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## Investigating the mediating role of the meaning of life in the relationship between perceptions of parenting styles and the academic life of second-year secondary school students in Zanzan city

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### ABSTRACT

**Background and Aim:** The meaning of life in a person can affect other aspects of his life. The academic vitality of people is among them; Therefore, this research was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between the perception of parenting styles and academic life with the mediating role of the meaning of life in the second secondary school students of Zanzan city. **Methods:** This is descriptive correlational research. The statistical population was 20,866 students of the second secondary school in Zanzan city in the academic year 2019-20. According to Morgan's table, 392 people were selected, but to increase the credibility of the findings, 400 people were selected and distributed by stratified random method. To collect data, the standard questionnaires of Alabama parenting (1991), Hossein Chari and Dehghanizadeh's academic vitality (2013) and the meaning of life were used by Sticker et al. (2006). The data was analyzed using SPSS.24 statistical software and AMOS statistical software was used for modeling structural equations. **Results:** The results showed that; There is a significant relationship between the perception of parenting styles and academic vitality ( $p < 0.01$ ) and also, there is a significant relationship between the perception of parenting styles and the meaning of life ( $p < 0.01$ ). The meaning of life plays a mediating role in the relationship between parenting styles and academic vitality ( $p < 0.01$ ). **Conclusion:** It can be concluded that in order to create academic vitality in students, perceptions of parenting styles play a decisive role and the meaning of life can lead to academic vitality in children.



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## Introduction

The family is the first social environment that places the child under guardianship and care. Therefore, before all social environments, it affects the growth and development of a person. The appearance of habits and behaviors of each person begins at home. Family conditions can be a positive factor during the child's development and provide the grounds for growth or disruptive and inhibiting action. Characteristics such as motivation and vitality, peace of mind, and mental health in a child are the result of a calm family atmosphere and healthy relationships between family members, especially in how parents play their role (Song, Han, Song, Wan, Conlon, Dong, et al., 2020).

The social status of the family, economic status, thoughts and beliefs, customs, ideals and wishes of parents, and their level of upbringing greatly influence children's behavior. As we know, families have differences in social, economic, educational, religious, and artistic fields. The shape of families, the way members of each family, communicate with each other, and the society in which the family lives are not the same in all cases. Therefore, the influence of families, especially parents, is in the behavior of different people (Keoh & Friel, 2020). In a family, the way the family members work and communicate is such that the family environment is conducive to meeting children's basic needs, both physically and psychologically. The behavior of a child raised in this family is completely different from that of a child whose family environment prevents him from providing basic needs. The habits the child acquires at home may be correct and rational, and sometimes these habits may hinder the child's normal development. The family influences children's tendencies, thoughts and opinions, and how they deal with others. The opinion of the family members towards the child, in general, regarding health, education, food, and communal life are effective in raising a child (Shariatmadari, 2017). Parenting styles are the methods that parents apply in dealing with their children and profoundly affect their formation and growth during childhood and their personality and behavioral characteristics (Shaarinejad, 2012).

Academic vitality is defined as learners' ability to succeed in dealing with academic obstacles and challenges on the path of normal academic life. Also, academic vitality refers to the positive, constructive response and adaptation to all kinds

of challenges and obstacles that are experienced in the ongoing field of education. Apathy, fatigue, and academic exhaustion are the opposite of academic vitality. When a person does something spontaneously, not only does he not feel tired and hopeless, but he also feels that his energy and strength have increased. In general, feeling an inner sense of vitality is a significant indicator of mental health, which provides the grounds for creative thinking. In fact, vitality reflects psychological and physical health (Veiskarami & Yosefvand et al., 2017). Academic vitality refers to a positive, constructive, and adaptive response to all kinds of challenges and obstacles that are experienced in the continuous and ongoing field of education. For sure, the result of living with meaning is a sense of mastery, peace, happiness, and academic vitality (Ghadampour et al., 2015).

On the other hand, the meaning of life is a sense of purposefulness and coherence in a person's life, paying attention to the values and importance of a person to certain conditions in life (Terek Moghadam, 2018). Humans need meaningful life. Being meaningful allows people to interpret events and prepare values for themselves according to their way of life and desires in life. Meaningfulness means valuing and valuing, and when it is associated with life, it means valuing and valuing life. It is meaningful if a person's life has a real positive value and is proper and sound (Skrzypińska, 2021). Academic life is one of the most important periods of a person's life, which affects a person's fruitful and successful education and learning, where merits and abilities are loaded and scientific progress is achieved. However, in their daily academic life, students face various challenges, obstacles and pressures specific to this course. During their studies, students face challenging academic situations. If they do not act properly, they endanger their mental health, which leads to dropping out, or even being expelled from school (Ostafin & Proulx, 2020). On the other hand, performing the appropriate behavior in these situations causes a feeling of satisfaction, happiness, and hope in the field of education. This point shows that to deal with academic challenges properly, it is necessary to learn how to live alive in order that it is possible to prevent harmful behaviors in education. By applying effective parenting styles, parents have a very decisive role in the academic vitality of

their children. They can create vitality in children with proper educational methods, which is achieved when parents strengthen such behaviors in the family (Lin, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to conduct extensive studies in this field and provide reliable research information to parents, teachers, and educational planners. Considering the mentioned cases in the present research, while examining the relationship between the perception of parenting styles and academic vitality in the second-year high school students of Zanjan city, we will also examine the relationship of these variables in the presence of the intermediary of the meaning of life. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between the perception of parenting styles and academic life with the mediating role of the meaning of life in the second secondary school students of Zanjan city.

### Method

The method of the present research the method of the present research is descriptive of the correlation type. The statistical population of this research consists of all students of the second secondary school in Zanjan city in the academic year 2018-2019. Using Morgan's table and respecting the ratio of classes in the society, 392 people were selected as a sample first based on the district and then based on gender and educational level. In order to increase the credibility of the findings, 400 people were considered as samples.

### Tools

**1. Alabama Parenting Scale (1991):** This questionnaire was prepared in the state of Alabama by Frick (1992). This scale has three different forms: parent, child, and telephone interview with the child. In this research, the child form developed and standardized by Samani et al. (2010) for use in Iran has been used. This tool includes six small scales, in order of positive parenting, father participation, punishment, exercising authority, weak supervision, and awareness of each other. This scale has a total of 44 items. The scoring method is based on a five-point Likert scale (from never = 1 to always = 5). To calculate the score of each sub-scale's score, the questions' score is divided by their sum (Samani et al., 2010). Validity and reliability Samani et al. (2010) confirmed the factorial structure (structural validity) of the questionnaire by deliberate factor analysis with varimax rotation and reported the reliability coefficient of the tool to be 87%.

### 2. Hosseinchari and Dehghanizadeh's Academic Buoyancy Questionnaire (2014):

Hosseinchari and Dehghanizadeh developed the Academic Buoyancy Questionnaire with 9 items based on the academic vitality scale of Martin and Marsh (2006), which had four items. To implement this scale in Iranian culture, first, an expert in psychology and an English language expert translated the text of the scale questions into Persian. After the translation of the Martin and Marsh scale items, some items were rewritten based on the original form of the scale, and educational psychology professors were asked about the items. These items were implemented on a group of high school students of Mehriz city for preliminary implementation and elimination of defects. They were rewritten and finally, 9 items reached the final stage. The scoring of the questionnaire is based on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The minimum score is 9, the average score is 27, and the highest score is 45. The validity and reliability of Hosseinchari and Dehghanizadeh's study (2014) showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained by removing one item was equal to 80% and the retest coefficient was equal to 73%. Also, the correlation range of the items with the total score is between 51% and 68%. These results indicate that the items have satisfactory internal consistency and stability. In order to check the factorial structure (construct validity) of the questionnaire, principal component analysis with orthogonal varimax rotation was used at the item level. The results generally showed that removing question (8) increases the reliability coefficient of the test, which was 75%.

### 3. The Meaning of Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

**Sticker et al. (2006):** The meaning of life scale was presented by Sticker, Fraser, Oishi and Kaler in (2006) to assess the existence of meaning and efforts to find it. Its validity, finality, and factorial structure have been investigated in different studies with different samples. The meaning of life scale includes two subscales that evaluate the presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning. To build this tool, these researchers first prepared 44 items, and then using exploratory factor analysis, they obtained two factors: the existence of meaning in life, and seeking for meaning in life with a total of 17 items. Then, in confirmatory factor analysis, by removing 7 items, a suitable 2-factor structure with 10 items was obtained. The total scores of questions 2, 3, 7, 8, 10 determine the level of a

person's effort to find meaning and the total scores of questions 1, 4, 5, 6, 9 (reverse coding) determine the level of meaningfulness of a person's life. To score this questionnaire, a score is given for completely false: 1 mostly false: 2 somewhat false: 3 don't know: 4 somewhat true: 5 mostly true: 6 completely true: 7. In this test, question 9 is graded in reverse. This way, the completely correct option will receive a score of 1 and the completely incorrect option will receive a score of 7. After obtaining the score of each statement, the subscales are also calculated in the following order. Validity and Reliability According to Steger et al.'s (2006) studies, the validity of this scale for life evaluation, 0.86 for the presence of meaning subscale and 0.87 for the search for meaning subscale, has been met. According to Steger et al.'s (2006) research, the reliability of the existence of meaning and the search for meaning subscales are 0.70 and 0.73, respectively. The test and retest reliability of this scale in Iran was 0.84 for the existence of the meaning subscale and 0.74 for the search for meaning subscale. In Elham's research (2008), Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.75 for the subscale of searching for meaning and 0.78 for the subscale of having meaning.

### Results

The current research aims to find the meaning of life in the relationship between perception of parenting styles and academic vitality. This research was approved and the results of its analysis showed that the meaning of life variable has been able to play a mediating role in the relationship between the perception of parenting styles and academic vitality.

Parenting styles and the type of communication parents have with their children are the foundations of many successes in their lives. Parenting styles are the methods that parents use in dealing with their children and have a profound effect on their formation and growth during childhood and their personality and behavioral characteristics (Shaarinejad, 2012). One of the factors that can affect the academic vitality of students is the educational patterns and parenting methods of parents and how they are perceived by their children. The type of parents' behavior in the form of diverse, normal and natural behaviors that they use in order to control and socialize their children is called parenting styles (Samani et al., 2009).

The amount and type of awareness of how to establish a meaningful and purposeful life, which

will actually lead to the recognition and achievement of the spiritual self, will make a person a realistic and positive thinker. Meaningful life is seen as a process of individual beliefs rather than an ultimate source of belief content. The more values a person believes in and is committed to, the more meaningful his life is. This type of view is effective in all aspects of his life, among which we can mention academic vitality, which has been confirmed by the findings of this hypothesis. Conducting this research, like other researches, has faced various limitations. Among other things, because the sample studied in this research was only secondary school students of Zanjan city, therefore, the findings obtained from this research should be generalized with caution and the generalizability of these findings requires further research. Since in the present study, the only tool used for data collection was a questionnaire, therefore, this can be one of the limitations of the research for a detailed examination of the reality. Also, due to time and financial constraints, this research could not be implemented in a larger society. According to the results, it is suggested that the officials and those involved in the education system should strengthen their perception of parenting styles by organizing family education workshops, necessary and sufficient training to increase the academic vitality of students. In order to increase the knowledge of teachers and students, it can be useful to compile educational programs in textbooks. It is also suggested that in order to achieve more logical results in the future researches of this research in the larger society and other provinces as well as in the students' society, the experience and its results should be compared with secondary school students. In the next studies along with the questionnaire, it is better to use face-to-face interviews to collect data.

### Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze the causes of mental weakness among students with the help of qualitative research tradition. Therefore, with the help of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method, the data from a semi-structured interview with thirteen soldiers were analyzed. Four core categories were extracted: intrapersonal weaknesses (external sources of expected happiness, negative motivation, low self-esteem), family component (causes related to one of the parents, causes related to family conditions), interpersonal causes (weakness of communication skills, weakness in managing

communication problems) environmental causes (perception of military personnel's weakness in establishing authoritative communication, perception of inattention environment to the current needs of soldiers).

The content analysis of the interviews with the soldiers showed that one of the core categories in the psychological weakness of the soldiers is intrapersonal weakness. They were suffering from interpersonal psychological weaknesses, which included the following organizational categories:

The organizing category of external sources of happiness, which showed that soldiers are dependent on the occurrence of external events to be happy, which included four basic categories: belief in the occurrence of a celebration for happiness, belief in having money for happiness, belief in having a party for happiness and believing in vacation as the factor of happiness. Another highly expected organizer category in this nuclear category showed that some soldiers suffer from mental weakness more than others because they are more expected. This organizing category included these basic categories. : Sadness due to the broken pride of Ahmad says: "The confrontation of the higher soldiers makes one's pride broken, they do not know how to deal with anyone, I have never seen such confrontations in my family before", the expectation of setting rules based on the characteristics and soldier's demands, inability to accept military duties. This result is in line with previous findings that have shown that sources of external happiness, high expectations, non-acceptance of experience or avoidance of experience are related to symptoms of psychological weakness, including the findings of Jacobson and Newman (2014) and Bardeen and Fergus (2016) based on the relationship between experiential avoidance and depression and anxiety are in line with the findings of Wang, Liu, Jiang and Song (2017) who showed that external sources of happiness and high expectations hinder happiness. Another negative motivation was the organizer category in this nuclear category, which showed that these soldiers had a negative motivation rather than a positive or neutral motivation to join the military, that is, they joined the military due to the fear of problems.

The inability to accept other conditions of the organizer category in the nuclear category was the individual cause of mental weakness, which showed that the soldiers did not have a proper understanding of the military period. Hence expectations are created in them. This makes the military path more difficult for them. This organizing category included the following basic categories: lack of correct understanding of military conditions and inability to accept

military duties. This finding is also consistent with the findings of Caouette and Guyer (2016), who showed that high expectations and cognitive deviations create disruptions in accepting conditions.

Low self-esteem was another organizing category in this nuclear category, which showed that these soldiers had not reached maturity in their self-worth. Therefore they were suffering from mental weakness. This organizing category included the following basic categories: Fear of others knowing about family problems; this finding is in line with Kircaburun (2016) finding, which showed that self-esteem could predict depression.

In general, according to the results of this research, the causes of mental weakness in soldiers are multi-dimensional. However, it can be improved because psychological enrichment training can cover many of these issues. Because with the help of such training, the mental strength of the soldier can be helped in such a way that he can learn the most important life skills in the real military environment and can solve many problems now and in the future. Many incompatible cognitions and emotions can be solved through training. Also, these results contained important implications for those in charge of military service, and that is that the soldiers should understand the compassion of the managers in the majority of the concern for the training of the career path. This will be a good opportunity to form a purposeful and planned life among the soldiers .

In general, this research also had some limitations, such as the fact that only soldiers who were in the military for three months were introduced. Moreover, the course of mental weakness or its improvement during the months of military service was not investigated. In sum, it is suggested to study the course of mental weakness or mental richness among soldiers. According to these results, it is suggested that career development packages in the military should be considered by those in charge of military service, along with other behavioral reforms.

### Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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