

The Relationship between Character Strength and Psychological well-being: The Moderating Effect of Strength-based Parenting

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the role of strength-based parenting moderators on the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being. The research design was correlational. The statistical population was all grade-sixth students in the 18th district of Tehran in 2019-2020. The research sample consisted of 300 grade-sixth students who were randomly selected from primary schools in Tehran's 18th district. Students completed the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), Ryff's scale of Psychological well-being, short-form (18-item), and Strength-based parenting. In data analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation matrix, and hierarchical regression by version 25 of SPSS statistical software were used. Findings showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between character strength and psychological well-being ($P < 0.01$). The results also showed that strength-based parenting has a moderating effect on the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being in children ($P < 0.01$). In total, 55% of changes in psychological well-being are explained by the strength of character and strength-based parenting. According to the research findings, it can be concluded that strength-based parenting will modify the strength of character and psychological well-being of students.

Keywords: Character Strength, Psychological well-being, Strength-based Parenting.

Introduction

Positive psychology focuses on what makes life worth living. It is not about recovering from anything problematic, but centers on every positive element that each person has in their life and aims to develop a person's potential, so that, they can thrive. Its purpose is high levels of functioning through the development of each positive human characteristic (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). A key element of positive psychology is well-being. Well-being has been defined as the combination of feeling good and functioning well; the experience of positive emotions such as happiness and contentment as well as the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships (Ruggeri, Garcia-Garzon, Maguire, Matz, & Huppert, 2020). The psychological well-being approach examines the evolution observed against the challenges of life and emphasizes to develop solving psychological problems. Self-regulation can have an effective impact on psychological well-being and its dimensions (Sharbafshaaer, 2019).

Well-being has been linked to life satisfaction and self-regulation, self-efficacy, quality of life, and happiness, (Medvedev, & Landhuis, 2018; Sharbafshaaer, 2019; Ruggeri et al., 2020; Mortezaabegi, Safari, Bozorgkhoo, & Farid, 2022) and interpersonal levels, with those individuals high in well-being exhibiting greater productivity in the workplace, more effective learning, increased creativity, more prosocial behaviors, and positive relationships (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Psychological well-being is the ability of individuals to regulate their emotions wisely, able to develop warmth or dynamic relationship with others, have independence in the face of the social environment, control the external environment, set goals in life, and realize their potential continuously. These capabilities had pursued by focusing on self-realization, self-expression, and actualization of her potential positively so it can function fully and achieve happiness (Faizah, Rahma, Dara, & Gunawan, 2020; Prabowo, 2016).

Positive psychology assumes that individuals have inherent capacities for growth, fulfillment, and happiness. If an individual lacks these capacities, depression may occur. Character strengths are regarded as an essential component of positive psychology. A previous study showed that character strengths were closely correlated with depression, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction (Xi et al., 2020). Cross-sectional and longitudinal literature has demonstrated the positive link between strengths use and well-being. In a longitudinal study, for example, strength use was found to be significantly and positively associated with self-esteem, and vitality, and predicted increased well-being over time (Huber, Webb, and Höfer, 2017; Littman-Ovadia, Lavy, and Boiman-Meshita, 2017). Another study with undergraduate students also suggested that strengths in use and satisfaction with a life yielded a significant and positive relation (Waters et al., 2019). According to recent research, character strengths can be relevant to the full range of human experiences, from positive opportunities and adversities to suffering (Niemiec, 2020).

During the teen and preteen years, a young person experiences many changes that affect physical development, identity, social life, family relationships, drug and alcohol use, academic requirements, employment, and economic responsibilities (Waters et al., 2019). Patton et al. (2016) argue that adolescence is the phase of life in which an individual

establishes the social, cultural, emotional, educational, and economic resources necessary to maintain health and wellbeing throughout their lifetime. Parents are critical in shaping an adolescent's health and wellbeing (Bøe et al., 2018). The paucity of rigorous research into the family influences on childhood health and wellbeing is a striking knowledge gap, Patton and his colleagues argue in their review of adolescent health and wellbeing (Patton et al., 2016). As Patton and colleagues pointed out, parenting research has often been criticized for failing to fully investigate the dynamic between parent and child and for emphasizing parents' negative effects (such as addiction, violence, or mental illness) rather than the benefits of parent-child interactions (such as compassion, strengths, and emotional atonement) (Conoley et al., 2015; Waters and Sun, 2016; Waters et al., 2019). Mental health professionals at the primary prevention level strive to improve child-parent relationships and promote positive psychological components through this approach. The family plays an important role in every individual's development. As many countries' national programs and social policies are geared towards fostering psychological wellbeing and positive characteristics in children, this study aimed to find out if strength-based parenting plays a moderating role in this process. The focus of this study was on the moderating role strength-based parenting played in character strength and psychological well-being. Thus, the conceptual model of the research is as follows:

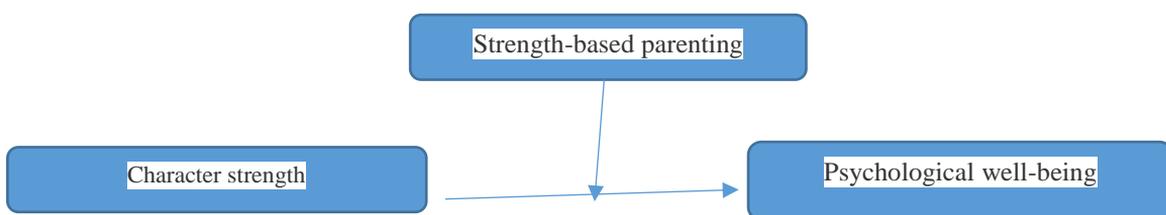


Figure 1: Conceptual model of research

Methods

A cross-sectional and descriptive study design was used to test the hypothesized model that links character strength, psychological wellbeing, and strength-based parenting. A stratified cluster random sampling method was used to obtain the final sample. For the present study, the statistical population was all sixth-graders in primary schools in Tehran's 18th district in the academic year 2019-2020. Most researchers have indicated at least 200 samples for studies like factor analysis and structural models, but there is no consensus as to what the size of the sample should be (Hooman, 2005). A statistical sample of 300 people was selected to prevent sample loss in the present study. To conduct the sampling, the first six schools for boys and six schools for girls were selected from the 18th district schools. Within each school, two sixth graders were randomly selected and 25 people from each were sampled.

Following the selection of the participants and preparation of the questionnaires, the researchers explained the research purpose and related content to the students and explained to the randomly selected students that participation in the study was voluntary. Afterward, the students had 40 to 60 minutes to fill out the questionnaires. Initially, the researcher explained the confidentiality of the data to the students. Participants in the study did not leave the company or continue to work for it. Finally, after completing the questionnaires, researchers collected data. Data analysis was performed in SPSS 25, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), a correlation matrix, and hierarchical regression were used to analyze the data.

The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS): This is a self-report questionnaire of 240 items in which the respondent reports the degree to which each statement applies to him/herself. This questionnaire has five factors in the following terms: emotional strengths, interpersonal strengths, strengths of restraint, theological strengths, and intellectual strengths (Peterson and Park, 2009). To measure the 24 character strengths of the VIA Classification in the participants of this study, the Spanish adaptation of the VIA-IS was used (Azañedo et al., 2014). The items are scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very much unlike me) to 5 (very much like me). The score for each of the 24 character strengths ranges from 10 to 50, with a higher score indicating a greater presence of the corresponding character strength. To obtain the 24 scores corresponding to the 24 character strengths, the mean of the items corresponding to each subscale was calculated. In order to identify the higher-order strength factors, the 24 subscales had high reliability (median $\alpha = .77$; median corrected item-total correlations = .45) and high stability across 9 months (median test-retest correlation = .73) (Peterson and Park, 2009). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.93.

The Ryff's scale of Psychological well-being, short-form (18-item): Caregiver psychological well-being was assessed based on the score of the 18-item Index of Psychological Well-being (Ryff, & Keyes, 1995). This scale evaluates six significant dimensions of psychological well-being that consist of (a) autonomy, (b) environmental mastery, (c) purpose in life, (d) personal growth, (e) positive relations with others, and (f) self-acceptance. The items were scored on a 6-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Generally, the score is in the range of 18-108, and higher scores indicate better psychological well-being. In this study, the internal consistency was 0.76, and for each subscale, it was 0.72-0.88. The scale's internal homology using Cronbach's alpha in 6 factors of Self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, having a purpose in life, personal growth, and independence, were respectively, 0.52, 0.76, 0.75, 0.52, 0.73, 0.72, and for the total scale it was 0.71. Overall, the results suggest that the short form (18-item) of Ryff's scale of Psychological well-being was a useful tool to measure psychological well-being among the Iranian sample (Khanjani et al., 2014). In this study, the Cronbach's for the total scale was 0.78.

Strength-based parenting A modified version of Govindji & Linley's (2007) Strengths Use Scale (SUS) was used. The SUS scale consists of 14 items such as "I am regularly able to do what I do best" and "I use my strengths every day". Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Govindji & Linley report a Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.95. Cronbach's alpha reliability in the current sample was 0.94. The wording of the SUS was modified to measure children's perceptions of parenting behaviors for both of their parents. For example, the item "I am aware of my strengths" was adjusted to "My parents are aware of my strengths" and the item "I can use my strengths in lots of different situations" was altered to "My parents encourage me to use my strengths in lots of different situations. More specifically, the Cronbach's alphas for the scale, was 0.91.

Results

The demographic characteristics of the sample size revealed that 54% of the sample size were firstborn, 35% were second-born and 9.7% were third-born. Among the sample's fathers, 60% had both a diploma and a master's degree, 31.7% had a bachelor's degree, and 7.9% had a master's degree or higher. The sample's mothers had a high school diploma and a master's degree, 33.8% had a bachelor's degree, and 7.3% had a master's degree or higher (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive findings of the studied variables

Variables	Mean ± SD	skewness	kurtosis
Character strength	361.32 ±52.83	0.04	-0.33
Strength-based parenting	37.52 ±22.65	0.46	-0.35
Psychological well-being	69.32 ±13.04	-0.24	0.41

The mean and standard deviation of the studied variables are shown in Table 1. Skewness and kurtosis of the indicators are not outside the range (2, -2) and are therefore considered normal in terms of distribution. An examination of the role of strength-based parenting moderators in the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being was conducted using hierarchical regression. Initial assumptions of regression analysis including the independence of errors as well as multiple alignments were examined, and the results confirmed these assumptions. The assumption that the errors will not be correlated with each other in the regression is certain to be considered in the regression; it is not possible to use regression if the assumption of error independence is rejected and the errors are correlated. The Durbin Watson statistic is a test statistic used in statistics to detect autocorrelation in the residuals from a regression analysis. The Durbin Watson

statistic will always assume a value between 0 and 4. To check the independence of errors, the Durbin Watson test is used, and the results of this test (1.69), demonstrate that this assumption is valid.

Table 2: Default of multiple lines

Amounts	Character strength	Strength-based parenting	psychological well-being
Tolerance statistics	0.89	0.58	0.59
Inflation variance factor	1.45	1.70	1.69

It can be seen in Table 2 that the low tolerance value and the high tolerance factor can indicate multiple sequence alignments. Considering the values in the table below, it can be concluded there are no multiple sequence alignments, and this assumption is also confirmed, and regression testing is possible.

Table 3: Correlation matrix of research variables

Variables	Character strength	Strength-based parenting	psychological well-being
Character strength	1		
Strength-based parenting	** 0.41	1	
Psychological well-being	** 0.63	** 0.27	1

** $P < 0.01$

As the correlation matrix illustrates, there is a positive and significant relationship between character strength, strength-based parenting, and psychological well-being at the level of 0.01. Statistical analysis shows a positive and significant relationship between psychological well-being and strength-based parenting (Table 3).

A three-stage hierarchical analysis was used to examine the role of strength-based parenting moderators on the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being (stage one of independent variables, stage two of moderator variables, and stage three of interaction variables). The significance of the regression expression, as represented by the beta coefficient, is the basis of inferring the existence and the strength of the relationship between variables.

Table 4: Results from the hierarchical regression model

Variables	Modified R2	Model steps	$\Delta R2$	β
Characteristics of regression model	** 0.342		** 0.386	
Character strength	-	1	-	** 0.418
Strength-based parenting	-	2	-	** 0.132
Strength-based parenting * character strength	-	3	-	** 0.557

** P<0.01

Using table 4, the computed modified coefficient of determination (R2) explains 34% of the variance in the psychological well-being variable, while the computed coefficient of determination (R2) explains 38%, indicating an increase in the ability to explain variation when the modifier variable is taken into account separately. As it can be seen, the standardized beta coefficient is significant for both the modifier variable ($\beta = 0.132$) and the character strength variable ($\beta = 0.418$) at the 0.01 level. To test the hypothesis, interaction and strength-based parenting were added to the model, which is also significant at the level of 0.01 ($\beta = 0.555$), thus confirming the role of strength-based parenting as a moderator in determining the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being (Table 4).

Discussion

This study aimed to see whether strength-based parenting moderates the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being. The findings suggest that strength-based parenting plays a moderator role in explaining the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being. This finding was consistent with Kelly, Whiteside, Barich, & Tsey (2021), Cherif, Wood, & Watier (2020), Smith, Ford, Erickson, & Guzman (2021), Xie et al. (2020), Wagner, & Ruch (2021), Hausler et al. (2017). Waters et al. (2019) suggest that strength-based parenting may help teens make better use of their abilities and strengths.

Using strength-based parenting for this purpose is also a way to connect talents to the strength of character. Providing adolescents with a path that can lead to satisfaction with life. This result can be attributed to the research conducted by Fattahi and Tamnaeifar (2014) who found in their research that strength-based parenting has a significant positive correlation coefficient with all components of psychological well-being. As Arian and Tahmasbnejad (2020) documented in their research, while parents who employ the strength-based parenting method control their children, they are also flexible with them and accept the conditions their children wish to accept. Moreover, they encourage their children to think critically and help them understand their autonomy. In addition to being expectant, these parents are also receptive to their children's needs. Parents with these characteristics have a warm, accepting, child-centered approach while maintaining a

balanced control at the same time. By giving their children age-appropriate responsibilities, they provide an environment in which the child's best interests are at stake for them to become confident and independent individuals (Cherif et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020).

As another way of explaining the findings, it can be said that students who use their character strength to achieve their goals have greater self-esteem, engage in learning, and feel more engaged overall (Abasimi, Gai, & Wang, 2017). Furthermore, the use of strong character alone, and the subsequent success of the student, leads to the belief that rewards are distributed according to merit and ability, resulting in the belief that people will eventually receive what they deserve and achieve success due to luck. It is not a matter of external forces, but rather of one's efforts (Taheri, Naami, Amir Fakhraei, & AtashAfrooz, 2020).

Character strength and enjoying their fruits in the student also creates an image of a connection with a superior goal instead of just focusing on grades and makes the student strive to learn more, which increases psychological well-being in students. There are several limitations to this study. It lacked homogeneous groups and intrusive variables were not controlled. In addition, all measures were self-reported, which may have led to response bias. It is also possible that some students could have responded more positively than others to all items. As a result, the findings could not be generalized to students in other cities or genders.

Conclusion

According to the current study, the concept of strength-based parenting is an important element of psychological well-being and character strength. In the findings presented herein, positive outcomes are a result of parents recognizing and encouraging their children's strengths. Accordingly, among the many positive parenting approaches available, being a strength-based parent can promote adolescents' subjective wellbeing.

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