

Sickness in Silence: A Quantitative Study of Media Exposure and Public Attitudes toward Men's Mental Health in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The aim was to determine whether increased exposure to media content that represents the mental health of men is associated with more supportive attitudes among the population.

Methodology: Using the ground of “*Cultivation Theory*”, study adopted quantitative research design and using self-designed structured questionnaire, data was collected from (n= 300) respondents of 20 years and above. Data was collected using non-probability (purposive sampling). Statistical treatment was performed with the use of descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and linear regression, analyzed in SPSS.

Results: It showed that media exposure was moderately correlated with attitudes towards men having mental problems ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$) with a statistically significant regression result ($b = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$) and 22.2 % of the variance in the attitude of people to men having mental problems is explained by media exposure.

Conclusion: The outcomes imply that more empathetic and less stigmatized attitudes of the population are achieved in the case of frequent encounters with media production targeting the emotional well-being of men. Those findings support the idea that media can restructure cultural discourses on masculinity and mental health in Pakistan.

Keywords: Media Exposure, Public Perception, Mental Health.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Men and mental wellbeing form one of the least studied but most crucial areas of public health in general and patrilineal societies (like Pakistan) in particular. Traditional forms of masculine social constructs often portray men as tough, stoic, and independent individuals, and therefore, they do not encourage men to demonstrate vulnerability or seek mental health assistance. This is a socially established standard that

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makes men suffer silently as they are stigmatized because of their mental state (Safdar and Eman, 2025; Sabir et al., 2015).

Media influence on the formation of norms and the development of attitudes in the masses cannot be refuted. Masculinity performances in the Arabic region of Pakistan have been highlighted through television dramas, advertisements, and online sites that perpetuated and idolized hegemonic fantasies of manhood that negated the expression of emotions and criticized psychological openness and innermost weaknesses (Shahwar et al., 2025; Awan et al., 2024; Safdar et al., 2024). This kind of depiction makes mental health a taboo for men and further builds negative stereotypes (Dur e Shahwar, 2025; Syed et al., 2023).

The modern research on global literature questions the interaction of masculinity with mental-help-seeking behavior, and the empirical studies that explore the correlation appear to be rare in the Pakistani population (Shabir et al., 2015a; Shabir et al., 2014). With South Asia cultural practices on gender roles still in motion, it is only mandatory to analyze how gender-mediated masculinity influences the attitude of people towards the mental health issues of men.

This paper fills this gap by quantitatively analyzing the relationship between media exposure and attitude towards men's mental health in Pakistan. Its findings provide evidence of trends associating media exposures and interactions, including those patterns recounting the positive and negative attitudes toward the emotional well-being of men, informing the policies of health-communication measures and media-production policy-practices that would encourage more supportive ways of expressing the emotional well-being of men.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Pakistani situation censors the discussion of men's mental health because the cultural ethos preaches the appreciation of smothering male feelings. Despite the increased awareness of the population about the mental health problem, men are still underrepresented and underdiagnosed (Ali et al., 2017). Media as a strong influence of socialization will either dispute or affirm these norms, but the empirical approximation of the measure of societal attitude about male support and expression as maintained through the portrayals in the media has not been well approximated.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The current study makes a contribution to the development of the doctrine in the field by putting forward a complex study based on local culture. To the academics, the piece offers a quantitative perspective to study the patterns of media exposure and how the same has interacted with the issue of public stigma. The findings will help health communication professionals to guide strategies that can minimize differences in seeking mental help. The media producers could also use the information to create more responsible depictions of gender in which masculinity satisfies emotional health. The empirical contribution of the study is that it targeted a little-studied intersectionality in the circle of media influence and male mental-health stigma in the Pakistani context, which it empirically grounds with future-prospective implications: those of destigmatization campaigns and of needs-sensitive mental-health outreach.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To observe the level of media exposure related to men's mental health among adults in Pakistan.
2. To examine the connection between media exposure and public attitudes toward help-seeking behaviors in men.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the level of public exposure to media depictions of men's mental health in Pakistan?
2. Is there a substantial relationship between media exposure and public attitudes toward men's mental health support-seeking behavior?

1.6 Hypotheses

- **H1:** Greater exposure to positive media portrayals of men's mental health is connected with more supportive public attitudes.
- **H0:** There is no significant relationship between media exposure and public attitudes toward men's mental health in Pakistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The lives of men are threatened because of the rising cases of depression, suicide, and unaddressed emotional disorders identified in men's communities across the world, thus making their mental health a priority. However, in genuinely conservative cultures like Pakistan, the same facts are still concealed behind the established norms of masculinity and the unspoken taboo on emotionality in men (McKenzie et al., 2022). Since the media has cultural penetration and persuasive powers, the media takes a central role in supporting or challenging such expectations. The current review performs a synthesis of literature under three overlapping areas: (1) masculinity and mental health stigmatization, (2) media depictions of masculinity and emotionality, and (3) media effects on community attitudes towards men and mental health.

2.1 Masculinity & Mental Health Stigma

Traditional ideas of masculinity in South Asian cultures emphasize emotional control, physical strength, and self-sufficiency. These prescriptions encourage men not to admit their mental discomfort and not to seek medical help, and contribute to both the extension of symptoms and to the failure of treatment. Empirical texts have constantly indicated a negative relationship between adherence to masculine norms and the pursuit of help among men (Mokhwelepa & Sumbane, 2025).

Most recently, in one cross-cultural study, de Visser, Mushtaq, and Naz (2022) found that Pakistani men were much less likely than their British counterparts to accuse themselves of resorting to psychological treatment, and masculinity beliefs constituted a significant impediment. Similar observations are made by Ali et al. (2017), who have recorded that Pakistani young people believe that mental health is stigmatized in the country, and this is particularly the case among the male population, which is supposed to be resilient to emotional issues. This evidence is aligned with the report of Keohane and Richardson (2018), which reported that distressed men tend to find themselves between a rock and a hard place, torn between fulfilling emotional needs and maintaining masculine ideals. This warfare within leads to a silence of gender with men coping with the hurt as described by Whitley (2021), who provides a gendered silence of men suppressing emotion to save face without looking deeper into the identity they embrace as masculine.

2.2 Media Representation of Masculinity in Pakistan

Media acts as a major tool upon which social-normative structures, especially those that influence gender roles in society, are constructed and reproduced. Television dramas, advertisements, and digital media in Pakistan tend to disseminate ideal masculine archetypes on top of the cultural values instead of the empirical reality of psychology (Shahwar, Hashmat & Vincent, 2025). By emphasizing that print media in Pakistan always portrays men as being superior, unemotional, and controlling, Awan et al. (2024) confirm the notion that the print media remains keen on perpetuating the traditional concepts of hegemonic masculinity.

The television serials also have a major impact. A critical analysis by Aslam, Mehmood, and Saeed (2022) indicate that male characters in Pakistani drama show emotional susceptibility or asking psychological advice very rarely; rather, they are commonly seen as solutions to problems, decision-makers or aggressors, which discourages the audience to consider emotional expression as something that would fit with masculinity.

Ali (2021) argues that online services are starting to present gender alternative representations, but this material is still on the periphery and scarce. Since online creators sometimes defy the traditional masculinity rules, they do not change things much since the mainstream media narratives still dominate the discourse.

2.3 The Influence of Media on Public Attitudes

Modern-day research establishes over and over again that media products do not merely reflect shared values but act as an instrument of their creation. Constant exposure to certain types of character archetypes and plot formats leads to the solidification of defined beliefs and attitudes among viewers. When a new and normal depiction of restricted emotions or cognitively insensitive men is initiated, the audiences absorb such portrayal as a head. This is further supported in the scoping review by McKenzie et al. (2022), which indicates that media stereotypes have a profound effect on stigma throughout the life course, especially in such social environments where gender roles are rigid. In Pakistan, where mental health is still largely a taboo subject barely discussed in the media, audience shyness and awkwardness about the subject all testify to a lack of normalized media representation.

De Boise (2015), whose interpretation of the phenomenon is based on the Western cultural construction, explains how the emotionality of men is silenced regularly in the popular music and media system. His results echo the Pakistani experience, where the issue of male vulnerability is also pushed to the side. All of these observations can be characterized as the sickness in silence or a cultural phenomenon of avoiding discussing the mental health of men by people and the media.

2.4 Empirical Gaps & Research Justification

Extant literature has proven that there is a strong relationship between normative masculinity and mental health stigma; thus, there is a lack of research that explicitly attributes the role played by media exposure in shaping the masses' perception towards these concepts in Pakistan. Studies today usually follow qualitative methods in understanding the media, or fail to isolate the role of media content in explaining the awareness of mental health.

The pre-existing quantitative studies that consider Pakistani data but focus on the area outside the scope of media consumption do not address the question of attitudes based on media consumption behavior, but are related to help-seeking behavior (e.g., de Visser et al., 2022). The gap is addressed in the current study, which quantitatively evaluates the impact of exposure to media representations of mental health among men on the general population's perception and stigma. The study is an interdisciplinary contribution to the fields of media studies, gender psychology, and public health, since it is located at the intersection of these domains.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The current study builds on the position of Cultivation Theory, which holds that as a result of extended exposure to mediated content, the audiences are gradually recreated to become adapted to a new vision of reality. Repasting such behavioral attributes sufficiently frequently on men, the mass media runs the risk of creating prescriptive attitudes toward men by people who consume these screens, according to whom the representations are constructed (Seidler et al., 2016).

In a broader sense, the paradigm of Hegemonic Masculinity developed by Connell and witnessed in Pakistani studies (Aslam et al., 2022; Shahwar et al., 2025) provides a sociocultural analysis that explains the interconnection of gender positions and mental health stigma.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This paper was a quantitative and cross-sectional survey research design investigating the relationship between exposure to media and the attitude of the population towards the mental well-being of men in Pakistan. To collect numerical data regarding the frequency of the situation in which the participants get acquainted with media images of men's mental health, and also regarding the fact, whether images that the participants see affect their related attitudes, a structured questionnaire was designed. This methodological decision aligns with quantitative research that aims at quantifying variables and identifying empirical regularities by means of a well-organized collection of data (de Visser, et al., 2022).

3.2 Population & Sampling

The target population in the present study was Pakistani adults who were aged 20 or more years, as this is a group of people who were expected to have significant exposure to both the traditional and media. The sampling strategy adopted to identify the participants was non-probability purposive, whereby the identification of those who were enrolled ensured that they used media sources regularly and were familiar with the construct of mental health.

The sample of 300 respondents was considered (both male and female) to be optimal in terms of statistical analysis, as well as corresponding to the needs of generalizability, referring to such quantitative precedents that study attitudes and behaviors related to masculinity and mental health (Ali et al., 2017; McKenzie et al., 2022).

3.3 Research Instrument

A structured, self-administered questionnaire was used in the present study, which has been created to correlate with the measures that were validated before (Seidler et al., 2016; McKenzie et al., 2022). This consisted of three major parts:

- A. Demographics- surveyed age and gender.
- B. Media Exposure-determined the level and variety of media exposures relating to the mental health of men.
- C. Public Attitudes Towards Men's Mental Health- addressed the views of the interrogated participants in light of emotional expression, help-seeking activity, and stigma.

The items in these B and C sections were scored using a Likert scale (Strongly Disagree 1- Strongly Agree 5), and both attitudes and behaviors could be quantified.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The current research used the method of an online survey sent via Google Forms and shared in WhatsApp, social media, and university communities. They gave informed consent before agreeing to participate in the study, and there were no incentives. All data are kept confidential and anonymous. The given methodology was selected for its efficiency to accomplish a large sample size in the shortest possible period, which is widespread in quantitative research in the mental health and media sphere (De Visser et al., 2022).

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of the data was done with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Analytical techniques that were used included the following:

The description of research variables, media exposure patterns, and the scores on measurement of attitudes were described with the help of descriptive statistics, that is, frequencies, percentages, and means.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the media and the attitude of the people.

Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the predictive value of media exposure on attitudes toward male mental health. In sum, these processes assist in hypothesis testing and pattern recognition in line with previous quantitative systems (McKenzie et al., 2022; Seidler et al., 2016).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Strict ethical standards were observed in the current research. They were made well aware of the objectives of the investigation, the right to stop at any time, and the confidentiality of their answers. The personal identifiers (including names, cities, occupations, etc.) were not obtained. The research was conducted in agreement with ethical research at the institution, and it was sanctioned by the supervisor of the research.

4. RESULTS & DATA ANALYSIS

The current research considers the relationship between media exposure and the perception of people towards the mental health of men in Pakistan. The number of participants was 300 aged 20 and above; all data collection was carried out through a survey-based set of questions distributed using an online method. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, and a linear regression model were computed using SPSS to test the hypothesis and answer the research questions.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Age and Gender (N = 300)

Variable	Category	f	%
Age	20–25 years	135	45.0%
	26–30 years	90	30.0%
	31–40 years	60	20.0%
	41+ years	15	5.0%
Gender	Male	170	56.7%
	Female	130	43.3%

The figures produced by data analysis depict that the respondents showed the highest age groups of 20 25 years (45 %) and 26 30 years (30 %). In addition, most of the participants, namely 56.7 %, were male.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Mean Scores for Media Exposure and Public Attitudes

Variable	No. of Items	M	S.D
Media Exposure	5	3.62	0.81
Attitude Toward Men's Mental Health	7	3.29	0.74

The mean exposure to media, which was equal to 3.62, means that the participants were exposed to mental health-related media on the moderate-to-high scale. Likewise, the average rating of 3.29 on the aspect of public attitudes indicates a neutral-positive reaction to the mental health and emotional expression of the male population.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between Media Exposure and Attitude Toward Men's Mental Health

Variables	r	p-value
Media Exposure & Public Attitude	0.47	0.000

Media exposure has a slight positive relationship with the attitude of the masses with regard to men's emotional health ($r = 0.47$, $p < .001$). Namely, those participants who watched more depictions of the issue in the media related to mental health expressed positive attitudes toward the topic.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Table 4: Linear Regression Predicting Public Attitudes Toward Men's Mental Health

Model	B	Std. Error	β (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.21	0.15	—	14.73	0.000
Media Exposure	0.30	0.04	0.47	7.39	0.000

The current analysis shows $R^2 = 0.222$, meaning that about 22.2 % of the views by the people about the mental health of men are explained by exposure to the media. Moreover, the regression model is also proved to be significant; $F = 54.61$ and $p < 0.001$, thus proving that media exposure is an essential predictor of respondents' attitude towards men's mental health.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The study under examination evaluated the media influence on participants in terms of exposure to the mental-health-related media messages and measured the attitude of the population towards the emotional expression and help-seeking among males.

The Pearson correlation analysis gave a positive statistically significant relationship between media-exposure level and attitudinal stance of participants to these behaviors, with 22.2 % of the variance as shown in the Pearson correlation table.

These findings were affirmed by regression analysis, in which a stronger exposure to media was cited to lead to improved public attitudes; in other words, it supported the hypothesis about the issue that:

H1: The higher the exposure to media, the more supportive the attitude is of the consent toward the mental health of men.

5. DISCUSSION & INTERPRETATION

5.1 Media Exposure & Public Attitudes

A positive correlation between the level of media exposure and the public attitude toward men mental health was statistically significant and moderate ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that the higher the quantity of media content focusing on the topic of men mental health, the more favorable and less stigmatizing attitude to men mental health the majority of the population can have. This finding can be explained using Cultivation Theory, or rather the idea that prolonged media exposure to a particular media content eventually influences the minds of the audience, causing them to believe certain things about society (Seidler et al., 2016). In this regard, the media content displaying the emotional experiences of men could make vulnerability normal and reduce the stigma.

The current results support the conclusion made by Shahwar, Hashmat, and Vincent (2022), according to which the Pakistani media often fails to provide substantial representation of male emotional lives, thus contributing to the stigma on a societal level about them. Such representations do take place; however, when they do, they have positive effects on audiences as evidenced by the present study.

5.2 Predictive Role of Media Exposure

The results of a recent regression test show that exposure to the media has a significant effect on the attitude of people regarding the mental health challenges of men, with a standardized beta of 0.47 ($p < 0.001$), which accounts for 22.2 % of the variance. Such findings highlight the enormous influence of the media discourse on shaping social impressions. Awan et al. (2024) present a similar presentation through an analysis of masculinity representation patterns of Pakistani advertisements, in which they demonstrate

that the media has a story or narrative that constantly either seeks to confirm or question a culturally dominant story or traditions. The current research provides empirical support to those accusations, specifically the hypothesis that strategically constructed, understanding media texts can adjust the mass mood and reduce the stigma.

5.3 Masculinity Norms & Emotional Expression

The descriptive analysis showed that the overall attitude formulated in the population was shown to have a tendency towards neutral to moderately in favor, with a mean of 3.29 on a 5-point Likert scale. Such findings point towards the idea that although stigma still exists, recent changes lead towards a more accepting orientation, particularly in younger adults, who make up the majority of the survey results. This observation supported the current scholarship that limited norms of masculinity repress expressing emotions and discourage men from seeking help (McKenzie et al., 2022; Seidler et al., 2016). Ali et al. (2017) revealed similar obstacles in youth groups in Pakistan, and masculinity turns out to be one of the key mental health advocacy inhibitors. The conducted study will thus provide quantitative research confirming these observations, emphasizing the possible role of the modern media networks.

5.4 Comparison with Existing Literature

Several empirical studies confirm the current results. De Visser, Mushtaq, and Naz (2022) showed that Pakistani men were less inclined to seek psychological assistance as compared to the British men, and cited the ingrained masculine ideals as the reason behind this difference. The relationship between positive effects of media exposure on supportive attitudes is already effective, and a pragmatic intervention entails intentional media messaging. The same was found by McKenzie et al. (2022), who reported that the stigma against mental health remains throughout the lifespan in men. This research elaborates on this understanding by explaining how media engagement helps in mitigating such stigma. Similarly, Aslam, Mehmood, and Saeed (2022) depicted how television serials often strengthen hegemonic masculinity. The current findings reveal that the attitude of the audience changes in case such depictions are marked with compassion and emotional openness.

5.5 Theoretical Contribution

The current study adds to the Cultivation Theory since it shows that exposure to media content repeatedly affects the audience's perceptions in the long run. The empirical evidence suggests that when male emotional vulnerability is portrayed in the media narratives, the attitudes of viewers toward men's mental health later become more positive.

Furthermore, the discussion develops the important theoretical formulation of Hegemonic Masculinity, a theory of masculinity that postulates that hegemonic male ideals hinder emotional openness. This view is well attested in the findings of the study, as it is found that such portrayal is reflected and reacted to by audience attitudes. In this respect, through media, a more or less sustained change in the attitude toward the mental health of men may occur by challenging the traditional perceptions of masculinity.

5.6 Practical Implications

The results of the current research imply a number of practical implications. To begin with, television, film, and digital media content creators have an important role to play in breaking stereotypes and minimizing the stigma of how they portray men and their mental health to be more realistic and sympathetic. Second, the mental health groups can partner with the media channels to develop community awareness programs that share the value with the cultural community but encourage open dialogue. The method corresponds to the guidelines proposed by Shahwar et al. (2025) and Awan et al. (2024), who insist on the increased social responsibility of media content in Pakistan.

6. CONCLUSION

The study under consideration investigated the relationship between media exposure and community perception toward the mental health of men at the Pakistani level. Referring to the Cultivation Theory and a construct related to Hegemonic Masculinity, the researcher evaluated the rates of exposure to promises of male emotional well-being in the media and investigated how this influence predetermined the societal perception of male emotional expression and seeking help. The results showed that the relationship between media exposure and the attitudes of the population was moderately positive. In particular, high levels of exposure to the media messages focused on men and mental health were associated with more supportive and less stigmatizing community beliefs. The regression analysis showed that media exposure had a significant correlation with the prediction of an increased position on public attitudes by 22.2 % variance. These results prove that the media is also a powerful social control system that can stabilize or reshape the cultural standards in terms of masculinity and emotional health. These results take on a special significance within the Pakistani cultural context, in which emotional restraint in men is widely considered appropriate and in which mental health is still seen as stigmatized. The conclusion of the article allows observing that culturally thoughtful and controlled application of empathetic and balanced media representations can be used to further develop the advocacy of mental health among the population and enact sustainable cultural transformation.

6.1 *Limitations of the Study*

In spite of the valuable findings of the study, a number of limitations are to be discussed. To begin with, the authors have used non-probability purposive sampling which could be a restriction to the formulation of the findings for the general Pakistani population.

Second, the demographic distribution was very limited in the study, i.e., only age and gender were measured; no data were collected concerning level of education, rural and urban residency, and other mental health backgrounds of the study participants.

Third, the research implemented a cross-sectional research design that only provided data of snapshots that failed to provide a causal inference. Lastly, it seems that analysis of media content per se was not taken systematically, but the study focused on what the audiences perceived about media exposure as opposed to a pure qualitative or content analysis of the media.

6.2 *Recommendations for Future Research*

The current results, along with the limitations described above, should lead to a few suggestions regarding the future evolution of the academic discussion regarding the subject of the Pakistani population's mental attitude toward men's mental health.

- To begin with, the study should increase the range of the representative sample, appealing to the rural population, diverse educational levels, and age groups.
- Second, the longitudinal designs would be incorporated to trace the change of opinion of the audience with respect to the changing patterns of media.
- Third, to obtain more detailed analyses concerning the recognition of media messages among the audience, it would be best to employ a mixed-method approach involving a quantitative survey and a qualitative interview or focus group.
- Fourth, the direct analysis of particular media texts, including TV dramas, advertisements, and content on social media, would help to get a better understanding of how frequently and in what tone the mental health of men is covered.
- Fifth, the effectiveness of specific media campaigns or public health programs could be assessed to ascertain the extent to which they reduce stigma among men.

- Last but not least, media policies that are gender sensitive and will be manifested under the aegis of the regulatory bodies should be developed to propagate a more balanced and responsible portrayal of male mental health in Pakistani media culture.

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