



Journal of Fundamentals
of Mental Health



Mashhad University
of Medical Sciences



Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Research Center

Original Article

The relationship between parental child abuse, psychological hardiness, and resilience in students under the supervision of welfare organization

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Abstract

Introduction: The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between parental child abuse, psychological hardiness, and resilience in students under the supervision of welfare organization.

Materials and Methods: In this descriptive-correlational study, all students under the supervision of Kazeroon Welfare Organization in 2013-2014 were selected on clustering random sampling. In order to gather the data, the Connor resilience questionnaire, Ahvaz psychological hardiness and childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) were used and then they were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and bivariate regression.

Results: The results indicated a negative and significant relationship ($P < 0.001$) between parental child abuse, psychological hardiness and resilience. Stepwise regression showed that the role of child physical abuse is greater than other variables. Also, emotional abuse plays a more significant role in children's resilience.

Conclusion: It seems that child abuse and undesirable relationships in families lead to reduced resilience and psychological hardiness.

Keywords: Child abuse, Psychological hardiness, Resilience.

Please cite this paper as:

Simi Z, Ghaderi Noosh Abadi K, Jamali SK, Ghasemi N. The relationship between parental child abuse, psychological hardiness, and resilience in students under the supervision of welfare organization. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health* 2020 Mar-Apr; 22(2):121-128.

Introduction

The family is the most important institution of children's socialization, especially in the critical first few years of their lives. Nowadays, families

face various vulnerabilities and crises, some of which include: domestic violence, divorce, suicide, runaway children, which parental child abuse is one of the most critical social harm in

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Received: Apr. 15, 2019

Accepted: Nov. 15, 2019

today's society (1). Nowadays, child abuse is considered one of the most common and complex psychosocial issues in society. These unfortunate childhood events and experiences in adolescent personality development are associated with long-lasting and unpleasant consequences (2). Alexander et al. have defined child abuse as any physical or psychological harm, sexual abuse, and behaving in an abusive or violent way with a child by a person responsible for their comfort and well-being; as a result, the health and comfort of the affected child are compromised (3).

According to the statistics, the most child abuse cases occur in African and Asian countries, followed by European and American countries with the highest child abuse rates. In Asian and African countries, child abuse has been most prevalent in child abuse, sexual abuse, and murder, but most sexual and psychological abuse has been due to family problems in European and American countries. As the National Welfare Organization has reported, 66% of child abuse cases are more likely to be abused by men and girls than boys. Also, 25% of child abuse cases are observed in divorcing families, so that according to the statistics, in 50% of Iranian parents' opinion, punishment is necessary for the child and 40% of parents are more likely to punish physically. According to the results reported by studies on the relationship between family and children, at least two other cases remain hidden against a child abuse case being disclosed. The studies show that more than 90% of child abuse occurs in the home environment, while fathers with 48.5% have earned the highest rate, followed by mothers with 23.8%, followed by factors of child abuse in child abuse families. There have been reports of child abuse and neglect of girls and boys of all ages and across all socioeconomic groups, and its rate is rising worryingly (4). According to the results of many studies, there is a significant relationship between the history of any childhood abuse and adverse consequences for adulthood and child abuse in any form can lead to mental disorders, depending on the type, severity, duration, and frequency (5). There is a significant relationship between child abuse and domestic violence and several physical and psychological symptoms in adulthood and has resulted in problems and issues at the individual, institutional, and social levels, such as

aggressive behaviors, anxiety, low self-esteem, delinquency, home escape, suicide, and tendency to substance abuse, and multiple social harms (6). Silvern et al. (7) carried out a study among teenagers and concluded that parental violence and child abuse were associated with problems such as distress, social inadequacy and low self-esteem, and psychological stressors. On the other hand, psychological resilience and psychological hardiness are the most important human abilities that lead to effective compliance with risk factors and can modify stresses and their undesirable effects. The resilience and psychological hardiness to flexibility conclude to effective coping with stressful factors and situations and dealing with pain (8). Psychological hardiness refers to a positive personality construct that Maddi and Kobasa in the eighties of the twentieth century paid attention to it on the basis of existential theories of personality (9). Kobasa suggests that psychological hardiness is a combination of beliefs about the self and the world, which consists of three components: commitment, control, and accepting challenge. Maddi and Kobasa presented the following theory: psychological hardiness is a set of personality traits that play an essential role as a source of resistance when confronted with stressful life events. It is able to reduce the likelihood of disease symptoms and comes from useful and different childhood experiences. Resilience is considered as the second psychological variable that leads to adapting more to the needs and threats of life and is referred to as the ability of a human being to successfully cope with adverse conditions and matching them and achieves educational, emotional and social potential despite facing life problems. According to the results of studies on the social sciences over the past 3 decades, the concept of resilience has been recognized as a multidimensional phenomenon that differs in different social and intrinsic contexts (9). According to Connor and Davidson, this perspective of resilience is essential to individuals' well-being. This feature enables people to cope with the difficult challenges of life and stressful situations (10). The results of the studies showed that persons with high levels of resilience use positive emotions and leave bad experiences and return to their desires (11).

Resilience reinforces self-esteem and successfully copes with negative experiences through increased levels of positive emotions (12). Kiamarsi studied on resilience, mental health, and life satisfaction. The findings showed that resilience leads to life satisfaction by reducing emotional problems, and increases the threshold of tolerance, stability, and mental health (13). As mentioned, adaptation to stressful living conditions is influenced by psychological and social factors. Considering the importance of child abuse, its consequences and people's characteristics such as resilience, hardiness, and coping with traumatic consequences, the present study aimed to determine the relationship between parental abuse with psychological hardiness and resilience in adulthood.

Materials and Methods

The statistical population of this study consisted of adolescents aged 16-18 years who studied in high schools and pre-university centers of Kazerun city in academic year of 2013-2014.

Inclusion criteria included adolescents aged 16-18 years, Iranian nation, and willingness to participation. Using multistage cluster sampling, one education district was selected among the districts. Then one boy high school and one pre-university center and one girl high school and pre-university center were selected randomly among centers which supervised by Welfare Organization. Two classes from both high school and pre-university were randomly selected and all of their students were evaluated. After exclusion of the incomplete questionnaires, data related to 104 cases were analyzed.

Research instrument

A) Ahvaz Hardiness Inventory (AHI): This 27-item questionnaire belongs to Kubasa Psychological Hardiness Scale. This scale has been developed and validated by Kiamarsi (1998). The subject responds to each item with one of the options of "never", "rarely", "sometimes", and "often". These options are scored zero to three. Each of the four options is scored reversely. Except for items 6, 7, 10, 13, 17, 27, and 27 which have a negative charge. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability coefficient, which was 0.84 for all subjects and internal consistency was obtained

0.76 for all subjects using Cronbach's alpha method. In order to investigate the validity of the Ahvaz Psychological Hardiness Questionnaire, this scale simultaneously with the four questionnaires, including the Maslow Self-actualization Scale, the Hardiness Construct Validity Scale, the Ahvaz Depression Scale and the Anxiety Questionnaire were distributed among students. The Anxiety Hardiness Scale was used to calculate the correlation coefficients between the total scores of the subjects, which for the whole sample was: -0.55, -0.70, and -0.40, respectively (13).

B) Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale: This questionnaire was developed by Connor and Davidson by reviewing research resources (1991-1999) on resilience. The psychometric properties of this scale were studied in six groups: general population, referrals to Primary Health Care Unit (PHCU) patients, outpatient psychiatric patients, patients with generalized anxiety disorder, and two groups of patients with post-traumatic stress disorder. Connor and Davidson believe that this questionnaire is able to distinguish resilience from non-resilience well in clinical and non-clinical groups. So, it can be used in research and clinical evaluations. There are 25 items in this questionnaire which are scored on a Likert scale ranging from zero (completely false) to four (always correct). The minimum score of resilience is zero and the maximum score is 100. The scale has five subscales, including competence, stamina, confidence in personal instincts, tolerance of negative emotions, positive acceptance of emotions, safe relationships, restraint and spirituality. This scale has been standardized in Iran by Mohammadi. The correlation of each item with the total score was calculated to determine the validity of this scale, and then factor analysis was used. After correlation of each item with total score was calculated, coefficients were between 0.41 and 0.64 except for item 3. In order to determine the reliability of the Connor and Davidson Resilience Scale, Cronbach's alpha method was used and the reliability coefficient was 0.89 (14).

C) Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ): This scale was developed by Bernstein et al. in 1995. This self-report scale has 52 questions and used to measure child abuse (15). It measures child abuse on four subscales and calculates an

overall score indicating overall abuse. Its four subscales include Emotional Abuse (EA), Physical Abuse (PA), Sexual Abuse (SA), and neglect. A 5-point Likert scale was used to score the items. Bernstein et al. (1994) used Cronbach's alpha and test-retest methods and reported that the reliability of different factors of the questionnaire is in the range 0.79 to 0.94.

Also, Shahny Yeylagh et al. used factor analysis to determine the validity of the questionnaire and concluded the Cronbach alpha equal to 0.91 for total scale, domestic violence 0.87, physical violence 0.85, emotional neglect 0.70, and physical neglect equal to 0.77 (16).

D) Demographic characteristics questionnaire: This scale is a researcher-made questionnaire consisted of 13 questions. It was used to collect demographic information such as age, educational level, current marital status of parents, physical or mental illness of parents, income of families, the order of child's birth, mother's age, mother's education, mother's occupation, father's education, father's age, and father's occupation. First, the contents of a number of questionnaires, their accuracy and content validity were evaluated by psychologists. Then, the comprehensibility of the questionnaire was investigated during a pilot study on normal subjects. Then, the questionnaire was prepared for implementation in the original sample. This questionnaire was completed by all participants after obtaining verbal informed consent to participate in the research and having the right to leave the session in case of withdrawal from doing research. SPSS version 18 was used to analyze the data. For this purpose, statistics indices (mean and standard deviation) were first described and then data was analyzed using inferential statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient, stepwise multiple regression analysis, variance analysis).

Results

In this study, 24.2% of the participants were male, 73.1% were female and 2.9% of the subjects did not answer this question. 20% of the subjects, who were at second grade secondary (high) school, 36.5% at third grade secondary (high) school, 40.4% at pre-university level, and 2.9% of them, did not answer this question. 20.2% of the subjects aged 16 years, 36.5% of the subjects aged 17 years, 42.3% of the subjects aged 18 years, and 1.9% of the participants did not answer this question.

26.9% of the subjects were the first child of the family, 20.2% the second child, 12.5% the third child, 18.3% the fourth child, 6.7% the fifth child, 10.6% the child was sixth and above, and 4.88% did not answer this question. 1.9% of mothers aged less than 30 years, 20.2% were aged 30-40 years, while 67.3% of them aged 40 years or more. 10.6% did not answer this question. 56.7% of the mothers were illiterate, 27.9% had diploma, 11.5% and 2.9% had bachelors and masters or above. 35.6% of mothers were employed and 64.4% were unemployed. 42.3% of the fathers were illiterate, 37.5% had diploma, 13.5% had bachelor degree and 6.7% of them had master degree or above. 74.0% of the fathers were employed and 26.0% were unemployed. 10.6% of the fathers were aged less than 30 years, 22.1% percent aged 30-40 years, and 66.3% aged 40 years or more. In term of physical or mental illness of the parents, 56.7% had a disease and 43.3% had no disease. Almost of the parents (86.25%) had monthly income below 5000,000 Rials (2013-2014). In term of marital status, 62.5% of the parents lived together, 26.9% were divorced, and 10.6% of them were seeking for divorce. The findings related to the psychological hardiness, resilience, child abuse and its types were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The scores of psychological hardiness, resilience, child abuse, and its types

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
Psychological hardiness	67.3	22.06	486.93
Resilience	49.30	29.40	864.79
Child abuse	138.59	33.66	1133.02
Emotional abuse	28.98	12.82	164.40
Physical abuse	44.23	12.16	148.02
Sexual abuse	35.72	8.33	69.42

The normality of the data distribution, approved through Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The data was analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient method. As shown in Table 2, there is a negative significant relationship between parental child abuse and psychological hardiness ($r = -0.464$, $P < 0.001$). It means that the psychological hardiness of children reduces by increasing the child abuse. Also, there is a negative and significant relationship between the dimensions of child abuse (emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect) with psychological hardiness. As shown in Table 2, there is

correlation test between parental child abuse and Resilience. According to the results, of there is a significant negative relationship between parental abuse and resilience ($r = -0.374$, $P < 0.001$).

This means that the resiliency of children decreases by increasing parental child abuse. There is a significant negative relationship between child abuse (emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect) with resiliency. This means that the resiliency of children decreases with increasing emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and the resiliency of children.

Table 2. The correlation between child abuse and its dimensions with psychological hardiness and resilience

Psychological hardiness	(r)	(sig)	Resilience	(r)	(sig)
Parental child abuse	-0.503	0.001	Parental Child Abuse	-0.563	0.001
Emotional abuse	-0.405	0.001	Emotional abuse	-0.583	0.001
Physical abuse	-0.463	0.001	Physical abuse	-0.332	0.001
Sexual abuse	-0.391	0.001	Sexual abuse	-0.578	0.001
Neglect	-0.392	0.001	Neglect	-0.473	0.001

The demographic variables were entered the equation using the stepwise regression, and dimensions of child abuse as independent variables. Psychological hardiness and resilience were entered as dependent variables.

The main elements of multivariate analysis for predicting psychological hardiness are listed in Table 3. The equation has three stages. Multivariable regression coefficient or R in the third stage is 0.555. The coefficient of determination or R² in the third stage is equal to 0.312. According to this coefficient, the three variables of physical abuse, emotional abuse and marital status of the parents together can predict or analyze 31.2% of the variance of psychological hardiness. As mentioned earlier, the regression coefficient of the three variables within the equation in the fourth stage is equal to 0.559 which is significant at the 99% level according to the F-test. Also, the elements of the variables within the equation to predict the dependent variable of psychological hardiness are listed in this table. According to the beta values, there is a negative and an inverse direction between the variables entered into the regression equation with the dependent variable. According to the beta coefficient of the equation, the physical

abuse plays a more role in explaining children's psychological hardiness compared to other variables, and then emotional abuse and marital status respectively had the highest effect on explaining children's psychological well-being.

The main elements of multivariate analysis for predicting resilience are listed in the table 4. According to the statistical results, as shown in the table below, the equation has four stages. Multivariable regression coefficient or R in the fourth stage is equal to 0.760. The coefficient of determination or R² in the fourth stage is 0.777 and indicates that the three variables of emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse and father job are able predict or analyze 57.7% of the variance of the dependent variable.

As shown in the table, the regression coefficient of the four variables within the equation in the fourth stage is 0.760 which is significant at the 99% level based on F test. Also, the elements of the variables within the equation are used to predict the dependent variable of resilience. According to the beta values, there is an inverse and negative relationship between all the variables entered into the regression equation with the dependent variable. According to the beta coefficient of the equation, the emotional

abuse plays a more role in explaining the resiliency of children compared to other variables and then neglect, sexual abuse and father's job

have had the highest effect on explaining the resiliency of children, respectively.

Table 3. Principal components in multivariate analysis to predict psychological hardiness

Step	Variable	R	R2	SEM	Sig F	B	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Physical abuse	0.463	0.214	0.207	0.001	-0.597	-0.463	-5.277	0.001
2	Emotional abuse	0.527	0.278	0.264	0.001	-0.467	-0.272	-2.987	0.004
3	Marital status of parents	0.559	0.312	0.291	0.001	-6.093	-0.1888	-2.214	0.029

Table 4. Principal elements of multivariate analysis within equation to predict resilience

Step	Variable	R	R2	SEM	Sig F	B	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Emotional abuse	0.583	0.340	0.333	0.001	-1.337	-0.583	-7.244	0.001
2	Neglect	0.704	0.495	0.485	0.001	4.538	1.659	5.572	0.001
3	Physical abuse	0.746	0.557	0.543	0.001	-0.479	-0.279	-3.732	0.001
4	Father's job	0.760	0.577	0.560	0.001	-9.721	-0.146	-2.197	0.030

Discussion

The present study aimed to determine the relationship between child abuse and psychological hardiness and resilience in adulthood. According to the results of this study, there is a significant relationship between child abuse and psychological hardiness in adulthood. The results of this study are consistent with the results of Florea et al. study.

According to the results, the poor parent-child interactions, and negative, and stressful family environment reduces ego strength and psychological hardiness. Ego strength is one of the factors affecting the human personality that play a decisive role in his/her vulnerability. Ego strength refers to the ability or the capability of individuals to interactions with each other and their social environment. It includes the ability of individuals to withstand anxiety and to cope with stresses, one's capacity to moderate that enables person to use his or her natural skills and abilities for not be influenced by hardiness in uncomfortable situations. Given that, different parent child-rearing practices have a significant effect on the components related to ego strength, such as ego hardiness, ego skill, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. So, the authority parent child-rearing practice of child abuse including high levels of restraint, punishment, rejection, control, hearing, harsh hegemonic practices, will reduce the level of ego strength (17,18). Therefore, it can be concluded that people with hardiness are able

to improve their mental health in unforeseen events due to their optimistic explanatory style, ability to cope with problems, problem-centered dealing with problems, positive expectations about outcomes, and belief in the consequence of action. Also, according to the results, there is a significant positive relationship between parental abuse and resilience. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Hatamloo et al. (19), Toozendehjani et al. (20), Hosseini et al. (21), and Tam et al. (22). According to the results reported by these researchers, the styles of parental child abuse can play a significant role in reducing resiliency and perceived adolescent efficacy and self-efficacy. Families have the first and highest effect on their children therefore people with resilience, high confidence, and mental health belong to families with strong powerful parent child-rearing practice. There is a warm and intimate relationship between parents and their children. Whereas individuals with behavioral, antisocial, and impulsive behaviors belong to families with democratic and authority parent child-rearing practice, and there is a cold relationship between the parents and their children (23).

On the other hand, the results of this study are inconsistent with the findings of a study which concluded that children who grow up in troubled families are vulnerable and they grow resilience in the process of dealing with these harms. According to some theories, the balance between

protective and risk factors does not play a significant role in determining resilience and the personality of the child is of most importance. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the resiliency of two people who are in exactly the same situation that is one faces problems in inappropriate situations and the other experience no problem in this field. So, the effects of all forms of abuse on all children are not the same (24). The factors of resilience, personality structure, and the child's own ego has a decisive effect on their vulnerability. Also, the child's vulnerability can be reduced by coping skills and internal controls, high intelligence, and empathy for each other and supportive environments and due to reducing negative emotions and increasing mental health, the resilience is considered as a source to facilitate the overcoming of problems (22), resistance to stress, and eliminate their psychological effects (25).

Findings of a study aimed to investigate the relationship between parent child-rearing practices and their domestic violence towards children in Ahvaz showed that there was a significant positive correlation between democratic and authority parent child-rearing practices with domestic violence, but there was a negative significant correlation between authority parent child-rearing practices and domestic violence towards children (25).

Finally, there was a significant correlation between all parent child-rearing practices with the dimensions of physical violence (physical, emotional, and neglect) except for the democratic parent child-rearing practices with physical violence. According to the interpretation of the results of stepwise multivariate regression analysis, the variables of authority parent child-rearing practices and democratic parent child-rearing practices explained 48.35% of the dependent variable changes.

Shamaizadeh and Yousefi investigated the relationship between five personality factors and child abuse experience with family relationships

in healthy individuals. According to the results, there is a positive and significant relationship between the five personality factors, extraversion and conscientiousness had with family relationships. There is a negative and significant relationship between neuroticism and child abuse experience with family relationships. According to these results, in order to improve family relationships, the extraversion and conscientiousness should be increased and neuroticism reduced. Also, some measures should be developed to resolve the child abuse experience (26). According to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that resilience and hardiness are considered as interpersonal resources that can moderate levels of disability and stressful living conditions and reduce the negative effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Also, hardiness can be learned. Individuals are likely to have acquired a sense of efficiency and control in the face of events. Therefore, appropriate education practices replace punishment-based practices in the families are considered as important steps to solve and prevent the short-term and long-term negative consequences of child abuse.

It is recommended to pay much attention to other effective psychological and personality variables on adaptation and empowerment of these individuals through psychological treatments.

Conclusion

Based in the findings, it seems that child abuse has negative and significant impact on resilience and psychological hardiness.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the staff of Welfare Organization in Fars province (Shiraz and Kazeroun) those who helped us conduct the research, as well as to the research participants who collaborated with us collect data by spending time. No conflict of interest was reported by the authors in the present study.

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