in dangerous activities<sup>29</sup>. There is a match between emotion and situation in normal behavior. However, there should be a mismatch between emotional responses to a situation in problem behavior. A person who faces the above emotional problems with behaviour like being too weak to intense or the incorrect ones usually acts inappropriately for the situation<sup>30</sup>.

## Methods

The present study was planned based on exploratory and cross-sectional survey design. The main study was designed to explore the emotional and behavioural problems among schoolchildren in the district of Peshawar. The study also aimed to verify the demographic factors' influence on the occurrence of emotional and behavioral problems among government and private secondary high school students.

The sample of the study was 406, including 203 government and 203 private secondary high school students, which was taken by using the Slovenes formula. The study was carried out in four government and four private secondary high schools of district Peshawar with children falling into the age range of 13-18 years. The four towns of the district Peshawar were taken as four clusters in which one and three were randomly selected.

After validation through the pre-testing stage, the instrument for detecting problems with school children was adopted for use in the main study. A structured questionnaire containing 30 closed-end questions was used to collect the data.

Demographic data consists of a questionnaire relevant to the study variables of children's age, gender, class, school, medical condition, socioeconomic status, and family system.

The measure (Urdu version) finalized in Phase I of the study was used for assessing the emotional and behavioural. The original scale was developed by the Canadian paediatric association in 2012 to identify psychological problems among school children. It contains 30 items. All of the items have a three-point range of responses (1-3) from 1 (No Concern), 2 (Minor Concern) and 3 (Major Concern). The total score ranges from 30-90, with higher scores reflecting problematic behaviour. The reliability of the questionnaire is 0.93 for high school age youth. The questionnaire has no copyright protection. A translated version of the instrument was used.

The study included students from both public and private schools in the district of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The detailed data of the public and private schools was collected for the purpose of drawing a random sample of the district of Peshawar through the Private Schools Regulatory Authority (PSRA) and the District Education Office Peshawar.

The data collection was started after getting permission from the government and private school authorities. They are given instructions about the purpose of the research. They were assured that the information from the collected data would be kept confidential and would be used for research purposes only.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)<sup>21</sup> was used for the analysis of the data. The mean and standard deviation for all the variables computed conveyed the concurrent validity of the instrument. A T-test was applied in order to determine if significant differences existed between government and private school students. Keeping in view of the objectives of the study, multiple regression analysis was carried out.

## Results

Table I shows means and standard deviation values for of behavioral and emotional problems. Findings indicates significant mean differences on emotional problems ( $M = 7.14$ ,  $p > .000$ ) and behavioral problems ( $M = 6.04$ ,  $p > .000$ ). Results indicate that high school students exhibited higher emotional problems as compare to behavioral problems.

**Table I results of Independent t test**

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>P</i>	95%CI	
				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Behavioural problems	6.04	4.63	.00	5.58	6.49
Emotional problems	7.14	4.24	.00	6.72	7.55

Note: M= mean, SD= standard deviation, t= T-test, df= degree of freedom, \*p<.05, N= 406

Table II shows standard deviation mean and *t*-values for emotional and behavioral problems among private and government secondary high school student. Findings indicates non-significant mean differences between government and private secondary school student with respect of emotional problems with  $t(198) = .245, p>.294$ . Findings indicated significant mean differences between government and private secondary school student with respect of behavioral problems,  $t(198) = 2.50, p >.000$ . Overall analysis explores that private schools student's face higher level of emotional and behavioral problems as compare to government secondary school student.

**Table II results of Independent t test**

Variables	Government ( <i>n</i> = 203)		Private ( <i>n</i> = 203)		<i>t</i> (198)	<i>P</i>	95%CI	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Emotional Problems	7.08	4.49	7.19	3.98	.245	.294	-.725	.932
Behavioural problems	5.46	3.53	6.61	5.47	2.50	.000	.248	2.04

Note: M= mean, SD= standard deviation, t= T-test, df= degree of freedom, \*p<.05, N= 406

Table III analysis results revealed that demographic variable (Socioeconomic status, and family) are non-significantly positively predict emotional problems while demographic variable (gender, mental illness, status, and school type) are non-significantly negatively predict emotional problems among secondary school students and accounts 4% ( $R = .042$ ) of variance in predicting emotional problems among secondary school student.

**Table III Multiple Regression analysis**

Variables	$\Delta R$	B	<i>P</i>
Model 1	0.78		
Socioeconomic status		.073	.147
Gender		-.137	.008
Mental illness		-.037	.478
Family status		.076	.141
School		-.130	.010
R	.354		
R <sup>2</sup>	.042		
F	2.67		

**Note:** Dependent variable; emotional and behavioral problems

Table IV shows the results of Multiple Regression analysis

Table IV analysis results revealed that demographic variable (Socioeconomic status, and family) are non-significantly positively predict behavioral problems while demographic variable (gender, mental illness, status, and school type) are non-significantly negatively predict emotional problems among secondary school students and accounts 5% ( $R=.053$ ) of variance in predicting behavioral problems among secondary school student

**Table IV Multiple Regression analysis**

Variables	$\Delta R$	B	P
Model 1	0.73		
Socioeconomic status		.068	.180
Gender		-.114	.029
Mental illness		-.046	.337
Family status		.080	.118
School		-.136	.007
R	.367		
R <sup>2</sup>	.053		
F	2.34		

**Note:** Dependent variable; emotional and behavioral problems

## Discussion

Secondary high school Students are more vulnerable to emotional and behavioural problems because they are still adolescents, a stage of stress and storm. The present study was conducted to examine the difference between emotional and behavioral problems among secondary high school children.

Findings indicate significant mean differences on emotional problems ( $M = 7.14$ ,  $p > .000$ ) and behavioral problems ( $M = 6.04$ ,  $p > .000$ ) among secondary school students. Results indicate that high school students exhibited higher emotional problems as compare to behavioral problems. The results are consistent with prior studies of Collishaw (2004)<sup>31</sup>, who have concluded that there is a wide fluctuation in the rates of emotional and behavioral problems among schools students and face more emotional problems initially as compare to behavioral problems. A study conducted by Syed, Hussein and Haidry (2008), found that 38.3% emotional and 35.8% behavioral issues that were rated by their teachers.

Another study was carried out on school children with emotional and behavioural problems using Rutter rating scales. The study revealed a high rate of emotional problems as compared to anti-social and conduct problems<sup>32</sup>. Results of another study using the Rutter behavioral scale conducted in India, on 957 school children showed that emotional problems existed in around 45.6% children, of which 36.5% children had behavioral problems<sup>33</sup>. Another study conducted in India found the behavioral and emotional problems in high school students as 25.6% and 74.4% respectively<sup>34</sup>. Another study shows that emotional and behavioral problems are likely to be more in high school students than middle school children. However, these elements persist, in an increasing number of children. Still, sufficient research work has not been done in Pakistan to conclusively establish the incidence and extent of prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems<sup>8</sup>.

Results also revealed a non-significant mean difference between government and private secondary high school students with respect to emotional problems, with  $t(198) = .245$ ,  $p > .294$ . Findings indicated significant mean differences between government and private secondary high school students with respect of behavioural problems,  $t(198) = .250$ ,  $p > .000$ . Overall analysis explores that private school students face higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems as compared to government secondary school students<sup>8</sup>. The results indicate that the magnitude of mental health problems, including emotional and behavioural ones, was significantly higher among private school students, whereas government school students were significantly better due to their level of adjustment and coping strategies.

The results of the current study revealed that demographic variables (social economic status and family) non-significantly positively predict emotional and behavioural problems, while demographic variables (gender, mental illness, status, and school type) non-significantly negatively predict emotional and behavioral problems among secondary high school students.

According to literature, it suggests that emotional and behavioural problems in secondary high school children lead to low socioeconomic status, poor family system, poor self-esteem, social incompetence, feelings of loneliness, and lack of feelings of well-being later in life, and found no relationship between poor school adjustment, poor school performance, high dropout rates, and gender<sup>35</sup>.

There are many studies which revealed that number of parental and family related factors is associated with emotional and behavioral problems of children and adolescents<sup>36, 37, 38</sup>. Parental educational level was associated with a higher risk of developing emotional and behavioral problems in male Saudi adolescents<sup>19</sup>. In another study, Harland, Reijneveld, Brugman, Verloove-Vanhorick and Verhulst (2002), examined the association between demographic characteristic of children, family factors and risk for developing emotional and behavioral problems. It was concluded that children who had recent experience of parental unemployment, parental divorce or separation were considered to be high risk factors of emotional and behavioral problems numerous studies have shown a strong association between socio economic status, family and behavioral and emotional problems<sup>39</sup>.

It was found that parents from lower socio economic status tend to report higher emotional and behavioral problems in their children (Larsson & Frisk, 1999)<sup>40</sup>. In another study, Costello, Keeler, and Angold (2011)<sup>41</sup>, investigated the impact of poverty on the prevalence of mental health problems in children. The sample consisted of 541 black and 379 white children. The overall findings suggest that poverty was found to have a strong association with emotional and behavioral problems in white children. Family history of mental health problems, lack of parental support and harsh discipline were also found to be risk factors for child psychopathology.

In another longitudinal study (Wadsworth & Achenbach, 2005)<sup>25</sup>, it has also been suggested that early and timely identification of emotional problems in school children and adolescents may prevent the long-term negative consequences associated with untreated or unidentified mental health problems<sup>42</sup>. Many empirical studies have investigated the association of gender with different emotional and behavioural problems and found no such correlation.

## Conclusion



The present study concluded that a predictive relationship between emotional and behavioural problems among secondary school students as well as its demographic effect on it. As we have seen that children have gone through centuries of ignorance to become the focus of modern society and face a lot of behavioral and emotional problems. Similarly, the interest in children and their welfare spilled from psychology to other disciplines. The increasing awareness of children also laid the foundation for developing applied areas of study of children, including developmental psychopathology and school psychology. The new trends and advancements in the field of psychology have also shifted the focus on children having various mental health problems.

With the passage of time the concept of mental illness was replaced by mental health, quality of life and well-being of children. This research gives a unique opportunity to explore the phenomenology of the types, patterns and frequency of emotional and behavioral problems. This study further provides an understating of the cultural influences on experience, expression and manifestation of emotional and behavioral problems in cultural context. Also, early and timely identification of the type, intensity and distribution of the emotional and behavioral problems in children and adolescents will also help in estimating the need for intervention and establishing the mental health services in schools. This study also identifies the interaction between emotional and behavioral problems, school performance of the child. It is expected that these findings will help in developing functional profile of the child that ultimately help in providing individualized intervention plans.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

The present study had limitations for which suggestions and other future research options have been advised. There has been little work done on this phenomenon, largely due to a lack of reliable nationwide data either in private schools or public schools. The conclusions of this work point towards the importance of a nationwide analysis of

Private schooling and public schooling and their roles in educational delivery, personality development, and building confidence in adolescents to participate in communication. Although the scale was reliable enough to be used in the present study, it had some faults and limitations, e.g. the locally developed scale is only limited to the current culture and more age-appropriate for which it was developed. The scale has a limited number of statements to cover the whole measurement of the level of emotional and behavioural problems. The other limitation of the research is that it was conducted in Peshawar. Although the hypothesis has been supported, it must be kept in mind that individual differences do exist.

### **Implications**

The findings provide awareness about the conditions and issues that secondary high school students are facing, both while studying in government and private schools. The current findings also highlight emotional and behavioural problems that are faced by school children at this age, so that we can make a better plan to improve their functioning and eliminate the problems that are faced by secondary school students. The results of the present study will help the authorities of both private and government schools to arrange counseling workshops to teach coping communication and social skills and to take steps to reduce emotional and behavioural symptoms and stressors. Involvement in different activities will provide them with a sense of meaning, which

will lead to optimism and self-efficacy. Teachers and parents should be encouraged and trained to participate in activities such as joining a social group, starting a stress management program, exercising, or developing a new hobby to teach communication and social skills to cope with their emotional and behavioral problems effectively.

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