

The relationship between mother's parenting style and social adaptability of adolescent girls in Isfahan

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social adaptability is an important requirement of the social life of adolescents, which can be affected by their mother's parenting style (PS). The purpose of this study is to compare the social adaptability in four parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful) through which mothers interact with their adolescent girls.

Materials and Methods: This survey is a cross-sectional and analytical study on 737 adolescents that study in the all girls junior high schools in Isfahan. Data collection was done with a questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed by the adolescents. After data collection, the parenting styles were determined and the social adaptability of the four groups was compared.

Findings: The mean social adaptability in adolescents who their mothers have the authoritative parenting style was 49.6 ± 6.1 , in the permissive parenting style 50.1 ± 5.8 , the authoritarian parenting style 44.2 ± 6.5 and in the neglectful parenting style was 42.2 ± 7.5 . The social adaptability of the four groups was significantly different ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusions: This study shows that the permissive parenting style and after that authoritative parenting style were followed by higher social adaptability in adolescent girls.

Key words: Social adaptability, parenting style, adolescent

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INTRODUCTION

Adaptability is one of the most important requirements of adolescent social life, which can be influenced by the parent-child relationship. Because of the multi-dimensional changes in physical features, psychology, and cognition, as well as social requirements and values, adolescence is a challenging season of life. At this stage of their life, instead of ignoring their problems, adolescents learn to confront them, and try to find appropriate solutions.^[1] They need to understand their own identity and to learn adaptive behaviors in order to establish firm mutual relationships, show positive reactions, avoid behaviors that lead to negative consequences, and enhance their social communication skills to a point where they can live easily in their society and get adapted to it.^[2] Adaptability is a general term that refers to all the strategies that one employs to handle critical life circumstances including real and unreal threats.^[3]

Achieving appropriate social positions depends upon being adaptable and in consensus with others. Hence, adaptability as the most important sign of mental health has been an interesting theme for many sociologists, psychologists, and teachers. The sophistication of today's social communications also raises the need to study the factors associated with adolescents' social adaptability. Accordingly, behavioral science experts have also

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emphasized the great influence of parent-child relationship on adolescents' social behaviors.^[4]

Family as a social institution has an initial impact on how adolescents are raised.^[5] The family relationship has deep effects on different life aspects. To develop a stable personality, adolescents need the affection of their parents as well as security, so that they can base their lives on the feelings of being in compliance with their parents, and being loved and secure.^[6]

Although parents normally fulfill the adolescents' physiological and emotional needs, their demands from their adolescents can shape and strengthen their social behaviors and values. Family is a place, in which skills are taught and the groundwork for enhancement of personality and increasing of adaptability is laid.^[7] Within the family, adolescents understand their abilities, feel competent, and learn to adapt to new circumstances. Training methods that are employed within the family have significant consequences on the adolescents' adaptability.^[8] Based on a combination of parents' responses and demands, parenting styles (PS) are classified into four types of authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful.^[9] Authoritative PS includes emotional acceptance, mental independence, and constant behavioral control.^[10] The children of parents with authoritative PS are usually autonomous, dominant and curious, whereas within the authoritarian families, the dominance of parents along with their strict and inflexible expectations may reduce the adolescents' motivation for development.^[11] The neglectful PS is defined by the lack of parents' encouragement, support, and participation, which reduces the adolescents' motivations for success and social competency.^[12] Parents with the permissive PS are warm and receptive; however, they do not set limits for adolescents, which causes low adherence to social values. Miller reported that aggressive reactions are observed in teenagers with permissive mothers more than those with authoritative and authoritarian mothers. The researcher believes that in order to control the emotions and limit behaviors, the personality should be adequately disciplined. Instability of personality is mostly observed in those adolescents, who have permissive mothers.^[7] Moreover, in Rahmani *et al.* study, the least behavioral problems were found to be in the authoritative PS group.^[13]

Shulman examined the adolescents' different reactions to various family environments. Their study showed that while getting exposed to stressing factors, the adolescents who were raised in a unsupportive, conflictive, and

forceful environment were likely to respond to strains in a passive way.^[14] Guay and Dusek also found that adolescents of authoritative parents deal with problems effectively, and that the honest and positive communication with parents brings them social acceptance.^[15] Sillars also stated that the expectation of failure, as well as passive and inappropriate behaviors were observed in the adolescents of authoritative type parents.^[16]

Previous study showed that the adolescents of authoritative parents' are more adaptable, have higher self-esteems, and achieve higher educational degrees, whereas, the adolescents of type authoritarian parents achieve lower educational degrees and show more anti-social behavior.^[8]

Although the role of family and PS in the development of adolescents is not deniable, the factors influencing this development should be evaluated in the context of the society's cultures, as well as in their society's gender roles.

Considering the major impacts that mothers have on different aspects of adolescents' development, this study aims to examine the association of PS with adolescents' environmental adaptability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a cross-sectional study on 737 of Iranian adolescent girls with a mean age of 11 to 15 years that studied in schools of the 5 educational regions in Isfahan. Every subject was under the direct supervision of her parents. The exclusion criteria were mental illness in mother or adolescent, physical inability, and loss of a family member over the previous month. Eligible adolescents were invited to participate in a baseline interview after being briefed on the study. They also signed a consent form. Multi-stage clustering sampling method was used as the sampling method. Each educational region in Isfahan is considered as a cluster and each cluster has a share according to the number of its students. Schools were randomly chosen from every region and classes from first, second and third grades were randomly selected in each guidance school.

Mother parenting style (PS) evaluation was developed by the principal investigator to evaluate the adolescents' perceptions of parental involvement and control. The items selected for the evaluation were derived from a review of the literature on PS and the work of Miller *et al.* (2002) with twenty-six items, 13 items for parental involvement and 13 items for control.^[7]

The adolescents' social adaptability was measured by a 13-item scale adapted from Merrell and Boelter's questionnaires and the responses were based on the Likert scale.^[17]

The questionnaires were first translated and edited by two separate teams. A pilot study leading to the final revision was conducted. To assess the validity of the final versions, 20 adolescents participated in the pilot study. Cronbach's alpha for the evaluation of the internal consistency were 0.80 for the Social Adaptability questionnaire and 0.85 for the mother PS questionnaire.

After data collection the analysis was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the adolescents were classified into PS groups. This was accomplished by using principle component analysis followed by cluster analysis. The component scores were computed based on the exploratory factor analysis by dividing the number of components into two parts (one for control and the other for involvement). These two component scores were then submitted to a K-Means Cluster Analysis to identify the categories of the respondents who, because of the similarity of their pattern of scores, were in agreement with the four-group PS structure proposed by Baumrind including authoritative PS (high involvement, high control), permissive PS (high involvement and low control), authoritarian PS (low involvement, high control) and neglectful PS (low involvement, low control).^[18]

The data were analyzed using SPSS software v.16.0 for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, 2009). ANOVA and Post-Hoc test were used for the comparison of quantitative variables and the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to evaluate the correlation between variables.

FINDINGS

The mean age of adolescents was 13(\pm 1.2) and the mean age of mothers was 37.05(\pm 5.73). 19.23% of mothers were housewives. Regarding the educational level of mothers, 3.4% were illiterate, 19.09% had a primary school degree, 32% had a high school degree, 32.8% had a high school diploma and 10.4% had a university degree. The perception of mothers' PS in 30% of the participants was authoritative, 7.9% authoritarian, 48.2% permissive and in 13.2% neglectful. The results of the analysis comparing the social adaptability according to the PS categorization using analysis of variance are noted in table I.

The results showed that the difference in social adaptability in the four groups of PS was significant.

Therefore, analysis using the Post-Hoc test indicated that the participants perceiving their mother to use authoritative parenting techniques tended to demonstrate a greater social adaptability than the participants indicating authoritarian and neglectful PS ($z = 4.15$, $p = 0.001$) and the adolescents perceiving their mother to use permissive PS had greater social adaptability than the participants indicating authoritative PS ($z = 2.17$, $p = 0.03$). The correlation between the social adaptability and mothers' age ($r = 0.04$) and educational level ($r = 0.03$) had no significant differences. There was no difference in the social adaptability of occupied mothers and housewife mothers ($t = 0.21$).

Table 1. Adolescents' social adaptability according to parenting style categorization

Parenting Style	Social Adaptability Mean (SD)	F	P value
Authoritative	36.06 (4.64)	49.91	0.03
Permissive	37.05 (4.47)		
Authoritarian	33.18 (5.32)		
Neglectful	31.02 (6.36)		

DISCUSSION

Adaptability has been a very challenging concept to behavioral scientists. Family as a major social institution has a major initial impact on how children are raised. Consequently, it also has profound effects on adaptability. Accordingly, the present study revealed that in the mother-daughter interaction, permissive PS style is employed the most, and authoritative PS is the second most used style. This study also found a significant relation between mother's PS and daughter's adaptability. In the same way, Hickman et al. had also reported a relationship between mother's PS and adolescents' adaptability. These researchers believe that parents play the most important role in adolescent's adaptability and social acceptance.^[19]

According to the findings of this research, the employment of authoritative and permissive PS by mothers can lead to more adaptability, and authoritarian and neglectful PS to the decline of adaptability in adolescent daughters. Nevertheless, statistical analysis indicates that the mean rate of adaptability in the permissive PS is significantly more than in the authoritative PS. Hence, a warm and supportive family relationship has positive influences on the adolescent's development, whereas arbitrary and incompatible relationships, as well as mother's inattentiveness to adolescent daughter's needs cause problems in the development of the adaptability skill. Development of

adolescent's adaptability can be influenced by an emotional environment, which is provided by the mother. Although adaptability is properly developed in the safe family environment of authoritative type mothers, it is developed more easily in an environment in which mothers have lower expectations from their adolescent daughters. Adaptability of the adolescent may cause a closer mother-child relationship and lead the mother to use the permissive PS. This is because the adolescents' characteristics can influence PS-type parents choose to use.^[20]

Darling illustrated that adolescents' with authoritative type parents are socially and psychologically mature, enjoy higher educational potencies, are less stressful, and have less behavioral problems comparing to their coevals. Furthermore, adolescents of inefficient parents are less mature, and cause more problems, and the criminal adolescents' are often of authoritarian parents. In contrast to the findings of the present study, Darling *et al.* reported that adolescents of permissive type mothers suffer from behavioral problems.^[21] Miller *et al.* also illustrated that conflict with peers among adolescent boys of permissive type mothers are observed more than those with authoritative mothers.^[7]

Chen *et al.* found that the authoritative parenting style is positively associated with adolescents' aggression and that the use of this style induces a decline in peer acceptance.^[22]

Although most similar studies on other regions and different age groups show that adolescent adaptability is better developed in authoritative PS than in permissive PS,^[23] this study found that the permissive PS is superior in the development of adaptability. In this regard, Endicott also believes that the adolescents of permissive type parents enjoy higher development and self-esteem.^[24] As social communication is a significant factor in the development of adaptability, use of the permissive PS by mothers may provide the adolescent daughters with the opportunity to establish more social relationships and to show their capabilities. Furthermore, to learn how to use different and efficient strategies to solve problems, a supportive family environment allows the adolescent daughter to gain various experiences.

The Parenting Style's role and training experiences are not general, but differ from one culture and society to another.^[25] Use of one parenting style in different countries and cultures leads to various results, so that the use of authoritative PS in American and European countries causes developmental growth and educational

success, whereas in Africans the authoritarian PS leads to better results for the adolescents. Although the corporal punishment of authoritarian PS leads to poor results in European-American children, it does not necessarily have the same results in African-American children.^[26]

Supple's study shows that the support that parents offer their children increases the self-esteem and declines the probability of risky behaviour in Chinese, American, and European adolescents. According to the findings of this researcher, the mother's authoritative decision-making is the most important predictor of adolescent risky behaviours.^[25] Furthermore, the study of Allen *et al.* shows that strong parental verbal interaction is associated with positive adaptability in those individuals, who were drawn from the society's middle class, while this kind of interaction is associated with negative results in the lower socio-economical classes of the society.^[27]

In this study the fathers' parental style was not considered, although the father is generally the undisputed authority who has the responsibility to discipline the children.^[28] Therefore, supportive mother-adolescent interactions can coordinate this condition with the secure emotional environment, exploring the environment with feelings of safety and security leading to healthy social adaptability. In this condition the adolescent can adjust themselves much more to their social values. Moreover, society demand to respect these values can join with permissive characteristics of mother for the development social adaptability in adolescent girls.

Adaptability and the PS are in interaction with each other and are formed by the cultural background of the society. That is, adolescents' behavior influences PS and PS also influences various dimensions of adolescents' development. Moreover, social adaptability which is in the children's genes may cause particular emotions, behaviors, perceptions, and physical symptoms, which are influential on parent's behaviors.^[29]

In addition, familial background, which can affect adolescent social adaptability, may affect the parenting style of the mother. However, this study indicated that mother's educational and occupational status were not associated with adolescent's social adaptability. Hoff *et al.* found a significant association between socio-economic circumstances and PS. They found that parents with higher educational levels provide appropriate entertainments, and social development incentives, whereas, such facilities are less provided in lower-educational level parents. He also believes that the

parents' educational level influences parent-child verbal interactions.^[30] Nevertheless, Kaufmann et al. suggest that the influence of PS on adolescent development does not get adjusted by demographic variables, such as child's age, educational level, family's income, and ethnicity.^[31] Thus, it is imperative that parents choose a parenting style by considering the culture, tradition, and religious beliefs of the region that will meet the adolescents' needs in today's rapid social changes. They should make plans for the development of the adolescent adaptability, which leads to their multi-dimensional social growth.

It is of importance that the country's social policy makers aim towards training parents regarding the appropriate parenting styles based on children's' age. They should also aim towards training adolescents regarding the establishment of social and communicational skills. As the parent-child communications might be challenging, training parents and related organizations with new skills, assists the development of adolescents, and results in the increasing of self-esteem of both parents and children, and modifies the parent-child relationship.

This study suggests that a secure affectionate environment created by permissive and authoritative parenting styles in mothers provides a background for social adaptability. The correlation between the parenting style and adolescents' social adaptability is a two-way correlation. Adolescents with high social adaptability can provoke the supportive and permissive behavior in their mothers. Therefore, educational program for social adaptability promotion should be focused on both mothers and adolescent girls.

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