

Original Article

Regression model of sensitivity in interpersonal relationships based on body image concern and relationship with father among female freshman students

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Abstract

This study aimed to present a regression model of sensitivity in interpersonal relationships based on concern about body image and relationship with the father. For this purpose, 292 first-year students of the Hazrat-e Masoumeh University of Qom in fall 2020 completed the Body Image Concern Questionnaire (BIC), Parent-Child Relationship Assessment Questionnaire (PCRS), and Symptom Checklist-25 (SCL-25) using a random sampling method. The data were analyzed using SPSS software version 25 and Smart PLS version 3 and the relevant model was analyzed by Pearson correlation and multivariate regression with the stepwise method in a descriptive-correlational study. Regression coefficients showed that body image concern and father-child relationship components could explain 0.31 of the variances of interpersonal sensitivity. Body image concern ($B = 0.43$, $t = 0.45$), anger directed to father ($\beta = 0.13$, $t = 2.41$) and positive affect to father ($\beta = -0.12$, $t = -2.29$), could significantly explain female interpersonal sensitivity. The findings of the present study showed that prevention and intervention programs with an emphasis on improving body image and relationship with the father among female students can affect their mental health.

Keywords

Interpersonal sensitivity
Body image concern
Relationship with father

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Introduction

Human beings have a strong motivation or drive to communicate with others and to be loved and respected by others. Social situations are essential in people's lives and psychological status is influenced by interpersonal relationships and social interactions, and positive relationships can create psychological flexibility and provide external resources for them (Hadi, Al Naser, Kamour, Ashour & Al Qaruty, 2021). One of the negative factors in social interaction is increasing interpersonal sensitivity in which the person shows a constant interest in negative social evaluation and is alert and sensitive to the evaluation of others (Hadi et al., 2021).

Anli (2019) states that one of the most prominent characteristics of people with high interpersonal sensitivity is avoidant social behavior. They tend to avoid interacting with people and see themselves as inadequate and worthless because of their irrational beliefs. Students who have high interpersonal sensitivity in the classroom environment may not feel a sense of belonging to the class. Thus, academic failure, maladaptive and antisocial behaviors or communication problems can occur for

them. The study by Nyström, Kjellberg, Heimdahl and Jonsson (2018) showed that girls show more interpersonal sensitivity than boys.

One of the factors that can affect interpersonal sensitivity is the child's initial relationship with parents. The parent-child relationship reflects the most basic human social relationships in the span of a person's life and the quality of these relationships as the most important factor in the prosperity and success of individuals is debatable. When we talk about the relationship between parents and children, we mean a relationship that is reciprocal and mutual, and parents understand and consider the expectations and feelings of the child and her needs (T'esami-Pur, Baqeri, & Zare Bahram Abadi, 2020). Parenting is a burden for parents and the parent-child relationship is a unique and lasting bond between child and parent and parents are the role model of the child and affect the emotional, cognitive, and moral development of the child (Kumari & Kumar, 2020).

Smorti, Sica, Costa, Biagioni and Liga's (2021) study on 497 young people showed a direct effect of the maternal-paternal bond with the child on interpersonal sensitivity and life satisfaction of the children so that parental bond

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with high warmth and low extreme protection can affect interpersonal sensitivity and life satisfaction. This study also showed that parent-child bonding indirectly and by affecting the need for dependence, independence, and competence could affect young people's interpersonal sensitivity and life satisfaction. Research also shows that students who feel comfortable with their parents and can openly express their feelings about their parents are equally better able to control and adapt themselves in their relationships with others in the community and at school in problematic situations (Rahdar, Seydi & Rashidi, 2020).

Meanwhile, the role of parents can be significantly different. The results of Kazemeyan and Karimi (2018) showed that only the quality of communication with the father could significantly predict the social identity of female adolescents. As a result, the relationship with fathers has a greater role in predicting the social identity of their daughters. The research of Seyed Mousavi, Mazaheri and Ghanbari (2016) also showed that the parent-daughter relationship has a great impact on their psychological adjustment in adulthood, but the role of fathers in this impact is more prominent.

Another variable that can predict interpersonal sensitivity among girls is body image concern. Those who are less satisfied with their body image, are very sensitive to social messages about appearance, so they may negatively interpret any comments about appearance. Body image concern is a complex structure of mental image about size, shape, body appearance, and feelings about these characteristics (Farahzadi, Maddahi & Khalatbari, 2018).

Body image can be defined as a person's perceptions, feelings, and thoughts about their body, which is usually defined as a combination of estimating body size, assessing body attractiveness, as well as various emotions related to body shape and size (Grogan, 2006). Coping with the constant social pressure to achieve a great body or lose weight makes having a good body image, one of the major challenges and mental health problems for adolescents, especially girls (Coccia, Darling, Rehm, Cui & Sathe, 2012). Typically, a person's body image is formed through a long, gradual process that begins at birth, and continues in the person's relationships with important people like parents, family, and then peers (Greenberg and Ben-Bast, 2009). Positive body image (i.e., positive attention to one's appearance) can often prevent eating disorders, depression, and other mental health problems (Haugland, 2011), and people with concern about their body image become sensitive to interpersonal relationships and avoid relationships (Zargar, Sayad & Bassak Nejad, 2012). A survey in Egypt found that about 40 percent of female students and 25.6 percent of male students reported having mild to severe body image concerns. For both sexes, body image anxiety was positively associated with perceiving their body image as overweight and with depressive symptoms (El Ansari, Dibba, Labeeb, & Stock, 2014). Sharma (2014) also showed that body image disorders are positively correlated with depression in girls. The results

of Buddeberg-Fischer, Klaghofer & Reed (1999) also showed that psychiatric disorders are most associated with a negative body image.

Studying sensitivity in interpersonal relationships is vital as it is an important part of the person's mental health. The factors that can predict it, include father-daughter relationship and body image concern. There has been little attention being paid to the father-daughter relationship; mostly the focus has been on the role of mothers in children's health. On the other hand, the studies indicate that girls are concerned with their body image more than boys (Luevorasirikul et al., 2012) which can lead to mental health issues. Sociocultural factors, family, friends, and the media can play a significant role in the development of body image concern (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Luevorasirikul et al., 2012), and as any culture has specific rules considering the father-daughter relationships and considering that no research was found to examine this model, in female freshman community and Iranian culture, this study aims to answer the question of whether the body image and relationship with father can predict sensitivity in interpersonal relationships among freshman female students.

Method

Participants

This study is a descriptive-correlational study. The population of the present study included the freshman students of Hazrat-e Masoumeh University in Qom, Iran. In this study, random sampling was performed among freshman female students. The sample was selected among 505 female first-year students based on Krejcie and Morgan's sample size formula. 292 female students were randomly selected as the sample.

Procedure

After the study was approved by the university research committee and instructions and informed consent were provided to the students, all respondents completed the questionnaires. The data were analyzed using SPSS software version 25 and Smart PLS version 3 and the relevant model was analyzed by Pearson correlation coefficient and multivariate regression with the stepwise method.

Instrument

Body Image Concern Questionnaire (BIC):

This list is a 19-item self-report tool designed to assess dysmorphic appearance concerns (Littleton et al., 2005). For each case, individuals showed how often they felt the described feeling or performed the described behavior on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never and 5 = always). The findings of Littleton et al. (2005) on a sample of students showed that the reliability of this questionnaire by Cronbach's alpha method is 0.93. The researchers also examined the factor structure of the

questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the first and second factors was 0.92 and 0.76, respectively, and the correlation coefficient between the two factors was 0.69. Also, the psychometric properties of this instrument in Iranian society were studied by two methods of splitting and internal consistency, which obtained validity coefficients of 0.66 and 0.84, respectively. The results of factor analysis showed two factors in this questionnaire that explained a total of 39.88% of the total variance of the test. The correlation coefficients of these factors with the whole test were 0.87 and 0.82, respectively, and the correlation coefficient of these two factors together was 0.45 (Mohammadi & Sajadinejad, 2007).

Parent-Child Relationship Assessment Questionnaire (PCRS):

This instrument is designed to measure adults' perceptions of the parent-child relationship. It has two forms, one to assess the mother-child relationship (24 items) and the other to assess the father-child relationship (24 items). Both forms are identical. In this study, only the relationship with the father has been examined. It is scored on a 7-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very high). Factor analysis of the scale has been reported to measure four factors for the relationship with the father: 1) positive affect to father, 2) father involvement, 3) communication with father, and 4) anger directed to father. According to the factor analysis that Fine, Morland, and Schubel (1983) have done, the questionnaire has a total score. This instrument has shown good internal validity and consistency with appropriate α values for paternal subscales (89% to 94% with a total α of 96%) (Fine,

Morland, & Schubel, 1983). Furthermore, research has shown appropriate validity and reliability (92 to 93%) in Iranian samples (Parhizgar, 2002; Dadash, 2004).

Symptom Checklist-25 (SCL-25):

This instrument is a 25-item questionnaire that includes 9 main factors including somatization disorder, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sensitivity in interpersonal relationships, somatization, psychosis, paranoia, depression, and phobia in the past week. An average of two or higher in the raw scores of the whole questionnaire is considered a sign of serious symptoms. To score this questionnaire, five options of zero, somehow, partial, high, and severe are considered, which are awarded scores of zero, one, two, three, and four, respectively. Najarian and Davoodi (2001) reported the short form of the 90-sign list as valid and the correlation between the long-form SCL-90 and the short form of SCL-25 as 0.95. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for SCL-25 internal consistency was 0.97 in the female sample and 0.98 in the male sample, and 0.78 for a total score. Furthermore, concurrent validity of this scale with the General Anxiety Scale, Beck Depression Inventory, and Ahvaz Perfectionism Scale has been confirmed (Najarian & Davoodi, 2001).

Results

In the sample ($n = 292$), 87.7% were single and 12.3% were married, 90.4% had a bachelor's degree and 9.6% had a master's degree. Most participants were in the age group of 18-19 years.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of variables

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive affect to father	7	61	48.13	8.56
father involvement	6	45	30.81	6.41
Communication with father	0	35	28.94	7.25
Anger directed to father	0	7	2.75	1.72
Father-child relationship (Total)	28	154	125.29	20.02
Body image concerns	19	83	35.57	12.89
Interpersonal sensitivity	0	10	2.83	2.52

As can be seen in Table 1, among the components of the father-child relationship, positive affect to the father has

the highest mean and anger has the lowest mean.

Table 2. Pearson correlation matrix between research variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Positive affect to father	1						
2 father involvement	.67**	1					
3 Communication with father	.72**	.81**	1				
4 Anger directed to father	-.34**	-.38**	-.42**	1			
5 Father-child relationship (Total)	.89**	.88**	.90**	-.33**	1		
6 Body image concerns	-.34**	-.32**	-.36**	.38**	-.36**	1	
7 Interpersonal sensitivity	-.32**	-.26**	-.28**	.34**	-.31**	.53**	1

$n = 292$. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$

The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient in Table 2 showed that there was a direct relationship between body image concern and interpersonal sensitivity ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, there was a reverse relationship between the father-child relationship and its components (positive affect to father, father

involvement, communication with father, and anger directed to father) with interpersonal sensitivity. The results indicated a direct relationship between anger directed to the father and interpersonal sensitivity ($p < 0.01$).

Table 3. Multivariate regression coefficients by stepwise method for predictor variables on interpersonal sensitivity

Model	F	P	Adj R ²	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	P
				B	S. E	Beta		
1								
(Constant)	-	-	-	-0.856	0.36	-	-2.31	0.021
Body image concerns	112.89	0.0001	0.28	0.104	0.01	0.52	10.62	0.000
(Constant)	-	-	-	-1.081	0.37	-	-2.90	0.004
2								
Body image concerns				0.092	0.01	0.46	8.83	0.000
Anger directed to father	62.60	0.0001	0.29	0.235	0.07	0.16	3.02	0.003
(Constant)	-	-	-	0.996	0.97	-	1.01	0.309
3								
Body image concerns				0.086	0.01	0.43	8.04	0.000
Anger directed to father	44.106	0.0001	0.31	0.192	0.07	0.13	2.41	0.016
Positive affect to father				-0.036	0.01	-0.12	-2.29	0.022

The results of Table 3 show that the predictor variables of body image concern and father-daughter relationship components were able to predict interpersonal sensitivity in three steps so that these three variables can explain 0.31 of the variances of interpersonal sensitivity. Regression coefficients of predictor variables show that body image concern ($\beta = 0.43$, $t = 8.45$), anger directed to father ($\beta = 0.13$, $t = 2.41$) and positive affect to father ($\beta = -0.12$, $t = -2.29$), can significantly explain the variance of girls' interpersonal sensitivity.

Discussion

The results of the present study showed that the relationship with father is related to interpersonal sensitivity in such a way that father involvement, positive affect to father, and communication with father had a significantly positive link and the anger directed to the father had a significantly negative link with interpersonal sensitivity in freshman female students. This finding is consistent with the results of [Kazemeyan and Karimi's \(2018\)](#) research, and [Smorti et al.'s \(2021\)](#) study, which showed that parental bonding with high warmth and low extreme protection can lead to less interpersonal sensitivity and high life satisfaction. The family is the first social environment in which the child learns about relationships. Glasser believes that adolescents develop their identity through interaction and emotional involvement with others, especially parents. Various studies in this field also show that parental behaviors affect the type of perception that adolescents have of "themselves" and their parents ([Shafiabadi, 2012](#)). People with high interpersonal sensitivity value others' opinions and judgments too much and are too much concerned about what others think of them. In other words, their life and behaviors are for others to gain their satisfaction and protect themselves from criticism. In general, high interpersonal

sensitivity is a feeling of personal inadequacy that is accompanied by frequent misinterpretations of others' interpersonal behavior and is thus manifested as feeling uncomfortable in the presence of others and consequently avoiding others ([Narimani, Porzoor & Basharpour, 2015](#)). In the family, if people feel they are unconditionally accepted, will perceive unconditional self-respect, which probably this self-respect can remain at an appropriate level under the influence of evaluations, opinions, and criticisms of others, and consequently, a person with high self-worth will be less sensitive to the feelings, opinions, judgments, and behaviors of others. In parent-child relationships where the parent-child bond doesn't have a positive affect and qualified communication and less involvement and high aggression, can lead to insecure attachment ([Khorasani Zadeh, Poursharifi, Ranjbaripour, Bagheri & Poyamanesh, 2019](#)). This insecure attachment causes anxiety or avoidance of communication with others and thus increases a person's sensitivity in interpersonal relationships ([Nyström et al., 2018](#)). More specifically, in line with the other studies, the father-daughter relationship is important as it can affect the different aspects of a girl's life like quality of response to stress ([Byrd-Craven, Auer, Granger & Massey, 2012](#)), self-esteem, and academic achievement ([Cooper, 2009](#)), and eating disorder ([Horesh, Sommerfeld, Wolf, Zubery & Zalsman, 2015](#)). Fathers as the primary different sex in girls' lives can make the view toward the relationships and others. According to the fact that in Iranian and especially Qom city as a religious city in Iran, the relationship with the other sex is limited, so it can be inferred that the relationship of females with their fathers especially until adolescence is important and can lead to personal inadequacy. If the girls are unconditionally accepted by their fathers, this might lead to less sensitivity to others' judgment.

Another finding of the present study was that there was a direct relationship between body image concern and

interpersonal sensitivity in female first-year students. In line with the present study, other studies show that concern about body image can greatly affect social status, self-esteem, and family relationships (Liu, Ang & Lwin, 2013).

Widespread concern about body shape and weight has been well documented among adolescent girls. Coping with the constant social pressure to achieve a great body or lose weight makes having a good body image, one of the major challenges and mental health problems for adolescents, especially girls (Coccia, Darling, Rehm, Cui & Sathe, 2012). This pressure from society makes women and especially young girls sensitive to others' evaluations and in case their body is not according to the social norms can make the girls avoidant from society and feeling dissatisfied and their self-esteem might become vulnerable. Dissatisfaction with body image is associated with aspects of interpersonal sensitivity like feelings of inferiority, and social exclusion (Gupta & Gupta, 2013). Girls who are dissatisfied with their appearance become more sensitive to the opinions of others. They can tolerate less stress in social interactions and have more negative interpretations.

The importance of the body in the new age and the visualization of beauty criteria, increasing interest in youth, and the tendency of different classes and groups to manage the body, due to the existence of gender ideologies and stereotypes related to the body of women in societies. This tendency is more among women and girls. factors such as height, weight, skin color, facial expressions, and other biological factors are considered important criteria for acceptance in society. These perceptions can lead women to psychological and mental involvement, anxiety, obsession, lack of self-confidence, and depression, and the desire to manage the body can lead to interpersonal sensitivity.

Conclusion

The results of this study should be considered in the context of its limitations and strengths. Our sample included freshman female students. Thus, the findings may not be generalizable to other communities, clinical samples, other age groups, and people with less formal education. The same model can be examined in different age groups and other communities.

Despite these limitations, the present findings have new insights and understandings about the different effects of father-child relationships and body image concerns on the prevalence of mental disorders, including interpersonal sensitivity, especially in the culture of Iranian society. Findings can have beneficial implications for prevention and intervention programs that address family underlying factors.

Conflict of interest

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

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