

The Relationship between Character Strength and Psychological Well-being: The Mediating Strength Use and the Children's Relationship with Parents

Mina Khosravi¹, * Hassan Shams Esfandabad², Azadeh Farghedani³

¹ Ph.D. Candidate, General Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Saveh Branch, Iran.

² Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, International University, Qazvin, Iran.

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Saveh Branch, Iran.

Abstract

Background: character strengths show a person's assets over his/her faults or problems, so they are also called personal assets. This study aimed to investigate the role of strength-based parenting moderators in the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being.

Methods: The research design was correlational. The statistical population included all sixth-grade students in the 18th district of Tehran in 2019-2020, which comprised 300 sixth-grade students who were selected through a stratified cluster random sampling method. Students completed the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), Ryff's scale of Psychological well-being, short-form (18-item), Strengths Use Questionnaire, and Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire (PCRS). Descriptive statistics, correlation matrix, and hierarchical regression were performed through SPSS statistical software, version 25.

Results: The demographic characteristics of the sample showed that 54% of the sample were firstborn, 35% were second-born and 9.7% were third-born. The findings revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between character strength and psychological well-being ($P < 0.01$). The results also illuminated 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 were explained by the strength of character and strength-based parenting.

Conclusion: According to the research findings, it can be concluded that strength-based parenting will change the strength of character and psychological well-being of students.

Key Words: Character Strength, Child-parent Relationship, Psychological Well-being, Strength Use.

* Please cite this article as: Khosravi M, Shams Esfandabad H, Farghedani A. The Relationship between Character Strength and Psychological Well-being: The Mediating Strength Use and the Children's Relationship with Parents. Int J Pediatr 2022; 10 (12):17144-17156. DOI: **10.22038/ijp.2022.68166.5068**

*Corresponding Author:

Hassan Shams Esfandabad, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, International University, Qazvin, Iran. Email: hshams1333@gmail.com

Received date: Sep.27,2022; Accepted date:Dec.05,2022

1- INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, a growing interest in positive psychology and the emerging application of positive education has emerged around the world. Considering the prevalence of mental disorders among adolescents and young people, psychologists, educators, and policymakers have realized that education, besides training students in different skills, should teach them to succeed. One of the main concerns of positive psychology is the enhancement of Character Strength (1). Character Strength can be identified as a complete set of positive features that are crucial to a good life. Character Strength is revealed through a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (1,2). Character Strength is morally valuable, and individual differences make a difference in strength (1). One of the most important goals of positive psychology is to help individuals in identifying these true forces in human existence through representing one's true self; and when it is identified and used by individuals, they experience more success, efficiency, happiness, and vitality (3).

Psychological well-being is one of the factors affecting Character Strength. According to Ryff, conceptual well-being is a completely dynamic concept and includes various aspects of psychological, social, mental, and health-related behaviors. The components of psychological well-being include self-acceptance, personal growth, purposefulness in life, dominance over the environment, autonomy, and positive communication with others (4). From the point of view of power theory, every person has his unique ability to move towards self-esteem by applying his strengths (5). It should be noted that in addition to increasing the sense of value without relying on others, these strengths have important advantages for

psychological well-being (6). Increasing the use of Character Street is energetic and makes optimal performance, growth, and progress in life (1). To better identify and evaluate the character strengths, Peterson and Seligman (6) have provided six main components and 24 sub-components of character strength to make it easier to think about and make decisions for enhancing it (7). The promotion of Character Strength will lead to increased individual and social mental health and reduces possible environmental damages (8). Sohrabi and Jafari Roshan (8) also confirmed the effect of Character Strength on improving psychological well-being among individuals. The study by Taheri et al. (9) on 354th-grade students indicated a significant and positive relationship between Character strength and psychological well-being. Similarly, Ghiasi et al. (10) found a positive and significant relationship between the positive character component and regulating emotion and psychological well-being. According to the authors, psychological well-being has no meaning without addressing the elements of the promotion of character strengths (11).

In the same line, Park and Peterson (2009) achieved a positive relationship between character strength and psychological well-being (12). The results of Leontopoulos and Triliva (13) indicated that wisdom, courage, and excellence are the most prominent dimensions of character strength that are directly related to adolescent psychological well-being (11). Wang and Wang (14), also found relationships between the five components of Character Strength (appreciation, beauty, citizenship, perfection, and justice) psychological well-being of the employees. Another study by Bechler (3) demonstrated that the powerful components of character strength such as happiness, hope, love, taste, appreciation, and curiosity are, Positively, associated

with psychological well-being. Also, the results of the studies of Dubreuil, et al. show that personality-based interventions can increase happiness and reduce the symptoms of depression (15).

Hausler, et al. (16) examined the relationship between personality strengths and psychological well-being revealing that the strengths of hope, zest, gratitude, curiosity, and love (called "happiness strengths") were significantly associated with psychological well-being (16). Dubreuil, et al. (15) found in their research on first-year high school students that cognitive interventions lead to an increase in character strength and, subsequently, an increase in students' psychological well-being. This finding confirms the results of a large volume of existing literature showing that a strong character is correlated to various indicators of psychological well-being (1). Investigating the correlations between psychological well-being and a set of different individual factors, Balchik, et al. found that Character strengths strongly correlated with positive well-being; and academic achievement was the next most highly correlated, while psychopathology and physical health had only moderate associations with it (17). According to the research results of Cherif et al., the strength of character improves the health of people's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; and affects the improvement of psychological well-being (5).

Also, based on the findings of Suh and Choi, the educational environment, especially the school, plays an effective role in the excellence and development of a strong character. Strong character is an internal resource that describes a good life, and external resources such as education and health can also help provide psychological well-being for adolescents (18). Smith et al. concluded that positive people scored better in all measures of character strength than people with

negative thoughts. From the results of their research, they also concluded that education has an effective role in increasing character strength (19). According to Wagner and Ruch, character strengths components, such as courage, forgiveness, honesty, humility, humor, kindness, and abilities, such as self-discipline, social intelligence, independence, mastery of the environment, purposefulness in life, self-acceptance, are strongly correlated to psychological well-being and achievement at school (20).

In general, as research evidence indicates, growth-based research should pay more attention to the scientific study of character strengths because it is directly related to psychological well-being. Research evidence shows that the true use of character strengths, i.e. the ability to use one's strengths and apply these strengths in performing tasks, guarantees children's psychological well-being (16). Strengths of character and the use of the strength of character component have been confirmed to have a positive effect on improving the academic performance of students (22). Growth and self-fulfillment are, in fact, the prominent factors leading to psychological well-being (21). Thus, the use of strength in character has a positive relationship with academic enthusiasm and psychological well-being of students (9). As the review of literature reveals, despite the importance of character strengths, the use of strengths, and the impact of parental-child relationships on psychological well-being, very little research has been conducted in this field, in the country. Implementing a structural model, the current research seeks to fill this gap by exploring how character strengths and psychological well-being are related through the use of strengths and the relationship between parents and their children. Thus, the conceptual model of the research is as follows:

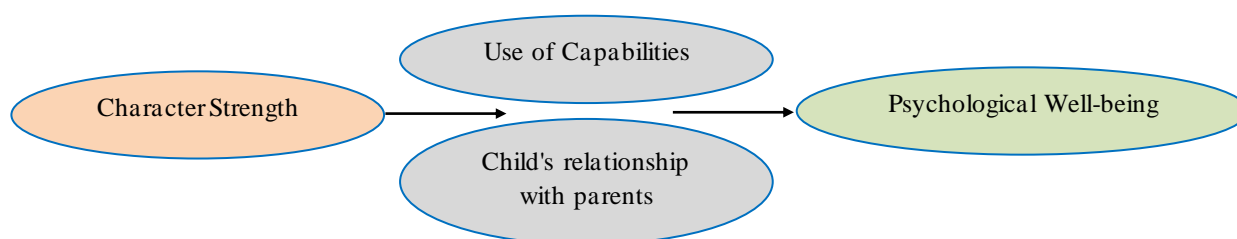


Fig. 1: Conceptual model of the research

2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

2-1. Study design and population

To examine the hypothesized relationship between strength-based parenting and character strength, a cross-sectional and descriptive study design was used. The final sample was obtained using stratified cluster random sampling. In Tehran, there are 22 regions based on their geographic location. For the present study, the statistical population included all sixth-graders in primary schools of 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 on the appropriate sample size (23). Thus, a statistical sample of 300 people was selected to prevent sample loss in the present study. The inclusion criterion for participating in the study was satisfaction. The exclusion criteria included mental disorders that required immediate treatment, such as epilepsy, which prevented the completion of questionnaires; and incomplete questionnaires. To conduct the sampling, six schools for boys and six schools for girls were randomly 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. Afterwards, the students had 40 to 60

minutes to fill out the questionnaires. Initially, the researcher explained the confidentiality of the data to the students.

2-2. Measuring tools

2-2.1. The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS)

This is a self-report questionnaire containing 240 questions asking the respondents to rate how often each statement applies to them. Specifically, there are five strengths graded as emotional strengths, interpersonal strengths, restraint strengths, theological strengths, and intellectual strengths (12). The items are scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very much unlike me) to 5 (very much like me). A higher score shows a greater presence of the corresponding character strength for each of the 24 character strengths. Based on the means of the items matching each subscale, 24 scores are calculated for the 24 character strengths. The 24 subscales were confirmed to be highly reliable (median score = .77; median item-total correlations = .45) and highly stable over time (median test-retest correlation = .73) (12).

2-2.2. The Ryff's scale of Psychological well-being, short-form (18-item)

The caregiver's psychological well-being was evaluated based on their scores on the 18-item index of psychological well-being (24). This scale assesses six important dimensions of psychological well-being, including (a) autonomy, (b) environmental mastery, (c) purpose in life, (d) personal

growth, (e) positive relationships with others, and (f) Self-acceptance. The items are scored on a 6-point Likert scale from (1) completely disagree to (6) completely agree. In general, the scores range from 18 to 108; and higher scores indicate better psychological well-being. The internal consistency of the scale using Cronbach's alpha in 6 factors of self-acceptance, mastering the environment, positive relationships with others, having a purpose in life, personal growth, and independence are 0.52, 0.76, 0.75, 0.52, and 0.73, respectively. Overall, it confirmed that the short form (18 items) of the RIF psychological well-being scale is a useful tool for measuring psychological well-being among the Iranian sample (25). In this study, the internal consistency was found to be between 0.76 and 0.88 for all subscales.

2-2.3. Strengths Use Questionnaire

This scale was used to assess the individuals' use of strength with 14 items. A sample item is: "I always play to my strengths." Participants answer each item on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The higher the average score of the total scale, the higher the degree of the used strength. In the initial study, the alpha coefficient of SUS, as reported by Govindji and Linley, (26) was 0.95 and it has been shown that this construct is significantly correlated with other measures including self-esteem, self-efficacy, mental vitality, and measures of related constructs including SWB and PWB.

According to Wood et al., this scale has a good internal consistency ($\alpha(T1/T2/T3) = 0.97/0.97/0.94$) and test-retest reliability ($r = 0.85$) as well as good criterion validity in relation to well-being (27). In the current study, the internal consistency coefficient was 0.93.

2-2.4. Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire (PCRS)

This questionnaire was developed by Fine et al. (28) to evaluate the quality of the parent-child relationship. This scale includes 24 Likert scale items that are scored in the range of 1 to 7. This 24-item instrument measures youth's perception of their relationship with their parents. It measures positive affection, anger/role confusion, identification, and connection. The survey is divided into two subscales, one measuring the "relationship with mother" and the other "relationship with father". Both scales are the same, except that the words "mother" and "father" are interchanged. However, different factor loadings were reported for the two scales. The α coefficient for subscales of the father-child relationship scale, ranged from 0.89 to 0.94 and for the mother-child relationship scale, the α coefficient for subscales ranged from 0.61 to 0.94. The α coefficient for the whole instrument was 0.96, which indicates its excellent internal consistency. Items in the PCRS can be easily scored. Negative items (9, 13, 14) are scored in reverse. Then, the total score of each item is calculated and divided by the number of items of each factor to obtain the average score of the subscales. The total score of the survey is the sum of the average scores of the subscales (28). The content validity of the scale was evaluated and confirmed for use in Iran, and its reliability was evaluated through Cronbach's coefficient of 0.91 for the Persian version of the scale (29).

2-3. Data analysis

Data analysis was done in SPSS software V. 25 and descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), correlation matrix, and hierarchical regression were used for data analysis.

3- 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 a diploma, 31.7% had a bachelor's degree, and 7.9% had a master's degree or higher. Among the sample's mothers, 58.9 had a high school diploma, 33.8% had a bachelor's degree, and 7.3% had a master's degree or higher.

The variance tolerance index was obtained close to 1, which indicates the normality of the data on all variables; therefore, none of the predictor variables had a linear effect on other predictor variables, and the value of the variance density factor index was less than 2, so there was no linear effect between the predictor variables. The results are presented in **Table 1**.

Table-1: Descriptive findings of the studied variables

Variables	Mean ± SD	skewness	kurtosis
Strength of character	361.32 ±52.83	0.04	-0.33
Use of strength	39.51 ±19.56	1.08	0.79
Psychological well-being	69.32 ±13.04	-0.24	0.41
Child's relationship with parents	230.80±42.83	-0.47	0.16

The mean and standard deviation of the studied variables are shown in **Table 1**. The 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. 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.

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; so regression testing is possible.

Table-2: Default of multiple lines

Amounts	Character strength	Use of strength	Child's relationship with parents
Tolerance statistics	0.89	0.59	0.58
Inflation variance factor	1.45	1.69	1.70

As the correlation matrix demonstrates, there is a positive and significant relationship between character strength, Use of strength, psychological well-being, and Child-parent relationship at the level

of 0.05 (**Table 3**). Statistical analysis shows a positive and significant relationship between character strength and psychological well-being (**Table 3**).

Table-3: Correlation matrix of research variables

Variables	Strength of character	Use of strength	Psychological well-being	Child's relationship with parents
Strength of character	1	-	-	-
Use of strength	** 0.63	** 0.27	1	-
Psychological well-being	** 0.72	*0.45	*0.59	1
Child's relationship with parents	** 0.41	1	-	-

** P<0.01

The results of **Table 4** show that character strength has a direct effect on psychological well-being, and character strength is directly connected to psychological well-being (4.73 and 0.62 = β). Therefore, the hypothesis about the direct effect of character strength on psychological well-being was approved

with 95 % reliability (p <0.05). **Table 4** shows that character strength had an indirect effect on psychological well-being through using character strength, so the hypothesis regarding the indirect relationship between character strength and psychological well-being was approved with 95 % confidence (p <0.05).

Table-4: Coefficient and Significance of the direct effect of the Character Strength on psychological well-being

Criterion Variable	The predictable variable	Effect Type	beta	β	Sobolev statistics	sig
Psychological Well-being	Character Strength	Direct	1.03	0.62	4.73	0.001
Psychological Well-being	Character Strength	Mediating Strength Use	0.62	0.21	3.76	0.001

According to **Table 5**, has a direct effect on psychological well-being of students; Strength of character has direct relationships with Strength Use and psychological well-being (4.37 and 0.54). Therefore, the hypothesis regarding the direct effect of the use of strengths and the psychological well-being of students was approved with 95% confidence (P= 0.05).

Table 5 shows that character strength has a direct effect on the use of students' strengths. Therefore, the hypothesis regarding the direct effect between character strength and the use of students' strength was 95% confirmed (P= 0.05).

Table 6 demonstrates that character strength affects psychological well-being through the use of strengths; so the hypothesis relevant to the indirect relationship between character strength and psychological well-being is confirmed by 95 % reliability (p <0.05).

Table 6 also shows that character strength affects psychological well-being through enhancing parent-child relationship: therefore, the hypothesis regarding the indirect relationship between character strength and the psychological well-being of students is confirmed with 95 % confidence (p <0.05).

Table-5: Coefficient and Significance of the Direct Effect of Using the Strengths on Psychological Well-being and the Character Strength

Criterion Variable	The predictable variable	Effect Type	beta	β	Soblle statistics	sig
Psychological Well-being	Character Strength	Mediating Strength Use	0.62	0.21	3.76	0.001
Psychological Well-being	Strength Use	Direct	0.94	0.54	4.37	0.001
Strength Use	Character Strength	Direct	0.66	0.39	3.51	0.001

Table 6: Coefficient and Significance of Effects of Character Strength on Psychological Well-being

Criterion Variable	The predictable variable	Effect Type	beta	β	Soblle statistics	sig
Psychological Well-being	Character Strength	Mediating Strength Use	0.62	0.21	3.76	0.001
Psychological Well-being	Character Strength	Mediating Children's Relationship with Parents	0.64	0.23	3.85	0.001

4- DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between character strength and psychological well-being with the mediation of the use of character strengths and child-parent relationships. The findings confirm the results of previous studies (2,5,19, 20), showing a positive relationship between character strength and psychological well-being. According to our results, there is a significant relationship between the 24 components of strengths of character and psychological well-being structures with the mediation of the use of strengths and the child's relationship with parents. According to the factor analysis, 4 logical and coherent factors are identified which form the basic dimensions of character in children. These personality dimensions are seen as conceptual categories in young children by which they can acquire a good personality and improve their personality in adulthood. Park and Peterson refer to social strengths as one of the dimensions of the interpersonal aspect of children's

personality; they suggest that social strengths include intelligence, fairness, kindness, and love. According to their findings, this dimension is related to the dimension of positive relationships with others in the structure of psychological well-being (12).

The second category has been identified as strengths that give meaning to children's lives, provide a positive interpretation of reality, and emphasize the bright aspects of life. These strengths include zest, hope, spirituality, humor, and gratitude. It is related to the purposeful structure of life, among the sub-components of psychological well-being. The third category deals with intellectual and cognitive strengths. These features facilitate exploration and create interest in learning, knowledge, and innovation (2, 16, 20). The fourth category is related to self-regulation of behavior and perseverance to achieve long-term goals, which include stability, self-regulation, resourcefulness, forgiveness, and humility, which are related to personal

growth among the dimensions of psychological well-being. These four categories provide solutions about various paths to achieve a good personality in middle childhood and elementary ages, as well as the need for a comprehensive cognitive, social and emotional, and transcendental approach to the development of children's personalities (5, 19).

As Yan et al. also assert, character strengths are related to the mental health and psychological well-being of children due to the positive psychological conceptualization (30). Personality strengths increase children's temperament, motivational factors, performance, emotion regulation, and social support. Some of these points relate to the mind or cognitive abilities, such as intellectualism and perseverance, and others to the heart or emotional states, such as humor and love. Character strengths also affect social interactions in shared environments such as teamwork and forgiveness (2, 5). In explaining this hypothesis, it is important to compare previous research in terms of age and gender variables. For example, some studies have shown the effective contribution of gender to personality strengths (31, 32). So girls ranked higher than boys in the ranking of character strengths. Several studies have examined gender and reported its contribution to differences in personality strengths. However, it seems difficult to find a consistent pattern in personality strengths except for the higher ratings in love and kindness assigned to girls. Of course, more research in terms of differences in gender-specific roles and expectations should be pursued in specific cultures and cross-cultural comparative research on children's personality strengths should be, then, conducted.

Shoshani and Sloan, in line with the other studies, explained emotional, and social problems, psychological well-being,

satisfaction with life, and positive and negative emotions in relation to strong character in them as a collaborative factor and cooperation in school were used as an interactive criterion (33). Furthermore, continuous effort and interest in learning over time, and interpersonal strengths are among the predictors of children's mental health and psychological well-being. Using strengths such as Hope, zest, appreciation, love, and curiosity were significantly correlated with psychological well-being; thus, in line with other studies (9, 11-13), they introduced these points as unique predictors of psychological well-being (33). The previous studies suggest that the strengths of character are useful not only in education but also when choosing a profession, choosing a job, and increasing interpersonal relationships (19, 31). Moreover, using strength reduces stress and increases vitality and positive affect (34).

Abasimi, Gai, & Wang (2017) explained that by using character strength, students can achieve their goals, feel better about themselves, be more interested in learning, and be able to engage constructively with their surroundings, resulting in increased psychological well-being (35). Taheri (2019) shows that, by using the strength of character and the success that results from it, students can be convinced that rewards are distributed on the basis of competence and ability, and that success is not the result of luck or external forces, but rather the result of the individual's own actions. Using the strength of character and enjoying its fruits create a belief in the possibility of having higher goals, instead of just paying attention to grades; make the student seek to learn and progress more, and this will eventually manifest itself in the form of his natural behavior(9). Waters (2017) concluded that the parent-child relationship increases self-efficacy and self-regulation in children and keeps them away from depression and anxiety, increasing their

psychological well-being. As a result, these children have more self-confidence and are more successful at school; they are less involved in anxiety, stress, and depression problems; and they respect people older than themselves and the rules of family and society. What we have got from the results of the present study is also similar to previous studies (36). Consistent with the results of the mentioned studies, our research also confirmed the direct causative relationship between the strength of character and the child-parent relationship, as well as the relationship between the variables of character strength and psychological well-being.

4-1. Study Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. There was no experiment, and intrusive variables were not controlled. In addition, all measures were self-reported, which may lead to response bias. It is possible that some students give more positive or negative answers to all items regardless of the construct being tested. And due to the limited setting and sample of the study, the findings cannot be generalized to students from other cities or genders.

5- CONCLUSION

According to the results of this study, character strengths and using them, among children, can play a positive role in the improvement of parent-child relationship which can in turn have an effect on enhancing various dimensions of psychological well-being, such as independence and mastery over their surroundings. Positive relationships with others, a sense of purpose in life, and self-acceptance are all aspects of personal growth. In the findings presented herein, positive outcomes are a result of the 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 well-being.

6- ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study was approved by the Islamic Azad University of Saveh Branch, with the ethical code of IR.IAU.REC.1399-022. A note informed the subjects that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason. Furthermore, a consent form was obtained before completing the questionnaires.

7- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is taken from a doctoral thesis conducted in Azad University, Saveh. The researchers would like to appreciate the staff as well as all participating adolescents and their parents.

8- CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

None.

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