

## Mental Health of University Students: The Mediating Role of Critical Parenting and Irrational Romantic Beliefs

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### Abstract

The present study was designed to study the role of critical parenting in the development of irrational romantic beliefs and its impact on the mental health of the university students. A sample of 1298 university students, 593 males and 705 females was collected through stratified random sampling from public and private universities of Lahore. Irrational Romantic Belief Scale (Majeed, Ijaz, Naz, & Tariq, 2018), Critical Parenting Inventory (Randolph & Dykman, 1996) and Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983) were used for measuring romantic irrationality, perception of critical parenting and mental health of the university students. Findings revealed that the critical parenting both from father and mother predicted increased psychological distress and compromised psychological well-being among university students. Moreover, overdependence by mother mediated psychological distress positively while awfulizing mediated it negatively both for father and mother. The current findings uniquely contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the role of parenting practices in cultivating the romantic irrationality and mental health problems in Pakistani Youth.

**Key words:** Irrational Romantic Beliefs, Critical Parenting, Mental Health, University Students

Mental health of university students has been an area of interest for the researchers since long ago. The primary reason for this appears to be the highly vulnerable age (16-25) for the development of psychological disorders (Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, Merikangas, & Walters, 2005). The prevalence of mental health among university students is reportedly high. There is an ample research evidence suggesting the increase in the mental health problems among university students (Gallagher, 2010; Storrie, Ahern, & Tuckett, 2010; Erskine, Moffitt, Copeland, Costello, Ferrari, Patton, Degenhard, Vos, Whiteford, & Scott, 2014). Among many other causes, problems in romantic relationships are one of the increasing causes of referrals at university counseling centers (Creasy, Kershaw & Boston, 1999; Ayduk et al., 2001; Davila et al., 2004; Aluede, Imhonde & Eguvoen, 2006; Erkan, Cihangir-Cankaya, Terzi, & Ozbay, 2011).

Since romantic relationships are very important and have a significant impact on multiple life domains, it is important to understand how an individual thinks about them. The way romantic relationships are processed cognitively very much depicts their course of development over the time. In this regard, beliefs about romantic relationships seem the area to be explored in order to understand the perception of romantic relationships. According to Ellis (1993, 2003), irrational beliefs are defined as lacking in logic, are excessively exaggerated, and are far away from reality while rational beliefs are reflective of one's flexible and functional thinking pattern and empower a relationship with peace and happiness.

Irrational beliefs about romantic relations are very important in defining the nature of the relationship they cannot only produce psychiatric symptoms like depression but also may negatively affect one's sociability and optimism in young adults (Cash, 1984). Dysfunctional thinking pattern about a relationship can seriously harm the quality of the relationship by giving rise to problems and sufferings (Epstein, Baucom & Rankin, 1993).

Irrational romantic beliefs have been defined as lacking in logic, rigid and unrealistic (Ellis, 2003). For example, Epstein and Eidelson, (1981) described irrational romantic beliefs as "mind reading", perceiving "disagreement as destructive", and "change in the partner is unexpected". Similarly, Baucom, Epstein, Sayers and Sher (1989) have discussed the core themes of irrational romantic beliefs as making assumptions and negative attributions. Irrational beliefs have been found to create distress and dissatisfaction in ongoing romantic relationships (Moller, Rabe & Nortje, 2001; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Demirtas-Zorbaz, Ulas, Kepir-Savoly, 2015). In addition to this relationship dissatisfaction, irrational romantic beliefs are found to predict various psychiatric symptoms and disorders (Jones, 1968; McDermut, Haaga, & Bilek, 1997; Macavei, 2005; Küçük, Gür, Sener, Boyacıoğlu, & Cetindağ, 2016).

Now the question arises how does romantic irrationality develops? Among many other causes of the development of irrational romantic beliefs, critical parenting appears to be an important contributing factor. Parenting is a context provided to a child for the development (Bowlby, 1980; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). An individual is always heavily influenced by the family he is raised in. A family has its own culture, norms, traditions and values that surely affect the development of a child right from the beginning (Can, 2006 as cited in Sardoğan, 2014). According to Hazan and Shaver (1987) romantic love is a progression of attachment and is identical to the process one goes through in infancy while establishing a relationship with parents. Early experiences with family, parents and friends lay a foundation for future romantic relationships. In context of early pattern of interaction with parents, romantic experiences have been found to follow a developmental course (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003; Truant et al, 1987; Rader, 2003; Hall, 2006). The quality of parent child relationships has been found to predict the future romantic relationships of adolescents (Ellis, 1986, 1993; Collins, Cooper, Albino & Allard, 2002; Conger, Cui, Bryant, Elder, 2000; Steinberg & Davila, 2008; Einav, 2014). Baumrind (1975) has classified parenting into three basic styles and has discussed the impact of each style on the development of the child. These styles are permissive, authoritarian and democratic. Research has proved the supremacy of democratic parenting styles over the permissive and authoritarian style (Steinberg et al, 1994; Monica Konnie & Alfred, 2013).

Authoritarian and permissive parenting style can harbor a suitable environment for the development of dysfunctional beliefs in adolescents (Glasgow, et al, 1997). Similarly, childrearing practices have been found to be significantly related to the development of irrational beliefs in children (Siavoshi, et al, 2011). Authoritative /democratic indulgent styles of parenting has been proved to be positively related to the psychological adjustment of adolescents as compared to that of authoritarian and neglecting parenting style (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Gracia, Gracia, & Spain, 2006 ; Monica Konnie & Alfred, 2013).

Inconsistent with the original theory of parenting styles, different findings have emerged regarding parental practices across the cultures. For example, in China, authoritarian parenting was found to positively promote academic achievement as compared to authoritarian parent that had no effect on achievement (Leung, Lau & Lam, 1998). Similarly, Dwairy and Menshar (2006) have reported that authoritative parenting is closely related to better mental health of adolescents. However, authoritarian parenting did not predict poor mental health, the probable reason for this finding could be (as suggested by the authors) the authoritarian culture where the study was conducted which was Egypt. Whereas in Eastern cultures, authoritarian parenting is viewed as normal, therefore it does not create noticeable distress in children (Akinsola, 2013; Pinquart, & Kauser, 2018)

In the light of the cited literature, the role of parenting practices appears to be one of the important factors for cultivating romantic irrationality and also seems responsible for poor mental health in young adults. Therefore, this study is aimed at exploring the impact of critical parenting and irrational romantic beliefs on mental health of university students.

1. To study the role of critical parenting practices in predicting irrational romantic beliefs and mental health among university students.
2. To study the mediating role of irrational romantic beliefs between critical parenting and mental health of the university students.

### Hypotheses

1. Critical parenting (father & mother) and irrational romantic beliefs will positively predict psychological distress.
2. Critical parenting (father & mother) and irrational romantic beliefs will negatively predict psychological well-being.
3. Irrational romantic beliefs will mediate between critical parenting (both father& mother) and psychological distress and well-being.

### Method

The present study explored the relationship among romantic irrational beliefs, critical parenting and mental health of university students. Research design employed was correlational research design.

### Participants

The sample consisted of 1298 university students including 593 men and 705 women. The age range of the sample was 19-22 years ( $M=19.89$ ,  $SD= 1.77$ ). All the participants were Pakistani national and Muslims. The participants were from government and private universities of Lahore to get a representative sample of students (I-IV years). Stratified random sampling was used to collect data from six main universities of

Lahore. Two strata based on the sector of the study i.e. public and private and gender i.e. male and female were made to draw the sample. This data was collected in the year 2018.

**Inclusion criteria.** Students enrolled in a B.A/ B.S/ M.A/M.Sc program (I-IV years) of university were included in the sample.

**Exclusion criteria.** Students with physical disabilities were excluded from the sample. **Demographic Profile of the Sample.** Females were comparatively more in number (54%) as compared to male students (46%). Number of students from preliminary years was slightly greater (61%) as compared to final years (39%). Most of the sample was from private sector (54%) as compared to public sector (47%). Majority of the sample was from intact family structure, i.e. parents were married (83%) while very few belonged to disrupted family structure (divorced, separated and widow) (10%). Only a small percentage of students were currently in a relationship (29%), majority was not committed (51%) and very few reported to have a broken relationship (8%). Majority of the students reportedly did not have a past relationship (64%) in comparison to a small percentage reportedly having a past relationship (25%).

### Instruments

Following instruments were used during this phase of the study.

**Irrational Romantic Beliefs Scale.** Irrational Romantic Belief Scale (IRBS) is an indigenously developed scale for university students (Majeed, Ijaz, Naz, & Tariq, 2018). It measures the extent to which an individual has irrationality in romantic beliefs. It is a 40 items scale with a four point Likert scale ranging from “not at all” to “always”, with three subscales overdependence, over demandingness, and awfulizing. IRBS constituted of items like, “Beloved should be center of attention”, “All the happinesses and sorrows of one’s life are dependent on his/her beloved”, “beloved should be perfect” and “Failure in love is failure of life”. This scale has got impressive psychometric properties with a chronbach alpha of .92, split half and a spearman brown of .84. The concurrent validity of the scale with Romantic Relationship Belief Inventory (Kalkan, 2006) is  $r=.49$ .

**Critical Parenting Inventory.** Critical Parenting Inventory developed by Randolph and Dykman (1996) is a self-report measure. Consisting of 25 items (12 critical and 13 non critical) items with a 6 point Likert rating scale. The scale includes items like “you will never be able to do it”, “This is stupid”, “there is no harm in making mistakes”, and “it was not your fault”. The scale has got separate versions for father and mother. The scale has impressive psychometric properties with Cronbach alpha co efficient of 0.93 for father and 0.92 for mother form and total test retest reliability of 0.78. Urdu version the scale (Mumtaz & Ijaz, 2016) was used in the present study. Chronbach alpha for the current sample was .85 for father’s version and .84 for mother’s version.

**Mental Health Inventory.** This scale is developed by Veit and Ware in 1983. It is used to measure the mental health of the university students. This scale has 38 items with six point rating scale, with each item measuring the intensity or frequency of the given item in the last one month. The inventory provides us with a total mental health index and also gives a subdivision of scores on two global subscales i.e. psychological distress and psychological well-being. It includes items like “in the last one month to what extent have you felt sadness”, “ in the last one month how often you felt stressed”, and “in the last month how often you felt relaxed and satisfied”. The scale has good

psychometric properties with a Chronbach alpha for psychological distress .94 and for well-being scale .92. Furthermore test-retest for psychological distress was reported to be ( $r=.71$ ), for well-being ( $r=.69$ ) and for total mental health index ( $r=.73$ ). Urdu version of Mental Health Inventory (Bashir & Naz, 2003) was used in the present study. Chronbach alpha for the current sample was .74.

**Demographic form.** This form includes variables of age, gender, parents (alive/ late), education of parents, year of education, sector, family type and history of romantic relationships. These demographic variables were selected on the basis of literature review.

### Procedure

After taking the informed consent from the students, they were provided with research protocol including demographic form, romantic relationships belief inventory, measures of mental health, critical parenting and indigenous scale for romantic irrational beliefs. The scales were administered in the group form on each stratum. Written and verbal instructions were provided at the time of administration of the questionnaires. After administration all the queries were duly answered and students were debriefed

**Table 1**

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Critical Parenting and Irrational Romantic Beliefs Predicting Psychological Distress among University Students (N=1298)*

Variables	Psychological Distress			$\beta$	95% CI
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		
Constant	63.01	51.20	41.88		
Age	.11	-.07	-.06	-.00	(-.55, .42)
Gender	2.42**	3.523***	2.74**	.08	(.90, 4.57)
Family structure	3.06**	1.45	1.38	.02	(-1.52, 4.28)
Current relationship status	3.22***	3.19***	3.68***	.12	(2.16, 5.19)
Past relationships	-2.29**	-.07	-.07	-.00	(-2.17, 2.01)
CP Father		.23***	.23***	.17	(.13, .32)
CP Mother		.19***	.20***	.15	(.11, .29)
Overdependence			.23**	.13	(.08, .38)
Over demandingness			.12**	.07	(-.02, .28)
Awfulizing			-.18**	-.08	(-.35, -.01)
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.10	.12		
F	6.32***	20.4***	17.6***		
$\Delta R^2$	.02	.07	.02		
$\Delta F$	6.32	54.22	10.16		

Note. N=1298. CI=Confidence Interval, \*\*\* $p<.001$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , CPM=Critical Parenting (Mother Form), CP=Critical Parenting (Father Form)

**Table 1**

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Critical Parenting and Irrational Romantic Beliefs Predicting Psychological Distress among University Students (N=1298)*

Hierarchical regression was used to test the various predictors of psychological distress. It was used to see to what extent particular independent variables and their covariates predict variance in psychological distress. Three models were derived from the analysis. In the first model demographic variables predicts psychological distress and contributes 2% of

variance in it which means change of one unit in demographic variables causes variance of 2% in psychological distress [ $R^2=.02$ ,  $F(5, 1292)=6.32$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. In the second model, 10% of variance is seen in psychological distress caused by critical parenting both from father and mother [ $R^2=.10$ ,  $F(2, 1290)=20.38$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. In the third model by the addition of irrational romantic beliefs, this variance in psychological distress increases to 12% [ $R^2=.12$ ,  $F(3, 1287)=17.62$ ,  $p<.001$ ] but awfulizing appeared to a negative predictor of psychological distress.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Critical Parenting and Irrational Romantic Beliefs Predicting Psychological Well-being among University Students (N=1298)*

Variables	Psychological Well Being				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	$\beta$	95% CI
Constant	57.89	62.28	63.33		
Age	-.07	-.00	.02	.00	(-.28,.32)
Gender	-2.59***	-3.04***	-3.17***	-.15	(-4.31, -2.03)
Family structure	-1.67*	-1.06	-.92	-.02	(-2.72, .87)
Current Relationship Status	-1.63**	-1.63**	-.170***	-.09	(-2.64, -.76)
Past relationships	.44	-.22	-.31	-.01	(-1.61, .98)
CP Father		-.12***	-.11***	-.14	(-.17, -.05)
CP Mother		-.03	-.03	-.03	(-.08, .02)
Overdependence			.02	.00	(-.06, .11)
Over demandingness			.00	.02	(-.08, .09)
Awfulizing			-.11*	-.08	(-.22, -.01)
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.05	.06		
F	7.51***	11.58***	8.76**		
$\Delta R^2$	.02	.03	.00		
$\Delta F$	.00	.00			

Note: N=1298. CI Confidence Interval, \*\*\*p<.001, \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05, CPM=Critical Parenting (Mother form), CP=Critical Parenting (father form).

**Table 2**

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Critical Parenting and Irrational Romantic Beliefs Predicting Psychological Well-being among University Students (N=1298)*

Table 2 shows the result of hierarchical regression used to test the predictors for psychological well-being. Analysis produced three models. In model 1 demographic variables like (age, gender, family structure, current relationship status and past relationships) explain psychological well-being accounting for 2% of variance [ $R^2=.02$ ,  $F(5, 1292)=7.51$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. In the second model in addition to the demographic variables, critical parenting both from father and mother explains psychological well-being by 5% of variance [ $R^2=.05$ ,  $F(2, 1290)=11.58$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. In model 3 by addition of irrational romantic beliefs this change in variance slightly increases and explains variance in psychological well-being by 6% [ $R^2=.06$ ,  $F(3, 1287)=8.76$ ,  $p<.01$ ].

#### **Mediation Analysis through Structural Equation Modeling.**

H3: Irrational romantic beliefs will mediate between critical parenting (both father & mother) and psychological distress and well-being.

Figure 1

*Empirical Results from a Complex Multivariate Model Representing Standardized Regression Coefficients (N=1298)*

The model modification process was conducted in two key steps in order to fit the tested model. In the first step covariance

was added as suggested by the modification indices. Modification indices suggested covariance between error terms of subscales of the irrational romantic beliefs scale and subscales of mental health. The subscales from each domain were similar in terms of content and context as well, moreover the covariance between error terms in survey based research can be legitimately drawn (Kenny 2012; Tomás & Oliver, 1999). The criteria of modification indices for error covariance should be at least 4.0 (Arbuckle, 2012). So only, that covariance was drawn that had a chi square value change of 4.0 or greater. While in step two, two structural paths from 1) awfulizing (subscale of irrational romantic beliefs) to wellbeing (subscale of mental health) and 2) critical parenting to over demandingness (subscale of irrational romantic beliefs) were constraint as 0. Arbuckle (2012) argued that a structural path having critical ratio value near to 0 (non-significant) can be removed or constraint as 0, in order to improve the model fit indices values. Again the indices of absolute and relative fit (GFI, CFI, NNFI, and RMSEA) were compared. The Root Mean Square Error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) for the model fit after drawing covariance was .01 and .01 respectively whereas the GFI, CFI and NNFI values were .99, 1.00, .99 respectively while  $\chi^2/df$  was 1.09. After being done with the model fit, the estimates were analyzed for direct and indirect effects for critical parenting, irrational romantic beliefs and mental health with 5000 boot strapped sample (Hayes, 2004).

**Table 3***Fit Indices for Critical Parenting, Irrational Romantic Beliefs and Mental Health(N=1298)*

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Initial model	2291.08	6	381.85	.71	.32	.32	.54	.21
Model fit	3.28	3	1.09	.99	1.00	.99	.01	.01
$\Delta\chi^2$	301.39*							

Note. N=298, All change in chi square values are computed relative to model,  $\chi^2 > .05$ , GFI= Goodness of fit index, CFI=comparative fit index, NFI =normed fit index; RMSEA=root mean square error of approximation, SRMR=Standardized root mean square,  $\Delta\chi^2$  = chi square change.

*Fit Indices for Critical Parenting, Irrational Romantic Beliefs and Mental Health (N=1298)*

The results of fit indices indicated for critical parenting, irrational romantic beliefs and mental health after controlling the effect for gender, shown in table 5. The absolute fit for presented model was  $\chi^2 (3, 1298) = 3.28$ ,  $p > .05$ . It is considered that the chi-square test of absolute model fit is sensitive to sample size and number of parameters to be estimated, in order to address these issues the investigators often turn to several fit indices to

evaluate the overall fit a model to the data. Hu and Bentler (1999) recommend  $\chi^2/df$  in between 0 and 3, RMSEA and SRMR values .08 or lesser and Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI) and Goodness of fit Index (GFI) values of .9 or higher are considered as good while  $.9 \leq .8$  is consider permissible sometimes.

**Table 4**

<i>Standardized Estimates of Direct Effects of the Paths Critical Parenting, Irrational Romantic Beliefs and Mental Health (N = 1298). Variables</i>	Over Dependence		Over Demandingness		Awfulizing		Psychological Distress		Wellbeing	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Critical Parenting Mother	.07**	0.02	0	0	0.11**	0.3	.14*	0.04	-.10**	0.04
Critical Parenting Father	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.13***	0.04	.18***	0.04	-.20***	0.04
Over Dependence	-	-	-	-	-	-	.11*	0.05	.04	0.05
Over Demandingness	-	-	-	-	-	-	.10*	0.05	-.029	0.05
Awfulizing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.11*	0.04	0	0
R <sup>2</sup>	.008		.012		.066		.100		.096	

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

*Standardized Estimates of Direct Effects of the Paths Critical Parenting, Irrational Romantic Beliefs and Mental Health (N = 1298).*

The results of direct effect showed that critical parenting of mother was found to be significant positive predictor of the subscales of irrational romantic beliefs (overdependence and

awfulizing) and psychological distress while it was found to be significant negative predictor of psychological wellbeing. Whereas critical parenting of father was found to be significant

**Table 5***Standardized Estimates of Indirect Effects through Over dependence (N=1298)*

Predictors	Psychological Distress			Wellbeing		
	$\beta$	95%CI		$\beta$	95%CI	
		LL	UL		LL	UL
Critical Parenting (Mother form)	0.007*	0.002	0.013	0.002	-0.001	0.004
Critical Parenting(Father form)	0.003	-0.001	0.011	0.001	0.00	0.003

Note. CI = Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit, \* $p < .05$ . *Standardized Estimates of Indirect Effects through Over dependence (N=1298)*

positive predictor of awfulizing and psychological distress, while it was found to be significant and negative predictor of wellbeing. Overdependence and over demandingness were

found to significant positive predictors of psychological distress. On the other hand awfulizing was found to be significant negative predictor of psychological distress.

**Table 6**  
*Standardized Estimates of Indirect Effects through Awfulizing (N=1298)*

Predictor	Psychological Distress		
	$\beta$	95%CI	
		LL	UL
Critical Parenting (Mother form)	-0.012**	-0.018	-0.004
Critical Parenting(Father form)	-0.015**	-0.027	-0.005

*Note.* CI = Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit, \*\* $p < .0$

The results of indirect effect through awfulizing showed that, it was found to be significant mediator between critical parenting (mother and father) and psychological distress. It showed that as

critical parenting (mother and father) increased, awfulizing was also increased. While increase in awfulizing turned into decrease in psychological distress.

### Discussion

Romance is an essential part of human life so are the romantic relationships. It is a dire need of almost every human being to have a true love in his/her life. Love begins at home where parents are the very first figure who provide a blue print for love and relationships. According to the type of attachment bond with parents, an individual keeps writing a script of attachment he would like to have with significant others in his future life (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). At the time of developing heterosexual relationships in late adolescence and early adulthood, those learned attachment patterns/scripts automatically come into play and determine the quality of the romantic attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins, 1996). The present study was aimed at studying the role critical parenting play in the development of irrational romantic beliefs in young adults. It was intended to explore that how critical parental communication can contribute to the development of faulty perception about the actual or ideal romantic partners and eventually how does it affect the mental health of an individual.

Critical parenting appeared to predict psychological distress positively alone as well as along with the inclusion of two categories of irrational romantic beliefs i.e. overdependence and over demandingness. These results verify the existing literary work suggesting that the critical parenting causes psychological distress alone and it gets increased when combined with the irrational romantic beliefs (Alloy et al., 2001; Meeus et al, 2007). Likewise critical parenting predicts psychological well being negatively and it gets further compromised in combination to irrational romantic beliefs (Chorpita & Barlow, 1998; Hamidi & Hosseini, 2010).

Results obtained through structural equation modeling for mediation showed that two of the subscales i.e. overdependence (for mother) and awfulizing (both father and mother) mediated between critical parenting and psychological distress while over demandingness did not show any mediating relationship. As far as the finding related to critical parenting from mother and increased overdependence is concerned, it is very explaining. Mothers are perceived as more of a sign of care and nurturance for children. As Bowlby (1969) has already put in a perspective of attachment theory, that mother is the primary care giving figure for the child and is looked upto more for security and

dependence as compared to fathers (Lamb, 2012). When mothers get critical in their parenting, children probably get more insecure and seek for a nurturing figure to depend upon. For this purpose, the best replacement for dependence seems to be the potential romantic partner. When this excessive dependence is projected on the partner the most likely result is relationship conflict and dissatisfaction that can affect mental health as well. This means that the critical parenting harbors a rich ground for the development of irrational thinking pattern in a romantic context that in turn causes relationship dissatisfaction and psychological distress. Therefore, it can be inferred that critical parenting both from father and mother predisposes an individual for the development of irrational romantic beliefs, as a result individual experiences psychological distress not only because of critical parenting but also because of presence of irrational romantic beliefs. The probable reason for these findings could be that the individual who faces attachment deprivation from parents tries to make up for this scarcity by projecting his irrational attachment demands towards the potential or actual life partner but unfortunately experience greater psychological distress. These findings appear to be consistent with what literature suggests that the critical parenting can cause the growing individual to develop irrational romantic expectations for the potential or actual life partner (Conger et al. 2000; Overbeek et al. 2007; Cui & Conger, 2008). This cannot only hamper the relationship stability but also creates psychological difficulties for the person holding them (Epstein, & Eidelson, 1981; Di Giuseppe & Zee, 1986; Ellis, 2003).

Overdependence did not mediate between father's critical parenting and psychological distress, the possible reason for this could be that in Eastern cultures children appear to have a distant relationship with fathers as compared to the mothers and on the basis of this typical role of a father, emotional bonding of fathers do not necessarily gets strong enough as mothers (George, Cummings & Davies, 2010). Therefore, on the account of less warmth attached to paternal bonding, critical parenting from father appears to play no role in cultivating romantic overdependence in offspring.

The other finding related to awfulizing inversely mediating between critical parenting and psychological distress is unusual. This means that the critical parenting neither contribute to awfulizing nor to psychological distress. Our findings suggest that critical parenting practices play a facilitating role in

lowering down romantic awfulizing yet decreasing the psychological distress related to romantic relationships. The probable reason for this finding lies in the explanation of cultural differences in the parenting styles and practices. It has been established through literature that there is a difference in parenting styles and their impact on children across the cultures. Parents from Western cultures have different parenting styles and practices as compared to the Eastern parents (Stewart & Bond, 2002) and authoritative parenting is not the only effective parenting style to warrant the child's mental health (Baumrind, 1972; Chao, 2001). There has been research evidence claiming authoritarian parenting to be a predictor of better parent-child relationship, high self-esteem, and better academic outcomes in non-white cultures (Steinberg et al., 1994; Quoss & Zhao, 1995; Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998; McBride-Chang & Chang 1998; Dwairy, Achoui, Abouserie, & Farah, 2006). Therefore, findings of was carried out on a sample that included both committed and non-committed students. Future researches can address this limitation by only taking the sample of students who are either committed or had a break up. By doing so, a clearer picture of association between irrational beliefs and psychological distress can be established.

Overall, we have a mixed pattern about the role that critical parenting plays in cultivating irrational romantic beliefs and psychological distress. For overdependence critical parenting mediates positively while for awfulizing it mediates negatively. These findings reflect the indigenous flavor of critical parenting practices and their outcome in Pakistani culture.

### Limitations & Future Directions

This study was an attempt to study irrational romantic beliefs in the context of critical parenting and their impact on the mental health of young university students. Despite the best efforts to ensure the best prospect of study it has some limitations attached to it. For example the sample of the study was only limited to bachelor's and master's students, it could have included under as well as post graduate students for a better comparison among the groups. The data was collected only from Lahore; generalizability of results could be further improved if data were collected from other cities as well. Further, a comparison of rural and urban areas could also result in some meaningful comparisons. Since this study only targeted university students, the generalizability of results is only limited to the university population. A comparison with married couples can further enable researchers to understand the phenomenon in a better way. Finally, the sample of the current study included majority of students who were not romantically committed in a relationship, therefore a true picture of association among the variables could not be derived. It is suggested that future studies should be conducted with students who are either committed in a relationship or had a break up.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that critical parenting plays a vital role in having irrational romantic expectations and is vitally linked to the quality of mental health of the university students. This study uniquely contributes to the Asian perspective on the association of critical parenting with mental health of university students.

the current research confirm to the existing ideologies of differences in parenting styles and practices across cultures. As far as relationship between awfulizing and psychological distress is concerned, there have been instances reported in the research where irrational beliefs including awfulizing failed to predict psychological distress (Chang & Bridewell, 1998).

The other possible reason for these findings could be the same as explained earlier that the majority of the sample was not committed romantically 51% as compared to 29% of committed and 8% of broken relationship students. Since the majority did not experience the romantic relationships and their responses were only based on perception about these relationships, therefore they did not experience awfulizing and eventually did not experience the psychological distress. This finding points out a limitation of current study that it

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Received: Oct 2, 2020

Revisions received: March 23, 2021