

## The mediating role of anxiety to perform social skills between parental attachment and adolescents' self-efficacy

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**Abstract:** The present study examined the mediating role of adolescent's anxiety to perform social skills on the relationships between perceived parental attachment and self-efficacy among 374 Iranian adolescents aged 17 to 19 years old. Survey results showed that parental attachment was significantly related to an adolescent's self-efficacy ( $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, the results revealed that adolescents with low self-efficacy experienced higher anxiety to perform social skills ( $p < 0.05$ ). Anxiety to perform social skills mediated the relationship between parental attachment and adolescents' self-efficacy ( $p < 0.05$ ). The findings highlighted the mediating role of anxiety to perform social skills on the relationship between parental attachment and adolescent's self-efficacy.

[Nakisa Parsa, Ma'rof Redzuan, Siti Nor Yaacob, Parisa Parsa & Bitra Parsa. **The mediating role of anxiety to perform social skills between parental attachment and adolescents' self-efficacy.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(10):63-70]. (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 11

**Keywords:** parental attachment, self-efficacy, anxiety to perform social skills, adolescence.

### 1. Introduction

Adolescence is a vital time between childhood to adulthood with many changes such as biological, emotional, cognitive and social expectations (Arnett, 2004; Parsa & Bashirian, 2013; Santrock, 2007). General self-efficacy is one of the skills adolescents can use in dealing with problems. Adolescents with high self-efficacy practice a small amount of anxiety during this developmental period (Caprara, et al., 2003) and showed better psychological and physical health, coping skills and educational achievement (Luszczynska et al., 2005). However, a small number of researches have examined the predecessor of general self-efficacy among late adolescents (Endler et al., 2001).

Self-efficacy defines as a person's beliefs of capabilities to performance in a certain manner to attain certain goals (Bandura, 1997; Ormrod, 2006). Healthy human functioning contributes to the key cognitive process of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy plays a significant role in adolescent's effort and resilience in encountering difficulties. The self-perception of a capability is helpful for an adolescent to make a plan and pursue it till the goal is achieved (Choi, 2003; Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Therefore an adolescent with a high sense of self-efficacy is moving towards complicated tasks as test to be accomplished rather than as pressure to keep him/her away from. On the

other hands, individual with low self-efficacy stays away from complex tasks and hesitates about their ability. They have little ambition to pursue their goals and exhibit more anxiety (Langendorfer et al., 2006).

One of the most influential factors on adolescent's self-efficacy is the role of parents. The family is the first place of building self-efficacy on belief and it develops as the child's peer interaction increases and social life enlarges. Bandura (1986) revealed four elements of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, symbolic experience, physiological and emotional arousal are help in the development of a sense of self-efficacy. Parents providing and engaging in social interaction may link to vicarious experiences and symbolic experiences. Parents as working model show children how to represent themselves and organize their relationships with others (Bowlby, 1982). Encouraging early parent-child relationship functions in environment that shows appreciation, provides emotional support and guidance, models constructive styles of coping, encourages engagement with children's ability and activities provide trust, competencies and self-efficacy beliefs in children and give varied and several chance for comprehensive skills. These beliefs of capability are essential as children move to different stages of development in finding ways of coping with the stress involved in these steps.

Therefore, parent's who supports of child's problem solving increases their sense of self-efficacy. The study by Razavi et al. (2013) showed a significant correlation between family functioning and the quality of attachment with children's adjustment. Children with better family functioning and positive attachment have shown less internalized and externalized problems. During late adolescence, parents support and guide for independence creates a strong feeling sense of self. In contract, unresponsive parents or caregivers who's not interested in children's activities and who disapproved their work may damage children's self-efficacy. The present study examined the roles of anxiety to perform social skills as mediators of the relationship between parental attachment and adolescents' self-efficacy.

Adolescent's belief in their capabilities to perform social skills affects how much anxiety they experience in harsh situations. Miell and Duck (1986) defines social skills as actions that individual use to build up and maintain their social relationships. It also motivates them to achieve their goals. For many adolescents, relationships with other adolescents are essential features of their lives. The increase, continuance, and ending of interpersonal relationships are highly dependent on an individual's self-efficacy and affect their lives. People with high sense of self-efficacy have long lasting relationships and are better off in a broad variety of ways, they show less stress in case of difficulties and challenging tasks, positive coping mechanisms and less health problems (Ferla et al., 2008) than Individuals with low self-efficacy beliefs. People with the perceived lack of skill to perform a specific task and less control over difficult situation produce anxiety to perform which reduce self-efficacy. Aloneness is highly related to sadness and depression (Argyle, 1987). Anxiety to perform social skills in adolescents affects their social acceptance and independence. Adolescents with low skills avoid social activities and new experience. They may deny their anxiety and fears by involving in risky behaviors and drug experiment (Rynn et al., 2012).

Self perception of efficacy can control stressors and anxiety situations. Adolescents who have control over stressful situation find this as a challenge and motivate themselves positively to achieve goals. On the other hands, low sense of self-efficacy produces anxiety as well as depression by doubt about their ability to accomplished ambition, low sense of control over ruminative thought which influences the duration and recurrence of anxiety and sadness, and low social networking. People look for social relationships as a cushion through the unpleasant effects of persistent stressors and have a role model to control difficult situations and get

supportive and satisfying relationships. Therefore, low sense of social self-efficacy increases depression and vulnerability through social isolation (Bandura, 1994).

Self-efficacy is an important indicator of success for many Iranian adolescent in their academic and occupational achievement due to the high value of education from their parents (Parsa et al., 2014; Sayyedi, 2009). Iranian parents are most known for monitoring and psychological control (Hojat et al. 1999; Sayyedi, 2009). They monitor their children to keep them on track educationally, and stay out of social problems and troubles as a way of protecting family heritage. (Frank et al., 2010). As family is important in Iranian culture, fulfill their expatriation is viewed as respect and grateful (Hojat et al. 1999; Jalali, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine (1) If the perceptions of parental attachment is related to Iranian adolescent's self-efficacy, and (2) If the anxiety to perform social skills can mediate the relationship between parental attachment and self-efficacy.

## 2. Theoretical background

Social cognitive theory (SCT) and attachment theory guided the present study. These theories discussed the relationship between parental attachment and self-efficacy.

### 2.1. Social Cognitive Theory

Self-efficacy is an important component of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory that hypothesizes the role of observational learning and social system in the development of personality. The central part of the theory is personal efficacy beliefs, defined as the judgments of one's capabilities to arrange and perform path of actions that over time affects an individuals' live (Bandura, 1986, 1994). This self judgment of ability determines of how people think, behave and react in demanding situations.

Furthermore, Bandura (1989) revealed that there is an equal relationship between behavioral, environmental, and cognitive influences. People who observe others achieve their desired results as a consequence of a specific action are probable to copy the action and do it again later. These responses from the environment influence expectances behaviors, belief and the motivation to display certain behaviors. On the other hands, if behavior does not bring a desired result, people are less probable to repeat the behavior again. Due to perceive failure in these situations, the self-efficacy reduces. In this situation, reciprocal system would be built and perceived self-efficacy will find a causal path in shaping behavior (Bandura, 1997). As people start relationship with others, this process begins to clarify and expand their

beliefs on their ability to achieve desired results from their social relationships. Adolescent may experience different levels of anxiety that affects their performance, when connected with other people (Baker & Edelman, 2002; Cartwright-Hatton et al., 2005). Anxiety will reduce their success in desired result and may receive negative response from others. This result may cause avoidance to interaction in similar situation which may increase anxiety and reduce their self-efficacy in the future (Bandura et al., 2001). Therefore reciprocal cycle would put in the place. In this study, within the framework of social cognitive theory, self-efficacy was considered as a significant social-cognitive construct.

### 2.2. Attachment theory

In attachment theory, security is a key element for one's well-being (Waters & Cummings, 2000). Based on infant attachment behavior Ainsworth et al. (1978) offered the initial experiment prove for the character of the secure attachment between infants and their parents through their direct examination of segregation and reunion situation. They recognized two major aspects of attachment as anxiety and avoidance.

Attachment style has forms through the experiences with parents or caregivers during childhood (Bowlby, 1982). When parents are responsive, sensitive, and reliable they help children understand the notion of safety (Bowlby, 1973). During adolescence, secure attachment is an important factor in the development of identity and self. Attachment system works when the one's is experiencing anxiety within a relationship and it is based on secure child-parents attachment (Bowlby, 1973). Based on first the relationships with caregiver adolescent build her/his internal working models of what she or he can expect from the self (Bowlby, 1982).

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Participants

In this cross-sectional study all freshman students of University of Medical Science in Hamadan, Iran who were between 17 to 19 years old were selected randomly. Respondents were selected based on probability proportional sampling procedure. Base on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 374 (260 female and 114 male) eligible students were selected randomly (response rate was 65%).

### 3.2. Procedure

The backward-forward translation method was used in the adaptation of the instrument for the study. First, the instruments translated from English into Persian language. Second, two separate local professional translators back-translated the instruments from Persian to English. The similarity

of meaning and concepts of these two versions of translation was approved by a panel of experts in University of Medical Science in Hamadan, Iran. Before starting the actual data collection a pilot study was done among 30 students for assessing and performing necessary modification. These students were not included in the study samples.

SPSS version 19 was utilized for data analysis. Skewness and kurtosis were assessed for each scale. Based on Lei and Lomax (2005) method, all variables displayed normal distribution. Pearson correlation was utilized to inspect the first assumption concerning the relations between parental attachments and adolescents' self-efficacy. Multiple linear Regression (MLR) Analysis was used to examine the relations between the variables. Sobel test was used to determine the significant indirect effect of anxiety to perform social skills on the relationships between parental attachment and self-efficacy.

### 3.3. Measures

#### 3.3.1. General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)

The General Self-Efficacy Scale GSE was used to assess adolescent's self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) the measure consists of 10 items ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ) and assess a general sense of self-efficacy to predict manage and adjust with daily disturbing situations. This is a 4-point likert type scale from 1 (*not true at all of me*) to 4 (*very true*). High scores on the general self-efficacy shows respondent with high sense of self-efficacy.

#### 3.3.2. The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)

Perceived parental attachment was assessed through The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden and Greenberg, 1989). For the purpose of this study, 25 items for attachment with parents were used to assess mother and father attachment separately. The IPPA consists of three subscales, including trust (10 items), communication (9 items), and alienation (6 items). The reliability of scales were in desirable level (Cronbach's alpha equals to 0.91 and 0.93 for mother's and father's attachment scale, respectively). Objects are rated on 5-point scale and ranging from 1 (*almost never or never*) to 5 (*almost always or always*). Alienation items were reversed scored. High scores on mother and father's attachment scale shows respondent with high perceived parental attachment.

#### 3.3.3. The Scale for Interpersonal Behavior (SIB)

The adolescents' anxiety to perform social skills was evaluated by The Scale for Interpersonal Behavior (Arrindell et al., 1984). In current study 46 items ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ) were used to measure anxiety to perform social skills the aggregations of four subscales (expression of negative feelings, 15 items;

expression of and dealing with personal limitations, 14 items; initiating assertiveness, 9 items; positive assertion, 8 items) represents the level of anxiety to perform social skills in respondents. Items were specified on a 5 point scale varying from 1 (not at all anxious) to 5 (extremely anxious). High score mean was high anxiety to perform of social skills.

**4. Results**

The results of Pearson correlation showed a significant positive correlation between mothers with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.36; p < 0.01$ ), and fathers attachment with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.30; p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant positive relations between mother and father attachments ( $r = 0.55; p < 0.01$ ). This means attachment to one parents resulted in a healthier attachment to the other. In this study adolescent with high self-efficacy described higher quality of perceived parent attachment and better relationship with parents especially with mother.

To examine the hypothesis of mediating effects of adolescent’s anxiety to perform social skills on the relationships between parental attachments

with self-efficacy, first, the bi-variate analysis were performed. The results indicated that there was a significant negative relationships between parental attachment with anxiety to perform social skills ( $r = -0.23, p < 0.01; r = -0.10, p < 0.05$ , for mother and father attachment, respectively) and anxiety to perform social skills with self-efficacy ( $r = -0.15, p < 0.01$ ). Second, a serious multiple regression analysis were performed to examine the effect of anxiety to perform social skills as a mediator in the relationship between parents’ attachment and self efficacy.

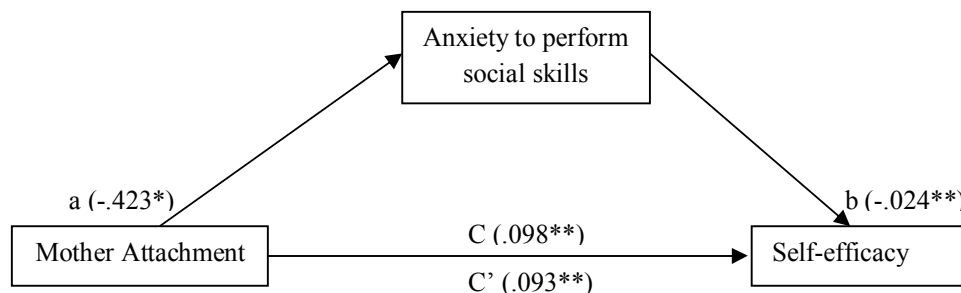
In Table 2, multiple regression analysis showed the direct significant effect of mother attachment on adolescents’ self-efficacy ( $B = 0.098, SE = 0.013, t = 7.336, p < 0.01$ ) and anxiety to perform social skills ( $B = -0.423, SE = 0.092, t = -4.605, p < 0.01$ ). The relationship between anxiety to perform social skills and self-efficacy was also significant ( $B = -0.024, SE = .008, t = -3.113, p < 0.01$ ). Based on the 4<sup>th</sup> step of regression analysis the findings support the partial mediation model. The relationship between mother attachment and self-efficacy was reduced after fixing anxiety to perform social skills ( $B = 0.093, SE = 0.014, t = 6.772, p < 0.01$ ). (See Figure 1).

**Table 2: Multiple regression model for assessing relationship between mother attachment and adolescents’ self-efficacy mediated by anxiety to perform social skills**

Step	IV	DV	B	SE	$\beta$	t
1	Mother attachment	Self-efficacy	.098**	.013	.356	7.336
2	Mother attachment	Anxiety to perform social skills	-.423**	.092	-.232	-4.605
3	Anxiety to perform social skills	Self-efficacy	-.024**	.008	-.159	-3.113
4	Mother attachment	Self-efficacy	.093**	.014	.337	6.772
	Anxiety to perform social skills	Self-efficacy	-.012	.008	-.081	-1.633

Note: B = Unstandardized coefficient,  $\beta$  = Standardized coefficient; SE: Standard error

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$



Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Figure 1: Mediated model for the relationship between mother attachment and self-efficacy mediated by anxiety to perform social skills**

In addition, MLR Analysis (Table 3) shows the direct significant effect of father attachment on adolescents’ self-efficacy ( $B = 0.065, SE = 0.011, t = 6.032, p < 0.01$ ) and anxiety to perform social skills ( $B = -0.152, SE = .074, t = -2.063, p < 0.05$ ). The relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety to

perform social skills was also significant ( $B = -0.024, SE = 0.008, t = -3.113, p < 0.01$ ). Based on the findings, anxiety to perform social skills partially mediated the relationship between father attachment and self-efficacy. The relationship between father attachment and self-efficacy was reduced after

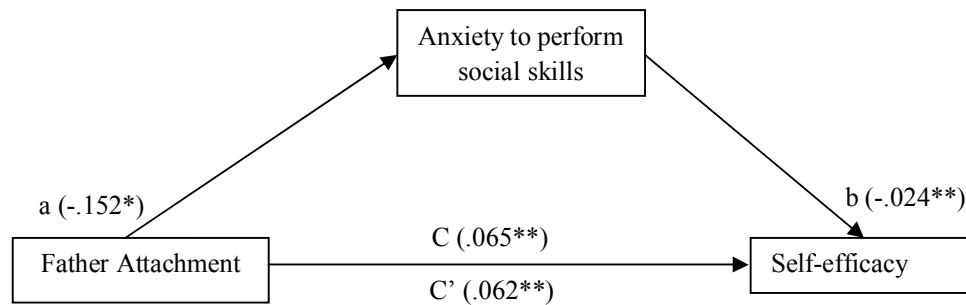
controlling the anxiety to perform of social skills (B = 0.062, SE = 0.011, t = 5.767,  $p < .01$ ). (See Figure 2).

**Table 3: Multiple regression model for assessing relationship between father attachment and adolescent self-efficacy mediated by anxiety to perform social skills**

Step	IV	DV	B	SE	$\beta$	t
1	Father attachment	Self-efficacy	.065**	.011	.299	6.032
2	Father attachment	Anxiety to perform social skills	-.152*	.074	-.106	-2.063
3	Anxiety to perform social skills	Self-efficacy	-.024**	.008	-.159	-3.113
4	Father attachment	Self-efficacy	.062**	.011	.285	5.767
	Anxiety to perform social skills	Self-efficacy	-.020**	.008	-.129	-2.614

Note: B = Unstandardized coefficient,  $\beta$  = Standardized coefficient; SE: Standard error

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$



Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Figure 2: Mediated model for the relationship between father attachment and self-efficacy mediated by anxiety to perform social skills**

Soble test (Baron and Kenny, 1986) was used to check the indirect effect of parental attachment and adolescents' self-efficacy through the mediation effect of anxiety to perform social skills. The result shows that anxiety to perform social skills significantly mediates the influence of mother attachment to adolescents' self-efficacy ( $z = 2.512$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). However, the result of Sobel test did not statistically confirm the indirect effect of anxiety to perform social skills on the relationship between father attachment and adolescent's self-efficacy ( $z = 1.694$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Figure 1 and 2 show the effect of parental attachment (IVs) on adolescents' self-efficacy (DV) mediated by anxiety to performance social skills (M).

## 5. Discussion

The finding of the current study confirmed the significant relationships between parental attachments with high self-efficacy among adolescents. This result contributes to previous empirical evidence that parental attachment has an affect on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Coleman 2003; Corcoran & Mallinckrodt 2000; Karavalis, et al., 2003). According to Arbano and Power (2003), adolescents with high social self-efficacy are securely attached to their parents and feel more independent. Supporting parents, encourage the child to know their

ability which more often helps the child to develop his/her skill which is helpful in the development and maintenance of friendships and find a solution in difficult situation (Karavalis et al, 2003). As the result of current study shows, higher interaction between adolescent-parents results in a higher sense of self-efficacy. This may result of cultural factors. Iranian adolescents perceive parents as a supportive and secure base of attachment especially mothers. They see mothers as more authoritative while they describe fathers as more authoritarian attachments (Assadi et al., 2011). Zeinali (2013) revealed that adolescents with a positive parent-child attachment have better adjustment, less drug abuse and low levels of risky behaviors compared to those with parental conflict within their home environment.

The result of the study shows a moderate and significant relationship between perceived parental attachment and adolescent's self-efficacy. This coincides with a prior study among Turkish late adolescents (Bilgin, 2011). In Bilgin (2011) study, there was no path between parental attachment and social self-efficacy. However, other studies have argued that there is a relationship between parental attachment and self-efficacy (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). It is presumed that it maybe caused by different cultures. In eastern countries the relationship with parents is more important than

friends, and adolescents view parental attachment as dependence not independence. Therefore, it may take the conclusion that there is no relationship between parental attachment and self-efficacy (Bilgin, 2011). Another reason for the result is that there is different point of view in parental attachment during adolescence. As children grow up child-parental attachment figure would change from parental accessibility toward non parental during adolescence, while peers may be situational or temporary basis (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). However, during adolescence, parents' commitment remains essential for them to feel secured and confident. Leaving home is stressful situation for adolescents (Ainsworth, et al., 1978; Kenny, 1987). They may exploit their parents as a secure base when they depart for college, to expand skill and independence in the new situation (Matheson, et al., 2005). In theory, encouraging parent helps child to be more independent than dependent (Bowlby, 1969). Furthermore, a positive adolescent-parent relationship boosts self-efficacy among collage students and further better intensity in academic achievement (Chemers, et al., 2001; Pajares, 1996).

To examine the mediating effect of anxiety to perform social skills on the relationship between parental attachment and adolescents' self-efficacy, the results showed that the anxiety to perform social skills partially mediate the influence of mother attachment to adolescents' self-efficacy. Within indirect relation, mother attachment was more predictive than father. This agreed with earlier studies that showed attachment to mother plays an important role in adolescent's conflict resolution behavior (Ross & Fuertes, 2010). According to Grossman et al, (2002) when the attachment system is vulnerable mother may play more important roles as secure support. Likewise, during times of distress the capability to reinstate attachment security with the mother maybe a representation for the adult child on how to relate to such abilities in interpersonal relations to preserve attachment security (Ross & Fuertes, 2010). However, a number of studies have indicated that mothers attachment have the same effect on the prediction of social self-efficacy as father attachment does (Diener et al., 2003; Paterson, 1995).

The current study has a number of limitations. The data was gathered from adolescents who perceived parents' behaviors that might have interfered in the data. Secondly, this study was on late adolescents, thus a similar research on early and middle adolescents better to be conduct to compare the result of self-efficacy in different stage of adolescent stage. In spite of these confines, it is notable that current study specifies the significant

role of parental attachment which has permanent influence on adolescents' self-efficacy. In addition, the present study would expand the existing research by examined mediating effect of anxiety to perform social skills in the relationships between adolescent-parent attachments and adolescents' self-efficacy. The results of the study highlight on essential parental abilities to establishing helpful results in their adolescents. Consideration should be given to adolescents' skills to reduce the anxiety to perform social skills this intervention helped adolescents to learn and develop new skills from their parents.

In conclusion, parental attachment and anxiety to perform social skills are effective in self-efficacy. The current finding highlights the significant role of ongoing parental attachment, during late adolescences to improve self-efficacy and reduce anxiety, control the situation, problem solving and have better academic achievement.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

Authors are grateful to University Putra Malaysia (UPM), and University of Medical Science in Hamadan, Iran for financial support to carry out this work.

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5/29/2014