

## **Sadistic Tendencies Scale for Young Adults: A Psychometric Approach**

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The current study explored the cultural manifestation of sadistic tendencies among young adults. In phase I, using an open-ended phenomenological approach, key components of sadistic tendencies were elicited from 33 young adults (men = 16, women = 17) aged 18-24 years. A content validity index for items and the scale was established in phase II. In phase III, pilot testing was conducted on 28 young adults (men = 13, women = 15). In phase IV, a sample of 400 young females and male adults (men = 200, women = 200) age ranges between 18-24 years ( $M = 20.52$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) from a BS four-year program were included. To test the psychometric properties of the Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS), Interpersonal Difficulties Scale (IDS) was used to establish the concurrent validity of the scale. Exploratory factor analysis generated three factors of the Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS): denigration, inability to regulate, and dominance. Furthermore, the scale was found to have high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .91$ ), convergent validity ( $r = .50$ ), split-half reliability, and test-retest reliability ( $r = .98$ ). The results are discussed in the light of the factorial structure in the Pakistani culture.

**Keywords.** Sadism, sadistic tendencies, young adults, psychometric validation, cultural adaptation

Sadism is a personality characteristic broadly defined as the propensity to take pleasure in the physical or mental misery of others (Foulkes, 2019). Sadistic tendencies are persistently prevalent in community and forensic samples, and span from the enjoyment of embarrassing others to the enjoyment of committing torture and murder. The likelihood of antisocial behavior in people with high levels of sadistic qualities is undeniable and unsurprising. These

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people are more prone to act cruelly toward others, both online and offline, since they enjoy doing so (Sest & March, 2017). While there are several measures available to measure sadistic behavior (such as the Varieties of Sadistic Tendencies Scale; Paulhus & Jones, 2015, and the Short Sadistic Impulse Scale; O'Meara et al., 2011), the majority of these tests were developed in Western contexts. They may not accurately depict the complex, relational, and socially rooted forms of cruelty that arise in collectivist countries like Pakistan. Instead, they tend to focus on overt or behavioral features of sadism, which are frequently found in forensic or deviant realms. Therefore, there was a strong rationale to develop an indigenous measure that could capture the culturally nuanced manifestations of sadistic tendencies as they appear in everyday interpersonal contexts.

Until relatively recently, sadism was considered a forensic phenomenon as the majority of studies were carried out in forensic contexts, with a special emphasis on sexual offenses (Mokros et al., 2014). More recently, it has been acknowledged that sadistic tendencies can also exist outside of this context; this phenomenon is known as "everyday sadism" to differentiate it from sadism in the context of sex or criminal activity (Buckels et al., 2013). Non-sexual, subclinical sadism has been labeled 'everyday sadism' and reflects cruelty in everyday life.

Interpersonal relationships are deeply influenced by hierarchical structures, social conformity, and collective identity in Pakistani society. Therefore, compared to Western contexts, behaviors reflecting humiliation, emotional control, or dominance may carry social implications. Acts such as public denigration, exerting control in relationships, or displaying authority may be normalized or reinforced through gender roles, social status, and power dynamics. A deeper contextually grounded knowledge of how cruelty appears in everyday encounters can be achieved by investigating these culturally ingrained expressions of sadism. Everyday sadists have lower levels of disgust sensitivity (Meere & Egan, 2017), demonstrate a willingness to harm bugs, experience reward when doing so, and demonstrate a desire to implement unprovoked aggression toward an unknown other (Buckels et al., 2013).

Everyday sadism positively predicts time spent playing violent video games (Greitemeyer, 2015), enjoyment of Internet trolling (Buckels et al., 2013), behavioral delinquency in boys, rape myth acceptance and sexual violence in men, hostile femininity in women (Russell & King, 2016), and adversarial sexual attitudes in women. The Dark Tetrad of personality traits is created by everyday sadism's strong overlap with subclinical levels of psychopathy, narcissism, and

Machiavellianism while remaining different from them (Plouffe et al., 2019). A harsh, violent, manipulative, and dominant man is characterized as a sadistic person. They constantly act in a way that demands attention from their audience, which gives them a bold and commanding appearance. Additionally, they were extremely violent and vicious to anyone who bothered to meddle in their affairs. They also had a keen ability to read people's minds (Segal et al., 2015).

According to the study of Buckels et al. (2013), Sadism can have serious negative effects on a person's life since it is defined by a desire to cause suffering or shame to others. People who do sadistic acts could feel guilty, psychologically distressed, and have a warped perception of who they are. Sadistic tendencies have been linked to increased hostility and antisocial conduct, which might result in internal tensions and possible mental health concerns. Furthermore, sadistic behavior can result in social exclusion and a lack of support from others since those who engage in it may become distant from those who do it. Sadistic actions have the potential to sabotage societal harmony and cohesiveness. Sadistic personalities might make it difficult for them to establish and sustain friendships because of their negative tendencies. Sadism is especially harmful in interpersonal interactions; relationship intimacy, respect, and trust can all be damaged when someone else suffers. Relationships can become strained or destroyed as a result of emotional pain, dread, and a sense of betrayal experienced by friends or partners of people with sadistic tendencies.

Subclinical Sadism may exist even outside the sexual realm. Young adults are unable to regulate impulses and use them on the wrong side, and they have acquired traits such as sadistic tendencies. As a result, they face a challenge in maintaining their relationships with others, and they can no longer live alone, which contributes to significant mental health problems. People who are thus impacted typically behave cruelly, degradingly, and aggressively in social and professional contexts. They also frequently display a lack of empathy and respect, a tendency toward violence, and a dehumanizing attitude toward others, all while getting pleasure from harming people around them. When people with this type of personality also derive pleasure from sexually abusing sexual partners, they can be termed sexual psychopaths or, in the case of criminals acting out, sadistic sexual offenders. A sexually sadistic person may cause physical pain by bondage or restraint, total immobilization, slapping, whipping, caning, biting, sensory deprivation, or psychological agony through words that are demeaning and insulting.

Sadistic Tendencies were defined by [Millon \(2011\)](#) as interpersonally extremely unbalanced and intra-psychically conflicting. People with this personality type are capable of exploding in anger, walking over others to get what they want, and humiliating others for no other reason than their enjoyment. Sadistic people have weak behavioral controls, which are manifested by a short temper, irritability, low patience for anger, and a controlled disposition. They are noted to be rude, aggressive, cunning, lacking in empathy, merciless, and rough from an interpersonal point of view to those they consider to be their inferiors. So, in their relationship growth, individuals with sadistic impulses have trouble.

They are considered rigid and vulnerable to social intolerance by their cognitive nature, and they are fascinated by weapons, fighting, notorious crimes, or offenders of brutality. Classically, sadists are believed to seek social places that permit them to practice their need to control others and punish or embarrass them harshly. As sadists are people who, as discussed above, seek pleasure by harming others, they face interpersonal difficulties in later life, especially in adulthood, which in turn can lead them to mental health issues. The experience of strong relationship impacts, interpersonal problems, and violence will undermine the sense of social support in depressed elders, potentially leading them to consider or attempt suicide ([Harrison et al., 2010](#)).

Research has shown that sadistic impulses are enraged in children by the parents' desire for an idealized and altruistic self-image of their children, and sadism as a way to regain connection with an elusive reality, often associated with boredom or moroseness. Sadism is described as cognitions and behaviors linked to the derivation of pleasure from inflicting on another person physical or emotional pain ([Porter & Woodworth, 2014](#)).

In particular, stressful childhood memories and traumatic early experiences appear to increase the risk of psychopathy development in adulthood. A pattern of cruel, violent, and threatening behavior is described as the style of personality. People who exhibit sadistic tendencies have managed in a degrading or demeaning way to manipulate or dominate someone else. They also take pleasure in psychologically damaging other individuals. Several research studies have already shown that sadistic tendencies are present as early as young adolescents, despite the lack of DSM acceptance ([Levesque, 2011](#)).

Social learning theory ([Bandura, 1977](#)) provides a theoretical framework for understanding these tendencies. It emphasizes how behaviors like aggression, dominance, and cruelty are learned through

observational learning and reinforcement in one's social environment. Experiencing authority-based or humiliating behavior can normalize aggression and denigration as socially acceptable forms of power in Pakistani contexts where hierarchical family structures, gendered power dynamics, and collective norms shape interactions. In later life, these learned patterns of relational control may show up as sadistic tendencies. Furthermore, it is possible to understand how recurring social patterns such as the acceptance of male dominance or public humiliation as corrective actions become internalized as behavioral traits that validate interpersonal cruelty by using cultural script theory (Triandis, 1994). These theoretical perspectives provide a culturally relevant framework to understand why “Denigration”, “Inability to Regulate”, and “Dominance” appear as socially meaningful expressions of sadistic tendencies in Pakistani society.

However, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding how these tendencies appear in South Asian or particularly Pakistani youth, where family structures, collectivist values, and gender norms may specifically shape aggression, dominance, and emotional regulation. This is because the majority of previous research has been conducted on Western populations. These subtleties have been brought to light by recent indigenous research conducted in Pakistan. While Khan et al. (2025) showed substantial relationships between everyday sadism, empathy, and dominance in educated Pakistani males, Liaqat et al. (2022) found that neuroticism strongly predicted sadism and schadenfreude among Pakistani adults. These results highlight the significance of looking into sadistic conduct in community-based, non-forensic contexts and creating culturally appropriate policies that take into account regional psychological circumstances.

Therefore, it was imperative to investigate sadism in local sociocultural contexts and create an indigenous, psychometrically sound measure that appropriately reflects these experiences among young adults in Pakistan. The present study was therefore designed with primary objectives to explore the phenomenological experience and culturally specific expressions of sadistic tendencies among adults in Pakistan and to develop and validate an indigenous Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS) to assess these tendencies in relation to interpersonal difficulties and psychological well-being.

## Method

### Phase I: Items Generation

After defining the construct, a research question was formulated. Interviews with the sample population were done one-on-one.

Interviews were conducted with twenty individuals at private universities. Students from all four years of the Bachelor of Science degree were interviewed using stratified sampling. To explore the phenomenological experiences of sadistic tendencies, qualitative data from 33 interviews (men = 16, women = 17) were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Recurring expressions, behaviors, and attitudes were identified and coded into preliminary themes. Then, conceptually related themes were grouped to represent culturally relevant manifestations of sadistic inclinations, such as dominance, denigration, and an inability to control. Inter-rater discussions were conducted to ensure consistency and reliability of the coding process. Participants were briefed on ethical considerations at the start of the interview. After a thorough examination of the qualitative replies, recurrent words, phrases, and behavioral expressions were found. Preliminary categories were created by grouping responses that shared a common concept. Following that, these categories were converted into item statements that captured the main ideas that the participants had conveyed. To maintain relevancy and clarity, statements that were unclear or repeated were eliminated. A refined list of 47 items was created for additional expert assessment and quantitative analysis based on frequency and conceptual coverage.

### **Phase II: Expert Validation**

The expert validation stage is the goal of phase II. In this phase, nine experts were presented with the items that were collected for the assessment of the items on the degree of their relevance to the desired construct, i.e., the scale of sadistic tendencies in young adults. On a “5-point rating scale” from 0-4, where “0” shows “no significance at all” and “4” shows “highly significant”. The experts were instructed to score each item on the Likert scale to the extent to which it gives the best reflection of the sadistic tendencies in young adults. After that, the degree of agreement will be checked. In the end, the guidelines and suggestions were added to the statements based on the ratings given by the experts. After expert validation, 37 items were finalized.

### **Phase III: Pilot Study**

After expert validation, when the final document was ready, the pilot study was carried out. The goal of this was to ensure that the scale was user-friendly and to verify its study relevance. For the pilot study, twenty participants were adopted. The indigenously created instrument on the Sadistic tendencies of young adults was given to

them. Then the final document was ready for the next step, known as testing the psychometric properties.

#### **Phase IV: Psychometrics**

The actual research was carried out to assess and verify the psychometric properties, the scale's reliability, and validity. It was also conducted to check the secondary hypothesis of the scale.

#### **Measures**

##### ***Demographic Sheet***

The demographic variables for this study were the age of the participants, education, family system, birth order, socio-economic status of the participants, and total number of family members.

##### ***Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS)***

The indigenously developed scale of sadistic tendencies in young adults of the university student's scale consisted of 37 items. After the factor analysis, a total of 31 items were finalized. The scale has three factors: denigration, inability to regulate, and dominance. A Likert scale was used in the scale in which the items were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 equal to "never" and 5 equal to "always".

#### **Procedure**

To conduct the research study, a permission letter was signed by every university before collecting the data from the participants. All the reasons, priorities, and goals of the study were explained to the department as well. The researcher explained to the participants the significance and aim of the study and also the nature of the tools. The participants were chosen according to the research's inclusion criteria. The young adults were given a demographic sheet with some personal information, such as age, gender, education, etc., and were asked to fill out the required information. Then, the research protocol, which included a demographic sheet and STS, was distributed/given to each of the participants. After collecting the data, analysis was applied to find the outcome of the research. Informed consent was signed by each participant, and they were provided with equal opportunities to participate or withdraw. All the participants were assured that their personal details would not be disclosed and would be kept confidential. They were also informed that they could discontinue participation if they experienced any discomfort during the study. SPSS 21 version was used for the analysis in the present study.

## Results

### Psychometric Properties of the Sadistic Tendencies Scale in Young Adults

It involves the psychometric properties of the newly developed indigenous scale, the Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS) in Young Adults. It involved factor analysis of scale, scree plot, eigenvalues, factor computation, and Cronbach's Alpha for measuring the Scale's internal consistency.

#### *Factor Analysis of Sadistic Tendencies*

In the present study, factor analysis was run on 35 items of the indigenous scale of the sadistic tendencies scale for young adults. Exploratory factor analysis was administered, and the principal component analysis and Varimax rotation were done. The factor loading of .40 was carried out to extract the factors from the scale. Item numbers 10, 19, 21, and 25 had dubious factor loading; hence, the items were not added to the scale for analysis purposes. KMO and Bartlett tests were carried out to determine the adequacy of the data. The value of KMO obtained was .92, and that of Bartlett was  $p < .000$ . The values of KMO and Bartlett showed that the results are highly significant, which shows that the data is adequate for factor analysis.

Figure 1. *Scree Plot Showing the Extraction of Factors of Sadism Tendency Scale (STS) in Young Adults*

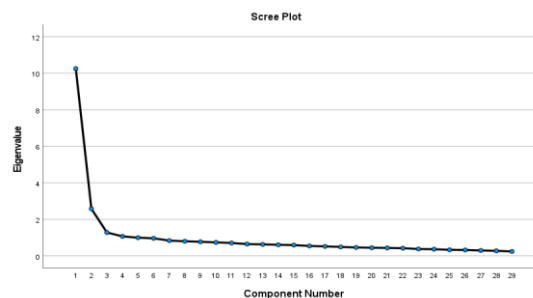


Figure 1 of the scree plot highlights the indication of 2 to 4 factors of the sadistic tendencies scale. Therefore, factor analysis was run on 2, 3, and 4-factor solutions to get the best-fit model. All the other factor solutions weren't relevant and best fit according to questionnaire demand, except the 3-factor solution as it has the least dubious items. So the factors were taken out by the three-factor solution of factor analysis. Factors were loaded on .40 to find out the scale features.



Table 1. *The Factor Analysis, Factor Structure, Eigen Values, Cumulative Variance, and Total Variance of Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS) with Varimax Rotation (N = 200)*

| S.#                                    | Items | Theme                                                             | F1         | F2         | F3         |
|----------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Factor 1: Denigration</b>           |       |                                                                   |            |            |            |
| 1.                                     | 12    | Having one thing on people's faces and another behind their backs | <b>.58</b> | .01        | .40        |
| 2.                                     | 13    | Causing financial harm to others                                  | <b>.77</b> | -.07       | .25        |
| 3.                                     | 14    | To heal the wounds of others                                      | <b>.72</b> | -.06       | .27        |
| 4.                                     | 16    | Unfounded suspicion of others                                     | <b>.49</b> | .12        | .43        |
| 5.                                     | 17    | To speak ill of others' loved ones                                | <b>.58</b> | .04        | .37        |
| 6.                                     | 18    | Not being able to maintain friendships                            | <b>.44</b> | .22        | .34        |
| 7.                                     | 20    | Making friends for your own benefits                              | <b>.63</b> | -.09       | .33        |
| 8.                                     | 23    | Using the emotions of others for your own comfort                 | <b>.67</b> | .04        | .23        |
| 9.                                     | 26    | Thinking badly about others                                       | <b>.61</b> | .10        | .22        |
| 10.                                    | 28    | Not being sympathetic                                             | <b>.57</b> | .32        | -.19       |
| 11.                                    | 30    | Feeling happy by blaming others                                   | <b>.78</b> | .03        | -.02       |
| 12.                                    | 31    | Considering yourself better than others                           | <b>.46</b> | .01        | .33        |
| 13.                                    | 32    | To be devoid of feelings                                          | <b>.63</b> | .26        | -.04       |
| 14.                                    | 33    | Don't keep other people's secrets                                 | <b>.58</b> | .20        | .10        |
| 15.                                    | 34    | Finding the weaknesses of others                                  | <b>.77</b> | .04        | .14        |
| 16.                                    | 35    | Making fun of others                                              | <b>.61</b> | .13        | .09        |
| <b>Factor 2: Inability to Regulate</b> |       |                                                                   |            |            |            |
| 17.                                    | 1     | Feeling inferior                                                  | .07        | <b>.60</b> | .22        |
| 18.                                    | 2     | Lack of patience                                                  | -.05       | <b>.61</b> | .24        |
| 19.                                    | 6     | Having difficulty controlling your emotions                       | .05        | <b>.52</b> | .21        |
| 20.                                    | 7     | Hiding your emotions/feelings from others                         | -.01       | <b>.55</b> | .11        |
| 21.                                    | 22    | Being impatient by nature                                         | .08        | <b>.56</b> | .26        |
| 22.                                    | 24    | Being irritable                                                   | .19        | <b>.67</b> | .01        |
| 23.                                    | 27    | Feeling lonely                                                    | .01        | <b>.70</b> | .02        |
| 24.                                    | 29    | Be sad                                                            | .13        | <b>.70</b> | -.02       |
| <b>Factor 3: Dominance</b>             |       |                                                                   |            |            |            |
| 25.                                    | 3     | Having a habit of taking revenge on others                        | .21        | .15        | <b>.61</b> |
| 26.                                    | 4     | To make oneself feel superior outwardly                           | .31        | .22        | <b>.54</b> |
| 27.                                    | 5     | Feeling jealous of others                                         | .50        | .13        | <b>.43</b> |
| 28.                                    | 8     | Trying to dominate others                                         | .45        | .10        | <b>.47</b> |
| 29.                                    | 9     | Resorting to lying for comfort                                    | .34        | .17        | <b>.55</b> |
| 30.                                    | 11    | Feeling happy by criticizing others                               | .57        | .06        | <b>.45</b> |
| 31.                                    | 15    | Trying to get the attention of others                             | .16        | .22        | <b>.54</b> |
| Eigen Value                            |       |                                                                   | 7.65       | 3.77       | 3.66       |
| % of Total Variance                    |       |                                                                   | 21.85      | 10.77      | 10.46      |
| % of Cumulative Variance               |       |                                                                   | 21.85      | 32.62      | 43.08      |

Note. Factor Loading > 0.40 has been bold-faced.

Table 1 indicates factor patterns and item categories. To get the best 4, 3, and 2 models, the factor solution was examined. Then these items were preserved in a particular factor that is with .30 and above high loading. During the Exploratory Factor Analysis, items 10, 19, 21, and 25 were removed from the final version of the Sadistic Tendencies Scale to ensure factorial clarity and construct coherence because they displayed cross-loadings on multiple factors with comparable loading values, indicating ambiguity in their factorial alignment. The 3-factor solution was considered the best fit as it represented the clearly extracted factors of the sadistic tendencies scale for young adults. The scree plot revealed a two or three-factor solution of the sadistic tendency scale. Based on the similarity of items in the corresponding factor, a descriptive tag was assigned to each factor. Also, the eigenvalues of all three factors were mentioned. The eigenvalue of the first factor was 7.64, for the second factor, it was 3.77, and for the third factor, it came to be 3.66. Besides all this, the factors % of variance and % of cumulative were also mentioned. The % variance of STS's three factors was 21.85, 10.77, and 10.46. While the % of the cumulative variance of all the factors was 21.85, 32.62, and 43.08.

#### ***Factor Description of Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS)***

The content of each factor was read in depth after maintaining the 3 variables, and a mark was allocated to each factor based on the general theme of the particular factor. The scale had a total of 35 items, but after factor analysis and extracting the dubious values, the remaining items were 31. A Likert scale was used in the scale in which the items were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 equal to "never" and 5 equal to "always".

**Factor 1: Denigration.** This parameter comprises 16 items that refer to the action of unfairly criticizing someone or something. All the items falling in this factor underlined the key features of causing financial harm to others, unreasonably suspecting others, not being able to maintain friendships, making friendships for self-interest and benefits, using other people's feelings for one's comfort/satisfaction, thinking bad about others, not being sympathetic, taking/having pleasure by blaming others, considering oneself better than others, being devoid of feelings, not keeping other people's secrets, finding other's weaknesses, to speak ill of others' dear ones, making friends for benefits, using emotions of others for own satisfaction, and making fun of others.

**Factor 2: Inability to Regulate.** This factor consisted of 8 items that refer to the inability of a person to control or regulate their emotional responses, feelings, and thoughts to provocative stimuli. All the items included in this factor underlined the key features of feeling inferior to others, lack of tolerance, having difficulty controlling emotions, hiding one's feelings/emotions from others, impatience in nature, being irritable, feeling lonely, and being sad most of the time.

**Factor 3: Dominance.** This factor comprises 7 items and it refers to an individual's drive and energy to pursue power and try to make others feel inferior and show themselves as more powerful than them. All the items falling in this factor underlined the key features of having a habit of taking revenge on others, making oneself feel superior outwardly, feeling jealous of others, trying to dominate others, resorting to lies for satisfaction, taking pleasure in criticizing others, and trying to get the attention of others.

### ***Reliability of Sadistic Tendencies Scale***

**Internal Consistency.** To establish the internal consistency of the 31 items of the Sadistic Tendencies scale for young adults. Alpha Coefficients were calculated.

Table 2. *Cronbach's Alpha of the Total Score and 31 items of the Sadistic Tendencies Scale*

| Factors                      | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | $\alpha$ |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Denigration                  | 16       | 9.71     | 10.09     | .91      |
| Inability to Regulate        | 8        | 12.19    | 6.17      | .80      |
| Dominance                    | 7        | 5.73     | 4.90      | .81      |
| Total of Sadistic Tendencies | 31       | 32.30    | 18.86     | .91      |

Note:  $\alpha$  = alpha coefficients.

Table 2 highlights that STS is found to have a high internal consistency. As the Cronbach's alpha of the scale is .91, this shows high internal consistency. Similarly, factor 1, which is "Denigration," has an alpha value of .91, and factor 2, which is "Inability to regulate" has an alpha value of .80. Furthermore, the third factor which is "Dominance" has an alpha value of .81. All the values are showing high internal consistency of the items within factors in the scale.

**Split-Half Reliability.** To determine the split-half reliability of the scale of the psychosocial issues, the odd-even approach was applied. The scale was divided into two halves; the first half (Form A) comprised 16 while the second half (Form B) was also comprised 15 items. The results indicated that the split-half reliability of the scale of

the Sadism Tendencies Scale for young adults was also very high. The internal consistency of form A was .84, and of form B was also .84. Whereas the Spearman-Brown coefficient and Gutman Split-Half coefficient indicate reliability of .91, which is also significant. These significant values of both forms of the sadism tendency scale suggested that these could be used individually to measure the sadism tendencies in young adults.

**Test Re-Test Reliability.** To examine the test-retest reliability of sadistic tendencies in young adults, the data on this were collected from the participants after a one-week gap. Twelve participants were asked to fill out the form. Data were then entered in SPSS. After analysis, the results showed that the test-retest reliability of the scale of the Sadism tendency was .98\*\* ( $p < 0.01$ ). The value shows a highly significant test-retest reliability of the Sadistic Tendency Scale.

### **Validity of the Sadistic Tendency in Young Adults**

**Concurrent Validity.** To establish the concurrent validity of the scale of sadistic tendencies, it was compared with the already established Interpersonal Difficulties Scale.

Table 3 indicates that all three factors of the sadistic tendencies scale for young adults, which are Denigration, Inability to Regulate, and Dominance, are significantly correlated with each other and also with the total scores of the Sadistic Tendencies Scale with the total of the Interpersonal Difficulties Scale.

Table 3: *Inter-Correlations, Mean, and Standard Deviations of the Sadistic Tendency Scale for Young Adults and the Interpersonal Difficulties Scale (N = 200)*

| Factors                   | F1    | F2    | F3     | STS Total | IDS Total |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-----------|-----------|
| F1: Denigration           | -     | .27** | .71*** | .88***    | .36***    |
| F2: Inability to Regulate |       | -     | .40*** | .63***    | .54***    |
| F3: Dominance             |       |       | -      | .85***    | .36***    |
| STS Total                 |       |       |        | -         | .50***    |
| IDS Total                 |       |       |        |           | -         |
| <i>M</i>                  | 9.71  | 12.19 | 5.73   | 32.30     | 49.23     |
| <i>SD</i>                 | 10.09 | 6.17  | 4.90   | 18.86     | 17.56     |

Note. STS-Total = Sadistic Tendencies Scale, IDS = Interpersonal Difficulties Scale, *M* = Mean and *SD* = Standard Deviation.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Gender Differences on STS**

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation, *t*, and *p*-value of Participants on Sadism Tendencies and Interpersonal Difficulties as a Result of Gender (*N* = 400)

| Variables | Male<br>( <i>N</i> = 200) |           | Female<br>( <i>N</i> = 200) |           | <i>t</i> (400) | <i>p</i> | Cohen's<br>d |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|----------------|----------|--------------|
|           | <i>M</i>                  | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                    | <i>SD</i> |                |          |              |
| STS_F1    | 11.27                     | 9.76      | 8.16                        | 10.20     | 3.12           | .002**   | 0.31         |
| STS_F2    | 10.90                     | 5.42      | 13.49                       | 6.60      | 4.28           | .001***  | 0.42         |
| STS_F3    | 6.55                      | 4.40      | 4.91                        | 5.25      | 3.38           | .001     | 0.33         |
| STS_T     | 33.49                     | 17.36     | 31.11                       | 20.22     | 1.26           | .21      | 0.13         |

Note. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, STSF1 = Denigration, STSF2 = Inability to Regulate, STSF3 = Dominance, STST = Sadistic Tendencies Scale Total.

\**p* < 0 .05, \*\**p* < 0 .01, \*\*\**p* 0 .001.

Table 4 shows that both male and female young adults have shown significant results on all three factors of the sadism tendency scale. The analysis showed significant outcomes on all the factors of the sadism tendencies scale.

**Discussion**

Young Adulthood is said to be a transition from adolescence to adulthood, ranging between 18-24 years. During the transition, they face a lot of challenges. The extension of social demands, where individuals must learn new social abilities to respond to social standards, stresses, and difficulties, is yet another significant part of this growth and development process for an emerging adult (Saleem et al., 2013). Close family members' emotional support is essential during this time, and a lack of it may worsen interpersonal issues and leave young adults more susceptible to negative behaviors like committing crimes or hurting other people. Approximately 31% of 1,850 university participants in a local survey reported having mental health issues, underscoring the importance of examining behaviors such as sadistic inclinations in this demographic. Another major issue of college years is increasing social pressures, where interactions become more complex and challenging. People need to develop new skills to cope with social interactions that help a person enhance psycho-social and emotional functioning (Lange & Couch, 2011).

An indigenous scale was developed, named as Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS which is for young adults. The scale was created to evaluate how sadistic tendencies manifest culturally in Pakistani young adults. The total item on this scale was 35, but after

the factor analysis and excluding the dubious value, the remaining final items of the scale were 31. The scale was divided into two parts after split-half reliability, in which the odd-even method was used. High split-half reliability may provide the short version of the test to be used when required for assessing sadistic tendencies. Test-retest reliability was also high.

The Sadistic Tendencies scale has a total of three factors after factor analysis, named as denigration, inability to regulate, and dominance. Denigration means the action of unfairly criticizing someone. In Pakistani culture, pulling others' legs is a very common thing; everyone is busy with this, especially people with no other job to do. So, one of the manifestations of sadistic tendencies in Eastern cultures like Pakistan is to criticize others. Previous literature shows that individuals with sadistic impulses often experience joy by trolling people. A study conducted by [Sest, & March \(2017\)](#) showed that men were more likely to participate in trolling than women, and higher levels of characteristic psychopathy and sadism reported trolling activity.

The next factor is the inability to regulate, which refers to not being able to control feelings and emotions. Research shows that individualists choose emotional communication to control emotions, whereas collectivists rely more on expressive repression, such as in Pakistan. They cannot control it; therefore, they direct it in the wrong direction, and thus mental disorders, physiological disease, and poorer psycho-social adaptation can be triggered by emotional repression ([Ramzan & Amjad, 2017](#)). In collectivism, communicating with family and friends with more focus on keeping social unity promotes greater control of emotional expression. Emotion regulation is the ability to control one's emotions, is crucial for maintaining good health and functioning well in social situations.

The third factor of the Sadistic Tendencies Scale is Dominance, representing exerting power and influence over others, was also higher in males. Pakistani cultural norms place a strong emphasis on gendered authority, respect for elders, and hierarchical structures, all of which might strengthen inclinations to dominate or exert control in day-to-day interactions ([Debenham, 2016](#)). It means in eastern areas like Pakistan, sadistic tendencies were manifested as criticizing others (denigration), suppressing emotions (unable to control), and showing power to others (dominance).

Consistent with the data, the results show that young adults who exhibit higher levels of sadistic inclinations across these categories also have more interpersonal challenges. For instance, people who

exhibit dominance or defamatory tendencies are more likely to experience relationship problems, and people who struggle with emotional control find it difficult to maintain cordial social contacts. Previous studies have linked antisocial behaviors among students to sadistic tendencies, which supports our findings (O'Meara et al., 2011).

Interpersonal issues can be described as persistent issues experienced by a person when communicating with someone else. It is found that interpersonal issues and mental health disorders are linked, e.g., people with weak interpersonal relationships can experience loneliness, depressive symptoms, and low self-esteem (Huprich et al., 2016). The research discusses the importance of interpersonal difficulties as a facilitator for mental health issues in college students, considering the continuing pessimistic effects of interpersonal problems on the social-emotional and personal well-being of an individual, (Saleem et al., 2020).

The findings showed that compared to females, males had higher levels of sadistic tendencies. In particular, male young adults exhibited higher levels of denigration (the propensity to disparage or criticize others), which could be partially explained by their increased exposure to competitive socialization patterns and criticism during their developmental years, especially in family contexts where control and dominance are frequently modeled. Males are more likely than females to engage in bullying or defamatory behavior, according to a prior study. For example, Popović-Ćitić et al. (2011) polled 387 students from five Belgrade public schools and discovered that the majority of cyber-victimization consisted of harassment and defamation, with men reporting more bullying and defamation. In collectivist societies like Pakistan, these gender patterns in sadistic tendencies can be seen via the prism of cultural upbringing. In hierarchical familial and social institutions, men are frequently urged to compete, show control, and establish authority, which reinforces behaviors focused on dominance. Females, on the other hand, are usually socialized to uphold social peace, follow rules, and repress emotions. Their higher scores on the inability-to-regulate measure may indicate that they have more difficulties regulating their emotions as a result of this repression.

Overall, these findings highlight that culturally influenced gendered socialization processes shape the manifestation of sadistic tendencies in young adults, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive assessment tools like the newly developed Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS) to accurately capture these behaviors within Pakistani populations.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The present study utilized a relatively homogeneous sample consisting of BS students aged 18–24 years, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Future studies should aim to validate the Sadistic Tendencies Scale (STS) should aim across diverse groups, including working adults and individuals with varied educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, to enhance the external validity of the scale. Furthermore, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was not carried out, despite the fact that the study effectively established the Sadistic Tendencies Scale's basic factorial structure by Exploratory Factor Analysis. To validate the factorial structure and thoroughly investigate sadistic tendencies among young adults, future research is advised to use CFA on a bigger and more demographically diverse sample from multiple universities around Pakistan.

### **Implications**

For young adults and researchers, the findings of this study have significant consequences. This analysis would be useful for researchers to explore in more depth the nature of sadism in our culture. The current study will support young adults in the process of transition and development, or train them for challenges. Implications for counselors and psychologists in school and college-based counseling centers are provided to assist them in understanding and supplying young adults with assessment and treatment. This research would be useful to provide insight and understanding of this growing phenomenon and pattern in young adults for counselors, clinical psychologists, educational institutions, and other institutions. This study will provide a valid method for young adults to assess sadism and provide information and instruction about how to use that tool.

### **Conclusion**

There are many international studies on sadism but there is limited indigenous work on it. So, from the present study, an indigenous scale was given through which expressions about sadistic tendencies and assessments were made. The scale is organized into three factors, namely denigration, inability to regulate, and dominance. All the factors had a strong correlation with interpersonal difficulties.



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