Family process and structure, attachment style, and emotional intelligence in runaway girls

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Original Article

Abstract

**Introduction**: The phenomenon of running away from home is taken into account as one of the highly sensitive and complicated issues in the field of social harms. According to a report released by the WHO, the annual rate of running away from home is more than 2.3 million. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to compare family structure and process, attachment style, and emotional intelligence among runaway and normal girls.

**Methods**: In this study, all runaway girls covered by social welfare organization of Iran in Bandar Abbas city were selected by using the convenience sampling method 40 individuals were selected including 20 runaway girls and 20 normal girls who were matched in terms of demographic characteristics. Two groups were compared with t-test and Pearson correlation coefficient was used for evaluating relationship between variables.

**Results**: According to the findings, there was a statistically significant difference between family structure, family process, attachment style, and emotional intelligence in normal and runaway girls (P<0.001). Moreover, there was a significant relationship between family structure and emotional intelligence.

**Conclusion**: Family structure and process, attachment style, and emotional intelligence can affect the phenomenon of running away.

**Key words**: Family Structure, Family Process, Attachment Style, Emotional Intelligence

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**Introduction**: The phenomenon of running away from home is considered as one of the highly sensitive and complicated issues in the field of social problems (1).

According to the report released by the World Health Organization (WHO), the annual rate of runaways is more than 2.3 million teens aged 13 to 19 years of which high significant percentage (74%) of it includes girls (2).

Similarly, the number of runaway adolescents in Iran is increasingly worrying. In this respect, the results of published reports have suggested a drastic rise in the phenomenon of runaway among Iranian girls in recent years (3).

Runaway is a multi-causal phenomenon whose roots can be traced back to failure to meet emotional needs and sense of safety at home (4).

Children who feel insecure at home cannot enjoy life and treat others with coldness and no
affection. They are also deprived of high self-confidence and have no obligations to stick to moral principles (5).

One of the local models that can display the psychological profile of a family is the family process and structure model (6).

Considering the factors influencing the control or exacerbation of family crises and conflicts, scientists developed a theoretical model and highlighted a set of family actions in this issue that were summarized into three dimensions: family process, family structure, and social context. The given dimensions constitute the foundations of life in each family. In this model, family process includes a series of actions used by each family to adapt to new conditions such as communication styles and skills, coping skills in decision-making and problem-solving, integrity, flexibility, and religious orientation. The second dimension, family structure refers to all things that form up the completely objective and tangible reality of life of family members and also mentions adequacy of family possessions in the domains of physical and mental health, occupation and education, financial resources, educational facilities, living space, time of togetherness, physical appearance, and social status. The third dimension of this model is social context. In this respect, the social context of family involves a collection of beliefs and values dominating a society where families are living in (7).

If a family is disrupted and fails to provide an appropriate environment for the growth and evolution of their own children’s character, they can establish the foundations of social deviations among them. Thus; various crimes such as running away from home, escape from school, theft, illegitimate sexual acts, addiction, etc. can be established in broken and dysfunctional families. Conflicts in families whether between parents or between parents and children are also taken into account as the damaging factors affecting different types of social deviations (8).

The term attachment includes evolving components which can contribute to human survival. Tendency to create strong emotional bonds with particular individuals is likewise a main component of human nature (9).

Numerous forms of neuroticism, personality disorders, communication disabilities, and emotional problems are the consequences of depriving children of maternal care or lack of stable attachment with the attachment figures (10). Ainsworth concluded with three major attachment styles: secure attachment, ambivalent-insecure attachment and avoidant-insecure attachment (11).

Lots of studies have indicated that early attachment styles can influence later behaviors in life (12,13).

Emotional intelligence was introduced by Peter Salovey to express quality and understanding of feelings among individuals, sympathy with others’ emotions, and ability to manage temperament effectively (14,15).

Scientists believe that people endowed with high emotional intelligence could cope more effectively with stress because they had an accurate perception and evaluation of their emotional states and they could easily control their emotions (16,17).

Given the increasing occurrence of running away from home by children especially girls as well as the decreased age in this respect, the present study was to compare family structure and process, emotional intelligence, and attachment style in runaway and normal girls.

Methods:

According to the aim of the present study, a descriptive-correlation research design was adopted.

The statistical population of this study included all runaway girls covered by the social Welfare Organization of Iran in the city of Bandar Abbas along with normal girls. The study sample comprised of 20 runaway girls residing in shelters affiliated with Social welfare Organization of Iran and 20 normal girls matched with the study group in terms of demographic characteristics (level of education and family’s economic status) selected through convenience sampling method.

In order to collect the data and measure the variable of emotional intelligence, Bar-On questioner was used (18). To assess the two dimensions of family structure and family process and to measure the variable of attachment style, questionnaire of family structure and process (19)
and Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RASS) by Collins and Reid were employed (20).

**Statistical Analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using the SPSS 16. In terms of descriptive statistics; minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation and considering inferential ones; Pearson correlation coefficient and independent t-test were used to compare the variables of family structure, family process, attachment style, and emotional intelligence in two groups. In this study, the confidence level was equal to 99% with a standard error of 0.01.

**Results:**

In this study, 40 girls were studied in two groups of 20 including runaway girls and normal ones. The descriptive statistics for the study variables were presented separately for the given groups as follows.

According to the findings the highest mean was associated with the components of family structure and particularly the component of coping skills which was equal to 50.15 and 36.1 in normal and runaway girls, respectively.

Moreover; the highest and the lowest means among the components of emotional intelligence in normal girls were related to self-awareness and empathy with values equal to 25.85 and 24.15, respectively. The highest mean among runaway girls was associated with flexibility with a value equal to 20.05. The lowest mean in runaway girls was also related to independence with a value equal to 18.6.

Among the components of attachment style; the means for the secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment styles in normal girls were 29.7, 18.05, and 20.05; respectively. Moreover, the means for the given styles in the runaway girls was equal to 7.35, 22.35, and 21.85; respectively.

The highest mean in normal girls was related to physical appearance and social status as one of the components of family structure with a value equal to 23.65 and occupation and education as one of the components of family structure with a value equal to 14.5. Moreover, the lowest means in normal girls (20.25) and runaway girls (12.95) in both groups were associated with the component of educational facilities.

According to Table 3, family structure, family process, attachment style and emotional intelligence in normal girls was statistically and significantly different from that of runaway girls with a 99% confidence level.

The observed correlation coefficient between family structure and emotional intelligence at a 0.0001 significance level of with a degree of freedom of 38 was equal to 0.737 which was greater than the critical value. As a result, this relationship was confirmed and it was concluded with a 99% confidence level that family structure and emotional intelligence were statistically and significantly correlated.

| Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the study variables |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Statistic               | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Standard deviation |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Family process       | Normal girls | 141        | 223   | 196               | 23.41 |
|                      | Runaway girls | 110        | 198   | 146               | 28.46 |
| Emotional intelligence| Normal girls | 280        | 435   | 371               | 5.95  |
|                      | Runaway girls | 194        | 401   | 290               | 7.31  |
| Attachment style      | Normal girls | 51         | 87    | 67.8              | 10.5  |
|                      | Runaway girls | 31         | 69    | 51.5              | 12.77 |
| Family structure      | Normal girls | 89         | 185   | 151               | 30.5  |
|                      | Runaway girls | 52         | 157   | 94.9              | 33.18 |
Table 2. Descriptive statistics for all components of variables

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Component</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
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</table>
Conclusion:

The present study investigated the status of the four variables of family process, family structure, attachment style, and emotional intelligence among runaway and normal girls.

Given the results of the present study, there was a significant difference between family structure among runaway and normal girls. Other research also indicated that familial factors including unstable family structure, rejection by parents, and socioeconomic problems were strongly correlated with mental health (21-23).

If children and teenagers cannot establish friendly relationships with family members or adapt themselves with family conditions, they choose runaway as the last resort (24,25). Economic conditions (poverty) can be also one of the reasons of runaway (26,27).

Considering the findings of the present study, there was a difference between runaway girls and normal ones in terms of family process. Other studies show that families with runaway girls were characterized with lack of emotional proximity, establishment of controlled social relationships or unwillingness towards them, no control over events, interactions along with conflicts among family members, as well as limited or strict rules (28). According to the Social Bond Theory developed by Hirschi, the weaker the bond between individuals, family members, and society, the more the possibility of deviations and crimes (29,30).

Children and teenagers may also leave home and run away due to numerous reasons including intrapersonal and interpersonal ones (coping skills and problem-solving), avoidance of constant blame and repeated humiliations, death of parents, parental violence, lack of relationship between members, rejection, and inconsistency with values. Thus, girls my select streets as a way to run away from difficulties (religious beliefs), extremism by parents in terms of religion, parental control (cohesion, family respect, and communication skills), inefficient parent-child relationships, inappropriate emotional environment in family, severe conflicts and quarrels between parents, poor interpersonal relationships between parents and children, experience of physical and mental violence by parent, as well as a sense of alienation and loneliness at home (31-33).

Our study showed a significant difference between two groups in terms of emotional intelligence in a way that normal girls were endowed significantly with higher emotional intelligence. The results of several studies on a group of young people also suggested a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and behavioral problems. It was argued that if the youth could well manage their emotions and benefit from more social skills, they can experience lower behavioral problems such as aggression, crimes (34).

Furthermore, research studies have revealed that runaway girls are usually weak in terms of emotional intelligence as well as establishment of appropriate social relationships (3). Runaway girls experience more stress compared with normal ones and they also have more stressors. The point of importance is the assessments of such stress by girls and how to cope with it although about 93% of runaway girls employ non-adaptive methods such as emotion-oriented coping style to cope with tensions (35).

Other studies confirmed the relationship between the components of emotional intelligence and the risks of running away from home and also believed that avoiding realism was the foundation of this relationship (36,37).
According to the results of one study, mental vulnerability of runaway teens makes them feel negative about themselves and fail to establish supporting healthy relationships with others. Therefore, they lose opportunities for the growth and development of intellectual and problem-solving skills (38).

Considering the results of this study, there was a difference between runaway and normal girls in terms of attachment style. In this respect, runaway girls had insecure or anxious attachment style while normal girls benefited from secure attachment style. The results of other investigation indicated that safe parents had safe children and parents with anxious attachment style among the insecure group had children suffering from attachment disorders more than others (39).

A difference was also observed between family structure and emotional intelligence in runaway girls and normal ones.

Other researchers also believe that attachment theory is correlated to some extent with emotional compatibility and coping with stress in a way that avoidant attachment style is associated with maintaining emotional distance from others and avoiding any coping with stress. Ambivalent-anxious orientation is also related to emotional escape in social interactions and excessive caution in coping with stress. On the other hand, secure attachment style is associated with appropriate compatibility and flexibility in the face of emotional experiences as well as analysis of stressful events (without any disruptions by them) (40,41).

According to the findings of the present study, it was concluded that the components of family structure, family process, attachment style, and emotional intelligence could affect runaway girls. Moreover, family structure may have an impact on emotional intelligence. As a whole, parents could affect the methods of coping with mental pressures in their children.

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ساختار و فرآیند خانواده، سبک دلبستگی و هوش هیجانی در دختران فراری

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چکیده
فصل اول: پدیده فرار از خانه یکی از مباحث بسیار حساس و پیچیده در حوزه آسیب های اجتماعی می باشد. بر اساس آمار سازمان بهداشت جهانی میزان فرار از خانه بین زیر ۲۳ میلیون نفر در سال در نوجوانان ۱۳ تا ۱۹ ساله می باشد که حدود ۷۵ درصد آن را دختران تشکیل می دهند. این مطالعه با هدف مقایسه ساختار و فرآیند خانواده سبک دلبستگی و هوش هیجانی در دختران فراری و عادی صورت گرفت.

روش کار: در مطالعه حاضر، گروه دختران فراری تحت پوشش سازمان بهزیستی در شهرستان بندرعباس از طریق توزیع نمونه‌گیری ساده انتخاب شدند. ۲۷ دختر فراری و ۲۷ دختر عادی که از نظر خصوصیات دموگرافیک یکسان محسوب شده بودند با استفاده از آزمون ساختار و فرآیند خانواده سبک دلبستگی و هوش هیجانی پژوهش با آزمون مستقل مقایسه قرار گرفتند.

نتایج: بر اساس نتایج این مطالعه، تفاوت آماری معنی‌داری بین ساختار و فرآیند خانواده سبک دلبستگی و هوش هیجانی در دختران فراری و عادی مورد تفاوت قرار گرفت.

کلیدواژه‌های پژوهش: ساختار خانواده، فرآیند خانواده، سبک دلبستگی، هوش هیجانی

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ارجاعات
بخشیان فاطمه، مؤیدی فرح. ساختار و فرآیند خانواده، سبک دلبستگی و هوش هیجانی در دختران فراری. مجله پزشکی هرمزگان ۱۳۳۹؛ ۳۳۴ (۹۲۱۷۷۲۰۰۲۰۰۱۹) ۲۳۶-۲۴۰.