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# Efficacy of Parents' Perfectionism on Self-esteem among Iranian Female Students Seyed Mohammad Kalantarkousheh

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### Abstract

The present research is a study of the relationship between parents' perfectionism with guidance and high school female students' self-esteem in Khoda Bandeh, Iran. There were 220 students and their parents who participated in this study. Parents were asked to complete the Ahvaz Perfectionism Scale; students were requested to complete the Eysenck Self-esteem Questionnaire in order to evaluate their level of self-esteem. We applied Spearman correlation, step by step multiple regression and the t-test for data analyses. The obtained results showed a meaningful difference in perfectionism between fathers and mothers. There was a meaningful relationship between parents' perfectionism and student's self-esteem, however parents' perfectionism was not singly predictive of students' self-esteem. Parents' Perfectionism, together, can somewhat predicate self-esteem at students.

Keywords: Perfectionism, Self-esteem, Regression, Students, Parents

### 1. Introduction

Self-esteem as the main subject of hundreds of articles in a variety of majors is defined as the way we think and feel about ourselves. Self-esteem refers to beliefs about our appearance, abilities, relations with others and hopes for the future. However, people are not born with an inherent self-esteem. Rather, it can be enhanced during life time. Researches argue that self-esteem can have a tremendous impression on our general health, job choices, relations with others and ability to solve problems. Self-esteem is one of the most important factors for happiness (2003). In general, self-esteem represents the rate of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with oneself. People with low self-esteem are more likely to have depression, negative outlook and excitement instability than those who have higher degrees of self-esteem (Petrie & Brook, 2011)

Remarkably, self-esteem is formed through children's interaction with their surrounding environment. Although there are some uncertainties about the relationship between people and self-evaluation (Felson & Reed, 1986), there is an attitude that family of origin or other relatives play a major role in the formation of children's self-esteem (Stafford & Beyer, 1993).

Self-esteem is a concept usually confused with "self-concept" and "self". "Self-concept" refers to one's beliefs and awareness about his abilities which makes one to have unique configurations. Mann et al. (2004) have shown that self-esteem differs from "self-concept". Self-esteem is actually the appreciable and impressive part of "self-concept" according to these researchers.

Perfectionism is another important concept. Rice et al. (2012) believe that "perfectionism" has been defined for various uses, however the main concept of perfectionism is how to do "self-criticism" which strongly causes psychological disorders and stress. Stoeber (2012) believes that perfectionism is an effort to be perfect, to place a high standard for oneself and anxiety about others' negative opinions about oneself.

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Self-critical perfectionism has been defined as a concept that a person faces failure due to the selection of a high standard of factors. Some researchers believe that determination of high personal standards is the main difference between perfectionists and non-perfectionists (Gilman & Ashby, 2003).

Belt and Silove (1999) believe that in order to achieve perfectionism one behave in the form of high, nonpractical and unrealistic personal scales. The presence of high, and often unrealistic goals can lead to hopelessness, particularly when not achieved. In this situation, usually someone who has inconsistent perfectionism considers this failure to be due to his inefficiency.

Although there has been much emphasis on the perfectionism structure in the psychological literature during the past 40 years, the main definition of perfectionism has slightly changed within this time. Nevertheless, the performed efforts have differentiated its bad from good aspects (Vieth & Trull, 1999), which means that perfectionism can also have positive aspects (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Recent findings support the view that perfectionism is a multi-aspect structure which has both positive and negative aspects (Lopez, Fons-Scheyd, Bush-King, & McDermott, 2011). In other words, some people enjoy performing due to a perfectionistic orientation; others, however, likely develop psychoses and suffer from perfectionism (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Currently there is increasing interest towards the study of nature and the relationship of perfectionism in adults and children. Research has indicated that people who are perfectionists during their adulthood possess multi-feature perfectionism. Researchers can judge the positive and negative aspects of their perfectionism, depending on how their spirits show compatibility or incompatibility towards perfectionism (Beldona & Kwansa, 2008; Stornelli, Flett, & Hewitt, 2009). According to Stoeber and Otto (2006), perfectionism can affect different features of a person's life such as one's social life, relationship with family members and colleagues, amusements, appearance and religious life.

According to Missildine (1963), one downside of perfectionism is that perfectionist parents not only degrade their achievements, they find it difficult to accept that a child should be praised for his achievement. These types of parents usually do not confirm their children's good behavior, rather they insist the child perform better and always worry them. Such children are never satisfied because their behavior is inadequate enough to be of interest for their parents. In the same manner as their parents, these children also downplay their achievements and have a feeling of never meeting their parents' expectations.

Self-esteem is one of the most essential factors of children and teen personality growth. Strong selfconfidence and volition, innovation and decision making ability, creativity and mental health all have a direct relationship with self-esteem and self-validity (BiyabanGard, 1384). Psychological research insists on the impression of social interactions on enhancement of self-esteem.

According to research, among depressed children the signs of self- and society- oriented perfectionism have been observed (Stornelli, et al., 2009).

Self-oriented perfectionism consists of a human's internal beliefs for perfection with zero defects. Its primary feature is having excellence expectations for that person, whereas society-oriented perfectionism consists of others' expectations which demand that a human have zero defects(Stoeber, 2012).

Perfectionism is particularly related to depression, less satisfaction with life and dissatisfaction with achievements (Stoeber, 2012). Coopersmith (1967) has concluded that children who have a high degree of self-esteem are very creative and talented, have high self-confidence, Sociable hang out and are not easily impressed by environmental factors. Research on people with low self-esteem has concluded that these people usually complain about physical problems, depression, anxiety, reduced general health, indifference, feelings of isolation, blame others for their failures, job dissatisfaction, reductions in function, lack of educational achievement and the presence of interpersonal problems.

Besharat (1383a) researched the relationship between parents' perfectionism and students' exam anxieties. A total of 422 students (237 females and 205 males) completed the test anxiety scale and 386 of their parents (212 mothers and 174 fathers) completed multidimensional perfectionism scales after which both groups participated in the research study. The research conclusions implied that there was a negative association between parents' positive perfectionism and students' exam anxieties; a positive association

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existed between parents' negative perfectionism and students' exam anxieties. The parents' positive perfectionism justified the reductions in students' exam anxieties through realistic expectations according to the children's Capabilities and limitations, and children's self-esteem reinforcement. In contrast, parents' negative perfectionism weakened children's self-esteem through non-realistic expectations that were mostly beyond students' abilities. Rosenberg (1965) realized that high self-esteem among high school boys and girls was essentially related to the children's interest in their parents. Bachman (1970) studied these boys and determined that self-esteem was related to parental affection and absence of discrimination in addition to engaging them in the decision making process.

Some researchers believe that the relationship between self-esteem and self is caused by social comparisons. In other words, some features of self are formed by self and comparisons with other important people (Arjmand, 1386). These researchers believe that self-idealism has a close relationship with perfectionism and can be a product of social comparison.

Hewitt and Flett (1991) have concluded that parents' perfectionism leads to the development of serious problems for their children. This perfectionism eradicates children's self-esteem, and leads to the formation of deep feelings of failure, anger, and non-assertiveness. Therefore we can presume that there are numerous obstacles in normal psychological processes of people that create problems for their progress. Perfectionism can be one of these obstacles.

As a psychological concept, perfectionism is actually a personality structure which is being forgotten. In the Iranian society the two modes of negative and positive perfectionism have become intermingled such that it is difficult to differentiate between them. For example, in Iran only a few families do not criticize their children for small mistakes.

As previously mentioned, sometimes this sensitivity and over attention from parents towards children regarding their educational performance or parents' high expectations can affect children's personality features such as self-esteem. In discussing the relationship between perfectionism and self-esteem, the research findings have shown a relationship between positive perfectionism and higher self-esteem on the one hand and an association between negative perfectionism with lower self-esteem on the other hand (Gotwals, Dunn, & Wayment, 2003; Trumpeter, Watson, & O'Leary, 2006).

Rice et al. (1998) studied the relationship between perfectionism, self-esteem and depression variables among university students. They determined that a relationship between positive perfectionism and self-esteem existed as well as the relationship between negative perfectionism and depression. Gotwals et al. (2003) surveyed the relationship between perfectionism and self-esteem among 87 college athletes and concluded that there was a meaningful relationship between high self-esteem and perfectionism. Stumpf and Parker (2000) concluded that negative perfectionism was related to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

In a survey of the relation between perfectionism and self-esteem among pre-university students, Besharat (1383b) concluded that self-acceptance enabled a man to respect himself regardless of the failure or success which was in coordination with positive perfectionism. However negative perfectionism was related to self-criticism and reductions in self-esteem.

Although perfectionism has been Studied in Iran, the number of studies in this field is limited. This concept has caused numerous problems for the Iranian society and is increasingly spreading. With regards to the importance of the parent's role, the current study researches the relation between parental perfectionism and children's self-esteem. It is our intention that the result of this research will offer and introduce a suitable educative pattern as well as a safe relation between parents and children. Hence, this study is an attempt to answer the general thought regarding whether parental perfectionism can influence children's self-esteem or not.

#### 2. Materials and Methods

The present research used the Ahwaz Perfectionism Scale and Eysenck's Self-esteem questionnaire.

#### 2.1 Ahwaz Perfectionism Scale

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This scale consists of 27 questions developed by Najjarian et al. (1378) through factor analysis for the evaluation of perfectionism. Their research consisted of 395 Ahwaz university students as the study population. The primary articles of the research have been provided based on valid psychological texts, those related to Spielberg anxiety, Madzeli practical-intellectual scrupulosity, the non-MMPI logical scale according to Jones, and clinical interviews. Najjarian et al. (1378) showed that the scale had Cronbach alpha coefficients for the entire study group of 0.90, for female university students it was 0.90 and 0.89 for male university students.

### 2.2 Eysenck self-esteem questionnaire

The durability and validity of the Eysenck self-esteem questionnaire were calculated by Nezhad (1380) who administered this questionnaire to a select number of Chamran University students in Ahwaz. He reported 0.88 durability of this questionnaire by Cronbach alpha and 0.87 with the median method. Nezhad (1380) reported a coefficient of 0.74 for female students and 0.79 for male students using the construction fluency method, both of which were significant at P< 001. The value of Cronbach's alpha derived from this questionnaire for the current study was 0.81 which shows suitable durability in this research (Table 1).

questionnaire	Amount of alpha
Self-esteem	0.813
Fathers' perfectionism	0.792
Mothers' perfectionism	0.779
Parents' perfectionism	0.868

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha

#### 2.3 Study population and sampling method

This was a correlation type of research that studied female students from guidance and high schools of Khoda Bandeh, Iran who were students from 1390 to 1391. We randomly chose 10 out of 20 classes and interviewed all students (approximately 300) from these classes. Students completed the Eysenck questionnaire and their parents completed the Ahwaz perfectionism scale. Of the 270 students, 220 students completed the questionnaire.

Table 2. The research sample students considering the schools and educational levels.

total		guid	e 3 of ance ool	ince Grade 2 gu			Grade1 guidance school	
percentag e	affluence	percen tage	affluence	percentage	affluence	percent age	affluence	School name
% 56/82	125	%13.6 4	30	% 20.45	45	%22.73	50	Tohid
% 43/18	95	%9.09	20	% 15.90	35	%18.18	40	Fatemiy eh
%100/00	220	%22.7 3	50	% 36.36	80	%40.91	90	total

In this research 57.07% of Tohid Guidance School students and 42.93% of Fatemiyeh Guidance School students completed the questionnaire. Table 2 shows the students' education levels. The parents of these students also participated in this research. Students' fathers who participated in this study were of the following age groups: 215 (42.22%) were between 30 to 40 years of age, 53.33% were between 40 to 51 years of age and 4.44% were 51 to 60 years of age. Of mothers, 220 (77.77%) were between 30 to 40 years of age. 20% were from 41 to 50 years of age, and 2.22% were 51 to 60 years of age.

Table 3 reports the amount of standard refraction and average points for self-esteem and perfectionism.

Students'self-esteem	Parents'	Mothers'	Fathers'	
	perfectionism	perfectionism	perfectionism	
4.70	19.69	10.14	11.63	Standard
				refraction
18.54	122.86	59.14	63.65	average

## 3. Results

We used Pearson's correlation Coefficient to evaluate the first three hypotheses. As observed in Table 4, the first hypothesis, "there is a significant relationship between fathers' perfectionism and students' self-esteem" was confirmed (r (215) =-. 14, P< 001). The second hypothesis between mothers' perfectionism and children's self-esteem was significant according to Table 3 (001.>p, 18. - = (220) r). Here the noticeable point is the high meaningfulness of mothers with respect to the fathers that somehow confirms more impression of mothers on students. In general the conclusions showed a significant relationship between children's self-esteem and parents' perfectionism, which confirmed the third hypothesis [r (215)=-.17, P<001].

Considering the results and the existence of a meaningful relation between children's self-esteem and parents' perfectionism, we used step-by-step multi- regression to predict the amount of perfectionism and tested hypotheses 4, 5 and 6. As noted in Table 5 the amount of perfectionism for each father and mother could not be considered as predictors for students' self-esteem. Hence hypotheses 4 and 5: "fathers' perfectionism can predict students' self-esteem" and "mothers' perfectionism can predict students' self-esteem" and "mothers' perfectionism can predict students' self-esteem" as seen in Table 6, a mixture of parents' perfectionism can predict students' self-esteem (P<0.5; F=6.70). However, the percent of self-esteem predicted from parents' perfectionism was small (0.031%).

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Correlations								
		Student	Father	Mather	Parent			
	Pearson Correlation	1	148*	180**	175 <sup>*</sup>			
Student	Sig. (2-tailed)		.030	.008	.010			
-	N	220	215	220	215			
	Pearson Correlation	148*	1	.644**	.920***			
Father	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030		.000	.000			
	Ν	215	215	215	215			
	Pearson Correlation	180**	.644**	1	.892**			
Mather	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.000		.000			
	N	220	215	220	215			
	Pearson Correlation	175*	.920**	.892**	1			
Parent	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.000	.000				
	Ν	215	215	215	215			
	*. Correlation	is significant at	the 0.05 level	(2-tailed).				
	**. Correlation	is significant at	the 0.01 level	l (2-tailed).				

 Table 5. Perfectionism of the fathers or mothers as the sole variable predictor

	Model		Beta In t		Partial Correlation	Co linearity Statistics			
			· ·	Sig.		Tolerance			
1	father	.082 <sup>a</sup>	.477	.634	.033	.153			
	mother	071 <sup>a</sup>	477	.634	033	.204			
	a. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), parent								
	b. Dependent Variable: student								

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	F
		В	Std. Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	23.734	2.022		11.739	.000	.031	6.70
	parent	042	.016	175	-2.589	.010		0.70
	a. Dependent Variable: student							

Table 6. Multiple regression analysis results for parents.

We used the independent samples t-test to test the final hypothesis, "there is a difference between mothers' and fathers' perfectionism". According to Table 7, males  $(63.65\pm11.63)$  scored higher compared to females  $(56.14\pm10.14)$ , which confirmed the seventh hypothesis (d = 0.35; P<0.001; t(734) = 4.30).

Table. 7. Independent Samples t.test

	Ν	Mean	SD	t	р
Father	215	63.65	11.63	4.31	.000
Mother	220	59.14	10.14	4.31	

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

Parents' behavior can affect the condition of their children's feelings. This study has attempted to determine if parents' perfectionism affected children's self-esteem. In general, the results showed meaningful correlation between perfectionism of each parent and students' self-esteem. The findings showed that with respect to fathers, this is the high meaningfulness of mothers impressed more on their children, which confirmed the impact of dominant figures on children during the formation of self-esteem. These results confirmed findings by Hoffman et al. (1988). According to the current research, fathers' perfectionism was more than mothers which confirmed the results of a variety of studies (Besharat, 1383a, 1383b; Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2003; Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Stumpf & Parker, 2000), particularly with regard to gender differences in a variety of researches (Kalantarkousheh, 2012).

The present research findings showed that the perfectionism of each parent alone were not predictive of children's self-esteem. Perfectionism of both parents together could predict(?) children's self-esteem. Possibly perfectionism was one of the personality constructions that play a major role at human comportment. Positive perfectionism forms intellectual and realistic expectations according to a human's abilities and limitations. This realism along with limiting man's expectations at individual and inter-individual contexts helps him to not impose difficult and inaccessible scales on himself and others. Man's self-esteem fortifies under this psychological fact, with reduction of failure phobia and enhancement of self-satisfaction. Negative perfectionism is determined according to dissatisfaction, constant criticism about personal functions and critical evaluations. This situation causes a type of incompetence. In negative perfectionism, man is always attempting to impose his perfectionism to those who are important to him, such as the imposition of parents' idealistic scales to their children. These scales are usually beyond the children's abilities and facilities, thus increasing the parents' failure phobia about substantiation of ambitious goals, causing a weak self-esteem.

In the child-parent relationship, particularly the mother-child relationship, parents' perfectionism scales are made internally. If positive perfectionism is made internally, the child will have flexible and realistic goals; the self-satisfaction about partial success amplifies his self-esteem. However, if negative perfectionism is

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internally made, as with his parents, the child will have non-realistic and inflexible expectations which cause him not to experience success. As a consequence one cannot experience the feeling of self-satisfaction and the factor of self-esteem will be decreased. According to Besharat (1383b), the parents' positive perfectionism has caused amplification of children's self-esteem. In contrast, parents' negative perfectionism weakens the child's self-esteem. Self-acceptance helps one respect himself irregardless of his achievements or failures; negative perfectionism is related to self-criticism and reduction of self-esteem, as confirmed by the current research.

The result of the current research matched with conclusions from identity research (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The result shows that parents' perfectionism causes serious challenges for children, diminishes their selfesteem and forming feelings of non-existence, in addition to deep feelings of failure and anger.

The findings of this research supported studies by Rice et al. (1998), Gotwals et al. (2003) and Trumpeter and colleagues (2006). These findings have shown that negative perfectionism is related to low self-esteem. Following these studies, Stumpf and Parker (2000), and Dankly et al. (2003) stated that negative perfectionism was related to low self-esteem, results that confirm the current and previous studies.

The current study has shown the amount of severity of the relation between the structure of parents' perfectionism to children's' self-esteem and not an explanation of grandeur. The statistical limitations and type of research provided some limitations about generalized items, interpretations and cognitive reason for ongoing variables which should be considered. One limitation of this research was the study population of only female students which should be considered during generalization of the results. Due to the limited numbers of study participants, the interpretations and generalizations related to the findings of the current research should be confirmed by the performance of additional research in the context of the present study.

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