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Articles

Impact of Masculinity and Normative Male Alexithymia on Interpersonal Difficulties in Young Adult Males

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Abstract

The study of psychology of men and masculinity received scientific attention recently focusing on gender differences and its impact in communicating and expressing emotions. It has been proposed that men, who had been discouraged as boys in expressing and talking about their emotions showed difficulty in identifying and expressing emotions throughout their lives which has been termed as normative male alexithymia (Levant, 2011). Emotions are related to many vital functions, and its awareness leads to healthy intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning. The present study aimed to explore the impact of masculinity and normative male alexithymia on interpersonal difficulties in young adult males. Assessment measures included a demographic form, sex role attitude scale, normative male alexithymia scale, and interpersonal difficulties scale. Sample of the study (N=232) included young adult males (Age = 18 to 24) who were approached through the universities of Lahore. Results suggested that with the increase in traditional masculinity, normative male alexithymia and interpersonal difficulties also increases. Further it was found that traditional masculinity predicted interpersonal difficulties and normative male alexithymia aggravate the relationship. Moreover, normative male alexithymia mediates the relationship between traditional masculinity and interpersonal difficulties. Findings of the study were explained and future implications were discussed.

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1. Introduction

Literature on specifically men's gender roles have almost been absent in the psychological world until the end of 1970's and this concept was only partially accepted in the 1980's (O' Neil, 2008). In the 1960's, the feminist scholars highlighted the importance for gender specific approach in research. It gradually laid the foundation of new psychology of women in the past 50 years. In the same spirit, men's scholars started examining masculinity as a complex construct rather than the universal depiction of human behavior (Levant, 2011).

Early pioneers investigated the norms of masculinity and traditional man as dominant, aggressive, self-reliant, and emotionally restrictive (Levant, 2006). The problems found to be prevalent among men and emphasized by the researchers of masculinity included violence, neglecting health needs, disengagement from relationships, and devaluing women (Allison & Klein, 2019; Bal, 2020; Olanrewaju et al, 2019; Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015; WHO, 2020).

There is no universal definition of masculinity, however, it is generally known as a configuration of practices, organized in reference to the structures of gender identities and relations (Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015). Culture has strong influence in shaping the beliefs of masculinity in any society that intensely affect men's mental health (Mankowski & Smith, 2016; Rice, 2019). When masculinity intersects with the male physiology it creates unique challenges for men's healthcare (Brooks, 2001). The World Health Organization (WHO) brought to light the dire need to pay attention to the shorter life expectancy of men as compared to women. It has been identified that there is a gap in understanding the role of masculinity in shaping men's behaviors and expectations as a primary factor causing health disparity between men and women (WHO, 2013).

It has been observed that men experienced a hard time in giving words to their emotional states as compared to women (Chung & Chen, 2020a). Alexithymia is a personality construct associated with reduced ability to identify and describe feelings, limited fantasy and imaginal activity, and concrete way of thinking. The construct emerged in nineteenth century and was primarily discussed in the context of patients having psychosomatic illness (Heshmati & Azmoodeh, 2017; Taylor & Bagby, 2013). This term 'alexithymia' was first used by Sifneos (Peasley-Miklus et al., 2016) and he described individuals with high alexithymia as anxious, depressed, and unaware of their emotional states (Pellerone et al., 2017). The neural correlates of alexithymia remained a topic of empirical investigation as it has yielded inconsistent results in the past. van der Velde et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analysis and found alexithymia to be associated with reduced response of the amygdala while processing negative emotional stimuli,

suggesting less attention to negative stimuli. On the other hand, alexithymia was found to be associated with reduced emotional awareness regarding positive affect due to the decreased activation in the right insula and precuneus as manifested by the functional neuroimaging studies.

Alexithymia makes an individual vulnerable to both somatic and psychological disorders as a result of emotional dysregulation (Chung & Chen, 2020b; Leonardi et al., 2014). It is considered a risk factor and/or exacerbating factor for a range of behavioral problems as well like smart phone addiction (Elkholy et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2018), caffeine addiction (Lyvers et al., 2017), problematic alcohol use (João Teixeira et al., 2017; Khosravani et al., 2018; Pedersen et al., 2016), internet addiction (Bonnaire & Baptista, 2019; Evren et al., 2019; Mahapatra & Sharma, 2018; Schimmenti et al., 2017), aggression and impulsivity (Evren et al., 2019) etc.

Alexithymia was found to be more prevalent in males as compared to females (Levant & Wong, 2013). Considering the significant gender differences in the level of alexithymia, Levant (1992) proposed a hypothesis for Normative Male Alexithymia (NMA) referring to a socialized pattern of restrictive emotionality which was observed in men due to the impact of traditional masculinity ideology. Impact of social learning theory in the development of alexithymia and significant gender differences observed in the existing literature laid the basis for the construct of normative male alexithymia. The NMA refers to mild to moderate levels of alexithymia prevailing more commonly among general population as compared to severe or clinical alexithymia which remained the focus of all the existing literature of alexithymia (Levant et al., 2009).

Levant (2011) theorized that the difficulty in giving verbal expression to the emotional states being experienced appeared to be more for those who had been discouraged in the childhood from the expression of emotions. Discouragement can be from parents, family members, friends, or teachers, which may lead to the development of limited or insufficient vocabulary and reduced awareness for many of the emotional states. Specifically, the greatest deficits are in the identification and expression of those emotions which reflect a sense of vulnerability like sadness or fear or which expresses attachment like fondness or care.

When a person becomes aware of the emotions he is feeling, only then he is able to regulate them and behave in healthy and socially acceptable ways (Lambie & Marcel, 2002; Rieffe et al., 2010). Alexithymia has strong impact on the interpersonal relationships of its sufferers. Challenge of identification of emotions and expression of emotions are two basic components of alexithymia that also play an essential role in developing and maintaining healthy

relationships. Hence much of existing research supports alexithymia to be in a significant positive relationship with interpersonal problems (Pellerone et al., 2017; Spitzer et al., 2005; Vanheule et al., 2007).

The university students as young adults face new challenges of forming and maintaining relationship at a level never experienced before (Havenga & Sengane, 2018; Parker et al., 2004). In university years, maturity and intimacy are regulated under new rules, acquisition of new skills to develop new self-identity, and new modes of bonding within the norms of the culture (Bouteyre et al., 2007). Inability to learn new rules can result in relationship problems. The manifestations of interpersonal difficulties are shaped not only by the age and stage, but by the cultural practices and expectations as well. Many cross-cultural researchers have also noticed a marked difference in the experience and expression of interpersonal relationships and problems associated with these relationships vary across collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Phinney et al., 2000).

It can be frustrating to be taught one thing and then asked to do another. This is, however, the experience of many men for been trained to be stereotypically masculine and then, upon aging into adult roles, are expected to be relationally skilled and emotionally available (Englar-Carlson & Shepard, 2005). The transition is not always smooth, and the personal and interpersonal consequences are not always pleasant, either for the stereotypically masculine men or for those around them. The degree to which a man learns to be strong and to devalue weakness, his compassion toward frailty not just in himself but in those around him may be limited or condescending.

Restrictive emotionality has been linked with increased health risks which may partially explain the greater mortality of men as compared to women (Levant et al., 2011). These gender specific problems have negatively affected not only men but also their families and society (Levant et al., 2003). Such problems seem to adversely affect one's overall functioning, feelings of well-being, quality of life, and personal happiness (Martino et al., 2019; Ravitz et al., 2007). As compared to west, in eastern cultures, masculinity is perceived in more traditional ways which has been identified in different researches as hegemonic masculinity (Bahsin, 2008). The relation of this specific kind of masculinity with the interpersonal problems and restrictive emotionality is an area which needs to be explored by researchers and mental health professionals. There seems a high relevance of exploring such linkages with assessment, treatment planning, and for the development and evaluation of preventative and remedial interventions (Alexithymia Reduction Treatment; Levant, 2011).

The present study aims at investigating normative male alexithymia as a mediator of the relationship between masculinity and interpersonal difficulties. We hypothesize that; (1): traditional masculinity would be associated positively with normative male alexithymia and interpersonal difficulties i.e. unstable relationships, mistrust, and lack of boundaries (2): normative male alexithymia would be associated positively with interpersonal difficulties i.e. unstable relationships, mistrust, and lack of boundaries. (3): traditional masculinity and normative male alexithymia would predict interpersonal difficulties i.e. unstable relationships, mistrust, and lack of boundaries. (4): the indirect paths from traditional masculinity, to interpersonal difficulties i.e. unstable relationships, mistrust, and lack of boundaries, through normative male alexithymia, would be significant.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of men ($N=232$) from 18 years to 24 years of age ($M=21.33$, $SD=1.87$) enrolled in various programs of different private, semi-government and government academic institutions of Lahore city, Pakistan.

2.2 Assessment Measures

Following tools were used in the present study to assess study variables:

Sex Role Attitude Scale (SRAS). The SRAS is an indigenous scale which was originally developed by Anila and Ansari (1992) in Urdu language. It was based on Gender Schema Theory by Sandra Bem (1981). This is a 32 items, 5 point likert scale assessing the degree of agreement and disagreement of individuals. Half of the items are phrased in a modern/egalitarian manner while other half in traditional/male dominant manner. The score range of SRAS is 32 to 160 in which the higher the score, the more modern gender role attitude an individual has whereas, lower scores depict traditional gender role attitude. The SRAS is a well-researched scale in Pakistan (Aziz & Kamal, 2012; Kamal et al., 2010). Cronbach's alpha for SRAS was 0.77 depicting it to be a reliable measure for the sample of the present research

Normative Male Alexithymia Scale. NMAS is a brief scale of 20 items developed to assess normative male alexithymia (Levant et al., 2006). Higher the scores, higher will be normative male alexithymia, and lower scores depict lower normative male alexithymia. It has no subscales and cronbach's alpha of NMAS turned out to be 0.73 which showed that it was found to be reliable measure for the sample of the present research.

Interpersonal Difficulties Scale. It is a self-report measure consisting of 61 items developed by Saleem et al. (2014) to assess the interpersonal difficulties faced by the university students. It consists of six factors including Dominated by Others, Low Self-Confidence, Mistrust, Lack of Assertiveness, Lack of Boundaries, and Instability in Relationships. In the present study only three of the factors of interpersonal difficulties had been assessed used which were relevant to the conceptual framework of the study. This include instability in relationships, mistrust, and lack of boundaries. It is a 5 point Likert Scale where each factor has its individual score. Cronbach's alpha for the 12 items of Mistrust ($\alpha = 0.71$), 7 items of unstable relationships ($\alpha = 0.72$), and 8 items of lack of boundaries ($\alpha = 0.66$) were calculated which showed it to be a reliable measure for the sample of the present research. High scores represent higher intensity of the respective interpersonal difficulty.

Demographic Questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed keeping in view the relevance of various demographic factors for present research. The information focused on the participant's age, education, questions related to education system, birth order, family system, general home atmosphere and questions related to relationships. Information regarding relationship and home environment were collected on 5 point likert scale from very unsatisfactory to very satisfactory.

2.3 Procedure

Initially 10 participants were approached for pilot study. The purpose was to explore the comprehension for the assessment measures and to see the average duration and time for administration. According to participants' responses it was found that questionnaires were easy to understand for them and 20-25 minutes duration would be required for administration. For the intention of data collection many departments of different universities of Lahore city were visited including University of the Punjab, Bahudinzikriya University, and University of Management and Technology. After undergoing the process of seeking permission from the head of the departments the participants were approached and briefed about the intention of the study. After providing all the necessary information, their consent to participate in the study was taken and questionnaires were given to the participants. Participants were assured that the confidentiality of their data will be maintained. Participants were not offered any monetary rewards or incentives.

All the questionnaires were filled by the participants in the presence of the researcher and the participants took almost 20-30 minutes for the completion of demographic form and the three measures. Mostly the data was collected in classroom settings in the form of groups. Almost 26

participants refused to participate in the study due to different reasons while 18 forms were incompletely filled and discarded by the researcher. So, the sample size of this study was 232 young adult males.

2.4 Data Analysis Strategy

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics were used to compute frequency, mean and percentages for the socio-demographic variables. Pearson correlation was used to find the association between masculinity, normative male alexithymia, and interpersonal difficulties. Mediation analysis was used to assess the mediating role of normative male alexithymia between masculinity and interpersonal problems.

Mediation analysis was conducted using the Process plug analysis which works on four assumptions of mediation: (1) predictor variable (masculinity) predicts outcome variables (unstable relationship, mistrust, and lack of boundaries); (2) the outcome variables (unstable relationship, mistrust, and lack of boundaries) predicts mediator (normative male alexithymia); (3) mediator (normative male alexithymia) predicts outcome variables (unstable relationship, mistrust, and lack of boundaries) taking in to account the effect of predictor variable (masculinity); (4) predictor variable (masculinity) no longer predicts or lessened in predicting outcome variables (unstable relationship, mistrust, and lack of boundaries) when the effect of mediator (normative male alexithymia) is taken in to account (Hayes, 2016).

3. Results

Data cleaning was initially done to look for possible errors and missing data. After examining the items of missing data points, mean substitutions were used to fill out the omissions (Dodeen, 2003). Further, the data was normally distributed and no significant outliers were found in the data set.

The present study aims to explore a relationship between traditional masculinity, normative male alexithymia and interpersonal difficulties. For this purpose, Pearson product moment correlation was carried out to find out the relationship between these variables (Table 1). Masculinity was measured using sex role attitude scale whose scoring lies on a continuum from traditional to modern where higher score on the scale depicts modern masculinity and lower scores represents traditional masculinity. On the other hand, normative male alexithymia was measured using normative male alexithymia scale in which higher the scores higher will be the normative male alexithymia and lower the scores lower will be the normative male alexithymia. The results of Pearson product moment correlation are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1 SRAS	-	-.55**	-.49**	-.49**	-.14*	98.56	14.79
2 NMAS		-	.79**	.71**	.43**	74.42	8.41
3 Unstable Relationship			-	.70**	.34**	13.91	2.45
4 Mistrust				-	.28**	13.44	2.08
5 Boundaries					-	15.25	4.22

Note. SRAS = Total score of Sex Role Attitude Scale, NMAS = Total score of Normative Male Alexithymia Scale, Boundaries = lack of boundaries, *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table no. 1 suggests that traditional masculinity varies with normative male alexithymia and there is a moderate, significant, negative correlation between masculinity and normative male alexithymia ($p \leq .01$). Further, there is a significantly negative correlation between masculinity, unstable relationships, mistrust, and lack of boundaries ($p \leq .01$). This shows that each of the three interpersonal difficulties varies with traditionally masculine beliefs while interpersonal difficulties vary inversely with modern masculine beliefs. Moreover, table no. 1 reveals that there is a significant positive correlation between normative male alexithymia, lack of boundaries, mistrust, and unstable relationship ($p \leq .01$). This suggest that normative male alexithymia varies with interpersonal difficulties.

In order to test the hypothesis that normative male alexithymia would mediate the relationship between masculinity and interpersonal difficulties mediation analyses was further conducted using the Process plug in analysis. Results of the three mediation models for each of the outcome variables are given separately in table 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2. Mediation analysis showing normative male alexithymia as a mediator between masculinity and unstable relationships (N=232)

Regression paths	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Mediation <i>a</i> path (Masculinity on NMA)	-.32	-10.18	< .001
Mediation <i>b</i> path (NMA on UR)	.22	15.76	< .001
Total effect, <i>c</i> path (Masculinity on UR; No mediator)	-.08	-8.69	< .001
Direct effect <i>c'</i> (Masculinity on UR including NMA as mediator)	-.01	-1.61	.11
Indirect effect bootstrapped ($c - c'$) with bootstrapped 95% CI		-.07 [-.08, -.06]	

Note. NMA=Normative Male Alexithymia, UR = Unstable Relationship, *B* = unstandardized coefficient, *CI* = confidence interval.

Table no 2 illustrates a complete mediation effect of normative male alexithymia between masculinity and unstable relationship. Masculinity significantly predicted unstable relationship and normative male alexithymia. But masculinity no longer explained unstable relationship once normative male alexithymia was taken in to account while normative male alexithymia did.

Table 3. Mediation analysis showing normative male alexithymia as a mediator between masculinity and mistrust (N=232)

Regression paths	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Mediation <i>a</i> path (Masculinity on NMA)	-.32	-10.18	< .001
Mediation <i>b</i> path (NMA on Mistrust)	.16	11.85	< .001
Total effect, <i>c</i> path (Masculinity on Mistrust; No mediator)	-.07	-8.52	< .001
Direct effect <i>c'</i> (Masculinity on Mistrust including NMA as mediator)	-.02	-2.36	.02
Indirect effect bootstrapped (<i>c – c'</i>) with bootstrapped 95% CI		-.05 [-.06, -.04]	

Note. NMA=Normative Male Alexithymia, *B* = unstandardized coefficient, *CI* = confidence interval.

Table no 3 showed a partial mediation effect of normative male alexithymia between masculinity and mistrust. Masculinity significantly predicted both mistrust and normative male alexithymia. However, masculinity was less related to mistrust when normative male alexithymia was taken in to account.

Table 4. Mediation analysis showing normative male alexithymia as a mediator between masculinity and lack of boundaries (N=232)

Regression paths	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Mediation <i>a</i> path (Masculinity on NMA)	-.32	-10.18	< .001
Mediation <i>b</i> path (NMA on LB)	.26	7.13	< .001
Total effect, <i>c</i> path (Masculinity on LB; No mediator)	-.04	-2.25	.02
Direct effect <i>c'</i> (Masculinity on LB including NMA as mediator)	.04	1.92	.06
Indirect effect bootstrapped (<i>c – c'</i>) with bootstrapped 95% CI		-.08 [-.11, -.05]	

Note. NMA=Normative Male Alexithymia, LB = Lack of Boundaries, *B* = unstandardized coefficient, *CI* = confidence interval.

Table no. 4 illustrates a complete mediation effect of normative male alexithymia between masculinity and lack of boundaries. Masculinity significantly predicted lack of boundaries and normative male alexithymia. However, it no longer explained lack of boundaries once normative male alexithymia was taken in to account whereas normative male alexithymia did.

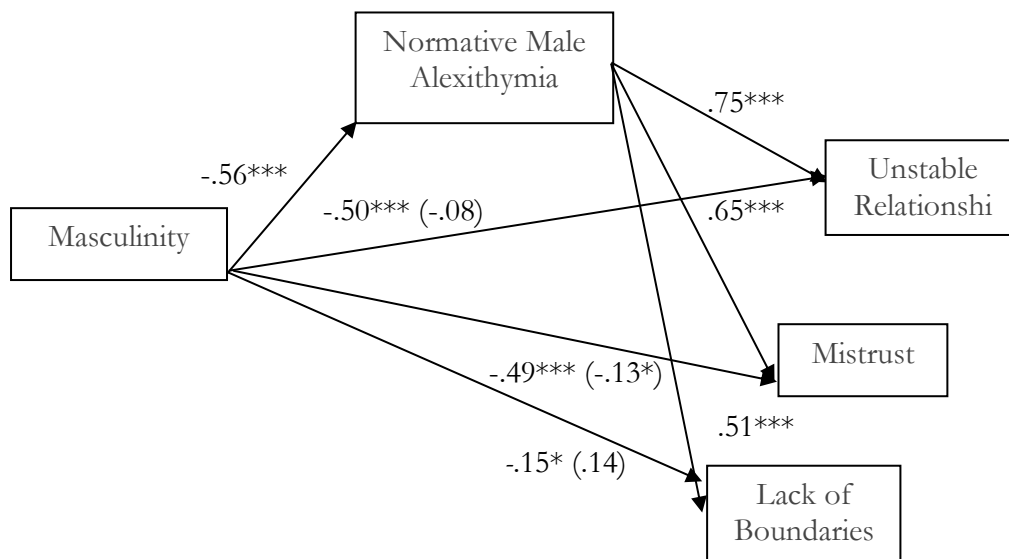


Figure 1. Emerged Statistical Model of mediation

4. Discussion

The present research aimed to explore the relationship among masculinity, normative male alexithymia in relationship with interpersonal problems in young adult males. We tried to identify the impact of traditional masculinity and normative male alexithymia on interpersonal difficulties in young adult males with Pakistani origin. Several hypotheses were formulated for the present research, analyzed and discussed.

We found a positive relationship between traditional masculinity and normative male alexithymia for Pakistani young adults studying in university setting which is also consistent with the existing international literature (Guvensel et al., 2017; Levant et al., 2003). Similar results were found in a Chinese study (Chung & Chen, 2020a) among young adults who were more likely to report emotional neglect and increased external oriented thinking style as compared to young females. Differing patterns of socialization among young adults may lead towards a reduced expressivity of their emotions and finding ways to relate themselves with others, thereby leading to relationship issues (Parnell & Hammer, 2018). Previous studies have also found normative male alexithymia to be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction and positively with fear of intimacy (Karakis & Levant, 2012). What one does not understand, one fears. Fear of emotional intimacy among young men can be affected by their understanding and expression of emotions coupled with belief in traditional masculine norms (Lentz, 2017). Fear of intimacy may affect interpersonal relationships among young men and feed the cycle of feelings of emotional inadequacy fueled by past experiences in difficulty in establishing trust and stable relationships.

Asian cultural norms on emotional restraint complement traditional masculinity ideology (Wong et al., 2012), which as the results indicate, strengthen alexithymia among young adults (Levant et al., 2015). Masculinity explained significant variance in alexithymia even when the other demographic variables had been controlled (Levant et al., 2003). Variance in masculine rigidity may be influenced by environmental factors (Berger et al., 2005), however, research is consistent in displaying that traditional masculinity influences normative male alexithymia (Levant & Wong, 2013; Levant et al., 2014). The effects of normative male alexithymia go beyond stable relationships and emotional expressiveness. Sullivan et al. (2014) reported that men scoring high on traditional masculinity and normative alexithymia report negative attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help.

By highlighting the role of masculinity and normative male alexithymia on interpersonal difficulties, the findings of the present study provide evidence for the relevance of these factors for interpersonal difficulties experienced by males. Even in advanced years of life, uninhibited alexithymia may continue to impede interpersonal relationships and even cause anxiety and depression among men (Carpenter & Addis, 2000; Gao et al., 2018; Hemming et al., 2019). A recent study among athlete men found that in active and retired players both, normative male alexithymia was associated with increased anxiety, depression, and decreased satisfaction with life. The tendency increased among players who identified more exclusively with the athlete role (Aston, 2019; Coleman et al., 2020). This gives some understanding that men who identify strongly with traditional male masculinity may feel similarly. Normative male alexithymia may be best explained by the archetype of masculinity i.e. a combat veteran. Military training, combat experience adds to the traditional masculinity ideology by instilling self-reliance, dominance, restrictive emotionality, and toughness. In a recent study, Cox and O'Loughlin (2017) examined veterans with PTSD on their romantic relationship dissatisfaction. Their findings indicated that PTSD partially mediated the association between endorsement of traditional masculine ideology and romantic relationship. The internalization of the 'male code' which prohibits exhibiting behaviors deemed feminine e.g. emotional expressiveness and/or looking vulnerable in young boys blocks the natural self-empathy required for normal emotional upbringing, leading to men lacking in such areas (Hoagland & Levant, 2015). Wood and Parker (2009) and Guvensel et al. (2017) suggest that high levels of alexithymia are connected to interpersonal problems and less satisfying interpersonal and sexual relationships.

Literature also provides evidence for the influence of men's adherence to traditional sex role beliefs on the quality of relationship. Traditional masculinity was found to not only decrease the relationship satisfaction of a man who conforms to traditionally masculine beliefs but was found

to similarly impact the relationship satisfaction of their partners (Breiding, 2004; Burn & Ward, 2005). Moreover, the present study revealed that higher scores on normative male alexithymia predicted higher scores for interpersonal difficulties among men. The results are found to be consistent with the previous studies which support that high alexithymic individuals have more interpersonal problems as compared to low alexithymic or non-alexithymic individuals (Vanheule et al., 2007; Zarei & Besharat, 2010). Karakis and Levant (2012) also found a negative association between normative male alexithymia and relationship satisfaction. Similarly, literature provides evidence of normative male alexithymia as a predictor of relationship dissatisfaction in other studies (e.g., Hoagland & Levant, 2015).

Our study further shows that normative male alexithymia mediates the relationship between masculinity and interpersonal difficulties. Lamke et al. (1994) studied the interplay of expression of emotions and feelings between gender roles and its impact on interpersonal relationships. Similar study was conducted by Frazier and Esterly (1990) where they found the mediating role of emotional dependence for gender and relationship satisfaction. The mediating role of alexithymia between the relationship of attachment patterns and coping strategies was explored and results revealed partial mediation among the said constructs (Craparo et al., 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge no study investigated the mediating role of normative male alexithymia between masculinity and interpersonal difficulties which is an addition to the existing body of literature.

5. Conclusion and implications

On the basis of the present investigation it can be concluded that those males who have traditional or male dominant beliefs have more difficulty in expressing their emotions which has a detrimental impact on the interpersonal relationships of men. Moreover, when masculinity interacts with normative male alexithymia it leads to instability and mistrust in relationships. It is implied that an increased understanding of the role of masculinity and awareness/expression of emotions can help in exploring some of the root causes of interpersonal difficulties which would further help in the provision of services to reduce relationship distress among men experiencing such difficulties.

The present study posits several implications for research and counseling practices.

It adds valuable insights to an improved understanding of the dysfunctional aspects of traditional masculinity and emotional display in interpersonal relationships. The present study can be utilized as a baseline study for guiding future researches to further explore this new psychology of men. This is an unexplored area of research especially for Pakistani young adults.

In western parts of the world it has been identified that many of the psychological problems remain undiagnosed among men and are found to have serious health damaging, and life-threatening impact on the life of men especially when it intersects with hegemonic masculinity (Coen et al., 2013). Hence it is suggested that treatment process and prevention programs should explicitly address the beliefs about gender among young men. Similarly, people high in alexithymia are usually reluctant in expressing themselves or sharing their experiences with others. They are also likely to either avoid or tend to withdraw from psychotherapeutic relationship earlier due to such challenges. Psychological interventions designed to address the beliefs about masculinity can be either adapted or contextualized for men in Pakistani culture. Existing interventions like Alexithymia Reduction Treatment (ART; Levant, 2006) can be adapted to improve the interpersonal functioning and well-being of Pakistani males. Also, it is further argued that men who are more traditional and have higher levels of emotional restrictivity, tend to experience wide range of intrapersonal and interpersonal problems. Hence such factors should be given special consideration during therapy process with men.

The present study was conducted with educated young males studying in Pakistani universities. Being a lower middle-income country with varying education/literacy levels, and differing ethnic backgrounds the sample of current study has a relatively limited generalizability. Further studies should be conducted with Pakistani young men coming from diverse backgrounds. This will help better understand the detrimental role of variables like literacy, ethnicity, socioeconomic status other demographic variables for gender related beliefs, varying ratio for the phenomena of Normative Alexithymia and its possible impact for interpersonal relationships for Pakistani men. Nonetheless, the study can be taken as a stepping stone to help us understand this understudied area and extend our insight for the young male adults of Pakistani origin.

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