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Simple and Multiple Relationships between Cohesive Self-Knowledge and Psychological Distress with Parental Self-Efficacy in Mothers of Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined the simple and multiple relationships between self-knowledge and psychological distress with parental self-efficacy among mothers of elementary school students in Lar City in 2022–2023.

Methods: The statistical population consisted of all mothers of elementary school students in Lar City during the 2022–2023 academic year. Using Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table, 219 mothers were selected through multi-stage cluster random sampling. Participants completed the Self-Knowledge Questionnaire (ISKQ), the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS), and the Parental Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (PSAQ). Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis in SPSS version 26.

Results: Findings indicated a positive and significant relationship between self-knowledge and parental self-efficacy. Additionally, stress, depression, and anxiety showed significant negative correlations with parental self-efficacy. Regression analysis revealed that among the psychological distress variables, stress and depression were significant predictors of parental self-efficacy in mothers of elementary school students.

Conclusions: The results suggest that mothers experiencing higher levels of stress and depression are more likely to struggle with emotional and behavioral challenges that impair parenting quality and reduce parental self-efficacy. Strengthening mothers' self-knowledge and reducing psychological distress may therefore play an important role in enhancing parental self-efficacy.

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Introduction

Parents in general, and mothers in particular, play a fundamental and influential role in shaping children's developmental outcomes (Lauver et al., 2019; Muno et al., 2018; Wijchers et al., 2018). The mother holds the most significant responsibility in fostering the child's emotional and psychological characteristics. Parenting is a dynamic, constructive, learnable, and socio-culturally embedded process that requires knowledge, skill, and motivation (Omidvar & Liravianinejad, 2018), and it strongly influences children's psychological well-being and behavioral adjustment (Hirisau et al., 2019). The expectations and perceptions a mother develop about herself as an influential caregiver shape her parenting trajectory and constitute what is referred to as parental self-efficacy (Dehghan Meneshadi et al., 2016).

Parental self-efficacy refers to a parent's belief in their ability to effectively raise their child (De Montigny & Lacharité, 2005; as cited in Mouton et al., 2018). It reflects the extent to which parents believe they can fulfill their parenting responsibilities and achieve desired parenting goals (Amirloo, Saberi, & Hakim-Shushtari, 2022). Empirical studies consistently show that higher or lower levels of parental self-efficacy among mothers are significantly associated with their parenting performance and child-rearing practices (Zinatelli & Nordling, 2018; Reed et al., 2016; Van Ingen et al., 2015). In other words, self-efficacy beliefs influence cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decision-making processes, all of which contribute to overall life quality and human functioning. Individuals with high perceived self-efficacy are more likely to confront challenges with greater confidence, interpreting adverse events as surmountable external conditions. This sense of agency enhances readiness, fosters predictability of outcomes, and strengthens personal control. Several studies have documented a negative association between parental self-efficacy and parenting stress (Miller, 2022). Thus, parents' belief in their ability to manage parenting responsibilities and address children's emotional and behavioral needs plays a vital role in parental well-being and child development (Amirloo et al., 2022).

Among the psychological components that influence maternal parental self-efficacy, negative emotional and behavioral states associated with various psychological disorders can disrupt mothers' psychosocial functioning. These conditions are broadly conceptualized as psychological distress (Irandoost et al., 2018). Psychological distress is a key component of mental health and a determinant of individuals' psychosocial functioning (Moradi et al., 2021). It interferes with daily

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functioning and fosters negative perceptions of the environment, others, and oneself, ultimately undermining self-belief and perceived capabilities (Berari Bazyar Khili & Ebrahimi, 2021). Research has shown that psychological distress significantly impacts human neurobiology and, by promoting perceptions of uncontrollability and negative self-appraisal, considerably reduces parental self-efficacy (Swenson, et al., 2012; as cited in Adalatian Hosseini et al., 2021).

Another variable closely related to family-based psychological constructs and influential in shaping parental self-efficacy is integrative self-knowledge (Sedghi et al., 2021). Integrative self-knowledge is a dynamic, adaptive, and coherence-building process that operates continuously throughout life, integrating self-related experiences and attributions into meaningful structures and shaping self-regulatory processes (Ahmadvand Shahvardi & Ramezanimoghadam Arani, 2022). It facilitates the integration of the self across past, present, and future (Ghorbani, Watson, & Hargis, 2008). This process enables individuals to organize their thoughts and emotions through an understanding of their capabilities, identify and select the most appropriate actions for achieving desired outcomes, and influence perceptions of self and one's abilities (Ghorbani et al., 2012; as cited in Shekarchei et al., 2020). Research by Sarafraz and colleagues (2009) also demonstrated that integrative self-knowledge is positively related to all dimensions of psychological well-being (Hojjati et al., 2021).

Parenting is a highly sensitive phase of life that brings numerous challenges, which may be especially salient for mothers. Mothers' self-perceptions and their evaluations of their past, present, and future abilities directly influence their effectiveness as parents. Given the critical role of mothers in fostering healthy and adaptive child development, studying this phase of life is of particular importance. Although numerous studies have examined psychological determinants of maternal parental self-efficacy, the specific roles of integrative self-knowledge and psychological distress—two components central to individual functioning—have received relatively limited attention. While prior research has explored relationships among related concepts, these variables have not been jointly examined within a single model. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the simple and multiple relationships of integrative self-knowledge and psychological distress with parental self-efficacy among mothers of elementary school students in Lar City in 2022.

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Material and Methods

The present study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The statistical population consisted of all mothers of elementary school children in Lar City during the 2021–2023 academic years, totaling 504 individuals. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table, 219 mothers were selected through a multi-stage cluster random sampling method. First, four educational districts in Lar City were randomly selected. Then, four elementary schools were chosen at random from these districts, and finally, 219 mothers were randomly selected from these schools.

Instruments

Parental Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (PSEQ): This questionnaire was developed in 1996 by Dumka, Stoerzinger, Jackson, and Roosa to assess parental self-efficacy. It consists of 10 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale. Five items (1, 3, 5, 6, and 8) are reverse-scored. Higher scores indicate higher parental self-efficacy, and lower scores represent lower parental self-efficacy. The possible score range is 10 to 70 (Zamani-Mazd et al., 2018). Internal consistency in English-speaking mothers of average socioeconomic status was reported to be 0.70 using Cronbach's alpha (Rezaei et al., 2017; cited in Zamani-Mazd et al., 2018). In the study by Omidvar and Liravianinejad (2018), reliability was calculated as 0.82. Item-total correlations ranged from 0.38 to 0.69, indicating good construct validity. Face validity was also reported at 0.70. Other studies reported Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 (Azimifar et al., 2018) and 0.76 (Bahadori Khosrowshahi, 2018). Talaei (2009) similarly reported reliability at 0.70 (Mogharrabi Sinki et al., 2015). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.77.

Integrative Self-Knowledge Questionnaire (ISKQ): Developed by Ghorbani et al. (2008) this scale assesses two components of experiential and reflective self-awareness, integrating past experiences with present experiential awareness and linking them to desired future outcomes. The scale consists of 12 items rated on a five-point scale ranging from "mostly true" to "mostly false." Items 3, 6, and 9 measure reflective self-awareness; items 1, 5, 7, and 8 assess experiential self-awareness; the remaining items measure integrative self-knowledge. Studies conducted in both Iran and the United States have reported satisfactory internal consistency and criterion and convergent validity (Ghorbani et al., 2008). Ghorbani et al. (2010) reported a Cronbach's alpha of

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0.79. Jalili-Rad (2014) reported reliability of 0.85, and Sedghi et al. (2021) reported alpha coefficients of 0.73 and 0.79 for experiential and reflective subscales, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.81.

Psychological Distress Questionnaire (DASS-21): This questionnaire was developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). The short form includes 21 items assessing depression, anxiety, and stress, each measured through seven items (Moradi-Manesh et al., 2012; cited in Adalatian Hosseini et al., 2021). Each item is rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (does not apply to me at all) to 3 (applies to me very much). Thus, scores for each subscale range from 0 to 21 (Ghadiri-Niyari & Haghighi, 2022). In the present study, the psychological distress scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93.

Procedure

After obtaining approval for the measurement instruments and permission to conduct the study, the researchers visited the selected schools according to a predetermined schedule. The questionnaires were distributed among participating mothers, with careful supervision during completion. Necessary explanations were provided both verbally and in written form through an attached instruction sheet.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients) and inferential statistics (multiple regression analysis using the enter method). All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committees, as well as the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the research prior to data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating mothers. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential, that their data would be used solely for research purposes, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. No identifying personal information was collected.

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Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Reflective Self-Awareness	9.64	2.06	2.00	12.00	-1.26	2.27
Experiential Self-Awareness	12.75	2.83	2.00	16.00	-1.18	1.81
Integrative Self-Knowledge	28.13	4.72	5.00	42.00	-1.14	3.88
Stress	6.70	4.79	0.00	21.00	0.59	-0.24
Depression	6.37	4.98	0.00	21.00	0.77	-0.04
Anxiety	5.58	4.18	0.00	18.00	0.65	0.01
Psychological Distress	18.60	12.95	0.00	59.00	0.69	0.01
Parental Self-Efficacy	42.23	9.58	11.00	60.00	-0.54	0.26

As shown in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation for integrative self-knowledge were 28.13 and 4.72, respectively. For its subscales, reflective self-awareness had a mean and standard deviation of 9.64 and 2.06, and experiential self-awareness had a mean and standard deviation of 12.75 and 2.83. The mean and standard deviation for psychological distress were 18.60 and 12.95, respectively, with subscales of stress (M = 6.70, SD = 4.79), depression (M = 6.37, SD = 4.98), and anxiety (M = 5.58, SD = 4.18). Parental self-efficacy had a mean of 42.23 and a standard deviation of 9.58. Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients among the study variables.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Reflective S-A	1							
2. Experiential S-A	0.97	1						
3. Integrative S-K	0.69	0.72	1					
4. Stress	-0.27	-0.24	*0.16	1				
5. Depression	-0.39	0.13	0.80	0.83	1			
6. Anxiety	-0.40	-0.35	0.06	0.78	0.82	1		
7. Psych. Distress	-0.38	-0.34	0.80	0.93	0.94	0.92	1	
8. Parental S-Efficacy	0.44	0.42	0.50	-0.57	-0.60	-0.57	-0.62	1

Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results in Table 2 show that reflective self-awareness and experiential self-awareness are both positively and significantly correlated with parental self-efficacy. Additionally, stress, depression, and anxiety are negatively and significantly related to parental self-efficacy. Table 3 reports the results of the normality test for the study variables.

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Table 3. Normality Test Results for Study Variables

Variable	Z Statistic	Significance Level
Reflective Self-Awareness	0.18	0.10
Experiential Self-Awareness	0.26	0.12
Integrative Self-Knowledge	0.32	0.14
Stress	0.44	0.18
Depression	0.19	0.13
Anxiety	0.27	0.15
Psychological Distress	0.43	0.17
Parental Self-Efficacy	0.17	0.071

The results indicate that all study variables are normally distributed.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis predicting parental self-efficacy from the study variables using the enter method.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Parental Self-Efficacy

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	R	R^2	F	p (F)
Constant	38.78	3.05	–	12.68	<0.001	0.66	0.44	32.00	<0.001
Reflective S-A	0.73	1.08	0.15	0.67	<0.001				
Experiential S-A	0.29	0.77	0.08	0.37	<0.001				
Stress	–0.21	0.09	–0.21	–2.11	<0.001				
Depression	–0.24	0.12	–0.24	–2.20	<0.001				

As indicated, the linear combination of some predictor variables—specifically, stress and depression—significantly predicts parental self-efficacy ($F = 32.00$, $p < 0.001$). The predictors together account for 44% of the variance in parental self-efficacy. The standardized coefficients (β) for stress (–0.21, $t = –2.11$, $p < 0.001$) and depression (–0.24, $t = –2.20$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrate that only these two subscales play a significant role in predicting maternal parental self-efficacy, with depression having a slightly stronger effect than stress.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the simple and multiple relationships of integrative self-knowledge and psychological distress with parental self-efficacy among mothers of elementary school students in Lar City in 2022. The findings showed that among the subscales of psychological distress, stress and depression significantly predicted parental self-efficacy, whereas the subscales of integrative self-knowledge did not. These findings are consistent with

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previous research reporting significant negative relationships between stress and depression and parental self-efficacy, including Amirlou et al. (2022), Miller (2022), Simon et al. (2015), Kim et al. (2011), and Arefnejad and Roshan (2019). To explain this finding, and based on the work of Swenson, Dugal, and Baum (2012; cited in Adalatian Hosseini et al., 2021), psychological distress affects the human neural structure and causes hormonal changes that in turn influence parental self-efficacy. As mood fluctuations intensify—which are biologically tied to levels of stress and depression—an individual's perceptions and beliefs about their own competence become increasingly disrupted (Simon et al., 2015).

Another finding of the present study indicated that anxiety does not predict parental self-efficacy. This result contrasts with previous studies in the field, including Miller (2022), Simon et al. (2015), and Kim et al. (2011). One explanation may be that anxiety places an individual in a heightened state of alertness. Although anxiety is often accompanied by unpleasant emotional experiences, this state of vigilance and activation may help a person carry out certain parenting responsibilities and prepare the conditions needed for successful child-rearing. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997), individuals' performance and success depend on the depth of interaction between their personal cognitions and the task at hand. Mild or normative levels of anxiety may facilitate successful task performance and strengthen beliefs in one's own abilities. Thus, mothers who experience normative levels of anxiety in relation to their children may be more active and motivated to engage constructively in child-rearing, which in turn may enhance their sense of parental self-efficacy.

The results also showed that the subscales of integrative self-knowledge—reflective and experiential self-awareness—did not predict maternal parental self-efficacy. This finding is inconsistent with studies by Sedghi et al. (2021), Ahmadvand-Shahverdi and Ramazani-Moghadam Arani (2022), Ghorbani et al.(2008), and Hojjati et al.(2021). One possible explanation can be drawn from Ghorbani et al. (2008), who argue that integrative self-knowledge involves efforts to synthesize the self across past, present, and future, and that this process is largely experienced in the present and is fundamentally individual and inward-focused. Because this construct reflects a personal, intrapersonal phenomenon rather than an interpersonal one, it may not align directly with parental self-efficacy—a construct that depends heavily on interactions with one's child and often with larger social environments (Reed et al., 2016). Therefore, although

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integrative self-knowledge may relate to parental self-efficacy in a parallel way through the self-insight it generates, it does not appear to engage with the interpersonal mechanisms necessary to predict it significantly.

Conclusion

The results of the present study demonstrated that stress and depression play significant roles in predicting parental self-efficacy among mothers of elementary school children in Lar City. Among these, depression was the stronger predictor. However, before generalizing these findings, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The interaction between fathers and mothers in parenting was not examined, although such interactions may meaningfully influence outcomes. In addition, the study population was limited to mothers from a single city with a relatively traditional cultural context, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions or cultural groups. Therefore, conducting similar studies in cities with more diverse populations and cultural backgrounds is strongly recommended to achieve more comprehensive and generalizable results. Moreover, given the important role of parental self-efficacy in enhancing students' academic performance, school counselors and psychologists are encouraged to organize workshops and training seminars aimed at strengthening parental self-efficacy.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Hakim Sabzevri University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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