

# Parental Reflective Functioning and Object Relations in Adolescents: A Path Model of the Direct and Indirect Effects on Reactive Aggression through Mentalization

Hanieh. Abbasi<sup>1</sup>, Afnan. Jafari<sup>2\*</sup>, Mona. Khalednejad<sup>3</sup>, Javad. Khalatbari<sup>4</sup>, Fakhri Sadat. Hosseini<sup>5</sup>

1. Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Medical Science and Technologies, Islamic Azad University, Sr.C., Tehran, Iran

2. Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Qoms.C., Islamic Azad University, Qom, Iran

3. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Ka.C., Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran

4. Department of Psychology, To.C., Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran

5. Department of Psychology and Counseling, Faculty of Physical Education and Behavioral Sciences, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran

\* Corresponding author email address: jafariafnan@gmail.com

## Editor

Maryam Fatehizade<sup>id</sup>  
Professor of Counseling  
Department, Faculty of Educational  
Sciences and Psychology, Isfahan  
University, Iran  
m.fatehizade@edu.ui.ac.ir

## Reviewers

**Reviewer 1:** Sara Nejatifar<sup>id</sup>  
Department of Psychology and Education of People with Special Needs, Faculty of  
Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.  
Email: s.nejatifar@edu.ui.ac.ir  
**Reviewer 2:** Elham Azarakhsh<sup>id</sup>  
Department of Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Qom Branch, Qom, Iran.  
Email: elhamazarakhsh@qom.iau.ac.ir

## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the first paragraph of the Introduction, the authors state that “reactive aggression predicts a wide range of maladaptive outcomes—including peer rejection, academic difficulties, delinquency, and psychopathology.” While this statement is theoretically plausible, it is supported by only a limited number of references. The paragraph would benefit from a more comprehensive synthesis of longitudinal evidence demonstrating temporal and causal pathways linking reactive aggression to these outcomes, thereby establishing a stronger rationale for the study.

The paragraph beginning with “Contemporary psychodynamic and attachment-based theories increasingly emphasize the role of mentalization and parental reflective functioning” provides a useful conceptual overview; however, it does not sufficiently distinguish mentalization from related constructs such as theory of mind, metacognition, social cognition, and

reflective functioning. Greater conceptual clarification is needed because the study positions mentalization as the central mediating variable, and construct overlap may threaten theoretical precision.

In the paragraph starting with “Within attachment and mentalization frameworks, parental reflective functioning (PRF) occupies a central role,” the authors present parental reflective functioning as a direct developmental antecedent of adolescent adjustment. However, the literature review does not adequately address possible moderating variables such as adolescent temperament, parental psychopathology, family conflict, or socioeconomic status. The omission of these factors creates an overly deterministic account of parental influence and should be acknowledged theoretically.

The sampling procedure described in the paragraph beginning “The statistical population of the present study consisted of all adolescents enrolled in the second cycle of secondary education” requires greater methodological detail. Specifically, the number of districts selected, the number of schools sampled, classroom selection procedures, participation rates, and refusal rates should be reported. Without these data, the representativeness of the sample cannot be adequately assessed.

The sample size justification citing Kline (2023) is insufficient for a path analysis model. Rather than relying solely on a general participant-to-parameter ratio, the authors should provide an a priori power analysis, anticipated effect sizes, and justification for the final sample size of 463. Such information would strengthen confidence in the statistical power of the study.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

## 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The discussion of object relations theory beginning with “The developmental significance of parental reflective functioning can also be understood through object relations theory” is conceptually rich but insufficiently operationalized. Since object relations is a multidimensional psychodynamic construct, the authors should explain how the specific BORRTI dimensions (alienation, insecure attachment, egocentricity, and social incompetence) correspond to the theoretical pathways proposed in the model.

The paragraph stating that “mentalization functions as a protective socio-cognitive mechanism” proposes mediation before the empirical rationale has been fully established. The authors should provide a more systematic review of prior mediation studies examining mentalization between attachment-related variables and aggression. Without such evidence, the proposed mediating pathway appears more speculative than theoretically derived.

The final paragraph of the Introduction presents the hypotheses but does not explicitly formulate them as testable research hypotheses. For clarity and methodological rigor, the study should state separate hypotheses for each direct effect, each indirect effect, and the overall mediation model. Explicit hypothesis numbering would improve transparency and facilitate interpretation of results.

In the Methods section, the statement “The study was conducted during the 2025–2026 academic year among adolescents enrolled in secondary schools” lacks sufficient contextual information. The authors should specify the country, city, educational districts involved, and whether public and private schools differed in recruitment procedures. These details are essential for evaluating external validity and cultural generalizability.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

## 2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.