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Parental Psychological Control and Adolescent Social Problems: The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation

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Abstract

Abstract

The present study investigated the relationship between parental psychological control and adolescents' social problems, with the mediating role of emotion regulation. This research employed a correlational method based on structural equation modeling. The statistical population consisted of adolescents in the age range of 13 to 18 residing in Mashhad. Among them, 215 individuals were selected through convenience sampling method. The participants filled out the following questionnaires: Soensen's Parental Psychological Control Questionnaire (2010), Achenbach's Youth Problem Behavior Scale (1991), and Gratz and Roemer's Emotion Regulation Difficulty Scale (2004). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and structural equation modeling through SPSS and LISREL software. According to the results of the model test, the direct effect of the exogenous variable, parental psychological control, on the mediating variable, emotion regulation difficulties, was significant ($t = 4.69$, $\beta = 0.39$). The direct effect of the mediating variable, emotion regulation difficulties, on the endogenous variable, social problems, was also significant ($t = 6.05$, $\beta = 0.53$). Additionally, the direct effect of the exogenous variable, parental psychological control, on the endogenous variable, social problems, was significant ($t = 4.37$, $\beta = 0.36$). Moreover, the indirect effect of parental psychological control on social problems through emotion regulation difficulties was significant. This finding indicates that emotion regulation difficulties play a significant mediating role in the relationship between these two variables. In conclusion, adolescents who experience high levels of psychological control from their parents face difficulties in emotion regulation (e.g., a lack of emotional clarity and difficulties with controlling impulsive behaviors). These difficulties in emotion regulation may lead to greater social problems.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a key developmental stage during which individuals experience hormonal changes due to puberty, continued brain development, and the formation of individual autonomy. During this period, rapid physical growth and relatively slow mental development occur; this imbalance can easily lead to many psychological conflicts and contradictions (Dahl, 2004) such that many people in adolescence suffer from depression, social phobia, and school fatigue (Doornwaard et al., 2012; Jessor et al., 2003). During this period, adolescents may engage in problematic behaviors categorized as intellectual, attention, and social problems (Deng et al., 2001). The term social problems refers to abnormal behaviors that hinder social adjustment and occur when individuals violate social norms, do not follow behavioral rules, or cannot adapt well to social life. Therefore, these behaviors may have effects such as harm to society or the individual (Lin et al., 2004). According to the theory of problem behavior, parental psychological control can affect adolescents' social problems (Jessor et al., 2003; Zhang & Dong, 2011). Higher levels of parental psychological control are associated with lower levels of trust and children's less tendency to communicate with parents, which in turn affects their interactions with others, increases the risk of aggressive behavior with others, and may lead to social problems (Shek, 2006). Parental psychological control may also play a role in the emergence of social problems in adolescents by affecting other variables, including emotion regulation. Emotion regulation refers to the internal and external processes related to monitoring, evaluating, and modulating emotional responses to achieve one's goals (Thompson, 1994). However, the effects of parental psychological control on children can vary across cultures (Fung & Lau, 2012); this highlights the importance of research on the consequences of psychological control in different cultures, including Iranian culture. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation in the relationship between parental psychological control and social problems in adolescents.

Methods

The present study's method was a correlational study of structural equations type in which the relationships between variables were examined in the form of a causal model. The statistical population consisted of adolescents who were in the age range of 13 to 18 years, from which a sample of 215 people was selected using convenience sampling method. The data of this study were collected through the Parental Psychological Control Questionnaire (Soenens et al., 2010), the Adolescent Problem Behavior Scale (Achenbach, 199), and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). The research questionnaires were filled out via a link on the Google Forms platform. The criterion for determining the sample size in this study was the opinion of experts who have suggested a minimum sample of 200 people for causal modeling studies (Kline, 2015). Descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to analyze the data. In addition, the structural equation modeling was used to examine the fit of the research model. These analyses were performed using SPSS (version 27) and LISREL 8.80 software.

Findings

A total of 215 adolescents (150 females and 65 males) with a mean age of 12.16 years participated in this study. Considering educational background, 90 were in junior high school and 125 were in senior high school. In terms of birth order, 110 were first-born children, 80 were second-born children, 15 were third-born children, and 10 were fourth-born children. With regard to the living situation, 180 were living with both parents, 5 were living

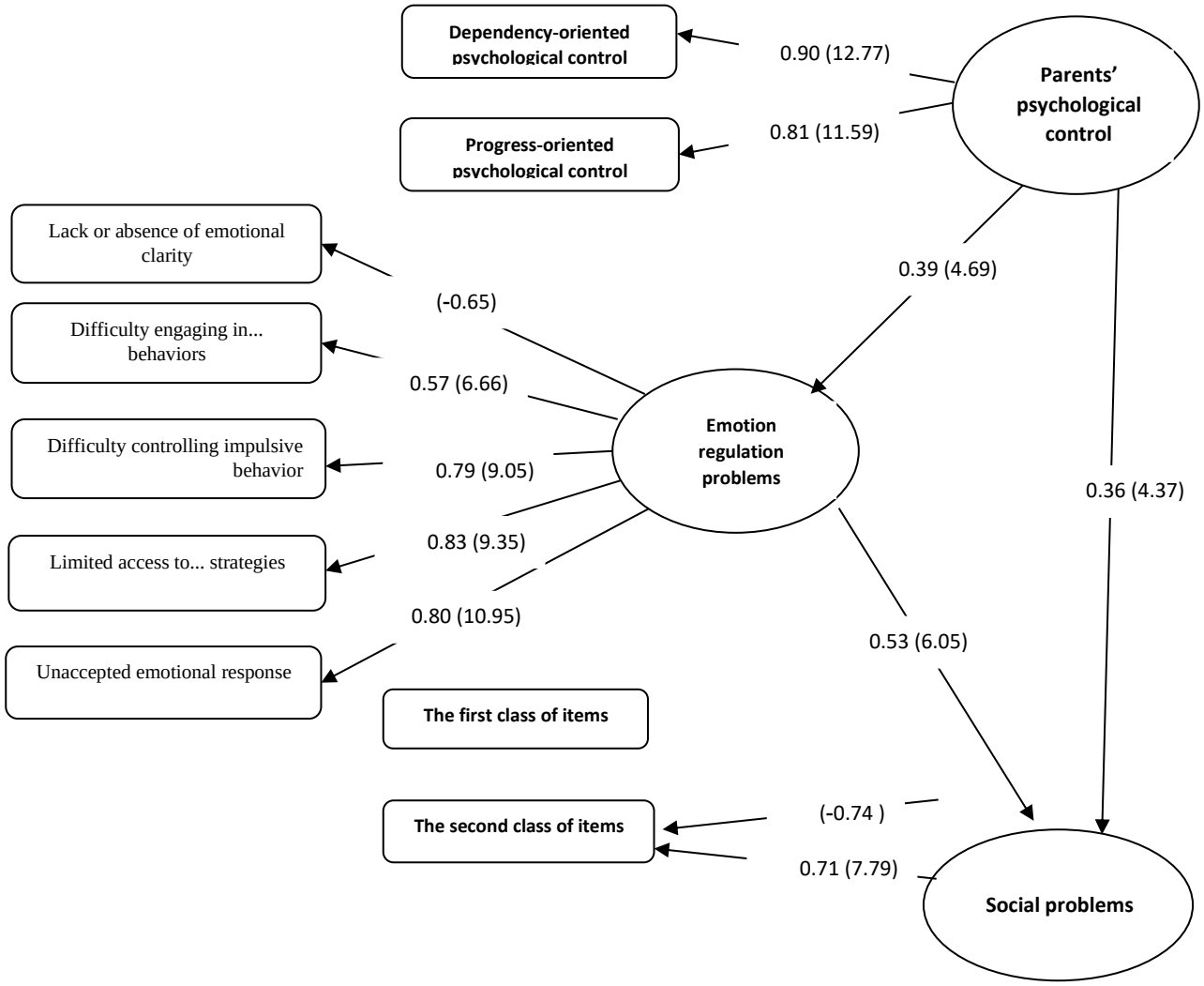
with their father, 15 were living with their mother, and 15 were living with their relatives. Considering economic status, 30 adolescents were in the upper economic class, 160 were in the middle economic class, and 25 were in the lower economic class. The mean and standard deviation of the total score of family psychological control were 38.95 and 13.29, respectively. In addition, the mean and standard deviation of the total score of difficulty in emotion regulation were 11.43 and 64.12, respectively. Finally, the mean and standard deviation of social problems were 58.4 and 17.3, respectively. To examine the relationships between variables, the correlation coefficients using the Pearson correlation (see Table 1) were performed.

Table 1. Correlation coefficient matrix for the relationships between research variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Total psychological control score	1									
2. Dependency-oriented psychological control	***.91	1								
3. Progress-oriented psychological control	***.94	***.73	1							
4. Total emotion regulation difficulty score	***.37	***.33	***.36	1						
5. Lack or absence of emotional clarity	.07	.10	.05	***.70	1					
6. Difficulty engaging in... behaviors	***.44	***.34	***.47	***.74	***.29	1				
7. Difficulty controlling impulsive behavior	***.44	***.36	***.45	***.82	***.47	***.66	1			
8. Limited access to... strategies	***.25	**.20	***.26	***.90	***.56	***.61	***.66	1		
9. Unaccepted emotional response	***.29	***.33	***.22	***.83	***.65	***.47	***.58	***.65	1	
10. Social problems	***.38	***.37	***.34	***.49	***.48	***.26	***.42	***.46	***.38	1

In other words, the Pearson correlation tests showed positive and significant correlations between parental psychological control and adolescents' social problems, between parental psychological control and difficulty in emotion regulation, and between difficulty in emotion regulation and adolescents' social problems.

A structural model was drawn based on theoretical and empirical literature to answer the research question and examine the mediating role of difficulty in emotion regulation in the relationship between parental psychological control and adolescents' social problems.



According to the final fitted model, the direct path coefficient of parental psychological control on difficulty in emotion regulation was 0.39, which is statistically significant (t = 4.69). The direct path coefficient of difficulty in emotion regulation on social problems was 0.53, which is statistically significant (t = 6.05). Furthermore, the direct path coefficient of parental psychological control on social problems was 0.36, which is also significant (t = 4.37). As a result, the indirect path coefficient of parental psychological control on social problems through difficulty in emotion regulation was 0.20, and the significance of the mediating role of difficulty in emotion regulation in this path was examined using the Sobel test.

Z-value = a*b / SQRT (b2*SEa2 + a2*SEb2) = 66.6

Considering that the obtained z value (6.66) was greater than 1.96, it can be stated that the indirect effect of family psychological control on social problems with the mediating role of difficulty in emotion regulation is significant. Therefore, difficulty in emotion regulation plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between parental psychological control and social problems (P < 0.05).

Discussion

The first finding of the study showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between all dimensions of parental psychological control and social problems of adolescents. This finding is consistent with those of Qian et al. (2022), Qui et al. (2015), Yan et al. (2020), and Romm et al. (2020). The second finding indicated a positive and significant relationship between all dimensions of parental psychological control and all components of difficulty in emotion regulation. This finding is also consistent with those of Goger et al. (2020) and Moris et al. (2017). The third finding indicated a positive and significant relationship between all components of difficulty in emotion regulation and its total score with the social problems of adolescents, which is consistent with the results of Njardvik et al. (2022) and Meng et al.'s (2020) studies. These findings showed that the higher the emotion regulation skills of adolescents, the better their ability to manage emotions; as a result, they can make better decisions in different challenging situations they encounter and would encounter fewer social problems. Moreover, according to previous research studies, parental psychological control negatively predicts the performance of adolescents' emotion regulation. In other words, the greater the parental psychological control, the lower the ability to regulate emotions; therefore, it can be concluded that difficulty in emotion regulation has a significant mediating role in the relationship between parental psychological control and the social problems of adolescents. Thus, parental psychological control can cause social problems by affecting the regulation of children's emotions. In general, parental psychological control can lead children to various social problems in adolescence by affecting the components of difficulty in regulating their emotions. It is suggested that other researchers consider other variables as mediators or moderators in the relationship between the variables of this study in future studies.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

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