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PARENTAL NEGLECT, SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG GRADE 5 AND 6 PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAHORE

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Abstract

The study was aimed to investigate the effects of parental neglect and general social-emotional and character development and academic achievement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 students studying in private schools in Lahore, Pakistan. Methods of the study: Correlational design was used to determine the relationship between the study variables. Participants: The target population of the study was students of grade 5 and 6 who were studying in private schools of Lahore. 252 students from six private schools of Lahore participated in the study and were selected by using the convenience sampling technique. Data were collected by using the Parental Neglect Scale and the Scale for Social Emotional and Character Development Scale and percentage of students. Parental neglect scale consists of 20 questions, and SECD scale consists of 28 questions. In the present study, these six components (trust, fairness, accountability, respect, caring, and citizenship) were treated as one single overall SECD construct and the mean of all 28 SECD items was used as a single overall SECD score. Data analysis: The results revealed that there was a strong positive correlation between parental neglect and overall SECD. The weak but statistically significant positive correlation was found between parental neglect and academic achievement (p =.004, N = 252). Furthermore, gender specific analyses revealed statistically significant positive correlations between parental neglect and overall SECD for male students (p <.001) and female students (p <.001). However, Fisher's Z test revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the two correlations. The present study should be viewed as two variables being associated with each other and not causal effects due to the cross-sectional correlational research design. The findings highlight the need to examine the relationship between children's experiences of parental neglect and overall social and emotional and character development and academic achievement.

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INTRODUCTION

Children spend a large proportion of their formative and middle childhood years in the family and home setting. In these formative and middle childhood years, children's experience with their parents and other caregivers can influence their emotional, social, behavioural and cognitive development. As a result, parental involvement can influence children's development. However, an inadequate focus on child's needs results in various problems with emotional and interpersonal functioning (Strathearn et al., 2020). Parental neglect, typically, refers to cases when children's basic physical, emotional, educational, supervisory or developmental requirements are not fulfilled.

Responsibilities of parents and caregivers are to give the children love, care, protection, supervise, and emotional support, and also give kids the chance to grow and develop. When these needs are not fulfilled, children will face challenges in different domains of development. For this reason, the problem of child neglect is very relevant because it can negatively affect children's physical, mental, social, behavioural, and educational aspects (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Strathearn et al., 2020).

Child protection is a major social concern for Pakistan. Child protection agencies' reports highlight numerous types of violence and risk experienced by Pakistan's children (Sahil, 2020). Although the problem of parental neglect may not receive as much focus as it does for physical or sexual abuse parental neglect remains significant.

Family interaction and communication at an early stage in life is an important predictor of children's social and emotional adaptation. During family interactions children develop competencies in communication, expression, empathy, and social norms (Sultana & Purdy, 2024; Tulviste & Tamm, 2023). The correlation between adequate emotional responsiveness and emotional problems, support the idea that parent openness to communication and listening, is a is vitally important for the development of social-emotional competence. They are closely linked and are both relevant to children's development. Development of social-emotional skills includes relationships with others in the appropriate ways, reacting to social situations, emotional regulation and effective interpersonal relationships. Character development includes personal attributes such as integrity, honesty, self-control, and a positive sense of self-development. This has been taken in this study as one construct called Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD).

Another important area of development is academic performance. Despite the number of factors and influences that impact the academic performance of children, children might be offered the chance to learn, become motivated, engage in learning and educational activities and demonstrate behavioural engagement in the home environment by way of the house school attachment and parental engagement. Hence the present study looked at neglectful parenting and SECD and academic performance.

There are much research carried out about child violence and maltreatment, but there are not too much research carried about neglect. It may be more invisible than abuse, both physically and sexually but the parents' failure to care about the child is associated with the child's developmental experience. In literature available for neglect and developmental experience of children, they may focus on specific stages of development or specific outcome.

Importance of family in child's life Parents (particularly those in urban Pakistan) may lay greater stress on formal schooling and enrolling them in private schools with this hope that the private school will provide an opportunity to grow educationally and personally. However, actually having education does not erase the significance of the family in the social, emotional, behavioural, and character development of the child.

There has been little empirical investigation into the relation between neglect of parents and the overall social-emotional and character development of Grade 5 and 6 students in a private school in Lahore, Pakistan. There has been little empirical investigation into the relation

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between neglect of parents and general academic achievement and whether the strength of the relation between neglect of parents and overall SECD and academic achievement differs by gender.

Thus the present study limited itself to Grade 5 and Grade 6 students in private schools of Lahore. Instead of taking social emotional development and character development as separate dependent variables, the present study combined social-emotional development and character development as one social-emotional and character development (SECD) construct. By doing so, the present study captured the child's general functioning with one composite outcome measure.

The present research focus was to examine the relationship of parental neglect, total social-emotional and character development and achievement of students studying in grade 5 and 6 in private sector schools in Lahore.

This study extends the above work in the aspects of context, population, and the variables in combination. First, most studies in child neglect have been conducted in contexts other than Pakistan. Knowledge of child neglect in the context of Pakistan and in urban private-school setting, is relatively limited. Second, majority of studies on child neglect has focused on younger children or adolescents. Grade 5 and 6 students constitute a relatively important developmental age group, as children experience increasingly sophisticated social and emotional development, self-regulation, moral development, and academic responsibilities at this stage. Third, the studies in this area have also failed to consider diverse developmental outcomes together. This study considers social-emotional as well as character development together as one overall SECD and relates its association with the neglected parenting as well as academic achievement. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the association between parental neglect and overall social-emotional and character development among Grade 5 and Grade 6 students in private schools in Lahore?
2. What is the association between parental neglect and academic achievement among Grade 5 and Grade 6 students in private schools in Lahore?
3. Does the strength of the association between parental neglect and overall social-emotional and character development differ by gender?

Literature Review

Parental neglect includes a range of conditions that occur when the basic needs of children are not fulfilled because parents or other carers do not give them adequate care, supervision, emotional support or other needs. Parental neglect can encompass emotional, physical, cognitive and supervisory neglect.

Effects of Childhood Neglect

This research has previously found childhood neglect to be related to a spectrum of developmental and psychosocial problems. Numerous studies have found neglect to be related to other adverse childhood experiences in addition to other psychological, behavioural, and health consequences (Kobulsky et al., 2021; Strathearn et al., 2020). Hence it is suggested that it is imperative to examine neglect independently of other destructive experiences in childhood.

Parental Neglect and Nature of Problems

Neglect is not exactly like physical violence. Physical violence is doing something while neglect is not doing something or not doing enough. Parent neglect that can refer to lack of attention to the child's emotional, cognitive, physical, educational, or management needs may reflect in the functioning of various domains of children. Earlier research identified relationships among childhood victimization, self-esteem, emotional functioning, and problem behaviour (Lee & Feng, 2021; Kobulsky et al., 2021).

Physical Problems

Neglectors may have physical health issues if the children physical needs such as the food intake, medical health, personal hygiene or other physical

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needs are not taken into consideration. Studies involving children with neglect have also found links with health problems and lack of support (Tiwari et al., 2023).

Social Problems

Parent-child and peer interactions may be related. Studies have found links between bad parent-child relationships and peer problems, and this may imply that family relationships have some role in children's peer difficulties (Kaufman et al., 2021).

Developmental Problems

Children's development is affected by various contextual factors, such as parenting, family, and social and economic factors. Parenting and socialization have been linked to children's adjustment and behavioural development (Climent-Galarza et al., 2022; Martnez-Escudero et al., 2020).

Parental Neglect and Social-Emotional and Character Development

Six domains of social-emotional and character development Social-emotional development is made up of four domains of children's functioning: self-management; social awareness; relationship skills; and responsible decision-making. Character-related development encompasses the following domains of children's functioning: honesty, respect, responsibility, empathy and self-control, integrity, civility and citizenship and self-development.

These skills can be provided in a social context, within the sphere of family relationships, where children learn to imitate and learn the correct social behaviour, emotional reactions, values and regulations, with which parents can lead by example. Family relationships and social values have been noted in children's development (Alhazmi, 2024). Further, in this study social-emotional and character development were not created as separate outcome variables, rather the six measured areas of prosocial behaviour, respect at school, respect at home, honesty, self-development, and self-control were merged to get one total 'SECD' variable. This has been explained in this way because this study was looking at children's non-context-specific social-emotional and character development.

Parental Neglect and Academic Achievement

The home setting is a factor in the kids' learning. It is not only school that can help children gain in academics. Adults may support the children's learning in many ways like giving money and encouragement, supervision and monitoring, contacting the school and supporting the school assignments.

There are many variables of school attendance which can affect academic achievement such as the individual, the school environment and teaching, peer group, socio-economic state, and family support. It is therefore essential to acknowledge these factors when examining the impact of parental neglect on academic achievement. There is research in this area regarding the correlations of home environment and academic achievement in regard to the importance of family in relation to student achievement (Khan et al., 2023).

Interrelationship Between Social-Emotional and Character Development and Academic Achievement

There is evidence to suggest that social-emotional skills can be related to children's classroom behaviour, social relationships, emotions and their involvement with learning. However, to date there has been some evidence of the relationship between social-emotional competence and behaviour and academic achievement (Martinsone et al., 2022). These correlations give some justification for the study of SECD and achievement alone in relation to children's development. However, just because there is a relationship between two variables does not mean that one causes the other to change.

Research Method

Quantitative approach was used to measure parental neglect, overall SECD, and academic achievement and examine statistical associations

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among these variables. A cross-sectional correlational research design was used. After collecting the data, statistical analyses were conducted to determine the associations among parental neglect, overall SECD, and academic achievement.

Table 1
Gender Based Distribution

Gender	N
Male	55 (21.8%)
Female	197 (78.2%)

Table 2
Grade Based Distribution

Grade	N
5	103 (40.9%)
6	149 (59.1%)

Table 3
Age Based Distribution

Age	N
10 years	46 (18.3%)
11years	73 (29.0%)
12 years	74 (29.4%)
Above 12 years	59 (23.4%)

Research Instruments

Two measures were administered; a measure of parental neglect and a measure of social-emotional and character development. The measure of neglect was a 20-item parental neglect measure based on the Neglect Scale developed by Straus et al. In the present study version of the parental neglect measure, all 20 items were phrased negatively with respect to parental care and 20 scores on the parental neglect measure therefore reflected increased reports of neglect; there was no need for reverse coding of the present study version of the scale. The internal reliability of the Neglect Scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha was.875. Children's social-emotional and character development The Social-Emotional and Character Development Scale (SECDS) was administered to measure children's social-emotional and character development. The SECD measure that was administered to all participants has 28 items. All 28 items are written in a positive statement and have the same four-point answer scale. In this study, all six component areas were combined to construct a general Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD) variable. The general SECD composite was derived by averaging the ratings on 28 items. Consequently, the study did not examine social-emotional development and character development as separate dependent variables. The general composite of the 28-item SECD measure was internally consistent (Cronbach's α =.900). Academic achievement was represented by academic percentage which were taken from school records/reporting.

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RESULTS

Table 4
Association Between Parental Neglect and Overall Social-Emotional and Character Development

Variables	Spearman's ρ	p	N
Parental Neglect – Overall SECD	.681**	< .001	252

The results show a statistically significant positive association was found between parental neglect and overall SECD (ρ = .681, p < .001). The magnitude of the coefficient indicates a strong positive statistical association between the two variables in this sample. Since the study is correlational and cross-sectional, this finding should not be interpreted as evidence that parental neglect causes higher or lower SECD. The positive direction is also noteworthy and requires cautious interpretation.

Table 5
Association Between Parental Neglect and Academic Achievement

Variables	Spearman's ρ	p	N
Parental Neglect – Overall SECD	.179**	.004	252

The results show a statistically significant but weak positive association was found between parental neglect and academic achievement (ρ = .179, p = .004). The coefficient indicates that the association was substantially weaker than the association observed between parental neglect and overall SECD. Again, this result represents an association and should not be interpreted as evidence that parental neglect improves or causes higher academic achievement.

Table 6
Gender-Specific Associations Between Parental Neglect and Overall SECD

Gender	N	Spearman's ρ	p
Male	55	.718	< .001
Female	197	.670	< .001

The results show that the association between parental neglect and overall SECD was statistically significant for both male and female students. For male students, the correlation was ρ = .718, p < .001 and for female students, the correlation was ρ = .670, p < .001. Although the numerical correlation coefficient was higher for male students, a difference between two sample correlations must be statistically tested before concluding that the strength of the relationships differs by gender.

Table 7
Fisher's *z* Test Comparing Gender-Specific Correlations

Comparison	Male ρ	Female ρ	Fisher's *z*	p
Parental Neglect – Overall SECD	.718	.670	.593	.553

The results indicated that the correlation between the male and female correlations was not statistically different, *z* = .593, p = .553. Therefore, although the observed correlation was numerically higher among male students, the evidence does not support a statistically significant gender

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difference in the strength of the association between parental neglect and overall SECD.

Discussion

The focus of the research was to examine the relationships among parental neglect, social-emotional and character development, and academic achievement among Grade 5 and Grade 6 students enrolled in private schools in Lahore, Pakistan. The results of the tests revealed statistically significant associations among these variables, providing insight into the relationships between children's family experiences, developmental outcomes, and academic performance.

The statistical tests revealed a statistically significant positive association between parental neglect and the combined social-emotional and character development score ($\rho = .681$, $p < .001$). This indicates that students reporting higher levels of parental neglect also obtained higher scores on the combined development measure. This finding differs from the general pattern reported in previous research, which has associated childhood neglect and emotional abuse with adverse emotional, behavioural, and cognitive outcomes (Maguire et al., 2015). Similarly, Beyazıt et al. (2023) investigated parental neglect in relation to children's socio-emotional and moral development and behavioural problems. The positive association observed in the present study therefore contrasts with the difficulties commonly discussed in the literature on childhood neglect. However, the present finding should be understood as an association between the reported scores rather than evidence that parental neglect supports children's development. Further research is needed to establish whether this pattern can be replicated in other samples and contexts.

A statistically significant but weak positive association was noted between parental neglect and academic achievement ($\rho = .179$, $p = .004$). This indicates that higher parental-neglect scores were associated with slightly higher academic-achievement scores among the students in the present sample. The strength of this association was substantially smaller than that observed between parental neglect and the combined social-emotional and character development score. This finding differs from the commonly held expectation that inadequate parental care and support may be associated with less favourable educational outcomes. Kim (2022), in his meta-analysis, that parental involvement and academic achievement were positively related. However, parental involvement and parental neglect are distinct constructs. The positive relationship reported by Kim (2022) concerns parental involvement and cannot directly explain the positive association between parental neglect and academic achievement found in the present study. Consequently, the current finding should be considered in relation to the specific measures, participants, and context of the study rather than interpreted as evidence that neglect is beneficial for academic performance.

The study also examined gender-specific relationships between parental neglect and students' developmental and academic outcomes. The results indicated that the observed associations were generally stronger among male students than among female students in the present sample. Nevertheless, differences in correlation coefficients do not, by themselves, establish statistically significant gender differences. Except for the relationship between parental neglect and prosocial behaviour, the observed differences should be interpreted as descriptive patterns unless supported by appropriate statistical comparisons. Previous research and future investigations may consider whether family circumstances, school experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and parental expectations are relevant to understanding gender-specific patterns. However, the present findings do not establish these factors as explanations for the observed differences.

Parental expectations and parent–child relationships provide additional context for understanding children's educational experiences. Wang (2024) reported associations involving parent–child relationships, parental educational

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expectations, adolescents' own expectations, and academic performance. This research highlights the relevance of family relationships and educational expectations when examining children's academic outcomes. However, parental expectations, parent–child relationships, parental involvement, and parental neglect are distinct constructs. Although this literature provides a broader framework for understanding family-related influences on education, it does not directly account for the positive associations between parental neglect and children's outcomes observed in the present study.

These results also have implications for research on child well-being. According to Hillis et al. (2016), the prevalence of violence against children around the world was demonstrated and the importance of prevention of violence and protection of children were noted. While this systematic review discussed violence against children in general, it also points to the importance of considering children's experiences in their family and social contexts. Further studies can be conducted in Pakistan in order to explore the relationship between parents' experiences, social and emotional development, and character and educational achievements of children. The current study explored these relations among students in Grades 5 and 6 at private schools in Lahore. Nevertheless, the results obtained cannot be applied to children studying at public schools in other geographic and socioeconomic contexts.

To conclude, the present research findings indicated that a significant positive correlation was found between parental neglect and social and emotional/character development, whereas parental neglect and academic achievement were observed to be positively related at a relatively low significance level. The present study findings highlight the importance of examining the associations of children's family experiences, development, and academic achievement in the educational setting. It can be concluded that the present study was conducted to investigate the association between children's family experiences, development and academic achievement of Grade 5 and Grade 6 students studying in private schools of Lahore. As the present study used a correlational design, the present study merely depicts correlations, not causations.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the relation between parental neglect, social-emotional and character development, and academic achievement among students in grade 5 and 6 in private schools in Lahore. The results showed that there exists a significant positive relationship between parental neglect and the combined social-emotional and character development scores. However, a positive relationship also exists between parental neglect and academic achievement, though it is relatively weak. These results indicate the importance of taking into account children's experiences at home when considering their development and educational outcomes. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge on the subject in the setting of private school education in Lahore. However, since this research utilized a correlational study design, it does not provide any evidence of causality.

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