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ROMANTIC BETRAYAL EXPERIENCES OF EMERGING ADULTS IN PAKISTAN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In this phenomenological study, the betrayal experiences of young Pakistani adults in romantic relationships were explored. Eight participants (4 men & 4 women) with an age range of 18-29 years (M_{age} = 22.63, SD = 2.87) were selected through purposive sampling from various public and private sector universities of Lahore, Pakistan. A demographic sheet with a semi-structured questionnaire was developed, and a face-to-face in-depth interview was conducted with every participant. Interpretative phenomenological framework (IPA) analysis was used to gain insight into participants' betrayal experiences with an ideographic focus. Findings suggest that Betrayal was experienced due to emotional infidelity and withdrawal, where betrayed men

experienced conditional love, and women specifically experienced sexual infidelity. The psychological disturbances caused due to betrayal were manifested in the form of emotional and behavioral symptoms. Adults used both Emotion-focused and problem-focused coping with gender differences in the different strategies used to cope with their relationship's dissolution. Thus, to conclude, Pakistani emerging adults engage in romantic relationships, exploring partners according to their expectations, which, when not fulfilled, leads to the violation of interpersonal commitment, making betrayal a salient phenomenon of their relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is the time of massive changes from adolescence to assuming a new adult role with independent identity explorations into work and relationships. It is the age where emerging adults are self-focused and explore various possibilities in love and work while making long-lasting life choices. Their explorations make it an age of instability for them to feel between not being fully adult or adolescents (Arnett, 2000). As this phase transitions from dependence to autonomy and independence, romantic relationships become an integral part of this life stage. In emerging adulthood, culture, society, and family are the factors that influence the dynamics of a love relationship to a great extent. A normative shift can be seen in young adults' romantic involvement based on their interpersonal dynamics, commitment, emotional, and sexual intimacy (Collibee & Furman, 2015; Roberson et al., 2017). Intimacy places competing for demands on young adults in this developmental stage, including trust and commitment. Emerging adults in a love relationship are both exploring and discovering themselves, where they also explore their preferences in a partner, leading to a lack of commitment in their relationship (Jaju, 2020). This exploration often violates interpersonal commitments, making betrayal a salient phenomenon of early adulthood love relationships (Feldman et al., 2000).

Theoretical Framework

Insight about the nature and quality of romantic relationships comes from two theoretical approaches, one is by Orlofsky's (1993) that originates from the Eriksonian's theory (1968), and the other is romantic stage theories followed by recent research and developments (Brown, 1999; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009, Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Orlofsky (1993) proposed that the quality of a romantic relationship depends on the degree of a person's involvement. The essential factor to consider is involvement in a committed relationship. Therefore, the ability to integrate commitment and intimacy in a romantic involvement is an indicator of the quality of young people's romantic relationships (Shulman et al., 2013). Theories on romantic stage development suggest that youngsters in emerging adulthood have developed the necessary competencies for forming intimate romantic relationships. Their next step is to develop commitment with their partners through adulthood. Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 2009; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). However, the current literature is not consistent with this expectation. Emerging adults fluctuate between relationships, delay marriage, and engage in short-term non-committed relationships (Arnett, 2004; Cohen et al., 2003). Shulman and Connolly (2016) proposed a middle adulthood romantic stage where romance is coordinated with life goals. The

youngsters attempt to integrate their career paths and life goals with a romantic partner. At this stage, fixation creates conflict, whereas conflict resolution gives room to long-term commitment in their relationship.

When it comes to gender, the literature suggests that women have been more intimate in their romantic relationships since adolescence and are involved in more stable relationships than men (Shulman et al., 2009). In emerging, adulthood similar trends are observed through empirical evidence where young women tend to be more invested in their romantic relationships (Bartoszuk & Pittman, 2010) and feel more committed in their relationships (Canary & Wahba, 2006). However, recently these differences have been challenged, suggesting that men and women behave similarly in intimate relationships (Perrin et al., 2011).

It is not uncommon in the west to experience betrayal in love relationships manifested in emotional or sexual infidelity. Infidelity is the most commonly noticed in western society; however, other forms of betrayal are equally capable of ruining love relationships. In any form, if there is no trust, respect, and protection between partners in a love relationship, the relationship is hampered. Apart from emotional and sexual infidelity, emotional cheating, conditional love, and emotional withdrawal are also forms of betrayal (Benson, 2016). Although betrayal in romantic relationships can take any form, regardless of its form, it is always negative, and there is empirical evidence that it leads to negative consequences (Goldsmith et al., 2012). As soon as the other partner discovers being betrayed, the degradation of trust with the loosening of connection and support between partners can follow (Couch & Olson 2016). Literature suggests that women report a higher level of Post-Traumatic Stress than men after romantic betrayal experiences. Women than men also reported higher levels of depression and anxiety after an experience of betrayal (Tang et al., 2012).

Cultural variation is the most crucial question regarding emerging adulthood, and it is essential to determine how this theory applies to different nations and cultural groups. Arnett (2006) did ascertain that the characteristics of emerging adulthood depend on cultural context. In Asian countries, the self-focus and freedom of emerging adults are manifested under their parent's and grandparents' supervision with their conservative views of sexuality (Arnett, 2011). Emerging adulthood relationships are understudied in Pakistan, lacking empirical evidence in many aspects. Today, no empirical evidence is available from this region concerning the emerging adult's love relationships and consequences of betrayal. Some inter/intrapersonal factors that might contribute to the experience can be explored through qualitative inquiries providing an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon for an individual. The literature above suggests that emerging adulthood characteristics contribute to non-commitment and betrayal in love relationships (Khawar, et al, 2021). This qualitative research was conducted to understand the emerging adult's lived experiences of romantic betrayal in a non-industrialized country like Pakistan. To the best of our knowledge, this study will serve as a pioneer in filling the gap in knowledge concerning the intrapersonal factors involved in romantic betrayals, their forms, and the aftermath of betrayal experiences. The following

research questions were posed to address the gaps, as mentioned earlier in knowledge:

- What are the forms of betrayal?
- What is the psychological impact of betrayal on young adults?
- What are the coping strategies used to cope with the betrayal experience?
- What are the gender differences concerning romantic betrayal experiences?

METHOD

Research Design

As a research methodology, Phenomenology helps researchers learn from others' experiences. It is the form of a qualitative research design that focuses on the subject's lived experiences. This design best suited the study by better understanding the researcher's underlying philosophy and its alignment with the specific research questions. Therefore, a phenomenological research design has been used to explore the lived betrayal experiences of study participants in a love relationship, particularly in Pakistani culture.

The interpretative phenomenological framework (IPA) approach was used with an ideographic focus to understand how each participant experienced betrayal by their romantic partner.

Sample Recruitment and Participant Characteristics

In this study, purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who fitted the profile according to the inclusion/Exclusion criteria. Through deviant case sampling technique, those participants were selected for voluntary participation in the study who: (a) were in the age range of emerging adulthood, (b) have been in an intimate love relationship for a minimum of one year, (b) had only one intimate love relationship (c) had experienced betrayal at least six months before their interview and (d) were not in any relationship at the time of interview. The sample comprised eight emerging adults (Mage = 22.63, SD = 2.87) between ages 18- 29 years from Lahore, Pakistan, with equal distribution on a gender basis. Seven of the participants were undergraduates, while 1 was a graduate, all of them were middle borns where two were working, and six were non-working. Three of them were in a relationship for three years, 3 for six years, whereas two were in a relationship for 7 to 9 years. Two had a breakup for three months, and 6 had a breakup from 4 to 6 months (see Table 1).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic Variables	Victims of Betrayal in a Love Relationship	
Age	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
19	2	25%
22	2	25%
23	2	25%
26	1	12%
27	1	12%
Gender		
Men	4	50%
women	4	50%
Academic Qualification		
Undergraduation	7	87.5%
Graduation	1	12.5%
Birth Order		
Upper	0	0%
Middle	8	100.0%
Lower	0	0%
Employment status		
Working	2	25%
Non-Working	6	75%
Family system		
Nuclear	6	75%
Joint	2	25%
Years of being in a love relationship		
1 to 3 years	3	37.5%
4 to 6 years	3	37.5%
7 to 9 years	2	25%
Months passed since the betrayal		
1 to 3 months	2	25%
4 to 6 months	6	75%

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Demographic Information Sheet

The researchers developed a demographic information Sheet to record the participant's personal information. The information included their religion, age, work status, number of months in a love relationship, time passed since their breakup, the family system in which they resided, education, birth order, and presence of any diagnosed mental illness or physical disability.

Semi-structured Interview Questionnaire

The researchers developed a Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire to conduct an in-depth face-to-face interview with the study participants. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions on betrayal experiences in an intimate love relationship and its psychological impact. During the interview, participants were asked to report "How and when their love relationship started." "How they would describe their relationship," "How and when they started to notice that their partner was betraying them." "What they think were the reasons behind the betrayal," " What were the efforts made to save the relationship." "How the breakup happened," "What were the Psychosocial circumstances faced after the breakup," and "How did they return to their normal routine life after the breakup."

Procedure

The Participant's written consent was taken after providing them informed consent. They responded to the demographic Information sheet, after which an in-depth interview was conducted with each participant face to face. The Interviews were taken in a separate and safe space to maintain the participant's confidentiality. A semi-structured interview was designed focusing on the posed research questions. The researchers conducted the interviews to gain deep insight into the phenomenon under study. The interview mainly lasted for one or one and a half hours. Each interview was audio recorded with the participant's permission, through which transcripts were developed for analysis. All the participants were given random names, for example, AF, HJ, GI, AS, FU, MT, IM, JL, TN, and FZ, to maintain their confidentiality. The transcripts were further analyzed through the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach to form emerging themes.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the analysis was based on the Interpretive Phenomenological Framework (IPA). At the initial stage, the transcripts were read multiple times, and the audios have also listened to a few times. The researchers noted their significant observations where distinctive phrases and emotions were highlighted. In the second stage, researchers worked on detailed and comprehensive notes taken from the transcripts and converted them into male and female participants (see Table 2 and 3). transformed into emerging themes called subordinate themes. At the third stage, researchers determined relationships between the emerging themes analyzed through the codes, grouped them based on conceptual similarities, and named each cluster. These clustered themes were named superordinate themes. Finally, a list of subordinate and superordinate themes was formed for both men and women (see Table 4 and 5).

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was provided to the participants, including a detailed description of the study, time for the interview, and potential benefits of

participation in the study. Participants were assured of their confidentiality while reporting their interviews in the study and disseminating results. The interviewer monitored how it affected the participants to take preventive measures against any emotional harm throughout the interview. Participation in the study was voluntary, with the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

RESULTS

Table 2. Initial noting and coding of transcripts from men with experience of romantic betrayal (n=4)

Verbatim	Initial Codes
"She told me she had developed feelings for someone else, she was still in a relationship with me, I got too much heart, although I have played with girls, but how can my lover do this to me"; It caught her red-handed, I read her messages, she used to talk to someone else, and when I confronted her, she denied saying it was just a friend"; "Because I was not available whenever she needed me, she developed emotional bonding and feelings for her neighbor who was available whenever she needed emotional support"; "Our breakup happened because of lack of physical contact, I think it is necessary to have close contact with your partner and see her daily to build a strong relationship, and this was not the case in our long-distance relationship. We lived in different cities."; She was getting away from me with passing the time. I discovered she had found someone who could be close to her, meet her multiple times, and provide her emotional support. This happened because of our long-distance relationship. She was too demanding when it came to giving time to her and too overprotective as well; I felt happy and less burdened after my breakup, instead of sorrow, I had a feeling of from, and I started achieving good things in my life."; "I broke up with her and moved on in my life; if she does not think of me, I do not need to think of her." She asked me to leave the army as I asked for time from her to get financially stable in life with this profession."; She wanted to talk to me more frequently, and when I was unable to give her time, she developed feelings for someone else."	Talking to someone else; Seeking Emotional Support from someone else. Developed Feelings for someone else Living in different cities; lack of physical proximity; Lack of availability when needed Financial instability; Asking for more time; change of career
"After the breakup, I used to cry frequently, had thoughts related to her and what happened"; "I developed guilt feeling because I thought it all happened to me as I betrayed many girls myself	Low mood; Recurrent thoughts of betrayal; Guilt, Feelings,

and this happened to me as a punishment from GOD"; "I became negative and hopeless from my future, I was very irritable after my breakup, had difficulty in making small decisions, my self-esteem was very low, I lost myself"; After the breakup, I became isolated, stopped meeting my friend, and became aggressive. I also tried to commit suicide by deliberately having an accident in my car to die. I also used to harm myself by hitting and cutting myself".	Indecisiveness; Hopelessness Irritability; Crying spells Aggression; Low self-esteem. Isolation; Suicidal attempts; Self-harming behavior
"My friends used to take me out, listen to me to help me come out of emotional trauma"; "My father has been very supportive whenever I felt emotionally burdened, I used to talk to him"; "I am blessed to have a supportive social circle which helped me to come back to life." "I thought if she is not bothered after leaving me, why am I dying for her? She is not that important" "I came back to life because of my ego and self-respect, and I cannot ruin myself because of a betrayer." "I joined the gym and started doing other activities to keep myself busy and relaxed." "It kept thinking how can she do this to me and looked for reasons"; "I used to blame myself as I must have done something wrong that lead her to betrayal"; "I used to sit with my friends and discuss my painful feelings regarding my breakup	Seeking Support. Adjusting Expectations. Relaxation; Physical Recreation. Denial; Self-blame; Venting

Table 3. Initial noting and coding of transcripts from women with romantic betrayal experience (n=4)

Verbatim	Initial Codes
"I asked him about his relationship and the girl. I asked him not to lie; he started ignoring me and made me feel like I am overreacting. He called me crying and used emotional dialogues". "He started liking someone else, and his interest was lessened in me, and we had many fights too over this issue." "I never wanted someone who has even liked someone else or who has been in talk with any girl, but life doe's things one cannot think of." I was tired of the daily fight, he was trying to initiate physical relations with a girl, and the existence of that girl was a reason for the breakup." "Second time that girl came to me and said that she had destroyed her life with my boyfriend as he had been physical with her not once but twice. I inquired from him, and he admitted saying that I cannot even look up to you and make eye contact. "My friend told me about his prior relationship" My heartbeat got	Relationship with someone else. Physical relations with a girl Misunderstanding due to distance

fastened, I asked her to tell me about it. When I got to know about him being physical with some girl, I could not breathe." "Many fights started to happen between us throughout the relationship of five years; he was caring but very obstinate, and mostly he would make issues on little things. There were misunderstandings between us. The reason for this was our long-distance relationship, as he moved to a different country when he was here it was all ok".	
"After the breakup, it felt like nothing was left. Everything seemed to be negative". "I used to feel that every person, even my family talking to me, has a hidden motive behind it." "Everyone will leave me and betray me. I was very depressed". "I ruined myself by crying for two whole days." "I used to go to university and scream and cry." "I could not sleep for several nights."	Hopelessness; Negative thinking; future apprehensions; Suspiciousness; Low mood; Crying spells; Screaming; Sleep disturbance
His lovely dovely talks now had a pungent smell. I changed my thinking; now, this did not affect me. I have got myself insulted a lot for him, and now I wanted him not to be around me". "When my trust broke, I realized all those fallacies that were existent since the beginning. His contact with his ex and also talking to his ex's sister". "A person feels that why should I do like this. I have cried so much in this relation that my heart has become stronger". "I thought I could not eat this fly with open eyes, he has bad nature, he gets rude in anger, he has a physical relationship with someone, so I why I was wasting myself." "When I was alone, I helped myself; I realized that I could handle all this, and I do not have to bear anyone's restrictions when my parents did not raise me in restrictions." "When my heart is too heavy, I offer my prayers, I pray to God that may he give me patience, and I am thankful to Allah for his blessings." "I got Support from my friends; they took care of me. However, they also have limits, so I learned to be self-sufficient. I thought to myself that it was not over yet, and there is more to come". "I met new people and made friends at the internship, and in knowing them, I got new thoughts. "I was very depressed, then I started using social media (Facebook, Instagram) and saw funny videos. "At first, I used to stay at home, but then I started going to university, started studying, and made myself busy so that I would not have time for this."	Adjusting Expectations. Positive religious coping. Seeking Social Support. Relaxation. Venting. Humor. Denial.

| "I am good at catharsis with my roommates, my sister, and my mother. My friends supported me a lot". "When I am tensed, I make fun of little things and laugh a lot with my friends." "I compromised as our parents usually compromise. It is an addiction when you know it is destructive for you, but you do not leave it; it feels like without this life is nothing". | |

Table 4. Subordinate and superordinate themes emerged from the coding of betrayed male transcripts (n=4).

Initial Codes	Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes
Talking to someone else; Seeking Emotional Support from someone else; Developing Feelings for someone else Living in different cities; lack of physical proximity; Lack of availability and emotional support when needed Financial instability; Asking for more time; change of career	Emotional Infidelity Emotional withdrawal Conditional Love	Forms of Betrayal
Low mood; Recurrent thoughts of betrayal; Guilt Feelings Indecisiveness; Hopelessness; Irritability; Low self-esteem. Crying Spells, physical aggression, Isolation; Suicidal attempts; Self-harming behavior	Emotional Manifestation of Disturbance Behavioral Manifestation of Disturbance	Psychological Disturbances due to Betrayal
Seeking Support; Adjusting Expectations. Relaxation; Physical Recreation; Denial; Self-blame; Venting	Problem Focused coping Emotion-Focused Coping	Coping Strategies Used to deal with betrayal

Table 5 Subordinate and superordinate themes emerged from the coding of betrayed females' transcripts (n=4).

Initial Codes	Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes
In a relationship with someone else; emotional bonding Physical relations with a girl Misunderstandings due to distance, emotional neglect	Emotional Infidelity Sexual Infidelity Emotional Withdrawal	Forms of Betrayal
Hopelessness; Negative thinking; Pessimism; future apprehensions; Suspiciousness; Low mood; Crying spells; Screaming; Sleep disturbance	The emotional manifestation of disturbance The behavioral manifestation of disturbance	Psychological Disturbance due to Betrayal
Adjusting Expectations; Positive religious coping; Seeking Social Support Relaxation; Venting; Humor; Denial.	Problem-Focused Coping Emotion-Focused Coping	Coping Strategies Used to deal with betrayal

Analyzing emerging male and female adults ' lived experiences of romantic betrayal resulted in Three superordinate themes. Based on the interpretive phenomenological framework, the themes that emerged were the forms of betrayal, psychological disturbance due to betrayal, and coping strategies used to deal with betrayal. The superordinate themes reflect the forms in which betrayal was manifested. They also reflect the negative consequences of the betrayal experience and shed light on the inner resources used to cope with the negative experience.

Theme 1: Forms of Betrayal

The forms in which men and women experienced betrayal, in the same way, were Emotional Infidelity, where their partner was giving time and talking to and seeking emotional support from someone else apart from being in a relationship with them. Moreover, the partners also admitted developing feelings for someone other than their partner. Another form of betrayal was the emotional withdrawal experienced by both men and women participants, manifested in turning away from a partner when they most needed them.

The only difference in the form of betrayal experienced by men and women was that men experience betrayal in the form of conditional love from their partner. Men did not feel supported when their partner kept a foot out of the relationship. They frequently complained about their financial instability, asked for more time, and wanted to change their career against their choice. They do not feel like their partner has their best interests at heart and has their

back. In comparison, women experienced betrayal in the form of sexual infidelity from their partners, engaging in sexual intercourse with someone else.

Theme 2: Psychological Disturbances Due to Betrayal

After the betrayal, young men faced psychological disturbances, which manifested emotionally in the form of low mood; Recurrent thoughts of betrayal; guilt feelings, indecisiveness; hopelessness; irritability, and low self-esteem. The behavioral manifestation of symptoms was in the form of Crying Spells, physical aggression, Isolation; Suicidal attempts; Self-harming behavior.

Young women faced psychological disturbances, which were manifested emotionally in hopelessness; negative thinking; pessimism; future apprehensions; suspiciousness, and low mood. The behavioral manifestation of symptoms was in crying spells, screaming, and sleep disturbance.

Theme 3: Coping Strategies Used to Deal with Betrayal

The coping strategies used by betrayed men and women were of two types: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Both young men and women used to seek support and adjusting Expectations as problem-focused coping strategies for dealing with their problems. However, young women also used positive religious coping to deal with their disturbance after betrayal.

Both young men and women used Emotion-focused coping strategies by using relaxation techniques, venting off negative emotions, and denying the betrayal. However, men used physical recreation and self-blame to deal with their problems, and women used humor to cope with betrayal experience emotionally.

DISCUSSION
In line with the romantic stage theories, emerging adults developing the necessary competencies for formulating intimate romantic relationships can maintain committed relationships throughout adulthood (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Mclsaac, 2009; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Along with the western literature that shows inconsistency with this expectation, a study from Pakistan also suggests that there have been significant changes in this region's culture. As the world is stepping into the quagmire of new technology, it has brought early adolescent fertility and further dating development and maintaining intimate love relationships in young adulthood. In Asian countries, the self-focus and freedom of emerging adults are manifested under their parent's and grandparents' supervision with their conservative views of sexuality. Unfortunately, betrayal, mental abuse, and violence in intimate romantic relationships have been observed in Pakistani society. Moreover, changes in relationship commitment among youth can be foreseen because our society is just a step short of or already headlong into such social issues (Sheikh et al., 2015).

Emerging adults fluctuate between relationships in Pakistani culture, delay marriage, and engage in short-term non-committed relationships, just like in western societies (Arnett, 2004; Cohen et al., 2003). Pakistan has a primarily middle-class population whose youngsters are frequently engaged in intimate love relationships. As no other option due to parental supervision and societal demands are left, young men and women find intimate romantic relationships, a source of life satisfaction, and social enjoyment in their emerging adulthood. This dating or romantic involvement is more prevalent in developed cities like Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad. Therefore, the current study was carried out in Lahore, Pakistan, as Punjab is predicted to be the most liberal area suffering from the after-effects of betrayal in such relationships.

The study's findings suggest three superordinate themes emerged through IPA analysis by exploring emerging adults' romantic betrayal experiences. The themes were based on betrayal, psychological disturbances, and coping strategies used to deal with betrayal.

The first superordinate theme that has emerged is betrayal forms, i.e., emotional infidelity and withdrawal, which is in line with the western literature already discussed. The gender difference observed is the betrayal in conditioned love experienced by men and sexual infidelity experienced by women. This conditioned love by women can be linked to materialism, as mentioned above, in young Pakistani girls. Moreover, sexual infidelity is in line with literature that suggests that Pakistani men did not feel guilt related to any form of infidelity and perceive sexual dissatisfaction as the cause of their betrayal. In contrast, Pakistani women perceived emotional infidelity as the most distressing form of infidelity and most challenging to forgive (Urooj et al., 2015). Sexual jealousy had a significant positive impact on partner infidelity, whereas gender was a significant moderator between sexual jealousy and partner infidelity (Saleem et al., 2020). Recent research also suggests that men are prone to sexual infidelity and female to emotional infidelity (Valentova et al., 2020).

The second theme that has emerged is psychological disturbances due to betrayal. Research suggests that a romantic relationship's quality significantly impacts the couple's mental health (Smetaniuk, 2014). Betrayal is a traumatic experience that can lead to mistrust, post-traumatic stress disorder, guilt, depression, suspiciousness, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, self-doubt, and the desire to avoid relationships in the future. The emerged theme is in line with western literature. Pakistani young adults also suffer from the symptoms mentioned above, as betrayal is the death of a relationship and trust (Everly, 2018).

Local empirical evidence concerning gender differences suggests that men are higher in romantic relationships and mental health than women. Moreover, romantic relationships with marked avoidance of interaction or betrayal or breakups were negatively associated with emotional and psychological wellbeing, decreasing the victim partner's mental health (Zonash et al., 2020).
The third theme that has emerged is the coping strategies used to deal with betrayal. Findings suggest that men and women used similar problem-focused and emotion-focused coping to deal with the betrayal experience. It appeared

that different coping strategies play a role in reducing the distress of breakup due to betrayal. Literature also suggests that coping with stress by physical exercises and seeking social support by spending time with friends can help cope with post-breakup stress (Roepke et al., 2018). The kind of experiences youngsters go through in an intimate romantic relationship helps develop coping skills required for future romantic relationships (Bravo et al., 2017). Moreover, positive cognitive coping skills predict adjustment after losing a romantic relationship because of betrayal (O'Sullivan et al., 2019).

Limitation Of the Study

Recruitment of the study participants was challenging as the sample was collected from Lahore, Pakistan, during COVID -19 Pandemic and strict lockdown. Therefore, the researchers could not include participants from all socioeconomic statuses, and all the participants belonged to the middle socioeconomic status. It is recommended that future studies should be conducted with participants from different cities and socioeconomic backgrounds to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon concerning different Pakistani cultures.

CONCLUSION

The present research was based upon the romantic stage theory, which was explored to gain insight into the dynamics of intimate romantic relationships and betrayal experiences of emerging adults and gender differences in the characteristics of betrayal and forms in which betrayal was experienced. Gender differences in terms of psychological disturbances resulting from the betrayal experience and the coping mechanisms used to deal with it were also explored. The study's findings are also in line with Western literature. According to romantic stage theory, a contradiction is found in expecting emerging adults to develop competencies for establishing intimate relationships. Pakistani emerging adults also engaged in intimate romantic relationships while exploring their partners according to their expectations, which, when not fulfilled, led to the violation of interpersonal commitments, making betrayal a salient phenomenon of their relationship. These qualitative research findings can be used for developing appropriate interventions for young Pakistani adults suffering from psychological disturbances after the dissolution of an intimate romantic relationship. This study's findings can help mental health professionals guide young couples to develop ways to safeguard their relationships.

Conflicting Interests

Funding

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