

Key Factors Contributing to Emotional Suppression in Male Adolescents

Badhon. Ahmmmed¹, Ayesha. Khan^{2*}

¹ Department of Psychology, Haripur University, Islamabad, Pakistan

² Department of Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

* Corresponding author email address: ayesha.khan@pu.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore the key sociocultural, familial, emotional, and intrapersonal factors contributing to emotional suppression in male adolescents in Pakistan.

Methods and Materials: Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 male adolescents aged 14 to 18 years from urban and semi-urban areas of Pakistan. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The interviews, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, focused on adolescents' experiences and beliefs related to emotional expression and suppression. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software to identify and organize recurring themes and subthemes.

Findings: Analysis revealed four main themes: sociocultural expectations, family dynamics, emotional socialization, and intrapersonal factors. Subthemes included gender role pressure, family honor, authoritarian parenting, emotional neglect, school environment, media influence, fear of vulnerability, and habitual suppression. Adolescents consistently reported suppressing emotions due to cultural expectations of masculinity, fear of peer ridicule, lack of parental emotional support, and internalized beliefs about strength and emotional control. Many participants described emotional suppression as both a learned behavior and a protective mechanism, often resulting in emotional fatigue and confusion.

Conclusion: Emotional suppression in male adolescents is a multifaceted phenomenon rooted in cultural, familial, and psychological contexts. The findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive emotional education, supportive family environments, and school-based interventions that challenge harmful gender norms and promote emotional expression and well-being in adolescent boys.

Keywords: emotional suppression, male adolescents, qualitative research, Pakistan, gender norms, emotional socialization, family dynamics

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a formative period marked by heightened emotional sensitivity, social transitions, and identity exploration. During this phase, the ability to recognize, express, and regulate emotions plays a crucial role in shaping psychosocial well-being. However, for many male adolescents, emotional expression is restricted by sociocultural, familial, and personal factors, leading to a pattern of emotional suppression that can have enduring psychological consequences. While emotional suppression may serve as a short-term coping strategy, over time it is associated with internalizing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and diminished social functioning (Clifford et al., 2020; Karłyk-Ćwik, 2021; Rabinowitz et al., 2017). Understanding the mechanisms and influences behind this phenomenon is vital, particularly in non-Western sociocultural contexts where traditional gender norms may more stringently dictate emotional behavior.

Male adolescents in conservative or patriarchal societies are often socialized to view emotional expression—particularly of sadness, fear, or vulnerability—as incompatible with masculinity. This internalization of hegemonic masculinity norms can lead to significant emotional incongruence, where boys feel emotions deeply but are discouraged or even punished for expressing them outwardly (Eranda, 2024; Lozada, 2024). Within South Asian cultures, including Pakistan, the intertwining of cultural honor, religious expectations, and familial control further amplifies this suppression. The family, as a primary agent of emotional socialization, plays a central role in reinforcing or challenging these expectations. Emotion-related parenting practices, such as emotional invalidation or authoritarian discipline, have been associated with heightened suppression and poor emotion regulation outcomes in adolescents (Allen et al., 2022; Breau et al., 2021; Nyquist & Luebke, 2021).

Parental influence on adolescents' emotional development has been widely documented across various cultural contexts. Research shows that parents' emotional expressivity and responses to their children's emotions directly shape youth emotional competence (Guo et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2021). When parents model emotional restraint or respond to emotional disclosures with criticism or dismissal, adolescents often learn to inhibit their own emotional expressions. This suppression, in turn, correlates with increased psychological distress and difficulties in social relationships (Nyquist & Luebke, 2021; Rabinowitz et

al., 2017). Furthermore, research has found that differential family affective expression—particularly between fathers and children—can predict divergent emotional trajectories among youth, contributing to internalizing or externalizing behaviors depending on the child's gender and emotional awareness (Allen et al., 2022; Rabinowitz et al., 2017).

School environments also contribute significantly to emotional suppression. Adolescents often internalize peer norms and teacher expectations regarding emotional comportment. In many settings, boys who express sadness or fear may be subjected to ridicule or social ostracism, reinforcing the message that vulnerability is socially unacceptable (Clifford et al., 2020; Dillon-Owens et al., 2022; Kwon & Byun, 2023). Peer dynamics rooted in dominance, competition, and conformity to masculine ideals can further inhibit open emotional expression. These social pressures become more pronounced in adolescence, a period characterized by heightened concern for peer acceptance and status (Karłyk-Ćwik, 2021; Morningstar et al., 2017). Cognitive-affective development during early adolescence makes boys particularly sensitive to these social cues, yet lacking in the emotional literacy needed to navigate them effectively (Dillon-Owens et al., 2022; Zampella et al., 2020).

Media also plays an influential role in shaping adolescents' beliefs about emotions. Content that glorifies stoicism or mocks vulnerability can lead male viewers to associate emotional restraint with strength and status (Cameron et al., 2018; Lozada, 2024). This is especially significant given adolescents' increased engagement with social media, where emotional expression may be met with ridicule, invalidation, or misunderstanding (Neag & Supa, 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Studies have shown that youth, especially boys, curate their emotional identities online in ways that reflect broader cultural expectations, often reinforcing suppression rather than authentic self-expression (Grigoryeva, 2020; Neag & Supa, 2020).

From a developmental perspective, chronic emotional suppression can impair the growth of emotional intelligence, including emotion recognition, labeling, and regulation. Emotional development is critical for adolescent social competence, mental health, and academic success (Malti, 2020; Zaff et al., 2016). Adolescents who suppress their emotions are more likely to experience emotional confusion, reduced empathy, and maladaptive coping strategies such as aggression, substance use, or social withdrawal (Clifford et al., 2020; Karłyk-Ćwik, 2021). In contrast, interventions that promote emotional literacy and safe emotional

environments—such as mindfulness training or expressive therapies—have demonstrated improvements in emotional well-being among youth (Litchke et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2020).

Cross-cultural studies emphasize that emotional suppression is not only a personal psychological issue but also a culturally embedded practice. For example, collectivist societies often encourage emotional moderation to maintain social harmony, which can be misinterpreted as suppression if not contextualized properly (Jun & Jung, 2022; Pizarro-Campagna et al., 2023). Emotional norms are often internalized unconsciously and enforced implicitly by caregivers, educators, and community leaders. These dynamics become especially salient for boys, who are often positioned as future family protectors and cultural representatives, tasked with upholding norms of strength, resilience, and self-control (Eranda, 2024; Lozada, 2024).

In addition to external influences, individual psychological and biological factors also shape tendencies toward suppression. Some adolescents may exhibit heightened sensitivity to social rejection or emotional overload, prompting them to withdraw emotionally as a protective mechanism (Dillon-Owens et al., 2022; Pizarro-Campagna et al., 2023). Others may have difficulty recognizing or labeling their emotions due to underdeveloped affective theory of mind, further complicating their ability to express emotions appropriately (Clifford et al., 2020; Zampella et al., 2020). These internal deficits, when combined with external pressures, create a cycle of silence and emotional fatigue that often goes unnoticed until it manifests as psychological distress or maladaptive behavior.

In the South Asian context, particularly in Pakistan, limited empirical work has explored the specific mechanisms of emotional suppression in male adolescents. While research on gender norms and youth emotional development is expanding globally, there is a lack of culturally grounded qualitative studies that explore how boys in patriarchal societies make sense of and navigate their emotional lives. A qualitative approach offers the opportunity to capture the nuance, complexity, and cultural embeddedness of emotional suppression, moving beyond diagnostic criteria to lived experience (Villafania, 2023; Zaini et al., 2023). Understanding how male adolescents in Pakistan perceive, experience, and internalize emotional suppression can inform more effective interventions and culturally responsive emotional education programs (Rajni & Singh, 2016; Zaini et al., 2023).

Additionally, the intersectionality of emotional suppression with other identity factors—such as socioeconomic status, family structure, and exposure to trauma—warrants closer examination. Emerging studies suggest that youth coping strategies are deeply intertwined with structural inequalities, which can exacerbate emotional distress and restrict access to emotional support systems (Racz et al., 2022; Villafania, 2023). In contexts where mental health resources are limited or stigmatized, adolescents may rely solely on informal support networks or adopt maladaptive strategies like silence and emotional detachment (Allen et al., 2022; Breux et al., 2021). These dynamics highlight the urgent need for context-specific research that centers the voices of adolescents and investigates emotional suppression as a culturally mediated phenomenon rather than a purely individual deficit.

Given these gaps, the current study aims to identify and explore the key factors contributing to emotional suppression in male adolescents in Pakistan using a qualitative design.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the key factors contributing to emotional suppression among male adolescents. A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria of being male, aged between 14 and 18 years, and residing in urban and semi-urban regions of Pakistan. The total number of participants included in the study was 24, with recruitment continuing until theoretical saturation was reached, indicating that no new themes were emerging from the data. The participants were selected to ensure variation in terms of educational background and family structure to capture diverse emotional experiences and expressions.

2.2. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted exclusively through semi-structured interviews, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' personal narratives and emotional regulation strategies. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted in either Urdu or English, based on the participant's preference. Interviews were guided by a flexible interview protocol that included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the

participants' emotional experiences, social expectations, family dynamics, and coping mechanisms related to emotional suppression. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, supported by the use of NVivo qualitative data analysis software. After transcription, the data were carefully coded, and recurring patterns were identified and categorized into themes and subthemes. An inductive method was used to allow themes to emerge directly from the data rather than imposing preconceived categories. Coding was conducted iteratively, and the coding framework was continuously refined in accordance with emerging insights. Credibility was enhanced through peer debriefing and member checking

with selected participants to ensure the authenticity of interpretations and the trustworthiness of findings.

3. Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 24 male adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 years, all residing in urban and semi-urban areas of Pakistan. The participants represented a range of educational levels, including middle school (n = 6), high school (n = 12), and early college (n = 6). Socioeconomic backgrounds varied, with participants coming from lower-middle (n = 10), middle (n = 9), and upper-middle class (n = 5) households. Most participants lived in nuclear families (n = 15), while the remainder were from joint family systems (n = 9). All participants identified as Muslim, reflecting the dominant religious affiliation in the region. Recruitment aimed to capture a diverse range of emotional experiences and social contexts related to emotional suppression.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Related to Emotional Suppression in Male Adolescents

Categories (Themes)	Subcategories (Subthemes)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Sociocultural Expectations	Gender Role Pressure	"Boys don't cry", "Be strong always", "Don't show fear", "Hide weakness"
	Family Honor and Reputation	"Protect family image", "Avoid embarrassment", "Don't share personal matters"
	Peer Conformity	"Fit in with friends", "Act tough", "Avoid looking emotional", "Match group behavior"
	Religious Norms	"Control feelings as moral duty", "Emotions seen as lack of faith", "Avoid shame"
	Public Judgment	"People will talk", "Fear of gossip", "Reputation at stake"
2. Family Dynamics	Authoritarian Parenting	"Father doesn't allow crying", "Strict discipline", "No space for emotions"
	Emotional Neglect	"Ignored feelings", "No one listens", "Emotionally distant parents"
	Sibling Comparison	"Told to be like older brother", "Shamed for sensitivity", "Mocked at home"
	Lack of Parental Role Models	"Father never talks about feelings", "No emotional guidance", "Mother is distant"
	Communication Barriers	"Hard to talk to parents", "Fear of punishment", "Avoid family discussions"
3. Emotional Socialization	Family Conflict Environment	"Arguments at home", "Silent treatment learned", "Avoid fights by staying quiet"
	School Environment	"Teachers punish emotions", "Boys teased in class", "No safe space at school"
	Emotional Literacy Deficits	"Don't know what I feel", "Hard to describe emotions", "Lack of vocabulary"
	Absence of Safe Outlets	"Nowhere to vent", "No counselor", "No emotional friends", "Bottled up feelings"
	Media Influences	"Movies show tough guys", "No crying heroes", "Social media mocks feelings"
4. Intrapersonal Factors	Peer Ridicule	"Crying means weak", "Friends call me soft", "Bullied for emotions"
	Fear of Vulnerability	"Afraid of being hurt", "Can't trust others", "Hiding real self"
	Low Self-Esteem	"Feel not good enough", "Always doubt myself", "Ashamed of crying"
	Internalized Masculinity Norms	"I must be strong", "Crying is failure", "I fix my problems alone"
	Emotional Confusion	"Mix sadness with anger", "Don't understand feelings", "Everything feels numb"
	Habitual Suppression	"Used to hiding emotions", "Keep quiet always", "Automatic response now"
	Psychological Fatigue	"Feeling tired inside", "Mentally drained", "Too much to handle silently"

Participants consistently emphasized the influence of gender role pressure on their emotional behavior. Many described being taught from an early age that expressing vulnerability was a sign of weakness. As one 16-year-old participant stated, "In our home, if I cry, my father says, 'Stop acting like a girl.'" Concepts such as "boys don't cry," "be strong always," and "don't show fear" were repeated

across interviews, illustrating a shared cultural script discouraging emotional expression.

Family honor and reputation emerged as another significant sociocultural constraint. Several participants mentioned suppressing their feelings to avoid bringing shame or dishonor to their family. One 17-year-old remarked, "I don't talk about my depression because it

would make my parents feel ashamed in front of relatives.” The concepts of “protect family image,” “avoid embarrassment,” and “don’t share personal matters” illustrated how emotional suppression was framed as a protective act for the collective dignity of the family.

Peer conformity also played a key role. Many boys reported mimicking the emotional behavior of their male friends to maintain group acceptance. A 15-year-old participant explained, “When my friends act tough, I have to do the same, even if I feel like crying inside.” The idea of “acting tough,” “fitting in with friends,” and “avoiding looking emotional” highlighted the peer pressure that reinforced emotional suppression.

Religious norms were mentioned by several participants who associated emotional control with spiritual discipline. Some believed that showing emotions, especially sadness or anger, was contrary to religious expectations. “My imam says patience is better than complaining,” one 18-year-old shared. Concepts such as “control feelings as moral duty,” “emotions seen as lack of faith,” and “avoid shame” revealed how religion was internalized as a framework for emotional restraint.

Public judgment also contributed to emotional suppression. Fear of being criticized or misunderstood in public spaces caused participants to conceal their feelings. A 14-year-old noted, “If I cry at school, people will laugh and talk about me.” Concepts like “people will talk,” “fear of gossip,” and “reputation at stake” encapsulated how external social observation limited emotional expression.

Authoritarian parenting was a commonly reported familial factor. Many participants described a home environment where emotions were neither welcomed nor validated. “My father always says, ‘Be quiet, don’t talk nonsense,’ when I try to share something,” said a 16-year-old. This reflected open codes such as “strict discipline,” “no space for emotions,” and “father doesn’t allow crying.”

Emotional neglect also emerged as a powerful subcategory. Several adolescents expressed that their emotional experiences were routinely ignored or dismissed. A 15-year-old participant said, “No one at home asks how I feel. They just tell me to study.” These reflections included “ignored feelings,” “no one listens,” and “emotionally distant parents.”

Sibling comparison intensified emotional invalidation. Many boys felt judged or mocked when compared to more emotionally reserved siblings. One 17-year-old shared, “My brother never cries, so my parents say I should be more like him.” The concepts “shamed for sensitivity,” “told to be like

older brother,” and “mocked at home” illustrated how sibling dynamics discouraged emotional openness.

Lack of parental role models in emotional expression was another theme. Participants often described their fathers as emotionally unavailable or their mothers as overwhelmed. As one boy noted, “I’ve never seen my dad talk about feelings. So I don’t know how to.” This absence led to concepts like “no emotional guidance” and “father never talks about feelings.”

Communication barriers within the family further obstructed emotional sharing. Many adolescents feared being misunderstood or punished for expressing feelings. A 14-year-old said, “If I say I’m sad, my parents think I’m being ungrateful.” Concepts such as “fear of punishment” and “hard to talk to parents” were recurrent in this theme.

Family conflict environments shaped avoidance behavior as a coping strategy. Participants often reported retreating emotionally to avoid being caught in verbal or physical altercations. “When my parents fight, I go silent. I don’t want to make things worse,” explained one 16-year-old. “Avoid fights by staying quiet” and “silent treatment learned” were typical codes under this subtheme.

In the context of emotional socialization, the school environment was described as emotionally suppressive. Several adolescents noted that teachers discouraged emotional expression and peers mocked vulnerability. “In school, if you cry, you become a joke,” one boy remarked. Concepts like “teachers punish emotions” and “no safe space at school” reinforced this perception.

Deficits in emotional literacy also surfaced frequently. Participants struggled to identify and articulate their emotions, often defaulting to silence or aggression. “I don’t know what I feel sometimes—maybe angry, maybe sad,” said a 15-year-old. Concepts such as “lack of vocabulary” and “don’t know what I feel” illustrated this internal confusion.

The absence of safe outlets was another recurring subtheme. Many boys expressed a lack of trust in their peers or adults, feeling that no one could be a safe listener. One participant said, “There’s no one to talk to about feelings. Everyone just says ‘man up.’” Codes such as “no counselor,” “nowhere to vent,” and “bottled up feelings” were prominent here.

Media influences shaped emotional norms by glorifying stoicism and mocking sensitivity. Several boys mentioned that television and online content portrayed crying as weak or feminine. “In movies, the hero never cries. So I learned not to cry,” explained one adolescent. Concepts like “no

crying heroes” and “tough guys in media” underscored this theme.

Peer ridicule intensified the fear of emotional expression. Adolescents noted that expressing feelings among peers often led to bullying or exclusion. “If you get emotional, they’ll start calling you names,” shared a 14-year-old. Open codes included “crying means weak” and “bullied for emotions.”

Fear of vulnerability emerged as a strong intrapersonal factor. Participants shared that expressing emotions made them feel exposed and at risk of emotional harm. “If I show my real feelings, people will hurt me,” said one 17-year-old. This was linked to codes such as “can’t trust others” and “hiding real self.”

Low self-esteem was frequently associated with emotional suppression. Some boys described feeling ashamed of their emotions or doubting their worth if they became emotional. “I feel weak when I cry, like something’s wrong with me,” said one participant. Concepts like “not good enough” and “ashamed of crying” captured this internalized stigma.

Internalized masculinity norms also contributed to emotional restriction. Participants often echoed beliefs that true masculinity required emotional self-control. “Real men solve things quietly,” explained one 16-year-old. Codes such as “crying is failure” and “must be strong” exemplified these norms.

Emotional confusion was another reported theme, where boys described struggling to differentiate between emotional states. One adolescent noted, “Sometimes I lash out, but I don’t even know why—I just feel weird inside.” Concepts included “don’t understand feelings” and “everything feels numb.”

Habitual suppression reflected the normalization of emotional silence over time. For many, withholding emotions had become an automatic response. “I’ve kept things in for so long, it just feels normal now,” said one 15-year-old. Open codes such as “used to hiding emotions” and “automatic response” were representative here.

Finally, psychological fatigue was the result of prolonged emotional suppression. Participants described experiencing exhaustion, mental strain, and emotional numbness. One boy stated, “Sometimes I feel so tired inside, like I’m carrying too much I can’t say.” Concepts like “mentally drained” and “too much to handle silently” reflected the emotional toll.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study sought to identify and explore the key factors contributing to emotional suppression among male adolescents in Pakistan. The findings revealed four overarching themes: sociocultural expectations, family dynamics, emotional socialization, and intrapersonal factors. Each theme encompassed several subthemes that provided insight into how male adolescents internalize emotional restraint as both a protective and socially adaptive strategy. Collectively, the results underscore the deeply embedded cultural and interpersonal scripts that discourage emotional expressivity and prioritize masculine ideals of strength, silence, and self-reliance.

A central finding of this study was the pervasive influence of sociocultural expectations, particularly gender role pressure, peer conformity, and public judgment. Participants reported feeling compelled to align with masculine norms that equate emotional expressiveness with weakness. This aligns with previous research that illustrates how boys are taught from an early age to suppress emotions such as sadness and fear to maintain a socially acceptable masculine identity (Eranda, 2024; Lozada, 2024). Studies across diverse cultural contexts confirm that emotional suppression is not merely a personal choice but is reinforced by collective expectations of male emotional restraint (Clifford et al., 2020; Kwon & Byun, 2023). The findings also resonate with evidence that adolescents are highly susceptible to peer influence, and deviation from dominant gender norms often results in ridicule or exclusion (Dillon-Owens et al., 2022; Karłyk-Ćwik, 2021). In Pakistani society, where cultural and religious norms uphold a traditional model of masculinity, such expectations become even more pronounced, further discouraging open emotional expression among boys.

Another major theme centered on family dynamics, including authoritarian parenting, emotional neglect, sibling comparison, and communication barriers. Participants frequently described households in which emotions were dismissed, minimized, or punished. These findings support previous studies demonstrating that parental emotion socialization practices—particularly when emotionally invalidating—contribute to adolescent emotional suppression and reduced emotional literacy (Allen et al., 2022; Breux et al., 2021). Adolescents raised in emotionally distant environments often internalize the belief that their feelings are irrelevant or burdensome, leading to habitual suppression over time (Nyquist & Luebke, 2021; Rabinowitz et al., 2017). Furthermore, the lack of parental

role models for emotional expression, especially from fathers, perpetuates a generational silence around emotional vulnerability (Guo et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2021). Consistent with these findings, studies have highlighted that paternal emotional expressivity is particularly influential in shaping male adolescents' beliefs about acceptable emotional behavior (Rabinowitz et al., 2017).

The emotional socialization process beyond the family context—especially in schools and media—was another contributing factor. Participants described emotionally unsafe school environments, where teachers and peers alike discouraged or mocked emotional expression. This mirrors evidence that educational institutions, particularly in patriarchal cultures, often serve as sites of emotional policing rather than emotional development (Clifford et al., 2020; Kwon & Byun, 2023). Research on school-based emotional development shows that male students who display sadness or anxiety are often perceived as weak or immature, further reinforcing emotional inhibition (Dillon-Owens et al., 2022; Morningstar et al., 2017). The role of media, including social media and television, was also evident in participants' narratives. The portrayal of stoic male figures in media and the normalization of emotional mockery online shape adolescents' internal expectations of what masculinity should look like (Cameron et al., 2018; Neag & Supa, 2020). Such portrayals not only reinforce gender stereotypes but also create social environments in which authentic emotional expression is discouraged and devalued (Grigoryeva, 2020; Wang et al., 2019).

Intrapersonal factors, including fear of vulnerability, low self-esteem, internalized masculinity norms, and emotional confusion, emerged as powerful internal drivers of emotional suppression. Many participants reported a longstanding habit of silence and emotional detachment, often as a protective strategy against anticipated judgment or emotional harm. These findings are in line with research demonstrating that adolescents with low emotional awareness are more likely to suppress emotions due to difficulty labeling or understanding their feelings (Clifford et al., 2020; Zampella et al., 2020). Internalized ideals of toughness and emotional independence were also evident, consistent with prior findings that boys who subscribe to traditional masculine norms are more likely to avoid emotional expression (Jun & Jung, 2022; Lozada, 2024). Importantly, the emotional fatigue and psychological strain that emerged from prolonged suppression reflect a need to view emotional suppression as not only a behavioral pattern

but also a source of long-term emotional distress (Pizarro-Campagna et al., 2023; Racz et al., 2022).

Interestingly, the study also surfaced a subtle tension between emotional suppression and emotional need. While participants reported suppressing emotions in public or familial settings, many expressed a desire for safe emotional outlets and greater understanding from adults and peers. This is supported by previous work indicating that adolescents may suppress emotions not out of lack of feeling but due to a lack of emotionally safe environments (Malti, 2020; Zaff et al., 2016). Emotional intelligence and emotional maturity are known to improve when adolescents are given structured opportunities for expression, reflection, and validation (Lu et al., 2020; Zaini et al., 2023). Moreover, positive youth development frameworks emphasize the importance of social and emotional competencies in supporting adolescent mental health, particularly for those navigating complex sociocultural landscapes (Villafania, 2023; Zaff et al., 2016).

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of knowledge on adolescent emotional development by offering a culturally contextualized understanding of emotional suppression in Pakistani male adolescents. While much of the existing literature has focused on Western contexts, this study supports cross-cultural evidence that suppression is a learned, reinforced behavior rooted in broader social systems rather than innate personality traits (Eranda, 2024; Lozada, 2024). Furthermore, it aligns with emerging findings that adolescents, regardless of geography, are increasingly impacted by media influences, peer dynamics, and gendered emotional norms (Kwon & Byun, 2023; Neag & Supa, 2020). However, the cultural specificity of family honor, religious expectations, and hierarchical family roles adds a nuanced layer to the Pakistani context that may differ from patterns seen in more individualistic societies.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

This study, while rich in qualitative insight, is not without limitations. The sample was limited to 24 participants from urban and semi-urban areas of Pakistan, which may not fully capture the emotional experiences of male adolescents from rural settings or different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, while semi-structured interviews offered depth, self-reporting bias may have influenced participants' willingness to disclose emotionally sensitive experiences. The study also focused exclusively on male adolescents, excluding perspectives from female

adolescents, caregivers, or educators, which might have offered a more holistic understanding of the emotional ecology shaping suppression. Moreover, while NVivo software enhanced systematic analysis, researcher interpretation remains inherently subjective, which may affect theme formation despite efforts to ensure credibility and consistency.

Future research should consider expanding the demographic scope to include rural and ethnically diverse adolescent populations in Pakistan to explore regional and cultural variations in emotional suppression. Longitudinal studies could provide insight into how patterns of suppression evolve across developmental stages and the long-term psychological outcomes associated with chronic emotional inhibition. It would also be beneficial to examine the role of intervention programs—such as school-based emotional literacy training or family-focused emotion coaching—to determine their effectiveness in reducing suppression. Incorporating multi-informant perspectives, including parents, teachers, and mental health professionals, could offer a more comprehensive picture of the support systems and barriers adolescents face. Additionally, exploring emotional expression in digital contexts may reveal how online spaces simultaneously restrict and enable emotional exploration for youth.

Practitioners working with adolescents in Pakistan should prioritize creating emotionally safe environments both in schools and at home. Emotional literacy training and culturally sensitive counseling interventions can help boys recognize, articulate, and manage their emotions constructively. Schools should implement peer mentoring and emotional wellness programs that challenge harmful masculine norms and promote empathy, inclusiveness, and emotional safety. Parents and caregivers must be educated about the importance of validating boys' emotional experiences rather than suppressing them through discipline or shame. Mental health services should be made more accessible and stigma-free, with trained counselors equipped to support adolescents navigating emotional struggles. Ultimately, strengthening emotional resilience and self-expression in male adolescents requires coordinated efforts across family, school, community, and policy levels.

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Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. To adhere to ethical principles, participants were informed about the research objectives, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally.

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