

## Emotional Stroop Task, Parental Acceptance- Rejection and Personality Assessment in Sexually Abused Children, Pakistan

\*Rabia Iftikhar & Iqra Tariq

Clinical Psychology Unit  
Department of Psychology  
GC University, Lahore  
Pakistan

\*All correspondence should be addressed to Ms. Rabia Iftikhar, Lecturer, Clinical Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology, GC University, Katchery Road, Lahore, Pakistan 54000.  
Email: [rubail1983@gmail.com](mailto:rubail1983@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The current study examined the parental acceptance-rejection and personality assessment of sexually abused children. A sample of 50 control (25 girls and 25 boys) and 50 abused (25 girls and 25 boys) were drawn through the process of purposive sampling (N = 100). The sample consisted of school going children between the ages of 8-16. The sample was taken from non-governmental schools and NGO. Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ-Mother/Father; Rohner, Saaverda, & Granum, 1980), Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ; Rohner & Khaleque, 1978) and Emotional STROOP task, were used to explore the relationship between the variables. The results showed that girls showed greater parental rejection than boys, were less psychologically and emotionally adjusted than boys. The results also showed that boys were high on psychological abuse while girls were high on physical and sexual abuse. The results of STROOP showed that sexually abused children showed more reaction time than non-abused children.

[Rabia Iftikhar & Iqra Tariq. **Emotional Stroop Task, Parental Acceptance- Rejection and Personality Assessment in Sexually Abused Children, Pakistan.** *Biomedicine and Nursing* 2022; 8(4):26-36]. ISSN 2379-8211 (print); ISSN 2379-8203 (online). <http://www.nbmedicine.org>. 04. doi:[10.7537/marsbnj080422.04](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsbnj080422.04).

**Keywords:** personality, STROOP, abused, rejection, adjustment, Pakistan

All over the world organizations and various institutions have tried to protect the rights and welfare of children. Abuse has still continued in all nations of the world regardless of preventions. According to National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) child abuse is a form of child maltreatment in which another person tries to inflict harm either directly or indirectly. This abuse can occur at home or even in the child's institution, by known or unknown, another child or an adult (2009). Child abuse is a broad phenomenon which is further divided into four types. These types further define the type of abuse and consequences associated to it. The four researched types of child abuse include physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and sexual abuse. All types of abuse are devastating the degree to which they differ depends on their long term consequences. Child abuse, especially sexual abuse, is a phenomenon which Pakistani society is struggling to overcome. It has begun to increase rapidly in all strata's of society. Faqiha Rafi, a Psychologist, reports that sexual abuse can be explained as a social issue which rises in frustration of inflation, poverty, terrorism and to seek pleasure or joy

people shift towards illegal and immoral methods to get pleasure. Lahore police reports 145 adult and child rape, with 32 gang rapes which were reported in the previous eight month period. The police reported that 108 arrests were made out of which 62 were challenged in court 24 accusations were found to be false.

Physical abuse is any type of abuse which includes physical maltreatment of the child. It may include burning, drowning, beating, scratching, kicking, biting, poisoning, suffocating, belting or even exposure to heat or radiation. This type of abuse is mostly used at home, school or even as corporal punishment (Nordqvist, 2012). Emotional abuse is another type of abuse which has increased over the past years and is beginning to gain importance. This type of abuse is not easily detected unlike physical abuse which shows scars and damage. Emotional abuse has been defined as a persistent emotional maltreatment of a child to such an extent that they cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. This type of abuse includes embarrassing, ridiculing and making the child feel

worthless or unloved. For example, sometimes parents may hold high expectations from the child which the child may not be able to fulfill. Those expectations may be too imposing or hard to live up to. Child neglect is also recognized as the worst possible abuse where a child is left unprotected and unloved. The child's basic needs are not catered i.e. no food, shelter, security or schooling provided. And if these are provided they are inefficient and may further lead to complications in the future. According to National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) child neglect can be defined as the persistent failure to provide the child with basic needs like physical and psychological needs which further lead to serious impairment in the child's health and growth (Nordqvist, 2012). Child neglect can be identified if the child is not provided with food, clothing, shelter, protection from emotional and physical danger and medical facility. Sexual abuse among children is a recent phenomenon which has not been studied extensively and has tremendously increased in a Pakistani society. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002), "sexual abuse is an epidemic and a public health crisis." Sexual abuse can be defined as, "unwanted sexual activity, perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent" (APA, 2013). It is further defined under two categories: touching sexual offences and non-touching sexual offences. "Touching sexual offences include: "fondling, making a child touch an adult's sexual organs and penetrating a child's vagina or anus." Non-touching sexual offences include: "engaging in indecent or exposure or exhibitionism, exposing children to pornography, deliberately exposing a child to the act of sexual intercourse and masturbating in front of a child." (American Humane Association, 2013).

Child sexual abuse is the least reported abuse in Pakistan. This is the case because of a taboo attached to such an issue. Such matters are viewed as domestic issues which like to be handled "under the roof" (Berti, 2003). Child sexual abuse has risen in the past few years, from 1187 in 2001 to 447 cases reported in the first four months of 2002 (Berti, 2003). Child sexual abuse is still considered a less acknowledged abuse in comparison to other forms of abuse. The major reason being: scarcity of reported cases. "This scarcity reflects the social and cultural taboo that is attached to this issue, and on the poor likelihood of seeing such denunciation succeed, if not even turned against the victim..." (Berti, 2003). Children who lack the difference between good touch and bad touch are mostly the ones that get dragged into sexual abuse and never become aware of what happened. Another very important characteristic associated with sexual abuse is ambivalence (Kinnear, 2007). Further sexual abuse has

been legally defined under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as, "the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of a child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, and sexually explicit conduct or the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with a child" (Kinnear, 2007). According to a report conducted in Lahore, Pakistan by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) the report states that sexual abuse can be defined as, "the violation of rights of a child i.e. rape or sodomy and other acts like fondling, stroking, exposure to adult genitalia and caressing" (Penal Code, 2000).

A study conducted by Finkelhor in 1990 reports that high rates of sexual abuse found among women (sexually abused in childhood) were those who were raised in unloving families, lived without their natural parent and who were provided with inadequate sex education; while males who were abused in their childhood were those who were raised in an unloving family and who were only raised by their mother. It is believed worldwide that children are the most vulnerable form of human being to be sexually exploited. Children are young, ambivalent, unable to rationalize situations on the spot and easily manipulated. Organizations like National Society for Prevention of Cruelty in Children (NSPCC) puts forth a list of child victims who are most vulnerable to sexual abuse: runaways, homeless, those with disabilities, raised by other children, previous experience of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional or neglect, teenagers, girls (most likely to be abused because they are considered the most suggestible of the gender), illiterate, out-group, marginal groups (i.e., race or ethnic group), those who misuse drugs, belonging to deviant families, poverty, health concerns, associated with sexually abused children, low-self-esteem or low self-confidence and those who have experienced loss of a loved one.

A family that looks after the child's needs and provides them complete attention and care are very careful in their child's whereabouts and easily sense if something is wrong. However, there are also families that are too rigid or enmeshed to understand their child's behavior and needs. For example, in a Pakistani society a father as well as the family expects the mother to provide undivided attention to her children and if anything goes wrong she is blamed. A mother not only has to look after her children but the house along with other family members (i.e. if living in a joint family system). This theory than blames the family for not looking after their children and always remaining in a blame game. The theory also postulates that the mother is aware of the incestuous relationship but refuses to do anything about it. The reason might

be either out of fear of breaking up the family or social outrage.

According to the PAR-Theory parental acceptance and rejection play a significant role in the way a child's personality develops (Rohner, Khaleque & Cournoyer, 2004). A child then identifies oneself with the way the parents perceive them. In cases of sexually abused children they are unaware of what has happened and therefore find it difficult to relate with. However, if parental acceptance is available the child may feel secured otherwise rejection may lead to further insecurities and even psychological problems. PAR-Theory shows that "children everywhere who come from loving (acceptance) families are more likely than children who come from unloving (rejecting) families to feel good about themselves, feel competent, have less problems with the management of hostility and aggression, have adequate emotional responsiveness and emotional stability, have less dependence and have a positive worldview" (Kim & Rohner, 2003; Rohner 2004). If children perceive their parents as loving and caring (accepting) they would probably feel good about them as well. As can be seen in a study conducted by Cournoyer et. al., (2005) on Ukrainian University students who showed high parental acceptance leads to positive self-concept and better psychological adjustment. The level to which children perceive their parents as accepting or loving may be affected by the traumatic experience they have suffered i.e., if sexually abused. A study conducted in Finland and Pakistan revealed that children in both Finland and Pakistan perceive their mother's as more accepting than rejecting (Rohner, et.al. 2005). However, there were results indicating that in both nations children reported love withdrawal when the mothers reported maternal acceptance. This difference is however, considered minor and normal especially in Pakistan where a mother is considered as a member of the family who has to look after all errands. The mother takes care of the husband, kids, the in-laws and other guests all at once. And sometimes without any help and due to this less love and attention is divided between her children and responsibility.

It has been seen that individuals who find difficulty in responding to words shown may be due to a traumatizing event (Williams et. al., 1996). He believed that there might have been a traumatic event which might have triggered by viewing the word and the color it was shown in. Therefore, the cognitive interference which might be intruding in the time taken to read the word shown might be due to the traumatic event in the person's life. It has also been seen that the bigger the trauma is the larger the interferences are. A recent study on physical abuse was conducted by Malik (2010) indicating that STROOP task performance is affected due to cognitive interferences and to measure

its causes a study by Malik and Humphreys (2011) was conducted. The results indicated that maltreated group of children showed slower overall reaction times, more pronounced interference from emotional but non-violent words and extremely prolonged reaction time to emotional words with violent associations. It was also seen that these effects were larger for maltreated male participants than for maltreated female participants. Along with all this it was also seen that maltreated children showed a form of startle-response to emotionally violent words, blocking their response to the color. Also, the maltreated children were seen to be more affected by emotional words per se (with emotional non-violent words compared with neutral words) than controls. Children who are sexually abused may also encounter some personality problems.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), "girls tend to be at a greater risk of sexual victimization than boys", while, "boys are more likely to be victimized by a perpetrator outside the family than girls." According to Bano (2013), a total number of 2017 girls become victims of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is one such phenomenon that brings 'shame and guilt to the family'. The loss of virginity through sexual abuse is a stigmatizing phenomenon for families in Pakistan. Even though girls in Pakistan have restrictive mobility but abuse still occurs because according to statistics mostly abuse occurs within the family.

The rationale of the study was to investigate the underlying cognitive interferences in the performance of emotional STROOP task of sexually abused children and whether any specific factor plays a critical role in it. The underlying explanation of STROOP task is that due to cognitive interferences an individual is unable to give a required response. This study aims to investigate whether traumatic events like child sexual abuse act as a cognitive interference in the performance of STROOP task.

#### **Hypotheses:**

- Sexually abused children will show latency to engage in terms of delayed response than control group
- In comparison to the control group sexually abused children will report more parental rejection
- There is likely to be a relationship between child sexual abuse and personality traits (i.e., hostility/aggression, dependency, negative self-esteem, negative self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, negative worldview)
- Girls will be more likely to report incest than boys
- There will be an association of boys reporting more gang rape than girls

**Method****Research Design and Participants**

Experimental mixed factorial within-between group design. The design is a 2×2×4 (gender, group: experimental exposed to sexual abuse and control not exposed to sexual abuse, STROOP conditions: violent, non-violent, emotional and sexual). Purposive sampling was used on a sample of 100. The population

consisted of 50 voluntary participants with a history of sexual abuse and 50 control children (no prior history of sexual abuse). Each group consisted of 50% girls and 50% boys, with an age range of 8-16 years. Sexually abused children data was gathered from a National Governmental Organization (NGO) while the control children data was gathered from two different Government schools (one for girls and one for boys).

Table 1

*Frequency and Percentages on Demographic Variables*

Variables	<i>n</i> (100)		Total (%)
	Abused (%)	Control (%)	
<b>Age</b> ( <i>M</i> = 2.60, <i>SD</i> = .77)			
9-10 years	6 (12)	2 (4)	8 (8)
11-12 years	12 (24)	22 (44)	34 (34)
13-14 years	24 (48)	24 (48)	48 (48)
15-16 years	8 (16)	2 (4)	10 (10)
<b>Gender</b>			
Boys	25 (50)	25 (50)	50 (50)
Girls	25 (50)	25 (50)	50 (50)
<b>Family system</b>			
Nuclear	29 (58)	26 (52)	55 (55)
Joint	20 (30)	23 (46)	38 (38)
Single mother	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (1)
Single father	2 (4)	0 (0)	2 (2)
<b>Mother's occupation</b>			
Working	11 (22)	2 (4)	13 (13)
Nonworking	35 (70)	48 (96)	83 (83)

**Measures****Child Abuse Screening Tool (CAST-I)**

The indigenous version of Child Abuse Screening Tool (CAST-I) institution version used to assess sexually abused children developed by International Society for the Protection of Child Abuse and Neglect in 1977. The age range of the scale was 11-18 years and it comprised of 52 questions. The responses of the scale were rated on a four-point rating scale ranging from 'Never-Always'. The Cronbach's alpha is .94 which is considered high reliability.

**Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ)**

The questionnaire was developed by Rohner, Saaverda, & Granum in 1980. It comprised of separate forms for mother and father, each consisting of 60 items further divided into four subscales including parental less warmth and affection, parental hostility and aggression, parental neglect and indifference and parental rejection. And its Cronbach's reliability ranges from 0.72 to 0.90 (less warmth=.90; hostility/aggression=.87;

neglect/indifference=.77; undifferentiated rejection=.72).

**Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ)**

The questionnaire was developed by Rohner and Khaleque in 1978. A self-report questionnaire used to measure the way children perceive their own personality and behavioral dispositions. The questionnaire comprises of subscales of: hostility/aggression, dependence, negative self-esteem, negative self-adequacy, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability and negative world views. It comprised of 42 items whose overall Cronbach's reliability for PAQ was .79.

**Emotional STROOP Task**

The validation of Emotional STROOP task in which 100 participants of (50 sexually abused children and 50 control children) were used.

**Procedure.** Both sexually abused and controlled children were asked to complete a set of questions from Child Abuse Screening Tool (CAST-CI). After being assessed for sexual abuse both groups were given the short forms of Parental Acceptance

Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) mother and father form to complete. After completing PARQ-M and PARQ-F both groups were given the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) to complete accordingly. To avoid any fatigue effect the children were asked to relax for a while to talk or draw if they liked. The forms were then completed after a few minutes break. A group of sexually abused children and control children consisting of 50 in each group (25 girls and 25 boys) were asked to read particular words carefully chosen by the researcher which may help stimulate the sexual event. These words were assessed carefully using MRC software. Emotional STROOP task was used which consisted of 102 stimuli which were used in both groups. The words ranged from 4-6 letters pertaining four domains: violent words (e.g. hate or injury), non-violent words (e.g. kiss, hug), neutral (e.g., book or door) and sexual words (e.g. kiss and breast). The amount of time taken to read each word was recorded. The consent was taken from the NGO's where the children were living.

## Results

The table indicates a high mean (14.24, 17.82, 13.46, 13.48, 13.32, 16.38, 12.62) scores of abused children on Hostility/Aggression, Dependency, Negative self-esteem, Negative self-adequacy, Emotional unresponsiveness, Emotional instability and Negative worldview respectively as compared to non-abused children, respectively. Therefore, indicating that abused children are more psychologically disturbed. In addition, mean scores indicate that abused children were higher on Dependency and Emotional instability. The table also indicates that abused children were significantly higher on Hostility/Aggression  $t(98) = 4.75, p < .01$ , Dependency  $t(98) = 1.98, p < .01$ , Negative self-esteem  $t(98) = 3.47, p < .01$ , Negative self-adequacy  $t(98) = 6.55, p < .01$ , Emotional unresponsiveness  $t(98) = 3.70, p < .01$ , Emotional instability  $t(98) = 2.40, p < .01$  and Negative worldview  $t(98) = 6.85, p < .01$  as compared to non-abused children. Thus, child sexual abuse is a significant contributor toward psychological disturbances.

Table 2

*t*-test of Abused ( $n = 50$ ) and Control Group ( $n = 50$ ) for their Scores on Subscales of Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ)

Scale	Abused		Control		$t(98)$	$p$	95% CI		$d$	Cohen's
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			$LL$	$UL$		
Hostility/Aggression	14.24	4.63	10.44	3.24	4.75	.00	5.38	2.21	0.95	
Dependency	17.82	3.45	16.58	2.77	1.98	.05	2.48	.00	0.40	
Negative self-esteem	13.46	2.95	11.64	2.22	3.47	.00	2.85	.78	0.70	
Negative self-adequacy	13.48	3.44	9.36	2.80	6.55	.00	5.36	2.87	1.32	
Emotional Unresponsiveness	13.32	3.72	10.82	2.98	3.70	.00	3.84	1.16	0.74	
Emotional Instability	16.38	4.52	14.50	3.17	2.40	.01	3.43	.32	0.48	
Negative Worldview	12.62	3.81	8.08	2.70	6.85	.00	5.85	3.22	1.38	
Total	101.32	16.55	81.42	12.15	6.85	.00	25.66	14.13	1.38	

Note.  $N = 98$ . CI = confidence interval;  $LL$  = lower limit;  $UL$  = upper limit.

Table 3

Comparison between Abused Group (n = 50) and Control Group (n = 50) for Parental Rejection on Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) for both mother and father form

Group	M	SD	t(98)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d	
					LL	UL		
Mother Rejection								
Abused	1.32	.47						
Control	1.10	.30	2.77*	.00	.37	.06	0.55	
Father Rejection								
Abused	1.40	.49						
Control	1.06	.24	4.37*	.00	.49	.18	0.88	

\*p < .05.

Results indicate that abused group scores on parental rejection for both mother and father form are significantly higher than control group. Abused group scored higher on mother rejection  $M = 1.32(.47)$ ,  $t = 2.77$  than control group  $M = 1.10(.30)$ ,  $t = 2.77$ . In addition, abused group also showed higher scores on

father rejection  $M = 1.40(.49)$ ,  $t = 4.37$  than control group. In contrast to both mother and father form abused group showed higher scores on father form; indicating higher father rejection. Therefore, indicating that sexually abused children, in comparison to non-abused children, perceive their parents as rejecting.

Table 4

Cross tabulation of Gender and Type of Abuse of Abused Group (n = 50)

Gender	Type of Abuse			$\chi^2$
	Incest	Gang rape	Other	
Boys	1	1	23	.01*
Girls	9	0	16	

\*p < .05.

There was a significant association between gender and type of abuse  $\chi^2 (1) = 8.65$ ,  $p < .05$ . This seems to represent that more girls in comparison to boys are victims of incest. In contrast, boys usually

happen to be victims of gang rape. The results also indicate that more boys and girls are victims of abuse by others; boys being higher victims than girls.

Table 5

Between-Within ANOVA of Reaction Time on Emotional Violent, Emotional Non-Violent, Neutral and Sexual Words of Abused Group (n = 50) and Control Group (n = 50)

Sources of Variance	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between subjects					
Group	42.35	1	42.35	498.13***	.000
Group × EM × NM × SE	385.46	1	385.46	54.73***	.000
Within-group error	61.13	79	.77		
Within subjects					
EM × NM × S	114.07	1.24	91.43	56.95***	.000
Group × EM × NM × S	111.77	1.24	89.58	55.80***	.000
S within-group error	158.24	98.56	1.60		

Note. S = Subject, EM = Emotional Material, NM = Neutral Material, SE = Sexual. \*\*\*p < .000.

The assumptions of Mauchly's sphericity was violated ( $\chi^2 = 224.72$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p < .000$ ) therefore, Epsilon was considered in which Huynh Feldt was used (Field, 2005). The results indicate that all groups

significantly differ on color naming of emotional material (violent and non-violent words), neutral material and sexual material  $F (1, 79) = 498.13$ ,  $p < .000$ . The interaction between the groups with all three

types of stimulus material including emotional, neutral and sexual is highly significant  $F(1, 98) = 54.73, p < .001$ . Within subject effect shows a highly significant difference on all three stimulus materials  $F(1.24, 98.56) = 56.95, p < .000$  and a highly significant

interaction of groups with all three stimulus material  $F(1.24, 98.56), p < .000$ . This indicates that child abuse trauma is a main effect on performance of Emotional STROOP task.

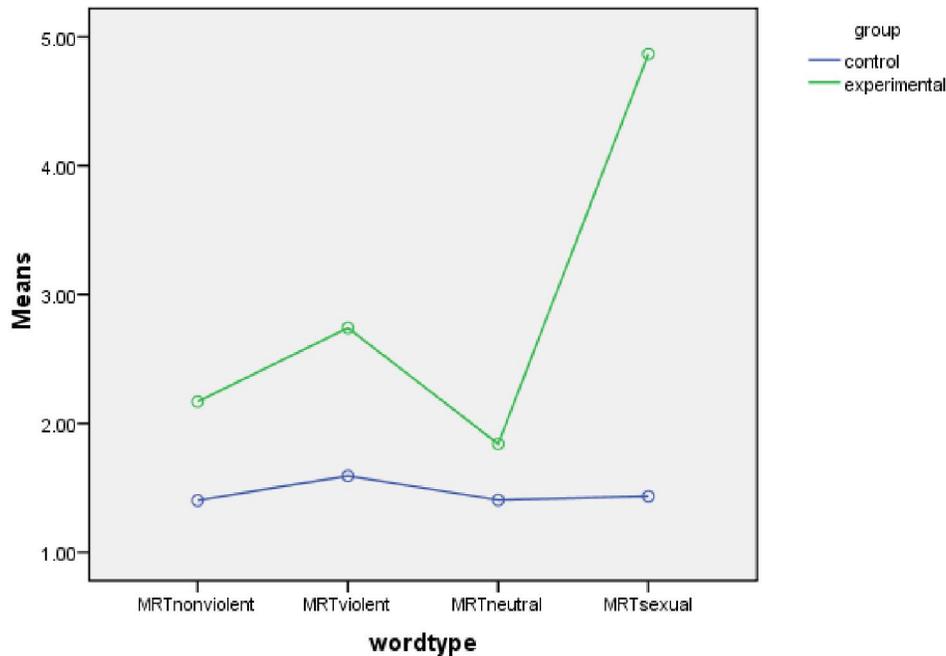


Figure 1. Reaction Time on Emotional Violent, Emotional Non-Violent, Neutral and Sexual Words of Abused and Control Group

Table 6  
Logistic Regression Analysis on Mother’s Occupation Showing Predictors of Child Abuse (N = 100)

Variable	Wald	df	p	Ex (β) OR	95% CI	
					LL	UL
SI	4.65	1	.03	2.86	1.10	7.44
Constant	31.95	1	.000	9.32		

Note. SI= STROOP Index.  $R^2 = .11$  (Cox & Snell),  $.20$  (Nagelkerke). Model  $\chi^2 = 10.15$ .  $**p < .001$ .

The results indicate that STROOP Index is a strong predictor of Child Abuse  $\chi^2 = 10.15, df = 1, p < .03, OR = 2.86, CI (1.10, 7.44)$ . Thus, showing that

mother’s occupation is a strong predictor in how a child performs on the Emotional STROOP task.

Table 7  
Linear Regression Analysis Showing Reaction Time as a Predictor of Child Sexual Abuse (N = 100)

Variable	Child Sexual Abuse		
	B	95% CI	
		LL	UL
Constant		1.35	1.57
Reaction Time	-.26	-.16	-.01
$R^2$	.07		
F	5.99		
$\Delta R^2$	.05		

Note. CI = confidence interval.

The model is overall significant indicating that reaction time is a significant predictor of child sexual abuse on Emotional STROOP task ( $F = 5.99, p < .05$ ). Sexually abused children take more time to respond to

words on Emotional STROOP task than non-abused children ( $t = -2.44$ ). Thus, indicating that sexually abused children's reaction time on Emotional STROOP task was 7%.

Table 8

*Linear Regression Analysis Showing Psychological Adjustment as a Predictor for Child Sexual Abuse (N = 100)*

Variable	Child Sexual Abuse		
	B	95% CI	
		LL	UL
Constant		86.33	94.20
Psychological adjustment	-.34	-7.07	-1.78
$R^2$	.12		
$F$	11.07		
$\Delta R^2$	.11		

Note. CI = confidence interval.

The model is overall significant indicating that psychological adjustment is a significant predictor of child sexual abuse on Emotional STROOP task ( $F = 11.07, p < .001$ ). Sexually abused children take more time to respond to words on Emotional STROOP task than non-abused children ( $t = -3.23$ ). Thus, indicating that psychological adjustment of sexually abused children's on Emotional STROOP task was 12%.

## Discussion

A child sexually abused by a family member or a stranger either way leaves a child traumatized for life. How a child reacts to that trauma is only seen and understood under certain circumstances. According to the STROOP theory certain cognitive interferences cause differences in the performance level. The present study findings support the theory that the reaction time of sexually abused children is longer than those non-abused (Williams et. al., 1996. The stimulus presented to the child may trigger the event and the child may take longer to respond. This cognitive interference is then due to the trauma related incident which occurred in their lives. The aim of the task is not to highlight the event but to see how it interferes in their performance of visual tasks and how easily their cognitions respond to the stimulus. Many studies believe that either a child purposely tries to repress his/her memory regarding the trauma or they are actually struck by the stimulus and therefore, take longer to respond. However, the present study supports the findings of STROOP that cognitive interferences are definitely playing a role in the way one performs on the task and out of the cognitive interference sexual abuse is one such trauma that interferes between the ways a sexually abused child performs on the task.

The way a child perceives him/herself is very essential to their self-concept. What we feel about ourselves has a huge impact on what we

do. According to the results of the present study psychological adjustment is a strong predictor in the performance of Emotional STROOP task. This can be related to a study conducted by Smith et al. (2001) which proposed that children who have undergone traumatic events in their lives are low on psychological adjustment. Sexual trauma is one event which significantly affects the way one feels and often represses the memory. Emotional STROOP task is a visual technique which sets out to narrow down that specific cognitive interference: in this case sexual abuse.

Mother's role in life is essential in the development of a child. The child looks up to his/her mother for trust, nurturance, love and protection. The present study's findings indicate that Emotional STROOP task performance predictor of sexually abused children is their mother's occupation. However, the study also shows that mother's occupation has no impact on child sexual abuse i.e. if a mother is working the likelihood of a child being abused increases. But results of Emotional STROOP task show that whether a child's mother is working or not their performance is affected. The reason for this may be that most of the samples mothers were non-working therefore, indicating household chores kept mother's busy and attention divided due to which the child was left deprived. Also within the family mother's feel safe that if they are unable to attend the child others will take care of them unknowing the fact that abuse occurs within and outside the family. This can be supported by the Family Dysfunction theory which proposes that a family works as a safe haven for the child and stressors like marital discord, poverty and divorce give rise to abuse. In the present study it was seen that almost all the sexually abused children were suffering from poverty (according to the authority figures at NGO).

According to the results of the main study abused children scored high on Child Abuse Screening Tool (CAST-I) in comparison to the control group. Abused children were especially high on sexual subscale indicating that trauma was severe. It was also seen that family system has an impact on whether the child is vulnerable to sexual abuse or not. According to the results it was seen that children living in nuclear family systems were at a greater risk than those living in extended or other type of family systems. However, this difference was not significant but did show a difference. The reason for this finding can be supported by a study conducted by Bano (2013) who reported that girls are more likely to be sexually abused within the family while boys are generally abused by others outside the family. This research however, only supports one gender but can also be applied to boys because boys are also victims of incest. The possibility could be that boys are less likely to report their incest because of masculinity, consider it a part of their sexual orientation and because they feel the incident is not worth talking about (Sahil, 2013).

Sexually abused children are abused for many reasons some including the socioeconomic status they belong to or which area they reside in. According to findings in the main study mother's occupation does not play a role in whether a child will be vulnerable to sexual abuse. This finding can be supported with a study conducted by Finkelhor in 1990 who reported that lack of sex education is a significant predictor of sexual abuse. And as can be seen children in Pakistani society are not given any sexual education due to which they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse. The role of a mother is very significant in the development of the child and because a mother has never obtained her sexual education believes that it isn't necessary to provide. Therefore, indicating whether a mother is working or non-working she does not provide sexual education.

A child's occupation is likely to increase the rate of sexual abuse among children however, according to the findings of this study working and non-working children are more or less at a similar level of vulnerability to sexual abuse. The reason for this finding can be related to the fact that the most sensitive population vulnerable to sexual abuse is children because they are ambivalent (Kinnear, 2007). The findings of the study report that children residing in large families are likely to be more vulnerable to sexual abuse than those living in small families. The difference was not different however, this can be understood under the paradigm of dysfunctional family theory. The theory postulates that conflict within the family members increases the rate of sexual abuse. And when a family comprises of many members the

possibility of sexual abuse increases especially since incest is very high in children (especially girls).

Psychological adjustment is very essential to a happy and healthy life. Children who are sexually abused not only feel shattered but helpless and lost as to what occurred with them. According to the findings of this study abused children scored low on psychological adjustment (i.e. high on hostility/aggression, dependency, negative worldview and emotional instability) in comparison to non-abused children. This can be related to a study conducted by Smith et. al. in 2001 to see the effects of war trauma on children. The results indicated that war is a traumatic life event in a child's life which can be related to our findings of the study because sexual abuse is a traumatic event after which a child's whole life is changed drastically. Also children who have been sexually abused not only have psychological adjustment problems but also perceive their parents as rejecting.

The study's findings support PAR-Theory that children low on psychological adjustment (i.e. who are insecure and view the world as negative) view their parents as rejecting (Khaleque & Rohner, 2005). The findings of the study also indicate that one parent influences more on the child than both parents. The study indicates that sexually abused children reported father rejection which can be supported by PAR-Theory. And no mother rejection because more acceptance was reported also supporting PAR-Theory. According to PAR-Theory children perceive both parents separately and one parent always happens to influence more than the other and often father rejection is reported (Khaleque & Rohner, 2005). The reason for this may be because a mother's role in a Pakistani society is perceived as more nurturing and caring. A child is considered safe in a mother's presence while father is perceived as a breadwinner whose main role is to financially support the family. Therefore, a child perceives the father figure as more powerful than nurturing.

According to the present study girls scored high on parental rejection (both mother and father form) indicating that sexually abused girls perceive their parents as more rejecting than accepting than boys. This finding supports PAR-Theory which proposes that children who perceive their parents as more rejecting than accepting view the world negatively and are less emotionally and psychologically adjusted. The gender difference between parental rejection however, was not supported by the theory or the present study. It was shown by the present study's findings that sexually abused girls are less emotionally and psychologically adjusted than boys.

Gender plays an important role in the way a sexually abused child perceives themselves. According to the findings of this study sexually abused girls report less psychological and emotional adjustment than sexually abused boys. This can be related to the cultural differences placed on gender in a Pakistani society. A girl sexually abused in a Pakistani society is a stigma for life. The girl has to live with the guilt she was not responsible for and is shamed by the society. And because mostly girls happen to be victims of incest, as the findings of the study, they are forced to keep quiet because of defame of the family name (Bano, 2013). The finding of the study show that sexually abused girls report more physical and sexual abuse than boys while boys report more psychological abuse. The reason for this difference is cultural because boys suffer more psychological abuse. Boys who are sexually abused are less likely to report their abuse because of guilt and therefore, suffer psychologically (Sahil, 2013). Also, boys are likely to defend themselves physically because they are generally stronger than girls (i.e. weight and height) therefore, do not report more physical abuse. Another reason why boys may not report more physical abuse may be because of gender stereotypes. Boys are supposed to be strong and powerful and fight for their right only girls are considered weak. However, girls are weak and seen as sex symbols who are easily physically and sexually manipulated (Bano, 2013).

Child sexual abuse is a traumatic event which occurs differently in both genders. Both genders may become victims of child sexual abuse but their forms may vary. According to the findings of the study girls are more likely to become victims of incest (father, step-father, paternal uncle) while boys are more likely to become victims of gang-rape (Bano, 2013). According to APA girls are more likely to become victims of incest because they are easily approached in the household, easily manipulated, the daughter abides to her father because she feels the obligation to be obedient to her authority figure. Also, girls are more likely to become victims of incest because it can easily be prolonged and hidden. A girl who loses her virginity to her father or paternal uncle in a Pakistani society is shamed not only in society but by her family as well. The truth is hard to accept and the solution is sort out by keeping silent. The daughter is threatened by the family to keep quiet and do as she is told. The girl who grew up to respect her father and trust is then forced to become helpless and remain in a disgraced relationship. As for boys they are more likely to become victims of gang rape because unlike girls boys become rebellious. Boys cannot be kept silent by mothers or fathers or else they would run away and tell everyone. And the reason to why boys become victims of gang rape is because they live in a more mobile environment than girls do.

Most of the low classes of a Pakistani society reside in colonies or slum areas. As boys move around they are easily shifted from one place to another increasing the possibility of being attracted by many spectators at once.

## References

- [1]. American Humane Association. (2013). *Child Sexual Abuse*. Retrieved from [www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/child-sexual-abuse.html](http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/child-sexual-abuse.html)
- [2]. American Psychological Association. (2013). *Child Sexual Abuse*. Retrieved from [www.apa.org/topics/sexual-abuse/](http://www.apa.org/topics/sexual-abuse/)
- [3]. Bano, M. (2013, March). Age of Victims. *Cruel Numbers 2013: A compilation of statistics on child sexual abuse of reported cases in Pakistan*, 13-15.
- [4]. Berti, Stefano (2003). *Rights of the Child in Pakistant* (Research Report No. 34). Retrieved from [www.refworld.org/pdfid/46c190b40.pdf](http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/46c190b40.pdf)
- [5]. Common Wealth Legal Institute. (2000). *Addition of the offence of Molestation to the Pakistan Penal Code 1980* (Report 42). Retrieved from <http://www.commonlii.org/pk/other/PKLJC/reports/42.html>
- [6]. Cournoyer, D. E., Sethi, R., & Cordero, A. (2005). Perceptions of Parental Acceptance-Rejection and Self-Concepts among Ukrainian University Students. *Ethos*, 33(3), 335-346.
- [7]. Dwairy, Marwin. (2010). Parental Inconsistency: A Third Cross-Cultural Research on Parenting and Psychological Adjustment of Children. *Journal of Child Family Studies*, 19, 23-29. doi:10.1007/s10826-009-9339-x.
- [8]. Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G., Lewis, I., and Smith, C. (1990). Sexual abuse in a national survey of adult men and women: Prevalence, characteristics, and risk factors [Abstract]. *Child abuse & neglect*, 14(1), 19-28.
- [9]. Foa, E.B., Feske, U., Murdock, T.B., Kozak, M.J., & McCarthy, P.R. (1991). Processing of threat related information in rape victims. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 10, 156-162.
- [10]. Kinnear, K.L. (2007). *Childhood Sexual Abuse*. California: ABC-CLIO, Inc.
- [11]. Kim, S.I., and Rohner, R.P. (2003). Perceived parental acceptance-rejection and empathy among university students in Korea. *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 34, 723-735.
- [12]. Lila, M., Garcia, F., & Gracia, E. (2007). Perceived Paternal and Maternal Acceptance and Children's Outcomes in Colombia. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 35, 115-124.

- [13]. Malik, F. (2010). Determinants of Child Abuse in Pakistani Families: Parental Acceptance-Rejection and Demographic Variables. *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 1(1).
- [14]. Malik, F., Gul, A., & Humphreys, G. (2011). Cognitive Interference for Trauma Related Word Cues in Maltreated Children: Evidence from the "Emotional Stroop Task" in a Pakistani Cohort. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 2(8).
- [15]. National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). (2009). *Child Protection Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/studentambassadors/assets/documents/NSPCCDefinitionsandsignsofchildabuse.pdf>
- [16]. NGO Coalition on Child Rights. (N.A). Community Perceptions of Male Child Sexual Abuse in the North Western Frontier Provinces, Pakistan. UNICEF.
- [17]. Nordqvist, C. (2012, February 10). "What Is Child Abuse? What Is Child Neglect?"  
a. *Medical News Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/241532>
- [18]. Putnik, et.al., (2012). Agreement in Mother and Father Acceptance-Rejection, Warmth, and Hostility/Rejection/ Neglect of Children across Nine Countries [Abstract]. *Journal of Cross Cultural Research*, 46(3), 191-223.
- [19]. Rohner, R.P., Khaleque, A., & Cournoyer, D.G. (2004). Cross-National Perspectives on Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory. In Peterson, G.W, Steinmetz, S.K., & Wilson, S.M, *Parent-Youth Relations: Cultural and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 79-86). New York: Haworth Press.
- [20]. Rohner, R. P., Khaleque, A., Riaz, M. N., Khan, U., Sadeque, S., & Laukkala, H. (2005). Agreement between Children's and Mothers' Perceptions of Maternal Acceptance and Rejection: A Comparative Study in Finland and Pakistan. *Ethos*, 33(3), 367-377.
- [21]. Sahil. (2013). *Stop Child Abuse: A compilation of statistics on child sexual abuse of reported cases in Pakistan*. Islamabad: Pakistan.
- [22]. Smith, P., Perrin, S., Yule, W., & Rabe-Hesketh, S. (2001). War exposure and maternal reactions in the psychological adjustment of children from Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 42(03), 395-404.
- [23]. Williams, J.M.G., Matthews, A., and MacLeod, C. (1996). The emotional Stroop task and psychopathology. *Psychological Bulletin*, 120, 3-24.
- [24]. World Health Organization. (2002). *The world health report 2002: Reducing risks, promoting healthy life*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.
- [25]. Vural, P., Hafizoglu, S., Turkmen, N., Eren, B., & Buyukuysal, C. (2012). Perceived parental acceptance/rejection and psychopathology in a group of sexually abused children/adolescents. *Medicinski Glasnik*, 9(2).

2/5/2022