

Adolescent Adjustment: Investigating the Predictive Role of Family Communication Patterns

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Abstract

Background: Adjustment is considered as one of the most important signs of mental health and well-being; it refers to any kind of healthy or unhealthy, conscious or unconscious attempt to prevent or weaken the stressors and ability to tolerate hard situations. One of the variables probably involved in adolescent adjustment is the family communication patterns which include two important dimensions: conversation pattern and conformity pattern. The present study aimed to explain the relationship between the family communication patterns and adolescent adjustment and investigate the predictive role of family communication patterns.

Methods: This study is correlational research and the study population consisted of all male and female students of the high schools in Shiraz, Iran, during the academic year of 2019-2020. Sample size was determined by Cochran formula with a significance level of 0.05. Through multistage sampling method, six schools from each of the four districts were selected; three classes were then chosen from each high school. Finally, five to six random students were selected from each class to answer the questionnaires. The sample consisted of 380 high school students (210 girls and 170 boys). We used the family communication patterns questionnaire; it is a self-report scale examining the agreement or disagreement level of the respondents based on a five-point Likert scale regarding 26 items on family communication. Multidimensional adjustment scale was further applied. This scale includes 15 items and five components, namely personal, social, educational, occupational, and family. The extracted data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression statistics in SPSS version 21.

Results: Conformity communication pattern had a significant negative relationship with adjustment (Beta=-0.48, P=0.001); meanwhile, there was a significant positive relationship between conversation pattern and adjustment (Beta=0.36, P=0.001), both predicting 55% of the variance in adolescents adjustment.

Conclusion: The dimensions of family communication patterns predicted adolescent adjustment and conversation communication pattern had positive and conformity communication pattern had negative relationship with adolescent adjustment.

Keywords: Communication, Social adjustment, Adolescents

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1. Introduction

Today, adjustment is among the most important concepts, which is directly related to mental health and people interactions. Thus, knowing the factors affecting adjustment and its dimensions can be conducive to reduce the interpersonal and intrapersonal problems. The adjustment concept was first introduced by Darwin's Theory of Evolution. The concept was then applied to other sciences, including psychology and sociology (1). Adjustment is considered as one of the most important signs of mental health and refers to any kind of healthy or unhealthy, conscious or unconscious attempt to prevent or weaken the stressors and ability to tolerate hard situations (2). Adjustment is the process by which a living being can balance the personal needs and the conditions influencing the satisfaction of those needs. Adjustment involves establishing a

satisfactory relationship that indicates conformity and compatibility. In other words, it is the process of finding and accepting the behavioral methods compatible with the environment and its changes (3). From a psychological perspective, an adjusted person is able to correctly process information and develop a realistic attitude which is not impacted by either painful mental fluctuations or interpersonal conflicts. This concept helps to experience better feelings and achieve appropriate results. Thus, compatibility can be associated with positive results. More than three decades of demographic studies have illustrated how the child-parent relationship affects the children adjustment (4, 5). Studies have always shown that if the relationship between children and parents is accompanied by closeness, friendliness and supporting behaviors, it will have positive effects on children adjustment. In addition, hostile and aggressive child-

parent relationships entail less adjustment in children. Various names have been proposed for the child-parent relationship, including authoritative parents, permissive parents, neglectful parents (6), conversation-orientation families, and conformation-orientation families (7). In a research entitled "Family communication problems, psychosocial adjustment and cyberbullying", Romero-Abrio and his colleagues reported that FCP dimensions (conformity and conversation) had important effects on adolescent behaviors and their psychological well-being (8).

A variable that is probably involved in adolescent adjustment is the family communication patterns (FCP). Koerner and Fitzpatrick (9) introduced a theory which stated that FCP discusses the methods by which the family interprets the social reality and the interpretations are shared among the family members. The main dimension of FCP is conversation-orientation; it refers to the ability of a family to create a condition in which all family members are encouraged to freely participate and share their ideas in discussions about a wide range of issues. Another important aspect of FCP is conformation-orientation based on which the family communication conforms to specific views, ideas, and beliefs. Families with high conformation-orientation place importance on obeying ideas and beliefs. Their communication is based on conformity, avoiding conflicts, and mutual respect between family members. In families of such ilk the communication between two generations consists of obeying the elders and parents (10).

Results of a study showed that adolescents with authoritarian mothers had significantly more depression symptoms compared with children whose mothers supported their freedom and independence (11). There is a large amount of evidence that family communication determines the emergence and development of depression in adolescents. However, a healthy family communication between parents and children is known as a preventive factor for depression (12), and it is related to the ability to confront distress in different situations in life.

According to Orrego and Rodriguez (13), the studies on communication patterns indicated the negative and harmful effects of limited communication patterns. On the other hand, open family communication patterns have shown positive psychological results. Orrego and Rodriguez (13) found that authoritarian families experienced significantly more conflicts and distress concerning the independence of adolescents.

Rueter and Koerner (14) investigated the relationship between the aspects of family communication patterns (conversation-orientation and conformity-orientation) and mental health in adopted children. They showed that family atmosphere was able to increase adopted children mental health and well-being through creating open atmosphere to communicate.

Love and Thomas (15) examined the role of various parenting styles in the adjustment of college students. They confirmed that the general adjustment of authoritative families was significantly higher than that of students with careless families. Female adolescents had more general adjustment than male adolescents. FCP and gender did not affect the adolescent adjustment. The objective of this study was to investigate the role of FCP in adolescent adjustment.

2. Method

Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

This descriptive correlational research aimed to measure and evaluate the relationship between FCP and adolescent adjustment. The Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University and Shiraz University approved this research. The study population included all male and female students of the high schools in Shiraz, Iran during the academic years of 2019-2020. Sample size was determined by Cochran formula with a significance level of 0.05. Based on multistage sampling method, six schools were selected from each of the four districts; next, we instructed the students on how to fill out the questionnaires. Afterwards, the volunteers among the students signed consent forms and filled out the questionnaires. Three classes were selected from each high school. Ultimately, five to six random students were chosen from each class to answer the questionnaires. The sample comprised 380 high school students (210 girls and 170 boys). The extracted data were analyzed by applying descriptive and inferential statistics including Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression statistics in SPSS version 21.

Research Instrument

The following instruments were applied to measure adjustment and family communication patterns:

Family Communication Patterns Questionnaire

This instrument is a self-report scale designed by FitzPatrick and Ritchie (16); it examines the

agreement or disagreement of the respondents based on a five-point Likert scale (5= completely agree, 1=completely disagree) regarding 26 items about family communication. This scale measures the conversation (open participation of the family members in family discussion) and conformity patterns (same views and family beliefs). Accordingly, the first 11 items are related to conformity and the next 15 are associated with conversation. The higher the scores in each scale, the more dominant the communication pattern in each respondent's family. The reliability of the Revised Family Communication Pattern (RFCP) Scale was as follows: a mean Cronbach alpha of 0.89 for conversation, 0.79 for conformity, a test-retest reliability of 0.99 for conversation, 0.73 for conformity. In Iran, Kouroushnia (17) obtained a reliability of 0.87 for the conversation dimension of FCP. In addition, the proper validity of the test (factor analysis and internal consistency) was reported. In the present study, the correlation coefficients of the dimensions with total score were 0.75 and 0.44, respectively. Moreover, 0.74 was the total of the test (measured by Cronbach alpha), 0.78 was the reliability of conversation, and 0.87 was that of conformity. In addition, after repeating the test with a two-week interval, the test-retest reliability was 0.90 for the entire scale, 0.87 for conformity, and 0.97 for conversation (18). The present study used Cronbach alpha to calculate the reliability coefficient. The reliability of the conformity and conversation dimensions were 0.71 and 0.79, respectively.

Multidimensional Adjustment Scale

Sohrabi and Samani (19) made and evaluated the multidimensional adjustment scale and examined its reliability using Cronbach alpha (reported 0.70 to 0.84 for its subscales). They also reported a high validity for the scale (19). This scale includes 15 items and five

components, namely personal, social, educational, occupational, and family. Each question is scored based on a Likert scale from not at all (0) to very much (5). The cronbach alpha coefficient calculated for different dimensions of the conformity questionnaire was 0.76 for personal conformity, 0.71 for social conformity, 0.87 for educational, and 0.87 for family conformity (19). Furthermore, based on the primary studies, the input and output of the factor from the questionnaire was 0.82, confirmed by the Cronbach alpha calculated by the experts.

3. Results

The sample of the study consisted of 380 high school students in Shiraz, Iran, which was determined by Cochran formula (210 girls, 170 boys). The participants aged 15 to 18 years with a mean of 16.44 and a standard deviation of 1.80. Students who were not willing to participate in the study were excluded. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the variables.

Table 2 depicts the correlation matrix of the research variables. To explain the research variables, we primarily calculated and reported the descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation, and correlation matrix.

Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the predictive ability of the FCP dimensions for adjustment. Table 3 shows the study results.

As seen in the table 3, t was significant at 0.001 level ($P < 0.001$).

Based on Table 3, it can be concluded that conformity had a significant negative relationship and conversation had a significant positive relationship with adolescent adjustment, and 55% of adjustment was predicted by

Table 1: The descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation of studied variables

	Variable	Mean±SD
Family communication pattern	Conformity	25.17±10.73
	Conversation	32.22±10.02
	Total adjustment	56.84±30.98

*SD: Standard deviation

Table 2: Correlation matrix between studied variables

Variable	Adjustment	Conformity	Conversation
Adjustment	1		
Conformity	-0.58**	1	
Conversation	0.57**	-0.43**	1

** Correlation at 0.01 significance level

Table 3: Multiple regression model to predict adjustment based on family communication patterns

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variables	Beta	T	Adjusted R Square	P
Adjustment	Conformity	-0.48	-5.84	0.55	0.001
	Conversation	0.36	4.53		0.001

family communication patterns.

4. Discussion

Some points are mentioned here to explain the negative relationship between conformity and adjustment. In conformity pattern, adolescents are not allowed to show their beliefs and interests and conversations are avoided; therefore, when they have different ideas and beliefs, they are not permitted to follow their own beliefs and are forced to obey their parents' and grandparents' ideas. As a result, they feel an enormous amount of pressure. It is clear that most adolescents grow up in conditions where despite having different ideas, they have to ignore and hide their own beliefs, since they are not decisive enough to speak for themselves, which is the long-term result of insecure family atmosphere. So, they experience mental maladjustment under the pressure of authoritarian parents, leading to maladjusted behaviors. In fact, when parents impose their ideas, they lose a close relationship with their children; this gives rise to problems such as irritability, avoiding from parents, and even anger and aggression, which are determining signs of maladjustment. This finding is consistent with the results of Harter and Whitesell (3), Mak, Kim, and Wang (5), and Romero-Abrio and colleagues (8). All of these findings suggest that an insecure atmosphere results in maladjusted behaviors in children, adolescents in particular.

To explain the positive relationship between conversation pattern and adjustment, some explanations are needed. In conversation pattern, adolescents are allowed to show their beliefs and interests, and conversations are included; accordingly, they have the chance to explain and share their ideas with their parents; these ideas are considered as valuable as other members' ideas and beliefs. It is clear that adolescents who grow in a secure family atmosphere which conversation is encouraged, they will experience higher psychological adjustment than adolescents who are not allowed to express themselves. Also, in such environments, the interaction between the children and their parents is confidential, and they feel secure to show and express their beliefs, thoughts, and emotions. This result is consistent with

the results of Mak and colleagues (5), Koerner and Mary Anne (9), Eun and colleagues (11), and Love and Thomas (15).

Taken together, it is necessary to provide a secure atmosphere in family and between family members, especially between parents and adolescents. This is because family environment determines adolescents' future behaviors in different settings such as school, college, and work; also, adjustment is one of the most important aspects which are definitely influenced by communication patterns. Therefore, family communication patterns should be strictly taken into account as an important and essential concept for adolescent adjustment. It is recommended that training courses are held for parents in order to teach them how to have efficient communication with their children.

5. Conclusion

Family communication patterns played major roles in adolescent adjustment. Conversation pattern had a significant positive relationship while confirmatory communication pattern had significant negative relationship with adjustment. In addition, this study demonstrated that both types of communication patterns were able to predict the ability of adjustment in adolescents.

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Ethical Approval: This study was approved by Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran and Marvdasht Branch of Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht, Iran, with the ethical approval code of 198292572314835162284236. In addition, written informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

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