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Comparison of the Effectiveness of Positive Youth Development Program Training and Cognitive-Social Problem-Solving Skills Training on Parent-Adolescent Conflict in Female Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study was conducted to compare the effectiveness of Positive Youth Development (PYD) program training and cognitive-social problem-solving skills training on parent-adolescent conflict in female students.

Methods: This applied study employed a quasi-experimental design with pretest, posttest, and follow-up and a control group. The statistical population comprised all female second-secondary students of Qaemshahr in the 2022-2023 academic year. Using purposive sampling and based on questionnaire scores, 45 eligible students were selected and randomly assigned to three groups of 15 (two experimental groups and one control group). The first group received PYD program training and the second group received cognitive-social problem-solving skills training over twelve two-hour sessions, while the control group received no intervention. Data were collected using the Straus Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (1990) and analyzed with repeated-measures analysis of variance and the Bonferroni post-hoc test in SPSS version 28.

Results: The main effect of group, the main effect of time, and the time × group interaction effect were significant for parent-adolescent conflict and its components (reasoning, verbal aggression, and violence) ($p < .001$). Both experimental interventions, compared with the control group, led to a significant reduction in parent-adolescent conflict, and a significant difference was also found between the two experimental groups; the PYD program produced a 3.978-point greater reduction in parent-adolescent conflict than the cognitive-social problem-solving skills training. Differences in adjusted means across the pretest, posttest, and follow-up stages were significant, and the effect of the interventions persisted at follow-up.

Conclusions: Both interventions were effective in reducing parent-adolescent conflict among female students, but PYD program training was more effective. Therefore, this program can be used as an appropriate educational-therapeutic framework for reducing parent-adolescent conflict in female students.

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Introduction

Adolescence is an important transitional period accompanied by major physical, cognitive, moral, and social changes, during which the individual often feels intense excitement and is caught between conflicting demands (Kent et al., 2023). The developments of this period substantially affect adolescents' functioning in various intrapersonal and interpersonal domains (Alipour Sabet Rai & Jadidi, 2021). In their school lives, adolescents face a range of challenges, obstacles, and pressures specific to this period, including poor grades, stress, threats to self-confidence resulting from performance, and reduced motivation (Xu & Wang, 2023). Although abstract and formal cognitive functions emerge in adolescence and the capacity for thinking becomes more complex, abstract, and logical, the efficiency of cognitive processes and impulse control remain immature (Son et al., 2024). Under the influence of these changes, adolescents at these ages often experience challenges and disagreements with their parents. The quality of parent-child interaction has a major effect on their psychological state, and conflict in this area increases the risk of behavioral and emotional problems in children (Isik Akin et al., 2024).

Parent-child conflict is an issue that can affect children's social problems. In this regard, children's academic problems are the product of poor-quality family interactions, a lack of parental emotional support, and conflict between parents and children (Liu et al., 2024). Parent-child conflict in the family is directly associated with angry and depressed mood, anxiety, and academic problems in adolescents (Leung, 2021). There is a bidirectional relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and adolescents' negative emotions and behavioral and academic problems, meaning that increased conflict leads to more negative emotions. Rezaei et al. (2021) showed that parent-child conflicts and family process problems, with an emphasis on the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties, have the power to explain adolescents' behavioral problems, and that reducing them can provide a basis for improving adolescents' behavioral problems. One of the most important concerns is understanding how students try to cope with academic and school problems (Ahmadpour et al., 2020). Many studies have shown a strong relationship between high levels of academic achievement and components of task engagement. Chen et al. (2024) showed in their study that learners' level of task engagement has a direct and positive effect on academic achievement (Van Gelder et al., 2022). Higher levels of engagement are correlated with better learning and higher levels of achievement (Luo & Wang, 2023). Researchers are interested in

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extending the concept of task engagement because they believe that this construct is an important predictor of learners' academic success. Thus, it can be said that when learners are actively engaged in activities through their thoughts, feelings, and actions, this increases their success and prevents them from dropping out (Pavlova, 2020).

Today, one of the most important concerns of educational systems is academic success, and these systems are successful when learners are in a favorable academic situation (Alazemi et al., 2023). Various theoretical models have been proposed to explain and treat adolescents' academic problems, including the forgiveness model, acceptance and commitment therapy, and pharmacotherapy (Xu & Wang, 2023). Each of these treatments has shortcomings in terms of treatment length and the costs they impose on students. In addition, the follow-up period in these trainings was not permanent or long-term (Nurjamin, 2023). Given the relationship between academic problems and deficits in cognitive, social, and emotional skills, cognitive-social problem-solving skills training can be an appropriate way to reduce these harms and offers considerable help in identifying and finding appropriate solutions in planning (Chen et al., 2024). In general, it can be concluded that all existing studies on cognitive-social problem-solving training, based on the results of the research conducted, have high effectiveness in improving academic performance and reducing behavioral problems. In this regard, Maureen (2017) showed in a study that cognitive-social problem-solving training strengthens students' self-efficacy and self-awareness, and that they learn to find multiple answers to their questions and, among the available answers, to select and implement the best preferred solution in social interactions. The results of Özkan and Aksoy (2017) showed that the development of children's communication skills resulting from interpersonal problem-solving skills training leads to a positive orientation toward the self and an increase in positive self-perception, such that both socialization and self-perception increase in a positive direction. Teaching problem-solving skills provides students with the conditions for adopting a logical strategy for facing difficult situations in school and society (Shokouhi Yekta et al., 2015; Hu et al., 2017; Fusaro & Smith, 2018).

Despite the increasing attention paid to adolescents, there is still a considerable lack of information about interventions that can affect academic conditions and influence this process and its outcomes (Qu et al., 2021). Many students encounter problematic educational and social conditions in home, classroom, and community environments during their studies, which can lead to failure at school

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and cause weakness and incapacity in their future lives (Ghasemi, 2021). In this context, the Positive Youth Development perspective emphasizes contexts and environments such as home, school, and community and regards them as developmental assets. Accordingly, in recent years, with the strengthening of positive psychology, the focus on the positive aspects of adolescent development has increased (Yaghoubi & Nasaei Moghadam, 2019). Some studies have examined the effect of Positive Youth Development programs on communication skills, and their results show that such programs are effective in improving communication skills and reducing aggression, academic and social adjustment, the ability to build structured relationships during conflict, improving self-confidence, reducing anxiety in interaction, increasing the willingness to seek social support, and reducing aggressive behaviors. Worker et al. (2019), in a model of the Positive Youth Development program, found that participants in the program reported positive experiences and improvements in indicators of competence, confidence, connection, caring, character, and contribution. Zhu and Shek (2020), in a study of high school students, showed that the Positive Youth Development program can increase psychological competencies, the perception of positive personality traits and identity, and reduce negative mood. Catalano et al. (2019) also showed that the Positive Youth Development program can increase adolescents' competence and be effective in their autonomy development. The study by Ciocanel et al. (2017) showed that the Positive Youth Development program can promote adolescents' psychological competencies.

Each of these two treatments has been examined alone for academic problems and their effectiveness, but no study has been conducted to determine which of the two (Positive Youth Development program training or cognitive-social problem-solving skills training) is more effective. It is therefore necessary to compare different treatment methods so that the most effective and appropriate intervention can be identified. As noted, there is considerable conceptual continuity between these two treatments, especially in that both emphasize the importance of awareness and problem solving (Khajeh et al., 2023). On the other hand, although these two treatments are similar in some respects, they differ in their use of therapeutic techniques and in their focus on the priority of interpersonal versus intrapersonal change, which led the researcher to compare two methods of improving adolescents' problems, Positive Youth Development program training and cognitive-social problem-solving skills training. Previous research on the effectiveness of Positive Youth Development program training and cognitive-social problem-

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solving skills training has reported effects on physical and mental health, aggression, positive emotional responses, and stress reduction, as well as on well-being as one of the variables. However, none of these studies has examined and analyzed the effectiveness of these two treatments on the different dimensions of parent-adolescent conflict, attitudes toward problem solving, and task engagement in female students. Moreover, despite the many studies on the types of treatments effective in improving psychological problems resulting from parent-child conflict, many aspects remain unknown. Therefore, the need for psychological interventions to empower adolescent girls is quite evident. An appropriate treatment program in this area can improve the quality of these individuals' academic lives. The present study was therefore conducted to fill the existing gap. Accordingly, this study sought to answer the question of whether there is a difference between the effectiveness of Positive Youth Development program training and cognitive-social problem-solving skills training on parent-adolescent conflict in female students.

Material and Methods

Research Type and Design

The present study is applied research and, in terms of method, is quasi-experimental with a pretest, posttest, and follow-up design with a control group. In this design, the independent variable comprised Positive Youth Development program training and cognitive-social problem-solving skills training, and the dependent variable was parent-adolescent conflict in female students. Three groups (two experimental groups and one control group) were measured on three occasions (pretest, posttest, and follow-up), and participants were assigned to the groups at random.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

The statistical population of this study comprised all female second-secondary students of Qaemshahr in the 2022-2023 academic year. The sample size was calculated with G*Power software, version 3.1; in this study, a power of 90% and a confidence level of 95% were adopted, and the alpha and beta error levels were set at .05 and .10, respectively. The number of variables for analysis and the number of groups were set at 3 and 3, respectively, according to the nature of the design, and the required total sample size was finally calculated as 45. From among the female second-secondary students, 45 individuals who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected as the sample through non-random purposive sampling, based on their pretest scores on

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the relevant questionnaire. The selected individuals were then assigned by simple random allocation to three groups of 15 (two experimental groups and one control group); the first group received Positive Youth Development program training, the second group received cognitive-social problem-solving skills training, and the control group was placed on a waiting list.

The inclusion criteria were being a female second-secondary student, giving informed consent to participate in the treatment program, not receiving individual counseling services concurrently with the study, and obtaining the cutoff score on the Parent-Adolescent Conflict Questionnaire. The exclusion criteria were missing more than two sessions, taking psychiatric medication, and concurrent attendance at individual or group psychotherapy sessions in counseling centers. Before the intervention began, all participants were informed about the aims and general course of the study, their questions were answered, and the intervention began after written consent was obtained.

Instruments

Straus Parent-Child Conflict Questionnaire (1990): In this study, the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale was used to measure parents' conflict with their children. This scale was developed by Straus in 1990 and is applicable to individuals under 18 years of age. The scale, with 15 items, was designed to measure three conflict-resolution tactics among family members, namely reasoning, verbal aggression, and violence, and its responses are scored on a six-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 5 (more than once a month). Scale scores fall into three ranges: a score of 1 to 15 is low (weak conflict), a score of 16 to 45 is moderate, and a score above 46 is high. Straus evaluated the reliability and validity of this scale on 2,143 American couples and reported a Cronbach's alpha of at least .78 for the scale. In Iran, the reliability of this scale was found to be .84 by the Cronbach's alpha method in the study by Hosseinpanahi and Goodarzi.

Procedure

To conduct the study, the necessary permission was obtained from the university and the vice-chancellery for research. For the theoretical framework, the views and theories of experts were reviewed by consulting various books, articles, and studies; in the field phase, after the instruments and participants were selected, preliminary explanations about the type and method of completing the tests were given individually. After the questionnaires were completed and it was determined how many students had scored above the cutoff on the Parent-Adolescent Conflict Questionnaire,

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these individuals entered the second stage of the study, and this process continued until the required sample size was reached. Both the experimental and control groups were measured three times (pretest, posttest, and follow-up) separately. The first measurement was made before the intervention, the second immediately after the intervention, and the third, for follow-up, two months after the intervention. During this period, the control group continued its normal routine. The first experimental group was trained based on the concepts of Dutrevich (2015), Shek and Wu (2016), and Flay and Allred (2010), and the second experimental group was trained based on the protocol of Chang (2004), each in 12 two-hour sessions, two sessions per week. A summary of the sessions of the two interventions is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Summary of the Cognitive-Social Problem-Solving Skills Training Sessions Program (Chang, 2004)

Session	Content
Session 1	Introductions and building rapport with group members, familiarization with the program's goals, grouping and presentation of group rules, and agreement with participants to attend the sessions.
Session 2	Introduction to problems and problem solving; familiarization with everyday problems and difficulties, acceptance that experiencing problems is a natural part of life, and belief in the effectiveness of the problem-solving framework.
Session 3	Positive problem orientation; familiarization with automatic thoughts and the ability to minimize avoidant or impulsive reactions.
Session 4	Recognizing everyday problems and difficulties; strengthening optimism and fostering constructive thinking.
Session 5	Self-efficacy beliefs; strengthening positive self-efficacy beliefs in orienting to problems.
Session 6	Changing attitudes toward the problem; increasing the individual's capacity to reduce impulsive and avoidant reactions.
Session 7	Training in problem definition and precise formulation; gathering information, objectively defining the problem, and distinguishing facts from assumptions.
Session 8	Training in generating alternative solutions; producing diverse solutions through brainstorming and developing adaptive solutions.
Session 9	Training in decision making; evaluating solutions and their consequences and choosing the best solution through cost-benefit analysis.
Session 10	Training in solution implementation and verification; carrying out the solution, monitoring the results, judging its effects, and troubleshooting.
Session 11	Practicing the problem-solving steps; presenting a worksheet of problematic situations, identifying and defining the problem, and choosing the most appropriate course of action.
Session 12	Reviewing the techniques and steps of the previous sessions and evaluating the implementation of the steps through role-playing.

Table 2. Content of the Positive Youth Development Training Program (Adapted From Dutrevich, 2015; Shek & Wu, 2016; Flay & Allred, 2010)

Session	Goals and Activities
1	Familiarization with the program; definition of adolescence and puberty, description of the characteristics and behavioral and cognitive changes of adolescence, introduction of the Positive Youth Development theory and program, and establishing rules.
2	Training in socialization; definition of socialization and its goals and stages, the factors influencing it, the role of the family, the educational system, peers, and the media, and citizenship rights and duties.

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Session	Goals and Activities
3	Training in spiritual skills; the existential dimensions of human beings, spiritual self-awareness, the concept of spirituality and religion, the meaning of life, and training in problem-solving skills with a spiritual approach.
4	Training in creative thinking skills; definition of thinking and its types, creativity and its elements, the stages of creative thinking, and carrying out creative activities.
5	Training in critical thinking skills; definition of critical thinking, its principles, stages, and ways of strengthening and applying it.
6	Training in physical self-care; definition of health, the components of health, and training in promoting it in personal life.
7	Training in empathy skills; the concept of empathy, its application and common mistakes, influencing factors, the stages of empathy, and its difference from sympathy.
8	Training in intimacy and planning skills; reciprocal behavior and roles, the concept of strokes and their types, and practical training in study planning.
9	Training in effective communication skills; definition, goals, and components of communication, barriers to communication, methods of coping with disagreement, win-win techniques, active listening, and assertive behavior in situations of anger.
10	Training in techniques for increasing self-esteem; definition of self-esteem, its sources and influencing factors, and practical strategies for increasing it.
11	Training in self-regulation skills; aspects of self-regulation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and the concept and strategies of emotion regulation.
12	Training in self-efficacy skills; definition, sources, types, and factors influencing self-efficacy, and techniques for increasing it.

To analyze the data, the assumptions of repeated-measures analysis of variance were first examined. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to examine the normality of the data distribution, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, and Mauchly's test of sphericity to examine the equality of the covariances of scores across the different stages. Repeated-measures analysis of variance was used to analyze the data, and the Bonferroni post-hoc test was used to reveal differences between groups. The above tests were performed with SPSS version 28.

Results

The results of the demographic analysis showed that, of the 45 participating students, 15 (33.3%) were in the control group, 15 (33.3%) were in the cognitive-social problem-solving skills training group, and 15 (33.3%) were in the Positive Youth Development program training group. By age, 6 students (13.3%) were 14 years old, 8 (17.8%) were 15, 12 (26.7%) were 16, 10 (22.2%) were 17, and 9 (20.0%) were 18. In addition, 15 students (33.3%) were in tenth grade, 17 (37.8%) in eleventh grade, and 13 (28.9%) in twelfth grade. Descriptive information on the parent-adolescent conflict variable and its components at the three measurement occasions, by group, is presented in Table 3.

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Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Its Components at the Three Measurement Occasions, by Group

Variable	Group	Pretest M	Posttest M	Follow-up M	Pretest SD	Posttest SD	Follow-up SD
Parent-adolescent conflict	Control	28.20	28.06	28.46	4.88	5.06	4.83
	Problem solving	27.80	21.80	24.66	4.75	4.09	4.36
	Positive youth development	27.20	15.06	15.06	4.87	3.57	3.53
Reasoning	Control	9.13	9.00	9.33	1.95	1.77	1.87
	Problem solving	9.20	7.13	8.20	1.65	1.40	1.82
	Positive youth development	9.00	5.06	6.46	1.73	1.38	1.18
Verbal aggression	Control	9.53	9.60	9.53	1.64	1.63	1.50
	Problem solving	9.20	7.20	8.33	1.82	1.56	1.63
	Positive youth development	9.13	5.00	6.80	1.68	1.13	1.32
Violence	Control	9.53	9.46	9.60	1.72	1.80	1.72
	Problem solving	9.40	7.06	8.13	1.45	1.33	1.40
	Positive youth development	9.06	5.00	6.80	1.57	1.25	1.20

As can be seen in Table 3, in the two experimental groups the mean scores of parent-adolescent conflicts and its components decreased from pretest to posttest and were partly maintained at follow-up, whereas no noticeable change occurred in the control group. The greatest reduction was observed in the Positive Youth Development program training group.

The results of the repeated-measures analysis of variance for the main effects of group and time and the time × group interaction effect on parent-adolescent conflict and its components are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Repeated-Measures Analysis of Variance for the Main and Interaction Effects on Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Its Components

Variable	Source of variation	Mean square	*F*	*df*	Significance level	Effect size	Power
Parent-adolescent conflict	Group effect	628.096	10.704	2	< .001	.338	1.00
	Time effect	426.846	575.447	1.960	< .001	.932	1.00
	Time × group interaction	95.559	112.472	3.288	< .001	.843	1.00
Reasoning	Group effect	60.563	7.922	2	< .001	.274	1.00
	Time effect	54.928	206.241	1.716	< .001	.831	1.00
	Time × group interaction	16.852	63.275	3.433	< .001	.751	1.00
Verbal aggression	Group effect	74.763	10.989	2	< .001	.344	1.00
	Time effect	48.586	179.091	1.896	< .001	.810	1.00
	Time × group interaction	17.662	65.103	3.791	< .001	.756	1.00
Violence	Group effect	74.785	12.035	2	< .001	.364	1.00
	Time effect	57.839	158.584	1.811	< .001	.791	1.00
	Time × group interaction	16.822	46.202	3.621	< .001	.688	1.00

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As can be seen in Table 4, for parent-adolescent conflict and its components the main effect of time is significant ($p < .001$), which indicates a significant difference among the pretest, posttest, and follow-up stages. The main effect of group is also significant ($p < .001$), and the time-by-group interaction is significant as well ($p < .001$). The effect sizes show that 33.8% of the variation in parent-adolescent conflict is attributable to group membership, 93.2% to changes over time, and 84.3% to the time × group interaction (changes over time in at least one of the group levels). The research hypothesis is therefore supported: there is a difference between the effectiveness of the two interventions on parent-adolescent conflict in female students. To examine the pairwise differences between group means, the adjusted means (Table 5) and the Bonferroni post-hoc test (Table 6) were used.

Table 5. Adjusted Means of Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Its Components in the Study Groups

Variable	Control	Problem-solving skills training	Positive youth development training
Parent-adolescent conflict	28.244	24.756	20.778
Reasoning	9.156	8.178	6.844
Verbal aggression	9.556	8.244	6.978
Violence	9.533	8.200	6.956

Table 6. Results of the Bonferroni Test on the Adjusted Means of Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Its Components in the Study Groups

Variable	Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean difference (I − J)	Significance level
Parent-adolescent conflict	Control	Problem-solving skills training	3.489	.036
	Control	Positive youth development training	7.467	.001
	Problem-solving skills training	Positive youth development training	3.978	.018
Reasoning	Control	Problem-solving skills training	0.978	.048
	Control	Positive youth development training	2.311	.001
	Problem-solving skills training	Positive youth development training	1.333	.027
Verbal aggression	Control	Problem-solving skills training	1.311	.022
	Control	Positive youth development training	2.578	.001
	Problem-solving skills training	Positive youth development training	1.267	.026
Violence	Control	Problem-solving skills training	1.333	.015
	Control	Positive youth development training	2.578	.001
	Problem-solving skills training	Positive youth development training	1.244	.023

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As can be seen in Table 6, there is a significant difference between each of the two experimental groups (cognitive-social problem-solving skills training and Positive Youth Development training) and the control group ($p < .05$), meaning that both interventions reduced parent-adolescent conflict. There is also a significant difference between the two experimental groups ($p < .05$), and the Positive Youth Development program produced a reduction in parent-adolescent conflict that was 3.978 points greater than that of cognitive-social problem-solving skills training. This pattern was repeated for the components of reasoning, verbal aggression, and violence; the Positive Youth Development program produced reductions that were greater than those of cognitive-social problem-solving skills training by 1.333, 1.267, and 1.244 points in these components, respectively.

Next, to examine differences in parent-adolescent conflict and its components across the three assessment stages, the adjusted means (Table 7) and the Bonferroni post-hoc test on them (Table 8) are presented.

Table 7. Adjusted Means of Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Its Components at the Study Stages

Variable	Pretest	Posttest	Follow-up
Parent-adolescent conflict	27.733	21.644	24.40
Reasoning	9.111	7.067	8.00
Verbal aggression	9.289	7.267	8.222
Violence	9.333	7.178	8.178

Table 8. Results of the Bonferroni Test on the Adjusted Means of Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Its Components at the Assessment Stages

Variable	Baseline stage	Comparison stage	Mean difference	Significance level
Parent-adolescent conflict	Pretest	Posttest	6.089	.001
	Pretest	Follow-up	3.333	.001
	Posttest	Follow-up	2.756	.001
Reasoning	Pretest	Posttest	2.044	.001
	Pretest	Follow-up	1.111	.001
	Posttest	Follow-up	0.933	.001
Verbal aggression	Pretest	Posttest	2.022	.001
	Pretest	Follow-up	1.067	.001
	Posttest	Follow-up	0.956	.001
Violence	Pretest	Posttest	2.156	.001
	Pretest	Follow-up	1.156	.001
	Posttest	Follow-up	1.00	.001

As shown in Table 8, for parent-adolescent conflict and the components of reasoning, verbal aggression, and violence, the difference between pretest and posttest is significant ($p < .001$), and the difference between posttest and follow-up is also significant ($p < .001$). Judging from the mean

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differences, scores decreased from pretest to posttest and rose slightly at follow-up; nevertheless, the follow-up mean remains significantly lower than the pretest mean, indicating that the effect of the interventions was partly sustained over time.

Discussion

The present study aimed to compare the effectiveness of Positive Youth Development program training and cognitive-social problem-solving skills training on parent-adolescent conflict in female students. The results showed that both interventions, compared with the control group, led to a significant reduction in parent-adolescent conflict and its components, and that there was also a significant difference between the two experimental groups, such that Positive Youth Development program training was more effective than cognitive-social problem-solving skills training in reducing parent-adolescent conflict.

The results showed that Positive Youth Development program training was effective on parent-adolescent conflict in female students. This finding is consistent with research evidence; for example, Ebrahimi et al. (2023), in a randomized controlled trial with female students, showed a considerable reduction in overall aggression, physical aggression, anger, and hostility after the intervention, which indicates that the program strengthens emotion regulation that is beneficial for family conflicts. This finding is consistent with the broader evidence that Positive Youth Development programs, by promoting alternative-thinking strategies and emphasizing comprehensive social skills, reduce academic maladjustment and increase positive behaviors, which is consistent with a reduced propensity for conflict (Alamo Muñoz et al., 2024). However, some studies have highlighted limitations or heterogeneous effects in specific subgroups and have suggested that the program may not address all dimensions of conflict uniformly.

In explaining this finding, it can be said that the Positive Youth Development program effectively reduces parent-adolescent conflict by strengthening female students' inherent strengths and competencies, such as self-confidence, emotion regulation, and interpersonal skills. Through structured sessions focused on recognizing personal abilities, decision making, and the formation of a positive identity, adolescent girls gain a stronger sense of self-efficacy, which enables them to handle family disagreements constructively rather than reactively. This internal empowerment shifts interactions from confrontational to collaborative patterns, as girls learn to express their

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needs assertively and to manage emotions such as anger, and the escalation of household disputes is consequently reduced. By emphasizing active listening, negotiation techniques, and resistance skills, the program enables girls to reduce the intensity of arguments and to promote mutual understanding with their parents.

From the perspective of Positive Youth Development and humanistic theories, adolescence is a period of potential in which cultivating competencies, self-efficacy, and social values promotes healthier relationships; programs that build empathy, affect regulation, perspective taking, and responsible decision-making help girls interpret parental control and restrictions as care and guidance rather than hostility. Family systems and attachment-based theories also explain the program's effectiveness by emphasizing that conflict is part of a reciprocal emotional feedback loop in the family rather than a one-sided problem; when adolescents acquire skills such as calm self-disclosure, boundary setting, and anger management, they introduce more regulated responses into the system, which interrupts cycles of mutual provocation and misunderstanding. Social learning and cognitive-behavioral frameworks likewise suggest that, through structured activities, role-playing, and practice, adolescents learn patterns of communication, negotiation, and non-hostile problem solving, and maladaptive beliefs about parents are gradually replaced with more balanced cognitions.

The results also showed that cognitive-social problem-solving skills training was effective on parent-adolescent conflict in female students. This finding is consistent with studies that have shown the effectiveness of this training in reducing parent-adolescent conflict by increasing cognitive flexibility, emotion regulation, and conflict-resolution strategies. For example, Dehestani (2023), in a quasi-experimental design with high school girls in conflict with their parents, showed that problem-solving skills training significantly reduced behavioral disorders and improved cognitive functions, and Semeniuk et al. (2016) found that adolescent-parent problem-solving interventions improve observed problem-solving skills over time and lead to better conflict management in the family setting. However, some studies have reported inconsistencies or limitations; for example, Farnam (2018) observed a considerable reduction in parent-adolescent conflicts and verbal anger through problem-solving and anger management training, but that study focused on boys, which limited direct generalizability to girls.

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In explaining this finding, it can be said that cognitive-social problem-solving skills training reduces parent-adolescent conflict by increasing female students' ability to systematically analyze and address interpersonal challenges in family dynamics. This training teaches girls to break disagreements down into manageable steps, such as identifying the problem, generating multiple solutions, and evaluating outcomes; practicing these cognitive processes builds a structured mindset that replaces impulsive reactions with conscious, rational responses and leads to fewer arguments and more constructive conversations with parents. The training also strengthens social awareness and perspective taking, enabling female students to better understand their parents' viewpoints and feelings during disagreements; through role-playing and empathy exercises, participants learn to anticipate others' needs and decode nonverbal cues, and this communicative insight turns hostile exchanges into collaborative problem-solving sessions.

From the perspective of social cognitive theory, the success of this training results from increased self-efficacy and observational learning; adolescents model the effective conflict resolution they observe in training scenarios and are reinforced through role-playing, replacing aggressive or avoidant behaviors with assertive communication, to which parents respond more favorably. Attachment theory also supports the program's effect by promoting secure communication patterns through improved emotion regulation and the adoption of different perspectives in problem solving; the training helps girls recognize parents' behaviors as protective rather than controlling, thereby reducing the misperceptions that provoke arguments, and trust is rebuilt through coherent and empathic solutions.

In addition, the results showed that Positive Youth Development program training was more effective than cognitive-social problem-solving skills training on parent-adolescent conflict in female students. According to the review conducted, no study was found that directly compared these two approaches, so comparison with others' results was not possible. In explaining this superiority, it can be said that the Positive Youth Development program comprehensively cultivates female students' strengths and overall identity and creates sustained intrinsic motivation for positive family interactions; whereas problem-solving training focuses specifically on the analytic stages of disagreements, the development program builds self-confidence, purposefulness, and emotional resilience through multidimensional activities such as goal setting and value reinforcement, enabling girls to proactively prevent conflicts rather than resolving them reactively.

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This comprehensive approach targets the root causes of relational tension in adolescent girls, such as the identity struggles of puberty, and leads to deeper and more lasting harmony at home. Unlike the more tactical focus of problem-solving skills, the superiority of the development program lies in promoting a coherent sense of self through socialization and purposeful activities, which integrate positive identity characteristics that protect against identity crises arising from family friction in girls and turn potential rebellion into collaborative growth.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the differential effectiveness of the two interventions in reducing parent-adolescent conflict in female students. Both interventions significantly reduced parent-adolescent conflict, which indicates the effectiveness of structured psychoeducational interventions in promoting family relationships in adolescence; however, comparative analyses showed that the Positive Youth Development program has a stronger effect in reducing parent-adolescent conflict, and its emphasis on emotional support, self-awareness, and positive communication may better resolve relational tensions and promote mutual understanding in families. These results are consistent with developmental and social-cognitive theories that emphasize the interaction between emotional regulation and cognitive processing skills in adolescent adjustment. From an applied perspective, practitioners seeking to reduce family tension can prioritize the approaches of the Positive Youth Development program, and the results of this study can provide an appropriate educational-therapeutic framework for improving parent-adolescent conflict in female students.

Limitations

This study had limitations that should be taken into account when generalizing the findings. Sampling was both convenience-based and purposive, which may limit the generalizability of the results and the external validity of the research. Sampling was carried out only among female second-secondary students of Qaemshahr in the 2022-2023 academic year and in a small sample, which limits generalization of the results to other groups. Moreover, because of the small sample size, matching the intervention and control groups on demographic variables was not possible. In addition, the self-report nature of the measurement instrument, the fact that the control group did not receive neutral counseling sessions to eliminate the expectancy effect, and the low motivation of some participants to attend the sessions consistently were other limitations of this study, since

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self-report measures are prone to distortion owing to unconscious defenses, response bias, and self-presentation styles.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the dimensions of the Positive Youth Development program and cognitive-social problem-solving skills be combined to provide comprehensive support for adolescents, and that the Positive Youth Development sessions focus on family communication, with an emphasis on empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution, to reduce tension between parents and adolescents. It is also recommended that the Positive Youth Development program be prioritized for students experiencing relational conflicts, and that cognitive-social problem-solving skills training be prioritized for those who struggle with problem-solving attitudes and academic motivation. Offering parallel training to parents, to align communication and problem-solving strategies with the principles adolescents are learning, and including key components of these programs in the school curriculum can provide continued reinforcement at home. In terms of research, it is recommended that future studies use random or stratified sampling methods and larger, more heterogeneous samples including female and male students from different regions and grade levels, use neutral or placebo interventions for the control group to control the expectancy effect, and use teacher ratings, parent reports, behavioral observation, or school performance data to overcome the limitations of self-report instruments.

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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 the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

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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