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# Perceived Parental Rejection and Emotional Behavioral Problems: A Case Study of the Psychosocial Issues faced by an Adopted Child

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## Abstract

The perceived maternal/parental rejection can leave a negative and long lasting impact on an adopted child's life. It can increase the chances of internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems and decreases school performance and prosocial behavior. On some occasions, the lack of emotional adjustment may increase parental rejection and criticism which, in turn, may intensify children's emotional reactions. More specifically, it was found that perceived parental rejection severely affects children and adult's psychological adjustment and personality development. The current case study highlights all important factors which hinder the normal development of a 14 year old. The assessment modalities including School Children Problem Scale (Saleem & Mahmood, [2011](#)) and Curriculum-based Assessment (CBA), revealed that the child's perceived maternal rejection as well as shifting to a new city and school made him vulnerable. For these reasons, he experienced emotional, behavioral, and academic issues.

**Keywords:** academic issues, behavioral, emotional, maternal/parental perceived rejection

## Introduction

It is widely accepted that family-especially parents-play the most crucial role in a child's development from its early childhood to adolescence and adulthood. Parent-child relationship is the first context of children's socialization and the early experiences of this relationship shape children's personality and future behaviors (Theodoropoulos & Giotsa, [2020](#)). Just like the effect of children's upbringing influences their development, their personality, and their socio-emotional adjustment, their manifest behavior may have an effect on the way, they interact with their parents (Mendo-Lázaro et al., [2019](#)). Life of a normal child is full of challenges but for an

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adopted child, it's even more complex (Paediatr Child Health, [2001](#)). Separation from attachment figures is very stressful for the young children. If it is not handled sensitively, it can have a long term impact on the children's development and in some cases it proves threatening to the success of the adoptive placement. They have different dilemmas; one of the dilemmas is perceived rejection. Parental acceptance refers to the expression of positive feelings, love and support toward the children, whereas parental rejection incorporates indifference, absence of positive feelings, judgment, and psychological or corporeal aggression towards children (Selwyn et al., [2015](#)).

Children in different age groups may be related to increasing challenges for adopted children as they get older (Neil et al., [2018](#)). Early adversity and negative experiences in the adoptive family can put adopted children at risk in terms of emotional and behavior problems (Hornfeck et al., [2019](#)). Although parents might have good intentions, some of these children tend to have a negative view of the parent-child relationship (Shulga et al., [2016](#)). Norton ([2017](#)) also finds that individuals who have felt their mother's rejection at important times in their development tend to have social anxiety, a high level of anxiety, and view themselves as less important/influential figures in interpersonal relationships. Research shows that children have been perceived to have serious or moderate challenges in respect of their relationship with at least one of their adoptive parents. Similarly, adoptive parents said their child had challenges with sibling relationships, emotional and behavioral problems, educational problems, and developmental delays and disabilities. Meta-analysis has revealed that adopted children tend to show higher rates of anxiety and depression, internalizing problems that hinder emotional wellbeing and self-esteem. Along with externalizing problems such as conduct issues, oppositional behavior and aggression, internalizing problems leave impact on peer relationships and social development (Neil et al., [2018](#)).

Considering the multiple adverse consequences of perceived parental rejection, it is needed to identify the risk and protective factors that play the role in solving problems in adolescents at various levels. For this purpose, the current study aims to highlight the association of perceived parental rejection and emotional behavioral problems in adolescents.

## Case Study

The present case study is about 14 years old boy who was referred by his teacher to the presenting complaints which include lack of attention from home and carelessness. Clinical interview was carried out with the child in order to take the in-depth history of the problem of the child. Partially maintained hygiene was observed during interview. Child revealed that his biological parents died when he was 4 years old. One of his relative took the responsibility to take care of him. They had only one daughter who was approximately 14 years old at the time of his adoption. His relationship with his adoptive father was reported very loving and caring by child but his adoptive mother started neglecting him as not paying attention to his needs, not loving him or taking interest in his childhood activities, etc. He talked about his adopted mother as mother but considered their daughter as their daughter not sister. The child felt that the mother loved her daughter more. The child reported that he missed his biological younger brother who was adopted by other relatives. When the child was 12 years old, his sister got married after the death of his adoptive father had died. Then he and his mother moved to current city along with her sister and his husband. This city and people of this city were completely strangers for the child as no relatives were living here. Here, her sister lived separately with his husband and the child lived with his mother in a nearby home. Her sister got job here and she started supporting them financially. As her daughter started supporting them, she became dominating her mother and him. She interfered in every matter.

He got enrolled in the current school where everything was new for him. The child used to study in Urdu medium while in the current school was in English medium. The child shared that it was difficult for him to study. He started feeling rejected at home as well as in school and the mother never attended to the child and the school teachers never gave him individual attention to fill his study gaps. In this entire crisis, the child felt lonely and isolated himself. There was no one at home with whom he could share his feelings and spend good time.

The child had adjustment issues along with relationship issues which created hindrance in the growth of the child's academic excellence and thus lowered his self-esteem. The child isolated himself at home and faced

difficulty in expressing his emotions to his mother. He wanted acceptance from his adopted mother as a son and equal love and attention as she gave it to his sister. Her adopted mother did not allow him to make friends near home or did not allow to go outside. She threatened him if he would go outside to play, he would be arrested by police. When she went outside she often left the child alone at home.

The ABA design or before and After Treatment procedure to manage the problems of the 14 year old boy.

The child's emotional behavioral assessment was done with the help of School Children Problem Scale (SCPS), developed by (Saleem & Mahmood, [2011](#)).

**Table 1**

*Factors, Scores, Mean, Standard Deviation & Category of Child on SCPS*

Factors	Obtain Score	Mean	S.D	Category
Rejection	8	3.30	3.25	Very severe
Somatic problem	6	4.03	2.54	Severe
Anxiousness	19	13.48	7.28	Severe
Academic problems	10	7.11	4.42	Severe
Aggression	7	7.05	4.35	Moderate
Withdrawal	8	8.51	3.94	Moderate
Total	58	42.45	19.17	Severe

The child scored very severe on Rejection domain as he was perceiving rejection from family which led towards the severe levels in the domain of Anxiety and somatic problems. Further, the anxiety level was affecting the academic performance of child, which is also on severe level of SCPS. Overall, these problems were resulting as moderate level of aggression and withdrawal symptoms in the child.

Curriculum-based assessment (CBA) technique was used to examine the mismatch between the curriculum and student skills. His writing skills were not appropriate. He wrote without giving spaces and it was difficult to read what he wrote. His Urdu reading was fine but he felt difficulty in reading English.

## Discussion

Parents play a significant role in determining human actions and personality. They serve as the primary institution for overall behavioral, emotional and psychological development of children. They adopt different techniques in controlling their children's behavior. They help them acquire and refine necessary skills in order to meet the challenges of later life and thus enable them to grow as well-adjusted members of the society. Harsh parenting such as physical/verbal abuse, lack of parental love and support, and parental neglect may lead to psychological maladjustment in children including aggression, low self-esteem, and behavioral difficulties that tend to persist and become more intensified in later life. This case study has highlighted all the important factors which can create hindrance into child's normal development and leave long-lasting negative impact on child.

As in this child's case, his perceived rejection and transition to new city and school made his life very challenging. Owing to these entire challenges, the child was facing emotional behavioral problems and academic issues as well. Despite the single mother's good intentions, the adolescent might view her actions as rejection. Maternal rejection has been found to be the main predictor of various forms of behavioral problems, and on the other hand, maternal acceptance has been found to have an impact on healthy social-emotional development. The results of this study confirm the previous studies' findings that adolescent perceptions of parental acceptance and rejection (especially the mothers') will have an impact on mental health, self-adjustment, and psychopathology. Children with higher perceived parental rejection also showed lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy and had a more negative worldview. Higher perceived parental rejection predicted increases in internalizing and externalizing behavior problems and decreases in school performance and pro-social behavior. Mother's warmth or acceptance is an important element increasing a more effective developmental process for children.

The child's case formulation was based on the bio-psycho-social model on the basis of precipitating, predisposing, maintaining and protective factors of client presenting problems.

**Table 2**

*Formulation of the Child Case according to Bio- Psycho-Social Model*

	Predisposing factors	Precipitation factors	Maintaining factor	Protective factor
Biology factors	Sensitive temperaments Age		Sensitive temperaments	Health
Psychological factors		Death of adoptive father Rejection from mother	Sense of loneliness Low self esteem	Child's compliance & willingness Insight of problem Relationship with biological brother
Social Factor		School transition		

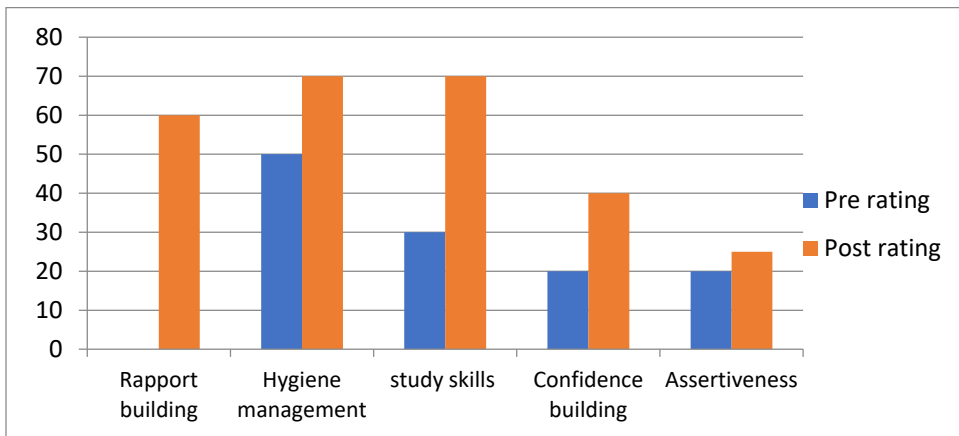
It seems that predisposing factors in the early age give development to children's sensitive temperament which leads children to have different problems. In the case of this child, his adoptive mother rejected the child, which led him towards increased dependency towards the mother figure. He feels minor things very deeply and wanted to be accepted by her. Precipitating factors were death of his adoptive father, rejection from his adoptive mother, school transition. In the child's life, his adoptive father was the only supportive figure. After the death of this adoptive father, the child started feeling lonely. Her adoptive mother's rejection makes scenario even worst for the child; pushed the child towards lack of communication skills and low self-esteem. While maintain factors also promoted his temperament and feeling of loneliness. While protecting factors affected his health, child's compliance and willingness, and insight of problems.

The key goal of this case study was to understand all the contributing factors that were responsible for the child's issues. On account of all the current circumstances, the child was going through so many different issues. To facilitate the child, intervention plan was made. The intervention plan was aimed to improve the child's hygiene, study skills, assertiveness and confidence. Improving hygiene can bring positive changes in the child's

life. Working on study skills was done to make him able to excel in life. Relaxation technique was also used to make him feel calm and relax during problematic situation. Overall intervention plan was effective as the child showed compliance throughout the sessions. The following figures show the post and pre intervention results of the child.

**Figure 1**

*Pre and Post Ratings of intervention Plan*



Parental acceptance and rejection is associated with psychological adjustments and problems respectively. The parents may have their own parental practices, biased by numerous factors but they result in highly psychological and social maladjustments in children. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded by the researcher that Assertiveness training (AT) helps to improve the level of assertiveness, self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic achievement among the adolescents along with reducing their level of stress. As we know, Adolescent Stage is among the most sensitive stages of one's life, so conducting AT programs in schools would be effective and beneficial for adolescents (Maqbool Parray et al., 2020). As the child's academics gets disturbed owing to overall life dissatisfaction, giving details to attention to the various factors affecting the academic achievement of student's results in their better academic performance. Along with this, Confidence Building at this stage is very crucial. The study shows that the existence of self-confidence in primary



school children determine its importance for school achievement, irrespective of a student's cognitive ability, age and gender. The results also suggest that parental care has an important influence on both the school achievement and levels of confidence (Kleitman & Moscrop, [2010](#)).

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