Correlates of Disciplinary Function in Secondary School Students: A case-control study

Aisan Ghaemian Oskouei*, Salman Abdi b

*a Department of Psychology, School of Social Sciences, Brunel University, London, United Kingdom
bResearch Development & Coordination Center, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

Abstract

This study was carried out to compare the individual and family characteristics of students- studying at high school level in East Azerbaijan, Iran- with their disciplinary function. Using multistage sampling method, we selected 372 and 338 low and high disciplinary students, respectively. According to Fisher’s exact test, the students disciplinary function was significantly related to: the educational level of their parents; students academic failure; and the students GPA. No significant difference was found between the students' height and their disciplinary function. Also, there was no relationship between parents' age and the students' disciplinary performance.

Keywords: disciplinary Function, students, academic failure, parents' education

1. Introduction

One of the main goals in the educational environment is following the discipline, which is considered as the most concern of school principals (Houghton, Wheldall, Jukes, & el al, 1990; Galloway & Rogers, 1994). Moreover, undisciplined behavior is considered as the first problem at schools due to being the major obstacle in achieving the educational goals (Armon, 2004). School discipline is a term combined with the specific culture and social rules of each society. Obviously, without taking into consideration the culture of the society, a clear knowledge of the exact effective factors on the students' discipline cannot be achieved. As a religious country, the Iranian society has specific disciplinary rules which are, to some extent, different from the disciplinary rules of the Western countries. Major disciplinary rules for students in Iran are: keeping polite and showing respect to the teachers and staff of the school; having appropriate behavior and cooperation with other students; being punctual; wearing appropriate clothes and shoes; not to bring cosmetics and valuables to the school; respecting the Islamic rules, namely, Hijab and doing religious duties (Ministry of Education of Iran, 2011).

Although rigid disciplinary rules govern Iran's schools, a review of several Iranian studies showed that consumption of drugs and alcohol, theft, vandalism (5%), aggression (13%), sexual deviation (9%), social deviation...
(27%) are common in Iran's schools (Serajzadeh, 2004). As a matter of fact, it is important to recognize and manage the factors affecting students' disciplinary function.

According to the psychologists, human behavior is affected by many factors (Kiesner & Kerr, 2004), and students disciplinary problems are no an exception. Previous reports showed that factors causing disciplinary problems are divided into five categories: those related to the students (Kumpulainen, 2008); family welfare (Kinsfogel, & Grych, 2004); those related to teachers (Wallace, 1994); institutional factors related to the atmosphere of schools, classes and school staff (Kiesner & Kerr, 2004; Haller, 1992); and disciplinary rules (Johnson, 2009).

Previous reports demonstrated that family income and father’s occupation have a huge impact on students’ behavior at school (Sekhavat, 2002). Another research indicated that drinking alcohol at school, as a type of undisciplined behavior, decreases students academic achievement (Goldschmidt, Richardson, Cornelius, et al, 2004; Balsa, Giuliano, French, 2011). According to another study, the demographic characters of parents are the most common predictors of children aggression in school (Nagin, & Trembly, 2001). Interactions of parents with their children are commonly associated with children’s academic functions (Vanderheyden, & Witt, 2000). The current study aimed at determining those factors affecting student’s disciplinary function.

2. Method

Using multi-stage sampling method we recruited 372 participants of low-disciplined schools. The sample was randomly selected from eight cities of East Azerbaijan Province (Iran) in 2010. The mean age of low-discipline students was 16.20 ±1.26 and high-discipline was 16.15±1.16 years old, ranged from 14-18 years.

2.1. Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria for subjects were: giving consent to participate in the study, obtaining disciplinary mark less than 17 (Maximum 20), and dissatisfaction of staff regarding the student’s performance. Additionally, the inclusion criteria for high-discipline students were: giving consent to participate in the study, disciplinary mark more than 19.5, and satisfaction of the school staffs about their performance.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Demographic properties questionnaire

This questionnaire contains questions regarding subject’s gender, age, birth order, GPA, parents’ educational level, self-report of the subject’s height in comparison to their classmates, and records of their academic failure.

2.3. Procedure

The following ethical issues were applied: subjects’ consent to participate in the study; confidentiality of the collected data; and no interference in both the case and control groups. All questionnaires were completed individually followed by self-report. Participants in the study did not receive any gift or money.

2.3. Data analysis

All data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 17). The Chi Squire test and Fisher’s exact test were used to determine the factors affecting the disciplinary performance of the students. Power values less than 0.05 were considered significant.

3. Results

In order to determine the relationship between the elements of the demographic properties, as seen in Table 1, we used frequency of independent variables in two groups of low and high discipline students.

According to Table 1, results of Chi-square, test used to compare the frequency of parents’ education, showed that there is a significant relationship between different educational level of the parents and students disciplinary function (P<0.01). In this regard, the frequency of highly educated parents was reported among students with high disciplinary function. Conversely, the frequency of low educated parents was associated with low disciplinary function of students. There was a significant difference in the frequency of GPA (namely, A: 17-20, B: 14-17 and C<14) between low and high discipline students (P<0.001). The GPA, A was more reported among high discipline students (64 out of 164). There was no significant difference between the two groups considering the following
variables: parents' age group (older than 45, between 40 and 45, and younger than 40 years), birth order and students' self-report regarding their height (short, approximately same, tall).

According to Fisher's exact test (Table 1), there was a significant difference in the frequency of academic failure between low and high disciplinary groups (P<0.001). According to this result, academic failure was one of the most important risk factors in low disciplinary function [OR (95%CI) = 2.5 (1.8-3.4)].

Table 1. Chi-square and Fisher's exact test of demographic properties between HDS and LDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>HDS N (%)</th>
<th>LDS N (%)</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational level of Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
<td>74(24.7)</td>
<td>64(21.9)</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td>138(46)</td>
<td>170(58.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td></td>
<td>88(29.3)</td>
<td>58(19.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' GPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 17</td>
<td></td>
<td>154(50.18)</td>
<td>64(22.1)</td>
<td>59.06</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 14 and 17</td>
<td></td>
<td>117(38.6)</td>
<td>148(51.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 14</td>
<td></td>
<td>32(10.6)</td>
<td>77(26.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents' age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger than 40 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td>108(36.5)</td>
<td>97(33.9)</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 40 and 45 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td>93(31.4)</td>
<td>97(33.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older than 45 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td>95(32.1)</td>
<td>92(32.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td></td>
<td>116(35.4)</td>
<td>127(37.7)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td></td>
<td>125(38.1)</td>
<td>128(38)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third and more</td>
<td></td>
<td>78(26.5)</td>
<td>82(24.3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived high in compare with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the classmates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shorter</td>
<td></td>
<td>35(10.3)</td>
<td>30(9.1)</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost the same</td>
<td></td>
<td>258(75.9)</td>
<td>245(74)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taller</td>
<td></td>
<td>47(13.8)</td>
<td>45(16.9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic failure records</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>88(27.2)</td>
<td>170(48.4)</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>235(72.8)</td>
<td>181(51.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HDS= High Disciplinary students; LDS= Low Disciplinary Students

4. Discussion

This study aimed at determining personal and family factors that influence students' disciplinary function. We showed that students from low educated families were accounted as low disciplined students. The result was in line with previous study carried out in Iran (Kaldi, & Rasouli, 2002) showing the relationship between parents’ educational level and students’ disciplinary performance. However, the finding was in contrast with Yahaya, Ramli, Hashim, et al (2009) regarding the same variables. We suggest that if parents modify their approach towards instructing children to learn social skills, it will enhance their children’s educational performance. This enhancement will help children to internalize the social rules both in the society and school. Moreover, when parents with high level of education face their children’s behavioral problems in critical periods, they deal with it through useful problem solving styles. The improvement results in modifying children’s behavior and encourages them to achieve the necessary social skills in order to enhance their social interactions (Mohammadi Kaji, & Kamkari, 2009; Muris, 2002).

According to Kaldi & Rasouli (2002), younger parents are better in teaching social skills to their children. However, findings of the present study demonstrate that parents' age was not a determinant factor considering students’ disciplinary functions. In this case, the parents' age cannot be considered as a significant determinant in relation to the students’ educational discipline. Moreover, our findings are in line with a previous study demonstrating that low-discipline students are ranked in low educational groups (Woods, & Wolke, 2004). It can be argued that disciplinary problems not only have negative impacts on the interaction between classmates, but also they deprive students from future opportunities. Basically, following disciplines is one of the most important priorities in teaching and learning fields and provides appropriate academic achievement.

Although birth order can cause specific personality characteristics, this is not consistent with our findings. According to the current research, there is no significant relationship between birth order and students' disciplinary
function. The result brings this question to the mind: Does birth order affect social behaviors that represent individuals' socialization?

Furthermore, another research showed that tall and masculine students are usually ranked as undisciplined (Yang, Kim, Kim, et al., 2006). However, our study showed that students self report regarding their height is not related to their disciplinary performance. This inconsistency probably comes from measurement criteria and different indicators in evaluation. To achieve more accurate results, further studies with objective measurable indicators are needed. We found that academic failure records, low GPA, and low educated parents were more likely to cause disciplinary dysfunctions. These indicators can be useful in developing behavioral interventions methods for students with disciplinary problems.

4.1. Conflict of interest
There is no conflict of interest.

4.2. Acknowledgement
We are indebted to all subjects in this study for their cooperation.

References