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## Investigating the effectiveness of behavioral parent training in bullying, emotional regulation and social adjustment of male students

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### ABSTRACT

This research is a semi-experimental study (pretest-posttest and follow-up design with a nonequivalent control group). To this end, a sample size of 30 secondary school male students (first period) was selected through convenience sampling and voluntarily from the statistical population of 10133 male students studying in District 1 of Mashhad. For data collection, Olweus Bully Questionnaire, Garnefski Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire and Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) were applied. The data was analyzed using SPSS software and based on variance analysis test with repeated measures, Hine-Feldet post hoc test and also the paired test of Bonferroni multiple comparisons. The results of this research demonstrated that behavioral parent training has had a significant impact on bullying, emotional regulation and social adjustment of students ( $P = 0.000$ ).

**Keywords:** Behavioral parent training, bullying, emotional regulation, social adjustment

### INTRODUCTION

Bullying threatens the physical and emotional safety of students at school and makes a negative impact on their ability to learn. The perpetrators of bullying are subject to a series of problems including conduct disorder, substance abuse, escape from school and crime. Victims suffer from physical and emotional pain and its consequences can continue until adulthood. Students who experience bullying are at greater risk for depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts[1].

In behavioral parent training, theories of behaviorism have been used. Behaviorists emphasize observable behavior, current determinants of behavior, learning experiences that help the changes, tailoring the treatment strategies for individual clients and careful assessment[2]. Modern behavior therapy includes an extensive set of conceptual assumptions and methodological tendencies with a number of possible methods for evaluating treatment. Three main trends in behavior therapy are as follows:

- Mutual inhibition of reciprocal conditioning that was proposed by Joseph Volpe. Volpe's approach is largely based on the conditioning of the respondent of problems associated with anxiety[3].

- Social learning theory according to which most of the human behaviors have been learned observationally and through modeling[4].

**Motivation:** For observational learning success, one must have sufficient motivation to imitate the behavior that has been modeled. Reward and punishment play an important role in motivation. As facing these stimuli can be very effective, observing the reinforcement or punishment of others can also be effective. For instance, you see that most of the human

behaviors are learned observationally and through modeling. Through observing others, an individual forms the idea of how to perform new behaviors. On the next occasions, this coded information serves the individual as a guide to action [4]. Studies show that bullying is a global issue and is particularly more common in countries where there are sharp class differences and also differences in income levels of families [5]. Numerous studies indicate the effectiveness of behavioral parent training in reducing external behavior disorders [6]. The results of the research by Kimiyayi, Raftar and Soltanifar (2011) entitled "The effectiveness of emotional intelligence reinforcement program in controlling the bullying behavior in adolescents" reveal that adolescents with lower emotional intelligence show more bullying behavior compared to others and emotional intelligence training has had a significant impact on adolescents' bullying behavior both generally and in terms of individual features and group dynamics[7]. Basharpour, Molavi, Sheikhi, Khanjani, Rajabi and Mousavi (2012) conducted a study entitled "Investigating the relationship between the methods of regulating and expressing emotions with bullying behaviors in adolescent students and came to the conclusion that emotional dysregulation during adolescence has an important role in bullying behaviors and being the victim of bullying[8]. Management emotional regulation and appropriate regulation of emotions are considered as one of the foundations of well-being and psychological health. Emotional regulation is regarded as processes through which people consciously and unconsciously adjust their emotions to respond to the environmental expectations [9]. Emotional regulation embraces conscious or unconscious (automated or controlled) processes that are used to increase, maintain or reduce one or more components of emotional response [10]. Research shows that emotion regulation strategies are associated with psychological distress and predict the individual's next adjustment and the focus on emotion regulation skills can be effective in predicting and treating mental problems. Further, other studies have demonstrated that emotion regulation predicts the positive adjustment [11]. Emotional dysregulation during adolescence plays an important role in bullying behaviors and being the victim of bullying. Therefore, emotion regulation skills training is suggested as an intervention method for such behavioral problems [8].

Behavioral parent training (BPT) teaches parents how to change their children's behaviors through understanding the antecedents and consequences of their inappropriate behaviors, identifying them, monitoring these behaviors, willful and planned disregard, temporary deprivation and other non-physical techniques without corporal punishment. Behavioral training program includes training how to use the behavior table, time-specific deprivation, use of positive reinforcement, use of daily charts and jetton economy system together with rewards and consequences, use of home-school notes for rewarding the behavior at school and keeping track of doing homework assignments, establishment of rules at home, learning to praise and appreciate the appropriate behaviors (admiring good behaviors at least 5 times as much as criticizing bad behaviors), use of appropriate commands, use of the words if ... then (getting the rewards and privileges back in response to inappropriate behaviors), training how to build positive relationships with children, training the method of providing positive reinforcement and training how to apply assignments and give orders. These trainings are presented to the parents of the subjects in the experimental group after holding the pretest of experimental and control groups; but the parents of the subjects in the control group do not receive any training. Then in the posttest and follow-up test, the effect of trainings is examined through repeated measures analysis of variance, post hoc tests and also the paired test of Bonferroni multiple comparisons. In this study, we seek to answer the question as to whether behavioral parent training has an impact on the rate of bullying, emotional regulation and social adjustment of the male students in the first period of secondary school.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a semi-experimental study (pretest-posttest and follow-up design with a nonequivalent control group). The statistical population consisted of 10133 secondary school male students (first period) studying in District 1 of Mashhad. The research sample comprises 30 secondary school male students who were selected through convenience sampling and voluntarily. After referring to three secondary schools of the first period, 30 individuals who obtained the highest scores in the bullying questionnaire were selected. They had similar scores. From each school, 10 individuals were selected and 5 people were placed in the experimental group and 5 people in the control group (totally 15 individuals in each of the experimental and control groups). The tools applied in this research include Olweus Bully Questionnaire with 17 questions, Garnefski Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire with 34 questions and Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) with 23 questions.

**Olweus Bully Questionnaire:** It is the most important and widely used bullying survey in the world. Cornell and Dewey cited in Qamarigiv, Soroushzadeh, Nader and Mikaeili (2013) have approved the validity and reliability of this questionnaire[12]. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86 indicates good and acceptable reliability of this questionnaire to evaluate bullying in children and adolescents.

**Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire:** This questionnaire has been developed by Garnefski and his colleagues and includes a special form for children and adults.[13]. have reported good reliability and validity for this questionnaire. It consists of 36 questions with five-point grading (from always to never) and every four questions assess one factor and altogether, the items evaluate nine factors. The Persian version of this scale has been validated by Samani and Jokar

(2007). Overall, this questionnaire is an opportunity for examining the relationships between the use of cognitive coping strategies with other personality variables, psychopathology and other issues. It is applicable in normal and clinical groups from the age of 12 years [13][14]. Samani and Sadeqi (2010) estimated the alpha coefficient of the questionnaire to be in the range of 0.71 to 0.81 [13][15]. In most cases, Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been reported to be higher than 0.70 and even 0.80.

**Social Adjustment Scale (SAS):** As a resultant scale, it has been designed to assess the drug therapy and mental treatment of depressed patients. Currently, this scale is widely used to measure the adjustment of patients and healthy subjects. Riyahiniya (2002) in a study reported the Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire to be 50% in adjustment and leisure time scale and 46% in family relationships scale[16]. Additionally, in the study conducted[17], the reliability of Social Adjustment Questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha and split-half methods, which were respectively 81% and 79%. The data was analyzed through multi-factor analysis of variance with repeated measures and Bonferroni post hoc test of paired comparison.

### Findings

The first hypothesis indicated that behavioral parent training program can affect the students' bullying. To assess the first hypothesis, multi-factor analysis of variance with repeated measures was employed.

**Table 1: Summary of the results of multi-factor analysis of variance with repeated measures about the scores of bullying questionnaire**

| Test name                           | pillai's trace test | Wilks Lambda test | Hotelling's trace test | roy's largest root test |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| F                                   | 419.256             | 419.256           | 419.256                | 419.256                 |
| Degree of freedom of the hypothesis | 5.000               | 5.000             | 5.0000                 | 5.000                   |
| Significance level                  | 0.000               | 0.000             | 0.000                  | 0.000                   |

According to the data of MANOVA significance test in Table 1, since the significance level in all the abovefour tests is lower than 0.005 and is shown with three decimal places of 0.000, the first hypothesis is confirmed with a 95% confidence coefficient which suggests that behavioral parent training has been effective in bullying.

**Table 1: Summary of the results of Bonferroni multiple comparisons test based on behavioral parent training – bullying behavior**

| Variable                                 | Bullying questionnaire              | Mean difference | Standard deviation | Significance |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Pretest of the experimental group        | Posttest of the experimental group  | 19.667          | 0.465              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the experimental group | 19.533          | 0.424              | 0.000        |
|  | Pretest of the control group        | 1.467           | 0.792              | 1.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | 1.400           | 0.702              | 0.991        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | 1.133           | 0.675              | 1.000        |
| Posttest of the experimental group       | Follow-up of the experimental group | -0.133          | 0.446              | 1.000        |
|  | Pretest of the control group        | -18.200         | 0.917              | 0.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | -18.267         | 0.813              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | -18.533         | 0.723              | 0.000        |
| Follow-up test of the experimental group | Pretest of the control group        | -18.067         | 0.720              | 0.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | -18.133         | 0.703              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | -18.400         | 0.689              | 0.000        |
| Pretest of the control group             | Posttest of the control group       | -0.067          | 0.700              | 1.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | -0.333          | 0.826              | 1.000        |
| Posttest of the control group            | Follow-up of the control group      | -0.267          | 0.613              | 1.000        |

Given the results of Table 2 in which the mean differences have been examined, pretest and posttest of the experimental group have a significance level of 0.000. Also, follow-up test has a significance level of 0.000. Significance levels of pretest in the experimental group and posttest and follow-up test in the control group are respectively 1.000, 0.991 and 1.000 which are higher than the significance level of the test (0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis indicating the non-significance of the impact of behavioral parent training on students' bullying is rejected and it can be said with a 95% confidence coefficient that behavioral parent training is effective in students' bullying.

The second research hypothesis suggested that behavioral parent training program can influence students' emotional regulation.

**Table 3: Summary of the results of multi-factor analysis of variance with repeated measures about the scores of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire**

| Test name                           | pillai's trace test | Wilks Lambda test | Hotelling's trace test | roy's largest root test |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| F                                   | 327.900             | 327.900           | 327.900                | 327.900                 |
| Degree of freedom of the hypothesis | 5.000               | 5.000             | 5.0000                 | 5.000                   |
| Significance level                  | 0.000               | 0.000             | 0.000                  | 0.000                   |

According to the data of MANOVA significance test in Table 3, since the significance level in all the abovefour tests is lower than 0.005 and is shown with three decimal places of 0.000, the second hypothesis is confirmed with a 95% confidence coefficient which indicates that behavioral parent training has been effective in emotional regulation.

**Table 4: Summary of the results of Bonferroni multiple comparisons test based on behavioral parent training - emotional regulation**

| Variable                                 | Bullying questionnaire              | Mean difference | Standard deviation | Significance |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Pretest of the experimental group        | Posttest of the experimental group  | -40.333         | 1.045              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the experimental group | -36.933         | 1.469              | 0.000        |
|  | Pretest of the control group        | -0.200          | 0.800              | 1.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | 0.467           | 1.345              | 1.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | -0.533          | 1.214              | 1.000        |
| Posttest of the experimental test        | Follow-up of the experimental group | 3.400           | 1.170              | 0.173        |
|  | Pretest of the control group        | 40.133          | 1.203              | 0.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | 40.800          | 1.306              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | 39.800          | 1.083              | 0.000        |
| Follow-up test of the experimental group | Pretest of the control group        | 36.733          | 1.837              | 0.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | 37.400          | 1.483              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | 36.400          | 1.384              | 0.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | 0.667           | 1.348              | 1.000        |
| Pretest of the control group             | Follow-up of the control group      | -0.333          | 1.174              | 1.000        |
| Posttest of the control group            | Follow-up of the control group      | -1.000          | 0.941              | 1.000        |

According to the results of Table 4 in which the mean differences have been examined, pretest and posttest of the experimental group have a significance level of 0.000. Also, the follow-up test has a significance level of 0.000. Significance levels of pretest in the experimental group and posttest and follow-up test in the control group are respectively 1.000, 1.000 and 1.000 which are much higher than the significance level of the test (0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis indicating the non-significance of the impact of behavioral parent training on students' emotional regulation is rejected and it can be said with a 95% confidence coefficient that behavioral parent training is effective in students' emotional regulation.

The third research hypothesis indicated that behavioral parent training program can influence students' social adjustment.

**Table 5: Summary of the results of Bonferroni multiple comparisons test based on behavioral parent training – social adjustment**

| Test name                           | pillai's trace test | Wilks Lambda test | Hotelling's trace test | roy's largest root test |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| F                                   | 364.618             | 364.618           | 364.618                | 364.618                 |
| Degree of freedom of the hypothesis | 5.000               | 5.000             | 5.0000                 | 5.000                   |
| Significance level                  | 0.000               | 0.000             | 0.000                  | 0.000                   |

According to the data of MANOVA significance test in Table 5, since the significance level in all the abovefour tests is lower than 0.005 and is shown with three decimal places of 0.000, the third hypothesis is confirmed with a 95% confidence coefficient which indicates that behavioral parent training has been effective in social adjustment.

**Table 6: Summary of the results of Bonferroni multiple comparisons test based on behavioral parent training–social adjustment**

| Variable                                 | Bullying questionnaire              | Mean difference | Standard deviation | Significance |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Pretest of the experimental group        | Posttest of the experimental group  | 78.867          | 2.539              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the experimental group | 78.933          | 2.590              | 0.000        |
|  | Pretest of the control group        | -2.000          | 2.979              | 1.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | -1.000          | 2.588              | 1.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | -3.533          | 2.887              | 1.000        |
| Posttest of the experimental test        | Follow-up of the experimental group | 0.790           | 0.067              | 1.000        |
|  | Pretest of the control group        | -80.867         | 2.669              | 0.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | -79.867         | 2.217              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | -82.400         | 2.118              | 0.000        |
| Follow-up test of the experimental group | Pretest of the control group        | -80.933         | 2.643              | 0.000        |
|  | Posttest of the control group       | -79.933         | 2.126              | 0.000        |
|  | Follow-up of the control group      | -82.467         | 2.131              | 0.000        |
| Pretest of the control group             | Posttest of the control group       | 1.000           | 2.680              | 1.000        |
| Posttest of the control group            | Follow-up of the control group      | -1.533          | 2.656              | 1.000        |
| Posttest of the control group            | Follow-up of the control group      | -2.533          | 2.541              | 1.000        |

According to the results of Table 6 in which the mean differences have been examined, pretest and posttest of the experimental group have a significance level of 0.000. Also, the follow-up test has a significance level of 0.000. Significance levels of pretest in the experimental group and posttest and follow-up test in the control group are respectively 1.000, 1.000 and 1.000 which are higher than the significance level of the test (0.05). Hence, the null

hypothesis indicating the non-significance of the effect of behavioral parent training on students' social adjustment is rejected and it can be said with a 95% confidence coefficient that behavioral parent training is effective in students' social adjustment.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of behavioral parent training in bullying, emotional regulation and social adjustment of male students. The first research hypothesis indicated that behavioral parent training affects bullying. The results of this research are consistent with previous studies. All the studies, efforts and activities that have focused on stopping and controlling bullying or helping the victims are defined in the field of behaviorist psychology and have emphasized the behavioral training of affected students and people close to them including parents and teachers. They also have laid stress on the effectiveness of these trainings and have considered their receipt as more effective than not receiving them. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that since behavioral parent training leads to parents' familiarity with the effective ways to control and regulate behavior and apply the methods of reinforcement and silence particularly anti-social behaviors, they have prepared more secure and calm conditions for their children through changing the methods of their behavior with children, establishing more peaceful relationships and avoiding violent behaviors and this issue has made its positive impact on friendly and sympathetic behaviors and avoidance of bullying. Given the significant reduction in bullying behaviors in the experimental group and considering the fact that these behaviors remained unchanged in the control group, it can be said that the reduction in bullying behaviors of the experimental group results from the effect of behavioral parent training and these trainings have led to decreased bullying behaviors. Therefore, the first hypothesis is significant and the impact of behavioral parent training on students' bullying is confirmed.

The second research hypothesis suggested that behavioral parent training influences students' emotional regulation. Studies that have been conducted in this field approve the results of this research. The results of the studies performed by Qasemzadeh Nassaji, Peivastegar, Hoseinian, Moutabi and Bani-Hashemi (2010)[18] and also the research by Basharpour et al. (2012) [8] demonstrate that emotional dysregulation during adolescence that is considered as a risky period for a variety of psychopathological states plays an important role in bullying behaviors and being the victim of bullying. This shows the necessity of considering emotional regulation and expression skills in therapeutic interventions for these problematic behaviors. Emotional regulation is a forgotten piece in our trainings [19]. Danner and Mander (2005) found that the children of the African-American fathers who are significantly involved in their child's care and education show greater ability in regulating their emotions[20]. Fathers who emotionally support their children and know what they are doing have less problems with their children. Besides, children of the godfathers who have a positive relationship with them have less emotional problems and less spoil their plays and their conversations are not much negative and when interacting with peers, they display less negative emotions [20] cited in Katz &Windecker - Nelson, 2004[21].

All the above-mentioned results approve the findings of this research and confirm the positive impact of parent training. The third research hypothesis indicated that behavioral parent training program affects students' social adjustment. The obtained results reveal that the difference between the scores of posttest and follow-up test in the experimental group has been affected by the behavioral training received by the parents of this group. In previous studies including the research conducted by Barghandan, Tarkhan and Qaemi Khamami (2012)[22], it has been mentioned that numerous studies indicate the effectiveness of anger management training program in individuals' social adjustment. Moreover, several studies have been performed by researchers including Findler and Wisner (2005), Findler and Ekton (1986) and Kellner and Barry (1999) and have reported the effectiveness of educational-therapeutic interventions of anger management for many of the target groups and in various environments (e.g. schools, centers for treating psychiatric patients, centers for correction and education and boarding residence centers)[23]. Further, the result of this research is congruent with the study by fallahi and Makvandi (2013) who demonstrated that teaching the parenting skills to parents has favorable effects on children's self-regulation and social adjustment[24].

In explaining the third hypothesis, it can be stated that one of the problematic assignments of adolescence growth and development is related to social adjustment. This adjustment includes the adjustment with family members, peers, opposite sex, adults outside the family environment and school environments and job adjustment. Because behavioral parent training has led to reduced bullying and regulated emotions in students, their social adjustment has been subsequently improved and has led to adaptive and desirable social behaviors and has made positive effects on the relationships of bully students with the victims. In all of the existing studies, there is a correlational relationship between the dependent variables of this research and increasing or decreasing each of the variables affects the other. Behavioral parent training that has reduced the bullying behaviors of students has caused that students respect their peers' rights in interpersonal relations and act more adaptively in establishing relationships with them. Thus, with regard to more productive and more adaptive relationship of the students in the experimental group compared to the control group, it can be concluded that it was behavioral parent training which led to greater social adjustment of the sample group relative to the experimental group.

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