

Comparison of the boys growing up with a single father with the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of emotional intelligence, assertiveness and empathy levels

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to compare the boys growing up with a single father with the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of emotional intelligence, assertiveness and empathy. This research is a causal-comparative research. Accordingly, two boy schools (Zia School and Besat School) in District 2 of Tabriz were randomly selected. A total of 100 single-parent students aged 8 to 12 were selected using the purposeful sampling method. Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Child Form (TEIQue-CF), Gambrell-Richey Assertiveness Questionnaire and Davis Empathy Questionnaire were used to evaluate the variables. According to the results analyzed using Smart PSS 20 and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test, there is no significant difference between the boys growing up with a single father and boys growing up with a single mother in terms of level of emotional intelligence. There is a significant difference between boys growing up with a single father and the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of level of assertiveness and the level of empathy. Moreover, the level of assertiveness and the level of empathy of the boys growing up with a single mother were higher than those of the boys growing up with a single father.

Keywords: Boys growing up with a single mother, boys growing up with a single father, single-parent students, emotional intelligence, assertiveness, empathy.

Introduction

Family is the smallest and most cohesive group in society that consists of a mother, father and one or more children. Due to the death of a parent, the symmetry of the family is disturbed and there would be several economic, educational, cultural, behavioral and social problems for the family. One of the family structures is the structure of single-parent families, and in Iran there is an increasing number of single-parent families. The absence of a parent will have negative effects on the personality, social and psychological development of the children (Shokrzadeh, according to Pasvishe, 2011). Death of a parent would directly and indirectly affect the general development and various aspects of the children's behavior, and physical health, mental health and academic performance (Jane and Lee 1, 2015). Children growing with a single father have a higher economic standard than children growing with a single mother and do not need government assistance. (Pasvisheh, 2017).

In addition to such problems, variables or characteristics such as emotional intelligence, assertiveness, empathy, etc. are affected in single-parent families. is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict. It helps humans tolerate the problems. According to several studies, there is a difference between the parents (mothers and fathers) in terms of emotional intelligence and it plays an important role in raising children by the mothers and fathers. The relationship between parents and children is the first relationship for children. Feelings of love, empathy, intimacy, and security are directly affected by these kinds of relationship (Carnes, 2012). Empathy is one of the influential variables in the relationship between children and caregivers and how children are cared against many internalization and externalization problems. The term "empathy" was first used by Theodore Lippi in the early twentieth century to describe aesthetic experiences. Since then, the researchers aim to determine a practical definition for the empathy structure. There is a process of cognitive role-playing and empathetic emotional response. The cognitive role-playing indicates the recognition of the feelings of others and empathetic emotional response indicates sharing the feelings of others, especially the basic emotions (pleasant and unpleasant ones). A high level of empathy of individuals would result in advantages in work and non-work environments due to meeting each other's needs, each other's feelings and ideas, communicating over time, and sharing data about thoughts. According to the literature on empathy, having empathy for one another requires a feeling of the emotion of others. The emotion that the person feels due to having empathy should be caused in a special way, and the emotion should also be felt in certain ways. According to learning perspective, the definition of empathy is different due to an educational process. Accordingly, empathy is caused by the observer's performance to understand the emotions felt by others. Also, assertiveness is in fact the ability of individuals to establish appropriate interpersonal relationships in social interactions and is one of the most effective factors affecting mental health. Assertiveness is the base of interpersonal behavior and indicates interpersonal communication skills (Han, 2014) and the ability to honestly express attitudes and feelings without feeling anxious, and it also indicates defending one's rights so that the right of others is also observed. Assertiveness means encouraging others to be open and honest about their views, wishes and feelings, so that both parties act appropriately. Assertive behavior includes: Being open in expressing wishes, thoughts and feelings and encouraging others to do likewise. According to several studies, assertive people are more likely to find a good job in the future and be successful in their lives (Fiendas 2002).

When children are assertive due to social and family settings and show conscious and voluntary behaviors, they choose the kind of their behaviors and they make certain activities, so that it is referred to Behavioral Activation and Inhibition (Kobleva 2014).

In general, there are many differences between the mothers and fathers and these differences should be considered in order to examine the differences between the three variables of emotional intelligence, assertiveness and empathy among boys growing up with mother or father. The results are useful for counseling to couples that want divorce; in this regard, given that various studies have conducted on the comparison of personal traits and behaviors of the children growing up with a mother of father, but so far no research has been conducted to compare the personal traits and behaviors of the children growing up with a mother of father. Therefore, this research aims to compare the boys growing up with a single father with the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of emotional intelligence, assertiveness and empathy.

Research background

According to Nami Pasvisheh (2017), there is no significant difference between female adolescents in single-parent families with them in couple-parent families in terms of adaptation, personality traits and self-concept. However, the level of self-concept was higher in single-parent students than it in couple-parent students. According to Ghafouri and Jajbi (2017), mothers' mental health is directly affected by their children's behavioral and emotional problems. According to Soleimani (2016), single-parent students have more emotional behavioral problems than couple-parent students and there is no significant difference between single-parent students and couple-parent students in terms of the social sensitivity. Motamedi,

Shark (2016) examined students in single-parent and couple-parent families in terms of the behavioral problems according to their teachers and demonstrated that single-parent students have more behavioral problems than students in couple-parent families. Also, girls have more problems than boys in terms of anxiety, depression and attention deficit disorder. Amato and Peterson (2017) examined the relationship between mortality rates among children and adolescents in single-parent families, and concluded that the increase in single-parent families can somewhat increase the rate of homicides and casualties. According to Castro et al. (2017), the family is effective in developing emotion recognition skills of children in middle childhood and is influenced by important age-related changes in the relationship between parental emotion socialization and child emotional development. According to Stephen et al. (2017), the children in single-parent families would have more challenges in adulthood period for education, work or life than the children in couple-parent families. Kuh⁵ et al. (2017) examined the impact of scholarships of single-parent children and concluded that the problems of single-parent families can highly affect quality of life and academic achievement of children in childhood and adolescence periods (especially when they are University students).

According to Walloon et al. (2016), depression in children is affected by mental health status of parents and social skills and behavioral problems of children in their future are affected by the mental health status of parents. According to Wolfe (2016), the effect of mothers' mental health on the behavioral problems of their children is not lasting; and social isolation level was higher in children whose mothers had drunk alcohol during pregnancy.

Methodology

This research is a fundamental research in terms of purpose and is a causal-comparative research in terms of data collection. The statistical population consists of the students aged 8 to 12 years, growing up with a single mother or father, and are studying in elementary schools in five districts of Tabriz. The students were divided in two groups of the students growing up with a mother and the students growing up with a father and 50 students were selected. The selected students do not also live with their grandfathers or grandmothers and they have been in single-parent families at least for four years ago due to the divorce and not death of one of their parents. Two boy schools (Zia School and Besat School) in District 2 of Tabriz were randomly selected. The students were selected by purposeful sampling method so that 50 students were randomly selected from each school, and since the students of these schools are from the same district, they are similar in terms of economic status. The study was conducted in second semester of the academic year 2019-2021.

Measurement methods

The following questionnaires were used to collect research data:

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Child Form (TEIQue-CF)

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Child Form (TEIQue-CF) was designed by Mavroveli et al. in 2008 according to Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire designed by Petrides and Farnham (2001). TEIQue-CF is for children age 8 to 12. The Persian version of the questionnaire consists of 69 questions and 9 subscales: spontaneity, peer communication, emotional tools, adaptability, emotional perception, emotional regulation, emotional readiness, reduced impulsivity, and self-esteem. In English version of TEIQue-CF, Mavroveli et al. demonstrated a level of satisfaction and internal consistency of 0.79 and reliability over a period of 3 months ($r=0.79$). The questionnaire was designed by Nazemi Moghadam et al. (2017). Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.59 to 0.89 for total scale. In this study, the questions 20, 29, 47, 52, 62 and 74 were in two subscales, all of which were omitted; therefore, the Persian version of this questionnaire consists of 69 questions.

Gambrill-Richey Assertiveness Questionnaire

Gambrill-Richey Assertiveness Questionnaire (1975) is used to measure the assertive behaviors of children and adolescents; this questionnaire consists of 40 questions (each one indicates a specific situation that requires assertive behavior) and is according to Iranian culture. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was 0.78. Factor validity of different items of the scale ranged between 0.39 and 0.70 and the reliability

coefficient of this test was calculated 0.81 according to Gambrill-Richey (1975) (Bahrami, 1996; according to Ghaffarianzadeh, 1979).

There was a good correlation between the scores of this scale and the results of the evaluation of observers who had observed the role of a sample of subjects in a study conducted in Tehran (Turkman Malayeri, 2003).

Davis Empathy Questionnaire; Standardization of the Persian Version by Saffarinia and Malekan

Davis (1983) designed an empathy questionnaire consisting of 21 items. The components of this questionnaire included personal distress, perspective-taking and empathetic concern. Participants rated the items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The internal validity of the empathy questionnaire (consisting of 21 items) was estimated 0.71 to 0.77. According to Saffarinia and Malekan, the validity and reliability of the empathy questionnaire was acceptable according to Iranian culture and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the empathy questionnaire was calculated 0.91 after omitting 2 questions (a questionnaire consisting of 19 questions). The reliability of the first factor (consisting of 7 questions) was 0.093, the second factor (consisting of 7 questions) was 0.889 and the third factor (consisting of 5 questions) was 0.754. There was a significant correlation between the empathy questionnaire and all three components, and the PBS questionnaire. The final form of this questionnaire was consisted 19 questions, which according to the 5-point scale, 19 is the lowest score and 95 is the highest score; Standardized T scores are determined with a standard deviation of 10 and an average of 50. Finally, the data were analyzed using SPSS20 by descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency, mean and standard deviation were used to measure skewness and elongation. At the inferential statistics, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to evaluate the normality of variables and since the variables were normal, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used.

Results

Descriptive statistics of variables

Table 1. Descriptive values of variables

Variables	Quantity	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Elongation
				Statistics	Statistics
Emotional intelligence of the child growing up with a single father	50	221.02	10.672	- 0 .622	1.555
Emotional intelligence of the child growing up with a single mother	50	220.46	8.204	-0.438	-0.224
Assertiveness of the child growing up with a single father	50	115.6	18.713	0.247	- 0 .728
Assertiveness of the child growing up with a single mother	50	106.36	15.960	-0.268	- 0 . 728
Empathy of the child growing up with a single father	50	56.52	4.691	-1.081	- 0 . 098
Empathy of the child growing up with a single mother	50	64.05	2.697	0.175	- 0 . 296

* The scores of the emotional intelligence questionnaire range between 69 and 345. A high score about 345 indicates high level of emotional intelligence and a low score about 69 indicates low level of emotional intelligence in children. Therefore, the average emotional intelligence of the children growing up with a single father (221.02) is relatively high compared to the average emotional intelligence of the children growing up with a single mother (220.46). The scores of both groups from assertive questionnaire are middle scores, among which the average of assertive scores of children growing up with a single father is 115.6 and the average of assertive scores of children growing up with a single mother is 106.36. The sum of the scores ranges between 40 and 200. A low score indicates high level of assertiveness and a high score indicates low level of assertiveness; therefore, the level of assertiveness of children growing up with a single mother was higher than it of children growing up with a single father. * In the empathy questionnaire, score 19 is considered low, 57 is considered middle and 95 is high considered. According to the results (Table 1), the level of empathy of the two groups is middle. The level of empathy of the children growing up with a single father is 56.52 and the level of empathy of the children growing up with a single father is 64.5. The skewness and elongation for all variables ranged between -2 and +2.

The normality of the data (k-s)

Table 2. The normality of the population distribution according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

Research Variables	Emotional intelligence of the child growing up with a single father	Emotional intelligence of the child growing up with a single mother	Assertiveness of the child growing up with a single father	Assertiveness of the child growing up with a single mother	Empathy of the child growing up with a single father	Empathy of the child growing up with a single mother
Sample size	50	50	50	50	50	50
Kolmogorov Smirnov	0.07	0.08	0.12	0.1	0.11	0.1
Significance level	0.2	0.2	0.05	0.2	0.14	0.2

According to the results in Table (2), the significance level for all research variables is higher than the significance level of the research (0.05), so the data normality at the level 95% confidence is approved. The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses.

Levene's test

Levene's test is here used to assess the equality of variances of errors. Therefore, the statistical assumption is as follows:

H0: The variances of the groups' errors are equal

H1: The variances of the groups' errors are not equal

According to Table (3) and the results of Levene test table, the significance level for all three variables is higher than 0.05, so the variances of the errors are equal.

Table 3. Levene's test to assess the equality of variances of groups

Variable	Levene statistics (based on average)	Significance level
Emotional Intelligence	0.039	0.844
Assertiveness	1.632	0.204
Empathy	1.640	0.203

Box's M test

Given that its significance level is higher than 0.05, then the null hypothesis is accepted; in other words, variance-covariance matrices of the quantitative research variables (i.e. components of emotional intelligence, assertiveness and empathy) are equal across different independent groups of each factor, so the variance-covariance matrices of the data are homogeneous.

Table 4. Box's M testing of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices

Parameters	Values
Box's M statistic	7.754
F statistic	1.249
Significance level	0.277

Wilks' lambda test is a well-known test, but Pillai's trace test is stronger, provided that the covariance matrices are homogeneous, like Table 4. Table 5 includes the tests for two different groups; emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and empathy in different groups of children growing up with a single father and children growing up with a single mother for the two tests. In other words, the mean of emotional intelligence, assertiveness and empathy is significantly different between the two groups ($p < 0.001$).

Table 5. Pillai's trace test and Wilks' lambda test for the groups

Effect	Value	F statistic	Significance level
Group	Pillai's trace test	9.072	0.000
	Wilks' lambda test	9.072	0.000

The effects of each of the quantitative variables (hypotheses)

In Table 6, the effects of each of the quantitative variables (emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and empathy) are examined in two different groups; in addition, the interactive effect of the three variables is also examined. According to the significance value ($p < 0.05$) in all three sections, the variable of emotional

intelligence is not statistically significant because its significance level is higher than 0.05. However, the variables of assertiveness and empathy are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$); in other words, they were significantly different.

Table 6. The effects of each of the quantitative variables (emotional intelligence, assertiveness and empathy)

Source		Sum of squares (type 3)	Mean Square	F statistic	Significance level
Group	emotional intelligence,	0.02	0.02	0.45	0.504
	Assertiveness	1.334	1.334	7.057	0.009
	Empathy	2.56	2.56	18.56	0.000

According to Table 7, the mean scores of assertiveness level of the children growing up with a single mother was lower than the mean scores of the children growing up with a single father; therefore, assertiveness level of the children growing up with a single mother is higher.

Also, according to Table 7, the mean scores of empathy of the children growing up with a single mother were higher than the mean scores of empathy of the children growing up with a single father.

Discussion and conclusion

This research compared the boys growing up with a single father with the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of emotional intelligence, assertiveness and empathy. According to the research results, there is a significant difference between the boys growing up with a single father and the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of emotional intelligence. According to the research findings, there is no significant difference between the boys growing up with a single father and the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of emotional intelligence; in order to explain this finding, several studies have demonstrated that emotional intelligence has no significant relationship with factors such as gender, age and educational background. Although it is more effective to develop emotional intelligence at an early age, adults can also develop their emotional intelligence; in other words, age does not affect emotional intelligence development; at a young age, the children usually develop their emotional intelligence, and so, there is no difference between the children growing up with a single father and the children growing up with a single mother in terms of emotional intelligence. According to the research results, there is a significant difference between the boys growing up with a single father and the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of assertiveness. In order to explain this finding that the level of assertiveness of the boys growing up with a single mother is higher than it of the boys growing up with a single father, we refer to Bowlby's attachment theory according to which the communication of mind, body and brain for people who experience early secure and positive attachment in their relationship with the primary caregiver is positive. They express how they feel about others assertively and respond to the feelings of others assertively. They know what is good for them and are assertive (Duman, 2007). According to Bowlby's research, mother-child attachment plays an important role in the development of personality and social development of the children. Influenced by psychoanalysis, natural and cybernetic behaviorists, he realized that the mother-child attachment is very necessary. According to parental investment theory (Dosenmore 2009), the amount of time that parents spend with their daughters and sons is different. According to all cultures, mothers are more effective than fathers in raising their children, and the level of romantic feelings of men and women is different; in other words, women are more emotional than men toward their children. Therefore, if children do not grow up with their mothers, they will be with low self-esteem that have consequences such as social isolation and as a result, their emotional needs will not be met. Also, according to the findings, there is a significant difference between the boys growing up with a single father and the boys growing up with a single mother in terms of empathy. In order to explain the finding that the empathy level of the boys growing up with a single mother is higher than that of the boys growing up with a single father, we refer to the opinion of John Bowlby, a British psychologist, that empathetic behavior is based on the instinctive behavior of attachment. In other words, empathetic behavior in infancy period is based on the relationship between the infants and their caregivers (that are usually their mothers). According to him,

attachment can highly affect behavioral disorders and social maladaptation. The quality of this behavior is very effective in the later stages of a person's life. According to several studies, lack of secure attachment is correlated with aggressive behaviors that inhibit empathy (Zinsmeister 2001). People with insecure attachment styles have a negative view of themselves or others (Young, 2010). According to several studies, insecure style of attachment prevents the transition from destructive responses to positive behavior and reduces the empathy level. People with a secure attachment style can trust in others and so they will have a high level of empathy. According to the research results, there is a difference between the two groups in terms of empathy and assertiveness, and since empathy and assertiveness are effective variables in the fields of social relations, career and marriage, we recommend that government agencies, welfare organization or schools should establish workshops and training courses to improve the skills of empathy and assertiveness for single-parent boys; in addition, training courses to increase empathy and assertiveness levels of fathers will also be very necessary. Since the statistic population of this research includes only the children living in Tabriz and with respect to the different economic status and cultures of people in different regions of Iran, the data of this research cannot be generalized to other regions of the country; therefore, it is suggested that similar studies should be conducted in other cities of Iran and then, the results should be compared with the results of this research.

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