



The Relation of Parental Attitudes to Life Satisfaction and Depression in Early Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Self-esteem

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine whether self-esteem in adolescence has a mediator role in the relationship between parental attitude and life satisfaction and depression. Data was collected from 360 secondary school students ages ranging from 11 to 14 ($M = 12.67$, $SD = .97$) out of which 216 of them were female and 144 male. The Satisfaction with Life Scale, Children's Depression Inventory, The Self Esteem Scale, and The Parental Attitudes Scale were administered in the study. Structural equality modeling was used to analyze the data. Data were analyzed using measurement and structural models (a two-step modeling method) thus artificial factors were produced for each scale matching the item counts. As a result, the confirmatory analysis confidence intervals led to acceptable levels. Complete and partial models were tested for structural modeling. The consistency values of all three models led to satisfactory levels. The results indicated that while self-esteem in early adolescents has a partial mediator role in authoritative parental attitude and in life satisfaction and depression; however, no mediator role was found in accepting parental attitude and in life satisfaction.

Keywords

Adolescence, Depression, Life Satisfaction, Parents' Attitudes, Self-esteem.

Adolescence is a period that rapid and various changes occur. In this period these changes affect adolescents' lives and relations with others (Jackson, 1993). Teenagers are in dispute with their parents on topics such as clothing, choice of friends, getting permission, studying. Conflicts may vary

according to parental attitudes. On one hand while some parents are warm and accepting some parents may be rigid and authoritative. Maccoby and Martin (1983) determined four types of parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful. Authoritative parents are understanding

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but disciplined in child development, on the other hand; authoritarian parents have a rigid, obedient, and insistent style of discipline. Neglectful parents have inadequate interaction with their children and are insensitive to their children's needs. Indulgent parents are accepting, and support their children's autonomy according to Maccoby and Martin (1983) (as cited in Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 491; Steinberg, 2007, pp. 158-159). It is possible that authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful parenting styles have different effects children's emotions and behaviors. This effect may influence the children's everyday behaviors and even general life satisfaction. Satisfaction with life is described as experiencing positive emotions more often and experiencing less negative emotions (Diener & Lucas 1999), and evaluating one's life according to a criterion (Pavot & Diener 1993). High life satisfaction results in positive experiences for an individual in a lot of ways. For instance, teenagers with high life satisfaction may have consistent functionality (Gilman & Huebner, 2006) and good mental health (Gilman et al., 2008). Life satisfaction in children and teenagers can be affected by various factors such as family, friendship (Suldo & Huebner, 2006), income (Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999), family conformity and positive parental relations (Rask, Astendt-Kurki, Paavilainen, & Laippala, 2003; Young, Miller, Norton, & Hill, 1995) family nonconformity and negative parental relations (Levin, Dallago, & Currie, 2012; Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Zumbo, 2011). Another factor that affects satisfaction with life is self-esteem. Rosenberg defines self-esteem as one's positive or negative self-perception (Mruk, 2006, p. 11). There are quite a few studies on the positive correlation between life satisfaction and self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 1995; Kapikiran, 2013; Lai, Bond, & Hui, 2007; Leung, McBride-Chang, & Lai, 2005; Zhang & Leung 2002). Nonetheless, positive or negative parental attitudes affect self-esteem (Frank, Plunket, & Otten, 2010; Koydemir-Özden & Demir, 2009; Liem, Cavell, & Lusting, 2010, McKinney, Donnelly, & Renk, 2008, Plunkett Henry, Robinson, Behnke, & Falcon, 2007; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). As a result of positive or negative parental attitude affecting self-esteem positively or negatively children's satisfaction with life is expected to be affected. These circumstances may affect mental health affirmatively or adversely. For instance, in a study conducted with adolescents, the findings indicated that low level affectionate behavior by parents increases depression (Kim & Cain, 2008). Various studies show that high levels of controlling

parental behaviors and depression are positively correlated (Kim & Cain, 2008; Masumi et al., 2002; McKinney et al., 2008; Muris, Meesters, Schouten, & Hoge, 2004; Perris et al., 1986; Tein, Roosa, & Michaels, 1994). On the other hand, children's depressive symptoms decreased when they received positively increased emotional behavior from their mothers (Yap, Allen, & Ladouceur, 2008). While cordial parental behavior is related to low levels of depression, hostile behavior could be related to high levels of depression (Ge, Best, Conger, & Simons, 1996). Whereas, teenagers who have mothers that support autonomy, showed low depression symptoms (Allen, Insabella, Porter, Smith, Land, & Phillips, 2006; Liem et al., 2010). In some situations typical behavior patterns of the parents may affect the children emotionally more than the parental behaviors. For instance, it is possible that the children might also be depressed if there is a depressed parent in the household. In a related study while both girls and boys showed depressive symptoms in a household with a depressed mother, only girls showed signs of depressive symptoms with a depressed father (Chen, Johnston, Sheeber, & Leve, 2009). Girls are more affected from both parents' depressive states compared to boys. There are numerous studies on the negative correlation between depression and self-esteem (Johnson, 2010; Marciano & Kazdin, 1994; Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007; Portes & Zady, 2002; Shrier, Harris, Stenberg, & Beardslee, 2001; Ward, Sylva, & Gresham, 2010; Wei, Ku, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Liao, 2008). The relation between depression and low self-esteem starts at very early ages. Depression increases the negative emotional state and may lead to negative self-perception. A longitudinal study by Block and Robins (1993) indicates that an individual's self-esteem does not show any significant changes from adolescence to early adulthood. Harter (1990) claims that global self-esteem develops at very early ages and drops around age 11 and drops to the lowest level at ages 12-13. According to Rosenberg self-esteem develops depending on self-esteem values and positive feedback (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 11 as cited in Mruk, 2006). Self-esteem flourishes as circumstantial or continuous character trait dependent on feelings of adequacy and noteworthiness (Mruk, 2006, p. 154). Family is the only place where children and teens gain most competence and noteworthiness. Teenagers whose parents are authoritative and indulgent have higher social, academic, and success self-esteem compared to teenagers with authoritarian and neglectful parents (Martinez,

Garcia, & Yubero, 2007). Moreover, Allen, Hauser, Bell, and O'Connor's (1994), longitudinal study showed that self-development and self-esteem in teenagers had a positive correlation with supportive parental attitude whereas autonomy preventive parental attitude had a negative correlation.

The Current Study

It is a known fact that parental attitudes have a great influence on children's and early adolescents' behavior and personal traits. Bahçivan-Saydam and Gençöz, (2005) found that while accepting and friendly parental attitudes resulted in less problems with teenagers, strict and controlling parental attitudes increased problems with teenagers. On the other hand, teenagers with neglectful and authoritarian parents have lower social self-esteem (Martinez & Garcia, 2008). Parents continue to be controlling because they believe that children cannot develop desired behaviors on their own. On the contrary, supportive parental attitudes result in increased self-esteem in teenagers (Frank et al., 2010; Plunkett et al., 2007). Children who have authoritative parents compared to authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful parents have higher self-esteem and life satisfaction, and lower depression (Milevsky et al., 2007). Furthermore, there is high correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction (Kapıkıran, 2013; Neto, 2001) and self-esteem and depression (Kamkar, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2012; Weber, Puskar, & Ren, 2010) in early adolescents. Dekovic and Meeus (1997) confirmed that self-esteem in teenagers between the ages of 12-18 has a mediator role between their relations with their parents and their good relations with their peers. While there is a positive correlation between life satisfaction and self-esteem in teenagers who have good relations with their parents, there is a negative correlation with depression (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Positive parental attitudes cause increase in self-esteem and life satisfaction, and decrease in depression in teenagers. Whereas authoritarian parental attitudes are predicted to cause negative self-esteem in teenagers, accepting parental attitudes are predicted to cause positive self-esteem. However, the mediator effect of self-esteem between strict and accepting parental attitudes with depression and life satisfaction is unknown. It is essential to find the direct role of parental attitude on self-esteem and the role of self-esteem on life satisfaction and depression during a period of low self-esteem. Furthermore, the quantity of the indirect role of self-esteem on accepting and authoritarian parental attitudes and with life satisfaction and depression is unknown as well. In the light of all the research

and studies above the aim of the current study is to determine whether self-esteem in early adolescents (6th, 7th, and 8th graders) has a mediator role in strict and accepting parental attitudes and in life satisfaction and depression.

Method

Participants

Participants in the present study are 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. The participants consist of 216 (60%) girls and 144 (40%) boys a total of 360 secondary school students. The participants are 6th, 7th, and 8th graders of 3 secondary schools randomly selected in Denizli city center. The ages of the participants range from 11 to 14 ($M = 12.67$, $SD = .97$) and 45% are 6th graders, 30% are 7th graders, and 25% are 8th graders.

Instruments

The Satisfaction with Life Scale: The Satisfaction with Life scale developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) measures an individual's personal evaluation of their life satisfaction. The scale's internal consistency was calculated as $\alpha = .85$ and was adapted to Turkish by Köker (1991) who applied it to university students. Later on, confirmatory factor analysis conducted by Durak, Senol-Durak, and Gencoz (2010) showed that the scale had a single factored good consistency index. Bendayan, Blanca, Fernando-Baena, Escobar, and Trianes (2013) tested the validity and reliability of the scale on adolescents.

Children's Depression Inventory: The Children's Depression Inventory is a 27-item self-rated, symptom-oriented, a three-point Likert scale developed by Kovacs (Kovacs, 1992 as cited in Savaşır & Şahin, 1997). The Cronbach Alfa coefficient was calculated as .86 for internal consistency and test re-test reliability as $r = .72$ (Öy, 1991 as cited in Savaşır & Şahin, 1997).

The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES): The scale is a ten-item scale developed by Rosenberg (Rosenberg, 1965 as cited in Çuhadaroglu, 1986) assessing self-esteem. Psychiatric consultations were conducted in order to test the validity of the scale during the reliability and validity testing. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Çuhadaroglu (1986).

The Parental Attitude Scale: The Parenting Style Inventory developed by Lamborn et al. (1991) consists of 26 items and 3 dimensions: acceptance,

authoritative/authoritarian, and neglectful (Lamborn et al., 1991 as cited in Turkel, 2006). The scale was adapted to Turkish by Yılmaz (2000) and reduced to 18 items.

Procedures

The 6th, 7th, and 8th grade participants of the study were told that the current procedure was for a scientific research and filling the scales were voluntary. Completing the instruments took about 40 minutes. Data were analyzed using SPSS 15.0 package program and LISREL 8.71 package program.

Results

In order to test the hypothesis of the current study structural equation modeling was utilized. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) advise a two-step modeling approach for mediation analysis using structural equation modeling. The current study uses the parceling method. Parceling method is quite adequate in order to increase the normality and reliability of the measurements and to decrease the number of observable variables (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Wisenbaker, 2006).

According to the procedure recommended by Marsh, Hau, Balla, and Grayson (1998), 2 to 5 factored parcels were produced regarding the item number in each instrument. Consequently, a model with five latent variables and 14 parcels was developed. Among consistency indexes values for RMSEA equal to and below .06 are accounted as "good"; values equal to and below .08 are "acceptable"; and if SRMR is equal to and below .08 it is accepted to have good fit indexes. Moreover, consistency indexes such as CFI, NNFI are accounted to be "acceptable" for values equal to .90, and "good fit" for values equal to and above .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Measurement Model

In order to determine whether the suggested model data has sufficient consistency values, confirmatory factor analysis was used. The analysis results of the model are as follows: $\chi^2(67, N = 360) = 135.52, p = .001, CFI = .98, NNFI = .97, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04$; confidence interval (CI) = .04-.06.

Structural Model

In the light of the previous suggestions, in the first step, the direct effect between the predictor

variables (accepting parental attitude and strict/ authoritarian attitude) and the dependent variables (life satisfaction and depression) was tested. The direct effect models showed good fit of predictor variable in the model (accepting and strict/ authoritarian parental attitude) and dependent variable (life satisfaction and depression): $\chi^2(70, N = 360) = 173.38, p = .001, (CFI = .96; NNFI/TLI = .95; SRMR = .07; RMSEA = .06, 90\% CI = .05 - .07)$. In the second phase, all the variables were tested together in order to determine whether self-esteem has a mediator role between accepting and authoritarian parental attitude and life satisfaction and depression in the partial model resulting in good fit indecies; $\chi^2(68, N = 360) = 156.19, p = .001 (CFI = .97; NNFI/TLI = .96; SRMR = .05; RMSEA = .06, 90\% CI = .04-.07)$.

In the third and final stage, fully mediated model was tested. In other words, as a result of testing the indirect effect of self-esteem on authoritarian parental attitude; and on life satisfaction and depression acceptable fit and good fit values were found: $\chi^2(72, N = 360) = 210.08, p = .001(CFI = .95; NNFI/TLI = .94; SRMR = .06; RMSEA = .07, 90\% GA = .06-.08)$. In order to determine the best fit structural model that tests the direct relation among the recommended partial model and fully mediated model, predictor variables and dependent variables chi-square difference ($\Delta\chi^2$) tests were executed. Consequently, the recommended model and the direct model (accepting and authoritarian parental attitude with life satisfaction and depression) testing was found statistically significant (.001) as the chi-square value was $\Delta\chi^2(2, N = 360) = 17.19$. Afterwards, the recommended model and fully mediated model (self-esteem with accepting and authoritarian parental attitude, and self-esteem with life satisfaction and depression) testing was found statistically significant (.001) as the chi-square value was $\Delta\chi^2(4, N = 360) = 53.89$. When the three models were assessed, the best fit model was the recommended model by the current study. Hence, in order to determine the indirect effect significance Sobel (1982) and mediator tests were performed. The indirect effect of self-esteem on accepting parental attitudes and life satisfaction was found to be significant at: $.24 (.51 \times .47, z = 5.50, p = .0001)$, the indirect effect of self-esteem on accepting parental attitudes and depression was found to be significant at: $-.32 (.51 \times -.62, z = 5.87, p = .0001)$, the indirect effect of self-esteem on authoritarian parental attitudes and life satisfaction was found to be significant at: $.21 (-.44 \times .47, z = 5.00, p = .0001)$, the indirect effect of

self-esteem on authoritarian parental attitudes and depression was found to be significant at: $.27 (-.44 \times -.62, z = 5.27, p = .0001)$ indicating all Z values were statistically significant.

Discussion

First of all, the analysis of the direct role of accepting and authoritarian parental attitude in life satisfaction and depression; parental attitude was determined to be the positive predictor of life satisfaction. According to these findings early adolescents whose decisions are respected, supported, and given autonomy by their parents have increased life satisfaction. The literature also supports that individuals who perceive positive parental attitudes have high life satisfaction scores (Gilman & Huebner 2006; Rask et al., 2003; Young et al., 1995). Moreover, negative correlation between accepting parental attitude and depression was found. In other words, depression increases in adolescents when accepting parental behavior decreases (Milevsky et al., 2007).

The second predictor variable tested for direct correlation with dependent variable life satisfaction and depression was authoritarian parental attitude. The findings showed that there is a negative correlation between authoritarian parental attitude and life satisfaction. Children whose parents pressure them into doing things, hinder their freedom, and make decisions for them have low life satisfaction and high depression levels. Milevsky et al.'s (2007), study showed that the depression scores of adolescents who had authoritarian parents were higher compared to adolescents who had authoritative parents. Liem et al. (2010) determined a positive correlation between authoritarian parental attitude and depression.

The main aim of the current study was to explore the nature of the role of self-esteem in parental attitudes and in life satisfaction and depression. The analysis showed that self-esteem has a partial mediation role on accepting and authoritarian parental attitudes, and in depression. Furthermore, the findings indicate that self-esteem is a mediator between authoritarian parental attitudes and between life satisfaction and depression. However, no statistically significant mediator role of self-esteem was found in accepting parental attitudes and in life satisfaction. This finding indicates that accepting parental attitude has a powerful influence on life satisfaction. Moreover, while early adolescents who have parents with accepting parental attitudes have high life satisfaction; life satisfaction is

not effected by high or low self-esteem. Nonetheless, accepting parental attitudes have a medium positive predictor role on early adolescents' self-esteem. According to this finding; then, accepting parental attitudes have a positive and medium level effect on the self-esteem of early adolescents. On the contrary, there is a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and authoritarian parental attitude. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Martinez & Garcia, 2007; Martinez et al., 2007; McKinney et al., 2008; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Furthermore, Diener and Diener's (1995) study enquiring different cultures indicated that both self-esteem and life satisfaction were low in families with negative relations. Frank et al.'s study (2010), indicated that self-esteem is positively related with parental support, whereas it is negatively correlated with controlling parental attitude.

In addition, there is a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction and negative correlation between self-esteem and depression. High self-esteem increases life satisfaction while decreasing depression. In the literature there are numerous studies on self-esteem and life satisfaction (Benyamini, Leventhal, & Leventhal, 2004; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997; Neto, 2001; Ulman & Tatar 2001; Yetim, 2003) and self-esteem and depression (Johnson, 2010; Marciano & Kazdin, 1994; Milevsky et al., 2007; Portes & Zady, 2002; Shrier et al., 2001; Ward et al., 2010). Nonetheless, it was found that self-esteem has a partially mediating role in perceived accepting parental behavior and depression. Namely, individuals who have parents with low accepting parental attitude have high levels of depression. Moreover, high self-esteem drops the highly negative correlation levels between accepting parental attitude and depression. Gilman and Huebner (2006) found that adolescents who have good relations with their parents have positive levels of self-esteem and negative levels of depression. On the other hand, the direct mediating effect of self-esteem on authoritarian parental attitudes and life satisfaction there is a slightly decreased direct relation. In other words, self-esteem has a partial mediator role in authoritarian parental attitude and life satisfaction. Similarly, the findings show that self-esteem has a partial mediator role between authoritarian parental attitudes and depression. McKinney et al. (2008) determined that adolescents who perceive strict and authoritarian parental attitudes have high depression and low self-esteem. Additionally, Koydemir-Özden and Demir (2009) indicated self-esteem had a partial mediator role between parental attitudes and shyness.

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