

Pathways and Practical Exploration of the Impact of Parental Psychological Control and Coping Styles on Life Satisfaction Among High School Students

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Abstract: To examine the impact of parental psychological control on high school students' life satisfaction and to test the mediating role of students' coping styles, this study surveyed first-year high school students (Class of 2024) at a high school in Tianjin using the Parental Psychological Control Scale, the Adolescent Coping Style Scale, and the Life Satisfaction Scale. The results revealed that: (1) Significant differences were found in dimensions of parental psychological control, coping styles, and life satisfaction across various demographic variables; (2) Parental psychological control negatively predicted students' life satisfaction; (3) Problem-focused coping styles negatively predicted life satisfaction, whereas emotion-focused coping styles positively predicted life satisfaction; (4) Both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles played mediating roles between parental psychological control and life satisfaction. The results show that parents' psychological control has a negative impact on the life satisfaction of high school students and regulates their life satisfaction through different coping styles of high school students.

Keywords: High school students; Parental psychological control; Coping styles; Life satisfaction

1. Introductions

Life satisfaction is a core component of psychological well-being (Huebner, 2004). It refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their life status and quality based on personal standards (Sun Ying & Tao Fangbiao, 2005). For high school students, the degree of satisfaction with

their lives significantly affects their future academic achievement, parent-child relationships, and overall personal development (Luo Xuefeng & Mu Shoukuan, 2017; Zhao Xiaoyun, Zhang Linya & Miao Hualing, 2018). Parenting style is one of the most important factors in family education and plays a crucial role in shaping the family environment (Sun Jing, Li



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Fengjuan & He Jian, 2018). Parental psychological control refers to parenting behaviors in which parents attempt to manipulate their children through emotional strategies, such as encouraging dependency or suppressing individuation, ultimately undermining the development of the child's autonomy (Wang et al., 2007). Such control hinders adolescents' satisfaction of their autonomy needs, often leading to dissatisfaction and conflict in the parent-child relationship, thereby reducing life satisfaction. Coping styles are the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals use when facing stressful situations or events. Research shows that coping styles are influenced by parenting practices: excessive interference, rejection, or denial by parents may hinder the development of effective coping mechanisms and instead encourage maladaptive responses (Yang Hairong, Shi Guoxing & Cui Chunhua, 2005). This study argues that when faced with parental authority, adaptive coping styles may help improve life satisfaction, while maladaptive coping styles—especially when shaped by excessive parental psychological control—can lead to unresolved issues that diminish adolescents' satisfaction with life.

2. Research Subjects and Methods

2.1 Research Subjects

The study surveyed first-year high school students who enrolled in 2024. A total of 652 students were selected, and questionnaires were distributed by class unit. After data cleaning, 634 valid questionnaires were collected, yielding an effective response rate of 97.2%.

2.2 Research Instruments and Methods

2.2.1 Instruments

2.2.1.1 Parental Psychological Control Scale

This study used the Psychological Control Subscale from the Parental Control Questionnaire developed by Wang et al. The subscale consists of 18 items, with the average score representing the degree of psychological control perceived by the student—the higher the score, the greater the perceived psychological control. In this study, the internal consistency coefficient was 0.932.

2.2.1.2 Coping Style Scale

The Coping Style Scale for High School Students was adopted, which contains 36 items divided into two subscales. The scale does not provide a total score; instead, higher scores on each factor indicate a greater use of the corresponding coping strategy. In this study,

the internal consistency coefficient was 0.946.

2.2.1.3 Life Satisfaction Scale for Adolescents

This scale measures the overall life satisfaction of high school students and consists of 36 items. Higher total scores reflect a higher level of life satisfaction. In this study, the internal consistency coefficient was 0.914.

2.2.2 Data Analysis

SPSS 22.0 for Mac was used for statistical analysis, including difference testing and mediation effect analysis based on the questionnaire data.

3. Research Results

3.1 Characteristics and Differences of Variables

In terms of coping styles among high school students, significant gender differences were found in the rational explanation factor ($t = 2.388$, $p < 0.05$), fantasy-denial factor ($t = -2.043$, $p < 0.05$), academic satisfaction factor ($t = 3.996$, $p < 0.05$), and the total score of life satisfaction ($t = 2.541$, $p < 0.05$). Male students demonstrated significantly stronger abilities in rational explanation of specific events than female students, while female students scored significantly higher in the fantasy-denial factor in emotional responses to specific situations. In the comparison between only children and non-only children, only school satisfaction showed a significant difference, with only children reporting significantly higher school satisfaction than non-only children ($t = 2.231$, $p < 0.05$). Significant differences were found based on residential location in the emotion-focused coping dimension and its four sub-factors ($F = 5.380$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 2.821$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 3.244$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 2.801$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 5.747$, $p < 0.05$). Significant differences were also found in maternal psychological control and maternal love withdrawal based on residential location ($F = 3.852$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 2.777$, $p < 0.05$). No significant differences were observed in other variables or their factors based on residential location. Students' coping styles were influenced by the father's level of education. Significant differences were found in the problem-solving factor of coping styles ($F = 3.065$, $p < 0.05$) and the emotion-focused coping dimension including endurance, avoidance, and fantasy-denial factors ($F = 4.182$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 3.538$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 3.339$, $p < 0.05$; $F = 2.983$, $p < 0.05$). Mother's level of education did not show significant differences in any of the three main variables or their sub-factors.

3.2 The Mediating Mechanism of Coping Styles Between Parental Psychological Control and Life Satisfaction

Parental psychological control, coping styles, and life satisfaction were all significantly correlated.

Both father's and mother's psychological control had a significant impact on high school students' life satisfaction, and both problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping played mediating roles in this relationship.

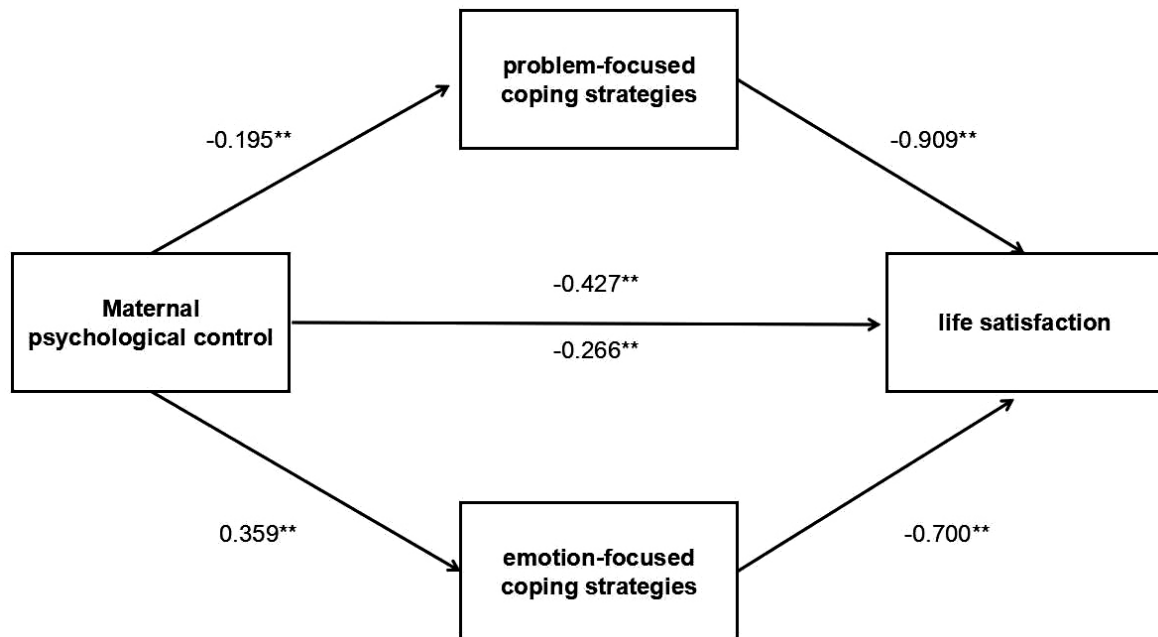


Figure 1.

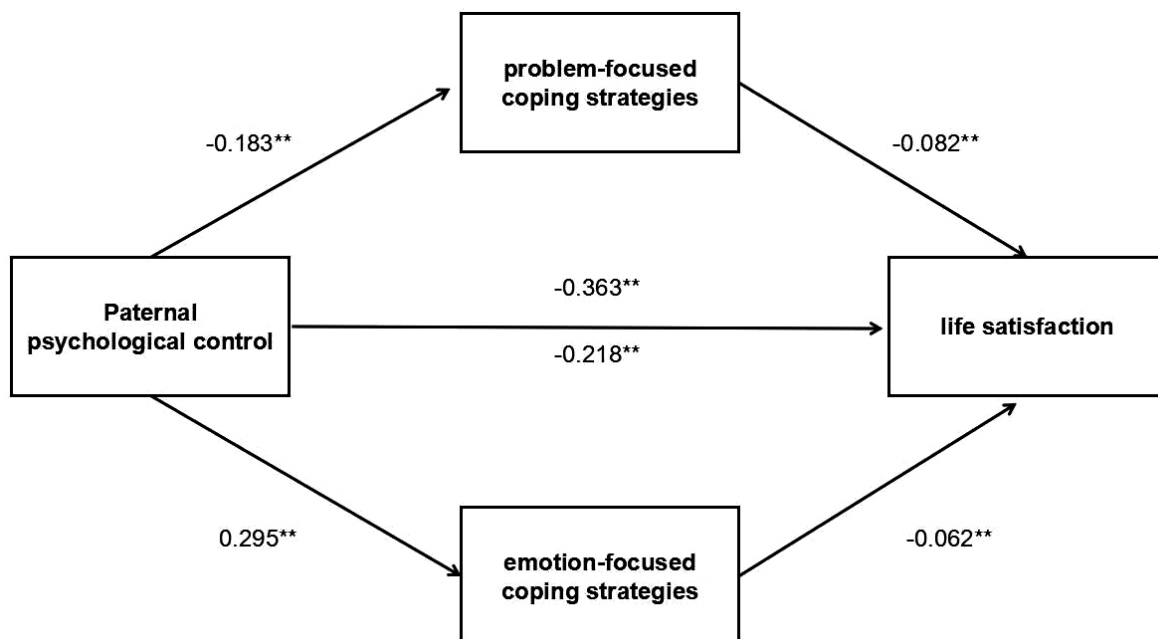


Figure 2.

According to the data presented in **Figure 1**, maternal psychological control had a significant overall predictive effect on adolescents' life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.427$, $p < 0.05$) and also a significant direct predictive

effect ($\beta = -0.266$, $p < 0.05$). Maternal psychological control significantly negatively predicted the use of problem-focused coping strategies ($\beta = -0.195$, $p < 0.05$), and positively predicted the use of emotion-

focused coping strategies ($\beta = 0.359$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, problem-focused coping significantly negatively predicted students' life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.909$, $p < 0.05$), and emotion-focused coping also significantly negatively predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.700$, $p < 0.05$).

According to the data presented in **Figure 2**, paternal psychological control also showed a significant overall predictive effect on adolescents' life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.363$, $p < 0.05$) as well as a significant direct effect ($\beta = -0.218$, $p < 0.05$). Paternal psychological control significantly negatively predicted the use of problem-focused coping strategies ($\beta = -0.183$, $p < 0.05$), and positively predicted the use of emotion-focused coping strategies ($\beta = 0.259$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, problem-focused coping significantly negatively predicted students' life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.082$, $p < 0.05$), and emotion-focused coping also significantly negatively predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.062$, $p < 0.05$).

The direct effect of maternal psychological control on life satisfaction, as well as the mediating effects of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping between maternal psychological control and life satisfaction, were all significant. Using 5,000 bootstrap resamples, the 95% confidence intervals for these mediation effects did not include zero, indicating statistical significance. The total indirect effect (0.161) accounted for 37.7% of the total effect (0.427), while the direct effect accounted for 62.3%. Similarly, the direct effect of paternal psychological control on life satisfaction and the mediating effects of both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles were also statistically significant, with their 95% bootstrap confidence intervals excluding zero. The total indirect effect (0.145) accounted for 39.9% of the total effect (0.363), while the direct effect accounted for 60.1%.

4. Discussion

4.1 Discussion on Variable Differences

Significant gender differences were found in the dimensions of coping styles among high school students. Male students in the high school stage tend to focus more on problem-solving, approaching situations from a more rational perspective, and are better at giving reasonable explanations for specific events, showing significantly stronger performance than female students in this aspect. In contrast, female

students place more emphasis on emotional guidance, with significantly higher scores in the fantasy-denial factor of emotional responses. At this stage, academic achievement is the main task for students. Female students tend to be more composed and have clearer academic goals, leading to higher academic expectations and, consequently, greater academic pressure and lower life satisfaction compared to their male peers. Parental attention also plays a role. In terms of academic satisfaction, only children scored significantly higher than non-only children, possibly because non-only children may feel neglected when facing high academic stress. Regarding residential areas, parents from non-urban areas tend to be stricter in discipline, often using guilt-inducing tactics or "moral coercion" to make children acknowledge their parents' efforts. In addition, parents' educational backgrounds shape their child-rearing concepts, which in turn positively correlate with children's coping styles and perceptions of parenting.

4.2 Discussion on Mediation Mechanism and Practical Strategies

Parental psychological control is mainly reflected in the way parents guide children through guilt-inducing behaviors in an effort to better support their growth. However, data analysis shows that such psychological control tends to negatively impact students' satisfaction with their academic and daily lives. Adolescents in this stage experience a growing sense of self-awareness and believe they are capable of managing their lives independently. Excessive parental control can trigger self-doubt and result in negative emotional impacts on their learning and life satisfaction. The results indicate that students' coping styles significantly influence their evaluation of life satisfaction. Thus, both parents and educators should guide students toward developing coping strategies that are not overly rational or problem-focused. For students, it is important to be more emotionally aware, prioritize their emotional well-being, and reduce overly adult-like coping patterns. A balance that allows space for emotional expression and psychological adjustment should be encouraged.

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