

A causal-comparative study of the families' behavior styles, the students' mental condition and their attitudes towards human-relationships at school

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Abstract

The family's behavioral style and parents' relationship method with children are important elements in children's mental condition and attitude toward life and social relationships (such as their attitude toward human-relationships in school). This research, which was conducted on a sample of 1522 middle-school, high school, and pre-university level students in the province of Tehran, has tried to answer the question of how each of the families five parenting styles (in integrated, authoritative & responsive, indifferent, authoritarian, and chaotic families) impact the mental condition and attitude of adolescents and youths of middle schools and high school levels toward the school staff's type of behavior with students.

In order to measure the mental health factor, the individuals' normal condition from the respect of lack of anxiety, depression, aggressiveness, anti-social attitudes, and wrong-doing mentality are set as the judging

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standards. As well, five variables meaning the students' age, gender, education level, economical status, and cultural condition were investigated as the background variables. The statistical methods used in this research, apart from descriptive stats have included "comparison of means" and "multivariate regression analysis" for the purpose of predicting the effective elements on the students' mental condition and their attitude toward human-relationships at schools.

The research results showed that integrated, authoritative & responsive families have a positive impact and indifferent, authoritarian, and chaotic families have a negative impact on the students' mental health and their attitude toward the human relationships at schools.

Key-words: family behavior; mental condition; human-relationships; Integrated family, authoritative family; indifferent family; authoritarian family; permissive family; disturbed family

Concepts under study and the research backgrounds

The individuals and events that each child or adolescent sees or encounters in his/her life have an important impact on his/her development of character and social attitude process. The students' mental health and attitude toward human relationships in school is also influenced by various elements in the family, social, and educational life. Researchers show that the most important influential elements on the children's and youths' mental health and social attitude are the other people especially the child's or youth's parents (Berk, 2003). In responding to their children, parents reward some of their behaviors and resist against certain other behaviors. The parents are also the thinking, the mental, the behavioral, and the information model for their children.

Without doubt, a part of the students' behaviors is also due to their genetic and natural characteristics. Researchers have been able to show that children's and youths' behavior differences are obvious

from their very beginning of birth. At the meantime, the environmental elements have an undeniable role in these behaviors. Researches have demonstrated that the attachment of the mother to her child and the impact of the parents on the children during the first weeks or the first month of life is very intense and lasting.

The models of nourishing a child or the method of parenting also have an important role in how the character and the mental health develop in the children. Some of the researchers (including Maccoby & Martin, 1983) have separated and clarified four styles of parenting and have studied the relationship between each of them and children's character, mental health, and social behavior. These four parenting styles are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and indifferent. The behavior of each group of parents in these four types of parenting is different from the others.

A set of researches have been conducted in Iran with regards to issues related to family behavior styles and their influence on children, adolescents, and youths (Esma-eeli, 1380/2001; Ghasemi & Nurbala, 1380/2001; Yusefi & Colleagues, 1379/2000; Tajvand, 1377/1998; Purdarvish, 1376/1997; Hoseynian-AghaMaleki, 1376/1997; Jamshidi-Eyni, 1376/1997; Kefayat & Shokrkon, 1375/1996; Leyl-abadi, 1375/1996; Sobhani, 1375/1996; Shokrkon; & Bagheri, 1373/1994; Moradi, 1365/1986;). The mentioned researches are to an extent related to the subject of the research we are discussing in this article. In another research which is conducted in an extensive way for investigating the family behavior styles (Lotfabadi, 1381/2002) and is about how Iranians do their parenting, a relatively new categorization of the parenting styles has been conducted, which is in more balance with the Iranian national characteristics. In these studies, which are titled "Iranian Adolescents' and Youths' Condition, Attitude, and Difficulties across all over Iran" and are conducted on a very large research sample of 75 thousand individuals a variety of subjects are included and five types of families have been described in the following way: integrated and sincere family, authoritative family, indifferent family, authoritarian family, and disturbed family. Each of these family groups has their own special characteristics. Their adolescent and young children also, have a special attitude toward

their parents depending on which of the family groups they belong to. We have used the same model in our research. The main particulars of each of the five groups of families discussed (by using the mentioned research report, same, pp. 114 to 123) is offered as follows in a summarized way:

a- The sincere and integrated family: Existence of close and sincere relationship between the members, providing a warm and sincere environment in home, existence of expectation from each other for sincerity, affection, acceptable behaviors, existence of trust between the family members, and resolving the family issues through calm and sincere dialogs.

b- Authoritative family: Existence of power and greatness in the parents that raise respect, parents' feeling of responsibility toward the children and offering of the necessary assistance, parents' attention to children's activities, involving the children in the decision-makings and leaving the personal decision-making opportunities for children, understanding the children's condition and responding to their needs.

c- Indifferent family: Family members' lack of attention toward each other and showing no support for the children, family members' optional activity at pleasure, family members' loose activity with lack of care for each other, Parent's lack of interference in their children's work and behavior, lack of expectation from children, parents low amount of interest in their children's life issues, family members being busy in their own world and with their own problems.

d- Authoritarian family: The older members bullying around the younger members in the family, transfer of low amount of affection to children and putting too much pressure over their shoulders, too much expectation from the children, setting difficult regulation for children's behavior without paying attention to their needs, expecting the children to follow rules without question, limiting the children's natural freedom, and lack of permission for the mutual give-take process and dialog between the parents and children.

e- Disturbed family: An atmosphere that is not calm in the family relations or for the parents, dispute and struggle between the parents and the children, existence of physical punishment and physical fights in the family; verbal punishment and insult to the children by the family, and lack of mutual respect and friendly relationships in the family.

Looking carefully in the above families' behavior as well as considering the national researches (Lotfabadi, 1381/2002) shows that the sincere and integrated family and the authoritative and responsive family are the best types of family for children (and the other members of the family). On the other hand, the remaining three types of families meaning the indifferent family, the authoritarian family, and the disturbed family, are the most unsuccessful families in educating their children. World-wide researches also (including that of Steinberg, 1993, and Steinberg & colleagues, 1989) show that the responsive family is the best type of family, and the disturbed family, indifferent family, and the authoritarian family are the worst types of families for children. In other words, families with the characteristics that follow, provide better opportunities for their children: The family is an integrated and moderate and sincere family that has enough of both dignity and responsiveness regarding the children and has reasonable norms and rules as well as enough expectations from the children and supports and controls them (Santrock, 2001).

With regards to the meaning of mental health, the general attitude of the psychologists is that it is one of the aspects of general health (which means possessing full physical, mental, social, and spiritual welfare). Mental health has the importance of being a priority in young peoples' lives (and other individuals). What it specifically means is feeling satisfied, fresh, and high-spirited, while having mental balance, proper understanding of the realities, and offering an agreeable and effective response in facing them. In addition, mental health means having health interaction between the individual's inner worlds with the surrounding world, as well as having the ability to control and organize the inner desires and interests. Mental health also consists of having the mental characteristics and life-style which is not contradicting the

health norms of social-cultural life. It also means having constructive and generative activities in personal and social life. In our research we have investigated the adolescents' and youths' mental health shot-comings through studying the level of anxiety, depression, quarreling, anti-social attitude, and wrong-doing manner.

With regards to the students' attitude toward human-relationships in school, we have investigated the students' opinion about the school principal, vice-principal, and teachers in eight different managerial and educational categories.

Research Methodology

We have been after investigating a certain research assumption based on the theoretical foundations explained above. This assumption is clarifying that the adolescent and youth students belonging to integrated families and the responsive families are firstly possessing stronger mental health in comparison with those of the indifferent and authoritarian and disturbed families and secondly possessing more positive attitude toward human-relationships in school.

The sample that was being studied in our research was selected through the cluster random sampling method, which included 1522 adolescent and youth students between the ages of 12 and 18 in the middle-schools, high schools, and the pre-university level throughout the province of Tehran.

The independent variable in this research is the family's behavioral style and the dependent variables are consisted of the most important shortages in the youth students' mental health and their attitude toward human-relationships in school. In order to assess the mental health shortcomings, the individual's condition was judged with regards to five aspects of anxiety, depression, quarreling, anti-social attitudes, and wrong-doing interests. As well, the five issues of students' age, gender, education level, economical status, and cultural status were investigated as the background variables.

The research tools used in the research is the “questionnaire on the parenting styles and the Iranian adolescent and youth students mental health shortages”, which was normalized on a 75 thousand individual Iranian adolescent and youth students and its validity and reliability were confirmed (Lotfabadi, 1381/2002).

Research Findings

The findings of this research are calculated and analyzed in three parts which include the introductory statistical findings of the frequency distribution of the background variables, comparison of the means, and the regression for predicting the impact of parenting styles on the students' mental health and attitude toward human-relationship at school) along with a final conclusion. Here, we will be offering two introductory statistical findings (economical and cultural status), the means comparison, and the regression analysis results.

a- Youth's economical and cultural status

With regards to the students' economical status (which is evaluated based on the variables of total monthly income of the family members, life condition and facilities, and the conditions of the students' place of living), our findings show that a 91 percent majority of the adolescents and youths are in low and relatively low economical status and only 9 percent of these adolescents and youths have high economical status. As well, three fourth of the adolescent and youth students in middle-school and high-school level in the province of Tehran are at a low and relatively low cultural level and close to one fourth have a suitable condition with this regard (The cultural status is evaluated based on the parent's education level, the father's and the mother's job type, and the family's cultural facilities).

b- Means Comparison

In the section related to the means comparison of various family behavior styles, students' mental health shortages and their attitude toward human-relations at school are investigated in four subject

areas, which are gender, education level, economical status, and cultural status. These statistics help us observe the students' difference from the point of view of the family behavior style, shortages in mental health, and their attitude toward human-relationships in school. This is done by considering the students' age, gender, the school level they are studying in (middle-school, high-school, or pre-university), the economical level, and the cultural level.

Our findings show that there is significant difference between the boys and the girls regarding the family's behavior style and subjects of shortages in mental health and attitude toward human-relationships in school. The male students have evaluated their families as having unity and sincere relationships. This evaluation rate by the male students is more than that of the female students. Anxiety and depression is found to be more among the female students. At the meantime, quarreling and anti-social attitude is more among the male students. Also, in comparison with the female, the male have a more optimistic attitude toward human-relationships in school.

From the other research findings, it is concluded that there is significant difference between the students of the middle-school level, high-school level, and pre-university level regarding the family's behavior style and the subjects of mental-health shortages and attitude toward the human relationships in school (From Alpha of 0.05 to 0.000). For example, in order from most to least, the students of the middle schools, then high schools, and then pre-university level have evaluated their families as possessing integration, sincerity, and authoritative behavior and have stated to have more positive attitude toward the human-relationships in school. The students of the pre-university level have talked more about the lack of attention their family have. The families of the high-school students are more disturbed; and on the other hand there is more of anxiety and depression among the students of high schools and pre university level.

On top of what was said, the other research findings clearly show that it is only with regards to human-relationships in school, which

the students of different economical levels have a different attitude toward; What this means is that the attitude of students belonging to very low economical classes, low economical classes, and high economical classes is more positive toward human-relationships in school. In other words, as we move from lower economical classes to higher, the positive attitude toward human relationship in school decreases. Certainly different explanations of the issue can be offered. It seems that the persons having higher and better economical status have more information regarding issues of human-relationships in their well-equipped schools and also have more expectations from the school for how the students are treated. And therefore they are less satisfied with the existing conditions in schools.

Also, as the family's cultural status is higher, the family's responsiveness to the children's needs is more; And on the other hand as the family's cultural status is lower there is problem within the family. It is also notable that the amount of anxiety and depression is seen more in the students who belong to families of lower cultural status.

c- Regression Analysis

In this section, the results of the regression analysis have been provided for the strength in predicting the students' mental status and their attitude toward human-relationships in school through the family behavior style. These analysis show that it is not only the family's behavior style that is influential on both the students' level of being healthy or not-healthy as well as their attitude toward human-relationships in school, but also the level of students' mental healthiness or unhealthiness is an effective element on what their attitude is toward human-relationships at school.

The research findings, which confirm our assumptions in this research, show the role of family behavior styles in both the students' healthy or unhealthy psychological characters as well as their attitude toward school human-relationships. With regards to the Standard Beta values that have been concluded from the analysis, it can be driven from these findings that:

1- Existence of the anxiety characteristics in the students is a result of the family's behavior style. What this means is that disturbed families, authoritarian families, disturbed families, and indifferent families create the ground for development of anxiety characteristics in their children.

2- The family's behavior system influences the existence of the depression characteristic among the students and in order from most to least, the disturbed families, non-responsive families, families that are not united, indifferent families and authoritarian families cause depression in their children.

3- Quarreling character among the students is a result of two styles of parenting. These styles are both in families where disturbance rules and in families that are not united.

4- The students' anti-social attitude is due to the behavior styles in indifferent, chaotic, non-responsive, and authoritarian families.

5- Wrong-doing characteristic is seen most among students whose families do not care for their children. Authoritarian and disturbed families also create such characteristics in their children.

6- Students' positive attitude toward the human-relationships in school is mostly seen among those whose families are united, sincere, and responsive. Families that are disturbed, indifferent, and authoritarian have children who have the most negative attitude toward human-relationships at school. And finally,

7- The group of middle-school, high-school, and pre-university level students which has the most negative attitude toward human-relationships at school is the group that are caught with anxiety, depression, anti-social attitude, quarreling and wrong-doing mentality.

Conclusion

The findings of this research clearly show that the family's behavior style influences both the students' mental status as well as their attitude toward the human-relationships at school. Therefore the school role in the students' education cannot be separated from the inner relationships in the student's family and their parenting

and behavior style. The clearest suggestion that can be made based on the above findings is that the various social, educational, and cultural organizations should apply programmed efforts in order to improve the inner-family relationships and behavioral styles and parenting methods. On the other hand, by considering the importance of the issue, schools should also play a more important role in making families aware who have limited enough attention to the role of healthy inner relationships and behavior styles. Since most Iranian families leave their children to the hand of school for a relatively long period of years, the education system can plan and conduct effective plans for the development of awareness and students' families' behavior and how they treat their children.

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