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Game Addiction, Experiential Avoidance, Sensation Seeking and Aggression in the Teenagers of Divorced and Non-Divorced Families: A Comparative Study

Abstract

Divorce is a phenomenon that affects not only the mental health of couples but also the psychological health of children. Accordingly, the present study was conducted to compare experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression in teenagers of divorced and non-divorced families. The method of this study was causal-comparative. The statistical population of the study included all teenagers from divorced families and ordinary teenagers (teenagers in non-divorced families) in the first grade of high school in the academic year of 2017 - 2018 in Shiraz. The sample included 100 teenagers of divorced families and 100 ordinary teenagers in Shiraz who were selected by the purposive sampling method. The results of data analysis showed that there is a significant difference between experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression in divorced and ordinary teenagers (P -value < 0.001). Teenagers with divorced parents have more experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, addiction to computer games, and aggression than ordinary teenagers. To improve these components, it is necessary to use treatments related to the components such as treatments of the third wave of psychology (i.e. treatment of mindfulness and positive psychotherapy).

Keywords: Aggression, Avoidance Experiences, Games Addiction, Sensation Seeking, Divorce.

Introduction

Family is an inevitable part of society as the first community structure that underpins the education of children. The formal and legal relationships of men and women are based on the family in the form of a legitimate and acceptable standard. The importance of paying attention to and preserving such a structure by considering its psychological, emotional, social, and behavioral role, as well as the

modeling of children in an emotional environment, is quite evident. However, in recent years, various phenomena have affected the family structure (Bayerman & Kleverson, 2014). Divorce is one of the stressful events during common life and the most important indicator of marital disturbance that disrupts the cognitive structure of individuals and subsequently causes ineffective coping strategies (DeLongis & Zwicker, 2017). Studies have indicated that children who frequently experience

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poor interactions with their parents, may have problems related to video gaming. Though it is not clear which specific part of such an interaction has a predictive role in the problems (Li, Lo, & Cheng, 2018). The occurrence of divorce not only results in psychological harm to couples but also damages the psychological health of children (G.H. Ghamari & Khoshnoodnia, 2016). This process can have a significant relationship with emotional deficits and other psychological disorders since the divorce of parents causes psychological, emotional, communicational, and social harm to children, and also affects children's adaptation over time.

Besides, divorce can also affect the social communication process of children. Accordingly, teenagers from divorced families avoid communicating with others. Instead, they communicate with their thoughts and emotions. Some people try to reduce their anxiety because of their painful experiences by avoiding their negative emotional experiences. Avoiding inner experiences (e.g. negative emotions, thoughts, and physical senses) is called Avoid Experiences (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). Avoid Experiences process involves extreme negative evaluations of unwanted private senses, emotions, and thoughts. It also involves a lack of tendency to experience these private events and deliberate attempts to control or escape them. Avoid Experiences acts to reduce or change thoughts, emotions, or upsetting senses. People with symptoms of depression and clinical experiences are more at risk of Avoid Experiences than non-clinical ones (Juarascio et al., 2013).

Researches have shown a relationship between Avoid Experiences and the formation of different mental disorders. For example, the Avoid Experiences, especially suppressed thinking of depression, has harmful effects. People suffering from depression report more avoid experiences compared to the non-clinical group (Biglan et al., 2015). Besides, experience avoidance has a significant positive relationship with generalized anxiety disorder and negative emotions, self-denial, behavioral disorder, self-control, and anxiety (Bardeen, Tull, Stevens, & Gratz, 2014).

Another vulnerable process in the children of divorce is their emotional regulation and sensation-seeking level. Sensation seeking is one of the most important factors influencing people's attitudes toward risky behaviors due to mental illnesses. Sensation seeking is defined as the need for diverse, new, and complex experiences and excitements as well as the desire to accept physical and social hazards to achieve such experiences (Zuckerman, 2007). Sensation seeking has four components as follows: risky adventure (the acquisition of excitement through hazardous activities), experiencing (gaining excitement through participation in unusual activities), lack of inhibition (lack of control over

self-assertive thoughts and behaviors), and sensitivity about monotony (the search for arousal to escape the routine) (Bancroft et al., 2004).

Divorce causes a single parent to play the role of his/her partner and carries the child's economic, educational, and social responsibilities alone. Being a single parent is not easy and it is quite clear that in this situation it is almost impossible to fully deal with all responsibilities. Therefore, it is inevitable that the single-parent neglects the child and this can lead these children to have more tendency towards computer games. Computer games are a kind of interactive entertainment in simulated or virtualized environments that are performed by computer-based devices equipped with a processor. Many computer games are also considered video games due to the production of motion pictures on a TV screen. Computer games can be categorized in a variety of ways and several dimensions. These categories include games of war, action, and intellectual, educational, and imaginative games which can have different effects on children depending on the type of chosen game (Zare & Jahanara, 2013). The importance of focusing on socio-relational aspects, especially those related to the family environment, has been proven to have a critical role in the development and maintenance of Internet gaming disorder in adolescence (Bussone, Trentini, Tambelli, & Carola, 2020).

In a systematic review, Masaeli and Farhadi (2021) indicated that anxiety, stress, and depression can increase an individual's inclination to online gaming, which can lead to gaming addiction. Destructive computer games can cause excessive sensation seeking, anxiety and trait, low self-control, and loneliness in children and teenagers, which can eventually lead to severe behavioral and emotional injuries (Mehroof & Griffiths, 2010). The results of previous studies showed that exposure to harsh video games was related to a rise in aggressive attitudes (Teng, Chong, Siew, & Skoric, 2011). "Children who perceived authoritative parenting and positive parent-child relationship were less likely to have an Internet addiction. When parents are warm, more supportive, and open-minded for two-way discussion and communication, they are more likely to establish positive relationships with their children, and this relationship can serve as a foundation for children's positive development and reduce the risk of Internet addiction" (Hsieh et al., 2018).

Also Among vulnerable aspects of children with divorced parents, aggression can be noted. Raver and Barling (2008), in their definition of aggression, stated that Aggression applies to all negative acts that have been carried out in a harsh way against others, causing the person to be negatively aroused aggression is usually a

behavior that is intended to harm yourself or to the other person or to destroy objects. Aggression may show in different ways. Hostility, indicating the cognitive aspect of aggression and anger, reflects its emotional aspect. The behavioral aspect of aggression is in verbal and physical form. Sometimes aggression is the result of a sense of insecurity this is a defensive response to the status of insecurity in which it is located (Martin, Boekamp, McConville, & Wheeler, 2010). Positive parenting and family dynamics are protecting and are related to lower rates of problematic gaming and problematic Internet use in adolescents. Negative parenting and family dynamics are correlated to increased levels of problematic gaming and problematic Internet use (Nielsen, Favez, & Rigter, 2020). Adolescents with Internet gaming disorder described their parents as "cared less about them" and "minded less on their autonomy". Parental attitudes may be among the risk factors for Internet gaming disorder (Bulanik Koç et al., 2020). Adolescents with self-confidence, higher school performance, experiencing positive youth development qualities, and well-educated parents, were less likely to have an Internet addiction. Internet addiction negatively impacts teens' growth and physical, mental, and psychosocial development (Chung, Sum, & Chan, 2019).

The findings of previous researches indicate the differences between individuals from broken families and those from intact families regarding different emotional processes such as the regulation and management of their excitement, avoidance grounds of their thoughts as well as their limited social activities. However, few studies can be found to consider the psychological damages of the children and teenagers of divorced families. Moreover, to the knowledge of the writers, there has not yet been any researches on the comparative advantages of these components in divorced and ordinary teenagers. Accordingly, the main goal of this study has been to investigate if there is any difference between experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression in teenagers of divorced families and their ordinary counterparts.

Methodology

1) Participants & Procedure

Upon referral to Shiraz District One Education Department, permission for researching the first secondary schools was obtained. Among 10 secondary schools, the students with divorced parents were identified and 100 students were selected using the available sampling method. A total of 100 students from non-divorced families were chosen from the same schools. Then, questionnaires were submitted to these individuals

and they were asked to answer the questions related to demographic factors, experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression. The questionnaires were then collected and analyzed.

The research method is descriptive-analytical and has a causal-comparative type due to the lack of intervention of the researchers in the variables studied. The statistical population of this study included teenagers of divorced families and ordinary teenagers in the first grade of high school in the academic year of 2017 - 2018 in Shiraz, Iran. By employing, purposive sampling method, educational district 1 was selected among other education districts in Shiraz. Then, by referring to 10 secondary schools in this district, 112 students of divorced families were identified and 100 of them were selected for this study. Subsequently, 100 students of unbroken families were also selected from the same schools. The two groups were matched in demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and education.

2) Instruments

Acceptance and Practice Questionnaire (AAQ-II) (Bond et al., 2011) is a 10-item version of the original questionnaire. This questionnaire assesses a construct that goes back to acceptance, experiential avoidance, and psychological inflexibility. Considering the psychometric characteristics of the original version, the results of 2816 participants with six samples showed that this tool has satisfactory reliability and validity with a mean alpha coefficient of 84.0. The reliability of the test in 3 and 12 months were 0.81 and 0.79, respectively. The second version of the Acceptance and Practice Questionnaire seems to measure the concepts similar to the first one but it has better psychometric stability (Bond et al., 2011). In our study, the reliability of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the subscales of avoidance of sensational experiences was 0.82.

Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Questionnaire consists of 40 items, Higher scores in this questionnaire and its subscales indicate that it has the most features. The reliability of this questionnaire was 0.85 (Mehrabi, Kajbaf, & Mojahed, 2010), whereas, in our study, the reliability of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for sensation was 0.78.

Computer Games Addiction Questionnaire was prepared by Farhadi H (2016). The questionnaire has 19 questions, each individual responds to a self-report. The scale of answering this questionnaire, based on the Likert spectrum, is from completely disagree (score one) to full agreement (score 5). Accordingly, the scores of the questionnaire ranged from 19 to 95. Obtaining a score higher than 52 indicates game addiction. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire were

reported by Farhadi H (2016). In this study, the reliability of the questionnaire was 0.87 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

The aggression questionnaire was created and reviewed by Buss and Perry (1992). This questionnaire is a self-report consisting of 29 questions and four sub-scales. The following are the scales of physical aggression, anger, verbal aggression, and hostility. The aggression questionnaire has acceptable validity and reliability. The results of the analysis of the findings were obtained for four sub-scales 80.0 to 72.0 and the correlation between the four sub-scales 38.0 to 49.0.

Results

To observe ethics in the research, students' consent for participation in the research was obtained. Moreover, everyone was assured that his/her information remained confidential and that there was no need to mention his/her name. In this study, two levels of descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. At the level of descriptive statistics, the mean and standard deviation were employed. At the level of inferential statistics, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to evaluate the normal distribution of variables. Levin test was used to examine the equation of variances and also to analyze the variance for the research hypothesis. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS₂₃ software.

The findings of demographic data showed that 100 students with divorced parents, 61 were female and 39 were male. The same number of students was selected from non-divorced families. The subjects were between 12-16 years old, 14 being the most frequent (31%). They were seventh to ninth graders, while the eighth graders had the most population (42%). It should be noted that there was no relationship between demographic variables and

related research variables. However, there was a significant difference between the demographic variables in the two groups of students.

The results of Table 1 indicate that the average scores of experiential avoidances, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression in the teenagers of divorced families are higher than those of teenagers of non-divorced families. However, the significance of this difference was examined by inferential statistics. Before the presentation of the results of variance analysis, the definitions of parametric tests were evaluated. Accordingly, the results of Shapiro Wilk's test indicated that the normalization of the distribution of data samples in all three variables of experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, and game addiction in the two groups were established (P -value > 0.05). Moreover, the results of the Levine Test for the same analysis of variances were investigated. The results were not significant and assumed homogeneity of variances (P -value > 0.05). The inferential tables are presented below.

Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference between the two groups of teenagers in the components of experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression (P -value < 0.001). Descriptive findings also indicate that the average scores of experiential avoidances, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression in the teenagers of divorce are higher than those of teenagers of unbroken families. The findings also show that respectively, 13, 16, and 26 percent of the variation in the components of experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression is explained by the grouping variable (divorce or non-divorced).

Table 1.

The mean and standard deviation of experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression in the teenagers of divorced and non-divorced families

Variables	Divorce		Non-divorce	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Avoid Experiences	36.66	7.43	30.12	10.11
Sensation Seeking	60.64	5.86	56.46	3.79
Game addiction	50.12	10.28	36.84	12.46
Aggression	89.72	14.84	77.98	17.33

Table 2.

Results of variance analysis to compare experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, addiction to computer games, and aggression in two groups of teenagers

Variables	Statistical Indicators of Variables	Total Drills	Degree of Freedom	Average Squares	F	Significance Level	Effect Size	Test Power
Avoid Experiences	Group membership	1069.29	1	1069.29	13.56	0.0001	0.13	0.95
	Error	7728.50	98	78.86				
	Total	120287	100					
Sensation Seeking	Group membership	436.81	1	436.81	17.89	0.0001	0.16	0.98
	Error	2391.94	98	24.41				
	Total	345639	100					
Game addiction	Group membership	3819.74	1	3819.74	28.93	0.0001	0.26	1
	Error	11220.32	98	132				
	Total	17668	100					
aggression	Group membership	3445.69	1	3445.69	13.23	0.0001	0.12	0.95
	Error	25513.06	98	260.33				
	Total	732041	100					

Discussion

The results of data analysis showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups of divorced adolescents and normal adolescents in physical and psychological aggression components, experience avoidance, sensation seeking, and addiction to computer games. The findings of the study pointed out that the physicalization of symptoms, anxiety, social dysfunction, depression, and general psychiatric disorder was significantly higher in teenagers of divorced parents than in teenagers of non-divorced parents. Furthermore, the components of the disorder in social function, depression, and general mental disorder in children with divorced parents were more than those in children of non-divorced parents. Children and teenagers exposed to separation and divorce pressures have weaker adaptation (Hamama & Ronen-Shenhav, 2012). These pressures and changes include the children's efforts to cope with the absence of a parent who does not live with them, the change in economic resources, lower parent-child relationships, and changes in family structure. Moreover, it should be noted that parental divorce causes more psychiatric disorders in the children of divorced families. As the children of the family are disconnected and destabilized, they are less socially protected. When one does not receive optimal social support from his/her parents, he/she will be weaker to deal with life and school stress, and consequently, he/she feels frustrated (Attar-Schwartz & Fuller-Thomson, 2017). This excitement, in addition to the sadness caused by the separation of parents, the feeling of guilt and self-restraint of a child affects his/her mental health. Since mental and physical health is closely

related, the bodies of the children of the divorce also suffer from disturbances (Raeisi et al., 2012). Subsequently, the problems caused by the psyche and the soma of these children usually bring about psychosomatic diseases and emotional and cognitive disorders such as sensation seeking and experiential avoidance. It should also be noted that the first works of divorce and family strife on children are the weakest victims of these problems, in other words, children during the divorce process and subsequently face severe physical, emotional, and social transformations, which should be consistent with them (Younesi F, 2010). The broken rage of the parents' strife and their separation make it possible for divorce children to show more aggression when confronted with communication, social and educational challenges.

The findings of this research revealed that teenagers of divorce are in a state of instability and they receive less social support. Therefore, they will be weaker in dealing with life stresses and feel frustrated (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1994). Also, it should be noted that these teenagers experience more internalization and extermination behaviors due to the experience of contradictions and ongoing differences. As a result, they do not have sufficient flexibility to determine the proper way of dealing with stresses (G. H. Ghamari & Khoshnoodnia, 2016) and more often they use ineffective coping strategies such as emotional coping and avoidance strategy in their relationships. When stress increases, their relationships are distorted and their social support is reduced so they show weak social performance (M. Ghamari & Fakoor, 2010). This process causes them to achieve lower personal and social self-control behaviors and avoid social and

enjoyable emotional experiences, resulting in an increased component of experiential avoidance.

In explaining the difference in sensation seeking between teenagers in divorced and non-divorced families, it is stated that the children of parents who positively welcome children are kind and supportive compared with the children of divorced families who are likely to be deprived of such experiences (Zakeri, Jowkar, & Razmjoe, 2010). The first group of children also have a higher level of resilience. The competence and function of children and teenagers are closely related to the quality of their social environments. Families with better performance are more likely to have deserving children. Most children and teenagers of divorce have experienced stressful pre-divorce courses before the parents are divorced. Therefore, it's expected that they lack the indications of developed, resilient, consistent, and self-control children and teenagers, or have less internalized these behaviors (Pedro-Carroll, 2011). This finding is important because other researchers suggest that those with a higher healing level can better manage their emotions and control their emotional and sensational inhibition (Taheripour L, 2016). Accordingly, children in divorced families have less psychological resilience due to the lack of their parents' emotional, psychological, and social benefits. This process makes them less aware of cognitive and behavioral control and management, resulting in higher levels of sensation seeking. On the other hand, the study of characteristics of the students in divorced and non-divorced families indicates that the latter has a relatively favorable family environment, a positive attitude, and motivation to have good progress toward academic work. In contrast, the former despite the benefit of higher intelligence and better living conditions, have not shown much effort and lacked motivation and academic achievement. If students of divorced families have an unpleasant and frustrating business of threatening, humiliating, punishing along with family conflicts, they suffer a lot of stress. Accordingly, while in terms of intelligence they are not very different from their successful peers, they are not enthusiastic about academic affairs, and they are mostly suffering from a degree of academic inertia (Arjmand & Eghbali, 2016). These findings indicate that the children of divorced families are largely unwilling to pursue normal goals in personal and social life. Accordingly, their tendency to do activities such as computer games increases. Besides, it should also be noted that the occurrence of divorce causes the single-parent to play the role of parental authority and carries the child's economic, educational, and social responsibilities alone. It is obvious that in this situation it is not possible to fully deal with all

responsibilities and the child faces neglect which can lead him/her to have more tendency towards computer games.

Conclusion

Concerning the significant differences in experiential avoidance, sensation seeking, game addiction, and aggression in teenagers of divorced and non-divorced families, it can be stated that teenagers of divorced parents due to the absence of one of the parents and lack of time of the other one are not under the proper control of their single-parents. As a result, they show more tendency towards computer games because they do not receive enough attention and supervision. So the Educational System of the country should identify these students and by employing dedicated school advisers plan to improve the psychological state of these students to reduce their psychological and emotional distress.

The limited scope of research for teenagers of divorced and non-divorced families, the existence of some uncontrolled variables such as family social and financial status, and lack of use of random sampling methods and methodological limitation (Using causal-comparative research method and causal inaccuracy of the findings) were the limitations of this research. To obtain a generalizable conclusion, it is recommended to conduct the study in other cities and districts with different cultures, considering the mentioned limitations.

Conflict of Interest

All authors have no conflict of interest to report.

Author Contributions

Mahshid Sadr, Hadi Farhadi, and Ansa Qurat-ul-ain designed the paper; Mahshid Sadr collected the data and did data curation; Mahshid Sadr and Hadi Farhadi analyzed the results; Nassim Masaeli did writing-original draft preparation, and editing. All authors contributed.

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