

# Predictors of Psychological Well-Being in a Sample of Iranian Adolescents in Malaysia

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**Abstract -- Greater psychological well-being has been related to positive health indicators. Parental autonomy support is an essential element in socializing with others and rising children and adolescents towards a happy life. Previous research have found Iranian adolescents who studying abroad report lower level of psychological well-being compared to the general population. The aim of this study was to investigate the level of psychological well-being among adolescents in the Iranian schools in Malaysia and to examine whether paternal and maternal autonomy support are related to psychological well-being. Cluster sampling approach was used to identify potential respondents for this study. Adolescents (n = 260) who were born in Iran and recently studying at Iranian schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, completed Subjective Vitality Scale and Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPS). The sample age ranged between 12-18 years. Descriptive analysis and Pearson's correlation were used to answer the research questions. Participants reported high level of psychological well-being. Results revealed that paternal autonomy support and maternal autonomy support were significantly positively related to psychological well-being ( $r = .62$  and  $r = .59$ ). Students with higher level of perceived autonomy support from their parents reported higher psychological well-being. This study highlights the significance of examining the consequences of autonomy-supportive parenting practices on well-being of adolescents separately for mothers and fathers. Finally, the conclusion of the study is discussed.**

**Keywords -- Psychological Well-Being, Parental Autonomy Support, Paternal Autonomy Support, Maternal Autonomy Support, Iranian Adolescents, Malaysia**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As a critically developmental period in human life, adolescence is definable in terms of a period of human's life span between childhood and adulthood (Santrock, 2015). Santrock (2015) further discussed that adolescence is related to an increase in susceptibility to biological, physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social changes as well as adjustment problems that teens may experience. Besides, adolescence also is a period of increased vulnerability to stressful life events and consequently may influence negatively on life quality and well-being (Momtaz, Hamid, & Ibrahim, 2014; Wong, 2011; Yaacob, Juhari, Talib, & Uba,

2009). According to Sussman (2013) behavioral patterns that affect the whole life span, are shaped during adolescence. In order to positively form well-being among adolescents, it is necessary to address them as a generation that are considered as pillars of society, which upon their efforts a nation will be constructed (Bakar, Fatah, Sidek, & Sample, 2013).

Huppert (2009) defined well-being as a positive and sustainable condition that guides individuals to survive as well as flourish in social life. Furthermore, as an emotional construct, adolescence is linked with future life that is happiness and satisfaction that individuals may be confronted with in their future life (Bakar et al., 2013). As a consequence, well-being is a condition of complete, physical, social and mental health that is associated with adolescence (Chen, 2010). In other words, well-being is portrayed by existence of positive feelings and lack of negative feelings and also it is associated with an insight into human potentials that are fully operating (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

As such, promoting well-being in adolescents is important and related to teaching, education, learning, achievements and sustainable development (O'Brien, 2008). Also, since well-being is often linked with happiness O'Brien (2008) happy students may be more enthusiastic about their education and it is less probable that happy students miss classes and consequently they are more devoted to their academic performances than unhappy students (Snyder, 2010). There are a number of factors that directly are connected to an adolescent's psychological well-being, but the present study concentrates on parental autonomy support.

Important environmental factors such as parents and teachers, which are influential on adolescent health and well-being, have been investigated during past decades. Consequently, a good number of research have provided empirical information that argued the associations among parents relationships with children from one side and psychological well-being of adolescence from the other side (Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010; Downie et al., 2007; Ghazizadeh Ehsaei et al., 2018; Leke, Gingras, Philippe, Koestner, & Fang, 2010; López-Walle, Balaguer, Castillo, & Tristán, 2012; Santrock, 2015; Stebbings, Taylor, Ian, & Spray, Christopher, 2015).

As the first factor, parental autonomy support is an essential element in socializing with others and in developing children and adolescents towards a happy life (Leke et al.,

2010). As the second factor, autonomy support is another social practice that parents persuade their children towards independent decision making, assist them to choose the best alternative in any social condition that is provide children for rational decision. As such, both factors are linked with positive outcomes that in turn assist children with constructing well-being (Joussemet, Landry, & Koestner, 2008). Also, perceived autonomy support promotes more behavioral regulation.

Clemente and Hezomi (2016) stated that psychological well-being of Iranian adolescents is low. Hosseini (2014) further discussed that going to a new country may even negatively affect the low psychological well-being of the Iranian students who study overseas, and it is while only few studies have been done about the construction of well-being among Iranian adolescents in Malaysia. Consequently, the present research attempted to investigate the construction of well-being among those adolescents who study in Malaysia. Due to the lack of literature about Iranian adolescents who study in Malaysia, the aim of this study was to fill this gap. Thus current study has explored the relationship between parental autonomy support and psychological well-being among Iranian adolescents in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Accordant to the stated problem, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the level of paternal autonomy support, maternal autonomy support and psychological well-being among Iranian adolescents in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia?
2. Are there any relationship between paternal autonomy support, maternal autonomy support and psychological well-being among Iranian adolescents in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia?

## II. METHOD

### *Sample*

The sample of this research was chosen out of a population of Iranian adolescents in Iranian schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In this study the cluster sampling approach was used to identify potential respondents. Participants in this research were included 260 adolescents (146 males and 114 females) who were born in Iran and recently studying at Iranian schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The age range of respondents was from 12 to 18 years old.

### *Procedures*

Following the approval of the study by University Putra Malaysia (UPM), the researcher obtained the permission from the Iranian Embassy in Malaysia to conduct the study in Iranian schools in Kuala Lumpur. Then, the researcher coordinates with the principles of the Iranian schools to administer the questionnaires. According to ethical

consideration in research, the principal and teachers send the parental permission to parents of students. Also, respondent permission letter was given to the respondents. Letters were sent to the parents of the students in the target classes informing them of the nature of the study and the opportunity to contact the child's school about the project was provided. Participants were administered questionnaires in class and received a small gift for taking part in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

### *Measures*

The instruments of the present research have been selected from previous studies. These instruments include subjective vitality scale and perceptions of parents scale. The following specific measures were used in the current study.

#### *Subjective Vitality Scale*

The concept of subjective vitality discusses the state of feeling alive and alert and having energy available to the self. Vitality is a feature of eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001), because being vigorous and active is part of what it means to be fully functioning and psychologically well. A measure is established for subjective vitality by Ryan and Frederick (1997) and it is worth mentioning that this scale and measure is used of each individual difference. It is steady feature in individuals that is proven to be positively in association with self-actualization and self-esteem while negatively in association with depression and anxiety (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999). The validity of the 7 items of the original scale was authenticated by Ryan and Frederick (1997). Some other scholars such as Bostic, Rubio and Hood (2000) utilized confirmatory factor analyses and believed that a 6-item version can show a better function than the 7-item version. Moreover, seven-point Likert-type scale has different levels that range from (1) to (7) in which (1) indicates "Strongly disagree" and continues to (7) which indicate "Strongly agree". The vitality scale which has been estimated by Internal consistency reliability is between  $\alpha = .85$  to  $\alpha = .93$

#### *Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPS)*

The level of perceived parental need support was investigated as the predictor variable and was measured by using The Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPS; Robbins, 1994). Specifically, this scale was used to assess participants' perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' (or primary caregivers') provision of support for autonomy (eighteen items; e.g., my mother tries to tell me how to run my life). POPS includes 18 items. Participants responded using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 7 (very true). The POPS identifies the degree to which parents provide optimal parenting context according to SDT definitions (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997). The scales are completed by adolescents to describe their mothers and their

fathers (Robbins, 1994). This questionnaire which was designed as part of a doctoral dissertation titled, "An assessment of perceptions of parental autonomy support and control: Child and parent correlates," done by Robert Robbins in the Department of Psychology at the University of Rochester under the supervision of Robbins (1994), provided preliminary evidence for the reliability and validity of the scale. Robbins (1994) reported internal consistency reliability estimates for each subscale as follows: autonomy support from mothers ( $\alpha=.88$ ), autonomy support from fathers ( $\alpha=.88$ ).

### III. RESULTS

Table 1 displays participants' perceptions of their mothers and fathers' provision of support for autonomy. According to table 1, the mean score for paternal autonomy support was 4.83 (SD=1.72) and for maternal autonomy support was 4.95 (SD=1.05). As shown in table 1, for psychological well-being the mean score is 5.23 (SD 1.51). As can be seen in the table 1 the levels of perceived paternal autonomy support, maternal autonomy support, and psychological well-being among Iranian adolescents were high. Accordingly, 53.46% of respondents experienced high level of perceived paternal autonomy support while 52.69% of them reported high level of maternal autonomy support. 54.62% of Iranian adolescents experienced higher psychological well-being.

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION ON PATERNAL AUTONOMY SUPPORT, MATERNAL AUTONOMY SUPPORT, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

	Rang e	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mea n	SD	N	%
Paternal autonomy support	4.56	2.35	6.89	4.83	1.72	12	46.5
Low (Scores ≤4.727)						1	4
High (Scores >4.728)						13	53.4
Maternal autonomy support	4.67	2.68	7.00	4.95	1.05	12	47.2
Low (Scores ≤4.834)						3	1
High (Scores >4.835)						13	52.6
Psychologica l well-being	5.88	1.74	7.00	5.23	1.51	11	45.3
Low (Scores ≤4.866)						8	8
High (Scores >4.867)						14	54.6

Note. SD= Standard Deviation

To answer the first part of second question of current study Pearson's correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between paternal autonomy support and psychological well-being.

TABLE 2: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PATERNAL AUTONOMY SUPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Variable	Psychological well-being	
	r	p
Paternal autonomy support	.62*	<0.001

\* Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$  level

Table 2 shows the significant moderate relationship and positive correlation between paternal autonomy support and well-being. ( $r = .62, p \leq 0.05$ ).

Pearson correlation analysis was run to find an answer for the second part of second question of this study to find out the relationship between maternal autonomy support and psychological well-being among Iranian adolescents.

TABLE 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MATERNAL AUTONOMY SUPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Variable	Psychological well-being	
	r	p
Maternal autonomy support	.59*	<0.001

\* Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$  level

Table 3 indicates a significant moderate positive relationship between maternal autonomy support and psychological well-being ( $r = .59, p \leq 0.05$ ).

### IV. DISCUSSION

Overall the results of this study showed that psychological well-being of Iranian adolescents who studying in Iranian schools in Kuala Lumpur were high not low which is in contrast with previous studies. Clemente and Hezomi (2016) stated that psychological well-being of Iranian adolescents is low. Hosseini (2014) further discussed that going to a new country may even negatively affect the psychological well-being of the Iranian students who study overseas.

Moreover, findings indicate that paternal autonomy support is related to well-being in Iranian adolescents. Higher psychological well-being of adolescents was found to be related to autonomy-supportive fathers. These findings are in consistent with previous studies on children suggesting a link between paternal autonomy support and well-being (Downie et al., 2007; Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Grolnick, Price, Beiswenger, & Sauck, 2007; Lokes, Gingras, Philippe, Koestner, & Fang, 2010).

Furthermore, the results of current study illustrated a strong link between maternal autonomy support and psychological well-being. Findings of this study supporting the study conducted by Kocayörük, Altıntaş and İçbay

(2015) who indicated a positive significant correlation between maternal autonomy support and well-being among adolescents. Similarly study by López-Walle et al. (2013) found meaningful influence of autonomy-support mothers on the child's well-being. In another study, Niemiec et al. (2006) mentioned that support from mothers had exclusive relationships to their adolescents' psychological health. An explanation offered for current findings is that adolescents have higher well-being when they stated their parents were autonomy supportive.

## V. CONCLUSION

The findings of current study indicate that autonomy supportive fathering may be as detrimental to the psychological well-being of children as autonomy supportive mothering. The importance of fathers in the lives of children has received recent attention in empirical studies (López-Walle et al., 2013). Nevertheless, although fathers are beginning to play a large role in the lives of children, fathers seem to serve a different function in parenting than do mothers, which may account for the differences found in the current study that paternal autonomy support has stronger association with adolescent's psychological well-being than maternal autonomy support. It is possible that since fathers play a more autonomous role in the lives of children, having a autonomy-supportive father may complement the fatherhood role and hence may not interfere with the child's well-being as much as having a autonomy-supportive mother. These differences highlight the importance of examining the consequences of parenting practices on well-being of children separately for mothers and fathers.

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