

Parents-children relationships in women with and without the experience of running away from home

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted with the aim of comparing parent-child relationships among women with and without running away from home. The research method was causal-comparative (post-event). This research was conducted in 2023 in Iran. The studied population includes all women who have experienced running away from home and have referred to one of the centers in one of the provinces. The statistical sample consisted of 60 people (30 people with experience of running away from home and 30 people without experience of running away from home) from the members of the aforementioned statistical community, who were selected by available sampling method. The instrument used was Finney and Schaubel's parent-child relationship questionnaire. For data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics (multivariate analysis of variance and t-test of two independent samples) were used using SPSS version 26 software. The results showed that the average father-child relationship and mother-child relationship of women with experience of running away from home was significantly lower than women without experience of running away from home.

Keywords: Parent-child relationships, Women, running away from home,

Introduction

Running away from home is the act of staying away from home and leaving family members without the permission of one's parents or legal guardian (Eftkhari and Alijan Noud Hepshangi, 2019). This is reacting to unbearable or unchangeable situations from a person's point of view (Hosseinzadeh and Afchengi, 2020). Running away from home is a defense mechanism to reduce unpleasant behaviors to get rid of annoying stimuli and achieve desired goals, which are usually incredible dreams or due to unfavorable conditions of the home and family environment and lack of security (Babazadeh, Mouszadeh and Tekloi, 2021). This group of women generally turn to the streets for reasons such as poverty, violence, unreasonable restrictions, harassment, and being abandoned by those around them, especially the family. The majority of them gradually turn into street women with a dark destiny. Runaway women often turn to unpleasant and illegitimate jobs to live and earn a living (Mousavi and Jamalianzadeh, 2022). Running away is associated with several challenges in the social, behavioral, and health domains that can

negatively affect the health and well-being of this vulnerable population (Castillo, Schellenberg, *et al.*, 2022). Recognizing and explaining the reason for running away in women includes various biological, sociological, and psychological factors. This issue, while emphasizing the inseparability of these dimensions, shows no single cause for delinquency (Najaran Tousi, Talebian Sharif, *et al.*, 2019). In Iran, women running away from home has become a social problem. Considering family and social norms, traditions, and religious and religious values, the numbers show a further increase in this social damage so that the age of runaway women is decreasing, and it has serious unfortunate consequences (Peikari, Barani, and Hassanzadeh, 2020). According to statistics, 74% of runaways are women because many of them are physically and sexually abused in the first hours and days after running away from home, and this causes them to lose their last hope to return home (Hamidi and Alipour, 2020).

The intensity of the conflict is a stronger predictor of the occurrence of negative effects of the conflict compared to its frequency. Adolescents have the highest amount of conflict with their parents in early adolescence, but its frequency decreases

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linearly with age, and its intensity increases (Purjabali and Ghanbari, 2018). Research shows that the conflict between parents and adolescents causes behavioral problems, while the opposite relationship is not evident. It cannot be said that the existence of incompatible behavior of an adolescent causes conflict between him and his parents, but the behavioral problems of adolescents appear under the influence of conflict with parents. If the created conflict is properly managed and useful coping methods are used, it is constructive and helps to grow the relationship. If the parties do not know how to deal with it, the existing disagreement will not only not be resolved, but it will also harm the continuation of a healthy relationship and may lead to depression in parents and children, violence and confusion, low self-esteem of adolescent, and academic problems (Mousavi and Jamalianzadeh, 2022). Regardless of the negative and obvious consequences of conflict, its positive side is to help family members to know more about themselves and the different characteristics of others, to identify the interactional problems of their relationship and energy, and to use their motivation to solve them. Conflict management is very important because positive parent-child interaction is associated with good outcomes for adolescents, including low levels of anxiety and depression, high self-esteem, low incidence of substance abuse, and behavioral problems (Mohammedzadeh, 2021).

The effect of running away from home can be observed in the parent-child relationship because the family is the first environment where children take their first steps towards growth and an emotional connection with parents is established in this environment (Rezaei, Akbari, Ahmadian, and Yarahamdi, 2021). Establishing and maintaining parent-child relationships creates a strong interaction between parents and children and contributes to mutual understanding and acceptance. The quality of parent-child interaction is also influential in how the child examines and interprets the world around him, and when this relationship is in conflict, people's interpretation of the world also becomes pessimistic (Zarbakhsh, Hosseini Ahangari and Mahmoudi, 2021). The parent-child relationship includes a combination of behaviors, feelings, and unique expectations between parents and their children and plays an important role in making children vulnerable or flexible (Chia, Ng, Kandasami, Seow, Choo & Chew *et al.*, 2020). The higher the conflict between parents and children, the higher the number of negative emotions and behavioral problems (Khazri, Mahmoudpour, Vahdani, and Ismaili, 2021). The interaction between parents and children strongly affects children's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive growth and development (Nikbakht and Haqayegh, 2019). Research has also shown that supportive parent-child relationships can smooth the child's development path, especially his social skills and mental health (Akbarzadeh, Hassanzadeh, Kamkari, and Lavasani, 2020). Conflicts between parents and children may be one of the worst family experiences for children (Branje, 2018). Improving the quality of parent-child interaction is associated with reducing children's behavioral problems and increasing pro-social behaviors (Adili, Mirzaei, and Abedi, 2018). High levels of parent-child conflict are linked to a variety

of negative social consequences, including aggression toward peers, reduced social competence, and conflict in deviant peer groups (Sagar and Gupta, 2018). The lack of affection, love, attention, support, and adequate and correct sincere relationships between parents and their children causes a lack of affection and many injuries, including children running away, especially women, from the home and family environment (Eftakhari, 2019). Unlike in the past, running away from home was considered to be caused by emotional problems and rebellion. However, runaways have recently been considered victims, and running away is regarded as a social problem, reflecting defects in family functions and parent-child communication (Hosseinzadeh and Afchengi, 2020). Therefore, understanding the factors that lead to people's behavior outside the home can be effective for improving preventive efforts and showing timely responses.

According to the report of the World Health Organization, every year, more than one million adolescents in the age range of 12 to 18 run away from home, of which 74% are girls (Thresia and Janna, 2020). Official statistics in Iran show a 15% increase in the phenomenon of running away (Hosseinzadeh and Afchangi, 2020). The phenomenon of running away occurs due to intra-personal or interpersonal factors. For whatever reason it happens, it creates a variety of risky behaviors such as drug addiction and abuse, sexual abuse, attempted suicide, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, violence, and aggression (Babazadeh, Musazadeh, and Tekloi, 2021).

Certainly, to prevent any problem, it should first recognize it and find out the reasons for its occurrence, then save the person and prevent the recurrence of that problem. In this field, Causal-comparative studies comparing the psychological characteristics of these people with normal people can help clarify the role of these factors. Research in this area and identifying the factors affecting it are very important due to the prevalence of running away from home in society and its harmful effects and preventing its continuation. In addition, quick identification of these people and appropriate and early interventions can prevent increased social damage and jeopardize people's personal and social health. This issue requires identifying the characteristics of these women by comparing them with normal women, which proves the importance of conducting research of this kind. If the hypotheses raised in this research are confirmed, the results obtained in individual counseling can be used to help these people and their families. According to the mentioned materials, this research aims to investigate the parent-child relationship in women with and without experience of running away from home.

Materials and Methods

According to the purpose, nature, and topic, the current research is a causal-comparative (post-event) type and was conducted cross-sectionally in 2023 in Iran. The studied population includes all women with the experience of running away from home and their normal counterparts who had been referred to one of the

centers in one of the provinces (the center's name is not mentioned due to ethical conditions) in Iran.

A sampling method was available. The sample of normal women was selected from among normal women. In terms of demographic characteristics, they were matched with the sample of women with experience of running away from home. The criteria for entering the study included consent to participate, having at least a guidance school certificate, and not using psychiatric drugs. The requirements for exiting the study included incompletely filling out the questionnaire and withdrawing from participating. From an ethical point of view, the subjects were assured that writing their name and address is unnecessary, and their information is only used in this research.

Research tool

Parent-Child Relationship Survey of Fine and Schoebel (1983)
The Parent-Child Relationship Survey was created by Fine and Schoebel (1983) and consists of 24 items used to measure the quality of parent-child relationships. The Parent-Child Relationship Survey has two forms: one for measuring the mother-child relationship and the other for measuring the father-child relationship. Both forms are the same for father and mother, except for the words "father" and "mother," which can be changed. The scoring of the questionnaire is in the form of a 7-point Likert scale. Items 9, 13, and 14 are graded in reverse, with the minimum possible score of 24 and the maximum possible score of 168. The components of this questionnaire for the father's version include positive feelings (questions 3, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24), father's conflict and fusion (questions 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12 and 16), communication (4, 2, 7, 8, 15, 17 and 19) and anger (questions 13 and 14). For the mother's version, it includes positive emotions (questions 1, 3, 6, 11, 23, 22, 20 and 18), hatred/loss of role (questions 9, 14), identity determination (questions 13, 12, 21 and 24) and communication (questions 4, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 15, 16, 19 and 17).

The parent-child relationship scale had alpha coefficients of 0.89 to 0.94 for the subscales related to the father, an overall alpha of 0.96, and alpha coefficients of 0.61 (identification) to 0.94 for the subscales related to the mother, and overall alpha of 0.96 has excellent internal consistency. The scale creators obtained these alpha coefficients by implementing the questionnaire on 241

students. In the research conducted by Iraqi (2008), the final coefficients calculated for the father form questionnaire were equal to 0.93, and for the mother form was 0.92, which indicates good internal consistency. In the research of Khoda Karmi Janbaz, Hossein Khanzadeh, and Abul Qasmi (2018), the validity of this tool with Cronbach's alpha method for the subscales related to the father was 0.79 to 0.91, 0.61 to 0.91 for the subscales related to the mother, and 0.92 was obtained for the overall relationship. SPSS version 26 software was used for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

According to the results, 60 women with the experience of running away from home along with their normal counterparts have participated in the present study, of which 30 (50%) had experience of running away from home, and 30 (50%) had no experience of running away from home. Twenty-one people (70%) of the women who experienced running away from home were unmarried, five people (16.7%) were married, and four people (13.3%) were divorced. Fourteen people (46.7%) of women without experience of running away from home were unmarried, and 16 people (53.3%) were married. Seven people (23.3%) of the women with experience running away from home were employed, and 23 (76.7%) were unemployed. Eight people (26.7%) of the women without experience of running away from home were employed, and 22 people (73.3%) were unemployed. The level of education of 16 (53.3%) of the women with experience of running away from home was less than a diploma, 8 (26.7%) had a diploma, 3 (10%) had an associate's degree, and 3 (10%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. The level of education of 9 (30%) of the women without experience of running away from home was less than a diploma, 6 (20%) had a diploma, 2 (6.7%) had an associate's degree, and 13 (43.3%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. The age of most of the women with experience of running away from home (13 people) was less than 20 years old. The age of most of the women without experience of running away from home (14 persons) was 35 years and above. Most women with experience of running away from home (24 people) and most without experience of running away from home (17 people) did not have children.

Table 1. Descriptive indicators of parent-child relationships and their subscales in two independent groups

Variables	Groups	mean	Standard deviation	Standard deviation error
The father-child relationship	Experience of running away from home	69.43	4.761	0.869
	No experience of running away from home	96.77	9.031	1.649
Positive emotions	Experience of running away from home	19.80	3.367	0.615
	No experience of running away from home	32.50	3.954	0.722
Father's conflict and fusion	Experience of running away from home	18.80	2.917	0.533
	No experience of running away from home	30.70	3.640	0.655
Communication	Experience of running away from home	20.20	3.295	0.602

	No experience of running away from home	29.20	3.478	0.635
	Experience of running away from home	10.63	1.109	0.385
Anger	No experience of running away from home	4.37	1.586	0.290
	Experience of running away from home	77.77	6.704	1.224
The mother-child relationship	No experience of running away from home	102.53	7.229	1.320
	Experience of running away from home	24.43	3.339	0.610
Positive emotions	No experience of running away from home	34.07	4.601	0.840
	Experience of running away from home	11.07	1.982	0.362
Hate/loss of role	No experience of running away from home	4.37	1.586	0.290
	Experience of running away from home	10.00	2.600	0.475
Identity determination	No experience of running away from home	20.00	3.173	0.579
	Experience of running away from home	32.27	2.803	0.512
Communication	No experience of running away from home	44.10	3.418	0.624

In **Table 1**, the descriptive findings of the father-child relationship and its subscales (positive emotions, father's conflict and fusion, communication and anger) and the mother-child relationship and its subscales (positive emotions, hatred/role

loss, identity determination and communication) are presented separately for those with and without experience of running away from home.

Table 2. The results of Levin's test to check the equality of variances of research variables

Variables	F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of Freedom 2	Significance level
Father-Child Relationship	1.110	1	58	0.301
Mother-Child Relationship	0.078	1	58	0.781

Levine's test was used to check the equality of variances of research variables (cognitive regulation of positive emotion, cognitive regulation of negative emotion, resilience, father-child relationship, and mother-child relationship) in the tested groups (with and without experience of running away from home). As

observed in **Table 2**, according to Levine's test and its non-significance for all research variables ($p < 0.05$), the condition of homogeneity of variances between groups has been met. Therefore, it is unrestricted to use analysis of variance test to check the research hypotheses.

Table 3. Inferential indicators comparing the mean of parent-child relationship subscales in two groups of women with and without experience of running away from home

Variables	Levine's test for equality of variances		inferential indicators		
	F	significance level	t	degree of freedom	significance level
Positive emotions	0.956	0.333	-13.393	58	0.001
Father's conflict and fusion	1.756	0.190	-13.972	58	0.001
Communication	0.099	0.754	-10.290	58	0.001
anger	3.329	0.073	13.007	58	0.001
Positive emotions	2.653	0.109	-9.281	58	0.001
Hate/loss of role	1.715	0.196	14.458	58	0.001
Identity determination	1.463	0.231	-13.352	58	0.001
Communication	1.192	0.279	-14.664	58	0.001

According to **Table 3**, the value of the obtained significance level (0.001) (last column) of the subscales of the father-child relationship (positive emotions, father's conflict and fusion, communication and anger) and the subscales of the mother-child relationship (positive emotions, hatred/ loss of role, Identity determination and communication) is smaller than 0.05. Therefore, the above hypothesis is accepted, and it is concluded that there is a difference between the parent-child relationships of women with and without experience of running away from home. The mean of father-child relationship subscales (positive feelings, father's conflict, and fusion) of women with experience of running away from home is lower than women without experience of running away from home. The average anger from the father-child relationship subscales of women with experience of running away from home is higher than women without experience of running away from home. The mean of hatred/loss of role from the father-child relationship subscales of women with experience of running away from home is higher than that of women without experience of running away from home.

Conclusion

The results showed that the mean of father-child relationship subscales (positive emotions, father's conflict, and fusion and communication) of women with experience of running away from home is lower than women without experience of running away from home. The mean anger from the father-child relationship subscales of women with experience of running away from home is higher than women without experience of running away from home. The mean of mother-child relationship subscales (positive feelings, Identity determination, and communication) of women with experience of running away from home is lower than women without experience of running away from home. The mean of hatred/loss of role from the father-child relationship subscales of women with experience of running away from home is higher than that of women without experience of running away from home. Therefore, the above hypothesis was accepted, and it was concluded that there is a difference between the parent-child relationships of women with and without experience of running away from home.

In the explanation above, it can be said that since the family is the unit of raising a child, the child first learns education from his family, and his behavior and social attitudes reflect the behaviors and beliefs he receives from his parents. In warm parent-child interactions, children are more willing to talk about their concerns, opinions, feelings, and needs when they feel listened to without judgment or belittlement. Therefore, parents are more aware of their child's needs; they are more able to convey the values and norms of the family and society, as well as appropriate patterns, and participate in correcting the child's

incorrect behavior patterns. In this way, they provide a solid foundation for developing important emotional and behavioral skills for the child. The family environment and the attachment style resulting from it is the first environment that provides the basis for a person's socialization and is also considered the most important educational factor. Parents and caregivers play an essential role in managing stressful situations because they help develop children's standards and values and build self-confidence by supporting, guiding, and creating life adaptation models. Parents are the first ones to communicate with the child and play the most effective interactions in forming his personality, so most of the children's behavioral problems reflect the complex interpersonal conditions of the family members, especially the parents. Therefore, parents can think flexibly, positively rebuild their mental framework, and accept challenging situations or stressful events; in this way, they communicate with their children and the social environment easily and with the least anxiety.

On the contrary, Parents who are weak in dealing with stressful situations and applying social-communication skills and have more conflicts in their relationships with their children can be the cause of women running away from home. Therefore, it can be said that the construction and functioning of the family of runaway girls is weak in creating a safe and favorable environment for forming a clear and normal attachment. As a result, it can be said that there is a difference between the parent-child relationships of women with and without experience of running away from home.

Hosseinzadeh and Afchengi (2020) investigated and compared parenting methods between runaway girls and family girls. The results of the research showed that there is a significant difference between runaway and normal girls in terms of permissive parenting style and authoritarian style, which is in line with the above finding.]

Ehsanpour *et al.* (2018) compared the feeling of loneliness and the family atmosphere of runaway and normal girls. The research results showed a significant difference between the emotional atmosphere of the runaway and normal girls, which aligns with the above findings.

Nasrallah *et al.* (2017) examined and compared psychological symptoms, parenting methods, family functioning, and the risk of running away in runaway and normal girls. The results showed a difference between parenting practices and family functioning and the risk of running away from home in runaway and normal girls, which aligns with the above finding. Asamoah and Aagaard (2017) addressed the determinants of risky sexual behavior at the individual and family level among Swedish and foreign-born young adults aged 18-30 in Skane, southern Sweden. The results showed that living with only one parent or another person while growing up, that is, the family level factor, increases the risk of engaging in sexual risks for Swedish and foreign youth, which is in line with the above finding.

The main limitation of this research was the impossibility of controlling disturbing socio-environmental variables (such as

socioeconomic status and lifestyle). The use of available sampling makes it difficult to generalize the results.

The results showed a difference between the parent-child relationship of women with and without experience of running away from home and the family, and the parent-child relationship greatly influences children's behavior. Therefore, it is suggested to establish good and friendly relations between parents and children in schools during meetings, and parents should be aware of the dangers of not having such a relationship.

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