



An investigation into the relationship between parents' attitudes towards gender roles and the social isolation of female adolescents

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Abstract

Background and aims: This study investigated the relationship between parents' attitudes toward gender roles and the social isolation of female adolescents in Iran in 2021.

Methods: This descriptive study of a correlational type and its statistical population included all female adolescents studying in secondary schools in the city of Isfahan in 2021, out of whom 133 were selected by convenience sampling. They answered the following questionnaires: the Homami et al Questionnaire on Attitudes toward Gender Roles in Family Life and the Modarresi Yazdi et al Social Isolation Questionnaire. Research data were analyzed through the independent *t* test, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), the Kruskal-Wallis test, and the Spearman correlation coefficient using SPSS-12 software.

Results: An analysis of the present data showed that the mean score of social isolation was significantly lower in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of parental roles than in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain ($P=0.005$, $t=-2.876$). The mean scores of social isolation in the dimensions: of loneliness ($P=0.040$, $t=-2.073$) and social despair ($P=0.036$, $t=-2.124$) were also significantly lower in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of parental roles than in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain. The mean score of social isolation was significantly higher in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in the domain of general marital roles than in students whose parents had a justice-seeking or masculinist attitude. The mean score of loneliness was significantly higher in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain than in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude. But no significant difference was observed between students whose parents had a feminist attitude and those with a masculinist attitude.

Conclusion: Parents' attitudes and behavior in gender behaviors are essential factors in mental health, especially social isolation in female adolescents. When parents' attitudes towards their children's gender roles are justice-seeking; they can better communicate with their children, so their children feel less lonely and socially isolated.

Keywords: Parent-child relations, Gender roles, Social behaviors, Adolescent well-being

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Introduction

Adolescence is a stage in human life that encompasses the years following the beginning of puberty until the beginning of adulthood. Puberty is considered a natural phenomenon and one of the stages of human development, which can be regarded as one of the remarkable stages of every human's life (1). In this period, the most sensitive experiences of human life occur, including affective, social, and emotional experiences such as love and friendship, identity formation, education, and occupation (2).

Nonetheless, research shows a close relationship between heredity and the environment in human biological and cultural behavior development (3). Despite playing a role in stages of biological evolution, puberty is dealt with in various ways in different societies due to the influence of culture (4). Hence, social and family contexts should be considered when studying and teaching

adolescent issues (5).

It has been observed in many cases that parental behavior has left such irreparable consequences on children's soul and mind that their effects have even remained in adulthood (6).

Research shows that people suffering from social isolation experience a different pattern of social response and a more significant threat in social confrontations. Therefore, lonely individuals are more likely to appear unsuccessful in social interactions (7). Other studies have mentioned social isolation and unwantedness in childhood as the most important causes of self-harming behaviors among adolescents (8). Nonetheless, instead of considering social isolation as a negative emotion, some researchers associate it with negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and unlovability (9). On the other hand, studies show that childhood loneliness can predict

low emotional health in adolescence (10).

In addition to being influenced by biological factors, puberty, and its individual, psychological, and physical symptoms are influenced by other variables, such as the attitudes and behaviors of parents and other people in society. Gender roles and social isolation could be sensitive issues, and we didn't find enough studies to investigate these variables. Hence, the present study investigated the relationship between parents' attitudes toward gender roles and social isolation among female adolescents in Isfahan in 2021. This study divided parents into three attitudes: feminist, justice-seeking, and masculinist. The feminist attitude is an attitude that seeks the superiority of the place and dignity of women in the family. In contrast, the masculinist attitude considers a higher dignity for men, and the justice-seeking attitude is a balanced and moderate attitude between the two.

Materials and Methods

The present study was descriptive based on the nature of the work and was correlational. The study was performed on a statistical population of all female adolescents in secondary schools in the city of Isfahan in 2021. These individuals met the inclusion criteria of the study: the appearance of signs of puberty, living with parents, being a girl, studying in a secondary school, and willingness to participate. The sampling method in the present study was convenience sampling, and 133 female adolescents were selected through the formula of sample size.

$$n = \frac{2\sigma^2 (z_{1-\alpha/2} + z_{1-\beta})^2}{\delta^2}$$

They were excluded if their parents were divorced or separated. Also, female adolescents suffering from acute psychiatric disorders were excluded from the study. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the normality of data distribution. Research data were analyzed at the two levels: descriptive and inferential, through the independent *t* test, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), the Kruskal-Wallis test, and the Spearman correlation coefficient using SPSS-12 software.

The Homami et al Questionnaire on Attitudes toward Gender Roles in Family Life will be used to evaluate and measure attitudes toward gender roles in family life. This questionnaire consists of 99 items in five dimensions, where the dimension of parental roles includes 42 items, general marital roles 30 items, marital roles in sexual and fertility issues 19 items, girls' and boys' roles on the verge of marriage three items, and the dimension of sibling roles five items. This questionnaire was administered to a sample of 390 subjects from the general population of Tehran city in 2012-2013. The results confirmed the questionnaire's reliability, face validity, and content validity (11).

The Modarresi Yazdi et al Social Isolation Questionnaire In 18 items and four subscales, namely, loneliness, helplessness, social despair, and decreased social tolerance, this questionnaire was normalized and used by

Modarresi Yazdi et al (12). In this questionnaire, items 1 to 6 constitute the dimension of social loneliness, items 7 to 9 the dimension of helplessness, items 10 to 14 the dimension of social despair, and items 15 to 18 the dimension of decreased social tolerance. The scoring method in this questionnaire is in the form of a 5-point Likert scale, where the option "very low" receives one score and the option "very high" receives five scores. The reliability of this questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha method, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated at 0.79, 0.85, 0.73, and 0.78 for the following dimensions: loneliness, helplessness, social despair, and decreased social tolerance, respectively, and 0.72 for the whole questionnaire.

Results

Findings from the analysis of demographic data are shown in Table 1. According to results obtained from the independent *t* test, the mean score of social isolation was significantly lower in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of parental roles than in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain ($P=0.005$, $t=-2.876$) (see Table 2). Also, the mean scores of social isolation in the dimensions of loneliness and social despair were significantly lower in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of parental roles than in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain. Also, based on the one-way ANOVA test, significant differences were observed in the mean score of social isolation between groups of students based on parents' different attitudes in general marital roles. The mean score of social isolation was significantly higher in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in the domain of general marital roles than in students whose parents had a justice-seeking or masculinist attitude. The mean score of loneliness was significantly higher in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain than in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude. But no significant difference was observed between students whose parents had a feminist attitude and those with a masculinist attitude (see Table 3). The independent *t* test showed that there was no significant difference between groups of students in the mean scores of social isolation and the dimensions: loneliness, helplessness, social despair, and decreased social tolerance based on parents' different attitudes in the domain of girls' and boys' roles on the verge of marriage (see Table 4). As you see in Table 5, there was no significant difference between groups of students in the scores of social isolation and the dimensions: loneliness, helplessness, social despair, and decreased social tolerance based on parents' different attitudes toward sibling roles.

Discussion

loneliness in childhood can predict low emotional health in adolescence. Therefore, social isolation in the long term limits physical, psychological, and emotional capacities.

Table 1. The frequency distribution of the subjects based on parental age, duration of the marriage, and level of education

Variable	Category	Number	Percent	Mean	Standard deviation
Parental age (y)	41 to 50	51	38.3	53.95	7.40
	51 to 60	50	37.6		
	61 to 70	32	24.1		
Duration of marriage (y)	Less than 20	20	15.0	25.83	4.16
	21 to 30	93	69.9		
	31 to 40	20	15.0		
Parental level of education	Lower than a high school diploma	40	30.1	-	-
	High school diploma	43	32.3		
	Associate degree & Bachelor's degree	40	30.1		
	Postgraduate	10	7.5		
Total		133	100.0		

Table 2. A comparison between the mean score of social isolation and its different dimensions based on parents' different attitudes in the domain of parental roles in family life

Dimension	Attitude	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	T-statistic	Degrees of freedom	P value
Loneliness	Justice-seeking	61	18.87	3.78	-2.073	131	0.040
	Feminist	72	20.21	3.66			
Helplessness	Justice-seeking	61	7.61	2.12	-1.530	131	0.129
	Feminist	72	8.18	2.19			
Social despair	Justice-seeking	61	13.56	2.51	-2.124	131	0.036
	Feminist	72	14.60	3.05			
Decreased social tolerance	Justice-seeking	61	8.56	2.80	-1.753	131	0.082
	Feminist	72	9.43	2.91			
The general dimension of social isolation	Justice-seeking	61	48.59	7.13	-2.876	131	0.005
	Feminist	72	52.42	8.05			

Table 3. A comparison between the mean score of social isolation and its different dimensions based on parents' different attitudes in the domain of general marital roles in family life

Dimension	Attitude	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	F-statistic	Degrees of freedom	P value
Loneliness	Masculinist	39	19.36	4.00	4.305	(2,130)	0.015
	Justice-seeking	60	18.87	3.84			
	Feminist	34	21.15	2.87			
Helplessness	Masculinist	39	7.62	1.94	0.983	(2,130)	0.377
	Justice-seeking	60	7.88	2.24			
	Feminist	34	8.32	2.28			
Social despair	Masculinist	39	13.46	2.95	2.206	(2,130)	0.114
	Justice-seeking	60	14.13	2.86			
	Feminist	34	14.85	2.62			
Decreased social tolerance	Masculinist	39	8.51	2.42	1.990	(2,130)	0.141
	Justice-seeking	60	8.92	2.57			
	Feminist	34	9.82	3.70			
Social isolation	Masculinist	39	48.95	7.56	4.913	(2,130)	0.009
	Justice-seeking	60	49.80	7.68			
	Feminist	34	54.15	7.62			

According to results from the independent *t* test, the mean score of social isolation was significantly lower in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of parental roles than in students whose parents had a feminist attitude. The mean scores of social isolation

in the categories: of loneliness and social despair, were also significantly lower in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of parental roles than in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain. As found in Bayat et al study, family function,

Table 4. A comparison between the mean score of social isolation and its different dimensions based on parents' different attitudes in the domain of girls' and boys' roles on the verge of marriage in family life

Dimension	Attitude	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	T-statistic	Degrees of freedom	P value
Loneliness	Masculinist	34	20.00	3.59	0.729	131	0.468
	Justice-seeking	99	19.45	3.82			
Helplessness	Masculinist	34	8.15	2.22	0.715	131	0.476
	Justice-seeking	99	7.84	2.16			
Social despair	Masculinist	34	14.29	3.14	0.411	131	0.682
	Justice-seeking	99	14.06	2.76			
Decreased social tolerance	Masculinist	34	8.44	2.69	-1.385	131	0.168
	Justice-seeking	99	9.23	2.93			
Social isolation	Masculinist	34	50.88	8.26	0.189	131	0.850
	Justice-seeking	99	50.59	7.75			

Table 5. A comparison between the mean score of social isolation and its different dimensions based on parents' different attitudes in the domain of sibling roles in family life

Dimension	Attitude	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	χ^2 statistic	Degrees of freedom	P value
Loneliness	Masculinist	16	18.69	3.63	1.722	2	0.423
	Justice-seeking	107	19.76	3.79			
	Feminist	10	19.30	3.74			
Helplessness	Masculinist	16	7.38	2.28	0.905	2	0.636
	Justice-seeking	107	7.99	2.14			
	Feminist	10	8.00	2.40			
Social despair	Masculinist	16	13.06	2.62	4.264	2	0.119
	Justice-seeking	107	14.15	2.78			
	Feminist	10	15.50	3.57			
Decreased social tolerance	Masculinist	16	8.25	2.41	1.805	2	0.406
	Justice-seeking	107	9.20	2.91			
	Feminist	10	8.50	3.27			
Social isolation	Masculinist	16	47.38	8.07	3.778	2	0.151
	Justice-seeking	107	51.09	7.57			
	Feminist	10	51.30	9.96			

and factors play an influential role in adolescent loneliness. It could be recognized as an important social and mental health problem. Also, increased parent-child emotional distance triggers feelings of rejection and loneliness (13). Our findings showed that the mean scores of social isolation in the dimensions: of helplessness and decreased social tolerance were not significantly different between groups of students. According to our results, it was observed in the domain of general marital roles in family life that, based on the results of the one-way ANOVA test, there was a significant difference in the mean score of social isolation between groups of students. The results of the Bonferroni post hoc test showed that the mean score of social isolation was significantly higher in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain than in students whose parents had a justice-seeking or masculinist attitude. In other words, individuals who experience gender role conflict are unable to express their emotions and feelings in interpersonal relationships, leading to decreased self-esteem (14). Hence, they avoid establishing relationships with those around them, thus

feeling lonely and socially isolated. Breiding et al state that people, who do not play justice-centered gender roles, show more violence, which ultimately leads to feelings of loneliness and social isolation in an individual (15). A study conducted by Yan et al in 2018 to investigate the longitudinal relations between a parent's relationship with the middle child and the child's perceived loneliness states that when the parents' attitudes toward the child's gender roles are justice-centered and encompass their internalized gender characteristics and functions, they can better communicate with their child, thus their child will show a lower feeling of loneliness and social isolation (2). In a study conducted in 2017 to investigate the relationship between parental and peer acceptance and adolescents' feelings of loneliness concerning the role of the mediator variable "self-esteem," Song et al showed that there was a negative relationship between acceptance of gender roles by peers and parents as well as self-esteem on the one hand and adolescents' feelings of loneliness on the other (16). Very little research has been undertaken to explore the expectations of the spousal roles and

responsibilities in marital life in contemporary contexts. Couples' expectations are shaped by gender role attitudes alongside cultural and societal norms (17).

Our results showed that 34 parents had a masculinist attitude and 99 a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of girls' and boys' roles on the verge of marriage in family life. According to results obtained from the independent *t* test, there was no significant difference between groups of students in the mean scores of social isolation and the dimensions: of loneliness, helplessness, social despair, and decreased social tolerance. Also, it was observed in the domain of sibling roles that based on the results of the Kruskal–Wallis test, there was no significant difference between these three groups of students in the scores of social isolation and the dimensions: of loneliness, helplessness, social despair, and decreased social tolerance. Based on a study by Hilário, the sibling relationship is commonly believed to constitute an essential context to comprehend the human mind and practice social skills (18).

Conclusion

Findings from the analysis of research data showed that parents' attitudes affect the degree of schoolgirls' social isolation in a way that the degree of social isolation was significantly lower in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of parental roles than in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain. The mean scores of social isolation in the dimensions: of loneliness and social despair were also significantly lower in students whose parents had a justice-seeking attitude in the domain of parental roles than in students whose parents had a feminist attitude in this domain. But the mean scores of social isolation in the dimensions of helplessness and decreased social tolerance were not significantly different between these two groups of students. Considering the research method and the statistical population, any research has some limitations. This study's statistical population included adolescent female students in Isfahan in 2021, but the results cannot be generalized to other populations.

Furthermore, the social isolation of female adolescents is influenced by multiple factors, which have not been addressed in the present study. Another limitation was the conditions of answering the questionnaires by female adolescents, so the researcher tried to choose the most suitable time for completing the questionnaires by consulting the participants. This study was performed for the first time in Iran and supported the need for further study. One of the strengths of the current research was entering the field of sexuality and determining the gender roles of parents. Due to the lack of similar articles in this field, we tried to compare them with related research. So, gender roles and social isolation could be sensitive issues in different communities, and doing research in these fields could be very challenging. This study will increase healthcare providers' knowledge about psychological health outcomes when adolescents face social isolation.

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Author's Contribution

Conceptualization: Mahnaz Nabi, Sadat Mousavi.

Investigation: Mahnaz Nabi.

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Supervision: Mahsa Sadat Mousavi.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were following the ethical standards of the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch under the ethics code IR.IAU.KHUISE.REC.1398.284

Informed Consent

All participants signed a written informed consent form

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