




Comparison of the Effectiveness of Career Path Development Parenting with Attachment-Based Parenting on Mothers' Mental Health and Parenting Orientation

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this research was to compare the effectiveness of career path development parenting training with attachment-based parenting training on mothers' mental health and parenting orientation.

Materials and Methods: The research method was quasi-experimental with a pretest, posttest, and follow-up design involving three groups; the statistical population included all mothers with elementary school children. The sample consisted of 60 mothers who were selected purposefully based on inclusion and exclusion criteria and were assigned to two training groups and one control group. The research instruments were the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) by Goldberg and Hiller (1972) and the Parenting Orientation Questionnaire (Yousefi, 2021). While the control group was on a waiting list, the experimental groups received the educational interventions. The collected data were analyzed at both descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential levels (repeated measures ANOVA). Calculations were performed using SPSS software.

Findings: The results showed that, among career path development parenting and attachment-based parenting, only career path development parenting style was effective in improving mothers' mental health and parenting orientation.

Conclusion: Thus, it can be concluded that career path development parenting is effective in enhancing the mentioned parenting constructs.

Keywords: Parenting, Career Path Development, Attachment, Mental Health, Parenting Orientation

1. Introduction

Mothers are one of the primary factors in the growth and nurturing of children in the early years of life, and their psychological states affect their children's lives. In

other words, mothers have a heavier responsibility in caring for children, which shows that mothers interact with their children more than other family members, making the attention to their psychological characteristics in relation to their children important (Gong et al., 2024). As children

enter school, they become separated from their mothers and face new expectations in the educational environment that were not previously required; learning lessons, doing homework, and following classroom and school rules are among the new demands that children are expected to meet (Santos et al., 2024). Thus, mothers' mental health is influenced by their maternal duties and vice versa. Normally, mothers' mental health allows them to perform at an acceptable level, enjoy life, and balance various activities, indicating mental health marked by autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependency, and self-actualization of emotional and intellectual abilities (Keyes, 2009).

On the other hand, heavy maternal responsibilities alongside other life duties can lead to parental burnout, characterized by physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion from parenting duties, causing mothers to become skeptical about their responsibilities and performance (Ren et al., 2024). In this context, parenting orientation, which refers to parents' optimism and pessimism towards their child and parenting, can significantly manage parenting tasks. It helps parents feel effective or doubt their performance (Morales et al., 2024).

For years, the role of parenting style training in improving mothers' and their children's psychological well-being has been confirmed. One type of parenting style is attachment-based parenting, which focuses on attachment to manage and educate children (Gregory et al., 2020). Another major concern among parents, especially mothers, is raising their children to be highly successful in their career paths, as research emphasizes the crucial role of parents in their children's academic and career success (Zhou et al., 2020).

Finding employment and developing a career path have always been significant human concerns. Additionally, preparing children to attain suitable professional positions and be beneficial to society is a crucial concern for parents (Saadati et al., 2020; Sadeghidehkordi et al., 2022). Historically, individuals had to guide their children towards the job market to meet basic needs. However, over the past forty years, societal growth, attention to children's mental health, and increased family welfare in Iran have led children to pursue knowledge more than job readiness. This focus on knowledge without necessary skills makes job searching and enduring workplace difficulties harder for young adults (Heydari et al., 2023). Thus, job placement becomes challenging for some individuals. Despite the benefits of this shift from child labor to adult job readiness, it also brings issues such as delayed job skills acquisition and over-reliance on family (Heydari et al., 2023). However, many

families have successfully navigated this, finding their children well-placed in today's job market, while others struggle. Parental influence is a critical factor in children's career path success (Zhou et al., 2020). Therefore, identifying the best parenting approach to raise independent, responsible, and successful children has always been a concern for parents and child psychologists.

Some parents worry about fulfilling their career aspirations through their children's career paths. Ideally, raising independent, responsible, and successful children who are satisfied with their activities is the goal. A significant and impactful choice in addition to marriage and selecting a life partner is choosing a career. Those who find job compatibility have higher life satisfaction (Bakshi, 2016). Thus, parents should help children identify their interests and develop the potential skills needed for their future careers (Bakshi, 2016). Existing parenting training often overlooks early childhood career development, highlighting the need for a parenting style that can predict future career success. Attachment-based parenting has been noted before (Kohlhoff et al., 2022).

Parenting styles are described as a set of behaviors characterizing parent-child interactions across a wide range of situations, creating an influential interactive environment (Yaffe, 2023). Attachment style significantly affects positive child development and maintains positive parent-child relationships. Playful and responsive caregiving is vital for children to develop secure attachments, emotional regulation, empathy, and a strong sense of self-worth. Since trust and self-perception are rooted in early growth, revisiting points of emotional growth interruption is crucial for resuming healthy interactions (Yaffe, 2023). Attachment-based parenting includes four fundamental dimensions forming the basis of a healthy parent-child relationship, appearing as specific behaviors, activities, and words (Kohlhoff et al., 2022): 1) Structure: Parents define rules and boundaries to promote security and self-regulation in the child, effective for children with high impulsivity and lack of focus. 2) Engagement: Parents focus personally on the child, fostering joyful and responsive companionship and deep emotional connections, beneficial for socially withdrawn children and neglectful parents. 3) Nurture: Parents and children engage in soothing activities to enhance warmth, security, and comfort, helping anxious, hyperactive, or aggressive children and harsh parents express emotions better. 4) Challenge: Children are encouraged to undertake age-appropriate, mildly risky tasks to build confidence and

competence, suitable for shy children and competitive parents.

Despite existing parenting styles addressing specific aspects, they may not prepare all children for future job markets, as evidence shows some young adults struggle with job placement and retention (Heydari et al., 2023). Research indicates that career path growth is influenced by parenting styles (Deng & Tong, 2020; Zahedani et al., 2016).

The Child Career Path Development Parenting Training Package was developed by Heydari et al. (2023), maintaining warmth, acceptance, and high expectations from authoritative parenting, covering six main areas: 1) Group activities training, 2) Developing intellectual outlook, 3) Fostering love of learning, 4) Teaching strategy and prudence, 5) Age-appropriate understanding of the job market, and 6) Preparing for networking and job market conversations. The effectiveness of this package was compared to attachment-based parenting training. Both methods include warmth, acceptance, and high expectations, but differ in strategies and techniques. One approach aims to improve parenting styles and psychological constructs of mothers and children through career path growth strategies, the other through attachment strategies (Heydari et al., 2023). This study examined the effectiveness of these two methods. The study aimed to answer whether the Child Career Path Development Parenting Training Package significantly affects mothers' mental health and parenting orientation compared to attachment-based parenting.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

Given the research aim to compare the effectiveness of career path development parenting training with attachment-based parenting training on mothers' mental health and parenting orientation in Isfahan, the study employed a quasi-experimental design with pretest, posttest, and follow-up with a control group. Sixty mothers were selected through coordination with the Isfahan Department of Education, informed about the course in girls' elementary schools. From the volunteers, 60 mothers were purposefully selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. While the control group was on a waiting list, the experimental groups underwent eight 90-minute sessions of educational content. All subjects were assessed in pretest, posttest, and 45-day follow-up stages. Data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods.

The statistical population comprised all mothers and their elementary school children in Isfahan during the 2022-2023 school year. A sample size of 15 per group suffices in experimental research, but the sample size was increased to 20. Participants were purposefully selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria among mothers and elementary school children registered for psychological training courses.

Inclusion Criteria: Having an elementary school child, basic literacy, child's age between 7 to 9 years, child's gender female, willingness to participate in the training course.

Exclusion Criteria: Unwillingness to continue sessions, disruptions in session flow (irregular attendance, off-topic discussions, lack of commitment to tasks), participation in other psychological training courses in the past three months, failure to complete tasks.

To conduct the research, necessary permissions were obtained from the university, and the Isfahan Department of Education was approached. After promoting the course in authorized schools, 60 mothers registered and were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, then randomly assigned to research groups. The two experimental groups received eight sessions of educational training.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Mental Health

The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) by Goldberg and Hiller (1979) was used to assess mental health. This 28-item questionnaire reports an internal consistency of 0.87 using Cronbach's alpha. Items are scored from 1 to 4 for options a to d, with subscale scores ranging from 4 to 28. Scores above 14 indicate lower mental health. The internal consistency of this questionnaire was re-evaluated in this study, yielding a Cronbach's alpha above 0.80 (Mosayebi et al., 2023).

2.2.2. Parenting Orientation

The Parenting Orientation Questionnaire, a 23-item scale, was scored on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Developed by Yousefi (2021), it measures parental optimism and pessimism towards parenting. The internal consistency was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha above 0.60 ($\alpha = 0.777$). Construct validity was established by correlating individual items with the total score, showing significant positive correlations. Convergent validity was also confirmed by positive

correlations with the Parenting Self-Efficacy Questionnaire and Parenting Stress Questionnaire. Exploratory factor analysis indicated a single factor structure. This questionnaire's Cronbach's alpha was again evaluated, showing a score above 0.80 (Saadati et al., 2020; Zahedani et al., 2016).

2.3. Interventions

2.3.1. Attachment-Based Parenting Training

The attachment-based parenting training intervention focuses on fostering secure attachment between mothers and their children. This intervention emphasizes understanding and improving attachment types, recognizing the impact of maternal attachment on children, and adopting strategies to support secure attachment. The sessions are designed to introduce and reinforce key concepts and practices for secure attachment, with practical tasks for mothers to observe and apply in their daily interactions (Kohlhoff et al., 2022).

Session 1: Introduction to Course Goals and Attachment Concept

The first session introduces the course objectives and the concept of attachment. Participants undergo a pretest, get to know each other, and learn about the importance and types of attachment. They are encouraged to identify their attachment type and that of their child. The homework involves monitoring their own and their child's attachment behaviors.

Session 2: Impact of Maternal Attachment on Child and Role of Mother-Child Relationship

The second session covers the impact of a mother's attachment on her child and the importance of the mother-child relationship in the child's attachment and future outcomes. Mothers learn how their attachment style affects their child's attachment and are tasked with observing their interactions with their children.

Session 3: Maternal Behaviors Disrupting Attachment and Four Essential Needs for Secure Attachment

In the third session, mothers learn about behaviors that can disrupt their child's attachment and the four essential needs for secure attachment: challenge, security, nurture, and structure. They are instructed to monitor these necessities in their family environment.

Session 4: Prioritizing Essential Needs for Secure Attachment

The fourth session focuses on how parents can prioritize these essential needs and provides strategies to nurture their child's growth. Mothers are introduced to games that

promote nurturing and are tasked with observing the impact of nurturing skills on their child.

Session 5: Strategies and Methods to Provide Challenge for Secure Attachment

The fifth session introduces strategies and methods for creating appropriate challenges for the child to promote secure attachment. Mothers learn about games and activities that present healthy challenges and are guided on how to integrate these into their parenting.

Session 6: Strategies and Methods to Establish Structure for Secure Attachment

The sixth session teaches strategies and methods for establishing structure, an essential component for secure attachment. Mothers are taught how to set boundaries and rules in a way that fosters a sense of security and organization in their child.

Session 7: Strategies and Methods to Promote Engagement for Secure Attachment

In the seventh session, mothers learn about strategies and methods to enhance engagement with their children, which is crucial for secure attachment. They are introduced to interactive activities and games that promote deep emotional connections.

Session 8: Prioritizing Secure Attachment Needs Based on Child's Issues and Summary

The final session helps parents prioritize the secure attachment needs based on their child's specific issues. The session also includes a summary of the course content and strategies for maintaining the correct approach over time.

2.3.2. Career Path Development Parenting Training

The career path development parenting training focuses on preparing children for future career success by incorporating elements of authoritative parenting and practical skills for career readiness. This intervention includes understanding various parenting styles, the significance of authoritative parenting, and strategies for nurturing career-oriented skills in children (Heydari et al., 2023).

Session 1: Introduction to Trainer, Group Members, Group Goals, and Parenting Styles

The first session introduces the trainer, group members, and the goals of the group. Mothers become acquainted with different parenting styles and their characteristics, setting the stage for the course.

Session 2: Understanding Authoritative Parenting Style and Its Impact on Children

The second session delves into the authoritative parenting style, its principles, and its positive effects on children. Mothers learn how to implement this style effectively.

Session 3: Concept of Career Path Development and Future Success Based on Authoritative Parenting

In the third session, mothers are introduced to the concept of career path development within the framework of authoritative parenting and learn about foresight training to prepare their children for future career success.

Session 4: Setting Up a Learning Environment with Emphasis on Career Path Development

The fourth session teaches mothers how to create a forward-looking and authoritative learning environment for their children, with a focus on career path development.

Session 5: Importance of Practical Learning Opportunities for Children

The fifth session emphasizes the importance of practical learning opportunities. Mothers learn how to create and use these opportunities to shape their children's learning experiences.

Session 6: Teaching Strategy and Cleverness to Children

In the sixth session, mothers are educated on the importance of teaching strategy and cleverness to their children and learn methods to impart these skills.

Session 7: Teaching Group Work Skills and Conflict Resolution

The seventh session focuses on the importance of group work skills and how to teach them to children. Mothers learn methods for teaching teamwork and resolving conflicts, with a task to monitor parenting with an emphasis on these skills.

Session 8: Importance of Empathy and Teaching Empathy to Children

The final session addresses the importance of empathy and how to teach it to children. Mothers learn methods to impart empathy effectively, concluding the training with strategies for maintaining these teachings.

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed at both descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential levels (repeated measures ANOVA). Calculations were performed using SPSS software.

3. Findings and Results

To address the research question, repeated measures ANOVA was used. The Shapiro-Wilk test results (regarding the normality of variable distributions), Levene's test results (equality of group variances), Box's M test for the equality of variance-covariance matrices, and Mauchly's test for sphericity were provided for the variables of mothers' mental health and parenting orientation. The Shapiro-Wilk test results showed that the mental health and parenting orientation of mothers in the pretest, posttest, and follow-up stages had normal distributions ($p > .05$), equal error variances ($p > .05$), and equal variance-covariance matrices (via Box's M test) ($p > .05$). Additionally, Mauchly's test results indicated significance, meaning the sphericity assumption was violated. Due to this violation, Greenhouse-Geisser statistics were referred to in the final analysis tables. [Table 1](#) presents the means and standard deviations of the pretest, posttest, and follow-up stages for the variables of mothers' mental health and parenting orientation in the research groups.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Mothers' Mental Health and Parenting Orientation in the Research Groups at Three Time Points

Variable	Time	Career Path Development Parenting Group M (SD)	Attachment-Based Parenting Group M (SD)	Control Group M (SD)
Mothers' Mental Health	Pretest	53.70 (13.61)	59.45 (12.86)	53.10 (13.27)
	Posttest	46.65 (8.27)	53.30 (12.28)	53.45 (12.03)
	Follow-up	46.40 (7.60)	53.55 (11.59)	53.48 (11.74)
Parenting Orientation	Pretest	36.05 (10.92)	43.70 (10.40)	35.45 (9.51)
	Posttest	80.25 (20.71)	43.35 (10.20)	36.36 (9.42)
	Follow-up	79.55 (20.77)	43.55 (10.83)	36.10 (9.64)

As shown in [Table 1](#), in the variables of mothers' mental health and parenting orientation, especially in the career path development parenting group and then the attachment-based

parenting group compared to the control group, more significant changes were observed in the posttest and follow-

up stages. The results of the repeated measures ANOVA for mothers' mental health are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of Repeated Measures ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Power
Within-Groups	Time	885.52	1.16	760.68	74.34	.001	.39
	Time × Group	713.25	5.82	122.54	11.98	.001	.34
	Error (Time)	1357.90	132.71	10.23	-	-	-
Between-Groups	Group	2454.76	5	490.95	8.05	.001	.21
	Error	6955.55	114	61.01	-	-	-
Within-Groups	Time	14339.85	1.07	13357.81	153.82	.001	.57
	Time × Group	30596.32	5.37	5700.20	65.64	.001	.74
	Error (Time)	10627.83	122.38	86.84	-	-	-
Between-Groups	Group	65725.56	5	13145.11	33.37	.001	.59
	Error	44912.42	114	393.97	-	-	-

Given the violation of the sphericity assumption, Greenhouse-Geisser statistics were reported in Table 2. As observed in Table 2 for the variable of mothers' mental health, within-group effects, the time factor ($F = 74.34$, $df = 1.16$, $p < .01$) and the interaction of time and group ($F = 11.98$, $df = 5.82$, $p < .01$) show significant differences in mothers' mental health over time and the interaction of time with group (three research groups). The partial eta squared for the time factor is .39 with a power of 1, and for the interaction of time with group, it is .34 with a power of 1. This result indicates that the time factor and the interaction of time and group account for 39% and 34% of the variance

in mothers' mental health, respectively, with 100% power confirmation. Additionally, in the between-group effects, there is a significant difference in mothers' mental health for the group factor ($p < .01$). The partial eta squared for the group factor is .21 with a power of .96, indicating that the conducted ANOVA shows 21% of the variance between at least one of the experimental groups (two parenting groups) and the control group in mothers' mental health with 96% power. Table 3 presents the results of the Bonferroni post hoc test for pairwise comparisons of the three experimental groups and the control group in mothers' mental health.

Table 3

Bonferroni Post Hoc Test Results for Time and Group Comparisons in Mothers' Mental Health and Parenting Orientation

Variable	Row	Reference Group	Comparison Group	Mean Difference	Standard Error	Sig.
Time	1	Pretest	Posttest	3.39	0.35	.001
	2		Follow-up	3.26	0.40	.001
	3	Posttest	Follow-up	-0.13	0.13	.97
Group	4	Career Path	Attachment-Based	-6.52	1.29	.003
	5		Control	-6.46	1.29	.002
	6	Attachment-Based	Control	-2.10	1.29	.15
Time	1	Pretest	Posttest	-13.30	1.04	.001
	2		Follow-up	-13.47	1.09	.001
	3	Posttest	Follow-up	-0.17	0.24	1.00
Group	4	Career Path	Attachment-Based	21.75	3.62	.001
	5		Control	29.43	3.62	.001
	6	Attachment-Based	Control	7.68	3.62	.54

As shown in Table 3, there are significant differences in the variables of mothers' mental health and parenting orientation between the pretest and posttest and follow-up stages. This means that from the pretest to the posttest and follow-up stages, the level of mothers' mental health

increased. At the group level, there are significant differences between the career path development parenting group and the attachment-based parenting group compared to the control group ($p < .01$). Therefore, based on the presented results, career path development parenting has had

a significant effect on mothers' mental health compared to attachment-based parenting and the control group, while the attachment-based style has not had a significant effect.

In the variable of parenting orientation, there are significant differences between the pretest and posttest and follow-up stages. This means that from the pretest to the posttest and follow-up stages, the level of parenting orientation increased. At the group level, there are significant differences between the career path development parenting group and the attachment-based parenting group and the control group ($p < .01$), but there is no significant difference between the control group and the attachment-based group. Therefore, based on the presented results, career path development parenting is more effective on parenting orientation compared to attachment-based parenting and the control group.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post hoc tests showed that only the career path development parenting style was effective on mothers' mental health and parenting orientation. Aligning with other research findings, it can be said that no studies addressing this topic were found in the existing databases, but research has shown the effectiveness of other methods on parenting constructs.

To explain the effectiveness of the career path development parenting style on mothers' mental health and parenting orientation, it can be said that mental health means not only the absence of anxiety, depression, and stress but also the ability to cope with stress, recognize one's capabilities, learn well, work well, and be beneficial to society. Mental health is necessary for personal, social, and economic growth (Prior et al., 2019). Additionally, parenting orientation is derived from life orientation, referring to optimism and pessimism. Optimistic orientation means having positive expectations for outcomes, while pessimistic orientation means having negative expectations for outcomes (Carver & Scheier, 2014). Therefore, the career path development parenting style has mechanisms that have improved these two constructs.

This educational package pursued two general goals: improving the authoritative parenting style and developing the child's career path within the authoritative parenting framework. It included eight career path development strategies derived from the qualitative section in two main areas of the authoritative parenting style: age-appropriate

expectations and limits, and appropriate responsiveness to the child's needs. Six specific career path development strategies for childhood were included: foresight training, fostering a lifelong love of learning, creating a learning environment, teaching cleverness and critical thinking, teaching teamwork skills, and finally, teaching empathy within the authoritative framework. These teachings and skills helped mothers improve their authoritative parenting by setting age-appropriate rules and limits and responding to the child's needs, which enhanced the parent-child relationship and reduced parenting problems. Furthermore, career path development training structured the parent-child relationship, helping mothers understand the purposefulness and meaningfulness of parenting, thus improving their mental health and orientation (Heydari et al., 2023).

To explain the lack of effectiveness of the attachment-based parenting training on mothers' mental health, the results were unexpected. In this method, mothers learned that secure attachment and its necessities include nurture, challenge, structure, and engagement with the child. Attention to these four necessities should optimize the mother-child relationship, making mothers feel more compliance from the child. Moreover, mothers' tasks in each dimension of nurture, challenge, structure, and engagement are clear. These changes in parenting should have improved mothers' mental health and orientation. Several reasons can explain this unexpected result: excessive emphasis on attachment style and its importance at age five may have caused mothers to feel guilty or depressed about their parenting performance, feeling they missed opportunities. Additionally, this method's impact on mental health may require more time. There may also be a moderating variable affecting effectiveness not identified in this study, such as other factors impacting mothers' mental health, like their relationship with their spouse (Kohlhoff et al., 2022).

5. Limitations and Suggestions

This study, like others, had limitations, including the non-random selection of participants and the limited statistical population to mothers, making generalization to other populations cautious. It is recommended that child counselors and family educators consider this method to improve parenting constructs.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics principles

In this research, ethical principles including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy, and confidentiality were observed.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Authors' Contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to the research process, covering various aspects from study design to data handling and manuscript preparation.

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