The Mediating role of self esteem in the relationship between the authoritative parenting style and aggression

Narjes Khatoon Zabihi Hesari a*, Elahe Hejazi b

aUniversity of Tehran, Tehran, Tehran 14155-6456, Iran
bPayame- Noor University, Khorasan, Torbat-e–Heidarie, Iran

Abstract

This study used a structural model to investigate the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between an authoritative parenting style and aggression. For this purpose, 300 female college students in the social and basic sciences from Payame-Noor University were sampled through multistage sampling, completed a questionnaire on parenting style, another on self-esteem, and an aggression scale. Researchers analysed the data by using a structural equation model. The results show that the causal effect of an authoritative parenting style on self-esteem was positive while the effect on aggression was negative. The causal effect of self-esteem on aggression was also negative. The data allowed us to accept the proposed model by indicating that self-esteem has a mediating role in the relationship between an authoritative child-rearing style and aggression.

Keywords: authoritative parenting style, self esteem, aggression

1- Introduction

The quality of the parent-child relationship has long been one of the most important issues for scholars and Education specialists. From the attachment theory, we know that parents shape their children's attitudes, behaviours, emotional functioning, and interpersonal relations outside the family ( Dekovich & Meeus, 1997).

In the west The most widely used typology for parenting behaviours is that developed by Baumrind (Berg-Cross, 2000). She identified three parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive ( Baumrind, 1967, 1991).

Parents who follow the authoritarian style focus on their control of the child and his/her obedience .They restrict their children's autonomy and decide what is behaviourally appropriate for them ( Baumrind,1983). Their children tend to be uncooperative and suffer from depression, low self-esteem, low initiative and difficulty in making decisions in adulthood (Baumrind, 1991; Whitfield, 1987; Forward, 1989; Binger, 1994;Wennar, 1994).

Parents, who adopt the permissive style, encourage their children's autonomy and let them make their own decisions and regulate their own activities. They avoid confrontation and tend to be warm ,supportive people who do not care to be viewed by their children as authority figures .Children raised by permissive parents , have poor social skills and low self-esteem (Baumrind, 1991 ;Reitman et al ,2002), and are often seen as selfish , dependent , irresponsible , spoiled, unruly, ,inconsiderate of others needs and antisocial (Binger, 1994; Wennar,1994).

* * Narjes Khatoon Zabihi Hesari.Tel +98 9153164515;  Fax +98 5118691146
Email Address : zabibi_n@yahoo.com(N.K.Zabihi)
The authoritative style is a compromise between the authoritarian and permissive styles. Parent who adopt this style tend to have good nurturing skills and exercise a moderate degree of parental control that allows the child to become progressively more autonomous (Baumrind, 1967, 1983, 1991, Reitman et al., 2002). Children raised according to this parenting style are not completely restricted but are allowed a reasonable degree of behavioural latitude. Children of authoritative parents display high self-esteem and tend to be self-reliant, self-controlled, secure, popular and inquisitive (Wennar, 1994).

Children's traits and attitudes differ according to the parenting style used to raise them. Baumrind (1991) found that parenting styles can be linked to specific traits, personalities and degrees of children mental health.

Shick (1999) investigated the effects of parents' child-rearing on the mental health of adolescents and found that parental characteristics were related to mental health of adolescents and that in general the father's characteristics have a stronger effect on the child's mental health than the mother's.

Numerous studies have supported that adolescents who have a close relationship with their parents report greater social competence, life satisfaction and closeness in peer relationship (Bell et al.; 1985, Feldman & Wentzel, 1990). On the other hand, Simons et al. (1998) found that a lack of parental support and involvement was associated with adolescents delinquent behaviour and drug use, which in turn was also associated with aggression (specifically dating violence). These studies show that children exhibit lower levels of aggression when their parents are close to them and conduct healthy parent-child relationships. Eron et al. (1991) found that parental emotional rejection and physical punishment of a child are predictors of latter aggression.

Self-esteem is a particularly important part of an adolescent's evolution, and parents play a very important role in shaping their adolescents' feelings of self-worth.

Herz and Gullon (1999) found that excessively high parental monitoring leads to lower adolescent self-esteem. In addition Chen and Dornbusch (1998) found that a lowered sense of autonomy in adolescents contributes to low self-esteem which then leads the adolescents to identify with peer groups that violate social norms, increasing the likelihood that they shall endorse norm-violating attitudes and behaviour.

According to Baumrind (1971, 1983) people who report not having had affectionate, nurturing interactions with their parents or sufficient guidance and structure from them may have lower implicit as well as explicit self-esteem. Furthermore, Steinberg and Morris (2001) demonstrate that authoritative parenting has been consistently related to higher degrees of adolescent adjustment and psychosocial maturity than those produced by authoritarian and permissive parenting.

Dekovich and Meeus (1997) tested a model to investigate the influence of the parent–adolescent relationship quality on adolescents’ self-concept (i.e. on self-worth and competence): they explored how the parent–adolescent relationship affects adolescents’ peer relations. They hypothesized that adolescent self-concept would mediate the relationship between the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship and the nature of peer relationships. The findings indicate that adolescents who have more fulfilling relationships with their parents have more positive relationships with their friends.

The above data and the relationships between variables lead us to hypothesize that both direct and indirect effects play roles in the relationship between parenting styles and aggression and that self-esteem plays a mediating role. Ultimately, the authoritative parenting style can lead to lowered adolescent aggression by fostering a healthy self-esteem.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between the authoritative parenting style and aggression by using the aforementioned theoretical model.
2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 300 female Iranian university students who were studying at Payame-Noor University (in Torbat-e-Heidari) between 2008 and 2009. Participants were chosen through multivariate sampling.

2.2. Measures

Parenting style was measured through a Baumrind questionnaire, which consisted of 30 items, with one set of ten devoted to each of the three parenting styles—authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. The subjects were directed to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (‘do not agree’) to 5 (‘agree’). The study employed a 10-item authoritative subscale.

Our questionnaire was adapted from Baumrind (1991) as translated into Persian by Esfandyari in 1996. Baumrind (1991) obtained a reliability (Cronbach’s α) of 0.92 for the authoritative style, whereas we obtained a reliability estimate (Cronbach’s α) of 0.95. The construct validity of the fit indices was (RMR = 0.02, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.87), indicating a fairly reasonable construct validity for the measurement.

Self-esteem was measured through the 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale (1985). The questionnaire contains 10 items, 5 of which are positive and 5 negative. Each item was answered on a 5-point Likert scale.

We obtained a reliability estimate (Cronbach’s α) of 0.96 for this measurement. The Construct validity of the fit indices was (RMR = 0.02, GFI = 0.93, AGFI = 0.90).

Aggression was measured using the Khodayarifard Angry Reaction subscale (2007), normalized and standardized for Iran by Khodayarifard et al. (2007), who drew upon Spielberger’s state-trait anger expression inventory [22]. This scale contains 6 items, rated on a 4-point scale. The reliability (Cronbach’s α) for this measurement was 0.90. The construct validity of the fit indices was (RMR = 0.02, GFI = 0.95, AGFI = 0.89).

2.3. Procedure

The questionnaires were administered collectively at the beginning of the academic year. All participants were volunteers.
3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and preliminary analysis

Before examining the finding we shall provide a more detailed description of our sample. The mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum scores appear in Table 1.

| Variable                | Mean | Standard deviation | Minimum score | Maximum score |
|-------------------------|------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Authoritative parenting style | 2.85 | 0.85               | 1.33          | 4.67          |
| Self-esteem             | 1.94 | 0.87               | 0             | 0             |
| Aggression              | 1.45 | 0.82               | 0             | 0             |

As Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation scores for self-esteem are higher than those for aggression. Their minimums and maximums are identical. The mean for authoritative parenting is relatively high.

3.2. The structural equation model:

We applied a structural equation model in order to test the theoretical model presented in Figure 1. Before presenting its results, we display the covariance matrix for the latent variables in Table 2.

| Latent variables | Authoritative child rearing | Self-esteem | Aggression |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Authoritative child rearing | 0.71                        | 0.60        | -0.51      |
| Self-esteem      | 0.60                        | 0.80        | -0.58      |
| Aggression       | -0.51                       | -0.58       | 0.57       |

As Table 2 indicates, authoritative parenting and self-esteem have the highest covariance coefficient (0.60), while aggression and authoritative parenting have the lowest (-0.51).

As the structural model in Figure 2 indicates, authoritative parenting has a direct, positive, and meaningful effect on self-esteem ($B = 0.84$, $T = 16.52$) and a direct, negative, and meaningful effect on aggression ($B = -0.29$, $T = -5.02$). Moreover, self-esteem has a direct, negative, and meaningful relationship with aggression ($B = -0.51$, $T = -9.13$).
Furthermore, the fit indices for the predictive aggression model (Table 3 below) indicate a fairly reasonable fit for the measurement model; thus, the theoretical model was well supported by the data. The results therefore demonstrate that self-esteem mediates the relationship between the authoritative parenting style and aggression.

| Table 3. Fit indices for the structural model of the authoritative parenting style and aggression, with the mediating role of self-esteem |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2$ | df | $\chi^2$/df | p | RMSEA | GFI | AGFI | RMR |
| 87 | 24 | 3.6 | 0.00 | 0.094 | 0.94 | 0.89 | 0.03 |

4. Discussion

The results indicate that authoritative parenting style has a direct, positive and meaningful effect on self-esteem and a direct, negative and meaningful effect on aggression. The results further suggest that self-esteem has a direct, negative and meaningful relationship with aggression. The overall findings demonstrate that the proposed model fits the data relatively well.

Our conclusions regarding the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between the two variables is in line with the research results of Chen and Dorenbusch (1998), Dekovich and Meeus (1997), and Vazsonyi et al. (2003). Chen and Dornbusch (1998) found that a lower sense of autonomy in adolescents contributes to low self-
esteem, which contributes in turn to adolescent identification with peer groups who violate social norms and increases the likelihood that they will espouse norm-violating attitudes and behaviour.

Dekovich and Meeus (1997) investigated the influence of the parent–adolescent relationship's quality on adolescents' self-concept (i.e. self-worth and competence), exploring how the features of the parent–adolescent relationship affect adolescents' peer relationships. They hypothesized that adolescent self-concept would mediate the relationship between the parent–adolescent relationship's quality and peer relationships. Vazsonyi et al. (2003) conclude that low self-esteem mediates the effects of low maternal support and closeness on dating violence victimization.

It should be noted that our study investigated the relationship between authoritative parenting and aggression and self-esteem's mediating role within it. To the best of the author's knowledge, no research on this kind of aggression, the key component of our study that uses the structural equation model has yet been done.

Our results regarding the positive and direct relationship between the authoritative parenting style and self-esteem are in line with those of Herz and Gullon (1999), Chen and Dornbusch (1998), and Baumrind (1971, 1983). Herz and Gullon (1999) found that excessively high parental monitoring leads to lower self-esteem in adolescents. According to Baumrind (1971, 1983) people who report having had less affectionate or nurturing interactions with their parents and a lack of guidance and structure may have lower implicit and explicit self-esteem. Chen and Dornbusch (1998) found that a lower sense of autonomy in adolescents contributes to low self-esteem, which contributes in turn to adolescent identification with peer groups who violate social norms and increases the likelihood that they will espouse norm-violating attitudes and behaviour.

Our study finds that parenting style has a negative and direct effect on aggression. Similarly, Eron et al. (1991) found that parents’ emotional rejection and physical punishment of their children is predictive of later aggression. Simons et al. (1998) found that lack of parental support and involvement is linked to delinquent adolescent behaviour and drug use, which is linked in turn to aggression (specifically dating violence). Luchman and Lempron (1986) compared the self-esteem of aggressive and nonaggressive boys; the aggressive boys were found to have significantly lower self-esteem. Kernis et al. (1989) found that people with high and stable self-esteem report the lowest tendencies to anger and hostility. We should mention that the relationship between self-esteem and aggression, consistent in the theoretical model of this study, is inconsistent in other studies. For example, Bushman and Baumeister (1998) found, in a laboratory study on adult subjects, that self-esteem levels were unrelated to aggression. Baumeister (1997) and Baumeister et al. (1996) propose that aggression is associated with high self-esteem. Spencer and et al. (1993) argue that aggressive behaviour such as initiating fights is risk-taking behaviour that requires courage and confidence in one’s ability to beat one’s opponent. Risk-seeking is known to be typical of those with high, rather than low, self-esteem.

Thus, it can be proposed that individuals with high self-esteem will not try to avoid high-risk environments but will rather attempt to control what happens in those environments. Alternatively, this study and others would support the proposition that given the negative relationship between self-esteem and aggression, people with high self-esteem have an internal locus of control that confirms their sense of being in control of themselves and of potential threats, making aggressive behaviour unnecessary; highly affectionate and nurturing interactions with their parents would strengthen that sense.

However, the contradictory studies and findings that contrast with those of the present study—that report no significant relationship between self-esteem and aggression—are of interest and should be explored in future research.

References

Baumeister, R. (1997). Evil: Inside human cruelty and violence. New York. Free man.
Baumeister, R., Smart, L., & Boden, J. (1996). Relation of threatened egotism to violence and aggression: The dark side of high self esteem. Psychology Review, 103, 5-33.
Baumrind, D. (1967). Childcare practices anteceding three patterns of preschool behaviour. Genetic Psychology Monographs, 75, 43-88.
Baumrind, D. (1971). Current patterns of parental authority. Developmental Psychology Monographs, 4 (1, Pt. 2), 1–103.
Baumrind, D. (1983). Socialization and instrumentals competence in young children. In W. d'Amour (Ed.),
Social and Personality Development (pp.197-211). New York: W.W. Norton

Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescence competence and substance use. Journal of Early Adolescence, 11, 56-95.

Bell, N.J., Avery, A.W., Jenkins, D., Feld, J., & Schoenrock, C.J. (1985). Family relationships and social competence during late adolescence. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 14, 109-119.

Berg-Cross, L. (2000). Basic concepts in family therapy: An introductory text. New York: The Haworth Presses.

Binger, J.J. (1994). Individual and family development: A life span interdisciplinary approach. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bushman, B., & Baumeister, R. (1998). Threatened egotism, narcissism, self esteem and direct and displaced aggression: Does self-love or self-hate lead to violence? Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75, 219-229.

Chen, Z., & Dornbusch, S.M. (1998). Relating aspects of adolescent emotional autonomy to academic achievement and deviant behaviour. Journal of Adolescent Research, 13,293-319.

Dekovitch, M., & Meeus, W. (1997). Peer relations in adolescence: Effect of parenting and adolescents' self-concept. Journal of Adolescence, 20, 163-176.

Eron, L., Huebssmann, R., & Zeli, A. (1991). The role of parental variables in the learning of aggression. In D.Rubin and K. Rubin (Eds), The development and treatment of childhood aggression (pp.167-197). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Feldman, S.S., Wentzel, K.R. (1990). The relationship between parenting styles, sons' self-restraint, and peer relations in early adolescence. Journal of Early Adolescence, 10, 439-454.

Forward, S. (1989). Toxic parents: Overcoming their hurtful legacy and reclaiming your life. New York: Bantam Books.

Herz, L., & Gullone, E. (1999). The relationship between self-esteem and parenting style: A cross-cultural comparison of Australian and Vietnamese Australian adolescents. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 30, 742-7.

Kernis, M., Grennemann, B., & Barcly, L. (1989). Stability and level of self-esteem as predictor of anger arousal and hostility. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56, 1013-1022.

Khodayarifard, M., Lavasani, M.G., Akbari Zardkhane, S., & Liaghat, S. (2007). The study of psychometric properties and normalization of Spielberger State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2(STAXI-2) among of students.

Lochman, J., & Lemborn, L. (1986). Situational social problem solving skills and self esteem of aggressive and nonaggressive boys. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 14, 605-617.

Reitman, D., Rhode, P.C., Hupp, S.D.A., & Altobello, C. (2002). Development and validation of the parental authority questioner –revised. Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioural Assessment, 24(2), 119-127.

Rosenberg, M. (1985). Society and the adolescent self-image. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Simons, R.L., Lin, K., & Gordon, L.C. (1998). Socialization in the family of origin and male dating violence: A prospective study. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60,467-478.

Speilberger, C., & Reheiser, E. (2003). Measuring anxiety, anger, depression and curiosity as emotional states and personality traits with the SIAI,STAXI and STPI. Comprehensive Handbook of Psychological Assessment. Vol 2. Personality assessment. Hoboken ,N J: John Wiley and Sons.

Spencer, S., Josephs, R., & Steel, C. (1993). Low self esteem: The uphill struggle for self integrity. In R. Baumeister (Ed.), Self-Esteem. The puzzle of low self-regard (pp. 21-36). New York: Plenum Press.

Steinberg, L., Moriss, A.S. (2001). Adolescent development. Annual Review of Psychology, 52, 82-110.

Vazsonya, A.T., Hibbert, J.R., & Snider, J.B. (2003). Exotic enterprise no more? Adolescent report of family and parenting processes in four countries. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 13, 129-160.

Wennar, C. (1994). Development psychopathology: From infancy through adolescence. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Whitfield, C.L. (1987). Healing the child within: Discovery and recovery for adult children of dysfunctional families. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.