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Perceived Family Functioning and Aggression: A Descriptive Analysis Using a Sample of Middle Eastern Emerging Adults

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PERCEIVED FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND AGGRESSION: A DESCRIPTIVE

ANALYSIS USING A SAMPLE OF MIDDLE EASTERN EMERGING ADULTS

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Abstract

Emerging adulthood is the developmental stage between the ages of 18 to 29 years characterized by continued identify exploration, instability, and self-focus (Arnett, 2014). Developmental research demonstrates that family processes are critical predictors of outcomes across the life span (Bornstein & Lamb, 2016) including emerging adulthood. Positive family experiences lead to a strong sense of security, self-worth and greater psychological well-being (e.g., Buri, 1989; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Ravert, Kim, Weisskirch, Williams, Bersamin, & Finley, 2009) whereas negative effects of family experiences are predictors of both internalizing (e.g., Loukas et al., 2005) and externalizing problems including aggression (e.g., Clark et al.,2015). To date, most studies have focused their investigation on the association between family functioning and maladjustment in childhood and adolescence (e.g., Henneberger et al., 2014). Few studies have explored perceived family functioning and its association with maladaptation in emerging adulthood. Even fewer studies have examined such patterns in emerging adults of Middle Eastern heritage. According to the most recent Census data (2010) emerging adults represent the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population and Middle Eastern youth account for 35% of individuals aged between 18 and 29 years (Pew Research Center, 2016). The conceptualization for the current study is based on the Family Coercion Theory (Patterson, 1982) to evaluate the extent to which perceived family functioning predicts aggressive behavior among Middle Eastern emerging adults. Family Coercion Theory (FCT; Patterson, 1982) holds the premise that negative family interactions form the basis for engagement in aggression. The objective of this study was

to describe the predictive relationship between perceived family experiences and aggressive behavior in Middle Eastern emerging adults.

The current study used a cross-sectional design. Data for the current study was drawn from an archived data set, the Multi-Site University Study of Identity and Culture (MUSIC; Schwartz, Waterman, et al., 2011). A subset of de-identified data included 130 emerging adults of Middle Eastern background ranging in age from 18-29 years constituted the sample for the present study. The measures for the current study included a demographic questionnaire, a measure that assessed aggression in terms of overall antisocial behavior and measures of perceived family functioning processes. Parental cohesion was indexed in terms of maternal and paternal connection. Parental nurturance was indexed in terms of paternal and maternal nurturance and parental communication was indexed in terms of maternal and paternal psychological control and disrespect. Reliability analysis was conducted to evaluate internal consistency of all measures. Preliminary descriptive analyses were conducted to describe the sample in terms of background characteristics including, socio-economic status, gender, age, ethnic national origin, and family structure (divorced, blended, intact). A multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesis that perceived family functioning predicted aggressive behaviors.

It was expected that the perception of positive family functioning in terms of parental nurturance and connection would be negatively associated with aggression whereas the perception of negative family functioning in terms of parental psychological control and parental disrespect would be positively associated with aggressive behaviors.

Overall, the present findings indicate that perceived family functioning was associated

with aggression in a Middle Eastern sample of emerging adults.

Introduction

Developmental research demonstrates that family processes are critical predictors of outcomes across the life span (Bornstein & Lamb, 2016). Whereas family processes such as parental nurturance, family cohesion and communication when expressed in a way that is consistent with the individual's developmental needs contribute to positive outcomes (e.g., Steinberg et al., 1991), deficits in those areas predict maladaptation (Allen et al 2002). Positive outcomes of family experiences include a strong sense of security, self-worth, and greater psychological well-being (e.g., Buri, 1989; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Ravert, Kim, Weisskirch, Williams, Bersamin, & Finley, 2009). Negative effects of family experiences are predictors of both internalizing (e.g., Loukas et al., 2005) and externalizing problems including aggression (e.g., Clark et al., 2015). Current studies indicate that the familial context is a strong predictor of adaptation in emerging adulthood (e.g., Henneberger et al., 2014). Specifically, studies show that patterns of relationships with mothers and fathers can partly explain maladaptation in emerging adulthood (Pidcock & Dowd, 2007).

In the last two decades, the field of child development has expanded to include emerging adults. Emerging adulthood is a developmental period that spans from 18 to 29 years. There is a large body of literature on the influence of family functioning on child and adolescent development (Barnes, 1984; Mowder & Shamah, 2009; Wood et al., 2004). However, little is known about the influence of perceived family functioning in emerging adulthood and much fewer studies have explored patterns of perceived family relationships and their association with psychological outcomes in ethnically diverse emerging adults including Middle Eastern emerging adults. Moyed and Mitchell (2015)

have suggested that ethnicity and culture help to shape the outcomes of emerging adults in addition to their familial experiences.

As an influential driver of socialization, parental behaviors impact outcomes beyond childhood and adolescence. Examining family processes such as cohesion, nurturance, and communication in relation to aggression in a sample of Middle Eastern emerging adults provided a more comprehensive description of the long-term effects of perceived family functioning among Middle Eastern emerging adults. Therefore, the current study was grounded in Family Coercion Theory (Patterson, 1982) which stipulates that aggression is the result of a process of mutual reinforcement during which practices at the level of the family unintentionally strengthen negative behaviors. As such, family negative interactions define future engagement in social interactions. On the basis of coercion theory, this study described association between perceived family processes and aggression in a sample of emerging adults of Middle Eastern heritage.

The background and rationale for the current study is organized as follows: First, a description of emerging adulthood as a developmental period of the life span is provided. Second, behavioral theories on human development that form the basis for Family Coercion Theory (Patterson, 1982) are summarized Following this narrative is a description of Family Coercion Theory, the conceptual model for the current study. Third, empirical findings regarding the contribution of family functioning and its long-term effects on outcomes are presented. The purpose of the study and hypotheses are stated in the current study section followed by the methods, data analyses, results, and discussion sections.

Emerging Adulthood: Characteristics and Outcomes

The understanding of the first stage of adulthood has changed over the past decade. Emerging adulthood refers to the extended period of development that comes after adolescence and before young adulthood (Arnett 2000; Arnett 2004; Arnett 2006). Current literature characterizes this stage of the life as the period of *instability, possibilities, self-focus, in-betweenness, and continued identity explorations* (Arnett, 2003; Syed & Mitchell, 2015). Arnett (2014) notes that the stage of emerging adulthood is the time when individuals complete high school education to the period when they make major commitments such as marriage, long-term employment or parenthood. Emerging adulthood as a stage of the lifespan can be attributed to the changes in modern culture. For example, the transition from an industrial to an information-based economy and the rising need for post-secondary education have delayed major life transitions such as those aforementioned (Tanner & Arnett, 2009). Other factors that have contributed to the rise of this stage of development include increased occupational and educational opportunities for women, which led to a focus on career rather than marriage or having children (Tanner & Arnett, 2009). Also, changing cultural norms like increase acceptance for premarital sex which is associated with increased relational instability characterized by sporadic romantic encounters contribute delaying marriage (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014; Shulman & Connolly, 2013; Tanner &Arnett, 2009).

Emerging adulthood is distinct from adolescence and early adulthood. Emerging adults are no longer minors under the law, not going through puberty, and not in secondary school. Emerging adults have attained both physical and sexual maturity and are highly diverse in their educational and occupational achievements and trajectories

(Arnett et al., 2014). Some emerging adults combine work and education, in full-time

tertiary education, or in full-time employment. However, unlike the succeeding stage of

early adulthood, emerging adulthood is marked with heightened instability where

emerging adults go through a series of changes in romantic relationships, continued self-

exploration in socio-emotional particularly in identity and occupational development and

the selection of life partners (Arnett 2015; Arnett et al., 2014).

Emerging adulthood is not a transitory stage. Arnett (2015) argues that by terming

it a transition to young adulthood, it downplays the several changes that happen at this

stage. Arnett (2015) notes that during this stage, emerging adults make important

decisions especially during their college years and after college as they seek meaningful

employment. A core difference that distinguishes adolescence from emerging adulthood

is the parental relationship. During childhood and adolescence, parents are responsible

for their child behaviors including academic, health-related behaviors, as well as

adherence to social obligations and desirable social conduct such as attending school,

driving with a license. Parents can also be held responsible for their adolescents'

misbehaviors including rule breaking at school and other settings as well as other

antisocial behaviors. However, the direct influence and strength of parental involvement

diminishes in emerging adulthood (Arnett et al., 2014). Patterns of interactions also

appear to change in emerging adulthood. In a 10-year longitudinal study, Reina (2013)

examined changes in the relationship between parents and their emerging adult children.

Findings indicate that communication, affection, adaptability, and cohesion changed

during emerging adulthood. Such that conflicts between parents and their emerging adults

children reduced while communication, affection, cohesion increased.

Research shows that childrearing experiences have long-term effects on the individual (Young & Ehrenberg, 2008). However, few studies have investigated the impact of perceived familial experiences on emerging adults. In a study that evaluated the influence of perceived parent-adolescent communication on emerging adults' behavioral outcomes (Forehand, Armistead and Tannebaum (1998), found that familial communication was characterized by conflict in the family was associated with criminal behavior in emerging adulthood. Similarly, Aquilino and Supple (2001) reported that in high conflict families adolescents were more likely to engage in illicit alcohol and drug use and engagement in these risky behaviors were more likely to persist in emerging adulthood. In general, studies that have examined the impact of perceived family experiences on adjustment in emerging adulthood seem to conclude that the family represents a powerful context that have lasting impact on the individual.

Emerging adults in the United States: An Ethnically Diverse Group

Emerging adults are part of the millennial generation, which includes youth born from 1981 to 1996. According the Pew Research Center (2016), emerging adults are the most racially diverse adult generation in American history. Recent data show that 43% of millennials are nonwhite. This represents the highest proportion of youth who identified with a racial and ethnic minority group of any generation. People from the Middle East have considerably contributed to the changing demographics in the United States. The number of Middle Eastern immigrants in the United States has steadily increased over time (Camarota & Zeigler, 2017). In particular, youth with Middle Eastern background represent a fast growing group of emerging adults in the U.S. Individuals from the Middle East and those with Middle Eastern heritage are considerably younger than the

overall U.S. adult population. Recent census data indicate about a third (35%) of individuals who report to be of Middle Eastern origin are between 18 and 29 years old, which is a far higher percentage than the share of youth in that age bracket (21%) in the United States. Given the size and growth of Middle Eastern youth in the United States, it is necessary to examine family factors that contribute behavioral problems in emerging adulthood.

Family Functioning: Behavioral Conceptualization

The role of family dynamics on youth aggression merit continued examination. Family cohesion, nurturance, and communication directly impact children's behavior (Skinner, 1976). Children's earliest socializers include their immediate family environment (Carlson, 2012). Children learn different behaviors from their immediate family members, and in most cases, how they respond depends on the type of relationship they have with their parents (Skinner, 1976). If the environment is positive or safe, the child's behavior was positive, but when they are aversive, it gives rise to negative outcomes including aggressive behavior (Skinner, 1976). A number of behavioral theories have from the basis for the conceptualization of Patterson (1982) Coercion theory, which explains the influence of the familial context on maladaptive outcomes.

Operant Conditioning

Operant conditioning is a behavioral perspective that is based on the idea that environmental conditions shape all behaviors (Skinner, 1976). The operant learning perspective has been useful in providing strategies that parents can employ to build social competence in children and adolescents (Skinner, 1976). Behaviorists think that human reaction to environmental stimuli leads to behavioral outcomes (Skinner, 1976). Such

behavior occurs because of the consequences that follow. Punishment and reinforcement are identified as two central concepts of operant conditioning.

Skinner (1976) contended that behavioral change occurs through reinforcement, which increases the likelihood of a behavior recurring, and punishment, which decreases the probability that a behavior recurred. The concept of reinforcement includes positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement suggests that the application of a desirable stimulus increased the likelihood of a behavior. Negative reinforcement indicates that the removal of an unpleasant stimulus increases the likelihood of behavior (Skinner, 1976).

In a case study by Burchard & Tyler (1964) that examined strategies for modifying delinquent behavior using operant conditioning, it was found that operant conditioning strategies achieved more success in the five months it was used in a 13-year old boy who manifested delinquent behaviors compared to the earlier four years when he was under psychotherapy. A notable decline in the antisocial behavior and reduced seriousness in the offenses was noted in the boy through the five-month period, which established that operant conditioning was effective in controlling and addressing delinquent and antisocial behavior among the adolescents. No recent studies have examined the use of operant conditioning to modify behavior.

Similarly, punishment has two types. Positive punishment indicates that the application of an undesired stimulus immediately after the behavior decreases the likelihood of the behavior. Negative punishment suggests when the desired stimulus is removed after a behavior occurs, the recurrence of the behavior would likely decrease. The interplay of positive and negative punishment can be effectively used to influence

the behavior of either member of a dyad (Patterson, 1982). For example, Del Vecchio & Rhoades (2010) found that in the mother-toddler dyads, the mother could influence the desirable behavior from a toddler by employing positive punishments when the toddler displays undesirable behavior. Many studies (e.g., Del Vecchio & Rhoades, 2010) support Skinner's (1976) contention that children are most likely to decrease behaviors that are followed by application of stimuli that are undesirable.

The effectiveness of punishments is determined by different family factors. For example, lack of involvement of parents is associated with the likelihood of aggressive behaviors whereas consistent punishments, monitoring, and support of the adolescents in the family are associated with better and proper behaviors in the future (Carlson, 2012). Pinderhughes et al. (2000) share a similar position on the importance of family involvement in shaping adolescent behavior. The study found that parenting beliefs and practices are influenced by socio-economic status, ethnicity, stress, and cognitive-emotional factors that in turn lead to children's responses to the application of punishment and reinforcement strategies.

Parental support is another important factor in operant conditioning. Eron (1987) found that the lack of parental support in a family significantly reduces the effectiveness of punishment strategies that are meant to correct aggressive behaviors. In effect, the study showed that negative family dynamics such as low levels of family support, cohesion, communication, and nurturance might lead to the ineffectiveness of punishing strategies. This is suggesting that despite the fact the use of positive and negative punishment strategies can reduce the likelihood of the undesirable behavior recurring, these strategies are limited. In fact, it was noted that punishment itself is non-informative

and children are likely to replace one aggressive behavior with another indicating that use of punishment does not teach the child appropriate behaviors.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) is closely related to operant conditioning. On the basis of operant conditioning, the behavior is likely to be repeated depending on punishment and reinforcement. Within a social learning framework, behavioral development is also associated with punishment and reinforcement but also by the impact of observations. In effect, the learner actively observes other people being rewarded for certain behaviors reinforce those behaviors. Within Bandura's view human development unfolds on the basis of *modeling*. The concept of modeling indicates that behaviors are learned indirectly through observation of others. Bandura also argues that learning takes place through direct experience, which influence behavior by the punishments and rewards the individual experiences as well as vicariously, that is by observing others participating in the behavior. Further research needs to be done here too as there are no recent studies that have supported Bandura's theory of aggression.

Observed behaviors are often followed by immediate consequences and depending on whether the consequence is a punishment or a reward, the behavior might be discarded or retained (Bandura, 1977). The consequences can be reinforcing, motivating, or informative. The learning process through modeling is primarily influenced by four interrelated processes. The processes include attentional, retention, motoric reproduction, reinforcement and motivational processes (Bandura, 1977). The attentional process refers to the individual attending to the particular behavior. Once attention is paid to the behavior, they should remember the particular behavior and retain

the said behavior. After retention, one is likely to reproduce the behavior through overt actions, which is guided by motoric reproduction of symbolic representations.

Finally, the reproduced behavior influenced by the reinforcements it receives. If it received a positive response, it would likely continue otherwise if it received a negative response, it would not be repeated (Bandura, 1977). Studies that used Bandura's theoretical framework found that behavior could be changed using a series of reinforcements. Johnson & Bradbury (2015) posit that social learning theory effectively influenced change in relationships, specifically changing communication patterns in marriages and other committed partnerships.

Bandura (1978) acknowledged that besides direct learning (learning that involves direct reinforcement), individuals learn through modeling or vicarious learning, without any reinforcement to the behavior. All behaviors including deviant behavior such as aggression can be learned by observing others being rewarded for aggressive behavior. One important concept associated with the Social Learning Theory (SLT) is self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), in order for the four key processes (i.e. attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation) to take place, one has to believe in themselves and in their ability to carry out the observed behavior. Baron & Richardson (1994) noted that children subjected to violence in their early life are most likely to use violence later in life.

Williams & Rhodes (2014) reviewed the available literature on self-efficacy and noted that self-efficacy acted as a motivation for certain behaviors such as health-related behaviors. Fackler & Malmberg (2016) investigated the different factors that influenced the teachers' self-efficacy. The sources of the teacher's self-efficacy aligned with Bandura's theory: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion.

Miller, Ramirez, and Murdock (2017) noted that the teacher's self-efficacy influenced their actions and interactions with students in the classrooms and was reflected in the student's perceptions of teacher competence. Ross, Perkins, & Bodey (2016) added that information literacy self-efficacy among Australian undergraduate students was associated with higher levels of student academic motivation.

In the classic experiment by Bandura (1978), aggressive behavior was modeled using a doll (bobo) in front of children. In the experiment, 24 of the selected 72 children acted as the control group, while the others were exposed to aggressive and non-aggressive behavior. Current studies using Bandura's social learning theory suggest that behaviors can be effectively learned by emulating what others are doing although they are not focused on aggression. Kalkstein et al. (2016) in a number of studies that examine how psychological distance can affect social learning found that people learn more socially compared to direct learning. The studies reveal that the models play a significant role in the learning process. Cheng et al. (2015) noted that self-efficacy played a significant role in the promotion of self-care behaviors among pre-diabetes patients. Bethards (2014) notes that the application of the four key processes to the observer role in simulation accords all the learners equal opportunity to achieve the scenario learning objectives.

Conceptual Perspective for the Current Study: Family Coercion Theory

Family coercion theory (Smokowski et al. 2017) is grounded in a behavioral perspective of human development to describe and explain the impact of aggressive experiences that occur within the family on adolescents' engagement in aggressive behaviors. The family coercion theory acknowledges the role of reinforcements as well as

punishments in the development of aggressive behaviors. Learning theory, in particular, operant learning contends that typical family relationships are shaped by reinforcements. Similarly, coercion theory holds that reinforcements can be used to influence behavior.

The family coercion theory is based on the premise that individual behavioral challenges including aggression can be traced to the family. Patterson (1982) hypothesized that the pattern of negative reinforcements, family interactions could lead to aggressive behaviors in children (as cited in Fisher & Kane, 1998). When aversive reactions are employed, they increase likelihood (reinforce) of aggressive behavior (Smokowski et al., 2017). For example, negative interactions within the family often exacerbate the aggressive behaviors in adolescents and consequently leading to aggressive behaviors (Smokowski et al., 2017).

Smith et al. (2014) using Patterson's coercion theory argued that coercive family dynamics significantly contribute to the development of aggressive behaviors. Smith and colleagues (2014) contend that mutual reinforcement processes between parents and children inadvertently reinforce the adolescent's aggressive behavior. The mutual reinforcement occurs when the adolescent is issued with commands to which the adolescent react negatively to or resists. This leads to the parent reacting angrily. This pattern of interaction is repeated and become established as the typical dynamic for interpersonal relationships (Snyder et al. 1994). This family dynamic has been coined as the coercive circle that is not only, manifested in the family, but also is replicated in other settings such as in the school. The view of family coercion theory is that coercive interactions between individual adolescents and their families are bidirectional. This bidirectional pattern of negative interaction reinforces aggressive behavior.

A number of studies have explored the *coercive circle* family dynamics (e.g., Fisher & Kane 1998; Smokowski et al., 2017; Patterson 1982; Patterson 1985; and Patterson 1995). According to Patterson (1982), a behavior is coercive when it is consistently aversive and elicits reactions from the victim that benefits the aggressor. Studies that have examined this pattern in families with adolescents found that parents unconsciously reinforce coercive behaviors such as yelling, nagging, and scolding their children when they misbehave. As the adolescent continues to misbehave, the parent will eventually get tired and instead of adequately punishing their children for their misbehavior, they will ignore them and this increases the likelihood that the adolescent will continue to engage in the deviant behavior (Fisher & Kane, 1998). This occurs because adolescents learn that they can successfully coerce their parents to meet their needs, that is, if they continue to respond to the parent in an aversive way, it will lead to a behavioral change in the parent, which benefits the adolescent (Fisher & Kane, 1998).

Patterson (1995) states that a pattern of negative interactions serves as a negative reinforcement that leads to an increase in aggressive behaviors (as cited in Fisher & Kane, 1998). This family dynamic characterized by high frequency and payoffs of coercive behavior contributes to the development of aggressive behavior. The interactions between the child and the parents are likely to escalate as the frequency of aversive events rise. Over time, the child moves quickly to higher levels of aversive and aggressive behavior. Patterson (2015) acknowledges that the deviant behaviors are developed at the family, but the manifestation is across different settings.

Relationships between Family processes and Aggression

Family Cohesion

Cohesiveness has been studied for a very long time and can be understood in various ways and contexts. In general, cohesion has been defined as the process through which members of a particular group forge social bonds, consequently leading to unity among the group members (Carron, 1982). In the human development context, cohesion has been studied as a predictor of family development and functioning. Bruhn (2009) notes that cohesiveness reflects group members who share behavioral and emotional characteristics. The members of the particular group often stick together and are united on several fronts. From that background, family cohesion then refers to the behavioral and emotional bonding present among the family members, the social bond that keeps the family together (Bruhn, 2009). How close the family members are and the type of relationships that are formed within that family setting demonstrate cohesion in a family. In cohesive families, the intergenerational relationships between the family members are marked by emotional, warm, and close support among the family members (Vandeleur et al., 2009).

Family cohesion has been noted as a predictor of the social, behavioral, and emotional outcomes of family members. Choi (2012) noted that families that are believed to be highly cohesive spend more time together, show more nurturance, physical intimacy, consistency, and warmth. The higher the levels of family cohesiveness and the higher the frequency of contact among the members is believed to impact closeness and healthy familial relationships thriving (Choi, 2012). As a result, children benefit from the closeness and cohesiveness at home and are more likely to exhibit effective social interactions outside of the family (Giordano et al., 2005).

Family as a unit and an institution has been noted as one of the strongest socialization agents in an individual's life (Gray & Steinberg, 2009). As such, family cohesion influences the member's social life later in life. Vandeleur, Jeanpretre, Perrez, & Schoebi (2009) in their study noted that higher familial cohesion was associated with higher levels of emotional well-being among the family members. Specifically, the study findings highlighted that family cohesion is a significant predictor of emotional well-being in adolescents and fathers, and that the emotional closeness established between the fathers and children is mediated by their mothers, underscoring the crucial role of the mothers in promoting family cohesion. The mothers on the other side did not report any association between emotional well-being and family cohesion.

Engler (2014) used a social learning perspective to explain the influence of family functioning on children development. Within this framework, children learn about cohesion by imitating their parents. In fact, children are likely to select behaviors available in their immediate environment. As such, the family, as an immediate environment context has an influence on the individual's development. Kager, Lang, Berghofer, Henkel, Steiner, Schmitz, & Rudas (2000) studied the effect of family cohesion on psychiatric patient's subjective well-being, social functioning, and quality of life. The results of the study suggest that the patients who reported their families as extremely low cohesive consequently had lower levels of interpersonal and communication skills related to the problems in social functioning.

Similarly, Giordano et al. (2005) highlighted the role of family cohesion in building mutual social support. In this study, the researchers noted that interactions and relationships formed within the family translated to other social contexts. For example,

Leidy, Guerra, and Torro (2010) examined the relationships between positive parenting, family cohesion, and child social competence in a sample of immigrant Latino families found that family cohesion was a significant predictor of the child's social competence (self-efficacy). Gatlin (2017) investigated the link between family cohesion and social competence in a sample of Midwestern poor families in the United States and found that there was a significant positive relationship between family cohesion and social competence (likeability, independence, and ease of making friends).

Another study by Leidy et al. (2010), found that family cohesion significantly improved children's social competence, social self-efficacy, and social problem-solving skills. The study suggested positive family interactions and can effectively influence socioemotional skills by encouraging effective communication and maintaining close family connections. In addition, Wentzel (1998) found that higher levels of family cohesion were associated with higher GPAs in school because family cohesion boosted children's interest in elementary school and motivation in middle school.

The moderating effect of family cohesion has also been examined in samples of emerging adults. Vidal de Haymes et al. (2011) looked at the role of family cohesion and social support on Mexican immigrant's acculturative stress and reported that family cohesion and social support significantly reduced the stress levels by about 20%. The findings suggest that family cohesion is an important factor when addressing issues within the family such as stress, especially in the immigrant community. Similarly, Rivera et al. (2008) noted that higher family cohesiveness was related to lower levels of psychological distress. In this study, using a diverse sample of Latino immigrants, findings highlighted that family cohesion significantly reduced the levels of

psychological distress among family members. The studies show that family cohesion can impact both social and family aspect of its members, shaping and influencing outcomes within and outside the family setting. Overall studies that examined family cohesion report that it is a strong predictor of interpersonal relationships in the family but also in other contexts. In addition, the prediction of family cohesion on developmental outcomes persisted over time (Choi 2012; Engler 2014; Leidy et al., 2010).

In contrast, low levels of family cohesion have been associated with externalizing problems among children, adolescents, and emerging adults. Marsiglia et al., (2009) noted that the low levels of family cohesion led to more problem behaviors. In a study that used a sample of immigrant Mexican adolescents and their families, adolescents reared in families with low family cohesion reported more problem behaviors as compared with those who experienced households with higher levels of family cohesion. Rivera et al. (2008) suggest that there is a relationship between family cohesion and psychological distress among Latino adolescents. Such that Latino adolescents who experience low levels of family cohesion are more likely to report feeling depressed, hopeless, restless, worthless, and nervous. Ying, Lee, & Tsai (2004) noted that lack of family cohesion was linked to gang involvement, anxiety, and depression among adolescents, and to anger and depression in parents, showing the dyadic dynamics in families.

Family Communication

Communication occurs when messages are exchanged between the sender and the receiver through a system (Krauss, 2002). In any family, communication determines the outcomes and the nature of relationships among the family members. Communication has

been particularly attributed to the behavioral outcomes of children. Krauss & Fussel (1996) note that communication is a critical avenue for people to affect each other especially in family settings. They add that contemporary social psychologists have held that communication often mediates social behavior but they focus on the content and not the process. Segrin & Flora (2005) highlights that communication in a family setting is a transactional process and often benefits from feedback. The communication process in a family can be complex because families are more than dyadic relationships. Interactions in the family according to the perspective is marked by emotional ties, feelings of family identity, interdependence, an ongoing history and future, intimacy, commitment, and self-defined symbols and boundaries for a family membership (Segrin & Flora, 2005).

Parental communication often influences different aspects of the adolescent's lives and social relationships. Koesten & Karen (2004) in their study on the influence of family communication patterns on adolescent social relationships and risk behaviors found that the family communication patterns were a strong predictor in healthy interpersonal relationships. They found out that concept-oriented family communications – where parents emphasized consideration of all sides of an issue before taking a side and expression of individual opinion even if it differs from others – determined the adolescent's ability to develop interpersonal competence that helped them manage interpersonal relationships. Baym et al., (2004) examined the social interactions across different mediums and found out that face-to-face communication was still the most dominant form of interpersonal communication over communication on the internet and telephone. The results suggest that family communications, which are predominantly

face-to-face, will significantly influence the interpersonal communication of the adolescents.

Kewalramani & Singh (2017) in a study to assess the relationship between aggression and interpersonal communication noted that there was a negative correlation between the dimensions of aggression and interpersonal communication. The results show that effective interpersonal communication among young adults (18-21 years) was related to low level of aggression and vice versa, hence the negative correlation. Barbato, Graham, & Perse, (2003) explored the topic of "communicating in the family" and the influences of the family communication climate on interpersonal communication motives. They note that family communication has a significant influence on the children's motives for talking to others, which implies that the family communication climate affects interpersonal relationships and communication.

Furthermore, communication at the family level relies on the available communication channels. Westmyer, Dicioccio, & Rubin (1998) examined the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication channels (face-to-face, telephone, voice mail, electronic mail, letter, and fax) in competent interpersonal communication. They noted that the channels significantly influenced the motives and effectiveness when communicating different messages and needs. The family communication could be improved when there are appropriate and effective channels for communication.

Parental Nurturance

The underlying idea behind nurturance is to take care of another person. In the context of psychology, nurturance has been defined as the human tendencies and behaviors that are aimed at the provision of material and emotional support to those who

are weak, young, or helpless (Zhai, 2017). From that background and definition, familial

or parental nurturance is defined as the "parents' practice of flexible, engaged,

supportive, and emotionally expressive childrearing," (Locke & Prinz, 2002). It is further

posited that nurturance encompasses "pervasive attention, emotional investment, and

behavior management" by caregivers to foster children's social and emotional

development (Dishion & Bullock, 2002).

Parental nurturance has been shown to have positive effects on children's

behavioral and emotional development trajectories and is linked to secure attachment at a

young age (Mathew, Zhai, & Gao, 2017). Chopik et al. (2014) add that maternal

nurturance has been found to predict a notable reduction of attachment resistance among

emerging adults. The study results highlighted that participants who had nurturing

caregivers at age three registered the sharpest decrease in avoidance in their emerging

adulthood stage in their social relationships. The importance of caregiving in the early

stages has been found to have benefits later in life especially at the emerging adulthood

stage (14 to 23 years), which highlights how nurturance is an important foundational

developmental process (Chopik et al., 2014).

Parental nurturance has consequently been associated with increased self-esteem

among children and young adults (DeHart et al. 2006). Farah et al. (2008) in their study

noted that children who grow up in a family with parental nurturance have recorded

improved cognitive development. Mathew et al. (2017) note that parental nurturance

improves and encourages desirable behaviors among children, consequently reducing

instances of problem behaviors. Windle et al. (2010) noted that the higher levels of

maternal nurturance were associated with remarkable lower levels of internalizing

problems in adolescents. The studies discussed above highlights the importance of parental nurturance for the well-being of the child as well as in later stages of development, which by extension inform the role of parental nurturance both adaptive and maladaptive development (Collins et al., 2000).

Arım et al. (2009) in an extensive study explored the reciprocal relationship between aggressive behavior and adolescents' perception of parental nurturance. The study examined the enduring influence of caregiving to both boys and girls at different stages in adolescence. It was found that there was a negative correlation between parental nurturance and aggressive behaviors among the boys. However, it was noted that there was a difference in the timing of perception for both boys and girls. Parental nurturance at age 10 for girls influenced both direct and indirect aggression at age 12, while for boys the parental nurturance at age 12, and influenced aggression at age 14. Furthermore, Zhai (2017) notes that parental nurturance plays a significant buffering role for Asian Americans with strong adherence to their cultural practices and values in reducing conflicts with their children.

In another recent study by Kobe University (2016), they established that the respondents who had notable caring and supportive parental relationships as children had higher levels of happiness, higher incomes, and greater academic successes. The study highlights the enduring and extensive effects of parental nurturance. In another study by Heckman (2011), found out that positive parenting had a strong link with cognitive abilities and development of character in children. They note that strong character and high cognitive abilities in children enable them later to choose and succeed in white-collar jobs (Heckman, 2011). The study supports the premise by Kobe University (2016)

that positive parenting and nurturance (Nevarez et al., 2018) is linked with psychological and economic well-being.

Parental nurturance often helps children develop a secure base, however, as Michiels et al. (2008) notes, the lack of a secure base lead to both direct and indirect relational aggression among children. In another study by Mrug et al. (2008), they highlight that early maturing girls (the first period before age 12) were more likely to engage in relational and physical aggression if they had experienced low parental nurturance. Doyle (2013) notes that the levels of father nurturance were associated with and determined the time and frequency of the youth's interactions with their fathers.

Nevarez et al. (2018) further highlight the enduring effects of nurturance, noting that more parental nurturance during childhood translated to more defensive styles when the children are in their early adulthood stages, which is correlated with healthier midlife functioning in relationships and at work. Repetti et al. (2002) posit that children from a nurturing family benefit from an environment that provides them with physical safety, emotional security, and well-being. These experiences contribute to the maintenance of physical and emotional health later in life. Children who experience positive paternal (Schwartz & Finley, 2006) and maternal (Chopik et al., 2014) nurturance during their childhood have later exhibited better adult interpersonal functioning and more adaptive emotional regulation. Furthermore, Martin-Joy et al., (2017) found that high levels of childhood nurturing have been associated with more mature (adaptive) defense mechanism use in mid-life.

The Current Study

This study described the predictive relationship between perceived family experiences and aggressive behavior in emerging adulthood from Middle Eastern background. Family Coercion Theory (Patterson, 1982) is used as the conceptual basis for the current study. According to Family Coercion theory, family dynamics are robust predictors of future adaptation. Aggressive behaviors results from a process of mutual reinforcement where family processes unintentionally reinforce the individual behaviors. As such, family interactions shape individuals' future social interactions. Studies have shown, the observed coercive interactions between children and caregivers, oppositional and aggressive behavior, and growth in parent report of early childhood (ages 2–5) and school-age are family processes that unintentionally reinforce individual behaviors. As such, family interactions shape individuals' future social interactions. Based on coercion theory, this study evaluated the predictive relationship between perceived family processes and aggression among emerging adults of Middle Eastern background. As a result, the following hypotheses were assessed:

1) Parental cohesion indexed in terms of parental connection will be negatively associated with aggressive behaviors

2) Parental communication indexed in terms of parental control and disrespect will be positively associated with aggressive behaviors

3) Parental nurturance will be inversely associated with aggressive behaviors

Methods

Sample

The current sample was drawn from an archived data set from the Multi-Site University Study of Identity and Culture (MUSIC; Schwartz, Waterman, et al., 2011).

For the current study a sample of Middle Eastern emerging adults (*N*= 130) was used.

The data were obtained from the MUSIC study investigators (Schwartz et al 2011). The

study included 130 participants between the age of 18 and 34 with the mean age of 20.12

(*SD* = 2.33). Forty-seven of the participants (36.2%) were male and 83 of them (63.8%)

were female and all of them were of the Middle Eastern ethnicity.

Procedures

No additional procedures were completed for the study. In the archived study,

Multisite Study of Identity and Culture (MUSIC; Schwartz, Waterman, et al., 2011), data

were collected from college students attending 30 American universities. The faculty

researcher at the respective universities conducted the recruitment efforts and obtained

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The consent webpage link was sent out

by the instructors through an email or as a posting on an electronic notification (e.g.,

course management software) and the signed consent waiver provided at the site. The

participants had to check a box after reading the consent form in the website, which was

secure without access to individual responses except for the MUSIC collaborators after

the end of the data collection period. The questionnaire had five survey web pages but

was later expanded in 2008-2009 to six survey pages. There were options for the

participants to skip options they did not want to answer and continue to the next page,

submit responses, or save their progress. When they saved their progress, they received

an automated e-mail from the website with the link to complete the survey later. At the

completion of the survey, the participants were directed to a "thank you" page, which

provided debriefing information that informs the participants about the nature of the

measures and the research (Weisskirch, Zamboanga, Ravert, Whitbourne, Park, Lee, & Schwartz, 2013).

Measures

Background characteristics were assessed using a demographic questionnaire which included information about age, gender, ethnicity, income level, and family structure.

Predictor Variables

Three perceived family functioning processes were tested. Parental cohesion was indexed in terms of maternal and paternal connection. Parental nurturance was indexed in terms of paternal and maternal nurturance and parental communication was indexed in terms of maternal and paternal psychological control and disrespect. The measures assessed emerging adults' perception of the functioning of their family of origin.

Parental cohesion was assessed in terms of maternal and paternal connection using the Parental Acceptance subscale from the Child Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, 1965). The measure includes nine items and uses a Likert format on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. A sample item forms the maternal/paternal subscales is "My mother/father smiled at me very often very often when I saw her/him." Reliability coefficients indicate adequate internal consistency $\alpha = .87$ and $\alpha = .89$ for the maternal and paternal scale respectively.

Parental Communication was assessed in terms of maternal and paternal psychological control as well as maternal and paternal disrespect. Parental psychological control was measured using the psychological control subscale from the Child Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, 1965). The measure uses a Likert format with

responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item

includes "My mother/father would avoid looking at me when I disappointed her/him." A

reliability analysis was conducted to assess internal consistency. The reliability

coefficients were α = .83 and α = .85 for the maternal and paternal responses on

psychological control respectively. Maternal and paternal disrespect was measured using

an eight-item scale developed by Barber (2007). The measure uses a 5-point Likert

response format with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

An example item includes "My mother/father ridiculed me or put me down (e.g., saying I

am stupid, useless,)." A reliability conducted to assess internal consistency. The

reliability coefficients were α = .74 and α = .78 for the maternal and paternal disrespect

respectively. Parental Nurturance was measured using the Nurturant Parenting Scales

(Finley & Schwartz, 2004; Finley et al., 2008). The measure includes nine items using

Likert format with responses ranging 0 (never), 1 (once or the lowest level of nurturance),

2 (twice represents the highest level of nurturance. A reliability analysis was conducted to

assess internal consistency. The reliability coefficients were α = .83 and α = .84 for the

maternal and paternal nurturance respectively.

Outcome Variable

Aggression was measured using the Adult Self-Report (Achenbach and Rescorla

2003 modified by Burt and Donnellan, 2008). A composite score was computed to

include items reflecting rule breaking, social aggression, and physical aggression. The

measure uses a Likert format. Participants were asked how often they engaged in an

aggressive behavior during the last 6 months. Responses range from (1) = never to (5) =

nearly all the time. The rule-breaking subscale includes 11 items. An example item is

"Broke into a store, mall, or warehouse." The social aggression subscale includes 11 items. An example item is "Made negative comments about someone else's appearance" and the physical aggression subscale has 10 items. An example item is "Got into physical fights." A reliability analysis conducted to assess internal consistency $\alpha = .91$

Results

The current study used a cross-sectional design. The analysis of the data were conducted in two steps. In the first step, preliminary descriptive analyses were conducted to: 1) describe the sample in terms of background characteristics including, socio-economic status, gender, age, and ethnic national origin and 2), describe family history in terms of structure (divorced, blended, intact). In the second step, a multiple regression analysis was employed to test the study's hypothesis that perceived family processes will differentially predict involvement in aggressive behaviors among emerging adults of Middle Eastern heritage.

The aims of the multiple regression analysis were three-fold: 1) To report whether parental cohesion, communication, and nurturance predicted aggression 2), to relate the direction and magnitude of the relationship between predictor variables (perceived parental nurturance, perceived family cohesion, and perceived family communication) with the outcome variable, aggression and 3), to state the proportion of the variability in aggression accounted for by the predictor variables.

The following hypotheses were evaluated:

1) Parental cohesion indexed in terms of parental connection will be negatively associated with aggressive behaviors.

2) Parental communication indexed in terms of parental control and disrespect will be positively associated with aggressive behaviors.

3) Parental nurturance will be inversely associated with aggressive behaviors.

Descriptive Characteristics

A majority (*N*=95, 73.1%) of the participants were born in the United States while 35 of them (26.1%) were born elsewhere. When asked about their mothers, 25 of the participants (19.4%) said that their mother was born in the United States while 104 of the participants (80.6%) reported that their mothers were not born in the United States. Fifteen of the participants (11.8%) noted that their fathers were born in the United States while the fathers of 112 participants (88.2%) were not.

Regarding religious preference, 61 (47.7%) were Muslims, 24 (18.8%) were Orthodox Christian, 13 of them (10.2%) were protestant, 11 (8.6%) were Roman Catholic, 5 (3.9%) were Jewish, 3 of them (2.3%) were agnostic, 3 of them (2.3%) did not associate with any religion, 1 of them (0.8%) belonged to Assemblies of God/Pentecostal, 1 (0.8%) was a Buddhist, and 6 (4.7%) belonged to other religions.

Ninety-five (78.5%) of the participant's families were still intact, 22 (18.2%) were separated or divorced, three (2.5%) were never married, and one (0.8%) belonged to others. For the most important mother figure, 9 (69.2%) indicated that it was their biological mother and four (30.8%) said that it was their grandmothers while others did not answer the question. For the most important father figure, 9 (40.9%) indicated it was their biological father and the same number indicated 0, 1 (4.5%) said it was their stepfather, and 3 (13.6%) indicated others while the rest did not answer. Additional demographic characteristics including family income level, emerging adults' grade in

college and educational level for the sample can be found in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 respectively.

Table 1: Annual Self- reported *Family Income Level*

Income	*N*	%
Below 30K	29	23.0%
30K – 50K	25	19.8%
50K – 100K	36	28.6%
Above 100K	36	28.6%

Table 2. *Academic Performance in terms of School Grades*

Grades	*N*	%
A	30	23.8%
A/B	55	43.7%
B	18	14.3%
B/C	19	15.1%
C	1	0.8%
C/D	3	2.4%

Table 3. *Educational Attainment in terms of Number of Years in College*

Years	*N*	%
0	1	0.8%
1	41	32.3%
2	26	20.5%
3	27	21.3%
4	24	18.9%
5	4	3.9%
6	4	3.9%

Hypothesis Testing

The predictive utility of family functioning factors including cohesion, communication, and nurturance was examined for mothers and fathers separately. Bivariate correlation between predictor variable and the outcome variable of aggression are presented in Table 4 for parental factors and table 5 for maternal factors.

Table 4. *Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability Coefficients for Paternal variables*

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1.Connection to Father	35.08	12.04	__			
2.Paternal Psychological Control	16.53	7.26	-.46**	__		
3.Paternal Disrespect	15.38	7.60	-.53**	.79**	__	
4.Parental Nurturance	31.63	10.58	.72**	-.48**	-.60**	__
5. Aggression	62.20	22.04	-.34**	.33**	.39**	-.20*

Note: $p < .05$; **$p<.001$*

Table 5. *Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability Coefficients for Maternal variables*

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1.Connection to Mother	40.15	9.27	__			
2.Maternal Psychological Control	17.12	8.20	-.38**	__		
3.Maternal Disrespect	16.14	7.85	-.86**	-.40**	__	

4.Maternal Nurturance	37.95	7.60	-.41**	.68**	-.49**	__
5. Aggression	62.47	22.08	-.26**	.37**	.26**	-.22**

Note: * *p* < .05; ***p*<.001

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that family factors (family cohesion, communication, nurturance) would predict aggression among Middle Eastern emerging adults

Paternal Factors

Hypothesis 1: Paternal cohesion indexed in terms of paternal connection will be negatively associated with aggressive behaviors. Multiple regression results revealed that paternal cohesion (paternal connection) (β = -.35, t = -2.58, p < .01) was negatively associated aggressive behaviors as there was a negative correlation between the connection to the father and aggression, which was consistent with the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Paternal communication indexed in terms of parental control and disrespect will be positively associated with aggressive behaviors. Paternal control and was not observed to be a statistically significant predictor of aggression (β = .05, t = .32, p, ns) But paternal disrespect was a statistically significant predictor (β = .33, t = 1.98, p < .05). Results showed that there is a statistically significant correlation between paternal communication (both paternal psychological control and paternal disrespect) and aggressive behaviors. Therefore, the results supported the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: The hypothesis that paternal nurturance would be inversely associated with aggressive behaviors was not supported. Results indicated that paternal nurturance was not a statistically significant predictor (β = .27, t = 1.92, p =.06) of aggressive behaviors with. Also, in terms of directionality a positive pattern was apparent.

The regression model revealed a good model fit with an adjusted $R^2 = .18$, F (4, 92) = 6.19, $p < .001$ indicating that 18% of the variability in aggressive behaviors was predicted by perceived paternal factors in terms of connection, communication and nurturance.

Maternal Factors

Hypothesis 1: Maternal cohesion indexed in terms of maternal connection will be negatively associated with aggressive behaviors. Multiple regression results revealed that maternal cohesion (maternal connection) ($\beta = -.12$, $t = -.914$, p, ns) was supported.

Hypothesis 2: Maternal communication indexed in terms of parental control and disrespect will be positively associated with aggressive behaviors. Results showed that maternal psychological control ($\beta = .51$, $t = 2.93$, $p < .01$) was positively associated with aggressive behaviors while maternal disrespect ($\beta = -.30$, $t = -1.52$, p, ns) not a significant predictor of aggressive behaviors.

Hypothesis 3: Maternal nurturance will be inversely associated with aggressive behaviors. Results indicated that maternal nurturance ($\beta = -.07$, $t = -.47$, p, ns) was not supported.

The regression model revealed a good model fit with an adjusted $R^2 = .17$, F (4, 91) = 4.74, $p < .002$ indicating that 17% of the variability in aggressive behaviors was accounted by perceived maternal factors in terms of cohesion, communication and nurturance.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the predictive relationship between perceived family functioning and aggressive behaviors in a sample of Middle Eastern emerging adults. Findings show that perceived family functioning predicted aggressive behavior specifically paternal disrespect, paternal connection, paternal nurturance, maternal control, maternal connection, and maternal nurturance predicted aggressive behavior. However, paternal control and maternal disrespect were not observed to be significant predictors of involvement in aggressive behaviors among Middle Eastern emerging adults.

Findings indicated that in terms of background characteristics, a majority of the study participants were born in the United States and came from families that were still intact with more than half of the sample exceeding robustly the annual average household income in the United States. The majority of the participants were Muslims and more than half reported above average academic performance with the majority of them being freshmen in college.

Explanation of the Findings

The finding that family cohesion was negatively associated with aggressive behaviors was consistent with previous findings. Prior research has linked family cohesion with stress reduction and influence on developmental outcome over time (Choi 2012; Engler 2014; Leidy et al., 2010; Rivera et al., 2008; Vidal de Haymes et al., 2011). For instance, Choi (2012) concluded that healthy familial relationships thrived in cohesive families, which was evident from the time spent together, physical intimacy, consistency, warmth, and nurturance in the family. Similar findings that show family cohesion influenced development outcomes such as aggression was arrived reported by

Vandeleur et al. (2009) where they indicated that familial cohesion was a significant predictor of emotional well-being in adolescents and fathers, noting that the mothers played a critical role in the closeness between the fathers and their children. Kager et al. (2000) reported that low levels of cohesion in the family were associated with problems in social functioning, which is related to aggression.

Other studies (Gatlin, 2017; Leidy et al., 2000) found similar results noting that there was a significant correlation between family cohesion and social competence. Besides social competence, the moderating effect of family cohesion has been examined in prior research. Vidal de Haymes et al., (2011) study findings suggested that family cohesion and social support significantly reduced acculturative stress. Similarly, Rivera et al., (2008) highlighted that higher levels of family cohesion were associated with lower levels of psychological distress. Furthermore, the lower levels of family cohesion have been associated with problem behaviors (Marsiglia et al., 2009) and gang involvement, anxiety, and depression among adolescents (Ying; Lee & Tsai, 2004). The prior research findings support the current study findings that cohesion in the family is a significant predictor of problem behaviors, specifically aggression in this sample of Middle Eastern emerging adults.

The present findings indicate family communication (paternal control, paternal disrespect, and maternal control) was positively associated with aggressive behaviors was consistent with some prior research. Koesten & Karen (2004) had found that family communication patterns were a strong predictor in healthy interpersonal relationships and Baym et al., (2004) noted that family communication significantly influenced interpersonal communication among adolescents. In a related study, Kewalrami & Singh

(2017) noticed that there was a negative correlation between interpersonal communications and the dimensions of aggression, concluding that the effective interpersonal communication was related to lower levels of aggression. Although the current study found that maternal disrespect was negatively correlated with aggressive behaviors, the finding was not consistent with the prior research. It is possible that there may be a discrepancy between actual family communication and perceived family communication from the emerging adults' perspective. In fact some studies have noted parents and their youth often perceived family functioning differently (Kliewer, Sosnowski Wilkins, Garr, McGuirre, & Wright, 2018).

Furthermore, the study found that parental nurturance was inversely associated with aggressive behaviors has been supported by previous studies. Similar findings were reported by Chopik et al. (2014), highlighting that maternal nurturance was found to predict a significant reduction of attachment resistance among emerging adults. Additionally, Mathew, Zhai, & Gao (2017) noted that parental nurturance improved and encouraged desirable behaviors among children, consequently reducing instances of problem behaviors. Additionally, nurturance in the family has been associated with several other positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem among children and young adults (DeHart et al. 2006) and improved cognitive development (Farah et al., 2008). In congruence with previous research that that maternal nurturance was linked with lower levels of internalizing problems, the present study observed similar patterns of association in this sample of emerging adults.

In a study on parental nurturance, Arım et al. (2009) found that there was a negative correlation between parental nurturance and aggressive behaviors among

adolescent boys. Mrug et al. (2008) noted that low levels of parental nurturance were related to relational and physical aggression among early maturing girls. Parental nurturance has been found to play a buffering role, consequently reducing conflicts between the parents and their children (Zhai, 2017). Furthermore, a number of studies have highlighted the enduring effects of parental nurturance. Positive paternal (Schwartz & Finley, 2006) and maternal (Chopik et al., 2014) experiences during childhood has been linked to better adult interpersonal functioning and more adaptive emotional regulation, which by extension decreased likelihood of the different dimensions of aggressive behaviors.

Implications

Most of the available research on family processes and psychological outcome has focused on adolescents with very few examining these patterns in emerging adulthood. These findings are informative for the literature on emerging adulthood. The findings also contribute to knowledge regarding patterns of family relationships in Middle Eastern families living in the US. Research using Middle Eastern emerging adults are underrepresented in the available literature. In the United States Middle Eastern emerging adults represent a steadily rising demographic growing group of interest for various research inquiries (Camarota & Zeigler, 2017).

The study findings have two important implications. First, the findings highlighted the fact that the Middle Eastern emerging adults are underrepresented in the available literature. The present informs about association between perceived family functioning and aggressive behaviors among Middle Easter emerging adults. In addition, it informs the literature on emerging adulthood. Most of the available research on family

process and psychological outcome has focused on adolescents with very few examining these patterns in emerging adulthood. Understandably, the distinction on the development stage of early adulthood and emerging adulthood has been noted as defined by Arnett (2000), Arnett (2004) and Arnett (2006) as well as other researchers who have made emerging adulthood a focus of their research inquiries. In the United States yet some statistics point out that it is a steadily rising demographic growing group of interest for various research inquiries (Camarota & Zeigler, 2017). Therefore, this study attempted to add research available on this demographic and developmental stage that needs more research focus and attention.

Secondly, the examination of perceived family functioning and aggressive behavior among emerging adults needs to be studied with some thoughts in mind. The current study examined the predictive relationship between both the maternal and paternal factors (psychological control, connection, disrespect, and nurturance) and aggressive behaviors among emerging adults. From the literature review, it was apparent that the influence of paternal psychological control, connection, and disrespect has not been sufficiently studied. The present study attempted to focus attention on three equally critical aspects of perceived family functioning. Furthermore, when examining family functioning, it is critical to examine both paternal and maternal factors independently as it was evident from the study findings that the paternal and maternal differentially predicted aggressive behaviors among emerging adults.

Limitations

Despite these noteworthy descriptive findings. The interpretation of the finding must occur within two important limitations. First the cross-sectional nature of the study

limits the ability to describe temporal relationship between perceived family functioning and aggressive behaviors. Another limitation is the type of sample. The fact that the sample included only Middle Eastern emerging adults limits generalizability. The population of emerging adults include emerging adults that are not enrolled in college.

 Future Directions

The current study highlighted the correlation between paternal disrespect and maternal disrespect's correlation with aggressive behavior, further research should be focused on establishing the reasons behind the difference. Additionally, the study findings were not analyzed according to gender, religion, or immigrant generation, therefore other studies should attempt to establish the gender differences for both the parents and the emerging adults to establish patterns of either paternal or maternal factors and male and female children. These demographics characteristics have been shown to contribute to differences in aggressive behaviors. Furthermore, more studies should seek to examine patterns of association among correlates associated with aggressive behaviors among emerging adults from the Middle Eastern heritage to offer a better understanding predictor of aggression among emerging adults of Middle Eastern background.

Conclusions

The current study addressed an important gap in the literature by examining parental factors that predict aggressive behaviors among Middle Eastern emerging adults. The findings highlight that both paternal and maternal communication (psychological control and disrespect) were positively associated with aggressive behavior while paternal cohesion (connection) and maternal cohesion (connection) were negatively associated with aggression and that both paternal and maternal nurturance were inversely

associated with aggressive behaviors. The children who grow up in a family where both parents are nurturing and cohesive are less likely to engage in aggressive behaviors later in life, which reflects the premises of family coercion theory. In contrast, the children who grow up in families where either or both father and mother are psychologically controlling and disrespectful are more likely to engage in aggressive tendencies later in life, specifically during emerging adulthood.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age:

2. Gender (check one):   Male___   Female___

3. My ethnicity is (choose one):

a.   Black, African American, Afro-Caribbean, Black African, Other in this category.

b.   Caucasian, White, European American, White European, Other in this category.

c.   East Asian, Asian American, Amerasian, Asian-Caribbean, Other in this category.

d.   Latino/a, Hispanic, Spanish, Latin American, of Spanish speaking- South American/Caribbean heritage, Other in this category.

e.   South Asian, South Asian American, of South Asian heritage, Other in this category.

f.   Middle Eastern, Arab, Non-Black North African, Other in this category.

g.   Coloured-South African, Khoi San, Cape Malay, Other in this category.

1. What kinds of grades do you mostly get in your classes?

   (Check one)

   _____ Mostly A's

   _____ Mostly A's and B's

   _____ Mostly B's

   _____ Mostly B's and C's

   _____ Mostly C's

   _____ Mostly C's and D's

   _____ Mostly D's

   _____ Mostly D's and F's

2. How many years have you been enrolled in a university or college?___

3. Were you born in the United States?   Yes   No

3a. If no, where were you born? _____

4. Was your mother born in the United States?   Yes   No

4a. If no, where was she born? _____

5. Was your father born in the United States?   Yes   No

5a. If no, where was he born? _____

6. Where do you live?

    In parents' or other relatives' home

    On-Campus Dorms/ Residence halls

    On-campus or University-owned Apartments

    Fraternity/sorority house

    Off-campus apartments or house

    Other (specify)

7. Please indicate your family's annual household income. If you are supporting yourself, please indicate your income. If your family is supporting you, please indicate their income:

1 = Below $30,000   2 =$30,000 to $50,000   3= $50,000 to $100,000   4= Above $100,000

8. How would you characterize your family (check one)?

    Parents still married_____

    Parents separated/divorced_____

    Parents never married to one another_____

    One or both parents deceased_____

    Other (please specify) _____

IF SEPARATED/DIVORCED OR NEVER MARRIED, ASK THE FOLLOWING
    QUESTIONS:

8a. How old were you when your parents stopped living together?

8b. How would you describe the living arrangements you had after your parents stopped
     living together?   Lived with mother   Lived with father   Joint custody
     Other (specify)

8c. How often did you see the parent you did not live with? (Open-ended answer)

8d. How many people in your family (including cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.)
have ever had a severe alcohol or drug problem?

IF 8 IS MARKED FALSE, ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

8e. Whom did you consider to be the most important mother figure in your life?
     Biological mother   Stepmother   Adoptive mother   Grandmother

     Other (specify)

Appendix B

Perceived Family Functioning Domain: Communication

Paternal Disrespect Scale; Barber (2007).

Please answer the following questions, thinking about the most important father figure in your life and about the time when you were growing up.

1   2   3   4   5

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree Strongly Agree

Please answer the following questions, thinking about the most important father figure in your life and about the time when you were growing up.

1.   My father ridiculed me or put me down (e.g., saying I am stupid, useless, etc.).

2.   My father embarrassed me in public (e.g., in front of my friends).

3.   My father didn't respect me as a person (e.g., not letting me talk, favoring others over me, etc.).

4.   My father violated my privacy (e.g., entering my room, going through my things, etc.).

5.   My father tried to make me feel guilty for something I did or something he thought I should have done.

6.   My father expected too much of me (e.g., to do better in school, to be a better person, etc.).

7.   My father often unfairly compared me to someone else (e.g., to my brother or sister, to himself).

8.   My father often ignored me (e.g., walking away from me, not paying attention to me).

Perceived Family Functioning Domain: Communication

Maternal Disrespect Scale; Barber, 2007

Please answer the following questions, think about the most important mother figure in your life and about the time when you were growing up.

1   2   3   4   5

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree Strongly Agree

9.   My mother ridiculed me or put me down (e.g., saying I am stupid, useless, etc.).

10.   My mother embarrassed me in public (e.g., in front of my friends).

11.   My mother didn't respect me as a person (e.g., not letting me talk, favoring others over me, etc.).

12.   My mother violated my privacy (e.g., entering my room, going through my things, etc.).

13.   My mother tried to make me feel guilty for something I did or something she thought I should have done.

14.   My mother expected too much of me (e.g., to do better in school, to be a better person, etc.).

15.   My mother often unfairly compared me to someone else (e.g., to my brother or sister, to herself).

16.   My mother often ignored me (e.g., walking away from me, not paying attention to me).

Perceived Family Functioning Domain: Communication

Psychological control subscale from the Child Report of Parental Behavior Inventory

Paternal (Schaefer, 1965)

1   2   3   4   5

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree Strongly Agree

1.   My father was always trying to change how I felt or thought about things.

2.   My father changed the subject whenever I had something to say.

3.   My father often interrupted me when I was talking.

4.   My father blamed me for other family members' problems.

5.   My father brought up past mistakes when he criticized me.

6.   My father was less friendly with me if I did not see things his way.

7.   My father would avoid looking at me when I disappointed him.

8.   If I hurt my father's feelings, he stopped talking to me until I pleased him again.

Psychological control subscale from the Child Report of Parental Behavior Inventory

Maternal (Schaefer, 1965)

1   2   3   4   5

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral Agree   Strongly Agree

9.   My mother was always trying to change how I felt or thought about things.

10.   My mother changed the subject whenever I had something to say.

11.   My mother often interrupted me when I am talking.

12.   My mother blamed me for other family members' problems.

13.   My mother brought up past mistakes when she criticized me.

14.   My mother was less friendly with me if I did not see things her way.

15.   My mother would avoid looking at me when I disappointed her.

16.   If I hurt my mother's feelings, she stopped talking to me until I pleased her again.

Appendix C

Perceived Family Functioning Domain: Cohesion

The Parental Acceptance subscale from the Child Report of Parental Behavior Inventory
(Schaefer, 1965)

Paternal Connection Scale

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

17.   My father made me feel better after talking over my worries with him.

18.   My father smiled at me very often when I saw him.

19.   My father was able to make me feel better when I was upset.

20.   My father enjoyed doing things with me.

21.   My father cheered me up when I was sad.

22.   My father gave me a lot of care and attention.

23.   My father made me feel like the most important person in his life.

24.   My father believed in showing his love for me.

25.   My father often praised me.

26.   My father was easy to talk to.

Perceived Family Functioning Domain: Cohesion

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31.   My mother cheered me up when I was sad.

32.   My mother gave me a lot of care and attention.

33.   My mother made me feel like the most important person in her life.

34.   My mother believed in showing her love for me.

35.   My mother often praised me.

36.   My mother was easy to talk to.

Appendix D

Perceived Family Functioning Domain: Nurturance

Nurturant Parenting Scales (Finley & Schwartz, 2004; Finley et al., 2008).

Maternal Nurturance Scale

Please answer these questions regarding the person you think of as having been the most important mother figure in your life. Think about the time when you were growing up.

37.   Overall, how would you rate your mother?

1 = poor; 2 = fair; 3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = outstanding

38.   When you needed your mother's support, was she there for you?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always

39.   How emotionally close are you to your mother?

1 = not at all; 2 = a little; 3 = somewhat; 4 = very; 5 = extremely

40.   How much do you think your mother enjoys being a mother?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = somewhat; 4 = very much; 5 = a great deal

41.   When you were growing up, did your mother have enough energy to meet your needs?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always

42.   When you were growing up, was your mother available to spend time with you in activities?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always

43.   Do you feel that you can confide in your mother?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always

44.   When you were a teenager, how well did you get along with your mother?

1 = very poorly; 2 = poorly; 3 = ok; 4 = well; 5 = very well

45.   As you go through your day, how much of a psychological presence does your mother have in your daily thoughts and feelings?

1 = never there; 2 = rarely there; 3 = sometimes there; 4 = often there; 5 = always there

Perceived Family Functioning Domain: Nurturance

Nurturant Parenting Scales (Finley & Schwartz, 2004; Finley et al., 2008).

Paternal Nurturance Scale

Please answer these questions regarding the person you think of as having been the most important father figure in your life. Think about the time when you were growing up.

1.   Overall, how would you rate your father?|

1 = poor; 2 = fair; 3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = outstanding

2.   When you need your father's support, was he there for you?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always

3.   How emotionally close were you to your father?

1 = not at all; 2 = a little; 3 = somewhat; 4 = very; 5 = extremely

4.   How much do you think your father enjoyed being a father?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = somewhat; 4 = very much; 5 = a great deal

5.   When you were growing up, did your father have enough energy to meet your needs?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always

6.   When you were growing up, was your father available to spend time with you in activities?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always

7.   Did you feel that you could confide in your father?

1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; 5 = always

8.   When you were a teenager, how well did you get along with your father?

1 = very poorly; 2 = poorly; 3 = ok; 4 = well; 5 = very well

9.   As you go through your day, how much of a psychological presence does your father have in your daily thoughts and feelings?

1 = never there; 2 = rarely there; 3 = sometimes there; 4 = often there; 5 = always there

Appendix E

Adult Self-Report (Achenbach and Rescorla ,2003; modified by Burt and Donnellan, (2008).

Antisocial Behavior Measure

Antisocial Behavior - Rule Breaking

Antisocial Behavior - Social Aggression

Antisocial Behavior - Aggression

The following items describe a number of different behaviors. Please read each item and report how often ¬¬¬¬¬¬you have done each of these things during the past 6 months:

1	2	3	4	5
Very Inaccurate Accurate	Moderately Inaccurate	Neutral	Moderately Accurate	Very

1.   Made negative comments about someone else's appearance

2.   Hit back after I someone hit me

3.   Gave someone the "silent treatment" because I was angry with him/her

4.   Got angry quickly

5.   Failed to pay debts

6.   Revealed someone's secrets because I was angry with him/her

7.   Made fun of someone behind their back

8.   Got into physical fights

9.   Excluded someone from group activities because I was angry with him/her

10.   Felt better after hitting someone

11.   Broke into a store, mall, or warehouse

12.   Threatened others

13.   Stole things from a store

14.   Felt like hitting people

15.   Stole a bicycle

16.   Stole property from school or work

17.   Got into more fights than the average person

18.   Hit others after they provoked me

19.   Blamed others for things that went wrong in my life

20.   Tried to hurt someone's feelings

21.   Broke the windows of an empty building

22.   Swore or yelled at others

23.   Intentionally damaged someone's reputation

24.   Had trouble controlling my temper

25.   Tried to turn others against someone because I was angry with him/her

26.   Called someone names behind his/her back

27.   Sold drugs, including marijuana

28.   Littered public areas by smashing bottles, tipping trash cans, etc.

29.   Was rude towards others

30.   Left home for an extended period of time without telling family/friends

31.   Was suspended, expelled, or fired from school or work

32.   Had trouble keeping a job

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