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Prediction of Perfectionism in Adolescents Based on Maternal Conditional Regard and Parental Autonomy Support: The Mediating Role of Contingencies of Self-Worth

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Abstract

Abstract:

Perfectionism in adolescence is an important construct in developmental and family psychology and is associated with parenting practices and processes related to self-worth. The present study aimed to investigate the roles of maternal conditional regard and perceived parental autonomy support in predicting negative and positive perfectionism through the mediating role of contingent self-worth among adolescents. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed using structural equation modeling. The study population consisted of adolescents aged 15–18 years in Bandar Anzali during the 2022–2023 academic year, from whom 168 participants were selected through convenience sampling. The research instruments included the Parental Conditional Regard Scale, the Parental Autonomy Support Scale, the Contingent Self-Worth Scale, and the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the model using SPSS version 21 and SmartPLS version 4. The results showed that maternal conditional regard had a significant positive direct effect on negative perfectionism and a significant negative direct effect on positive perfectionism ($p < .01$). Perceived parental autonomy support had a significant negative direct effect on negative perfectionism and a significant positive direct effect on positive perfectionism ($p < .01$). Contingent self-worth significantly mediated the associations between the two parenting variables and both dimensions of perfectionism ($p < .01$). Thus, contingencies of self-worth may represent an important psychological mechanism linking parenting practices to adolescents' perfectionism. Accordingly, family-based interventions aimed at reducing conditional regard and enhancing autonomy support may help reduce maladaptive perfectionism and promote adaptive perfectionism in adolescents.

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Introduction

Perfectionism is a multidimensional construct that can manifest as positive perfectionism, characterized by striving to meet high standards and pursuing goals, or as negative perfectionism, marked by excessive concern over making mistakes, self-criticism, and doubts regarding one's performance (Frost et al., 1993; Hewitt et al., 2023). Research evidence supports the role of parenting styles in adolescent perfectionism. A meta-analysis by Smith et al. (2022) reported a link between parental expectations and criticism and various dimensions of perfectionism; furthermore, Curran et al. (2017) demonstrated that conditional parental regard predicts self-critical and narcissistic perfectionism.

Maternal conditional regard refers to a situation in which a mother's affection or approval becomes contingent upon a child's specific behavior or performance. Such an experience may link personal self-worth to success and external validation (Israeli-Halevi et al., 2015). In contrast, perceived parental support for autonomy, characterized by acknowledging the adolescent's perspective, offering meaningful choices, and explaining the rationale behind expectations, allows adherence to high standards to stem from personal values rather than external pressure. In such an environment, the connection between behavior and the adolescent's own value system is strengthened (Li et al., 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2024).

Contingencies of self-worth refer to domains such as competence, competition, and the approval of others in which success or failure increases or decreases an individual's sense of personal worth (Crocker et al., 2003). Curran (2018) identified competence-based contingent self-worth as a mediator in the relationship between parental conditional regard and perfectionism among adolescent athletes. However, the distinct role of maternal conditional regard has received less attention; notably, Ayoub (2020) found a particularly strong relationship between maternal negative conditional regard and both internalizing and externalizing problems in adolescents. The main question of this research is how maternal conditional regard (as a risk factor) and perceived parental autonomy support (as a protective factor) predict dimensions of adolescent perfectionism, and what role contingencies of self-worth play in these relationships. Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the role of maternal conditional regard and perceived parental autonomy support in predicting positive and negative perfectionism among adolescents, with contingencies of self-worth serving as a mediator.

Methods

The present study was applied in terms of objective and descriptive-correlational in terms of methodology, employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of students aged 15 to 18 in Bandar Anzali during the 2022–2023 academic year. Following the acquisition of necessary permissions and in adherence to research ethics and informed consent protocols, questionnaires were administered at one girls' high school and one boys' high school. The final sample consisted of 168 students. Based on the inverse square root method (Kock & Hadaya, 2018), the minimum required sample size was estimated as 160, while the gamma-exponential method yielded an estimate of 146; the minimum detectable effect size in the current sample was 0.192. The instruments used included the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (35 items, 6 dimensions; Frost et al., 1990), the Parental Conditional Regard Scale (24 items, 4 dimensions; Assor et al., 2004), the Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (24 items, 6 components; Mageau et al., 2015), and the Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale (29 items, 6 domains; Crocker et al., 2003). Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 21) and SmartPLS (version 4) software.

Findings

In the final sample of 168 individuals, 51.2% of the participants were female, and 48.8% were male; the mean age was 16.45 years, with a standard deviation of 0.764. Regarding the descriptive statistics for the research variables, the mean and standard deviation were as follows: negative perfectionism (M = 67.77, SD = 12.79), positive perfectionism (M = 46.33, SD = 6.38), contingencies of self-worth (M = 134.04, SD = 20.95), maternal conditional regard (M = 64.34, SD = 18.26), and perceived autonomy support (M = 100.55, SD = 14.38). The skewness for the five constructs ranged from -0.19 to 0.93, and the kurtosis ranged from -0.37 to 2.12.

Evaluation of the measurement model indicated that Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.71 for negative perfectionism, 0.72 for positive perfectionism, 0.73 for contingencies of self-worth, 0.75 for maternal conditional regard, and 0.71 for autonomy support. The composite reliability values for these constructs were 0.76, 0.76, 0.77, 0.73, and 0.70, respectively. The average variance extracted (AVE) values were 0.62 for negative perfectionism, 0.61 for positive perfectionism, 0.72 for contingencies of self-worth, 0.74 for maternal conditional regard, and 0.71 for autonomy support. The reported HTMT values ranged from 0.31 to 0.89, all of which were below 0.90; thus, the evidence supported acceptable reliability, adequate convergent validity, and acceptable discriminant validity. In the structural model, the coefficients of determination were 0.33 for negative perfectionism, 0.24 for positive perfectionism, and 0.32 for self-worth contingencies; consequently, the model explained 33%, 24%, and 32% of the variance in these constructs, respectively. The Q2-predict values were 0.58, 0.40, and 0.235, all of which were positive. Furthermore, the SRMR index was 0.06, and the NFI was 0.94. Overall, the evaluations indicate that the measurement indicators were adequate and that the model

possessed predictive value for the endogenous constructs. Tables 1 and 2 present the path coefficients and the direct and indirect effects of the research variables, respectively.

Table 1. Path coefficients and analysis of direct effects among the variables

Path	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	Result
1	Maternal conditional regard on negative perfectionism	0.40	4.201	Confirmed
2	Maternal conditional regard on positive perfectionism	-0.35	3.918	Confirmed
3	Maternal conditional regard on contingencies of self-worth	.27	2.842	Confirmed
4	Autonomy support on negative perfectionism	-0.28	2.092	Confirmed
5	Autonomy support on positive perfectionism	0.31	3.099	Confirmed
6	Autonomy support on contingencies of self-worth	-0.26	2.281	Confirmed
7	Contingencies of self-worth on negative perfectionism	0.47	3.476	Confirmed
7	Contingencies of self-worth on positive perfectionism	0.56	4.398	Confirmed

Based on the criterion, a t-statistic value greater than 1.96, all direct paths were confirmed.

Table 2. Path coefficients and analysis of indirect effects among the variables

Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	Result
Maternal conditional regard – Contingencies of self-worth – Negative perfectionism	-0.13	2.146	Confirmed
Maternal conditional regard – Contingencies of self-worth – Positive perfectionism	0.16	2.364	Confirmed
Autonomy support – Contingencies of self-worth – Negative perfectionism	-0.12	2.962	Confirmed
Autonomy support – Contingencies of self-worth – Positive perfectionism	0.15	2.211	Confirmed

To examine the four indirect effects mediated by self-worth contingencies, a bootstrap analysis was conducted using SmartPLS software (version 4). All four effects were found to be statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that self-worth contingencies mediate the relationship between both parenting variables (i.e., maternal conditional regard and parental autonomy support) and both dimensions of perfectionism.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of maternal conditional regard and perceived parental autonomy support in predicting positive and negative perfectionism among adolescents, with self-worth contingencies serving as a mediator. The findings indicated that maternal conditional regard was positively associated with negative perfectionism and negatively associated with positive perfectionism; conversely, perceived parental autonomy support was negatively associated with negative perfectionism and positively associated with positive perfectionism. These results are consistent with previous research (Curran et al., 2017; Damian et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2022). Furthermore, self-worth contingencies showed a positive relationship with both dimensions of perfectionism and mediated the relationship between the parenting variables and perfectionism (Haines & Schutte, 2023; Hill et al., 2011).

Mediation of self-worth dependencies showed that conditional maternal regard, through increased contingencies of self-worth, was associated with higher negative perfectionism. For positive perfectionism, the direct effect was negative, and the indirect effect was positive, indicating non-directional mediation. Moreover, autonomy support through reduced contingencies of self-worth was associated with reduced negative perfectionism; while in relation to positive perfectionism, the direct effect was positive and the indirect effect was negative, indicating a non-directional mediation. According to self-determination theory, conditional regard and approval on performance can strengthen controlled motivation and adolescent contingencies of self-worth. In contrast, accepting the adolescent's perspective, providing meaningful choices, and clarifying expectations facilitate autonomous internalization of goals (Assor et al., 2004; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Therefore, family-centered interventions should foster voluntary and flexible pursuit of goals by reducing conditional regard and increasing autonomy support.

Availability sampling, limited sample size, and use of self-report instruments were limitations of the study; future studies could examine these relationships more closely with longitudinal designs and by examining parents' and adolescents' perspectives.

Author Contributions

The first author: Research design, data collection, writing of the initial draft; The second author: Data analysis, revision, and editing of the paper; The third author: Methodology, revision, and editing of the article; All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the article.

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Conflict of Interest

There was no conflict of interest in this study.

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Statement of Data Availability

The data supporting this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Statement of Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors used artificial intelligence only for minor editing of parts of the text, and the authors are fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and final content of the article.

Ethical approval

In this study, the ethical principles derived from the Helsinki Declaration, including obtaining informed consent, explaining the study objectives to participants, maintaining data confidentiality, and the possibility of voluntary withdrawal from the study, were carefully observed. In addition, this study was conducted with the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Mohaghegh Ardabili and with the code of ethics IR.UMA.REC.1402.012.

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