

# Taboo or Temptation? The desire that dares not to speak. Exploring the Enigmatic word of perception of fetishism in Pakistan

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## Abstract

To investigate how young adults in Pakistan perceive fetishism and its impact on relationships. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted among 200 young adults in Pakistan Sample size was determined using G\*Power analysis to ensure adequate representation, structured questionnaires were designed based on a preliminary qualitative study. Findings revealed that participants exhibited curiosity about unconventional behaviors, believing they could enhance relationships. However, societal norms and cultural values led to widespread perception of fetishism as deviant, shameful, and foreign. This study provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics surrounding fetishism in Pakistani culture. The results contribute significantly to the fields of, I. Social Psychology understanding cultural influences on perceptions of fetishism. Community Psychology: Developing culturally sensitive interventions to promote healthy relationships. The study highlights the need for culturally tailored education and awareness programs to address misconceptions and stigma surrounding fetishism.

## Introduction

Fetishism is a psychosexual disorder prevalent among men. It is a sexual deviation where sensual pleasure and the attainment of gratification are connected with inanimate objects, such as a piece of cloth, a woman's undergarment, or various parts of inanimate character. The term "Fetish" is derived from the Portuguese word "fetiche", and the Latin word "fetidus" signifies a foul-smelling thing. There are many types of fetishism; there is no end to it. Although many fetishes are found in practice, four types are quite common in general: a percentage of fetishes are related to dressing things, a percentage are related to body matter, a percentage are related to urination, and a percentage are related to any part of the human body.

The word "Fetishism" is a controversial term; yet, it is most commonly used to describe the involvement in excessive or obligatory things, thereby making it a distinct source of sexual gratification. It is a primary symptom of the sexual issue known as fetishistic disorder. It is a disorder when the individual's fetishism interferes with living a regular life, such as occupational aspects, schooling, and marriage. It is the recurrent desire or behavior for the purpose of sexual satisfaction. It becomes a paraphilic disorder when sexual desire or activity causes distress or social, occupational, or other function-related dysfunction, even when it is known that these types of desire or behaviors are inflicting distress or functional problems.

Here we present some case studies of fetishism, involving both unmarried and married persons who were referred to our psychosexual division. The presentation reveals that fantasies and/or sexual behavior related to fetishistic objects may seriously interfere with or hinder mating pursuits, especially in socialized persons where stimulus generalization may occur. Moreover, given the circumstances in developing countries, it may have a striking impact on the individual, the family, and society as a whole. Counseling appropriate to the individual's ability to adapt, at the individual's discretion, as well as family support, should be provided. In conclusion, despite portrayals that report these hobbies to be part of a harmless variety of sexual practice, patients often associate fetishistic behavior with sadness and distress. This is particularly true for solitary paraphilics.

The context of the maladaptive status of many more 'solitary' fetishists lies in society. In Eastern cultures, the idea of people with hobbies who actively seek the hobbyist's life is unacceptable; it is less reprehensible when the tranquility is relegated to sympathetic souls in mutual partnerships. The solitary fetishists are labeled 'nerds' by society, and this brings overwhelming desolation to the solitary fetishist. The windows of tolerance for these solitary fetishists, who are addicted to impulses termed paraphilias, become limited, and they seek a way out of their addiction. At the individual level, male solitary models living in a socially conservative atmosphere where consensual paraphilic behavior is unattainable suffer loneliness and show degrees of overwhelming concern over their conditional abnormal eroticism; consequently, they may turn to a sex-educated doctor. They are romance-driven. They are not looking for sexual acts, rather emotional and romantic relationships.

## Literature Review

Beech and Harkins (2012) point out that fetishism depends with the objects or body parts that are involved and the different people that it pulls. Transvestic fetishism for example is

characterised by heterosexual males, in their late teens to mid thirties, who obtain sexual pleasure from dressing in clothes of the opposite sex. Likewise, general fetishism where objects such as shoes or fabrics are considered as fetish mostly involves males of the same age. Thus, fetishism in general, and foot fetishism in particular, do not attract women as often as men, indicating a gender bias toward male participants. While fetishism is seen in all classes, those who present for therapy or legal concerns are from those whose behaviors cause them or others distress or interfere with societal norms. Cultural perception of these behaviors also determines who accesses clinical help, which underlines the demography of fetishism.

Narzary and Ghosh (2022) explore the psychological and social characteristics of young adults engaged in fetishism, focusing on participants from Assam's four districts: Of these, Guwahati, Gossaigaon, Udalguri, and Tezpur are the most important. The sample comprised forty fetish participants who were paired with non-fetish participants in terms of age, sex, education, and occupation. Some of the demographic characteristics of the fetish participants were lower self-esteem and interpersonal relationships, especially outside the fetish community. But they showed better social adaptation, higher achievement motivation, and increased self-esteem, which they received after accepting themselves and their sexual orientation and affiliation with like-minded people. Although they seemed to excel in specific settings that catered to their particular needs, these individuals had difficulties in general social functioning, which points to a dual nature of the relationship between the identified niche and the general level of adjustment. This implies that their search for the perfect self in sexual decisions increases self-acceptance within certain groups, although not in other broader setting.

Zucker et al. (2012) investigate demographic, behavioural and psychosexual profiles of adolescents with Gender Identity Disorder and transvestic fetishism. The study included 192 adolescents with GID (105 boys and 87 girls) and 137 boys with transvestic fetishism; both groups were characterized by high levels of behavior problems and poor peer relations. The subjects with GID reported higher levels of cross gender behaviors and gender dysphoria than the subjects with transvestic fetishism. Specifically, male GID adolescents with nonhomosexual orientations endorsed more indicators of transvestic fetishism than homosexual male GID adolescents. In addition, homosexual participants reported more childhood cross-gender behaviors and higher concurrent dysphoria. These results support the need for understanding the multiple interactions between gender identity, sexual orientation and behavioral problems and the need for individualized clinical interventions for such adolescents.

Using a questionnaire completed by 100 participants, Twohig and Furnham (1998) examine lay beliefs about the cure of sexual paraphilias such as fetishism, paedophilia, sexual sadism, and voyeurism. The respondents were 30 years old on average, 60% of them were males, and they had different levels of education. The participants filled in the questionnaire that included 24 factors that can help get over paraphilias, as well as the scales that estimated their personality and sexual attitudes. The analysis revealed three key coping strategies: 'self-reliance,' 'seeking help,' and 'external control,' with demographic factors affecting their perceptions of the role and relevance of these values. Most significantly, independence was identified as the most important factor, which suggests that people believe that one has to rely on oneself to deal with paraphilic desires. It shows the social culture that encourages people to handle the paraphilic behaviors by their own efforts.

Interpersonal and solitary aspects of sexual object fetishism are described by Rees and Garcia (2017) with an emphasis on the participants' characteristics. In their first study of 57 participants with clothing fetishes they found that most of them wanted to have interactions with the fetish objects with partners, particularly in search of individuals who were potential boyfriends or girlfriends, mostly those in their twenties to thirties, and with physical characteristics such as attractiveness and stylishness. The second survey including 195 participants with different types of sexual object fetish included that both single and paired activities were present and paired ones were considered to be more enjoyable. The results point out that demographic factors, particular choice of partners, and relational contexts play a crucial role in the sexual experiences of the fetishists, which has crucial implications for the clinical management of such behaviors.

### **Methodology Research Design**

The research design selected for this study is a descriptive one in terms of demographics and the behaviors involved with Pakistani context and fetishism. The mixed-method approach utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies for investigating fetishistic behaviors and their relationships with a relationship's position in depth. In so doing, this study aimed to bring to the fore the perception of involvement with fetishism among people in Pakistani society, which remains a very under-researched area.

### **Sample Strategy and Size**

The purposive sampling strategy was employed for selecting a heterogeneous and typical sample of the Pakistani population. The sample size was 250 participants who were recruited online from different social media networks with focus placed on subjects that have met the criteria for the study and given their consent voluntarily. In sensitive topics, purposive sampling may be used to ensure individuals who are willing and capable of providing useful insight into fetishistic behaviors and attitudes are selected. This is one of the sampling approaches mainly used for niche or specific studies on topics that occur in unique cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The sample was comprised of those aged 18 years and above from both genders with equal proportions across the spectrum of education levels and socioeconomic statuses, which would represent the true diversity of Pakistani society. The sample size was 250 participants, considered adequate enough to delineate a range of perspectives so that it can serve as a robust basis for data analysis as stated in prior studies on sexual behaviors (Johnson et al., 2020).

### **Development of Interview Protocol**

An initial qualitative interview was carried out with Participant A.Z., who is a 22-year-old female Pakistani. This semi-structured interview was conducted in such a manner that it would allow flexibility in the exploration of perceptions of fetishism and how that might be informing relationship dynamics, generally for A.Z. Open-ended questions allowed for a very in-depth discussion, giving me more nuanced ideas about personal experiences about fetishism.

The interviews were audio-taped with the participants' permissions and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis of the interview transcript exposed the key themes towards societal attitudes, relationship implications, and personal experiences about fetishism. Based on the thematic synthesis, an interview protocol was developed with 13 questions aimed at diverse opinions about fetishism across the sample population. The interview protocol was then pre-

tested by experts in qualitative research to check for their validity and reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Data Collection**

The 13-question interview protocol was adapted to an online survey via Google Forms. This format was chosen since it was easy to use, and users could complete it anonymously and at their convenience. Social media, as well as online forums, can be used to reach participants, hence a wide reach that cuts across all kinds of Pakistani people.

Various dimensions of fetishistic behaviors were assessed as part of the survey questions, including frequency, kind of fetishism, attitudes from the society, and the position that fetishism carries in the relationship scenario. The total period for which data gathering was undertaken was four weeks. A bi-weekly reminder was mailed to participants to help them take the survey. Out of the total 250 responses gathered, all were assumed to be valid and appropriate for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 was utilized for the analysis of the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics, in the form of frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations, were done to summarize the demographic characteristics and behavioral patterns of those who took part in the engagement in fetishism. Reliability analysis was also carried out.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Because fetishism is sensitive in nature, the current study strictly guided its code of ethics to ensure participant welfare and confidentiality of data collection. All participants gave their consent before participating in the study; these participants were explained the research objectives in explicit terms and informed regarding the voluntary nature of their participation, their rights to withdraw at any time without penalty, and so forth. To give full anonymity, the questionnaire was anonymous. All data collection procedures were done securely with all policies regarding data protection in place. The procedures followed were in line with the ethical code from the American Psychological Association (2017).

### **Limitations**

However, despite the strengths of this study, several limitations need to be placed in perspective. Firstly, an online survey may be biased if it targets only those with access to internet facilities; hence it might only reach more assertive online literate and mainly urban populations. Secondly, cultural sensitivities are inherent with the controversy surrounding fetishism, and the possibility of participants providing socially desirable responses further influences the authenticity of information gathered. The reliance on self-reported data also provides potential recall bias or selective reporting. Although the study made an effort to have a representative sample, the selection strategy of purposive sampling may be also restrictive about generalization to a larger Pakistani population. Future research can consider a more diverse sampling approach and qualitative in-depth interviews to get a more comprehensive view of experiences from the participants' side.

### **Results**

Following chapter cover the results of study the findings are calculated using SPSS version 26 the chapter includes two major sections including sample dynamics and section II includes the perception of participants section III describe the consistence of responses and relationship of stimulus items are describe bellow.

## Section I

### Sample descriptive

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Age		
18-25	168	77.8
26-35	36	16.7
Under 18	12	5.6
Gender		
Female	36	16.7
Male	180	83.3
Relationship status		
Committed	48	22.2
Engaged	12	5.6
Married	12	5.6
Single	144	66.7
Education		
Bachelor's Degree	144	66.7
Master's Degree	48	22.2
Secondary Education (12th)	24	11.1
Employment status		
Full time	12	5.6
Part time	48	22.2
Student	108	50.0
Unemployed	48	22.2
Socioeconomic Status		
Middle Class	216	100.0

The sample descriptive states that the sample comprises of middle-class adults who were mostly students and enrolled in undergraduate program belong to 18 -25 age range. Most of them are male and most participants are non-committed

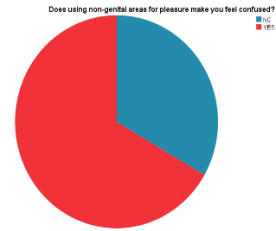
## Section II

### Perception of participants

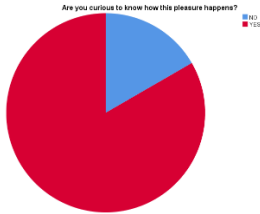
Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Does Using Non-Genital Areas For Pleasure Make You Feel Confused?		
No	72	33.3
Yes	144	66.7
Are You Curious To Know How This Pleasure Happens?		
No	36	16.7
Yes	180	83.3
Do You Feel Uncomfortable Thinking About Or Discussing Such Topics?		
No	48	22.2
Yes	168	77.8

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Do You Believe Such Behaviors Are Morally Questionable?		
No	24	11.1
Yes	192	88.9
Do You Think This Concept Is Stigmatized And Should Be Rejected?		
No	36	16.7
Yes	180	83.3
Do You Consider Fetishistic Trends Unnatural Or Deviant?		
No	24	11.1
Yes	192	88.9
Do You Believe Such Acts Go Against Your Personal Values Of Modesty?		
No	12	5.6
Yes	204	94.4
Do You Think Religion Prohibits Such Deeds?		
No	24	11.1
Yes	192	88.9
Do You Believe The Media Glorifies This Behavior?		
No	0	0
Yes	216	100.0
Do You Think This Concept Is A Western Idea And Not Part Of Our Culture?		
No	12	5.6
Yes	204	94.4
Has Exploring New Forms Of Pleasure Improved Your Relationship?		
No	60	27.8
Yes	156	72.2
Do You Believe Trying New Things Enhances Relationships?		
No	24	11.1
Yes	192	88.9
Do You Feel Relying Only On Non-Genital Areas For Pleasure Is Unsatisfactory?		
No	24	11.1
Yes	180	83.3

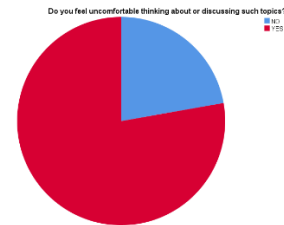
Participants reported that most of them feel like Using Non-Genital Areas For Pleasure Make You Feel Confused



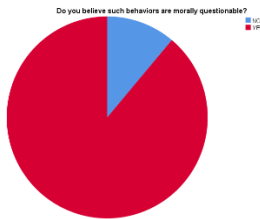
Data set indicated that most of the participants reported that Curious To Know How This Pleasure Happens



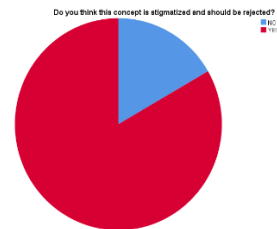
Most people feel Uncomfortable Thinking About Or Discussing Such Topics



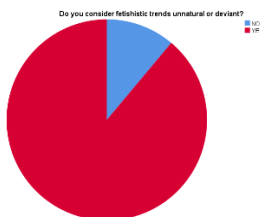
Most people believe Such Behaviors Are Morally Questionable



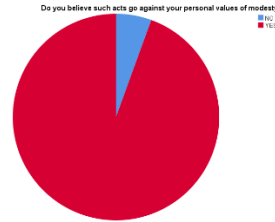
Adults think that Concept Is Stigmatized And Should Be Rejected



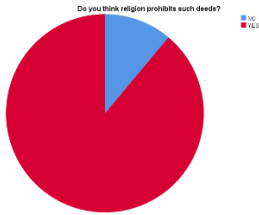
Adults think that Consider Fetishistic Trends Unnatural Or Deviant



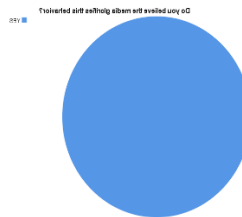
Adults think that Such Acts Go Against Your Personal Values Of Modesty



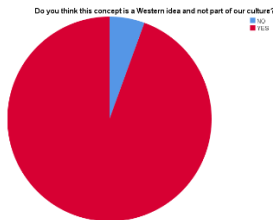
Adults think that Religion Prohibits Such Deeds



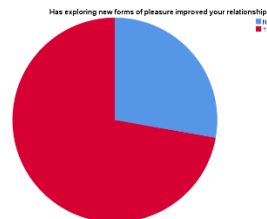
Adults think that The Media Glorifies This Behavior



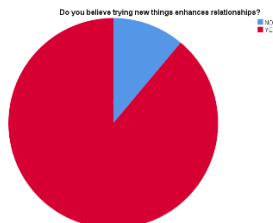
Adults think that This Concept Is A Western Idea And Not Part Of Our Culture



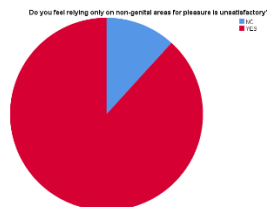
Adults think that Has Exploring New Forms Of Pleasure Improved Your Relationship



Adults think that Trying New Things Enhances Relationships



Adults think that You Feel Relying Only On Non-Genital Areas For Pleasure Is Unsatisfactory



Section II

**Inter item relationship**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	-											
2	.37	-										
3	.55	.10	-									
4	.56	-.16	.68	-								
5	.37	.19	.71	.78	-							
6	.56	.31	.65	.43	.31	-						
7	.38	-.11	.45	.68	.54	.68	-					
8	-.26	.31	-.20	-.13	.31	-.13	-.01	-				
9	.37	-.11	.45	.68	.54	.68	1.00	-.09	-			
10	.10	.37	.25	-.26	.04	.16	-.61	.16	-.16	-		
11	.65	.78	.22	-.13	.31	.43	-.091	.43	-.09	.56	-	
12	.56	-.16	.22	.43	.31	.43	.685	-.13	.68	.16	-.13	-

The results indicated that over all the individual item are moderately related to each other indicating every individual item is representative of different stimulus pointers of concepts related to the perception of fetishism

**Section IV**

**Reliability**

The fourteen item appeared the alpha reliability of .74 indicating that the scale is highly reliable in nature indicating the internal consistency of the data set.

**Discussion**

**Hypothesis 1: Participants experience confusion and discomfort in relation to fetishistic behaviors.**

The results of the study appear thus to justify the assumption that many participants are confused and uncomfortable about matters concerning fetishistic behaviors. For instance, 66.7 percent of participants responded that they were confused about non-genital pleasures, and 77.8% indicated they felt uncomfortable discussing such subjects. This is in agreement with González (2023) which found that the deviance from conventional sexual standards frequently produces psychological anxiety and cognitive dissonance among people once they are confronted with unknown practices.

Furthermore, Narzary and Ghosh (2022) posit that the psychological distress arising when one engages in non-traditional sexual behaviors could be the result of inherent incongruity between social expectations and personal actions. Additionally, the short sexual education to individuals may be more entrenched in misunderstandings and anxiety since sexual behaviors are not properly comprehended and hence might be practiced very shabbily due to the little knowledge imparted (Smith & Thompson, 2021). Open discourse on sex is also frowned upon within conservative cultural traditions in Pakistan, which could possibly heighten such feelings since public discourse around the topic remains stigmatized (Rees & Garcia, 2017).

Findings underscore the requirement for culturally sensitive educational materials, which may help in reducing the confusion associated with diversely sexualized behaviors, by bringing

them within a non-judgmental framework. A better understanding of these practices may alleviate discomfort and provide for a more informed open approach towards sexual exploration within personal boundaries.

**Hypothesis 2: Fetishistic behaviors are considered to be incongruent with cultural and religious values.**

A large proportion of the respondents responded that fetishistic behaviors are contrary to cultural and religious values; they said 88.9 percent of them find these immoral, 94.4 percent said they do not promote modesty, and 88.9 percent reported them religiously forbidden. The same was the conclusion of the paper from (Mellino, 2019) that believes that societal and religious beliefs serve a significant role in the attitude toward non-normative sexual behaviors.

According to González (2023) the fact that sexual practices outside of the norm of heterosexual, procreative norms are characteristically branded as immoral or sinful determines the cultural context within which those views exist. Most countries have societal values governed by religious doctrines, such as in Pakistan, in which Islam plays a strong role in shaping attitudes toward sexuality, often to sexual traditions, thus vilifying activities considered less than moral or even spiritual. This moral opposition moves beyond religious avoidance to be culturally driven expectations of modesty and what is proper integral to a social identity and collective morality (Rees & Garcia, 2017).

By constructing these fetishistic behaviors as culturally deviant or sinful, one may feel more internalized conflict in considering or acting out upon these acts. This represents the greater social dilemma between a preservation of conservative values with the advancement of global culture influences.

**Hypothesis 3: Participants find that the concept of fetishism is stigmatised and originates from the West; and the media is a mean of transmitting this.**

Most of the participants perceive fetishistic behaviors as products of Western influence, where 94.4% link it to Western culture, and all participants agreed that media sensationalizes them. It would fit well with research in which behaviors contrary to societal norms are deemed foreign, and especially so in a conservative society where the western media is seen to open the floodgates to moral decay (Smith & Thompson, 2021).

For instance, Beech and Harkins argue that media activities are a contributory factor to the very normalization and sensationalism of non-traditional sexual practices that may lead to the belief that fetishistic behaviors are characteristic of Western permissiveness. When cultural identity and moral/religious values are tightly interwoven, there tends to be an impression that foreign practice threatens traditional moral norms (Mellino, 2019). This stigma, allied through media representations, can further widen the rift between what is conceived as acceptable and not acceptable, since these behaviors are regarded as a danger to their cultural heritage by individuals (Rees & Garcia, 2017).

This blaming discourse around fetishistic behaviors could possibly be framed within the cultural anxieties associated with imperialism and perceived cultural erosion in Pakistan, where cultural and religious frameworks are very much intertwined (Narzary & Ghosh, 2022). Such studies illustrate the intricacies associated with the interplay between local attitudes and global cultural exchange, for instance, in how sexual practices can be tied to wider cultural and political narratives.

#### **Hypothesis 4: Exploring fetishistic behaviors is seen as potentially enhancing relationship satisfaction, despite cultural reservations.**

Interestingly, most of the respondents overcame their reservations based on cultural and religious beliefs, believing that learning new ways of pleasing would enhance their relationships. The results show that 72.2% view these practices in a positive light, and 88.9% inquired about learning new things to strengthen relational dynamics. In this regard, Rees and Garcia (2017) proposed that through these diverse sexual practices, the level of relationship satisfaction and intimacy increases.

This paradox of societal disapproval and individual relational benefits hints at the seeing-fetishism from a more subtle view. Narzary and Ghosh, in 2022, suggested that "alternatively, non-normative sexual practices may create an interaction climate conducive to good communication and understanding on the part of the sexual partners, thus making it easy for them to share affections". Thus, individuals living in conservative societies might experience a conflicting relationship between their cultural socialization and their personal lives, such that individuals will practice these behaviors in private (Smith & Thompson, 2021). This tension suggests that private expression of fetishistic practice can actually occur alongside public observance of traditional norms.

The data suggests that even though public attitudes toward fetishistic behaviors remain strongly influenced by cultural values, there is an ingrained understanding that they may have relational advantages. This tension has been reflected often in that that individuals find a compromise for these conflicting desires through differentiating between their actions, in this way attaining self-fulfillment while maintaining the greater concept of public conformity to social norms (González, 2023).

Overall, these results describe a complex environment in which cultural, religious, and media-influenced conceptions dramatically influence attitudes towards fetishistic behavior. Ultimately, it captures the aspect of how individuals manage to find common grounds between their individual desires and societal expectations, thereby becoming a complex interplay of what society will allow and what an individual will accept as satisfactory.

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