



The Relationship between Parenting and Attachment Styles and Moral Development in 5 to 7 years old Children

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Abstract: This study aimed to determine the moral development of 5 to 7 years old children in kindergartens in the second district in Tehran based on two criteria including attachment and parenting styles. This research is a descriptive – correlational kind of research. Three kinds of questionnaires were used to collect data including Baumrind parenting style questionnaire, Lotfabadi moral development questionnaire and Oudenhoven and Hofstra questionnaire of children's attachment style. Random sampling method was used to select the sample in this study. Based on Morgan Table, 340 children were selected from 2980 children who were between 5 and 7 years old in kindergartens in the second district of Tehran. Based on type and nature of the study, Pearson correlation and stepwise regression methods were used to analyze the collected data. Based on the conducted investigations, there is an inverse and significant relationship between moral development and authoritative parenting style while there is a direct and significant relationship between moral development and authoritarian parenting style and secure attachment style. Furthermore, the obtained results showed that authoritarian parenting and secure attachment styles are predictors of children's moral development .

Keywords: Moral Development, Parenting Styles, Attachment Styles.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important aspects of growth is moral evolution and development, which has a certain trajectory from childhood to young hood ¹. According to Piaget, moral development results from cognitive development and social experience. This issue refers to respect for law and social justice ². It can be stated that the family is the foundation of a numbers of moral characters. Certainly, the family background affects the children's mood. Parents shape the children's ethical behavior in various ways, including by providing scientific model of their own their behavior ³.

According to Kohlberg, the purpose of teaching ethics and moral standards to the children lies in prompting the child's ability to judge. Thus, he may be given the opportunity to control his behavior by taking advantage of sound judgment³.

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In this regard, parents play an important role in the growth and accordingly development of children's moral development. Therefore, it can be stated that one of the factors that influence the moral development is educational practices or parenting styles used by parents. Parenting styles are defined as a set of behaviors that describe the child-parent interactions over a wide range of situations. It is assumed that this creates an effective and interactive atmosphere⁴. According to Bamrind theory, parenting styles act the mediator between the parents' normative variables and the children's socialization; moreover, they are related to both ethical and social competence^{5, 6}. Furthermore, Querido showed that there is a positive relationship between authoritative parenting style and academic organization and achievement as well as intellectual orientation in children. Research has shown that the adolescents who have authoritarian parents are less self-reliant. They cannot do their tasks alone without help of either their parents or others. They do not have any opinion on any subject matter (they cannot express their feelings). They are less developed in terms of moral development. They are less flexible in dealing with everyday practical, educational and mental problems⁷. Thus, the role of family and parenting styles on children's growth is undeniable, especially on the children's moral development⁸.

Among other relevant variables within the family, children's attachment style can be noted. This is noteworthy because many studies, including Kurdistan et al.,⁹ Gallarin and Alonso¹⁰, Vignoli et al.,¹¹ Pakdaman and Khanjani⁴ and Farahbakhsh et al.,¹² confirmed that there is a relationship between both parenting and attachment styles in the children. Attachment is one of the most important evolutionary concepts (factor) which affects the human development. Bowlby proposed this issue for the first time in order to explain the relationship between child and the primary caregivers in 1973¹². Then, Ainsworth introduced attachment styles in 1978⁹.

Forming a secure attachment during the first years of life is considered as the foundation of sound moral orientation. Then, it is essential that mothers apply appropriate strategies in raising their children to create a secure attachment with their children. This consequently creates a healthy social and moral orientation in the children raised by such parents⁶.

In this regard, Shahsavari et al.,⁷ showed in their research that there is a significant relationship between the family performance and permissive parenting style and moral judgment. Moreover, the results obtained by Sabbagh¹³ indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship between the level of children-parents interaction and their moral development. In addition, a review on literature showed that attachment and its levels are predictors of moral beliefs and norms^{14, 15}. Arsenio & Gold¹⁶ also expressed in their research that attachment plays an important role in forming emotional concepts, empathy and concern for others. These concepts lead to moral understanding and development in the children. Stilwell et al.,¹⁷ showed that the level of attachment is significantly correlated with five stages of moral sense. Moreover, they showed that there is a

stronger relationship between moral development and the secure attachment style compared to other attachment styles.

Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the factors that influence the children's moral development. It is also important to pay attention to both context and the environment where the child grows, i.e. family environment. It is also vital to pay attention to the parenting styles used by parents and kind of attachment between individuals (the attachment style between parents and the children).

According to these issues, this study aimed to investigate moral development based on both parenting and attachment styles in 5 to 7 years old children in kindergartens in second district of Tehran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This present study is a descriptive – correlational kind of study. The statistical population included all 5 to 7 years children in kindergartens in second district in Tehran. Simple random sampling method was used to select the sample in this study. Accordingly, it was confirmed that the total number of children in kindergartens in the second district in Tehran was equal to 2980 children based on the inquiry made from Tehran Welfare. According to Morgan table for determining the sample size, 340 children were selected. The following tools were used to collect data :

Baumrind Parenting Style Questionnaire: this was developed by Diana Baumrind. This questionnaire consists of 30 items. In this questionnaire, 10 items refers to permissive parenting style, 10 items refers to authoritative parenting style while 10 other items refers to authoritarian parenting style. The pattern of response to the questions was based on five-point Likert scale, which was obtained from sum of the scores of every 10 items of the three components. The reliability and validity of this questionnaire was investigated in various studies. It was reported that this questionnaire has satisfactory reliability and validity ¹⁸.

Oudenhoven and Hofstra Questionnaire of Children's Attachment Style: it was developed in 2005 to measure attachment styles of the children. This questionnaire consists of four dimensions including: a) secure, b) avoidant insecure, c) ambivalent insecure, d) disorganized insecure attachment styles. This consists of 24 items. In every item, a score between totally agree (score 5) and totally disagree (score 1) is given to each subject. The reliability of this questionnaire for each dimension including secure, avoidant insecure, ambivalent insecure, disorganized insecure attachment styles were respectively reported as 68%, 92%, 88% and 80% using test-retest and Cronbach's alpha methods ¹⁹. Moreover, the validity of this questionnaire was approved by three psychologists. In the present study, the level of reliability for secure subscale was reported as 0.30, for avoidant insecure as 0.81, for ambivalent insecure as 0.24, and for disorganized insecure as 0.88.

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Lotfabadi Moral Development Questionnaire: Lotfabadi ² developed this 18-items form to measure moral development in 5 to 11 years old children. The questions of this test are designed based on six moral categories. Three kind of narrative question were designed for each category. Each one of the eighteen questions was evaluated by one or multi-degree scale of ethical judgment (totally ethical, ethical, a little bit ethical, a little bit unethical, unethical, totally unethical). The mean level of general moral development of children in Iran was equal to 3.97 in the six-degree scale. The validity of this tool was confirmed by psychology professors using formal and content validity. The correlation between concurrent validity of this tool and other tools such as Bandargashtalt was obtained as 0.44, which confirm that the correlation between concurrent validity of these two tools is high. It was reported that the internal consistency of the scale is greater than 0.34. This indicates that the scale is valid ². In this study, the mean of moral development of 5 to 7 years old children was equal to 3.02.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis tested whether the parenting styles used by the parents are predictors of moral development in 5 to 7 years old children. The results relevant to analysis of this hypothesis are given in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients between parenting styles and moral development

Domains	Permissive parenting style	Authoritative parenting style	Authoritarian parenting style
Moral development	-0.03	-0.11*	0.12*
Level of significance	0.546	0.049	0.029

* Correlations are significant in 0.05 level of significance.

The results presented in Table 1 shows that moral development of the children has no significant relationship with permissive parenting style; however, the former variable has an inverse and significant relationship with authoritative parenting style. Moreover, there is a direct and significant relationship between moral development of the children and authoritarian parenting style ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Results of ANOVA for significance of the regression equation and multiple correlation coefficients between parenting style and moral development variables

Statistics of input variables	Source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	F-value	R	R square	Mean of squares	Level of significance
Authoritarian parenting style	Regression	1.47	1				1.47	
	Residual	103.06	338	4.83	0.12	0.01	0.30	0.029
	Total		339					

Criterion variable: moral development

As it can be observed in Table 2, the authoritarian parenting style variable was only entered into stepwise multiple regression equation. This variable explains

0.01% of variance of the equation. Components of permissive and authoritarian parenting styles were excluded from the regression equation. The results of ANOVA for validity of the regression equation also showed that the result is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Results of stepwise regression analysis of parenting styles with children's moral development

Statistics of the variable	Standard coefficient		Standard deviation of the error	t-value	Level of significance
	B-value	Beta-value			
Step one					
Constant value	2.85		0.08	33.87	0.0001
Authoritarian parenting style	0.01	0.12	0.01	2.19	0.029

Criterion variable: moral development

Based on the results shown in Table 3, authoritarian parenting style is the only predictor of moral development among other parenting styles.

The second hypothesis tested whether parenting styles can predict moral development in 5 to 7 years old children. The results relevant to this analysis are given in Tables 4, 5 and 6.

Table 4. Correlation coefficients between attachment styles and children's moral development

Domains	Secure attachment style	Avoidant insecure attachment style	Ambivalent insecure parenting style	Disorganized insecure parenting style
Moral development	0.13*	-0.01	-0.01	-0.10
Level of significance	0.015	0.950	0.798	0.065

* Correlations are significant in 0.05 level of significance.

The results shown in Table 4 show that moral development of children has only a direct and significant relationship with secure attachment style ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5. Results of ANOVA for significance of regression equation and multiple correlation coefficients of attachment styles and moral development variables

Statistics of input variables	Source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	F-value	R	R square	Mean of squares	Level of significance
Secure attachment style	Regression	1.82	1	6.01	0.13	0.02	1.82	0.015
	Remaining	102.71	338				0.30	

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Total	104.53	339
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Criterion variable: moral development

As it can be observed in Table 5, only component of secure attachment style was entered into stepwise multiple regression equation. This variable explains 0.02% of variance of the equation. Components of avoidant insecure, ambivalent insecure and disorganized insecure attachment styles were excluded from the regression equation. ANOVA results for the validity of the regression equation also showed that the result is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 6. Results of stepwise regression analysis of children's attachment styles with moral development

Statistics of the variable	Standard coefficient		Standard deviation of the error	t-value	Level of significance
	B-value	Beta-value			
Step one					
Constant value	2.61		0.17	15.10	0.0001
Secure attachment style	0.03	0.13	0.01	2.45	0.015

Criterion variable: moral development

Based on the results presented in Table 6, secure attachment style is the only predictor of moral development among other attachment styles. The third hypothesis tested whether there is a significant difference between level of moral development of female and male children. The results of t-test results are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Dependent t-test between two groups of male and female children considering moral development

Indexes		Number	Mean	Standard deviation	t-value	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
Moral development	Female children	145	2.96	0.55	-1.63	338	0.105
	Male children	145	3.06	0.55			

According to Table 7, considering moral development variable, based on absolute value of calculated at (-1.63) and degree of freedom (338), the obtained t-value is smaller than the t-table (1.96). In addition, due to obtained level of significance (0.105), it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between moral development of female and male children with 95% confidence.

DISCUSSION

The role of family environment in shaping the concepts relevant to the child's character and its surrounding environment is undeniable (it cannot be denied that

family environment play an important role in shaping the child's character). In this respect, morality is also influenced by the family (the family has a major role in development of the children's morality). As it was stated in the above, one of the most important aspects of growth lies in evolution and development of morality, which has a certain trajectory from childhood to young hood. Morality is an innate characteristic. The child possesses this ability and talent since birth. In this regard, Carpendale et al.,¹⁹ stated that all kinds of individuals want to be perceived as an ethical individual who follow the norms of ethics. Power⁸ also stated that moral development actually occurs through the interaction established between various individuals. In this regard, various factors are effective in moral development. As it was already noted, parents play an important role in moral development of their children. The parenting styles used by the parents and attachment styles of the children, which are affected by the family environment, are influential in the formation and development of morality in children .

The results obtained from this study showed that authoritarian parenting and secure attachment styles were not only directly correlated with moral development, but they are also predictors of moral development. The studies conducted in this area confirm the role of family environment in the development of child's personality. Thus, paying attention to the family environment as the main factor affecting development of the children's personalities is still a priority as it was confirmed by many commentators.

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