

Challenges Faced by Parents of Adolescents in Urban Areas of Karachi

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Abstract

Parenting adolescents has become increasingly complex in today's modern technology world. Social media exposure, academic pressure, peer influence and shifting cultural norms often add stress to both parents and children. Understanding parents' perceptions of these challenges is essential for developing effective support systems that strengthen family relationships and promote healthy adolescent development. This study aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of parents regarding the difficulties they face while raising adolescents in the current era. A qualitative study design was employed to explore the perceptions of parents of adolescents regarding the challenges they face in parenting today. An online Google form was administered to collect in-depth insights from parents through an open-ended questionnaire. Sample of 117 parents of adolescents (aged between 10-19 years) in the Urban settings of Karachi were administered. Google form distribution allowed parents to complete the questionnaire at their own pace. Manual thematic analysis was used to extract codes, and themes. Five key themes were identified through manual thematic analysis, including Raising Children in the Current Era, Advancement in Technology, Generational Gaps, Moral and Value-Based, and parental support. This study's findings showed several challenges regarding Adolescents' parenting in the Urban settings of Karachi. Challenges such as advancement in technology, the generation gap, and the decline in moral values are affecting the parent-child relationship and the well-being of children. The findings suggest that despite the challenges, parents are committed to showing support for their child through understanding the perspective of Gen Z.

Keywords: Adolescents, Parenting challenges, Parent-child relationship

Article history:

Received on: September 15, 2025

Revised on: December 15, 2025

Accepted on: December 19, 2025

Published on: December 31, 2025

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How to Cite

Hanif, R., Shams, M., Khalid, S., Naseem, M., & Bhamani, S. (2025). Challenges Faced by Parents of Adolescence in Urban Areas of Karachi. *Journal of History and Social Sciences*, 16(4), 219–227. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18335708>

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents aged 10-19 are in a significant developmental phase that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood (UNICEF, n.d.). Younger adolescents are 10 to 14 years old, while older adolescents are between 15 and 19 (UNICEF, n.d.). This stage is characterized by the development of independence, self-exploration of personal beliefs and interests, autonomy, puberty, and involvement in risky behaviours. During this critical period attachment to parents and a supportive environment can lead to positive developmental outcomes; however, negative influences can have long-lasting adverse effects later in life. It also encompasses encouraging and supporting the child's development and social interaction. A prime challenge for parenting adolescents is to adapt and modify parenting practices as per the needs of adolescents' developmental needs (Kobak et al., 2017). Developmentally, after puberty, adolescents prefer to make independent decisions and be less supervised (Kobak et al., 2017). Urban setting, especially, brings its own set of challenges to parents. Adolescents are at high risk of being predisposed to potential risks such as excessive social and digital exposure, academic competition, and peer pressure, making them vulnerable to engaging in unhealthy behaviours such as substance abuse, sexual activities, and risky driving (Crone et al., 2016). Although autonomy help adolescents to explore the societal norms, Parents play a critical role in ensuring the protection and safety of adolescents while supporting their capacity to be independent and autonomous in decision-making (Begum et al., 2022). However, it becomes challenging for parents as adolescents are not all the time under the supervision of their parents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parenting is evolving with the recent advancements in various aspects of life. Particularly, parenting of adolescents has been a challenge for parents, especially in Urban settings. In today's modernization era, easy access to technology and AI, mental health disorders, substance abuse, sexual activity, cyberbullying, academic competition, and peer pressure strain parenting of adolescents. The excessive use of technology is one of the addictions among today's adolescents, which has increased over the years due to excessive exposure to social media and AI. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the rate of social media usage among adolescents increased from 7% in 2018 to 11% in 2022. WHO also reported that 12% of adolescents are at high risk of problematic gaming, impacting their mental well-being (World Health Organization: WHO, 2024). The constant use of technology and social media has adverse effects on the physical and psychological well-being of adolescents. According to a study by the National Sleep Foundation, 72% of adolescents use digital technology before bedtime, which can lead to sleep deprivation (Suni & Singh, 2024). Another study by Cyberbullying Research Centre reported that 59% of teenagers have experienced cyberbullying due to the use of mobile phones, leading to mental disorders such as self-harm, emotional distress, and anxiety (Anderson, 2018). A study by the Pew Research Centre revealed that 56% of adolescents agree that they have easy access to explicit content on social media (Vogels et al., 2022). All these evolving issues regarding the use of digital technology by adolescents bring several concerns to parents to have control over their children.

In a study by Marsh et al. (2024), parents showed concern that excessive exposure to technology is leading to mental health disorders, anxiety, suicide, and self-harm among adolescents, and also, children are being exposed to inappropriate and explicit content on social media. This study further

reported that parents' concerns over the physical health effects of screen use, such as weakened eyesight, sleep deprivation, and laziness (Marsh et al., 2024). Another study revealed that more than half of the parents (64.3%) showed concerns regarding access to explicit content, and 53% were concerned about cyberbullying (Kimball et al., 2023). Another common challenge faced by parents of adolescents is a communication and interaction gap (Ioffe et al., 2020). As adolescents mature, they tend to seek privacy and limit their engagement with parents and other family members. Moreover, the generation gap also worsens this gap, as the mentality and thought process of both generations differ a lot (Mujeeb et al., 2025). Parents often find it difficult to adapt their child's interaction and communication styles while ensuring the parental authority and respecting the child's autonomy and developmental needs (Ioffe et al., 2020). Effective parent-adolescent communication is significant for the prevention of adolescent depressive symptoms. It fosters connectedness and positive family relationships and offers emotional support to adolescents (Zhang et al., 2021).

Mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety are highly prevalent among adolescents (WHO, 2024) because of the different stressors they face during the transition from childhood to adolescence (World Health Organization: WHO, 2024). According to WHO (2024), worldwide, one in seven adolescents (14%) experiences mental disorders, which accounts for 15% of the global burden of disease among adolescents. This rise in mental health disorders among adolescent not only affects their mental health but also affects their Parents (Making Caring Common, 2023). Parents can feel stigmatized for having a child with mental health disorders, which may lead to their poor mental well-being (McKeague et al., 2021). Risky behaviours such as substance abuse, involvement in sexual activities, and risky driving by adolescents are another key challenge for parents to manage (Kahn & Graham, 2019). These concerns are further exacerbated by urban settings, where parents have minimal monitoring and control over their children (Pelham et al., 2024).

Research Objective

To explore the parents of adolescents' perceptions regarding raising children in today's time.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study design was employed to explore the perceptions of parents of adolescents regarding the challenges they face in parenting today. An online Google form was administered to collect in-depth insights from parents through an open-ended questionnaire. The target population for this study was parents of adolescents (aged between 10-19 years) in the Urban settings of Karachi. Parents in today's time are experiencing various stressors such as a fast-paced lifestyle, advancement in digital technology, and variations in societal and cultural dynamics which pose significant challenges in parenting practices. By including this population, this study aims to explore the challenges and concerns of parents face while providing parenting and care to their adolescents.

Study Setting

This study was conducted in the Urban Settings of Karachi. Karachi is a metropolitan city with a diverse population. Urban Settings in Karachi bring their own unique challenges to parenting.

Adolescents living in these urban settings have easy access to the urban settings' facilities and influences, and parents may have minimal control over their children. A total sample size of 117 parents was included in the study, using a convenience sampling technique. The qualitative data of the parents was collected through an open-ended questionnaire administered through Google Forms. Google form distribution allowed parents to complete the questionnaire at their own pace. The results for the qualitative data are analysed manually. Inductive thematic analysis was used to extract codes, and themes. Ethical approval was sought from the institution's Ethical Review Committee (ERC No: 2024-10848-32188). Informed consent was taken through a statement mentioning the Google form stating the purpose and significance of the study. Participants were informed about the voluntary participation and confidentiality. The data was kept in a password-protected computer and only core research team has access to it.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Manual thematic analysis was performed to extract themes. Five themes emerged from the data, including *Raising Children in the Current Era*, *Advancement in Technology*, *Generational Gaps*, *Moral and Value-Based*, and *parental support*.

Theme 1: Raising Children in the Current Era

In today's modern evolving era, parenting has become a complex and multifaceted approach that has been significantly influenced by the variations in social-cultural practices, technological advancement, and enhanced interactions among people. This shift in daily life dynamics brings unique challenges and opportunities to parents, according to which they must adapt their parental practices. More than half of the parents showed concern that raising children in the current era is far more difficult than their parents and grandparents. One of the parents mentioned that *raising children in today's world requires adaptability, patience, and a willingness to learn and grow alongside them. The constant digital noise, social media pressure, economic uncertainty, climate anxiety, and information overload can be overwhelming for kids and parents. It requires more conscious effort to in still focus, emotional resilience, and self-worth.*

Theme 2: Advancement in Technology

A significant number of parents showed concern over the advancement of technology, social media, and artificial intelligence. They were mainly concerned about the screen time and the content that is easily available on social media, which could be inappropriate for children. One of the Parents mentioned that *parents face modern pressures: technology overload, kids are growing up with screens and social media from an early age, which impacts attention, emotions, and relationships. Academic and societal pressures, competition, comparison, and even anxiety are hitting kids earlier. Safety concerns, from online dangers to real-world threats, parents feel they have to be more protective than ever.* Another parent showed concern about high screen time. They mentioned that *it's really hard to see how much screen time affects kids these days. It worries me that they aren't always safe when they're online. We need to watch them closely.* Some other responses urged the schools to limit the use of technology in education. One of them said that *educators and school systems need to understand that homework and resources can be shared traditionally, offline, as they used to be before. Teenagers should not be in possession of digital*

devices till they are 18, and schools should not force the parents to do otherwise. Inappropriate online content has made parenting challenging.

Some parents also commented on the impact of artificial intelligence on today's generations. *As one of them said, it is very challenging because of the advancement in the internet and Artificial Intelligence, which parents are struggling to understand, means the adverse effects of it... Like hyper-stimulating content and excessive screen time can have a very negative effect on a child, but many parents are not aware of it.* While many parents expressed concerns over the negative impact of social media on adolescent well-being, some parents showed the positive aspects of technology. *As one parent said that raising children in today's world presents distinct challenges, but also offers notable opportunities, thanks to technological advancements and a deeper understanding of child development. Parents and caregivers now navigate a more complex environment compared to previous generations, balancing modern conveniences with new concerns.*

Theme 3: Generational Understanding

The responses of parents showed their realization that today's children, especially Gen-Z, have different mindsets from the previous generation. Many parents are aware of the generational gap. They believed it's essential for parents to recognize their child's mindset and evolve with them accordingly to better understand them and the generational shifts in Behaviors and patterns. One of the parents responded that *every era has its own challenges. The generation gap has always existed, but it seems it's widening nowadays due to digitalisation.* Another parent stated that *Gen-Z is a different generation, so we need to update strategies and new skills to understand them to become good humans.*

Theme 4: Moral and Value-Based

Degradation of moral values among today's younger generations, particularly adolescents, has become common. Honesty, respect, helpfulness, integrity, and good behaviour are diminished. This theme was observed in various responses. One parent expressed it as follows *Raising children is crucial, as they are the future, they must know how to behave and shape society and carry on traditions and values.* Many other parents expressed concern that today's younger generation has forgotten moral values, especially while communicating with their elders. According to one parent *they are not ashamed of answering back to adults, empathy is not there, they emotionally black mail giving answers like no one loves them in this house, but they don't see these behaviour, Some parents perceived that adolescents today show less adherence to traditional norms of respect and obedience, particularly in religious or family contexts.*

Theme 5: Parental Support

While many parents showed various concerns about raising adolescents in current times, some parents also reflected on the role of parents in providing support and positive parenting in this digital era. This theme centres around the idea that effective parenting today requires a friendly and open approach. As one parent stated that *we should be an open space for our children where kids should always feel free to share, to be themselves around the parents and family.* Another parent also reflected on the same perspective, saying that *we have to keep pace with this generation's challenges, the subtle cues, the understanding of their behaviours, and appropriate*

knowledge and capability to address the issues. Providing friendly parenting is essential for open communication between a child and a parent. Mental health disorders are emerging issues among adolescents in today's times. Parental support can lead to better emotional regulation and improved psychological well-being. This was reinforced by one parent stating that raising kids today is complex, with tech advantages and mental health challenges. Parents must balance freedom and guidance, fostering emotional intelligence and open communication. Setting clear boundaries and being adaptable are key. It's a challenging yet rewarding journey. Every child is unique, requiring personalized approaches.

Discussion

This study highlighted the challenges faced by the parents of adolescents in Urban settings of Karachi. Five main themes emerged from the responses of the parents: raising children in the current era, advancement in technology, generational gap, degradation of moral values, and parental support. All the emerged themes reflect the challenges faced by parents of adolescents, particularly in Urban settings, where life is fast-paced with the availability of all kinds of facilities. Children, particularly adolescents, get exposed to these facilities, such as digital technology, at a very young stage, leading to an impact on their well-being. One of the prominent issues highlighted by parents in this study was the impact of digitalization, especially social media, high screen time, and the hype of artificial intelligence. A significant number of parents expressed the concern that children in today's time are involved in excessive screen time and have easy access to inappropriate content on social media. The excessive use of technology and screen time can negatively affect the parent-child relationship, academic outcomes, and the physical and mental health of children. A study conducted by Marsh et al. (2024) also reported that parents perceived screen time as a negative factor for the overall well-being of the child due to exposure to inappropriate content, minimal social interaction, poor academic results, obesity, and anxiety. Another study reported that 80% of the parents considered cyberbullying a serious issue, which can have a more adverse effect than traditional bullying (Alghamdi et al., 2021). A Study further reported that parents believed video games and social media platforms are the main cause of cyberbullying, which increases the risk of suicide and self-harm among children (Alghamdi et al., 2021).

According to our study, parents believe that advancements in various aspects of life have created a gap in general understanding. Today's generation, such as Gen Z, differs from previous generations. According to Sharma et al. (2022), some parents believed that a lack of parent-child interaction is impeding attachment and understanding. A study further revealed that parents expressed that Gen Z is independent, and they don't ask for any approval as previous children used to (Sharma et al., 2022). According to Raj (2024), in today's materialistic world, the degradation of moral values among young children has risen. They lack discipline, disobey, and even disrespect their elders. Due to digitization, the young generation has been exposed to Western culture and is trying to adapt it, which is affecting local societal norms (Raj, 2024). Parents highlighted the significance of a friendly and open approach to parenting, so that children feel comfortable while sharing their concerns with their parents. An open and comfortable communication between a parent and a child leads to strong emotional regulation, optimal physical and mental development (Zhong et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study's findings showed several challenges regarding Adolescents' parenting in the Urban settings of Karachi. Challenges such as advancement in technology, the generation gap, and the decline in moral values are affecting the parent-child relationship and the well-being of children. Our findings suggest that despite the challenges, parents are committed to showing support for their child through understanding the perspective of Gen Z.

Limitations and Implications

The findings of the study highlight that current modernization has introduced notable stressors for parents of adolescents in urban Karachi. Stressors such as technology, change in societal dynamics, and globalization are not only affecting their well-being but also their attachment to their parents. However, some limitations should be considered while interpreting the findings. Firstly, responses were collected through a Google form, which may limit the researcher's capability to understand the in-depth perceptions and non-verbal cues of the participants. Secondly, data were collected only from urban settings; therefore, generalizability cannot be applied to slums or rural areas where the socioeconomic conditions, such as limited access to technology, are different from those compared in urban settings of Karachi. Therefore, more research is recommended to understand the challenges of parents from both Urban and rural settings, through which targeted interventions can be designed for both parents and adolescents based on their socioeconomic background.

Following the challenges faced by parents in raising the current generation, some future directions and considerations have emerged that are crucial for addressing these problems. Since a significant number of the parents showed their concerns regarding how difficult modern parenting is, it is a clear sign that there is a need to upgrade parenting strategies that work with the modern generation. It can be done through webinars and workshops. Also, it can be done through creating awareness about the evolved behaviour and mannerisms of kids in today's world. Additionally, concern regarding increased screen time and excessive and unsupervised use of social media among parents suggests the importance of integrating digital literacy in both parenting and the education system. Future interventions should include tools for parental control, monitoring of devices, and an educational guidebook promoting responsible use of technology. Lastly, enforcing mutual respect between parents and children encourages open communication and understanding that will likely shape the parent-child relationship in the future and overall improve family wellbeing.

Competing Interests

The authors declared no known competing interests.

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