Investigating the Relationship between Social Support and Identity Formation: A Case Study of the Children of Martyrs in Neyshabur, Iran

Ali Akbar Majdi
Assistant Professor of Sociology, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Hossein Ramezani
Expert at the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, Neyshabur, Iran

Mojgan Azimi Hashemi
Faculty Member Jahad Daneshgahi Khorasan Razavi, Mashhad, Iran

Received: 4 January 2016  Accepted: 16 February 2016

1. Introduction
The children of martyrs face many challenges in their individual and social lives, among which are identity challenges. When encountering such challenges, the role of social networks is vital in providing different kinds of social support for them. Due to their special condition, these children get harmed very quickly as a result of ignorance and disregard. The process of identity formation is not a separate issue from the social environment; rather, identity is formed as a result of relations with society members. One of the factors which affects identity formation and has almost been neglected is social support.

2. Theoretical Framework
Social support creates a secure and trustful relationship for each individual. Moreover, it is a bilateral aid which results in a positive perception of the self, acceptance of the self and a feeling of self-worth, all of which provide the opportunity for self-actualization. Social support has two main dimensions: the mental dimension of social support is the perceptions that the individual has about the influential individuals who have the potential to help him/her in times of insolvency and hopelessness. The actual or objective dimension of social support depends on the degree of help that the individual has actually received. Social support influences the identity style of individuals. However, the influence is different for each of the identity styles. In the current study, three identity styles are taken into consideration:

- **Informational identity style:** this identity style is characterized by encountering identity issues and decision-making situations through active processing and evaluating the information related to the self. Individuals with an informational identity style make use of the problem-based approach, they are responsible and goal-oriented and have trust in the information related to themselves. Therefore, they do not delay their tasks and duties.

- **Normative identity style:** individuals with this type of identity are responsible and goal-oriented, but also very structured. They are not open to information that may be in conflict with their personal values and beliefs. Individuals who use the normative identity style are more defensive and less open to feedback about some of the aspects of themselves such as personal values.
Diffusive-avoidant identity style: individuals with this identity style use the diffusive-avoidant identity processing style. They try to avoid encountering identity issues and conflicts as much as possible. When they are forced to make a decision, they act based on a situational-emotional style and are easily influenced by the immediate outcomes of that decision. Diffusive-avoidant individuals always try to avoid encountering personal issues, conflicts and decision-making situations.

3. Methodology
This descriptive-analytical study has a functional aim and has been conducted through field studies and survey. The population of this study consisted of 3938 children of martyrs, veterans with 50% and higher degrees of injury and the freedmen of Neyshabur, Iran. Overall, 350 children were selected randomly and systematically from the population.

4. Results
The descriptive findings of the current study indicated that normative identity style is stronger than the other identity styles with a mean of 3.18. Moreover, social support was at an average level and the perceived social support by the respondents was more than the actual support they had received.

The results of the regression test for investigating the correlation between the degree of social support and its dimensions (perceived and received) and the informational identity style showed a significant correlation between the two variables (df= 0.000). The correlation between the dimensions of social support (perceived and received) and the normative identity style was not significant. The results indicated a significant inverse correlation between the degree of social support and its dimensions and the diffusive-avoidant identity style. The degree of social support was higher for female respondents as compared to the male participants. Moreover, there was a significant difference between male and female respondents regarding identity styles.

5. Discussion and Conclusion
The results of the current study indicated that received social support has more effect on the identity styles of participants. Identity commitment had a positive correlation with social support and informational and normative identity styles. There was also a negative correlation between social support and the diffusive-avoidant identity style.

Quantitative studies have directly investigated the relation between social support and identity styles. However, some points could be mentioned regarding the influences of social support: there is a strong relationship between perceiving higher social support from friends and family and a predictable, structured, controllable, and optimistic providence with strong commitments in the fields of identity.

Behavioral characteristics of the family such as support, collaboration and kindness are strong predictors of the growth of adolescents’ identity. Moreover, there is a strong relationship between the growth of an appropriate identity and the atmosphere of the family. Higher social support by the family and a high level of self-expression are related to a high level of professional job identity.

Adolescents who were at a higher level of classified identity exploration came from families who had more opportunities for self-expression in a supportive environment. It can be
concluded that individuals who have good social relations in the society and are supported by their family and other social institutions mostly use the normative and informational identity styles and those who have weak social relations and do not receive significant social support mostly make use of the diffusive-avoidant identity style.

**Keywords:** Perceived social support, Received social support, Berzonsky’s identity styles

**References (In Persian)**


12. Lotfzabadi, H. (2002). *The psychology of growth (2).* Tehran, Iran: SAMT.


References (In English)


