

# CHILD ABUSE AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOR: MEDIATING ROLE OF AGGRESSION IN ADOLESCENTS

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## I. OVERVIEW

### A. Abstract

Stanley Hall rightly stated that adolescence is a time of storm and stress to illustrate that it is a particularly difficult period for the adolescent because it is an age of transitional and developmental changes.<sup>1</sup> During this time period, young people are not just vulnerable to deviance more than either children or adults but also subjected to negative

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<sup>1</sup> Monica L. McCoy & Stefanie M. Keen, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, PSYCHOL. PRESS (2013).

emotions like aggression due to biological changes that occur during puberty. The present study was intended to find out the relationship between child abuse, aggression, and deviant behavior among adolescents. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a relationship between child abuse, aggression, and deviant behavior. It was also hypothesized that aggression is likely to mediate between child abuse and deviant behavior. Correlational research design was used to assess the relationship between variables. Purposive sampling technique was used to recruit the sample. The sample comprised of (N= 300) school and college students with age range 13-19 years. The questionnaires for collecting data included the Child Abuse Scale developed by Parvaneh Mohammadkhani, et al.,<sup>2</sup> the Aggression Scale by Pamela Orpinas and Ralph Frankowski,<sup>3</sup> and Deviant Behavior Scale by Shahnila Mushtaq

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<sup>2</sup> Parvaneh Mohammadkhani, et al., *Development, Validation and Reliability of Child Abuse Self Report Scale (CASRS) in Iranian Students*, 17 MJIRI 51 (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Pamela Orpinas & Ralph Frankowski, *The Aggression Scale: A Self-Report Measure of Aggressive Behavior for Young Adolescents*, 21 J. EARLY ADOLESCENCE 50 (2001).

and Rukhsana Kausar.<sup>4</sup> Results revealed that there was a positive relationship between child abuse, aggression, and deviant behavior. It was also revealed that aggression mediated the relationship between child abuse and deviant behavior. These results have implications in various educational settings for increasing awareness of parents about how responsive they should become for the better upbringing of their child and providing better understanding about how aggression and child abuse can lead to deviant behavior.

## B. Introduction

Deviant behavior is an adverse phenomenon affecting any and all areas of life in the contemporary society. It has become a major focus of public debate and concern.<sup>5</sup> Deviant behavior has been derived from a Latin word called deviation which indicated abnormality. Puberty has been described as a time of

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<sup>4</sup> Shahnila Mushtaq & Rukhsana Kausar, *Exploring Dimensions of Deviant Behaviour in Adolescent Boys*, 28 J. BEHAV. SCI. (2018).

<sup>5</sup> JOHN OPARADURU & JOHN ONYEMAUCHE, *DEVIANT BEHAVIOURS IN SCHOOLS: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING* (2021).

storms and stress to show that it is an especially difficult time for adolescents and for people around them. This difficulty manifests itself in all aspects of adolescent life. For example, teenagers are now starting to defy adult authority and show more behavioral problems. They also show more impulsiveness than when they were young, and increased mood swings. Compared to children or adults, reckless, norm-violating and antisocial behaviors are more common in adolescents.<sup>6</sup> As the possibility of engaging in behavior that is defined as deviant, illegal, and risky behavior increases, the consequences of young people's choices become more serious. Since participation in deviant behaviors can have serious consequences for young people and these behaviors have important implications for society, it is important to understand the factors that lead to deviant behavioral choices.<sup>7</sup>

Deviant behaviors during the period of adolescence are predictors of a number of

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<sup>6</sup> S. Hashmi, *Adolescence: An Age of Storm and Stress*, 2 REV. ARTS & HUMAN. (2013).

<sup>7</sup> TRAVIS HIRSCHI, *CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY* (2002).

problematic consequences in adulthood, like risky sexual behaviors, crime, and substance abuse.<sup>8</sup> Many people consider deviance to be bad behavior because it poses a social problem. This is because deviant behavior interferes with the smooth flow of social interaction and harms social organization. Due to the unusually chaotic behavior, the government and government officials have transferred and allocated a large number of resources to modern social control agents, for instance buying bulletproof cars, uniforms for police and prison officials, and building police stations, courts, and prisons across the country. All of these agents are intended to enforce or set consistency. Investment of these resources could have been done in other money-making areas such as industry, agriculture, education, and human and social development. In addition, deviant behavior can undermine trust.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Russell A .Barkley, et al., *Young Adult Follow up of Hyperactive Children: Antisocial Activities and Drug Use*, 45 J. CHILD PSYCHOL. & PSYCHIATRY 195 (2004).

<sup>9</sup> Augustine Bala Nalah & Leku Daniel Ishaya, *A Conceptual Overview of Deviance and Its Implication to Mental Health: A Bio Psychosocial Perspective*, 2 INT'L J. HUMAN. & SOC. SCI. INVENTION 1 (2013).

Integrated cognitive theory of antisocial potential given by Farrington in 2017, states that experiences of child ill-treatment such as child abuse, problematic family environment, antisocial patterns, and child abuse experiences of criminal parents are, in the long run, factors that encourage deviant behavior. Similarly, according to research by Sampson and Laub (2003), they face disadvantages such as poverty and child abuse, which provide more favorable conditions for future crimes. For example, a child who has experienced negligence in the family environment may infrequently be loved, under limited family supervision, and the parent or legal guardian may be negligent. Because of the neglect of parenting behavior, this young man is more likely to develop weakened social bonds, which is the core aspect of deviant behavior.<sup>10</sup> It is always found that participation in juvenile justice or deviance

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<sup>10</sup> Robert J. Sampson & John H. Laub, *Life Course Disasters? Trajectories of Crime among Delinquent Boys Followed to Age 70*, 41 CRIMINOLOGY 555 (2003).

continues to be related to the child's bad experiences.<sup>11</sup>

Children have experienced and witnessed abuse by their guardians and their lives are severely affected as adults.<sup>12</sup> There are numerous studies examining the relationship between child abuse and adult aggression. Many studies have shown that there is a link between experiences of child abuse and emotional distress, such as an increased incidence of anger, anxiety and depression.<sup>13</sup> There is association between child abuse and variety of deviant behaviors such as suicide, substance use and delinquency. Deviant behavior is a bad phenomenon that affects all areas of life. Various factors and reasons cause this unacceptable behavior to appear. Dysfunctional families and child abuse are two of main reasons of deviant behavior. Therefore, the study wants to

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<sup>11</sup> Jessica M. Craig, *Do Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence the Desistance Process?*, 41 *DEVIANT BEHAV.* 683 (2020).

<sup>12</sup> Randy A. Sansone, Justin S. Leung, & Michael W. Wiederman, *Five Forms of Childhood Trauma: Relationships with Employment in Adulthood*, 36 *CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT-THE INT'L J.* 676 (2012).

<sup>13</sup> DAVID HOWE, *CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT: ATTACHMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND INTERVENTION* (2005).

determine how child abuse leads to aggression and then how it results in deviant behavior in adolescents.

## II. METHOD

### A. Participants and Procedure

Present study comprised of 300 participants (N=300) male and female students from different government, semi-government and private schools and colleges of Lahore. The age range of sample was 13-19 years old and from ninth to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Prior to any data collection process, permissions from the respective authors of questionnaires were taken through e-mail. After taking the permission, authority letters from School of professional Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, explaining the nature of the research, requesting for the permission of data collection were obtained and permission was taken from different schools and colleges of Lahore. After that, the pilot study was done to check the reliability of all these instruments and then formal data



collection was done. The purpose of this research was completely explained to the participants. A consent form was also given to the participants to take permission of participation from them. The participants were assured about the privacy and confidentiality of the data collected from them. The purpose of the research was completely explained to the participants and informed consent was signed by them. They were asked to fill the demographic information sheet. The assessment measures regarding all the variables were given to them and they were asked to fill them. At the end, all the questionnaires were scored quantitatively as per scoring guidelines.

## B. Measures

### 1. Demographic Sheet

Demographic Information Sheet consisted of important demographic information. Demographic questionnaire included age, gender, smoking, number of siblings, birth order, family system, father

alive, mother alive, occupation of father and mother, total family income, most attachment with, time spent with parents, socioeconomic status, do you find easy to talk with your parents, number of friends, time spent with friends, restricted time with friends, and activities with friends.

## 2. Child Abuse Scale

The Child Abuse Self Report Scale (CARS) consists of 38 items for measuring four categories of neglect and child abuse and the response is required on scale ranging from 0= Never, 1= Sometimes, 2= Most often, 3= Always. It has four subscales, neglect includes 11 items, psychological abuse subscale includes 14 items, sexual abuse includes five items and physical abuse includes eight items. CARS has good internal consistency, with reliability coefficient of .92, as well as good stability, test-retest correlations of .89.

### 3. The Aggression Scale

This scale was developed by Orpinas and Frankowski in 2001.<sup>14</sup> There are 11 items in this scale. Those behaviors are measured in this scale which might result in physical injury or psychological issues in other students. For the minimization of recall bias, the information about the behavior of adolescents during past seven days is requested in this scale. Participants can respond to each item ranging from zero times to six or more times. The alpha reliability coefficient of this scale is  $\alpha = .87$ .

### 4. Deviant Behavior Scale

This scale was developed by Mushtaq and Kausar.<sup>15</sup> There are 76 items in this questionnaire and the response is required on scale ranging from 1= Almost never, 2= Sometimes, 3= Often, 4= Almost always. This scale identifies three factors of

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<sup>14</sup> Orpinas & Frankowski, 21 J. EARLY ADOLESCENCE 50.

<sup>15</sup> Mushtaq & Kausar, 28 J. BEHAV. SCI. (2018).

deviant behavior scale namely intermittent explosive disorder with alpha reliability  $\alpha=.95$ , conduct disorder with alpha reliability  $\alpha=.96$ , and oppositional defiant disorder with alpha reliability  $\alpha=.93$ . The total time for completion of questionnaire is almost ten minutes. The alpha reliability of this scale  $\alpha= .87$ .

### III. RESULTS

The results of the current research represent the relationship of child abuse, aggression and deviant behavior among adolescents. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was generated to assess the relationship between research variables. Furthermore, mediation analysis was carried out to determine the mediating effect of aggression between child abuse and deviance.

**Table1. Inter-correlation among child abuse, aggression and deviant behavior**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	27.19	8.54	-	.92***	-	-	-	-
Psychological Abuse					.37***	.29***	.33***	.33***
12	20.39	5.79	-	-	-.19**	-.23**	-	-
Neglect Abuse					.22***		.24***	
13	6.61	4.78	-	-	-.72***	-.53***	-.52***	-
Physical Abuse								
14	3.20	3.34	-	-	-	-.56***	-.46***	-
Sexual Abuse								
15	26.27	16.22	-	-	-	-	-.69***	-
Aggression								
16	141.13	44.44	-	-	-	-	-	-
Deviance								

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

At first, the Pearson product moment correlation analysis has been used to investigate the correlation among the study variables. Psychological abuse and neglect abuse has negative significant relationship with aggression and deviance which indicated adolescents with high psychological and neglect abuse have low aggression and deviance. Furthermore, Physical abuse and sexual abuse have positive significant relationship with aggression and deviance which indicated that adolescents who

suffered from more physical and sexual abuse have more aggression and deviance tendencies. On the contrary, Aggression has positive significant relationship with deviance which indicated that adolescents with higher aggression have higher deviance tendencies in their behaviors.

Mediation analysis was applied as main analysis. It was hypothesized that aggression will act as a mediator between (psychological, neglect, physical and Sexual abuse) and deviance in adolescents. Mediation analysis was carried out between child abuse, aggression, and deviance, using *PROCESS* macro v3.3.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A. F. Hayes, Process macro v3.4. (2019), available at <http://processmacro.org/version-history.html>.

Table 2. Direct Effects of Child Abuse, Aggression, and Deviant Behavior (N=300)

Antecedent	Consequent									
	Aggression			Deviance						
	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>F</i> (1,298)	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>F</i> (2,297)	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
Psychological Abuse	-.63	.10	.000	36.88***	.11	-.63	.22	.006	144.42***	.49
Aggression						1.78	.12	.000		
Neglecton Abuse	-.65	.15	.000	17.26***	.05	-.63	.32	.053	140.66***	.48
Aggression						1.84	.11	.000		
Physical Abuse	1.79	.16	.000	116.31***	.28	1.99	.44	.000	156.61***	.51
Aggression						1.58	.13	.000		
Sexual Abuse	2.71	.23	.000	136.25***	.31	1.56	.66	.019	142.37***	.48
Aggression						1.71	.13	.000	142.37	

Note. *Coeff.*= standardized regression coefficient

The results of direct effects of psychological abuse on aggression is negative and significant (b=-.63, p=.000), indicating that adolescents scoring higher on psychological abuse are more likely to have a low score on aggression. The direct effect of aggression on deviance is positive and significant (b=1.78, p=.000), indicating that adolescents high scoring on aggression are more likely to have more deviance in their behavior. Furthermore, the direct

effect of psychological abuse is negative and significant ( $b=-.63$ ,  $p=.006$ ) which indicated that adolescents higher scoring on psychological abuse are more likely to have less deviance in their behavior.

The results of direct effects of neglect abuse on aggression is negative and significant ( $b=-.65$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that adolescents scoring higher on neglecting abuse are more likely to have a low score on aggression. The direct effect of aggression on deviance is positive and significant ( $b=1.84$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that adolescents high scoring on aggression are more likely to have more deviance in their behavior. Furthermore, the direct effect of neglect abuse is negative and but not significant ( $b=-.63$ ,  $p=.053$ ).

The results of direct effects of physical abuse on aggression is positive and significant ( $b=1.79$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that adolescents scoring higher on psychological abuse are more likely to have a high score on aggression. The direct effect of aggression on deviance is positive and significant ( $b=1.58$ ,



$p=.000$ ), indicating that adolescents high scoring on aggression are more likely to have more deviance in their behavior. Furthermore, the direct effect of physical abuse is positive and significant ( $b=1.99$ ,  $p=.000$ ) which indicated that adolescents scoring high on physical abuse are more likely to have more deviance in their behavior.

The results of direct effects of sexual abuse on aggression is positive and significant ( $b=2.71$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that adolescents high scoring higher on sexual abuse are more likely to have a high score on aggression. The direct effect of aggression on deviance is positive and significant ( $b=1.71$ ,  $p=.000$ ), indicating that adolescents high scoring on aggression are more likely to have more deviance in their behavior. Furthermore, the direct effect of sexual abuse is positive and significant ( $b=1.56$ ,  $p=.000$ ) which indicated that adolescents scoring high on sexual abuse are more likely to have more deviance in their behavior.

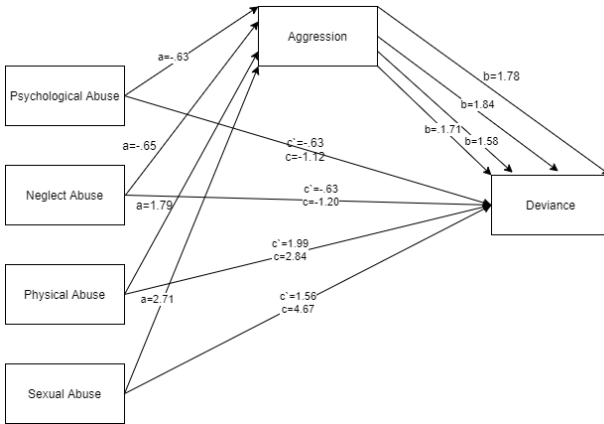
**Table 3. Indirect Effects of Aggression between child abuse and Deviant behavior (N=300)**

	<i>Effect</i>	<i>BootSE</i>	<i>95%BootCI</i>	
			<i>BootLL</i>	<i>BootUL</i>
Psychological Abuse	-1.12	.20	-1.54	-.73
Neglect Abuse	-1.20	.32	-1.86	-.61
Physical Abuse	2.84	.32	2.21	3.48
Sexual Abuse	4.67	.52	3.69	5.75

Note. *Effect* = *BootCI* = bootstrapped confidence interval, *BootUL* = bootstrapped upper limit *BootLL* = bootstrapped lower limit, *Effect* = standardized regression coefficient

The indirect effect is tested using non-parametric bootstrapping. As per results, Aggression was found to be significant mediator between sexual, psychological, neglect, physical abuse and deviance.

### Emerged Model



## IV. DISCUSSION

This research was designed to examine the link between child abuse, aggression and deviant behavior among adolescents. Deviant behavior in adolescents has been one of the variables that has been studied from the beginning of the research, but in the modern world it has gained much importance. The findings of the present study lend considerable support to the influential role played by child abuse and aggression in deviant behavior. It was intended to find out the consequence of child abuse and aggression on deviant behavior of adolescents.

Furthermore, it was also intended to test the mediating role of aggression in the relationship between child abuse and deviant behavior in adolescents.

It was hypothesized that there is likely to be significant relationship between child abuse, aggression and deviant behavior among adolescents. Results of the study supported this hypothesis as a significant relationship has been found between child abuse, aggression, and deviant behavior.

Previous studies also supported this study's hypothesis. In 2020, Qinhong Xie, et al., explored the relationship between child abuse and aggression among Chinese adolescents.<sup>17</sup> The results of the study indicated positive significant relationship among child abuse, callous traits, and aggression in deviant adolescents. Negative emotional responses due to child abuse and imprisonment in an aversive

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<sup>17</sup> Qinhong Xie, et al., *Childhood Maltreatment is Associated with Aggression among Male Juvenile Delinquents in China: The Mediating Effects of Callous-Unemotional Traits and Self-Control*, FRONTIERS PSYCHOL. 11 (2020).

family setting can also lead adolescents to display deviant behaviors.<sup>18</sup>

The other hypothesis of the present study stated that there is likely to be a mediating effect of aggression between child abuse and deviant behavior in adolescents. The study's findings showed that aggression plays an important mediating role in the relationship between child abuse and adolescent deviant behavior. Hence, the results of this study support this hypothesis. Previous research also support the results. Anger is seen as a mediator<sup>19</sup> and moderation factor for aggression and deviant behavior. In addition, anger is seen as a trigger for deviant behavior. Compared to offenders who did not engage in aggression, offenders who did engage in aggression find it more difficult to control their

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<sup>18</sup> Inga Dora Sigfusdottir, et al. *Suicidal Ideations and Attempts among Adolescents Subjected to Childhood Sexual Abuse and Family Conflict/Violence: The Mediating Role of Anger and Depressed Mood*, 36 J. ADOLESCENCE 1227 (2013).

<sup>19</sup> Rick Trinkner, et al., *Don't Trust Anyone over 30: Parental Legitimacy as a Mediator between Parenting Style and Changes in Delinquent Behavior over Time*, 35 J. ADOLESCENCE 119 (2012).

behavior and are more likely to suffer from anger.<sup>20</sup> There are several studies that link early child maltreatment to later aggression and deviant behavior.<sup>21</sup> A research study on anger acting as a mediator between peer victimization and deviant behavior in a population of South Korea was conducted in 2018 by Gyeongseok Oh and Eric J. Connolly.<sup>22</sup> Anger accounted for 27.06% of the total direct impact of peer victimization in late childhood on the adolescent's early behavioral disorders. Findings of this research provided support of applications of strain theory for cross cultures, which helped in explanation of the longitudinal link between deviant behavior, aggression and peer victimization.

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<sup>20</sup> J. Martin Ramirez & José Manuel Andreu, *Aggression, and Some Related Psychological Constructs (Anger, Hostility, and Impulsivity) Some Comments from a Research Project*, 30 NEUROSCIENCE & BIOBEHAVIORAL REV. 276 (2006).

<sup>21</sup> Magda Stouthamer-Loeber, et al., *Maltreatment of Boys and the Development of Disruptive and Delinquent Behavior*, 13 DEV. & PSYCHOPATHOLOGY 941 (2001).

<sup>22</sup> Gyeongseok Oh & Eric J. Connolly, *Anger as a Mediator Between Peer Victimization and Deviant Behavior in South Korea: A Cross-Cultural Application of General Strain Theory*, 65 CRIME & DELINQUENCY 1102 (2019).

In 2016, the impact of child abuse and aggression was studied on deviant behaviors among adolescents. This study also intended to examine the mediating roles of anger and frustration as well as gender differences. The results suggested that an experience of child maltreatment is linked with probability of engaging in deviant behaviors. The mediating role of negative emotions, especially anger was also highlighted in the results, including aggression, depression, deviant behaviors, low self-esteem, self-destructive behaviors, property crimes, and delinquency.<sup>23</sup> Studies have also revealed that the more severe the abuse is the greater is its probability of contributing to an increased chance of psychological and social problems in adulthood. Adolescents may also be pressed into deviant behaviors by the negative emotional responses resulting from the strain caused by child maltreatment and the feelings of being trapped in

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<sup>23</sup> Sigfusdottir, et al., 36 J. ADOLESCENCE 1227 (2013); H. Y. Swanson, et al., *Juvenile Crime, Aggression and Delinquency after Sexual Abuse: A Longitudinal Study*, 43 BRIT. J. CRIMINOLOGY 729 (2003).

their aversive home environments.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in 2010, Timothy Brezina found that in addition to a direct effect, anger also mediated the relationship between child abuse and an individual's deviant attitude.<sup>25</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to interrogate the relationship between child abuse, aggression and deviant behavior in adolescents. The results of the above-mentioned research are in favor of our present study. On the whole, results calculated prove our hypothesis and also corresponds to the research done on these variables. Hence, it was proved that child abuse significantly correlated with aggression. Moreover, aggression was also positively correlated with deviant behavior. Furthermore, the relationship between child abuse and deviant behavior in adolescents was mediated by aggression.

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<sup>24</sup> Sigfusdottir, et al., 36 J. ADOLESCENCE 1227 (2013).

<sup>25</sup> Robert Agnew & Timothy Brezina, "General Strain Theory," HANDBOOK ON CRIME AND DEVIANCE (2019), at 145-160.



In conclusion, deviant behavior in adolescents is an alarming issue which results in a number of problematic outcomes later in life. Moreover, there is lack of research on deviant behavior in adolescents in developing countries particularly in Pakistan. While addressing the issue of deviant behavior among adolescents these variables, particularly aggression (which acts as mediator between child abuse and deviant behavior) and child abuse, must be taken into account and thoroughly worked upon in order to deal effectively with behavioral issues in adolescents. They are the most vulnerable group whose proper growth and development are important in shaping a better future of not only themselves but also the society as a whole.

## VI. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A number of limitations have been noted in the present research. Correlation research design was used for the present study. Causation is not explained by this type of research design as it explains

relationship only. Further research in this area needs to be conducted with experimental research design. Moreover, cultural variances can be viewed as a limitation because the current study's results are in accordance with Pakistani culture which is different from western culture. Future research can benefit if they take samples having greater demographics as well as more study variables that are linked with deviant behaviors especially impulsiveness, peer influence and personality traits etc. The social and preventive approaches should be considered for the identification, elimination and neutralization of causes and conditions that cause deviant behavior.

## VII. IMPLICATIONS

Information from current research can greatly help parents and educators improve their understanding of the key factors involved in the development of deviant behavior in children leading to deviance in adolescence. To avoid the problem of deviant behavior in adolescents, a comprehensive approach to parents, teachers, and healthcare

professionals can be suggested. Prevention plans can be developed such as parental education, training session, and public education. Thus, it is the need of the hour for communities and for families to work while having support of the stakeholders. It will help them to speak out against child abuse and aggression, which eventually reduces mental health issues in society. Prevention of deviant behavior can be done by the monitoring of risk factors for deviant behavior especially child abuse and aggression, which will help parents in correction of deviant behavior among their children.

Deviant behavior is a serious issue not only at the individual level but also the familial and societal level. So, the statistics regarding the root causes of deviant behavior, especially child abuse (particularly child sexual abuse as well as physical abuse) and aggression among adolescents, should be gathered at provincial and national levels for the estimation of true burdens of these issues on our society. It will help to take appropriate actions accordingly and it

will help government to make policies and special laws against abusers.