

Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)**Understanding Risk and Protective Factors of Generation Z's Relationship with Extended Family in Pakistan**Aisha Tahir¹, Ajwa Anwar¹, Khadija Faisal Sheikh¹, Mariya Raza Noorani¹, Nabiha Fahim¹

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Abstract: In the sociocultural context of Pakistan, the relationship of Generation Z (born in 1997-2012) with their extended families is apparent by prominent battle between collectivist perspectives and individualistic values. The present qualitative study inquires the risk and protective factors that play a significant role in establishing the relational ties between Generation Z and their Extended Family within Pakistan. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, in-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with 12 generation Z (12-27 years of age) participants, recruited via purposive and snowball sampling. The analysis produced three overall categories of risk factors that included Interference, Perceived Difference & Distance and three categories of protective factors which included Relational Dynamics, Parental Roles and Mediation & Proximity and Engagement. Academic and work related interference by extended family, issues related to communication between generations, enforcement of value and emotional & geographic distancing play a role in risk factors however Protective factors included liberated communication, shared values and healthy boundary setting as well as role of parents as mediators. The findings point that Generation Z navigating through extended family ties by setting emotional boundaries and prioritizing their psychological health over engaging with extended family members out of obligation. The findings have been linked and supported within the literary context of Bowen's Family Systems Theory, Attachment Theory, and Eriksonian Developmental theories, alongside the idea of collectivism in Pakistani family culture. Implications for policy making and clinician have also been added in the study.

Introduction

The concept of extended family in South Asian countries has been playing a role of building block of social and moral support and also plays its role in identity formation. Specifically in collectivist culture of Pakistan, Extended Family which comprises of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins remains a significant feature of everyday life experience (Naif, Abbas, Raza, & Saeed, 2023). These familial ties are not only a source of practical facilities, as well as shared cultural framework through which the youth avails a chance of understanding generational value, shared culture, responsibility, and relational expectation. These relational ties are facing significant negotiations by the Generation Z (born between

1997 till 2012 (Dimock, 2019)).

GenZ is the first generation to have grown up in a full digital age, shaped by exceptional access to the global information, culture and mental health awareness (Twenge, 2017). In Pakistan, this generation has been trying to inculcate the liberty obtained digitally from the western literature and practices into the traditional framework of collectivist living experiences by preaching Psychological autonomy, emotional authenticity and individualistic self-expression (Jamal, 2020). The battle between individualistic self-expression and collectivist necessity to maintain familial bonds even when psychologically, financially, physically hurting, generates a dual identity tension. This coexists within an ideology of individualistic need to safeguard personal boundaries and prioritizing psychological well-being.

This is an environment that features both abundance and hostility. On one hand, relatives may act as guides, emotional support figures and a source of cultural transmission. On the other hand, they may constitute sources of unwanted interference, conflict between generations, criticism, and mental distress. In order to comprehend the conditions under which the quality of relationships with the extended family of Gen Z individuals in Pakistan can be jeopardized or protected becomes theoretically as well as practically relevant.

While there is already a considerable amount of literature concerning the education, labor, and technology usage of Generation Z individuals (Seemiller & Grace, 2018), comparatively little attention has been paid to family related processes. Furthermore, despite the large number of works dealing with risk and protective factors associated with nuclear families, most of them have been generated in Western contexts (Minuchin, 1974; Rothfuss, 2021). Therefore, the current study intends to fill this gap by relying on the voices of Pakistani Generation Z participants.

Existing literature has studied the involvement of extended family in child's development (Longo, Saadati, & Karakus, 2024), intergenerational like mindedness (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997), and familial support networks (Park, Wiemers, & Seltzer, 2019). However, the exploration of specific risk and protective factors that play role in generation Z relationship dynamics with extended family in Pakistan is largely under explored. Current literature in Pakistani familial framework focuses on spousal or parental dynamics (Ali, O'Cathain, & Croot, 2018) or intergenerational value differences (Naif et al., 2023), without any emphasis on psychological aspect through which younger generation navigates through extended familial obligation.

The present study addresses the gap by establishing a thematically grounded, culturally informed literature on the barriers and buffers of relationship dynamics of Generation Z's with extended family in Pakistan. The findings contribute to interpersonal and intrapersonal psychology in familial ties, developmental and social aspects by recognizing actionable domains for intervention and understanding.

The study is framed upon four interconnected perspectives. Erikson's (1968) Psychosocial Development Theory offers a unique lens of growth and developmental regarding the tension between identity formation and relational expectations of participants. Bowen's (1978) Family Systems Theory provides a structure for the emotional interdependency, triangulation and different dynamics reported in participants' narratives. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978) sheds light on the importance of early relationships in later kinships, how early relationships shape patterns of trust, comfort and emotional availability. Lastly, Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969) talks about the Generation Z's need to actively redefine familial relationships through the perspective of emotional significance rather than biological obligation.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Underlying Gen Z–Extended Family Relational Dynamics

Erikson Psychosocial Development	Bowen Family Systems Theory	Attachment Theory
Identity vs. role confusion; autonomy vs. expectations	Differentiation, triangulation, emotional enmeshment	Security, trust, early bonds with extended kin
↓	↓	↓
Symbolic Interactionism Meaning through interaction; redefinition of family boundaries		

Research Questions

- What are the risk factors that negatively influence the relationship between Generation Z and their extended family?
- What are the protective factors that strengthen the relationship between Generation Z and their extended family?
- How do risk and protective factors in a collectivist culture interact to influence relational ties?

Research Objectives

The following objectives directed the inquiry:

- To explore and identify the risk factors that influences the relationship dynamics of Generation Z with extended family.
- To identify and explore the protective factors that foster relationship dynamics of Gen Z with Extended Family.
- To discuss the risk and protective factors within the collectivist sociocultural context of Pakistan.
- To contribute a culturally grounded study that advances understanding of Gen Z's extended family relational ecology beyond existing Western-centric models.

Methodology

Research Design

The present research draws on data from a larger qualitative study examining the relationship dynamics of Generation Z with extended family in Pakistan (Tahir, Anwar, Faisal, & Fahim, 2025). A qualitative exploratory approach is used in the study and analyzed using Thematic Analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006) which assists in focusing on lived experiences and subjective meanings of individuals. The present

Participants

The study comprises of 12 Generation Z participants (N=12) residing in Pakistan, aged between 12-27years (born between 1997-2012). The sample was intentionally stratified into two stratas (six participants aged 12-18 ; six participants aged 19-27) and participating were equally divided into two gender. Participants belonged to nuclear and joint family structures and lower to upper socioeconomic backgrounds. All participants were currently residing in Pakistan with family members, ensuring direct engagement with extended family dynamics.

Table 1 Sociodemographic Profile of Participants (N = 12)

Code	Age	Gender	Family Setup	SES	Closeness with EF	Primary Contact Mode	Notable Focus
A1	12	Female	Nuclear	Upper middle	Very close	In-person	Maternal relatives
Z2	17	Female	Joint	Middle	Neutral	In-person	General extended family
N3	18	Female	Nuclear	Middle	Low	In-person	Paternal relatives
U4	23	Female	Nuclear	Upper middle	Very low	In-person	Limited maternal contact
A5	27	Female	Nuclear	Lower	Low	In-person	Minimal contact
H6	24	Female	Nuclear	Upper middle	Neutral	Social media	Maternal aunt
M7	15	Male	Joint	Middle	Close	Social media	Paternal side
S8	17	Male	Nuclear	Middle	Neutral–Close	In-person	Mixed relatives
A9	12	Male	Nuclear	Upper middle	Very close	In-person	Paternal relatives
J10	21	Male	Joint	Upper middle	Close	Mixed	Maternal grandparents
H11	23	Male	Joint	Unknown	Close	In-person	Maternal uncle
H12	16	Male	Nuclear	Upper middle	Neutral	In-person	Paternal uncle

Sampling

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used for recruiting participants. Recruitment was done using social media sites. None of the participants had any immediate kinship ties with the researchers.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted online using Zoom Call. The duration of each interview ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. Audio recording was done after obtaining informed consent from the participants. An interview guide was prepared based on the conceptual framework and research questions. The topic areas included extended family, relational history, risks, and resources. Questions for probing and further questioning were included. Interviews were held in the participant's preferred language (Urdu or English or code-switching). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, with Urdu sections being kept as they appeared with transliteration and translations provided in the brackets.

Procedure

The first step was to take permission from the affiliated institute to grant permission to conduct the study. After obtaining permission, researcher recruited participants via purposive and snowball sampling and debriefed the participants about the aim and purpose of the study. Consent was obtained informing participants their right to withdraw. Interviews on Zoom call were then conducted spanning 45-90 mins and recorded with consent. Interview explored participants' relationships with extended family and what strengthen and weaken the relationships. Interviews were transcribed and analysis followed six step Thematic analyses by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) Data Familiarization by reading the data repeatedly and taking notes; (2) Coding of data where the researcher systematically coded both explicit and implicit meanings of the data collected; (3) Theme Collation which involved clustering of codes to form potential themes; (4) Reviewing Themes within context of the dataset; (5) Defining and naming of final themes and (6) Preparation of Thematic Report. The analysis included both semantic and latent coding to analyze both the surface meanings and the underlying psychological process of the data. Peer validation through re-coding was done through a second researcher. After analysis findings are reported in tabulate and chart form along with related the finding with current literature and answering the research question of present study

Ethical Considerations

The data collected were subjected to ethical approvals from the appropriate Institutional Ethical Committee of Bahria University Karachi Campus before data collection. Consent from all participants was acquired in writing. In cases of minors assent was sought from them as well as guardianship. Consent from participants was sought in that they could withdraw from participation at any point without any penalties.

Results

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts produced two main thematic clusters which are highly relevant to the areas discussed in this paper: Risk Factors and Protective Factors. Each thematic cluster is composed of three main sub-themes, which in turn, include sub-categories grounded on participant statements. Themes are listed below along with illustrative quotations from interviews; tables showing verbatims can be found after each section.

Theme 1: Risk Factors

As conceptualized in this research, risk factors are relational, communicational, and structural dynamics that make emotional distress, disengagement, and conflict more probable within the extended family relations of Generation Z members. Three broad categories of risk factors emerged from the thematic analysis process: Interference, Perceived Difference, and Distance.

Figure 2. Thematic Overview of Risk Factors Influencing Gen Z's Extended Family Relationships

RISK FACTORS IN GEN Z – EXTENDED FAMILY DYNAMICS		
INTERFERENCE • Academic & career interference • Boundary violations • Value & gender-role imposition • Unsolicited opinions • Surveillance of women	PERCEIVED DIFFERENCE • Expectation mismatch • Communication gap • Generational divide • Judgment & psychological strain • Ideological incompatibility	DISTANCE • Emotional unavailability • Geographic separation • Conflictual engagement • Hollow presence • Chosen disengagement
<i>Outcomes: Relational withdrawal • Psychological distress • Diminished trust • Emotional disengagement</i>		

I. Interference

Among risk factors, interference was the most commonly reported one among participants' stories, as it was the feeling that the extended family was invading the areas where the participants wanted to have their autonomy. There were three subcategories within this general risk area.

Participants reported that their uncles, aunts and cousins would make them feel inferior because of comparisons that led to unnecessary pressure regarding appearances, work, education etc. Often, this was the case for women as some female participants noted family environments where their education was not highly valued. These results align with South Asian literature, where gendered familial expectations limit educational and career opportunities for young women (Ali et al., 2018).

There was a common theme among participants regarding the violation of boundaries by their extended families. These violations consisted of unsolicited interference in personal issues, surveillance, and attempts to control individual decisions. An excerpt from one participant was as follows; *“My uncle sometimes gets a little too involved in my problems. He doesn't always know when to stop. They want to dominate things... even when you don't ask them.”* In terms of the Family Systems theory proposed by Bowen (1978), such actions indicate a condition of being highly enmeshed with insufficient differentiation of the self, placing emotional strain on members of Generation Z.

A key type of interference took place through the imposition of traditional roles based on gender and culture. This was explained by the female interviewees as being told how to; *“They talk about, you know, like, hum larkiyan heina tou humare pyara hona chahiye aur humein boht elegant hona chahiye, we should be very housewife oriented.”* This trend illustrates Rothfuss's (2021) notion of intergenerational moral policing, which denotes the transmission of culture from generation to generation through unsolicited prescription, which becomes heightened due to younger people forming their identities via individualism and autonomy.

II. Perceived Difference

Perceived difference encompasses the perceived ideological, communication, and value-based differences the participants felt in their relationships with the extended family members. Perceived difference was classified into four categories.

Participants noted significant disparities between their life goals and the expectations set by their extended family members about education, marriage, and lifestyles. Such mismatches lead to inner turmoil and avoidance in their relationships. The mismatches can be attributed to Twenge's (2017)

portrayal of Gen Zers as autonomy seekers whose prolonged journey towards adulthood is often misunderstood by older generations.

Many respondents pointed out that communication with the extended family was a one-way process of monologue and not dialogue because members of the extended family dominated conversations without allowing any room for listening on the other side. The communication pattern negates the element of reciprocity that was identified by Gen Z participants as an important prerequisite of a relationship. According to Padilla-Walker, Nelson, et al., the strongest predictor of disengagement is the lack of reciprocity.

The participants expressed a basic feeling that they lived in a separate cognitive world apart from their extended families. This was illustrated by one participant who said; *"There's so much gap between us, like in terms of you know the way they live, the way we live in terms of our thought process, their thought process, and education and everything, maybe it all comes up and then adds to the gap."* This is reflective of the cultural dimension's framework presented by Hofstede (2011), whereby people born in the same generation in the same collectivist society may still adopt different individualism-collectivism orientations.

In terms of risk factors, the one that may be considered the most significant for clinical purposes is related to the feeling of judgment, criticism, or ridicule from the extended family. Participants specifically mention judgment as the source of psychological problems. Participant also refers to this phenomenon within the larger cultural context; *"In Pakistan, in desi culture, there is a lot of judgment in everything we people do."* In this regard, we can mention the pathologizing of vulnerability within families that is discussed by Weisz and Hawley (2002).

III. Distance

The distance between individuals and their families was presented as one of the most prominent domain in risk factors. Distancing was viewed by the participants not only as the consequence of other risk factors but also as an independent problem for relationship sustainability.

Despite the proximity to the family members geographically, emotional distances were felt strongly by many participants. For example, communication was perceived as a performance without sincere feelings. Situation, where physical closeness exists without emotional intimacy, was most evident in the case of paternal family members, who were generally seen as more authoritative and emotionally detached.

In cases where extended families lived in other cities or even in other countries, geographical distance further exacerbated the issue of weakening relations. The fact that geographical distance remains one of the main determinants of intergenerational contact reduction is confirmed by Silverstein & Bengtson (1997), although technology might somewhat offset this influence.

For several interviewees, maintaining relationships with extended families became an increasingly burdensome experience due to ongoing conflicts, unwanted interference, and repeated criticism. *"They do give a lot of unsolicited opinion, and they like to control things a lot."* Instead of simply ending contact, these individuals practice what Intent Clinical (2023) refers to as chosen disengagement; a strategy of emotionally protective self-regulation that involves withdrawal from highly stressful interaction.

Table 2 Risk Factors in Gen Z–Extended Family Dynamics: Themes, Categories, and Representative Verbatims

Theme	Sub-Theme	Category	Representative Verbatim
RISK FACTORS	Interference	Academic & Career Interference	“unnecessary comparison karte hain parhai mein, tou is wajah se unke sath weak bonding hoti hai” “Hamari family mein women education ka bhi khas scene nhi hai”
		Relational Boundaries Violation	“My uncle sometimes gets a little too involved in my problems. He doesn't always know when to stop.”
		Value Imposition	“They talk about, you know, like, hum larkiyan heina tou humare pyara hona chahiye aur humein boht elegant hona chahiye, we should be very housewife oriented.”
	Perceived Difference	Expectation Mismatch	“Main us se hamesha ek alag apna point of view rakhti thi, jo ke one of my khalas didn't like at all.” “Mai shuru say Thora rebellious tha”
		Communication Gap	“Mein kuch kehna chahta hoon lekin wo sirf apni baat sunatay hain.”
		Generational Gap	“ek pattern bana hota hai na adults ka, ke haan, har ek ne tou jee huzoori hi hamari ki hai. Tou koi ek agar aata hai, tou wo log chonk jaate hain—ke isne humein inkaar kaise de diya?”
		Judgment & Psychological Strain	“I have gone through depression, so it was due to the fear of judgment.” “Pakistan mein desi culture mein judgment boht hein in everything we people do”
	Distance	Emotional Distance	“There's so much gap between us, like in terms of the way they live, the way we live in terms of our thought process...”
		Geographical Distance	“But it's just that there was distance and that distance never went, I guess... we can't reignite that thing or we can't build that distance”
		Conflictual Engagement	“Unsolicited opinions come from them a lot, and they do want to dominate things.”

Theme 2: Protective Factors

Protective factors are the relational, structural, and behavioral factors which serve as buffers against psychological distress and facilitate the continued involvement in the extended family relationship. The following are the three main areas of protection recognized:

Figure 3. Thematic Overview of Protective Factors Enhancing Extended Family Relationships

PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN GEN Z – EXTENDED FAMILY DYNAMICS		
RELATIONAL DYNAMICS • Shared values & beliefs • Open, reciprocal communication • Autonomy & boundary maintenance • Psychological safety • Trust & emotional validation	PARENTAL MEDIATION • Parental bridging • Positive gatekeeping • Supportive coping facilitation • Covert privacy protection • Motivational scaffolding	PROXIMITY & ENGAGEMENT • Emotional availability • Geographic closeness • Intergenerational engagement • Grandparental warmth • Digital connection tools
<i>Outcomes: Relational resilience • Psychological wellbeing • Intergenerational cohesion • Emotional security</i>		

I. Relational Dynamics

Relational dynamics is one area which refers to the nature of interactions that take place between people within the extended family unit; particularly those related to communication, emotions, and boundaries that encourage psychological security and relational resiliency.

People who reported feeling emotionally close to their extended family members did so because they felt that they were on the same level intellectually and ideologically. This resulted in shared values and beliefs among the family members and provided a platform for communication. This conclusion fits well within Jamal's (2020) statement about how Gen Z youth from Pakistan, though being individually oriented, still ground themselves to belief systems formed by the family as a means of coherence and belonging. Shared values did not act as inhibitors but rather acted as connective tissue facilitating easy communication without stress.

For all participants, the ability of certain relatives to listen without being judgmental was consistently mentioned as the strongest protective factor. Participants felt like their voices were heard, understood, and respected as adults. This is in line with what Stewart (2023) states about how families with emotionally connected conversations develop much more robust relational ties and stronger conflict resolution skills despite being from Gen Z and engaging in social media use.

Setting appropriate personal limits within extended family networks emerged as another key coping strategy. Those who were successful in doing so reported positive relational benefits.

Maintaining boundaries did not involve withdrawing from relationship, rather maintaining differentiation, which, according to Bowen (1978), means being able to relate emotionally to one's family, without losing psychological autonomy. This is especially difficult to accomplish within the collectivist culture of Pakistan because clear personal boundaries might signal contempt or betrayal.

II. Parental Mediation

The second important protective domain pertains to the crucial role of mediation played by parents as mediators between Gen Z and their extended family members. The parents were identified as the main builders of the bridge between the two generations. The quality of parents' relationships with the extended family had much to do with whether their children enjoyed healthy connections with the extended family. When the parents had positive interactions with their extended family members, their offspring also had good relationships with the extended family. This transmission of patterns in relationships follows the concept of internal working models within the Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) where relational schemas learned through early care-giving relationships influence relational expectations and actions throughout one's life span.

Some interviewees spoke about their parents' efforts in controlling the disclosure of intimate information to extended family members, thereby safeguarding their privacy while staying connected to the wider family network. It was a culturally adaptive strategy to manage the conflict between collective values of transparency and individual preference for privacy.

Several cases of unintentional but well-timed support offered by extended kin members when faced with various personal or professional problems were noted as emotionally enriching relationship experiences. Such acts created an emotional surplus in the relational account book. This is similar to the research done by Longo et al. (2024), where they demonstrate the involvement of extended family members providing significant levels of emotional, cultural, and tangible support, which particularly occurs when going through transition phases and uncertainties.

III. Proximity & Engagement

The third domain of protection includes the proximity and connection, which allows for regular, supportive engagement of Gen Z with extended family members. Emotional availability was perceived as crucial for the participants' well-being by the participants themselves. They spoke about specific extended family members who served as secondary attachment figures in their lives; *"I actually feel really safe knowing that I have people like them in my life to rely on.* Emotional availability within extended families is related to the findings of Park et al. (2019) that describe extended families as a 'safety net' for their youth in which they receive identity, community, and crisis support when immediate family lacks the necessary resources.

Proximity positively predicted relational closeness and interaction frequencies. Those participants who were located closer to their extended families expressed deeper, more trustful, and more emotionally fulfilling relations with them regardless of the side of their family. The importance of geographical closeness in enabling intergenerational contact has been well documented in the literature (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Within an urban Pakistani setting, proximity allows for regular shared activities such as dining together, visiting one another and being part of the household to foster intergenerational relationships.

The participants viewed grandparents as particularly important figures that served as protectors, providing love, guidance, and culture without the criticality that was found when dealing with certain aunts and uncles. Intergenerational interaction through grandparents involved the following elements. It corroborates research from Generations United (2022) where intergenerational storytelling, culture sharing, and elders' participation played a major role in decreasing the threat of social isolation while developing the identity of youth. In addition, digital technologies including WhatsApp group chats, video calling, and social media platforms helped continue intergenerational interaction despite geographical

boundaries, as discussed by Hessel and LeBouef (2023) in their typology of connectedness among emerging adults.

Table 3 *Protective Factors in Gen Z–Extended Family Dynamics: Themes, Categories, and Representative Verbatims*

Theme	Sub-Theme	Category	Representative Verbatim
PROTECTIVE FACTORS	Relational Dynamics	Shared Values & Beliefs	“kyunki woh hamari tarah social media se bhi up-to-date rehte hain. To main unse kuch bhi share kar sakti hoon”
		Open Communication	“woh sunte hain aur samajhte hain”
		Autonomy & Boundary Maintenance	“Now, Alhamdulillah, I have set the boundaries — ke mujhe unke sath kitna share karna hai apna.” “Don't give too much, and Don't expect too much – that's the only healthy way I can think of”
	Parental Mediation	Parental Bridging	“Nahi, meri mother ka meri nani se tou bond acha hai. Baaki mamu se bhi acha hai. Matlab unka us taraf se hi zyada hota hai, unka bond acha hai.”
		Positive Parental Gatekeeping	“Tou is main parents ko chahiye ke boundaries set kar lein”
		Supportive Coping	“....., my uncle just reminds me to focus on myself.”
	Proximity & Engagement	Emotional Safety	“I actually feel really safe knowing that I have people like them in my life to rely on”
		Geographical Proximity	“ I see them more often, I talk to them more often. So that's why I feel closer to them.”
		Intergenerational Engagement	“A subject selection kaafi mushkil task hota hai, har bachay ke liye, pura career aagey usi pe banana hota hai, tou sab ne apna experience share kiya, tou us hisaab se kaafi easy ho gaya mere liye select karna.”

An Integrated Model of Risk and Protection in an Ecological Framework

Risk and protective factors observed in this study do not act separately but rather engage with one another in a larger framework of relationships influenced by the collectivistic cultural demands, development stage, family composition, and personal relationship history. An integrated diagram of this process is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Integrated Risk-Protective Ecological Model of Gen Z–Extended Family Dynamics in Pakistan

RISK FACTORS Interference → boundary violations, value imposition, surveillance Perceived Difference → generational gap, communication breakdown, judgment Distance → emotional/geographic separation, conflictual engagement	↔	PROTECTIVE FACTORS Relational Dynamics → shared values, communication, boundary respect Parental Mediation → bridging, gatekeeping, supportive coping Proximity & Engagement → emotional safety, intergenerational warmth
GEN Z IN COLLECTIVIST PAKISTAN Navigating extended family relationships through emotional selectivity, identity negotiation, and intentional relational engagement		

As can be seen from the diagram, risk and protection factors are in constant tension. The risk factor of interference may be somewhat mitigated by positive parental gatekeeping; the risk factor of generational difference may be overcome through common values and open communication, while the risk factor of emotional distance may be alleviated by geographical closeness. In effect, the result of this dynamic relationship will depend on which side prevails in a particular case.

Discussion

This paper sought to investigate and explain the risk and protective factors associated with the interactions between Generation Z and their extended family in Pakistan. Through this investigation, we can see how a generation comes into conflict with their inherited relationships due to an element of psychological planning and awareness that earlier theories of collectivist family systems had not considered.

Some of the domains found in this study that make up the identified risk factors include Interference, Perceived Difference, and Distance. It is important to note that the problems arising from these three categories are not only interpersonal challenges but also structural incompatibilities between the relational requirements of a digital generation and collectivist family systems.

Among these risk factors, interference has been found to be the most common. These findings support the theoretical framework provided by Minuchin (1974), whereby a lack of boundary differentiation within families leads to enmeshment and thus the loss of personal independence. As previously stated, in societies where patriarchal authority determines social structure (Ahmad & Qureshi, 2021), the young generation's objection to interference results in a perception of disrespect, thereby adding on the negative effects of the relational challenges.

It would appear, however, that there was also a significant impact related to the imposition of values, especially those associated with gender role socialization. Female study members were subjected far more frequently to commentary relating to dress, educational aspirations, and household orientation. This is reflective of the notion put forward by Rosenthal (1985) of kinkeeping and its associated stress on women. The experience of policing and not support produces the situation described by attachment theory as being conducive to avoidant and ambivalent strategies (Ainsworth, 1978).

By far the most clinically important risk factor identified during this research would have to be judgment and resulting strain. The connection drawn by participants between family judgment and their experiences of depression indicates a clear pathway from relational risk to poor mental health. The work conducted by Weisz and Hawley (2002) concerning the way in which emotional invalidation

prevents access to treatment is quite relevant to this issue; stigmatized vulnerability could easily become an obstacle to seeking psychological assistance.

The combination of distance, both geographical and emotional, aggravates other risks because it interferes with repairing relational damage. More specifically, conflict engagement establishes a cycle in which any interaction serves to increase rather than alleviate distress, resulting in the process known as chosen disengagement, according to Intent Clinical (2023). While a rational reaction, this can be interpreted incorrectly from a collectivist perspective.

The three identified domains of protective factors; Relational Dynamics, Parental Mediation, and Proximity and Engagement; outline a relational ecosystem that allows Gen Z individuals to see their extended families as an important asset, rather than an obligation.

Non-judgmental, open communication was found to be the most consistently mentioned form of protection in this study. While there is no shortage of research about the importance of psychological safety within a family setting (Stewart, 2023; Hessel & LeBouef, 2023), what stands out about the current findings is the extent to which communication in this study was tailored by respondents according to their perceptions of the ability of a certain family member to listen without making a judgment. In other words, communication itself becomes a way of assessing relationships; family members who successfully passed this relational test have earned the right to become effective protectors; otherwise, they are relationally marginalized.

The significance of shared values as a mechanism for enabling communication resonates with Jamal's (2020) assertion regarding Pakistani Gen Z successfully balancing their dual identities without having to renounce collectivist roots. When extended family members exhibit intellectual curiosity and openness toward contemporary thoughts and ideas or are attuned to the value systems of the participants, the distance between them becomes greatly diminished. Thus, an intervention strategy may entail supporting extended family members to become more flexible and intellectually curious rather than expecting Gen Z to lower their relational standards.

Parental bridging and gatekeeping turned out to be crucially important structural mechanisms for protection. The parents whose extended family relationships themselves are warm enable their children to have access to such resources through their mediation. By employing the technique of positive gatekeeping, which involves the strategic sharing of personal information with extended family members, the parents help protect their children's private space while keeping the link with family ties.

The intergenerational involvement of grandparents warrants special attention. The connections formed between the participants and their grandparents seemed to exist in a qualitatively different kind of safe space, one less likely to involve the kind of criticism and intrusion that could come from aunts and uncles. It is possible that grandparents' developmental stage makes them more able to provide relational support because they no longer have careers or childrearing obligations to attend to. Given that the importance of intergenerational engagement was highlighted by Generations United (2022), efforts to build relationships between grandparents and grandchildren could yield high returns on investment.

One of the major contributions from the research in terms of theory is that it highlights a paradox faced by Generation Z with regards to family collectivism. They belong to families that emphasize collectivist values, where connectedness is important, but the developmental need to be autonomous and have an identity, not to mention feel emotionally secure, is often impeded by the means through which they sustain their collectivist identity.

Individualism will not resolve this issue since members of the sample in this study did not simply shun participation in extended family activities, but rather selectively chose to relate to only those family members who offered an emotionally safe, reciprocal and autonomy-supporting relationship. This behavior is in accordance with what Smart (2007) calls 'personal life,' where the maintenance of social ties depends upon their personal importance.

It is crucial to note how this finding has implications for Pakistani family culture. With the increasing population of Generation Z in Pakistan, changes will need to be made within the extended family system in order to adapt to the demands of this new generation.

Implications

The results have a few implications. Clinically speaking, for therapists treating Pakistani Gen Zers, this research underscores the issues of experiencing familial judgment, violations of boundaries, and conflict of generational values as major stressors requiring therapeutic intervention. Helping clients develop and maintain healthy relational boundaries within extended families through psychoeducation may prove highly beneficial.

From a more general point of view, this research underscores the issue of intergenerational communication literacy. Developing intergenerational perspective-taking skills through seminars, dialogues in communities, or educational activities in schools could help mitigate misunderstanding between generations, leading to improved intergenerational relations.

For future researchers, the integrated risk-protective ecological model presented here may become a foundation for further empirical work, as it can be operationalized quantitatively, compared across cultures, or longitudinally examined within the same cultural setting.

Limitations

Some limitations should be mentioned here. The sample size was relatively small ($N = 12$) and included mostly people from the middle to upper-middle-class in an urban setting, making the results less transferable to different demographics within Gen Z in Pakistan. The study provides views on the matter solely from Gen Z individuals; thus, the views of other generations, particularly those of parents and grandparents, will add considerably to the picture of the matter. As is the case with any qualitative research using self-reports, the results are based on the subjective interpretations of participants that could be affected by memory distortion, social desirability, etc.

Conclusion

This study has thus yielded a rich thematic and culturally informed understanding of the risk and protective factors surrounding the relationship between Generation Z individuals and their extended families in Pakistan. While risks factors such as interference, mismatch, judgment and distancing act as systemic obstacles to relational wellness that emerge and feed into existing tensions between collectivist cultural norms and Gen Z's individualized needs, protective factors like reciprocal communication, value alignment, boundaries, parental mediation, and intergenerational warmth create an ecologically supportive context where extended family ties are psychological resources.

In essence, the findings here suggest that Generation Z's disengagement from extended family is not due to a rejection of the cultural collectivism at the center of Pakistani society but is a result of a generational choice: one in which this generation actively selects those ties that are psychologically meaningful, reciprocal, and respectful. To remain vital and beneficial to this generation, extended families need to be adaptable enough to offer the one thing they crave the most: recognition and validation of their worthiness as individuals.

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