

Exploration of Psychological Masochism among Community Sample

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.2425>

Abstract

Psychological masochism refers to cognitive, affective, and behavioral predispositions that are self-defeating, including excessive self-sacrifice, self-negligence, self-inflicted pain, and being in psychological pain. Despite its well-known theoretical and clinical status, the construct of psychological masochism is under-researched in indigenous literature and no indigenous scale has been developed to measure the construct among Pakistani community individuals. The present study explored expression of psychological masochism among Pakistani adults. An exploratory qualitative approach was adopted. Eleven participants (4 men and 4 women) between the ages of 18 and 30 years old were recruited through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen because of their ages (18-45 years) and their higher score on self-defeating and masochistic behaviors on the Measure of Self-Defeating Personality (Schill, 1990) and depressivity and submissiveness PID-5 facets. Data collection was done via semi-structured interviews. The research results identified two main themes of psychological masochism: inter-personal domain and intra-personal domain. The inter-personal domain was comprised of relational dependency and rejection sensitivity, self-sacrifice and people-pleasing tendencies, need for validation and attention; fear of abandonment and remaining in a dysfunctional relationship, need for belonging and connection. The intra-personal domain self-blame and religious and culturally based guilt, self-devaluation and self-defeat, difficulty in experiencing positive emotions; emotional distress and maladaptive coping. These topics represent the cultural representations of psychological masochism within the normal population. The themes highlighted above are culturally sensitive expressions of psychological masochism experienced by Pakistani adults and thus form the basis of understanding the indigenous expression of this construct. The results of this study add to the existing body of knowledge because they highlight the influence of culturally sensitive interpersonal experiences, religious experiences, and social experiences on psychological masochism. In addition, the results provide a base for developing an indigenous measure of psychological masochism in the future.

Keywords: Psychological Masochism, Qualitative Research, Thematic Analysis, Community Sample

Introduction

Human beings generally strive for pleasure, satisfaction, and psychological well-being and attempt to avoid pain and suffering. Nonetheless, clinical findings and empirical evidence have shown individuals who constantly resort to engaging in activities and relationships that produce feelings

of disappointment, rejection, deprivation, and pain even though they have the option to do otherwise. This contradictory behavior has been termed as psychological masochism, a complex style of maladaptive behavior that goes against the basic assumption that humans are inherently motivated by pleasure and pain aversion (Freud, 1924/1961; Kernberg, 1984). Psychological masochism denotes a persistent pattern of enduring, preferring, or sustaining pain, humiliation, deprivation, and painful interpersonal encounters, usually through self-sacrifice, self-neglect, feelings of guilt, and self-punishment (Huprich, 2014; Békés et al., 2018). While psychological masochism is distinct from sexual masochism, it manifests as a persistent pattern of thinking, experiencing, and relating to others that revolves around pain and defeat. Individuals who experience masochism tend to remain in dysfunctional relationships, disregard their needs, undermine their chances of success, and re-experience painful interpersonal encounters repeatedly (Békés et al., 2018; Malone & Huprich, 2023). Richard von Krafft-Ebing initially used the term "masochism" to describe individuals who found sexual pleasure in suffering, humiliation, and subordination in the nineteenth-century study of sexology (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965). It was called for Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, an Austrian novelist whose book "Venus in Furs" featured themes of voluntary pain and dominance (Sacher-Masoch, 1870/2000). Masochism was initially described as a sexual phenomenon, but other psychologists soon discovered that self-defeat and misery were not exclusive to the sexual realm.

The next major development was the Freudian approach, where masochism is redefined as a psychical process involving the unconscious experience of guilt, self-punishment, and repetition of pain experiences (Freud, 1920/1955; Freud, 1924/1961). The Freudian notion of moral masochism implied that suffering can be temporary relief from internal conflicts and punishment of oneself. In turn, according to Theodor Reik (1941), people desire suffering at the unconscious level to alleviate guilt and fulfill the self-punishing function. On the other hand, Wilhelm Reich (1933/1949) interpreted characterological masochism as personality disposition involving submissiveness, self-sacrificing behavior, and suffering. Finally, neo-Freudians stressed interpersonal motives underlying masochism. Horney (1945) perceived excessive self-sacrifice as an effort to get love and approval. Fromm (1941) viewed submission and dependence as efforts to avoid loneliness and gain security. Both the object-relations and attachment theories traced the sources of masochism in early relationships. Fairbairn (1952) claimed that people might be attracted to damaging relationships since attachment is inherently psychologically necessary, whereas Kernberg (1984) suggested that internalizing rejecting and punishing object-relations leads to habitual self-sacrifice and self-destructive interpersonal behavior. Attachment theorists similarly found masochistic tendencies related to fears of being abandoned and insecure attachment experience (Bowlby, 1988; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

In its turn, the personality perspective was developed by Theodore Millon (1996), who defined the masochistic or self-defeating personality as a persistent tendency towards overvalued self-sacrifice, devaluation, and thwarting of gratifications and success. The concept of the masochistic personality organization was similarly considered as the one of chronic guilt, fear of enjoyment, and inevitability of suffering as a price of love and morality (McWilliams, 2011).

All those advances led to the development of Self-Defeating Personality Disorder in the DSM-III-R (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). Although this disorder was eliminated due to the overlap of its concepts with other personality disorders, it considerably helped to develop contemporary concepts of psychological masochism (Widiger et al., 1989).

Research on psychological masochism is scarce since it does not have any official diagnostic criteria or any standardized measurement tools. Yet, about 18.3% of patients in psychiatric outpatient clinics and 5% of community samples have shown signs of self-defeating personality

traits and there is great comorbidity between self-defeating traits and borderline, dependent, avoidant, and depressive personalities (Reich et al., 1987; Widiger et al., 1989). Modern-day studies also report that self-defeating behaviors are present in both clinical and non-clinical individuals but they are largely understudied (Békés et al., 2018).

Psychological masochism is also impacted by cultural attitudes toward suffering and self-sacrifice. In the case of Western individualistic cultures, chronic self-deprivation and the ability to endure suffering are considered maladaptive and correlated with psychological disorders (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). On the contrary, in collectivistic cultures, endurance, obedience, and family loyalty might normalize suffering and self-sacrifice in order to preserve relationships and harmony in society.

In addition, gender roles influence the perception of self-sacrificing behaviors as well since females are more likely to be socialized for caring about others, for being patient, and for preserving relationships, and self-sacrifice becomes more acceptable for women than for men. These aspects are depicted in the Pakistani media where such TV series as *Humsafar* and *Meri Zaat Zarra-e-Benishan* show female characters who accept humiliation and emotional suffering in order to preserve their relationships.

Religion is another factor that impacts one's understanding of suffering. Psychodynamics approaches state that the unconscious guilt and self-punishing motives may force some people to find spiritual significance in suffering (Charne, 1983; Ivanova, 2016). Nevertheless, Islam does differentiate between endurance (*sabr*) and self-destructive suffering in that it fosters perseverance but not self-injury (Qur'an 2:153, 2:195; Ibn Majah, Hadith 2341). Hence, cultural acceptance of sacrifice and religious endurance must not be confused with the destructive tendency towards oneself typical of psychological masochism.

Psychological masochism can be defined as a multi-faceted phenomenon that includes self-destructive behavior, excessive self-sacrificing attitude, guilt, and suffering tolerance. Though there has been a considerable amount of research on the theory behind this construct in Western psychoanalytic and personality studies, little is known about the cultural representations of psychological masochism, especially in non-Western cultures such as Pakistan. It is important to study psychological masochism in the indigenous context in order to understand the concept better.

Clinical and Social Significance of Study

In addition to any clinical manifestations, the trait of psychological masochism can also manifest itself in otherwise normal individuals as self-sacrifice, tolerance for maltreatment, lack of personal self-care, and indulgence in maladaptive interpersonal styles. Such individuals place more value on the needs of others than their own and maintain dysfunctional relationships, as well as tolerate the experience of suffering. Studies have demonstrated the relationship between self-defeating behavior tendencies and depression, low self-esteem, dependency, and suicidality (Schill & Sharp, 1994, 1995).

Although self-defeating behavior tendencies have been demonstrated to affect psychological well-being and interpersonal relations, psychological masochism has not received enough research attention thus far. The research literature on psychological masochism has largely been conducted on a theoretical level, mostly focusing on psychoanalytic theory, personality pathology, and self-defeating behavior, using Western theories and quantitative methods of study. Therefore, very little is known about the manifestation of psychological masochism in collectivistic and religious cultures.

Furthermore, cultural values such as sacrifice, endurance, familial duty, and patience can affect the expression and interpretation of self-defeating behavior, thus making it hard to differentiate

between self-sacrificing behavior valued culturally and self-defeating maladaptive psychological distress. As such, there is a need for qualitative research into the indigenous conception and experience of psychological masochism amongst young adults. This would add up to the culturally sensitive definition of the concept and serve as the basis for further research.

Aim of the Study

To explore the manifestation or lived experiences of psychological masochism among community sample.

To explore and understand the factors that contribute and maintain towards psychological masochism

Research Questions

How is psychological masochism understood and experienced by individuals within their own lives?

How do people react when they are confronted with situations of disappointment, pain, or sacrifice?

What is the role of close relationships in people's experience of pain and sacrifice?

Research Design

The current qualitative exploratory research with phenomenological approach was designed in order to study the lived experiences, cognitions, emotions, and interpersonal relationships connected with the experience of psychological masochism among community adults. The semi-structured interviews helped in obtaining the culturally relevant descriptions of participants' experiences related to the process of self-sacrifice, suffering, guilt, interpersonal relations, and self-destructiveness.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling method was used to select participants having psychological masochism tendencies in order to get information-rich samples. The reason behind the selection of purposive sampling was that the current study was focused on the experience of psychological masochism and not on getting a representative sample from the population.

Sample Characteristics

The sample size was of 8 individuals, out of which four were male while the rest were females aged between 18 and 40 years. The participants came from various social backgrounds, are graduates and all are Muslims. Participants who were chosen for the interview had relatively higher scores on the screening measures, reflecting the existence of psychological tendencies. Those participants who have a reported history of serious mental illness, serious cognitive impairments, or undergoing any kind of acute psychological crisis at the time of the study were excluded from the study.

Table 3.1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants(N=8)

Participants code	Age	Gender	occupation	Marital status
P1	21	Female	Student	Engaged
P2	23	Female	Student	Unmarried

P3	27	Female	Housewife	Married
P4	22	Female	Private employee	Unmarried
P5	24	Male	Student	Unmarried
P6	21	Male	Student	Unmarried
P7	25	Male	Student	Married
P8	29	Male	Employed	Engaged

Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant departmental research committee. Permission to use the screening measures was also obtained from the respective authors or sources.

The research process included such steps as literature review, development of a semi-structured interview guide, selection of participants, semi-structured interviews, transcription of interviews and analysis of qualitative data by thematic analysis.

An interview guide was constructed after thoroughly analyzing the available literature on psychological masochism and consultations with the research supervisor. Open-ended questions, which were intended to explore experiences of pain, sacrifice, self-destruction, and relationships with other people, formed the content of the interview guide.

Participants were selected via screening procedure based on their scores on the Self-Defeating Personality Scale and the Depressivity and Submissiveness facets of the PID-5. In total, 20 participants were first approached using purposive sampling. Through preliminary screening, those who exhibited relatively high levels of psychological masochism and satisfied the criteria set for the research were then requested to take part in the interviews. Among them, 8 agreed to participate and underwent the interview session, including six males and five females.

Individual semi-structured interviews were held with each of the participants. The interviews lasted from 50 to 60 minutes based on the amount of information provided by participants. All interviews were recorded in audio form after obtaining consent from participants, and then transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the research process. Participants were first briefed on the aim and scope of the study before taking part in it, and their informed consent was obtained in writing. They were told that their participation was purely voluntary, and that they can withdraw from the study at any point without suffering any adverse effect. Confidences of the participants were guaranteed by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity in the reporting of results.

Results

Results from the thematic analysis of the participants' interviews are discussed in this chapter. Thematic Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used in analyzing the data collected from the interviews. This was done through the identification of the recurrent themes within the stories told by the respondents regarding their experiences of psychological masochism. Themes and sub-themes emerged through the process of analysis were found and then organized into broader categories.

Table 4.1

Table 4.1 Presenting Major Themes and Subthemes among the Participants

Interpersonal Factors	Relational Dependency and rejection sensitivity
	Self-Sacrificing and People-Pleasing tendencies
	Need for validation and attention

Intrapersonal Factors	Fear of abandonment and staying in Harmful relationships
	Unmet Need for Belonging and Emotional Connection
	Self-Blame and Self-Blame and religious or culturally based Guilt
	Self-Devaluation and Self-Defeating Patterns
	Difficulty in internalizing positive experiences
	Emotional Distress & Maladaptive Coping

Description of Themes and Subthemes

The results of analysis of the interview data revealed two major themes: Interpersonal and Intrapersonal. 5 main sub-themes were identified within interpersonal theme and 4 sub-themes emerged in intrapersonal theme.

Interpersonal Domain.

Relational Dependence and Rejection Sensitivity.

It was evident from responses that participants suffered greatly when there was an indication of being threatened or destabilized in their significant relationships. For example, according to participant 5,

میں صرف ایک ہی دوست کے بارے میں بہت زیادہ فکر کرتا ہوں۔ مجھے ہمیشہ یہ ڈر رہتا ہے کہ اگر وہ مجھ سے دور ہو گیا تو پھر میرے پاس کوئی نہیں رہے گا۔

There is only one friend I worry about deeply. I constantly fear that if he drifts away from me, I will have no one left.

According to participant 5

میری جذباتی وابستگی بہت اضطرابی قسم کی ہے۔ اگر اس انسان سے میری بات نہ ہو رہی ہو تو میری بہت بری حالت ہو جاتی ہے۔

My emotional attachment is highly anxious in nature. If I am unable to communicate with that person, I become extremely distressed and emotionally overwhelmed.

Self-Sacrificing and People-Pleasing Tendencies.

This subtheme relates to the inclination of participants to place the wants and needs of others above those of themselves. According to participant 3

مجھے لگتا ہے کہ اگر میں لوگوں کی توقعات پوری نہ کر سکوں تو وہ مجھے پسند کرنا چھوڑ دیں گے۔

I feel that if I fail to meet people's expectations, they will stop liking me.

According to participant 7

اگر میرے دوست کو مالی ضرورت ہو، اور مجھے بھی ضرورت ہو، تب بھی میرے ذہن میں یہی آتا ہے کہ شاید اس کی ضرورت میری ضرورت سے زیادہ اہم ہے، اس لیے میں وہ چیز اسے دے دیتا ہوں۔

Need for Validation and Attention.

This sub-theme highlights the participants' need for validation and recognition through acceptance, appreciation, and approval. For instance, according to participant 4

مجھے توقع ہوتی ہے کہ جو میں دوسرے کے لیے کر رہی ہوں، وہ بھی میرے لیے اتنا ہی کرے۔ کم از کم میری اہمیت میں کمی نہ آئے۔

I expect that what I do for others should be reciprocated. At the very least, my importance should not decrease in his eyes.

According to participant 2

مجھے سب سے زیادہ تکلیف تب ہوتی ہے جب مجھے نظر انداز کیا جاتا ہے، کیونکہ اس وقت مجھے لگتا ہے کہ شاید میری کوئی اہمیت ہی نہیں ہے

What hurts me the most is being ignored because it makes me feel as if I have no importance at all.

Staying in Unhealthy Relationships and Fear of Abandonment.

The participants indicated that they felt emotionally involved in these relationships even if these relationships were emotionally abusive or unsatisfactory in nature. For example, according to participant 4

کسی ایسے شخص سے تعلق ختم کرنا جو مجھے تکلیف دے رہا ہو، میرے لیے بہت مشکل ہوتا ہے۔ مجھے لگتا ہے شاید اس کی نیت بری نہیں تھی، شاید مجھے اسے ایک اور موقع دینا چاہیے تھا اگر تعلق ختم بھی کر دوں تو بعد میں بھی یہی سوچتی رہتی ہوں کہ شاید مجھے رک جانا چاہیے تھا، شاید حالات بہتر ہو سکتے تھے

It is very difficult for me to end relationships with people who hurt me. I keep thinking that perhaps they did not mean harm and maybe I should give them another chance. Even after ending a relationship, I continue thinking that perhaps I should have stayed and things might have improved.

According to participant 6

آخری دو سالوں میں بہت سی چیزیں غلط ہو رہی تھیں۔ مجھے بار بار تنقید کا سامنا کرنا پڑتا تھا لیکن پھر بھی میں تعلق میں رہا کیونکہ میں ذہنی طور پر بہت زیادہ وابستہ ہو چکا تھا

During the last two years many things were going wrong. I was repeatedly criticized, yet I remained in the relationship because I had become deeply attached.

Unmet Needs of Belongingness.

This subtheme reflects participants' experiences of emotional loneliness, disconnection, and an ongoing desire for meaningful interpersonal connections. For instance, According to participant 4 میں چاہتی ہوں کہ کوئی ایسا ہو جس کے ساتھ میں بغیر ڈر کے اپنی ہر بات کر سکوں، لیکن مجھے اکثر ایسا تعلق نہیں ملتا

I want someone with whom I can share everything without fear, but I rarely find such a relationship.

Participant 1 said

مجھے بھی وہ توجہ چاہیے تھی جو باقی سب کو مل رہی تھی۔ مجھے لگتا تھا کہ سب کو اہمیت دی جا رہی ہے لیکن میرے حصے میں وہ چیز نہیں آ رہی تھی۔ اس وجہ سے مجھے اکثر ایسا محسوس ہوتا تھا کہ شاید میری اہمیت دوسروں جتنی نہیں ہے

I wanted the same attention that everyone else was receiving. It felt as though everyone else was being valued, but I was not receiving the same. Because of this, I often felt that perhaps I was not as important as others.

Intrapersonal Domain

Self-Blame and Religious or Culturally Based Guilt.

In connection with adverse experiences, interpersonal problems, and life events, many participants felt that they were the direct result of their personal faults or failures in some way or another. In addition to self-blaming, there were participants who believed in their suffering based on religion and culture, where adverse events were viewed as punishments for not being good enough personally, failing to do one's religious duties, or simply straying away from what is socially or morally acceptable. According to participant 3

گر کوئی غلطی ہو جائے تو میں بہت زیادہ معافی مانگنا شروع کر دیتی ہوں۔ جتنا compensate کر سکتی ہوں، اتنا کرنے کی کوشش کرتی ہوں۔ بعض اوقات غلطی اتنی بڑی نہیں ہوتی لیکن میں اس کی معافی ضرورت سے زیادہ مانگتی رہتی ہوں

When I make a mistake, I begin apologizing excessively. I try to compensate as much as possible. Sometimes the mistake is not even that serious, yet I continue apologizing far beyond what is necessary.

As by participant 5

مجھے مذہب کے حوالے سے بھی اکثر لگتا ہے کہ شاید میں اس بات کی مستحق ہوں کہ میرے ساتھ زندگی میں اتنا برا ہو رہا ہے۔ کبھی کبھی میں سوچتی ہوں کہ شاید چونکہ میں نے نمازیں نہیں پڑھیں، اس لیے میرے ساتھ برا ہوتا ہے I often feel, in a religious sense, that perhaps I deserve the suffering I experience in life. Sometimes I think that maybe bad things happen to me because I have not prayed regularly.

Self-Devaluation and Self-Defeating Patterns.

The participants regularly cited how they discounted their abilities, ignored their successes, and continued to repeat patterns of action that were detrimental to themselves, although they knew the negative repercussions of such actions. According to participant 9

مجھے اپنی کامیابیاں کامیابیاں نہیں لگتیں، مجھے لگتا ہے کہ کوئی بھی میری جگہ ہوتا تو وہ بھی کر لیتا

My achievements do not feel like achievements; I think anyone else in my place could have done Participant 4 stated:

جب بھی کوئی کام مشکل لگتا ہے تو میں شروع کرنے سے پہلے ہی پیچھے ہٹ جاتا ہوں، پھر بعد میں افسوس ہوتا ہے کہ کوشش کر لینی چاہیے تھی

Whenever a task seems difficult, I withdraw before even starting it. Later, I regret not having tried.

Difficulty in Internalizing Positive Experiences.

This is another sub-theme that captures the challenges the respondents faced in terms of embracing or absorbing positive emotions and successes. Most of the participants downplayed their successes, doubted positive results, or found it hard to accept themselves as successful. For example, participant 2 stated

مجھے اپنی کامیابیاں کامیابیاں نہیں لگتیں، مجھے لگتا ہے یہ تو عام سی بات ہے

"My achievements do not feel like achievements to me; they seem like ordinary things".

According to participant 8

لوگ کہتے ہیں کہ میں نے اچھا کیا ہے، لیکن مجھے اندر سے محسوس نہیں ہوتا کہ واقعی یہ میری کامیابی ہے۔ مجھے لگتا ہے کہ شاید یہ بس حالات کی وجہ سے ہو گیا

People tell me that I did well, but internally I do not feel that it is truly my achievement. I tend to think that it happened because of circumstances rather than my own abilities.

Emotional Distress and Maladaptive Coping.

Participants cited emotions such as sadness, despair, emotional overload, and psychological discomfort. Coping techniques used included avoidance, withdrawing from others, ruminating, suppressing emotions, and overusing distractions. Participant 2 said

When I feel disappointed, I mostly listen to sad poetry. Then I read its interpretation and feel that the experiences described there are happening to me as well." Likewise participant 4 explained:

پہلے میں چیختی تھی، روتی تھی، لڑتی تھی، اپنی ضرورتوں کا مطالبہ کرتی تھی، لیکن اب میں تھک گئی ہوں اور خاموش ہو جاتی ہوں

Earlier I used to cry, shout, fight, and demand my needs, but now I have become tired and I simply remain silent.

Table 4.1

Shows Major Themes, Sub-Themes, Codes, Verbatim in Urdu and Verbatim in English of all Common Themes Emerged from Community's Perspective

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Verbatim in Urdu	Verbatim in English
Interpersonal	Excessive Self-Sacrifice & People Pleasing	Suffering in silence, not to bother others	میں اس حد تک خاموش ہو جاتی ہوں کہ اپنی بات بھی نہیں کرتی۔ اگر میری ضرورت پوری نہ بھی ہو تو میں چپ رہتی ہوں کیونکہ مجھے لگتا ہے کہ شاید P 4 یہ اتنی ضروری نہیں	I become so silent that I stop expressing my own needs. Even when my needs are not met, I remain quiet because I feel they are not important enough."
		Fulfill other's expectations	اگر میرے دوست کو مالی ضرورت ہو، اور مجھے بھی ضرورت ہو، تب بھی میرے ذہن میں یہی آتا ہے کہ شاید اس کی ضرورت میری ضرورت سے زیادہ	(P4)
		Sacrificing own needs	P7 اہم ہے، اس لیے میں وہ چیز اسے دے دیتا ہوں	If my friend needs something financially and I also need it, I still think that his need is
		Excessive submission		greater than mine, so I give it to him. P7
		Unable to say no to others specifically loved ones		

		All time available for others		
		Satisfaction by fulfilling other's needs		
	Relational dependency and staying in unhealthy relationships	Conflictual relationships	لوگ مجھ پر اپنا دباؤ ڈال لیتے ہیں لیکن میں جواب نہیں دیتا p2 مجھے پتہ چل بھی جائے کہ اس انسان کی وجہ سے مجھے تکلیف ہو رہی ہے پھر بھی میں اس relationship کو نہیں چھوڑ پاتی۔ مجھے لگتا ہے کرتی رہوں تو سب کچھ ٹھیک effort شاید اگر میں P(5) ہو جائے گا۔	. People impose their pressure on me, yet I do not respond back(P2) Even when I realize that a person is causing me pain, I am still unable to leave the relationship. I feel that if I keep making efforts, everything will eventually become alright.(P5)
		Normalization of relational trauma		
		Stay in problematic relationships		

		despite support		
		Inferior position in relationships		
	Need for Validation and Attention	Narrating problems to seek attention	میں چاہتی ہوں کہ کم از کم سامنے والے کو یہ احساس ہو کہ میں اس کے لیے کوشش کر رہی ہوں۔ P5 اگر کوئی میری بات کو اہمیت دے تو مجھے محسوس P 2 ہوتا ہے کہ میں اس کے لیے اہم ہوں	I want the other person to at least recognize that I am making an effort fort him.P5. When someone values what I say, I feel that I matter to them.P2
		Excessive Self-Sacrifice to seek attention		
		High submissiveness to seek attention		
		Enduring pain to seek attention		

		Sympathy seeking		
	Self-devaluation & Self-Defeating Behavior	Focus on negative aspects even in relationships	گر کسی تعلق میں دس اچھی چیزیں بھی ہوں تو میرا 7P ذہن اس ایک بری چیز پر ہی اٹکا رہتا ہے۔ مجھے معلوم تھا کہ یہ موقع میرے لیے اچھا ہے لیکن مجھے P8 پھر بھی میں نے اسے چھوڑ دیا گر کوئی مجھے برا کہتا ہے تو کبھی کبھی لگتا ہے P4 شاید میں واقعی اسی قابل ہوں	Even if there are ten good things in a relationship, my mind remains focused on the one negative thing. P7 I knew that this opportunity was beneficial for me, yet I still let it go P8 When someone criticizes me, I sometimes feel that perhaps I truly deserve this P4.
		Disregarding beneficial opportunities for self		
		Focus on negative aspects even		

		in relationships		
		Disregarding beneficial opportunities for self		
		Consider themselves deserving of criticism and disrespect		
	Abandonment Anxiety	Consider themselves inferior to others	میں اپنے قریبی لوگوں کو کھونے کے ڈر سے اپنی خواہشات تک قربان کر دیتا ہوں میں اکثر اپنی رائے نہیں دیتا کیونکہ ڈر ہوتا ہے کہ لوگ ناراض نہ ہو P6جائیں۔	I sacrifice my own needs because I fear losing important people in my life. I often avoid expressing my opinions
		Excessive submission due to fear of rejection	اگر کوئی کامیابی مل بھی جائے تو مجھے لگتا ہے کہ یہ خود ہی ہو گیا، اس میں میرا کوئی خاص کردار نہیں p3	because I fear they may reject me. P6 Even if I achieve something, I feel that it happened on its own

			لوگ میری تعریف کرتے ہیں لیکن مجھے لگتا ہے کہ اس میں میرا کوئی کمال نہیں تھا، یہ تو ویسے ہی ہو گی P2	and that I had no significant role in it. P3 People appreciate my achievements, but I feel there was nothing special about my contribution; it just happened. P2
	Lack of Positive Affect	Consider undeserving of happiness and success Avoiding activities that can bring happiness		

The analysis also uncovered some themes that came out uniquely within the community sample population and were indicative of culturally specific expressions of psychological masochism. The themes include Self-Blame and Religious/Culturally Based Guilt, Unmet Need of Belongingness, and Maladaptive Coping. They did not come out in the earlier qualitative study carried out by clinical psychologists. Their identification underscores the need to understand psychological masochism in its sociocultural environment, where religion, interpersonal relationships, and cultural-based coping are factors affecting psychological suffering.

Table 4.2

Unique Themes that were Solely Present in Community Sample

Theme	Codes	Verbatim	Verbatim in English
Unmet Needs of Belongingness and Emotional Connections	Emotional loneliness and longing for connection	(P5) مجھے بھی وہ توجہ چاہیے تھی جو باقی سب کو مل رہی تھی۔ مجھے لگتا تھا کہ سب کو اہمیت دی جا رہی ہے لیکن میرے حصے میں وہ چیز نہیں آ رہی تھی۔	I wanted the same attention that everyone else was receiving. It felt as though everyone else was being valued, but I was not receiving the same (P5).
	Desire for a secure emotional bond Desire to feel understood, Emotional	P4 چاہتی ہوں کہ کوئی ایسا ہو جس کے ساتھ میں بغیر ڈر کے اپنی ہر بات کر سکوں	I want someone with whom I can share everything without fear. (P4)

	connection seeking		
Maladaptive Coping	Rumination Emotional Withdrawal and Silence Emotional suppression Avoidant coping	میں ایک ہی بات کو بار بار سوچتی رہتی ہوں اور جتنا سوچتی ہوں اتنا ہی زیادہ پریشان ہو جاتی ہوں P4 میں سامنے سے کچھ نہیں کہتی۔ اندر سے بہت برا لگ رہا ہوتا ہے لیکن میں خاموش رہتی ہوں کیونکہ مجھے لگتا ہے کہ کوئی سمجھ نہیں پائے گا P5 جب کوئی مسئلہ آتا ہے تو میں اس کے بارے میں سوچنے کے بجائے خود کو کسی اور چیز میں مصروف کر لیتی ہوں۔ میں موبائل استعمال کرتی رہتی ہوں تاکہ میرا دھیان ہٹ جائے P	I keep thinking about the same issue repeatedly, and the more I think about it, the more distressed I become. P4 I do not say anything openly. Internally I feel deeply hurt, but I stay silent because I feel that nobody will understand. P5 When a problem arises, instead of dealing with it, I keep myself occupied with other things. I spend time on my phone so that I can distract myself from it. P1
Self-blame/religious and culturally based Guilt	Guilt on mistake Guilt for not fulfilling other's expectations Guilt for saying no to others Over justification of mistakes Over compensation of doing wrong	اگر مجھ سے کوئی غلطی ہو جائے تو میں کافی دیر تک خود کو ملامت کرتا رہتا ہوں کہ مجھے ایسا نہیں کرنا چاہیے تھا۔ P8 غلطی کے بعد مجھے لگتا ہے کہ مجھے اس کی سزا ملنی چاہیے (P5)۔ مجھے لگتا ہے کہ شاید میری قسمت میں یہی لکھا ہے کیونکہ میں اتنی اچھی انسان نہیں ہوں جتنی مجھے ہونا چاہیے تھا۔ P4	

Discussion

This study examined the native representations of psychological masochism in community sample and found both interpersonal and intrapersonal features of the construct. The results indicate that psychological masochism is not just a simple liking of suffering but also comprises an intricate combination of self-negligence, overinvestment in relationships, guilt, self-depreciation, and maladaptive coping strategies. Such results confirm current theories of psychological masochism as a multidimensional construct, which consists of developmental, cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and sociocultural elements (Békés et al., 2017, 2018; Malone & Huprich, 2023). Interpersonal subthemes such as relational dependency, people pleasing, continued involvement in destructive relationships, and unfulfilled need for belongingness have similarities with the attachment theory and object relations theory. Interestingly, the majority of the participants were young adults. In developmental literature, emerging adulthood has been conceptualized as a stage of life marked by identity exploration, the increased need for belonging, and intimacy (Arnett,

2000). Thus, the fears about acceptance and rejection and the issues surrounding intimate relations might have been especially important to the current group of participants. Moreover, most of the subjects had advanced educational backgrounds, and were from a collectivistic society where interpersonal harmony and family responsibilities are highly valued. Such sociocultural pressures might lead to the acceptance of self-sacrificing behavior and hinder people in identifying the point at which such behavior becomes psychologically harmful. According to Bowlby (1988), and Mikulincer & Shaver (2016), insecure attachment leads to fear of abandonment and excessive dependency on other people. This was evident in the personal accounts by the subjects who tolerated their pain just to keep their relationships intact. Nevertheless, these results indicate that such behaviors will be maladaptive in case of developing chronic self-neglect, reduced self-respect, and suffering due to the negative emotions experienced by individuals. Intrapersonal subthemes, such as self-blame, guilt related to religion and culture, self-deprecation, negative self-image, and maladaptive coping, reflect the notion of moral masochism introduced by Freud (1924/1961), who suggests that pain may perform a function of self-infliction as well as help reduce feelings of guilt. Likewise, the modern research associates psychological masochism with self-criticism, negative self-image, and inability to experience positive emotions (Huprich, 2014; Malone & Huprich, 2023). Subjects were constantly blaming themselves for interpersonal problems and viewed suffering as a burden one should bear. Therefore, guilt and self-inflictive attitudes may be considered important factors involved in the development of psychological masochism. These results also seem significant for the collectivist-oriented culture, where family cohesion, interpersonal duties, sacrifice, and relational interdependence are greatly esteemed (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In this cultural context, self-sacrificial and other-oriented behaviors can be considered socially adaptive at the beginning due to their similarities to culturally approved concepts of patience, loyalty, and devotion. The significance of religious and cultural guilt emerges here due to the indigenous nature of the current research topic. Pakistani culture attaches much importance to morals, self-sacrifice, and enduring pain. Literature review indicates that the belief system can lead an individual to self-punishment if the pain is viewed as a morally significant one or a deserved consequence (Charne, 1983; Ivanova, 2016). Similarly, the idea of moral masochism put forward by Freud (1924/1961) suggested that experiencing pain helps to reduce the feeling of guilt. While Islam teaches people to endure pain or *sabr*, it does not allow any self-inflicted pain (The Holy Qur'an, 2:153, 2:195; Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 2341). In conclusion, the results demonstrate that the construct of psychological masochism among normal population is contingent on the interplay of interpersonal vulnerability factors, negative self-conceptualizations, and sociocultural factors. This research emphasizes the significance of analyzing psychological masochism within its cultural context and shows that some cultural values, like self-sacrifice and perseverance, can become maladaptive when they are associated with suffering and neglect of oneself.

Conclusion

The current research examined the psychological masochism in a community setting and found out that the phenomenon is associated with the presence of both interpersonal and intrapersonal processes such as self-denial, dependency, self-harm, guilt, and ineffective coping strategies. It has been established that social and cultural aspects play an important role in determining psychological masochism.

Limitations

While the audio recordings helped improve the precision of the transcription and analysis process, there is a chance that some participants were reluctant to reveal their very private experiences. Furthermore, the difficulty of recruiting participants led to a low number of respondents within the age range of 30-45 years old, due to reluctance and disinterest.

Strengths

This is one of the first qualitative studies to research psychological masochism in the context of the Pakistani community. Application of the semi-structured interview technique helped to get a deep understanding of the subject's experience and revealed culture-specific elements of this phenomenon that can be underestimated by other researchers.

and

Implication of study

The findings of this research add to the culturally informed comprehension of psychological masochism and reveal the impact of sociocultural and religious influences on self-destructive behaviors. The results of this research can assist mental health professionals to identify culturally informed cases of self-sacrifice, feelings of guilt and suffering which may be unnoticed by clinicians. In addition, the findings will serve as a basis for further research on the topic of psychological masochism.

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