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## Anger in mothers of children with disabilities: effects of occupation and level of education

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### Abstract

In order to investigate anger in mothers of educable mentally retarded and slow learner children, based on their occupation and level of education, a total of 100 mothers completed the Multidimensional Anger Inventory (Siegel, 1986) and a demographic information questionnaire. Data were analyzed using two-way analysis of variance. Results showed a significant relationship between level of education with anger arousal and anger-in. More precisely, mothers with higher educational level showed lower anger arousal and anger-in. No significant differences were found between anger of mothers with different occupational status (housewife versus employed). Confirming the relationship between anger and level of education, the present research can be helpful in devising educational policies for mothers.

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*Keywords:* anger control, anger management, employment, education level, mentally retarded, slow learner;

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### 1. Introduction

Anger is a psychological phenomenon which plays a decisive role in personal and social life of individuals. According to Buss (1961), anger is an emotional state, aggression is a behaviour, and hostility is a distinct, stable, and negative tendency. Novaco (1994) considers anger as a mental and emotional state, which is accompanied by physiological arousal, cognitive conflict, and hostile outlook. Anger is a normal emotion; however, if the frequency, duration, and magnitude of anger passes the limit of adjustability, anger will become a behaviour problem.

Anger is a complicated phenomenon and various internal and external factors influence its development. Gender is an important variable in reaction to the anger. Males and females express their anger differently (Hatch & Forgays, 2001, Jack, 2001; Jones, Peacock & Christopher, 1992; Thomas, 2001; Yarcheski, Mahon & Yarcheski, 2002). Results from Thomas (1989) study, regarding gender differences in expressing anger, show that there is a significant difference between showing the signs of anger and lower level of education in males and females.

Various studies also showed that there is a relationship between tendency to experience anger and different factors such as health issues, low self-esteem, unemployment, educational problems, and interpersonal difficulties (Deffenbacher, 1992 & 1993; Deffenbacher, Eckhardt, Lyvch, Oetting & Kemper, 1996; Eckhardt & Deffenbacher, 1995; Feshbach, 1986, Quoted from Dahlen & Martin, 2005). Cultural issues within families (Wolf, 1991), being the only child, social isolation, and depression (Christmas, Wodarski & Smokowski, 1996) can also be considered as

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other influencing factors. There is a negative correlation between the level of education and aggression in parents; it means that the higher their education level is, less aggressively they behave (Saterland & Cooper, 1991).

Results of the last two decades of research show that parents' anger is related to their emotional traits, their physiological reactivity, impulsivity, negative attributions, stress, depression, childhood aggressiveness toward peers, and alcoholic parents (Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2007). At the ecosystem level, anger is related to different variables such as income, education level, and number of family members receiving social support, negative incidents of life, tension, and domestic violence (Smith Slep & O'Leary, 2007).

From social aspect, in many studies, the three key elements of socio-economic factors of income, employment, and education level, are important because of their connection with different variables. Studies show that anger is related to a lower level of socioeconomic status (Wolf, 1991). With any fluctuation in economic or social standing, individuals will face different situations, which affect their lives profoundly (Wen, Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2006). In hierarchical societies, people in the lower social class will feel intimidation, shame, and depression (Roy, 2004).

Anger is in close relation with mental health, and sometimes anger and aggression are considered elements of mental health. Studies show that mental disorders are related with lower social status, lower income, and lower level of education (Ecob & Smith, 1999). Studies Show that there is a positive correlation between women's mental health and their education level. Mental health in employed women is in direct correlation with their satisfaction with their employment benefits; the more satisfied they are, the healthier they would be. According to Matthews and Power (2001), Markus (1990), and Jackson (2000), employment creates potential benefits for mothers, which will end up in satisfaction from life and other aspect of mental health.

Ezazi (2001) in his study showed that socio-psychological elements of aggression, education level, income, employment, and personal health affects aggressive expression in families. Social pressures such as low income and unemployment make parents behave aggressively toward their children (Pakc & Collmer, 1975). An urban study in two different towns showed that child's mistreatment increases with the rate of unemployment. Few months after finding a new job, child's mistreatment stopped. It means that the pressure builds up during the time of unemployment and will be expressed after a while (Steinberg, Catalano & Dooly, 1981).

The main objective of the present research is to study the degree of anger in mothers with special needs children based on their education level and employment status. The following questions were considered in this study: 1) Is the level of anger in mothers with special needs children is different because of their education level? 2) Does anger level in employed mothers with special needs children differ from their homemaker counterparts?

## 2. Methodology

The present study utilized an Ex Post Facto design. The statistical population consists of all mothers in elementary schools in Tehran. The sample includes 100 mothers of educable MR and slow learner students of two private schools in Tehran.

### 2.1. Instrument

**The Multidimensional Anger Inventory** (Siegel, 1986): This inventory is a self-reported questionnaire with 38 questions, measuring general anger of mothers. Anger is a multidimensional emotion, and this inventory is developed to measure five basic factors:

- 1) Anger Arousal: The frequency, duration, and the intensity of angry reactions that the individual is usually experiencing
- 2) Range of anger-eliciting situations: It expresses the intensity of anger that the individual experiences in anger eliciting circumstances
- 3) Hostile outlook: It is an attitudinal component and expresses mistrustful, resentful, selfish, and destructive misbehaviors; those who suffer from it might consider many circumstances as threatening and pessimistic
- 4) Anger-out: expressing anger in the form of aggressive verbal or physical behaviours toward others or objects
- 5) Anger-in: a method through which individuals repress or inhibit their anger

Responses of participants will be graded based on a 5-degree Lickret scale. Psychological studies of the multidimensional anger inventory show that this questionnaire has a satisfactory degree of reliability and validity.

Siegel (1986) normalized this scale with a sample of 198 male and female students, and a sample of 288 male workers. The retest of these two samples, as an indicator of reliability, had a correlation of  $r=0.75$ , and the internal consistency calculated based on the Chronbach Alpha method was purported  $r=0.84$  and  $r=0.89$ . Besharat (2008) in the Persian version of this form, by using a sample of 180 students, reported Chronbach Alpha coefficient ranging from  $r=0.79$  to  $r=0.94$  for five dimensions of anger. In the study conducted by Zamani (2007), the reliability of multidimensional anger inventory, using Chronbach Alpha method was reported as  $\alpha=0.92$ .

The reliability of this inventory in the present study through method of Chronbach alpha was purported as  $r=0.85$  for anger arousal,  $r=0.82$  for anger eliciting situations,  $r=0.73$  for hostile outlook,  $r=0.54$  for anger in, and  $r=0.33$  for anger out.

### 3. Tables

In order to compare anger in participants, mothers were grouped in based on their level of education (High school diploma and less, Bachelor and above), and their employment status (employed and homemaker). The means and standard deviations of anger components for different shown in table number 1.

As one may observe, in table 1, employed mothers within the group of high school diploma holder and less, in average, scored higher than unemployed mothers in anger arousal, anger out, anger in, and hostile outlook. However, in the group with level of education of bachelor and above, mean scores of employed mothers in anger arousal, anger out, anger in, and anger eliciting situations are higher than the mean scores of unemployed mothers. We will discuss this issue further according to inferential statistics in this article. In addition, the mean scores of unemployed mothers are higher in all sub-tests except hostile outlook. As for the anger arousal, anger in and anger out, we noticed that the higher the level of education, the lower the range of scores is.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for Anger Components based on Education level and Employment Status

		Hs.Diploma & less			Bachelor & above			Total	
		Employed	Unemployed	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Employed	Unemployed
Anger Arousal	N	3	62	65	14	18	32	17	80
	M	49/66	38/30	38/83	32/42	34/05	34/03	36/29	37/45
	SD	10/21	9/71	9/95	9/37	8/33	8/67	11/18	9/50
Anger Eliciting Situations	N	3	59	62	13	18	31	16	77
	M	26	29/01	28/87	28/84	30/55	29/83	28/31	29/37
	SD	11/26	7	7/15	6/21	7/35	6/84	7/01	7/07
Hostile Outlook	N	4	61	65	13	18	31	17	79
	M	35/50	34/40	34/47	35/69	35/33	35/48	35/64	34/62
	SD	11/61	8/41	8/53	11/51	8/73	9/81	11/16	8/44
Anger Out	N	4	63	67	15	18	33	19	81
	M	12/75	12/06	12/10	11/06	12/50	11/84	11/42	12/16
	SD	4/11	2/52	2/60	2/43	2/45	2/51	2/81	2/50
Anger In	N	4/62	62	66	15	18	33	19	80
	M	21/25	18/98	19/12	17	17/83	17/45	17/89	18/72
	SD	2/98	3/96	3/93	4/53	3/18	3/81	4/54	3/81

Two-way analysis of variance was used to analyze the data (table 2). Results indicate that the interaction between the two variables of education level and employment status is not significant. For this reason, we continued studying the main effects. Findings of the main effects show a significant difference at the level of  $p<0.01$ , in the area of anger arousal for different levels of education. By comparing mean scores of the group with high school diploma

and less (38.83) and Bachelor and above (34.30), one might conclude that the higher the education, the lower the anger arousal is. In addition, analysis of variance shows that higher level of education has a significant effect on anger-in subcategory ( $F=4.93$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Average scores show that individuals with higher level of education (bachelor and higher 17.45) experience less anger-in comparing to the group with high school diploma and less (19.12). The results do not show any significant difference based on the level of education and employment status in subcategories of anger out, hostile outlook, and anger eliciting situations.

Table 2. Results of two-way analysis of variance

		Anger Arousal	Anger Eliciting Situations	Hostile Outlook	Anger Out	Anger In
<b>Education</b>	<b>F</b>	9.49	3.79	0.03	0.60	4.93
	<b>Sig</b>	0.00	0.37	0.84	0.43	0.02
<b>Employment</b>	<b>F</b>	2.49	0.91	0.06	0.21	0.34
	<b>Sig</b>	0.12	0.34	0.80	0.64	0.55
<b>Education *</b>	<b>F</b>	3.63	0.07	0.01	1.75	1.62
	<b>Sig</b>	0.06	0.79	0.89	0.18	0.20

#### 4. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to compare anger build up in mothers with different levels of education and employment status. Results of applying multidimensional anger inventory shows that in the subcategories of anger arousal and anger in, there is a significant difference between anger in mothers with different levels of education. However, in anger eliciting situations, Anger out, and Hostile Outlook subcategories, there is no significant difference based on employment status and level of education. Findings also indicates that homemaker mothers in all subcategories except hostile outlook experience higher level of anger. In addition, the higher the level of education in mothers, the lower their scores on anger arousal, anger in, and anger out would be. These findings are in accordance with the study conducted by Thomas (1989) regarding anger in males and females with lower level of education. Educated individuals can create larger social networks, and consequently will benefit from a better social support system. On the other hand, educated people are more successful in controlling their negative emotions that affects harmfully their mental and physical health. Education is an important factor to overcome the tension created by any anger-eliciting situation and can be considered as an adjusting factor. The depressing effect of having a mentally challenged child is probably the same for parents of children with disabilities, however, having a higher level of education will increase the resources and the strength of parents to surmount challenging situations, and enable them to adapt non-aggressive approaches. Mother's education, is an indicator of a positive family setting, optimal parental interactions, and less tension in the family (Menaghan & Parcell, 1991).

To explain the results of studies that show mothers with higher level of education are less angry than less educated mothers, one might use the theory of employment functions. According to this theory, employment has two functions: 1) the observable function, which is the financial benefits such as wage, and 2) unseen benefits, which refer to the fulfilment of psychological needs. People primarily work for the obvious benefit but gradually benefit from the concealed function of it. Therefore, it seems that unemployment deprive people from the observable and concealed benefits of the job and could cause some mental problems (Jahoda, 1982 quoted from Arizi, 2001). According to Matthews & Power (2001), Marcus (1990), and Jackson (2000), employment for mothers has some potential benefits which would offer satisfaction from life, and other mental health benefits. Employed mothers have better personal and family resources; they have a better social prestige comparing to homemakers, and being employed give them a better social support.

For future research, we recommend that, in addition to multidimensional anger inventory, other measures will be used; and using a larger sample, the data will be analyzed to compare the effects of different types of jobs as well. Finally, comparing anger in mothers of children with disabilities and normal counterparts could be helpful.

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