

A Model for the Effect of Parent-Child Conflicts and Main Family Function on Students' Aggression, Mediated by Perfectionism and Identity Styles

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Abstract

Aim: This study aimed to present a model for the effect of parent-child conflicts and main family function on aggression, mediated by perfectionism and identity styles, in students. The statistical population comprised senior high-school students in Kermanshah, Iran, in 2022-2023, of whom a sample of 384 was selected via random cluster sampling. The data collection instruments included standard questionnaires. Data was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings showed that parent-child conflicts and main family function directly, and indirectly through perfectionism and identity styles, affected the aggression of female senior high school students in Kermanshah. Therefore, it is possible to alleviate students' aggression by reducing parent-child conflicts, strengthening family functioning, boosting informational and normative identity styles, and correctly guiding perfectionism.

Keywords: *aggression, parent-child conflicts, identity styles, main family function, perfectionism*

Introduction

Adolescence is one of the most critical periods of life, and entering this period exposes adolescents to certain problems (Sheikholeslami, A., Asadollahi, E., & Mohammadi, 2017). The most important psychological disorder threatening the health of people, especially adolescents, is aggression. Social psychologists consider aggression as a conscious behavior that aims to inflict physical or psychological pain and suffering (Xie et al., 2016). Aggression is one of the important problems of adolescence, which can create the background for many problems and risky behaviors in the future (Hossein Khanzadeh, Maleki Manesh, Taher and Meghrad, 2017). According to the latest research, 68.3% of adolescent girls demonstrate psychological aggression (Muñoz-Fernández & Sánchez-Jiménez, 2020), which emphasizes the need for more research on girls' aggressive behaviors (Boutin et al., 2021).

The way parents interact and talk with their children can be associated with the children's physical and social aggression. Adolescents' increasing effort to achieve autonomy and independence can lead to parent-child conflicts in early adolescence (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2020; Smetana & Rote, 2019; Branje, 2018).

Another factor related to aggression in adolescents is the main family function, which refers to the family's ability to perform its duties, as well as its role in human life and social development (Riz Esteban Ruiz-Esteban, Méndez, Fernández-Sogorb et al., 2021; Jia & Li, 2021). A variable that can mediate the relationship between parent-child conflicts, main family function, and aggression is perfectionism (Yıldız et al., 2020; Gluch, 2018). The standards that perfectionists set for themselves are high, and they work hard to meet these standards and evaluate themselves based on the outcomes (Rice et al., 1998; Yıldız et al., 2020). Besides, as a key element that can be linked to adolescents' identity and identity styles, family has an important place. identity provides a

vehicle for understanding and operating within one's sociocultural surroundings (Ozer, Obaidi, Schwartz (2023), and Identity styles are the relative preference of people to use specific ways of solving identity problems and processing information about themselves (Shareati & Khaleghipour, 2023). In this regard, identity styles become prominent as the other mediating variable.

In this research, it is assumed that perfectionism and identity styles can mediate the relationship between parent-child conflict, main family function, and aggression.

Methodology

This was an applied, descriptive, cross-sectional study based on structural equation modeling (SEM). In terms of data collection, it was a cross-sectional survey. The statistical population consisted of all female senior high school students who were studying in Kermanshah (Iran) in the academic year 2021-2022. The population size was 60,000, according to the statistics from the regional Education Department. Cluster random sampling was performed, and the sample size was 384 based on the Cochran formula.

The Aggression subscale of Eysenck & Wilson's (1975) Personality Profiler, Fine et al.'s (1983) 15-item Parent-Child Relationship Scale, Hovestadt et al.'s 40-item Family-of-Origin Scale (1985), Terry-Short et al.'s (1995) 40-item Positive and Negative Perfectionism Scale, and Berzonsky's (2013) 27-item Identity Style Inventory were used to collect the data needed to measure the research variables. The validity and reliability of these instruments were confirmed in previous studies. The validity of the questionnaires was favorable in the current research, based on the opinions of 10 educational sciences experts. Moreover, the reliability of the questionnaire was checked based on Cronbach's alpha and equaled 0.720, 0.826, 0.910, 0.820, and 0.749, respectively, which was favorable.

Data analysis was performed in SPSS v. 26 and SmartPLS v. 3. Descriptive and demographic statistics included frequency, indices of central tendency and dispersion, relative frequency percentage, and cumulative frequency. As for inferential statistics used to test the research hypotheses, the test of the normality of the data distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov), factor analysis, path analysis, and partial least squares (PLS) with SEM were used.

Results

A total of 384 female students participated, 61.5% of whom studied in public and 38.5% in private high schools. The highest frequency belonged to the 12th grade (48.4%) and the lowest to the 10th grade (24.7%). In terms of age group, the highest frequency was related to the age group of 17-18 years and the lowest to the age group of above 18 years. The mean values of the research variables were as follows: parent-child conflicts (1.742), main family function (3.595), aggression (0.748), perfectionism (2.930), diffuse-avoidant identity style (2.590), informational identity style (2.979), and normative identity style (3.097).

The research model with standardized coefficients is depicted in Figure 1.

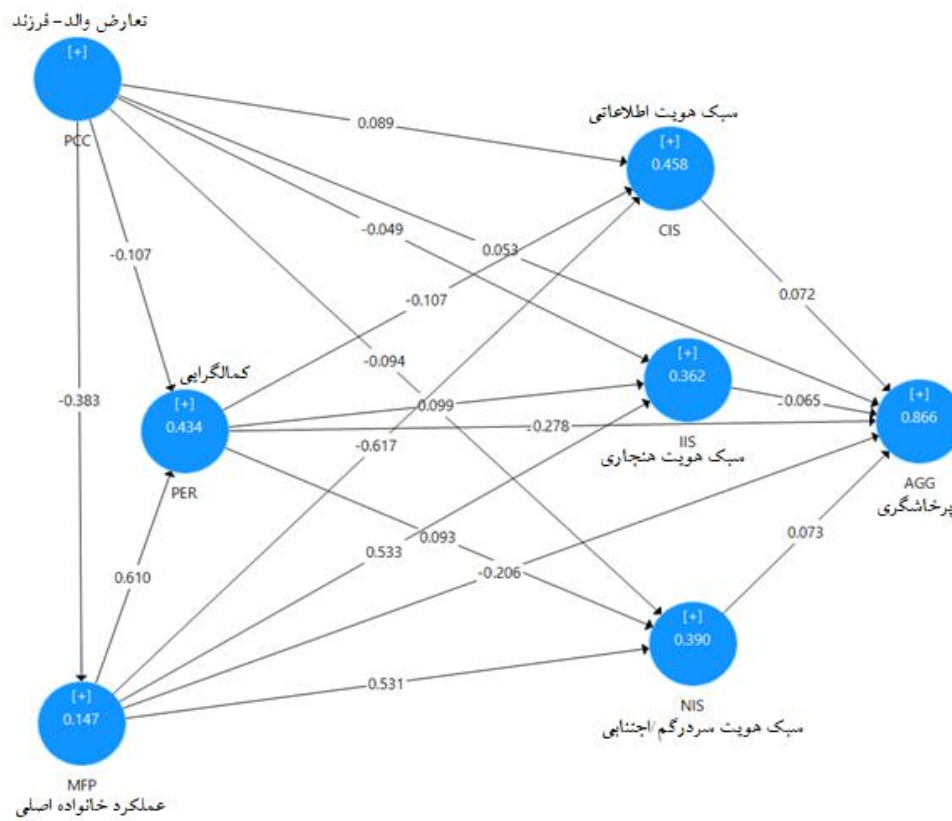


Figure 1. Testing the research model with standardized path coefficients

The test of the research model with standardized path coefficients showed that the significance level of the variables' relationships in most of the paths was less than 0.05 at the confidence interval of 0.95. Moreover, the model test in significance revealed that the t values in the relationship between the variables were greater than 1.96 at the confidence interval of 0.95 or more than 2.58 at the confidence interval of 0.99. Therefore, the relationships between the variables were significant.

Table 1 lists the values of the standardized coefficients, t value, and significance level of the paths.

Table 1. Standardized coefficients, t value, and significance level

Row	Path	Coefficient	t value	P value	Result
1	Diffuse-avoidant identity style → aggression	0.078-	1.985	0.048	P < 0.05
2	Informational identity style → aggression	0.103	1.287	0.199	P > 0.05
3	Main family function → aggression	0.775-	15.048	0.000	P < 0.05
4	Main family function → Diffuse-avoidant identity style	0.492	9.959	0.000	P < 0.05
5	Main family function → informational identity style	0.279	5.082	0.000	P < 0.05
6	Main family function → normative identity style	0.306	5.53	0.000	P < 0.05
7	Main family function → perfectionism	0.509-	15.352	0.000	P < 0.05
8	normative identity style → aggression	0.026	0.316	0.752	P > 0.05
9	Parent-child conflicts → aggression	0.137	3.092	0.002	P < 0.05
10	Parent-child conflicts → diffuse-avoidant identity style	0.093	1.934	0.001	P < 0.05

11	Parent-child conflicts → informational identity style	0.009	0.205	0.838	P > 0.05
12	Parent-child conflicts → main family function	0.364	9.692	0.000	P < 0.05
13	Parent-child conflicts → normative identity style	0.019-	0.44	0.66	P > 0.05
14	Parent-child conflicts → perfectionism	0.256	7.386	0.000	P < 0.05
15	Perfectionism → aggression	0.122	3.022	0.003	P < 0.05
16	Perfectionism → diffuse-avoidant identity style	0.248	0.0443	0.000	P < 0.05
17	Perfectionism → informational identity style	0.515-	9.632	0.000	P < 0.05
18	Perfectionism → normative identity style	0.479-	9.124	0.000	P < 0.05

Based on Table 1, there was a significant relationship between the variables in most of the paths. There was no significant relationship, only in the paths of rows 2, 8, 11, and 13. The indirect relationships between the mediators are presented in Table 2 based on the Sobel test.

Table 2. Sobel test results to determine the variables' indirect relationship with aggression

Independent variable	Mediator	a	Sa	b	Sb	Sobel statistic	Sig. level
Parent-child conflicts	Perfectionism	0.151	0.056	0.340	0.032	2.576	0.009
	Diffuse-avoidant identity style	0.187	0.035	0.340	0.032	4.555	0.000
	Informational identity style	0.095-	0.046	0.340	0.032	2.001	0.044
	Normative identity style	0.061-	0.028	0.340	0.032	2.113	0.034
Main family function	Perfectionism	0.15	0.044	0.934-	0.039	3.37	0.000
	Diffuse-avoidant identity style	0.093-	0.032	0.934-	0.039	2.88	0.003
	Informational	0.068	0.025	0.934-	0.039	2.70	0.006
	Normative identity style	0.065	0.023	0.934-	0.039	2.80	0.005

According to Table 2, the significance level of the Sobel test statistics was less than 0.05. The Sobel statistic was also greater than 1.96. Thus, with a probability of 95%, perfectionism and identity styles mediated the relationship between parent-child conflicts, main family function, and aggression. Moreover, the values of most model fit indices were suitable, and thus, the fit of the model was optimal.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings are in line with the results of Evans et al. (2024), Nwufu et al. (2023), Matthews (2023), Navarro et al. (2022), Oliveros & Coleman (2021), Zagefka et al. (2021), Itahashi et al. (2018), Mastrotheodorosé et al., (2020), Smetana & Rote (2019), Rollins et al. (2018), Miller et al. (2017), and Behroozi et al. (2016).

One of the most important limitations of this study was the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the findings of the present research, authorities should address training the concepts of identity styles and perfectionism to students and their parents. Parents should assist in education and carry out aligned measures, which can play an important role in the students' successful identity. Positive parenting programs can be effective in treating students' aggression. It is suggested that future studies use in-depth interviews and qualitative methods.

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