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European Journal of Experimental Biology, 2013, 3(2):306-309



### Effect of self-focused parenting on aggressive and stubborn behaviors in six-year-old children in Yazd

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#### ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the effect of self-focused parenting on reducing aggressive and stubborn behaviors in six-year-old children in Yazd city. In this regard, a number of 66 children and their mothers were randomly selected and assigned into either an experimental group ( $N=30$ ) or a control group ( $N=30$ ). The experimental subjects conducted self-focused parenting style while the control subjects conducted the common parenting style. Following the intervention, Rutter questionnaire and a researcher-made scale were used to examine aggressive and stubborn behaviors in children in either group, respectively. The results showed that self-focused parenting could reduce both aggressive and stubborn behaviors in children. The results of statistical analysis revealed that self-focused parenting reduced aggression and stubbornness in children. Considering the answers mothers provided on the researcher-made questionnaire, children's mean stubborn score was calculated to be 38.06 before and 31.23 after the training program, which indicates the effectiveness of the intervention. The results of descriptive statistics and measures of central tendency revealed that experimental children's mean aggressive score was 10.2 before and 6.83 after the training program, which indicates the effectiveness of the program. From a comparison between mothers' answers to the questionnaires and  $t$  distribution table, we may conclude with 95 percent certainty that there was a significant difference in mothers' attitude toward aggressive behavior in their children before and after the training program ( $P \leq 0.05$ ).

**Key Words:** Self-Focused, Aggressive, Stubborn Behavior

#### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it is well understood that how well mental health, adaptability and avoidance of aggressive behavior in children would contribute to their future development and social acceptance. Children are the most essential and influential capitals of a nation. Here, the role of families stands out since environmental factors and parents' behavior may either minimize stubborn and aggressive behaviors or maximize adaptive behaviors in children. Both tolerance and rejection may result in high levels of childhood aggression. By ignoring their children, parents may ignore the factors causing distress in children so that they may not respond to children's need for love and care. Besides, rejection may probably mean that parents are a poor source of positive reinforcement or rewards, which makes the role of parents less effective as the sources to train self-control – either aggression control or controlling any improper behavior. This may also hold true when parents lack any coherent program to control aggression and stubborn behavior or to reinforce social adaptive behavior in young children [9, 16]. A family may employ a variety

of techniques to play its essential role in paving the way for children to pass through the dependency stage of childhood to the independent stage of adolescence, maturity, responsibility, self-confidence and adaptability [21]. The parenting practice and its deep, sustained influence upon children's personality and mind pose serious challenges. The parenting practice affects all mental aspects of children and influences their behavioral, affective and cognitive performance [7]. Most of the children with early childhood emotional and behavioral disorders not only fail to readily resolve such problems but also may suffer from the disorders well through adulthood [10]. The prevalence of childhood disorders is estimated about 6 through 25 percent [12]. These disorders are broadly categorized as internalized and externalized disorders. The former refers to the set of disorders within the individual such as anxiety, depression, social isolation and physical complaints without physical symptoms. The latter refers to the individual's conflicts with others and others' expectations such as excitation, hyperactivity, assertiveness, negative work and conduct problems [2]. Oppositional defiant disorder is considered as a disruptable behavior disorder. This disorder is characterized by sustained negative pattern, defiance and adversity toward authorities, by failure to shoulder the responsibility of one's mistakes and by reproaching other people. Epidemiology studies of trait-negative characteristics in non-clinical population estimated the prevalence of these characteristics in elementary school students to be 16 through 22 percent. According to DSM-IV-TR, the prevalence of this disorder is estimated about 2 through 6 percent [4]. Evidence shows that childhood oppositional defiant disorder is associated with personality disorders, academic and social problems in later stages of life [13]. Aggressive children are usually rejected by their peers, have poor educational performance and are vulnerable to juvenile delinquency [1]. In etiological terms, many causes have been proposed to account for these disorders. One of most important causes may be parents' failure to manage children's behavior and negative child-parent interaction [8, 12, 13]. Research findings show that child-parent interaction affect such disorder so that strict discipline imposed by parents or their contradictory orders may bring about such disorders. Another significant factor in this regard is imperfect parent skills to interact and train children [1, 17]. Koenigs (1977) reported that 60 percent of children's aggressive behavior is predictable based on parents' negative, conflicting behavior. Thus, we may expect that resolving these parenting problems would help prevent such disorder. Research has confirmed the effectiveness of this approach.

As research shows that family risk factors such as poor parenting and conflicts is a strong predictor of developed externalized disorders in children and adolescents, the primary intervention technique – parenting style – is an effective method to prevent chronic behavioral disorders in children [12]. Thus, in the present study, the researcher developed a self-focused parenting program based on family and parenting interventions, which constitutes the basis of a healthy personality enjoying self-esteem, self-acceptance and self-confidence. In fact, self-focused parenting style aims to increase self-esteem and self-confidence in children using clear methods and parent training. The researcher addresses the question whether self-focused parenting style may help reduce aggressive and stubborn behaviors in children, considering the fact that parenting style may significantly influence children and social health. Besides, the researcher understands the lack of an effective training package that may clearly address the factors contributing to children's mental health. In self-focused parenting program, the researcher draws upon psychological findings to address the strongest variables that cause positive or negative excitement followed by consequent adaptive or non-adaptive behaviors in children. In this regard, the researcher aims to provide straightforward procedures to help eliminate negative excitements and to develop positive excitements that play a significant role in children's lives, affect their beliefs and broadly guide them as how to deal with their environment [6].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants

The present study adopts a quasi-experimental design consisting of a pre- and post-test and a control group. In this regard, a number of 66 mothers with 6-year-old children were randomly selected as the participants. Children and their mothers were randomly assigned into either an experimental group (N=30) or a control group (N=30).

### Procedure

In the first session, the objectives of the study were first explained to mothers. Then both the Rutter and the researcher-made questionnaires were administered to the mothers who completed them in situ with researcher guidance. Then the mothers were randomly divided into two groups with equal size: a control and an experimental group. The experimental subjects were then asked to participate in self-focused parenting training program. The program was conducted in three two-hour sessions with one-week interval between each session. The control subjects, however, followed the usual parenting style. When the training program was completed, the participants were asked to come together in a session where they completed the same questionnaires for the second time. The

Rutter questionnaire and a researcher-made questionnaire were used to collect the data. In order to examine the validity of either questionnaire, the researcher drew on the research advisors' opinions. The questionnaires were also sent to a number of ten child psychologists who approved the formal validity of the questionnaires. In order to examine the reliability of the questionnaires, the post-test was administered to the subjects two-weeks after the pre-test (N=60). The correlation coefficients between the pre- and post-test scores were then calculated. The correlation coefficients of the researcher-made and Rutter questionnaires were calculated to be 0.856 and 0.754, respectively. Thus, the reliability of the questionnaires was approved.

#### **Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics including frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation and variance were used to describe the demographic data. The data was analyzed using student's t test. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software.

### **RESULTS**

The children's mean stubbornness score was 38.06 in the pre-test, which reduced to 31.23 in the post-test. The results of t test showed a significant difference in mothers' attitude of their children's stubborn behavior before and after the training program ( $t_{(58)}=3.729$ ,  $P\leq 0.05$ ). However, there was no significant difference in mother's attitude toward their children's stubborn behavior in either questionnaire administration in the control group ( $t_{(58)}=0.016$ ,  $P\geq 0.05$ ). The statistical results of measures of central tendency showed that the experimental children's mean aggression score was 10.2 in the pre-test, which reduced to 6.83 following the training program. The results of t test showed a significant difference in mothers' attitude of their children's aggressive behavior before and after the training program ( $t_{(58)}=3.92$ ,  $P\leq 0.05$ ). However, there was no significant difference in mother's attitude toward their children's aggressive behavior in either questionnaire administration in the control group ( $t_{(58)}=0.135$ ,  $P\geq 0.05$ ).

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The present study was conducted to investigate the effect of self-focused parenting style on reduced aggressive and stubborn behaviors and increased adaptive behaviors in six-year-old children in Yazd city. Following the review of the related literature, the research hypotheses were developed. A researcher-made questionnaire and Rutter questionnaire were used to collect the data on children's stubborn and aggressive behaviors, respectively. The participants were randomly assigned into either a control (N=30) or an experimental (N=30) group. The data was collected in a pre- and a post-test. Student's t test was run to analyze the data and examine the research hypotheses. The results showed that the training program affected mothers' attitude toward stubborn behavior in their children. In addition, the program was found to have influenced the mothers' attitude toward reduced aggressive behavior in their children. The results of reduced aggressive behavior in children correspond to the findings of Khaleghi (2011), Azarakhsh (2010), Rahim Panah (2010), Saburi (2009) and Hosseini (2009). Khaleghi (2011) conducted a study entitled effectiveness of responsible parent treatment in reducing child aggressive behavior and reported that responsible parent treatment may reduce aggressive and rebelling behaviors. Azarakhsh (2010) conducted a study entitled effectiveness of parent management training using Sanders method to reduce elementary students' aggressive behavior. She reported that parent management training using Sanders method (positive parenting program) may reduce aggressive behavior in elementary schoolers. In his study entitled investigating the degree and factors affecting aggression in high school students in Mashhad, Akbia (2009) reported that the prevalence of verbal, physical and total aggressions were 5.43%, 30% and 7.26%, respectively. The results showed that swearing and infighting were the most common types of verbal and physical aggressions, respectively. Accordingly, 20 percent of the students reported that they had had infighting using a knife, chain or wood over the last year. About 5.28 percent reported that they were involved in group fighting at least once over the last year. Emotional attachment to parents, parent supervision and adherence to ethical mores were found to have a direct correlation while parents' misbehavior, friends' misdemeanor, victimizing to violence and watching violence were negatively correlated with aggression in students. The results of stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed that victimizing to violence, watching violence, friends' misdemeanor and adherence to ethical mores could account for 43 percent of students' aggression variance altogether. The results of path analysis showed that parents' misbehavior, conflict and supervision as well as socio-economic status could indirectly affect students' aggression. The present findings on children's stubborn behavior correspond to the findings of Sabouri (2009) and Rastgaran (2003). Sabouri (2009) conducted a study entitled the relationship between perceived social support and social adaptation in students in Tehran. The results showed that family was the most important source of social support, which is positively correlated with the levels of social adaptation. Perceived social support from peers and friends is positively

associated with social skills, school relations and social relations. Perceived social support has generally a negative correlation with family, school and social relations.

Eventually, considering the present findings, it seems that self-focused parenting training helped reduce aggressive and stubborn behaviors in children. It is recommended that researchers conduct further studies on other relevant factors such as the effect of self-confidence on aggressive and stubborn behaviors in children.

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