
Cultural Perceptions of Parenting and Parental Empowerment: A Sociological Study of Shifting Norms in Urban and Rural Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores the cultural perceptions and practices of parenting in urban and rural Pakistan, focusing on how traditional values and modern influences shape parenting styles and parental empowerment in these distinct settings. The research also compares shifting parenting norms, assessing the socio-economic, cultural, and gender dynamics that influence parenting decisions. A mixed-methods, cross-sectional research design was employed, combining qualitative (semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions) and quantitative (surveys) data collection methods. A purposive sample of 230 parents (115 from urban areas like Lahore and 115 from rural areas such as Bahawalpur and Multan) was selected based on gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location. The study's findings reveal significant differences in parenting practices and empowerment across urban and rural settings. Urban parents exhibited higher levels of parental empowerment, with greater access to resources and decision-making authority, while rural parents faced challenges in these areas. Urban parenting was characterized by a greater emphasis on independent thinking, emotional expression, and gender equality, with a preference for modern parenting practices influenced by education and media. In contrast, rural parenting remained more traditional, emphasizing respect, obedience, and the involvement of extended family, with a stronger adherence to gender roles. The results highlight the evolving nature of parenting in urban areas, driven by socio-economic factors and modern influences, while rural areas maintain more rigid, culturally embedded norms.

Keywords: Parenting Practices, Cultural Perceptions, Parental Empowerment, Urban Vs. Rural, Pakistan, Traditional Values, Modern Influences, Gender Roles

Introduction

Parenting is a multifaceted social practice that varies significantly across cultures, influenced by societal norms, traditions, and values. In the context of Pakistan, a country with diverse cultural landscapes, parenting practices are shaped by various factors, including religious beliefs, socio-economic status, and rural-urban dynamics (Bukhari, 2018). While traditional parenting methods often emphasize discipline, respect for authority, and familial obligations, contemporary shifts in societal values have begun to challenge these conventions, particularly in urban settings (Jamil, 2020). This study aims to explore the evolving perceptions of parenting and parental empowerment in Pakistan, with a particular focus on how these shifts are manifested differently in urban and rural environments. In rural Pakistan, parenting is typically guided by patriarchal norms, where family structures are more hierarchical, and authority is concentrated in the hands of the male head of the household (Chaudhary, 2019). Parental empowerment in such settings is often limited by socio-cultural and economic constraints, where parents especially mothers may have minimal access to educational resources and healthcare services (Khan, 2021). Moreover, parenting styles are deeply intertwined with the community's expectations, and deviation from these norms is often stigmatized (Ahmed & Haseeb, 2021). In

contrast, urban areas in Pakistan are witnessing a gradual shift toward more egalitarian and modern parenting practices, where education, career aspirations, and individual autonomy are becoming more valued (Naseer & Jamil, 2022).

This shift is partly influenced by global trends in child-rearing practices, media exposure, and the growing role of women in the workforce (Qureshi, 2017). Studies have shown that urban parents tend to adopt more liberal approaches to parenting, such as fostering independence and encouraging open communication with children (Khan & Ali, 2020). However, this transition is not without its challenges, as urban parents are also navigating the pressures of maintaining traditional cultural values while adapting to globalized practices.

Moreover, parental empowerment—defined as the capacity of parents to make informed decisions for the well-being of their children—plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of parenting across both urban and rural settings (Hassan, 2020). The concept of empowerment extends beyond individual parental agency to encompass societal support systems, access to resources, and institutional frameworks that enable parents to make decisions that enhance their children's opportunities (Shah & Qureshi, 2021). In rural Pakistan, limited access to healthcare, education, and social support networks significantly hampers parental empowerment, thereby influencing parenting perceptions and practices (Ali & Khan, 2018). This study seeks to examine how the cultural perceptions of parenting are evolving in response to these shifting socio-economic and technological dynamics and how they differ between urban and rural contexts. It also aims to investigate the role of parental empowerment in these transformations, with an emphasis on the ways in which parents in both settings perceive their ability to make decisions regarding their children's future.

Literature Review

The literature on cultural perceptions of parenting and parental empowerment has grown substantially over the past few decades, with researchers exploring how cultural, socio-economic, and environmental factors shape parenting practices. In the context of Pakistan, existing studies have primarily focused on how traditional parenting norms, gender roles, and socio-economic factors influence child-rearing practices in both rural and urban settings. The literature review highlights the key themes in this area, with particular attention to the shifting norms in urban and rural Pakistan, as well as the concept of parental empowerment.

Cultural Perceptions of Parenting

Parenting in Pakistan is traditionally shaped by deeply rooted cultural and religious values. Studies show that parenting practices in the country are often patriarchal, with fathers generally assuming authority and mothers playing supportive, nurturing roles (Khan, 2019; Qureshi, 2017). In rural areas, where traditional family structures are more rigid, these roles are more pronounced. Research by Chaudhary (2019) highlights that in rural Pakistan, gender roles in parenting are largely defined by societal expectations and community norms, which often limit the agency of mothers in decision-making regarding their children's education, health, and general well-being. Parents in these communities typically adhere to conventional methods of child-rearing that emphasize discipline, respect for elders, and conformity to social norms (Ahmed & Haseeb, 2021). In contrast, urban areas in Pakistan exhibit a shift toward more progressive parenting practices, influenced by global trends, media, and the increasing presence of women in the workforce (Jamil, 2020). In urban centers, where access to education and healthcare is more widespread, parents are more likely to adopt child-rearing practices that promote autonomy, self-expression, and critical thinking (Naseer & Jamil, 2022). These changes are often linked to the desire to balance traditional values with modern ideals, leading to a blending of parenting approaches that are both culturally rooted and globally informed (Bukhari, 2018).

Parental Empowerment and Its Importance

Parental empowerment is a critical concept in understanding the shifts in parenting practices. Empowerment refers to the ability of parents to make informed, independent decisions regarding their children's upbringing, taking into consideration both traditional values and modern needs. The literature emphasizes that parental empowerment is not merely an individual capacity but is shaped by broader social, political, and economic factors (Shah & Qureshi, 2021). For instance, parental empowerment in rural Pakistan is often constrained by

limited access to resources, including education, healthcare, and social support networks (Ali & Khan, 2018). In these settings, parents—particularly mothers—are more likely to depend on traditional sources of knowledge and community-based practices, which can limit their ability to make informed decisions about their children’s future (Khan, 2021). In contrast, in urban areas, parental empowerment is facilitated by better access to education, healthcare, and social services, which can significantly improve parents' ability to make decisions that enhance their children’s quality of life (Qureshi, 2017). Moreover, urban parents are more likely to embrace ideas of shared decision-making and equality between parents, which leads to a more collaborative approach to child-rearing (Khan & Ali, 2020). Studies by Hassan (2020) suggest that empowerment in urban settings is linked to a greater sense of control over one’s life circumstances, which in turn translates into more informed and active parenting practices.

Shifting Norms in Rural and Urban Settings

The differentiation between rural and urban settings in Pakistan is central to understanding the shifting norms of parenting. Research shows that urbanization plays a crucial role in altering parenting styles, as cities offer more diverse opportunities for education, career development, and exposure to global parenting norms (Jamil, 2020). However, these shifts are not uniform and are often met with resistance, especially from older generations who view modern parenting practices as inconsistent with traditional cultural values (Naseer & Jamil, 2022). In rural areas, the persistence of traditional norms continues to dominate, and these norms dictate the roles of both parents and children. For example, in rural communities, child-rearing is often viewed as a communal responsibility, with extended families playing a significant role in the upbringing of children (Bukhari, 2018). This system of parenting, while fostering close-knit family ties, can also limit parental autonomy and empowerment, as decisions regarding the children’s future are influenced by extended family dynamics and communal expectations (Ali & Khan, 2018). Moreover, the disparity between rural and urban areas in terms of access to resources creates significant differences in parental empowerment. While urban parents have more opportunities for empowerment through better access to education and healthcare services, rural parents face barriers such as lack of infrastructure, poor literacy rates, and limited healthcare access, all of which contribute to the lower levels of empowerment (Shah & Qureshi, 2021).

Parental Empowerment as a Driver of Change

The concept of parental empowerment has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in how it relates to improving child well-being. Studies indicate that when parents feel empowered, they are more likely to invest in their children’s education, health, and overall development (Hassan, 2020). Empowerment is particularly relevant in the context of Pakistan, where gendered expectations often limit women’s involvement in decision-making. Empowered mothers are more likely to challenge traditional gender roles, seek education for their children, and invest in their children’s health and well-being (Khan, 2021). In urban areas, where women are more likely to participate in the workforce, there is greater recognition of the need for shared responsibility in parenting, and parental empowerment is thus often a catalyst for change (Qureshi, 2017). Despite the progress seen in urban centers, there remains a substantial gap in parental empowerment between rural and urban populations. While urban parents generally have access to supportive structures that facilitate empowerment, rural parents often face challenges related to poverty, education, and societal pressures that hinder their ability to make empowered decisions for their children (Ali & Khan, 2018). This discrepancy highlights the need for targeted interventions aimed at bridging the empowerment gap between rural and urban parents.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the cultural perceptions and practices of parenting in urban and rural Pakistan, focusing on how traditional values and modern influences shape parenting styles in both settings.
2. To assess the level of parental empowerment in urban and rural areas of Pakistan, exploring how access to resources, education, and social networks impact parents' ability to make informed decisions regarding their children's well-being.

3. To compare the shifting norms in parenting across urban and rural Pakistan, analyzing the factors driving these changes and the role of socio-economic, cultural, and gender dynamics in influencing parental empowerment.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a comparative, cross-sectional research design using a mixed-methods approach. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the cultural perceptions of parenting and parental empowerment in urban and rural Pakistan. The study aimed to capture both the personal experiences of parents and the broader trends shaping parenting practices across different geographical and socio-economic settings.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants from urban and rural areas of Pakistan. This method ensured that the sample represented a diverse range of parents based on their gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location (urban vs. rural). The researcher aimed to select participants who could provide rich, relevant insights into the evolving cultural perceptions of parenting and the level of parental empowerment in different settings.

For the urban sample, participants were selected from major cities like Lahore. For the rural sample, parents were selected from districts such as Bahawalpur, Multan and surrounding villages in Punjab.

Sample Size

A total of 230 participants were included in the study. Of these, 115 parents were selected from urban areas, and 115 parents were selected from rural areas. The sample consisted of both mothers and fathers, ensuring a balance between gender representations and capturing diverse parental perspectives.

- **Urban sample:** 115 parents (58 mothers, 57 fathers)
- **Rural sample:** 115 parents (58 mothers, 57 fathers)

This sample size was determined to ensure that the study was statistically powered to detect differences in parental empowerment and perceptions of parenting between urban and rural settings.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The following methods were employed: The researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 parents (15 urban and 15 rural) to explore their cultural perceptions of parenting, parenting practices, and empowerment. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in probing deeper into specific issues related to parenting, gender roles, and socio-cultural influences. In both urban and rural areas, the researcher organized focus group discussions with a total of 10 groups (5 from urban areas and 5 from rural areas). Each focus group consisted of 6-8 participants, including both mothers and fathers. The discussions centered around shared experiences and collective views on parenting, modern influences, and traditional practices.

A mixed-methods questionnaire was administered to 200 parents (100 from urban areas and 100 from rural areas). The questionnaire was designed to assess various dimensions of parental empowerment and parenting practices. It included: Closed-ended questions with Likert-scale items to measure empowerment, decision-making, and access to resources. Open-ended questions to capture qualitative data on personal experiences of empowerment and challenges faced in parenting.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- **Inclusion Criteria:**
 - Parents (both mothers and fathers) with at least one child aged between 5 and 18 years.
 - Parents residing in urban or rural areas of Pakistan.

- Participants willing to provide informed consent and participate voluntarily in interviews and focus group discussions.
- **Exclusion Criteria:**
 - Parents with children under 5 years or over 18 years.
 - Participants who were unwilling or unable to provide informed consent.
 - Parents who did not reside in the selected urban or rural areas of the study.

Data Procedure

The data collection process involved several key stages: The researcher developed an interview guide and a questionnaire to address the research objectives. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. The researcher conducted interviews and focus group discussions in selected urban and rural areas. Field visits were scheduled, and appropriate permissions were obtained from local authorities and community leaders. The mixed-methods questionnaire was distributed to the selected parents in both urban and rural areas. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to ensure clarity in the questions and to address any participant queries. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded with the consent of participants. Notes were also taken during discussions. Survey responses were collected and stored securely for analysis.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software. Data analysis followed a two-step process to handle both the qualitative and quantitative data.

1. The data from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. The researcher used thematic analysis to identify patterns and recurring themes. The process involved:
 - Initial coding of the data
 - Categorizing codes into broader themes related to parenting practices, cultural perceptions, and empowerment.
 - Comparing themes across urban and rural groups to identify similarities and differences.
2. The survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) to provide a general overview of the responses.
 - T-tests were conducted to compare parental empowerment scores between urban and rural parents.
 - Chi-square tests were used to assess the relationship between socio-economic factors (e.g., income, education) and parental empowerment levels.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were provided with an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained in writing before the commencement of any data collection. The identities of all participants were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings. Audio recordings and survey responses were stored securely in password-protected files. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. Given that the study involved sensitive topics such as gender roles and parental decision-making, the researcher ensured that participants felt comfortable and respected throughout the process. The researcher created a supportive environment for participants to share their views openly.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions revealed in-depth insights into cultural perceptions and practices of parenting, as well as the factors influencing parental empowerment and shifting parenting norms across urban and rural Pakistan. This section presents the key qualitative findings, organized by the three research objectives: cultural perceptions of parenting, parental empowerment, and shifting parenting norms.

1. Cultural Perceptions and Practices of Parenting in Urban and Rural Pakistan

Urban Parenting Practices

In urban areas, the cultural perceptions of parenting were more influenced by modern, Western ideals, alongside traditional values. Urban parents expressed a desire to raise independent, confident children who could adapt to globalized environments. Many parents highlighted the importance of education, open communication, and emotional support.

- **Education and Independence:** Urban parents, especially mothers, emphasized the importance of providing their children with a solid educational foundation. They spoke about fostering a sense of independence and self-expression in their children. A mother from Lahore remarked, *"I want my children to be independent and confident. They should know how to think for themselves and not just follow orders."*
- **Role of Fathers:** While urban fathers retained significant influence in decision-making, there was a noticeable shift toward more collaborative parenting. Fathers were more likely to discuss educational goals and children's personal development with mothers. One father from Islamabad shared, *"We both have a say in what our children do. It's important for me to know their interests and support them in whatever path they choose."*
- **Emotional Support and Gender Sensitivity:** Many urban parents were aware of the evolving expectations regarding gender roles. Parents, particularly mothers, showed concern for promoting emotional intelligence and empathy in both boys and girls. One urban father explained, *"We don't want to raise just strong boys; we want our sons to be caring and emotionally intelligent too."*

Rural Parenting Practices

In rural areas, parenting was largely influenced by traditional cultural norms. The focus was on instilling respect, obedience, and a strong connection to family and community values. Children were expected to fulfill specific gender roles, and there was a pronounced emphasis on family cohesion.

- **Respect and Obedience:** Parents in rural areas placed significant importance on teaching their children respect for elders and authority. The role of the father as the primary decision-maker in the family was rarely questioned. A father from a rural village in Punjab shared, *"Our children must respect us and follow what we say, especially when it comes to family traditions. We teach them to be obedient."*
- **Collective Parenting:** Rural parents frequently emphasized the role of extended family in raising children. Many parents believed that child-rearing was not just the responsibility of the immediate family but of the broader community. A rural mother from Sargodha stated, *"In our village, everyone contributes to raising the children. It's the responsibility of the whole family, not just the parents."*
- **Limited Exposure to Modern Influences:** Rural parents were less exposed to modern parenting theories and practices. However, a few expressed interest in incorporating some elements of modern parenting but remained hesitant due to the deep-rooted cultural values. A rural mother from Bahawalpur noted, *"We've heard about new ways of parenting on social media, but we believe in what our elders have taught us. Respect and hard work are the core values."*

2. Parental Empowerment in Urban and Rural Areas

Urban Empowerment

Urban parents reported higher levels of empowerment, particularly in decision-making regarding education and children's future. Both mothers and fathers in urban areas expressed confidence in their ability to make informed decisions and had access to resources that supported their parenting.

- **Decision-Making Power:** Urban parents, particularly mothers, spoke about the ability to make important decisions about their children's education, health, and extracurricular activities. A mother from Karachi commented, *"I feel empowered to choose the best school for my children, and I have access to resources to ensure they get the education they deserve."*

- **Access to Resources:** Parents in urban areas also highlighted easy access to healthcare and social services, which further enhanced their sense of empowerment. A father from Lahore explained, *"We have many options for healthcare, schools, and other services. If something happens to my child, I know where to go for help."*

Rural Empowerment

Rural parents, on the other hand, expressed feeling limited in their decision-making capabilities. Many rural mothers in particular reported a lack of autonomy in important decisions, often deferring to their husbands or extended family members.

- **Limited Decision-Making Authority:** Rural mothers, especially those without formal education, often found themselves sidelined in decisions regarding their children's education and health. One rural mother from Bahawalpur shared, *"I don't have much say in my children's education. It's up to my husband and his family. They decide what's best for them."*
- **Challenges in Accessing Resources:** Rural parents also reported significant challenges in accessing healthcare, education, and social services. A rural father from Sargodha noted, *"We don't have many options for good schools or hospitals. It's difficult to make the best choices for our children when the resources are so limited."*
- **Role of Extended Family:** In rural areas, the role of the extended family in decision-making was stronger. A rural father stated, *"We often consult the elders in the family before making any major decisions for the children. It's how we've always done it."*

3. Shifting Parenting Norms Across Urban and Rural Pakistan

The interviews and focus group discussions revealed significant differences in how parenting norms were shifting between urban and rural areas, with urban parents adopting more modern practices, while rural parents maintained traditional values.

Urban Parenting Norms

Urban parents were more likely to adopt modern parenting practices influenced by global trends, media, and the increasing participation of women in the workforce. These parents showed greater flexibility in gender roles and emphasized a balance between traditional values and modern parenting strategies.

- **Promoting Critical Thinking:** Urban parents placed high value on fostering critical thinking, creativity, and independence in their children. A mother from Karachi stated, *"We try to teach our children to think critically, question things, and make their own decisions."*
- **Gender Equality:** Urban parents, particularly mothers, were more likely to challenge traditional gender roles in parenting. Many urban mothers stressed the importance of gender equality in their homes. One mother explained, *"We try to raise our sons and daughters the same. Both should have equal opportunities."*
- **Increased Participation of Mothers:** Urban mothers reported being more involved in their children's education and extracurricular activities, often sharing responsibilities with fathers. A mother from Lahore shared, *"I'm as involved in my children's education as my husband. We both attend parent-teacher meetings and make decisions together."*

Rural Parenting Norms

Rural parents showed less flexibility in shifting their parenting practices. Although some were open to new ideas, most adhered to traditional norms, focusing on respect, discipline, and obedience, with rigid gender roles.

- **Emphasis on Respect and Obedience:** Rural parents continued to stress the importance of respect and discipline in their children. A rural father from Sargodha stated, *"Our children need to respect their elders and obey without question. That's the foundation of good behavior."*
- **Gendered Roles in Parenting:** Traditional gender roles were more pronounced in rural areas. Fathers were typically seen as the primary decision-makers, while mothers were more likely to take on

nurturing roles. A rural mother expressed, "My role is to care for the children, cook, and look after the home. My husband makes the important decisions."

- **Resistance to Change:** Many rural parents showed resistance to adopting modern parenting practices, particularly those related to gender equality and child autonomy. A rural father from Bahawalpur remarked, "We don't need to change our ways. The old ways work. Children should know their place and follow the rules."

Quantitative Results

Table 1 Demographic Information of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Urban Parents (n=100)	Rural Parents (n=100)	Total (n=200)
Gender	Male	50 (50%)	50 (50%)	100 (50%)
	Female	50 (50%)	50 (50%)	100 (50%)
Age Range	18-25 years	10 (10%)	5 (5%)	15 (7.5%)
	26-35 years	40 (40%)	30 (30%)	70 (35%)
	36-45 years	30 (30%)	40 (40%)	70 (35%)
	46+ years	20 (20%)	25 (25%)	45 (22.5%)
Education Level	No formal education	5 (5%)	20 (20%)	25 (12.5%)
	Primary education	10 (10%)	25 (25%)	35 (17.5%)
	Secondary education	15 (15%)	30 (30%)	45 (22.5%)
	Higher secondary education	25 (25%)	10 (10%)	35 (17.5%)
	Undergraduate degree	25 (25%)	5 (5%)	30 (15%)
	Graduate/Postgraduate degree	20 (20%)	10 (10%)	30 (15%)
Family Structure	Nuclear family	65 (65%)	40 (40%)	105 (52.5%)
	Extended family	35 (35%)	60 (60%)	95 (47.5%)
Occupation	Housewife/Stay-at-home parent	20 (20%)	50 (50%)	70 (35%)
	Employed (public/private sector)	40 (40%)	25 (25%)	65 (32.5%)
	Self-employed (business/farming)	30 (30%)	15 (15%)	45 (22.5%)
	Unemployed	10 (10%)	10 (10%)	20 (10%)
Income Level (Monthly Household)	Less than 20,000 PKR	10 (10%)	35 (35%)	45 (22.5%)
	20,000-40,000 PKR	40 (40%)	45 (45%)	85 (42.5%)
	40,000-60,000 PKR	30 (30%)	15 (15%)	45 (22.5%)
	60,000+ PKR	20 (20%)	5 (5%)	25 (12.5%)

The demographic characteristics of the participants reveal several key differences between urban and rural parents (table-1). The sample was evenly split between male and female participants in both urban and rural areas (50% each). In terms of age, the majority of parents were between 26 and 45 years old, with rural parents tending to be slightly older, particularly in the 36-45 year range. Regarding education, urban parents had significantly higher levels of formal education than their rural counterparts, with a higher percentage of urban parents holding undergraduate or graduate degrees, whereas rural parents were more likely to have only completed primary or secondary education. When it comes to family structure, urban parents were more likely to live in nuclear families (65%), while rural parents tended to have extended family arrangements (60%). In terms of occupation, a higher proportion of urban parents were employed in the public or private sectors (40%),

while in rural areas, more parents were stay-at-home parents (50%) or self-employed (15%). Finally, urban parents had higher household incomes, with 20% earning over 60,000 PKR monthly compared to only 5% of rural parents. Conversely, rural families had a higher proportion of low-income households, with many earning less than 20,000 PKR monthly.

Table 2 Parental Empowerment

Empowerment Dimension	Urban Parents (n=100)	Rural Parents (n=100)	t-Value	p-Value
Decision-making authority	4.1 (SD = 0.75)	2.9 (SD = 1.02)	8.23	< 0.001
Access to resources (education, health)	4.0 (SD = 0.70)	2.8 (SD = 1.15)	7.45	< 0.001
Overall sense of empowerment	4.2 (SD = 0.65)	3.0 (SD = 1.05)	9.15	< 0.001

The analysis of parental empowerment revealed significant disparities between urban and rural parents across various dimensions (table-2). Urban parents reported higher levels of decision-making authority (M = 4.1, SD = 0.75) compared to rural parents (M = 2.9, SD = 1.02), with a significant difference (t = 8.23, p < 0.001). Similarly, urban parents had greater access to resources, such as education and healthcare (M = 4.0, SD = 0.70), whereas rural parents reported lower access (M = 2.8, SD = 1.15), with this difference also being statistically significant (t = 7.45, p < 0.001). Lastly, urban parents felt a stronger overall sense of empowerment (M = 4.2, SD = 0.65) compared to rural parents (M = 3.0, SD = 1.05), with a significant t-value of 9.15 (p < 0.001). These findings underscore the higher levels of empowerment experienced by urban parents, particularly in terms of decision-making, access to resources, and their overall sense of empowerment.

Table 3 Parenting Practices and Cultural Perceptions

Parenting Practice	Urban Parents (n=100)	Rural Parents (n=100)	χ² Value	p-Value
Encouragement of independent thinking	82%	48%	25.6	< 0.001
Use of physical discipline	32%	65%	20.2	< 0.001
Shared decision-making (father and mother)	68%	34%	17.4	< 0.001
Promoting gender equality	62%	36%	13.8	< 0.001
Encouragement of emotional expression	74%	46%	18.6	< 0.001

The analysis of parenting practices and cultural perceptions revealed notable differences between urban and rural parents (table-3). A significantly higher percentage of urban parents (82%) encouraged independent thinking in their children, compared to only 48% of rural parents (χ² = 25.6, p < 0.001). Regarding discipline, rural parents were more likely to use physical discipline (65%) than urban parents (32%), with this difference also being statistically significant (χ² = 20.2, p < 0.001). Urban parents were more likely to engage in shared decision-making with their partners (68%), while only 34% of rural parents reported similar practices (χ² = 17.4, p < 0.001). Additionally, urban parents promoted gender equality in their parenting more frequently (62%) compared to rural parents (36%) (χ² = 13.8, p < 0.001). Lastly, urban parents were more likely to encourage emotional expression in their children (74%) than rural parents (46%), with a significant difference found between the two groups (χ² = 18.6, p < 0.001). These findings highlight the more progressive parenting practices in urban areas, in contrast to the more traditional approaches observed in rural areas.

Table 4 Shifting Parenting Norms

Shifting Norm	Urban Parents (n=100)	Rural Parents (n=100)	χ^2 Value	p-Value
Preference for modern parenting methods	78%	42%	22.3	< 0.001
Involvement of extended family in child-rearing	52%	84%	16.5	< 0.001
Belief in the importance of education over tradition	80%	55%	18.1	< 0.001
Influence of media on parenting practices	66%	31%	21.2	< 0.001
Traditional gender roles in parenting	34%	72%	19.9	< 0.001

The data on shifting parenting norms revealed significant differences between urban and rural parents (table-4). A higher percentage of urban parents (78%) preferred modern parenting methods compared to 42% of rural parents, with this difference being statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 22.3$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, rural parents were more likely to involve extended family members in child-rearing (84%) compared to urban parents (52%), with a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 16.5$, $p < 0.001$). Regarding the belief in the importance of education over tradition, 80% of urban parents emphasized education as a priority, while only 55% of rural parents shared this view ($\chi^2 = 18.1$, $p < 0.001$). The influence of media on parenting practices was also more pronounced among urban parents (66%) compared to rural parents (31%), with a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 21.2$, $p < 0.001$). Lastly, rural parents were more likely to adhere to traditional gender roles in parenting, with 72% maintaining such norms, compared to just 34% of urban parents ($\chi^2 = 19.9$, $p < 0.001$). These results highlight the evolving parenting practices in urban areas and the continued prominence of traditional values in rural settings.

Discussion

The results of this study on cultural perceptions of parenting and parental empowerment reveal significant differences between urban and rural parents in Pakistan, shedding light on shifting norms, practices, and the broader sociocultural landscape. These findings contribute to our understanding of how socio-economic, cultural, and geographical factors influence parenting approaches and the sense of empowerment among parents in urban and rural areas.

Shifting Parenting Norms

One of the most striking findings was the marked contrast in parenting norms between urban and rural parents. Urban parents were more inclined to adopt modern parenting methods (78%) as compared to rural parents (42%), which could be attributed to greater exposure to global parenting trends, access to information, and social media in urban areas (Hassan, Malik, et al., 2022). This aligns with previous studies suggesting that urbanization often leads to the assimilation of more liberal and progressive parenting ideas (Krause & Rimal, 2019). On the other hand, rural parents were more likely to involve extended family in child-rearing (84%) compared to urban parents (52%), a practice deeply rooted in traditional family structures. This highlights the continued importance of extended family support in rural areas, where family ties are often more central to daily life, and where communal child-rearing remains a dominant cultural norm (Ahmed et al., 2016). Moreover, urban parents placed more emphasis on the importance of education over tradition (80%) compared to rural parents (55%), indicating a shift towards prioritizing academic achievement as a means of upward mobility, particularly in urban settings (Jamal, 2017). In contrast, rural parents often continued to uphold traditional values, which may be linked to more agrarian lifestyles where education may be seen as secondary to practical skills for farm-based livelihoods (Hassan, Luo, et al., 2022). This difference in cultural perceptions underscores the growing value of education in urban centers, driven by economic aspirations and the

competitive nature of city life. The influence of media on parenting practices was another area where urban and rural parents diverged significantly. A large proportion of urban parents (66%) reported that media played a significant role in shaping their parenting style, compared to only 31% of rural parents. The widespread availability of television, internet, and social media in urban areas likely facilitates the adoption of new parenting techniques, while rural areas, with limited access to such media, may rely more on traditional, local forms of guidance and socialization (Sultana, 2020). These findings suggest that urban parents are more likely to be influenced by global parenting discourse, which may offer alternative approaches to discipline, child-rearing, and gender roles (Malik et al., 2023). Finally, the results indicated that traditional gender roles in parenting were more prevalent among rural parents (72%) than urban parents (34%). This reflects the entrenched cultural norms in rural areas, where gender roles are typically more rigid, and fathers are often seen as the primary disciplinarians and providers, while mothers are expected to perform nurturing roles. In contrast, urban areas, where gender equality has become more emphasized due to exposure to modern ideologies, saw more equitable parenting practices.

Parenting Practices and Cultural Perceptions

In terms of parenting practices, urban parents were more likely to encourage independent thinking (82%) and emotional expression (74%) in their children, reflecting the influence of Western individualistic values that emphasize personal autonomy and emotional well-being. These practices are often associated with modern parenting paradigms, which emphasize the development of children as independent thinkers and emotionally expressive individuals. This contrasts with rural areas, where these practices were less common (48% and 46%, respectively). Rural parents, on the other hand, were more inclined to use physical discipline (65%), which has traditionally been a common method of managing children's behavior in more conservative, rural settings (Niazi & Usman, 2020). Additionally, shared decision-making between fathers and mothers was significantly more prevalent in urban families (68%) compared to rural families (34%). This finding suggests that urban parents may be more egalitarian in their approach to family decision-making, a trend that aligns with global shifts toward gender equality in household dynamics (Alam, 2015). The greater involvement of both parents in decision-making in urban families could be influenced by higher levels of education, greater gender equality, and a more progressive outlook on parenting. Promoting gender equality in parenting was another key distinction. While 62% of urban parents reported actively promoting gender equality, only 36% of rural parents did the same. This disparity reflects the influence of urban environments, where greater exposure to gender equality campaigns and media may encourage parents to challenge traditional gender roles and promote more equal opportunities for boys and girls (Khan et al., 2020).

Parental Empowerment

The study's findings on parental empowerment further illustrate the differences between urban and rural parents. Urban parents scored significantly higher on all dimensions of empowerment, including decision-making authority, access to resources, and their overall sense of empowerment. Urban parents felt more empowered in terms of decision-making ($M = 4.1$ vs. 2.9), access to essential resources such as education and healthcare ($M = 4.0$ vs. 2.8), and their overall sense of empowerment ($M = 4.2$ vs. 3.0). These findings are consistent with existing research that links urbanization with greater access to resources and opportunities, leading to higher levels of empowerment (Mahmood, 2018). Urban parents' enhanced access to education, healthcare, and social services likely provides them with the tools to make more informed decisions about their children's upbringing and future, thus increasing their overall sense of empowerment.

In contrast, rural parents' lower scores on these empowerment dimensions highlight the challenges they face, such as limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The lower sense of empowerment among rural parents could be tied to the more traditional family structure, where decision-making is often more hierarchical, and access to resources is constrained by geographical and economic factors (Khan, 2017). The findings suggest that empowering rural parents, particularly mothers, through improved access to resources and decision-making opportunities could help address some of these disparities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant cultural and socio-economic differences between urban and rural parents in Pakistan. Urban parents exhibit more modern, progressive parenting practices and a higher sense of empowerment, likely driven by greater access to education, resources, and exposure to global parenting norms. Rural parents, by contrast, tend to maintain more traditional practices and family structures, which influence their parenting styles and sense of empowerment. These findings underline the importance of considering regional and cultural contexts when studying parenting norms and parental empowerment. Further research should explore how these differences evolve over time, especially as urbanization and globalization continue to shape Pakistani society. Additionally, interventions aimed at improving access to resources and empowering rural parents could play a crucial role in bridging the gap between urban and rural parenting practices.

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