

FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: A MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Original Research

Sameen Sadaqat^{1*}, Ayesha Jabbar², Syeda Ayesha Noor³, Amna Khawar⁴, Fatima Saeed⁵, Tauseef Ahmad⁶

¹Ph.D. Scholar, Lahore College for Women University

²Ph.D. Scholar, Lahore College for Women University: Head of department Psychology, university of Okara

³Ph.D. Scholar, Lahore College for Women University: Principal Lecturer, University of Central Punjab

⁴Ph.D., Assistant Professor Lahore College for Women University

⁵Government Special Education School, Renala Khurd

⁶Lecturer, University of Okara

Corresponding Author: Sameen Sadaqat, sameen.sadaqat@gmail.com, Ph.D. Scholar, Lahore College for Women University

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ABSTRACT

Background: Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains a global public health issue, often rooted in early relational and emotional development. Dysfunctional family environments and poor emotional regulation are strongly associated with IPV-related attitudes and behaviors. Emotional intelligence, which reflects an individual's ability to recognize and manage emotions, may serve as a critical mediator in this context. Understanding the interplay between family functioning, emotional intelligence, and IPV attitudes can inform preventive interventions and promote healthier relationship dynamics.

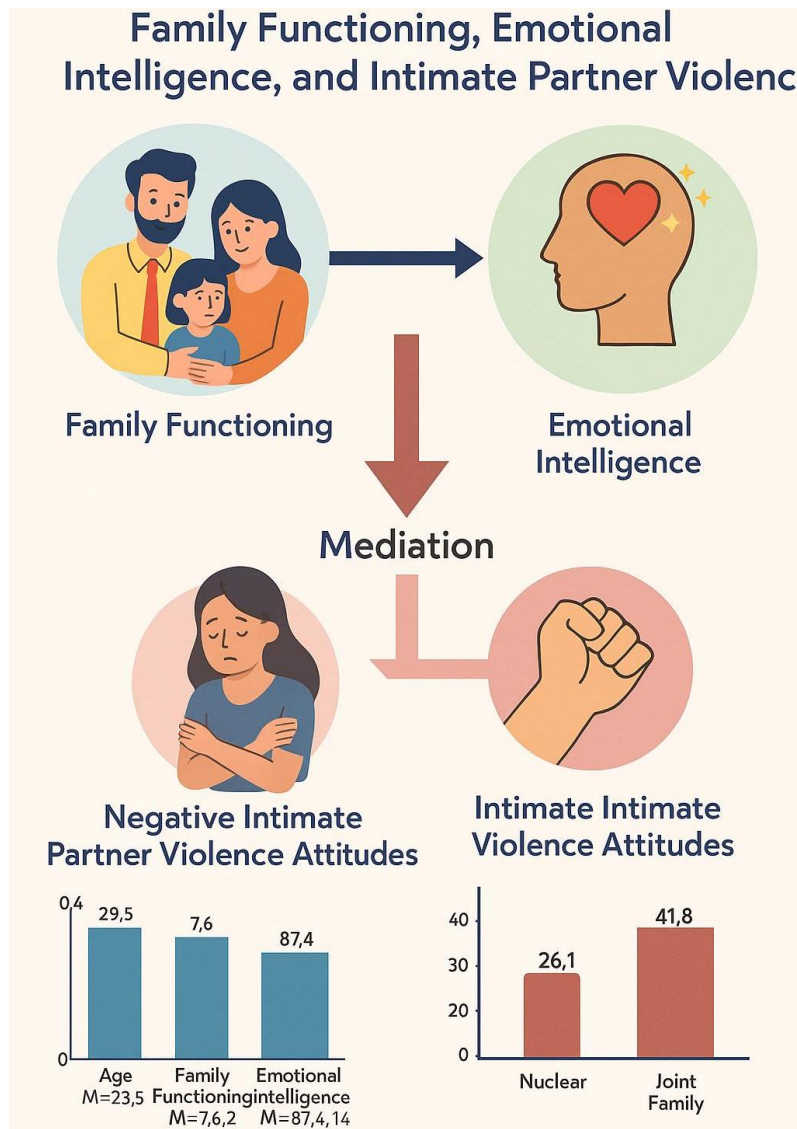
Objective: This study aimed to assess the relationship between family functioning and attitudes toward intimate partner violence, with a focus on the mediating role of emotional intelligence.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 150 Pakistani adults (N=150), aged 18–45 years (M=23.45, SD=4.79). Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. The study utilized the Family APGAR Scale (Smilkstein et al., 1982), the Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale (Smith et al., 2005), the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Law et al., 2004), and a structured demographic questionnaire. Data analysis included Pearson correlation, linear regression, mediation analysis via PROCESS macro, and independent sample t-tests using SPSS version 25.

Results: Significant negative correlations were found between family functioning and IPV attitudes ($r = -0.86, p = .01$), and between emotional intelligence and IPV attitudes ($r = -0.83, p = .01$). Family functioning positively correlated with emotional intelligence ($r = 0.89, p = .01$). Regression analysis indicated that family functioning significantly predicted IPV attitudes ($\beta = -3.87, p < .001, R^2 = .74$). Mediation analysis showed that emotional intelligence partially mediated the relationship ($\beta = -2.55, SE = 0.41, p < .001$). T-test results revealed that joint families showed significantly more unfavorable attitudes toward IPV than nuclear families ($t(138) = -9.14, p < .001, d = 1.5$).

Conclusion: Emotional intelligence partially mediates the relationship between family functioning and IPV attitudes. These findings highlight the value of family-based and emotional intelligence-focused interventions in reducing IPV-supportive attitudes.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Family Relations, Intimate Partner Violence, Mediation Analysis, Psychological Attitudes, Social Environment, Spousal Abuse



INTRODUCTION

Family dynamics significantly influence how individuals understand, regulate, and express emotions, which in turn shape their interactions within intimate relationships. The interplay between early familial experiences and later relational outcomes has been a central theme in psychological research (1,2). Among these outcomes, intimate partner violence (IPV)—defined as physical, emotional, or sexual harm caused by a current or former partner—represents a critical public health and social concern with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and communities (3,4). The origins of IPV are complex, often rooted in dysfunctional family environments characterized by conflict, neglect, or emotional disengagement. Research suggests that inadequate emotional support and poor family communication may disrupt emotional development and coping mechanisms, increasing vulnerability to IPV either as a victim or perpetrator (5,6). Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others, offers a meaningful lens through which to explore the pathways linking family functioning to IPV (7). Individuals with high EI are generally more adept at resolving conflict, managing stress, and building empathic, respectful relationships, thereby reducing the likelihood of aggression or violence (8,9). Conversely, emotionally dysregulated individuals may be more prone to mismanaging interpersonal tensions, escalating conflicts into abusive encounters. While research has established the significance of

both family environment and emotional intelligence in shaping relationship behaviors, limited empirical attention has been given to how EI may serve as a mediating mechanism between family dynamics and IPV (10,11).

The theoretical foundations of this inquiry are grounded in several well-established psychological models. Family Systems Theory underscores how rigid roles, unresolved conflict, and poor communication patterns within families may contribute to maladaptive relational behavior in adulthood (12). Social Learning Theory highlights the role of modeled behavior—such as witnessing or experiencing violence during childhood—as a pathway for normalizing aggressive conflict resolution strategies (13). Attachment Theory further explains how insecure attachments may foster dependency, jealousy, and emotional dysregulation, all of which are recognized risk factors for IPV (14). Finally, the Ecological Systems Theory broadens this perspective, contextualizing IPV as an outcome influenced by interactions between individual, familial, societal, and cultural systems (15). Despite the growing interest in IPV and the psychological mechanisms underlying it, a notable gap remains in understanding how emotional intelligence functions as a link between one's family experiences and the development or prevention of partner violence. Most studies have investigated these variables in isolation, leaving an integrative understanding of their interrelations largely underexplored (10,16). This research, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining the role of emotional intelligence in mediating the relationship between family functioning and intimate partner violence. Specifically, it aims to investigate how family communication, emotional support, and problem-solving capacities relate to emotional intelligence, and how these, in turn, influence the risk of IPV. By advancing this understanding, the study hopes to inform the development of prevention and intervention programs that emphasize emotional skills training to foster healthy, non-violent intimate relationships.

METHODS

A cross-sectional research design was employed to investigate the relationship between family functioning, emotional intelligence, and attitudes toward intimate partner violence. A convenience sampling strategy was utilized to recruit 150 adult participants from various educational institutions and organizations across Pakistan. The sample consisted of 110 women and 40 men aged between 18 and 40 years, all of whom volunteered to participate without monetary compensation. Data collection was conducted both online via Google Forms and in person by the research team. Participants were included based on specific eligibility criteria. Only individuals aged 18 years and above with at least a middle school level of formal education were considered. The sample included participants in formal and informal relationships, as well as those not currently in a relationship, and encompassed both working and non-working individuals. Exclusion criteria involved individuals younger than 18 years, those with chronic physical disabilities, and individuals experiencing severe emotional disturbances—such as suicidal ideation, unresolved post-traumatic stress due to unrelated traumatic events, or any psychological trauma occurring within the past three months. Notably, the criterion “no compensation for” was grammatically incomplete in the original version and has been revised for clarity. A self-constructed demographic form was used to gather essential sociodemographic data including age, gender, education, marital status, occupational status, and family system. To measure emotional intelligence, the study employed the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), comprising 16 items categorized into four domains: self-emotion appraisal (SEA), others' emotion appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE), and regulation of emotion (ROE). This scale has demonstrated sound convergent validity with established EI instruments, such as the Trait Meta-Mood Scale and the EQ-i. Attitudes toward intimate partner violence were assessed using the Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale (IPVAS). This scale originally consisted of 23 items reflecting three factors—abuse, control, and violence. One item was removed due to concerns regarding the wording (“egotistical”), reducing the final count to 22 items. Respondents rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Family dynamics were evaluated using the Family APGAR Scale, which examines five functional domains: adaptation, partnership, growth, affection, and resolution. Participants rated each item on a 3-point ordinal scale (0 = hardly ever, 1 = some of the time, 2 = most of the time). Based on cumulative scores, family functioning was classified as severely dysfunctional (0–3), moderately dysfunctional (4–6), or functional (7–10). The internal reliability of the scale was high, with an ordinal alpha of 0.89. Before data collection, participants provided informed consent through a form attached to the online survey. Clear instructions were provided for all scales. The completed questionnaires were reviewed and scored according to the original authors' guidelines. Data were then entered into SPSS version 25 for statistical analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB).

RESULTS

The results of the study were presented in a series of structured analyses, beginning with the demographic profile of the participants. A total of 150 adults, predominantly women ($n = 110$), with a mean age of 23.45 years ($SD = 4.79$), participated in the study. The majority of participants were undergraduate students (43.6%), with a significant portion belonging to middle-class socioeconomic status (37.3%). Most participants came from nuclear family systems (39.8%) and reported relationships of less than three years in duration (44.5%). Reliability analysis demonstrated acceptable to high internal consistency across all instruments used. The Family APGAR Scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72, the Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale had an alpha of 0.74, and the Emotional Intelligence Scale

exhibited excellent reliability with an alpha of 0.88. These values confirmed that all three tools were psychometrically sound for the study population. Correlational analysis revealed significant relationships among the primary study variables. Family functioning was positively correlated with emotional intelligence ($r = 0.89$, $p < .01$), suggesting that individuals from well-functioning families demonstrated higher emotional intelligence. Conversely, both family functioning and emotional intelligence were significantly negatively correlated with attitudes favoring intimate partner violence ($r = -0.86$ and $r = -0.83$, respectively; $p < .01$), indicating that higher scores in these domains were associated with less favorable views toward IPV.

Simple linear regression analysis confirmed that family functioning was a significant predictor of intimate partner violence attitudes. The model explained 74% of the variance in IPV attitudes ($R^2 = 0.74$, $F(1,138) = 393.14$, $p < .001$), and the regression coefficient indicated that better family functioning significantly predicted less favorable attitudes toward IPV ($\beta = -3.87$, $SE = 0.19$, $p < .001$). To assess the mediating role of emotional intelligence, mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro. The total effect of family functioning on IPV attitudes was significant ($\beta = -0.86$, $SE = 0.19$, $p < .001$), as was the indirect effect through emotional intelligence ($\beta = -0.31$, $SE = 0.40$, 95% CI [-2.12, -0.51]). Family functioning had a significant positive effect on emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.89$, $SE = 0.28$, $p < .001$), and emotional intelligence significantly predicted IPV attitudes ($\beta = -0.32$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$). After controlling for emotional intelligence, the direct effect of family functioning on IPV attitudes remained significant but was reduced ($\beta = -2.55$, $SE = 0.41$, $p < .001$), indicating partial mediation. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare IPV attitudes between individuals from nuclear and joint families. Results revealed a statistically significant difference ($t(138) = -9.14$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.5$), with participants from joint family systems showing less favorable attitudes toward IPV ($M = 41.78$, $SD = 12.61$) compared to those from nuclear families ($M = 26.10$, $SD = 6.38$). This finding supports the hypothesis that family structure is significantly associated with attitudes toward partner violence.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variable (N=150)

Variables	<i>F</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age			23.45	4.79
Gender				
Men	40	16.9		
Women	110	46.6		
Education				
Intermediate	5	2.1		
Undergraduate	103	43.6		
Postgraduate	50	21.2		
Ph.D.	3	1.3		
Occupational Status				
Student	106	44.9		
Unemployed	13	5.5		
Employed	27	11.4		
Homemaker	15	6.4		
Socioeconomic Status				
Lower Class	4	1.7		
Middle Class	88	37.3		
Upper-Middle Class	63	26.7		
Upper Class	6	2.5		
Family Structure				

Nuclear Family	94	39.8		
Joint Family	67	28.4		
Marital Status				
Arranged Marriage	72	30.5		
Engaged	12	5.1		
Single	29	12.3		
Love Marriage	36	15.3		
In a Relationship	12	5.1		
Length of Relationship				
Less than 3 Years	105	44.5		
Less than 5 years	25	10.6		
7+ Years	31	13.1		
Number of children if any.			.30	.79

Note: f= Frequency, %= Percentage, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's Alpha of Study Scales

Scales	N	M	SD	α
Family APGAR Scale	5	5.66	4.34	.72
Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale	17	50.24	76.18	.74
How Emotionally Intelligent are You? Scale	16	86.43	14.09	.88

Note: N=No. of items, M=Means, SD=Standard Deviation, α = Cronbach's alpha

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Family Functioning, Emotional Intelligence and Intimate Partner Violence Attitudes

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3
Family Functioning	150	7.59	2.84	--	--	--
Emotional Intelligence	150	87.37	14.47	.89**	--	--
Intimate Partner Violence	150	34.37	12.79	-.86**	-.83**	--

**p<.01

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression Showing Family Functioning as Predictor of Intimate Partner Violence Attitudes (N=150)

Variables	Model		
	B	β	SE
Constant	63.29***		1.56
Family Functioning	-3.87***	-.86	.19
R ²	.74		

Note. ***p<.001

Table 5: Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors and Model Summary Information for the Emotional Intelligence, Family Functioning and Intimate Partner Violence Attitudes Mediation Analysis (N=150)

Antecedents	Consequent					
	Emotional Intelligence (M)			Intimate Partner Violence (Y)		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Family Functioning	a .89	.28	.00***	c' -2.55	.41	.000***
Emotional Intelligence	---	---	---	b -.32	.05	.000***
	$R^2=.79$			$R^2=.87$		
	$F(1,138)= 525.26, p<.001***$			$F(2,137)=220.27, p<.001***$		

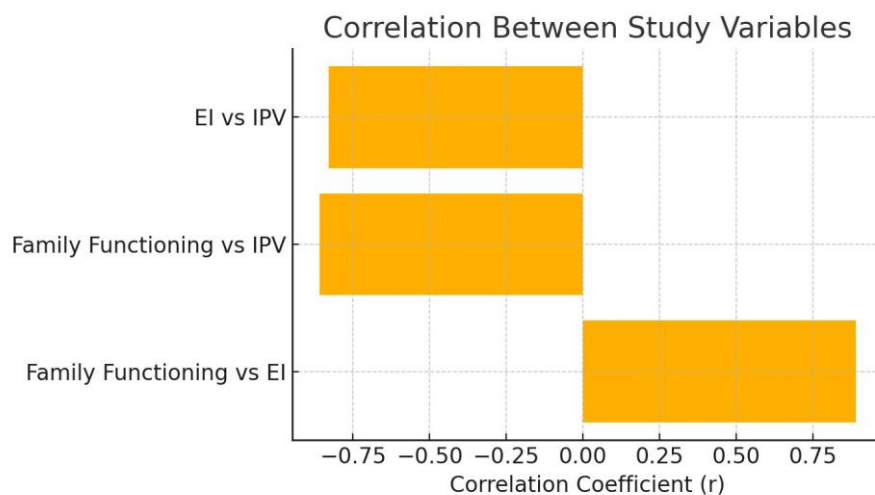
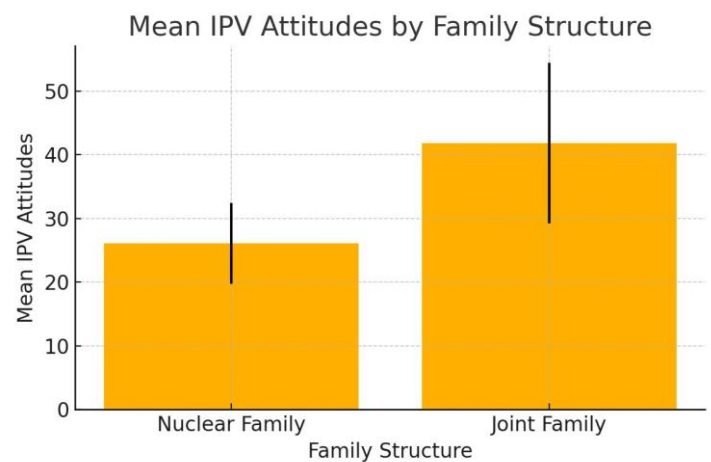
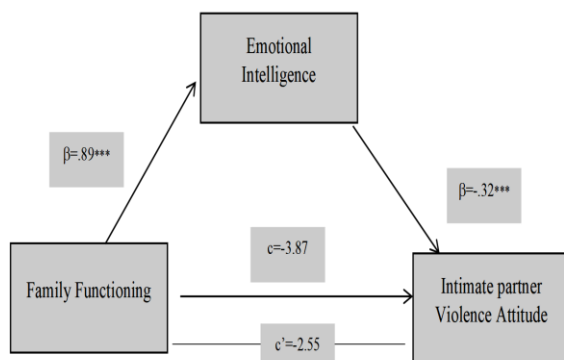
Note; β =Standardized Coefficient, SE = Standard Error, R^2 = R Square, *** $p<.001$, ** $p<.01$

Table 6: Mean Comparison of Family Structure on Intimate Partner Violence Attitudes

Measure	Nuclear Family		Joint Family		$t(138)$	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Intimate Partner Violence Attitudes	26.10	6.38	41.78	12.61	-9.14	.00	1.5

Note: CI=Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper limit , *** $p<.001$

The mediation pathway of Family Functioning, Emotional Intelligence and Intimate Partner Violence.



DISCUSSION

The present study examined the interrelationship between family functioning, emotional intelligence, and attitudes toward intimate partner violence, highlighting the mediating role of emotional intelligence. The findings supported the initial hypothesis, confirming that individuals from well-functioning families and those with higher emotional intelligence were more likely to hold unfavorable attitudes toward intimate partner violence. This aligns with earlier studies that reported a negative association between family dysfunction and pro-violence attitudes, suggesting that emotionally supportive and communicative family environments play a crucial role in shaping healthy relational perceptions (15). The significant negative correlation between family functioning and intimate partner violence attitudes observed in this study underscores the protective role of cohesive family structures. Previous research has demonstrated that individuals who grow up in emotionally neglectful or hostile family settings are more likely to internalize dysfunctional relational patterns, which may manifest in the form of acceptance or perpetration of violence in intimate relationships. Similarly, family environments characterized by adaptability, shared responsibilities, and emotional connectedness tend to foster resilience and healthier interpersonal behavior (16,17).

Emotional intelligence was also found to be significantly negatively associated with attitudes supporting intimate partner violence. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence were more adept at understanding, regulating, and utilizing emotional information, which reduced their tolerance for aggressive or coercive relational behaviors (18). These findings reinforce existing literature indicating that emotional intelligence serves as a crucial determinant of interpersonal behavior, conflict resolution, and mental well-being. Furthermore, the study highlighted the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the link between family functioning and IPV attitudes, supporting the notion that emotionally intelligent individuals, often nurtured in functional family settings, are less likely to endorse or engage in intimate partner violence. Regression analysis further supported the predictive role of family functioning in shaping IPV attitudes (19,20). Individuals from families with strong communicative, adaptive, and affectionate dynamics demonstrated lower acceptance of intimate partner violence. This is consistent with theoretical frameworks such as the Family Systems Model, which emphasizes the importance of relational patterns and emotional climate within the family as foundational for individual development and social behavior (21). The comparison between family structures revealed that individuals from joint families exhibited less favorable attitudes toward IPV compared to those from nuclear families. This finding suggests that the presence of extended kinship networks and greater adult supervision may contribute to the reinforcement of prosocial norms and reduce the likelihood of relational violence. It also highlights the socio-cultural dynamics in which collectivist values and intergenerational support may act as protective factors against abuse (22).

One of the notable strengths of this study lies in its attempt to integrate emotional intelligence as a mediating psychological construct, offering a nuanced understanding of the psychosocial mechanisms underpinning IPV attitudes. Moreover, the use of validated instruments and a comprehensive data analysis approach lends methodological rigor to the findings. However, the study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional nature of the research restricts causal inferences, and the reliance on self-report measures may have introduced social desirability bias. The sample was predominantly composed of females and young adults, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across gender and age groups. Additionally, the lack of analysis across other demographic subgroups, such as educational level and occupation, represents a missed opportunity for further insights. Future research should aim to address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs and incorporating more diverse and representative samples. There is also a need to examine the role of other psychosocial variables, such as coping strategies, attachment styles, and exposure to early trauma, which may interact with emotional intelligence and family dynamics in influencing IPV attitudes. Developing and evaluating intervention programs that promote emotional intelligence skills within families, schools, and communities could serve as an effective strategy for IPV prevention. Targeted emotional regulation training and family-based interventions may foster healthier relationship patterns and reduce the societal burden of intimate partner violence. The integration of emotional intelligence training into public health initiatives could enhance interpersonal resilience and contribute to violence reduction across various social contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that emotional intelligence plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between family functioning and attitudes toward intimate partner violence. By highlighting how emotionally supportive and well-functioning family environments contribute to the development of emotional intelligence, the findings offer meaningful insight into the psychological pathways that influence tolerance for relational violence. The study emphasizes that fostering emotional intelligence and strengthening family dynamics can be powerful strategies in preventing harmful attitudes and behaviors in intimate relationships. These insights hold significant practical value for designing targeted interventions aimed at promoting healthier interpersonal relationships and reducing the prevalence of intimate partner violence.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author	Contribution
Sameen Sadaqat	Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing - Original Draft, Validation, Supervision
Ayesha Jabbar	Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Review & Editing
Syeda Ayesha Noor	Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Software
Amna Khawar	Software, Validation, Writing - Original Draft
Fatima Saeed	Formal Analysis, Writing - Review & Editing
Tauseef Ahmad	Writing - Review & Editing, Assistance with Data Curation

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