



Research paper

The Effect of Parent-Child Conflict on Symptoms of Depression, Internalizing Problems, and Aggression: The Mediating Role of Emotional Security

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of parent-child conflict on symptoms of depression, internalizing problems, and aggression with regard to the mediator role of emotional security. The statistical population of the research included all first and second grade from which a sample of 240 students were selected through multi-stage cluster sampling. The research tools included parent-child conflict questionnaire, emotional security scale, children's depression questionnaire, internalizing problems questionnaire and aggression questionnaire. Evaluation of the proposed model was structural equation modeling. The results of path analysis indicated the direct effect of parent-child conflict on emotional security, depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression, and the direct effect of emotional security on depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression. Also, the results showed that parent-child conflict had an indirect effect on symptoms of depression, internalizing problems, and aggression through emotional security.

Keywords: Aggression, depressive symptoms, emotional security, internalizing problems, parent-child conflict.

Introduction

One of the factors that psychologists emphasize in the formation of psychological disorders and behavioral problems of adolescents is the parent-child conflict. One of the consequences of parent-child conflict is a decrease in emotional security in children and adolescents (Davis, et al., 2023). Among other consequences of parent-child conflict for teenagers, we can mention the occurrence of depressive symptoms and internalizing problems (Lougheed, et al., 2022). In addition, another consequence of parent-child conflict is increased adolescent aggression (Wang, et al., 2022). It seems that parent-child conflict, in addition to the direct effect on depression symptoms, internalizing problems and aggression, can also have an indirect effect on male variables by reducing emotional security. For this purpose, the following hypotheses were:

-Parent-child conflict has a direct effect on emotional security, depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression.

- Emotional security has a direct effect on symptoms of depression, internalizing problems and aggression.
- Emotional security plays a mediating role in the relationship between parent-child conflict and symptoms of depression, internalizing problems, and aggression.

Method

This descriptive-correlation study was based on SEM. The statistical population in this research included all students of Ahvaz in Iran. 240 students were selected by cluster random sampling method. Thus, one district (district four) was randomly selected among all the educational districts of Ahvaz, then eight schools were randomly selected from among all the schools in district four i. e. 20 subjects have been considered for each parameter. Data analysis were done with SPSS version 27 and Amos version 24 software.

Tools

Parent-Child Relationship Scale (PCRS): This 24-item was designed by Fine and Schoubel (1983), with two subscales father's and mother's version. Its concurrent validity is 0.79 and its reliability is 0.90 using Cronbach's alpha method. In the present study, the reliabilities were 0.92 and 0.89 for the father's /mother's subscales.

Emotional Security Scale (ESS): This 21-item was designed by Cordova, et al. (2005), are used to assess the symptoms of depression. Its concurrent validity is 0.82 and its reliability is 0.90 using Cronbach's alpha method. In the present study, its reliability was 0.81.

Children's Depression Inventory (CDI): This 27-item was designed by Kovacs and Beck (1977) with its concurrent validity with factor analysis method was 0.77 and its reliability was 0.89 using Cronbach's alpha method. In the present study, its reliability was 0.85.

Internalizing Problems Questionnaire (IPQ): This 21-item was designed by Aro et al. (2022), with three subscales external problems, internal problems and social behaviors. Its concurrent validity is 0.81 and its reliability is 0.94 using Cronbach's alpha method. In the present study, its reliability was 0.81.

Aggression Questionnaire (AQ): This 29-item was designed by Buss and Perry (1992), with four subscales physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. Its concurrent validity is 0.89 and its reliability is 0.90 using Cronbach's alpha method. In the present study, its reliability was 0.77.

Results

Descriptive findings including normality test through Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients between research variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlation matrix and checking the normality of the distribution of the scores of the research variables

Variable	Normality Statistics	P-Value	1	2	3	4	5
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Parent-child conflict	0.14	0.20	-				
Emotional security	0.14	0.20	-0.46**	-			
Symptoms of depression	0.16	0.20	0.35**	-0.39**	-		
Internalize problems	0.12	0.20	0.36**	-0.49**	0.31**	-	
Aggression	0.16	0.20	0.44**	-0.40**	0.28**	0.36**	-
Mean			66.06	49.52	17.22	22.17	75.53
SD			18.88	18.78	7.16	10.34	20.98

According to Table 2, all direct paths are significant; This means that parent-child conflict has a direct and significant effect on emotional security, depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression, as well as emotional security on depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression. The results of the bootstrapping test showed that through the mediation of emotional security. Therefore, these relationships are significant mediators and parent-child conflict through emotional security, the child has a significant effect on the symptoms of depression, internalizing problems and aggression.

Table 2: The SEM results of direct, indirect and total effects

Path		β	B	St. error	T-Value	P-Value
Parent-child conflict	to ES	-0.46	-0.46	0.05	-8.09	0.001
Parent-child conflict	to CD	0.21	0.08	0.02	3.32	0.001
Parent-child conflict	to IP	0.16	0.09	0.03	2.68	0.001
Parent-child conflict	to A	0.38	0.09	0.01	4.96	0.001
Emotional security	to CD	-0.29	-0.11	0.02	-4.44	0.001
Emotional security	to IP	-0.41	-0.22	0.03	-6.58	0.001
Emotional security	to A	-0.29	-0.06	0.01	-3.85	0.001
Results of indirect effect				β	Lower limit	Upper limit
Parent-child conflict → emotional security → symptoms of depression				0.13	0.07	0.20
Parent-child conflict → emotional security → internalizing problems				0.19	0.11	0.27
Parent-child conflict → emotional security → aggression				0.12	0.05	0.21

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the research results, parent-child conflict had a direct and significant effect on emotional security, depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression. When parents are in severe conflict with their children, fights and conflicts between them spread and children feel that they have unstable relationships in the family. Also, emotional security has a direct and significant effect on the symptoms of depression, internalizing problems and aggression. High emotional security, which is a response to interpersonal intimacy and

emotional responsiveness; It leads to the awakening of inner feelings. Also, parent-child conflict has an indirect effect on symptoms of depression, internalizing problems, and aggression through emotional security. Emotions play a fundamental role in human life, and if they accumulate too much in a person, it will cause irrational behavior such as aggression. Among the limitations of this research, there was no difference between parenting styles of parents and data collection was only based on the perception of students, it is suggested that future studies include measures to evaluate internalization and health issues of students.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the cooperation of the director of education and teachers of schools in Khuzestan province for their help and all the students who participated in this research

Funding

This research has not received any financial support.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declared no conflict of interest.



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