

Perceived family authority among middle school adolescents and its relationship with their aggressive behaviors (A field study at Aghiba Imran Middle School in Tamanrasset)

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Abstract---The present study sought to investigate the effect of parental authority patterns in shaping aggressive behaviors among adolescents enrolled in middle school education, within the framework of school psychology's interest in family factors influencing behavioral adjustment and academic achievement in the school environment. The study adopted the descriptive-analytical method as the most appropriate approach to reveal the nature of the relationship between the variables of parental authority and aggressive behavior. To achieve the research objectives, the Aggressive Behavior Scale by Buss and Perry (1992) was administered to a sample of (50) adolescents classified within the category of individuals with aggressive behavior, whose ages ranged between (13–17) years. The Family Patterns Scale by Nariman Maamir (2020) was also used to measure parental authority patterns among (50) parents of these adolescents. The data were statistically processed using the (T-test) for two independent samples to determine the significance of differences between the mean scores of adolescents on the Aggressive Behavior Scale according to the parental authority pattern in their families (weak/strong). The results revealed statistically significant differences between the mean scores of adolescents in aggressive behavior according to the parental authority pattern. The differences were in favor of adolescents belonging to families characterized by weak parental authority, as they recorded higher levels of aggressive behavior compared to their peers from families with strong parental authority. From a school psychology perspective, these findings indicate the importance of the family climate and parental control style in explaining certain manifestations of aggressive behavior within the school environment, which calls for strengthening family counseling programs and preventive interventions that support students' psychological and social adjustment.

How to Cite:

Messaouda, H. (2026). Perceived family authority among middle school adolescents and its relationship with their aggressive behaviors (A field study at Aghiba Imran Middle School in Tamanrasset). *The International Tax Journal*, 53(2), 731–739. Retrieved from <https://internationaltaxjournal.online/index.php/itj/article/view/575>

The International tax journal ISSN: 0097-7314 E-ISSN: 3066-2370 © 2026

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Submitted: 10 July 2025 | Revised: 27 November 2025 | Accepted: 05 January 2026

Keywords---family authority, middle school, relationship.

Introduction

Throughout the course of life, individuals experience a series of stressful developmental situations, most notably early childhood and the onset of retirement. However, adolescence remains one of the most complex and intense stages in terms of psychological and social challenges. While a child, upon first entering school, may experience feelings of fear and insecurity due to separation from the family environment, and an elderly individual may face difficulties adapting to retirement and the loss of a professional role, the adolescent lives in a more confusing situation due to the ambiguity of the expected social role and the conflicting expectations associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood.

The essential developmental task during this stage lies in building a coherent identity that achieves a sense of self, enabling the adolescent to cope with rapid changes in experiences and social roles, and to bridge the gap between the childhood being left behind and the adulthood being prepared for. It is natural for this stage to be accompanied by a degree of tension and anxiety, especially in early adolescence, due to biological, emotional, and social pressures. Patterns of adolescence also differ from one individual to another depending on cultural contexts, customs, social roles, as well as the nature of the family climate and prevailing interaction patterns within it.

In this context, the family plays a central role in directing the course of the adolescent's psychological and social development. Parental practices, the level of family cohesion, and the degree of adaptability and flexibility in relationships all positively reflect on mental health, cognitive maturity, and self-esteem when they are balanced and functional. However, when the family structure is disrupted and lacks harmony and compatibility, it may be associated with the emergence of behavioral problems and various forms of deviance among children.

From the perspective of systems theory, the family is understood as an integrated whole system composed of interacting subsystems; each individual is considered a system in itself, interacting within the nuclear family system, which may in turn be part of a broader system represented by the extended family (Kafafi, 1999, p.199). This perspective emphasizes that any dysfunction in one of the subsystems necessarily affects the rest of the family system components.

The concept of "parental authority" is considered one of the most important concepts in family structure, as it refers to how interactions between parents are organized (sharing caregiving roles, agreement on child-rearing methods, mutual support and cooperation), in addition to the way they perform their duties toward their children, such as emotional involvement, establishing disciplinary rules, ensuring consistency in treatment, adapting to children's needs, and providing their material and moral requirements (Robert & Judith, 2013, p.13). The quality of these interactions contributes to establishing a family climate supportive of balanced development, whereas their dysfunction may lead to internal conflicts and role performance disturbances.

Some Western studies have indicated a relationship between authoritarian parenting style and mental health disorders among children; Beker (1964, p.45) showed that parental aggression and excessive monitoring may hinder the development of children's self-awareness and contribute to strengthening aggressive tendencies and resistance to authority. In the Arab context, some researchers consider authoritarian paternal characteristics to be prevalent in certain societies and associated with patterns of submission and dominance within the family structure, along with potential psychological and social consequences such as intolerance and various forms of violence (Sharabi, 1985, p.67).

The rigidity of the family system, when it exceeds the limits of organization and becomes inflexibility, may weaken its functional efficiency, especially in the absence of flexibility in role distribution and decision-making. The parental function is not limited to issuing orders but also includes negotiation, conflict management, and sharing responsibilities to ensure a balance of authority within the parental subsystem (Louise, 2008, p.18). When parents fail to reorganize their roles in accordance with developmental transitions, such as children entering adolescence, unhealthy alliances may emerge within the family (such as excessive closeness between one parent and the adolescent at the expense of marginalizing the other), thereby disrupting the hierarchical structure and generating contradictions that affect the adolescent's psychological stability.

In light of these contradictions, the family system may retain old interaction patterns that do not align with the requirements of the new stage, limiting the family's ability to adapt to the family life cycle or cope with unexpected stressors. As a result, the adolescent may resort to maladaptive psychological responses, ranging from psychosomatic symptoms to aggressive behaviors, as expressions of internal conflict or imbalance in authority and relationships within the family.

Accordingly, understanding the relationship between parental authority patterns and aggressive behaviors among adolescents gains particular importance in the field of family and school psychology, given its role in guiding counseling and preventive interventions aimed at enhancing mental health and social adjustment within both the family and the school.

As a result of these facts and circumstances, we were prompted to investigate family authority in its functional and dysfunctional aspects and its consequences on aggressive behavior among schooled adolescents. Thus, the research problem of the study was summarized in the following question:
_Does family authority affect the aggressive behavior of the adolescent enrolled in middle school?

Study Hypotheses:

Family authority affects the aggressive behavior of the adolescent enrolled in middle school.

Objectives of the Study:

- The current study aims to identify the effect of family authority on the aggressive behavior of the adolescent enrolled in middle school.
- To identify the type of system in which the adolescent exists and the methods of interaction among its members.

Significance of the Study:

This study represents a contribution to the field of school psychology through the application of the systemic approach in family counseling, as it is based on a comprehensive assessment of the family environment with the aim of identifying the various factors influencing the difficulties manifested by the student within the school environment. This assessment ensures that no aspect of family dynamics that may have a direct or indirect impact on the behavioral, emotional, or academic problems in question is overlooked.

From this perspective, the study provides accurate and necessary data that contribute to designing intervention and counseling programs aimed at supporting the student and strengthening cooperation between the family and the school, which positively reflects on psychological adjustment, academic achievement, and the development of family relationships.

Definition of Concepts:

Family Authority:

Terminologically: It determines who holds decision-making authority within the family. This authority usually shifts from one individual to another within the family and from one subsystem to another

depending on the situation or personal context. It also refers to the distribution of power within families (who has decision-making and influence). The member at the top of the hierarchy is the person who possesses most of the relational power (the power toward which others' power is directed) within the family. The family performs its functions well when the hierarchy is clear, with parents forming the upper levels, followed by adolescents and older children (Kafafi, 2006, p.345).

Operationally: Authority in the family of the schooled adolescent with aggressive behavior is measured through the score obtained by their parents by responding to the family authority questionnaire.

Aggressive Behavior:

Terminologically: Perry and Buss define aggressive behavior as any behavior issued by an individual aimed at causing harm or injury to another individual or group of individuals who attempt to avoid it, whether physical or verbal, direct or indirect, or expressed in the form of anger or hostility directed toward the victim (Ben Abdullah Saleh, 1995, p.22).

Operationally: It represents the results obtained from the application of the Aggressive Behavior Scale by (Buss and Perry) 1992.

The Theoretical Framework of the Study

First: Family Authority among the Schooled Adolescent

Family authority plays a central role in shaping the psychological and social behaviors of the adolescent, as it reflects how responsibilities and decisions are distributed between parents and children, and determines the clarity of roles and boundaries within the family (Minuchin, 2011, p.8). Studies indicate that families with a clear hierarchy and balanced parental functions provide a supportive environment for developing adolescents' problem-solving and decision-making skills, and reduce levels of anxiety and psychological stress among children (Louise, 2008, p.18).

In this context, school psychology considers that understanding the pattern of family authority contributes to evaluating students' behaviors within school, as clarity of family authority is associated with increased school discipline, enhanced ability to comply with academic duties, and improved social interaction with teachers and peers (Kafafi, 2006, p.345). A balanced distribution of authority between parents and children also helps develop adolescents' sense of responsibility and independence in accordance with their level of maturity, and reduces tendencies toward rebellion or disobedience (Ben Nasser, 2018, p.194).

Studies indicate that adolescents raised in families with strong and clear parental authority show greater ability to deal with internal and external conflicts, tend to adopt positive social behaviors, and are capable of expressing desires and emotions in constructive ways (Rathod, 2019, p.90). Accordingly, assessing family authority becomes an important tool in school psychology for understanding the student's environment and supporting psychological and social adjustment strategies within school.

Second: Aggressive Behavior among the Schooled Adolescent

Aggressive behavior among the schooled adolescent is closely related to the clarity of family authority, as studies have indicated that ambiguity or weakness of authority within the family increases the likelihood of aggressive behaviors, whether toward parents, peers, or teachers (Moumen, 2004, p.101). Aggressive behavior appears through disobedience, repeated conflicts, and verbal and physical aggressive practices, often reflecting the conflict between the desire for independence and family restrictions (Basyouni, 2010, p.74).

Studies show that adolescents in families with weak authority tend to use aggressive behavior as a means of expressing dissatisfaction or demanding independence, or as a response to power conflicts

between parents, such as forming alliances with one parent against the other (Kharshi, 2009, p.72). These behaviors may also be accompanied by psychological and physical symptoms, such as psychogenic loss of appetite or anxiety disorders, increasing the need for specialized educational and psychological interventions by school psychologists (Ashour, 2019, p.59).

From a school psychology perspective, understanding the relationship between family authority and aggressive behavior represents a fundamental basis for designing preventive and therapeutic interventions, whether through providing psychological counseling to parents to enhance clarity of authority, or through individual and group support programs for students to strengthen self-control and improve academic and social adjustment (Alan, 2006, p.90). Studies also emphasize the necessity of linking the assessment of aggressive behavior with family indicators to ensure a well-considered intervention that achieves balanced psychological and social development for the adolescent (Rathod, 2019, p.90).

Methodological Procedures of the Study:

Research Method:

In this study, the descriptive-analytical method was used, which describes what exists and interprets it accurately as it appears in reality. It is expressed quantitatively in order to clarify the extent of the phenomenon and reach conclusions that contribute to understanding the reality of these perceptions through analyzing and interpreting the results (Allam, 2006).

Study Sample:

The study sample consisted of (50) aggressive adolescents and their parents from middle schools in Tamanrasset.

Study Tools:

The Aggressive Behavior Scale by Buss and Perry (1992).

The suitability of the Buss and Perry Aggressive Behavior Scale (1992), adapted to the Arab environment by Abdullah Suleiman Ibrahim and Mohamed Nabil Abdel Majid (1994), was verified, and its validity and reliability were confirmed in the Algerian environment.

The scale consists of (39) items distributed across three dimensions:

Physical aggression: consisting of (14) items represented in: (8-9-10-14-15-16-17-33-34-35-36-37-38-39).

Indirect aggression or hostility: consisting of (15) items represented in: (5-6-7-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32).

Aggression toward self and others: consisting of (10) items represented in: (1-2-3-4-11-12-13-18-19-20).

Responses to its items are given on a four-point scale (Never – Rarely – Sometimes – Always) ranging from (1–4) (Shibli, 2013, p.224).

Family Functional Patterns Questionnaire:

This tool was prepared for clinical practice and school guidance counselors by Nariman Maamir to diagnose the individual and collective characteristics of family functioning. Its construction was based on systems theory, which considers the person as belonging to a family system that has an important function determining the individual's behavior through the interactions that occur among its members (i.e., the symptom appears as a result of the interactions of those functional patterns within the family).

The tool consists of two main axes reflecting the specificity of the functional pattern to which each family system belongs. In each axis, the nature of interactions within the family system and relationships in daily life are examined, whether represented in each member's role within the family or each member's function toward others, with the aim of achieving family balance and thus adjustment, leading to functional family patterns that positively reflect on children. These axes also include a set of dimensions defined by a number of positive and negative items to reveal the behaviors adopted within the system and emotional reactions.

This tool is applied to couples who have children, adolescents, or adults alike.

Presentation of the Hypothesis Results:

Which states: There are statistically significant differences in the mean scores of aggressive behavior among adolescents according to the pattern of parental authority in their families (weak (dysfunctional) and strong (functional)).

The validity of this hypothesis was verified using the (T-test) for two independent samples to determine the significance of differences between the mean scores of adolescents on the Aggressive Behavior Scale according to the parental authority pattern in their families (weak/strong). The following table presents the obtained results:

Table (01): Results of the (t) test for two independent samples indicating the significance of the difference between the mean scores of the two research groups on the Aggressive Behavior Scale

Variable	Parental Authority	Sample Size	Mean	Mean Difference	F-value for Homogeneity	t-value
Aggressive Behavior	Weak (Dysfunctional)	25	110.29	13.5	0.828	3.666**
	Strong (Functional)	25	80.78			

*The difference is significant at: 0.05

*The difference is significant at: 0.01

The statistical analysis of the results of this dimension showed that the value of the (T test) was estimated at (3.666), which is statistically significant at the level of significance ($\alpha = 0.01$). This suggests that the observed difference between the mean results of the group of adolescents from families with weak parental authority (110.29) and the mean results of the group of adolescents from families with strong parental authority (80.78) in aggressive behavior, estimated at (29.5), is a substantial difference in favor of the group of adolescents from families with weak parental authority and is not due to chance. This reflects higher levels of aggressive behavior among adolescents from families with weak parental authority compared to their peers in the second group.

The results of the current study showed that the pattern of family authority constitutes a central dimension in understanding the dynamics of adolescent behavior, as the organization of authority within the family is closely linked to children's adaptation to school requirements and the social environment. In families with strong functional authority, the hierarchy is characterized by clarity and cohesion, where the parental subsystem occupies the highest level of authority and assumes responsibility for major decisions and setting behavioral rules for children, while adolescents are granted regulated autonomy according to their developmental stage (Minuchin, 2011, p. 8). This organization is consistent with studies indicating that a clear and balanced educational style in distributing authority between parents and children enhances adolescents' emotional stability and reduces family conflicts, leading to positive reflections on school behavior, such as increased cooperation with teachers and peers and lower levels of aggression (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992, pp. 1270-1275). Studies have shown that parental authority patterns directly influence the development of positive psychological skills among adolescents, such as assertiveness, negotiation ability, and problem-solving skills, which play an important role in the school context and daily social interactions (Smetana, 1994, pp. 1152-1155). Recent studies in the Arab context have also indicated that parental authority patterns are associated with psychological vulnerability among adolescents, and that the absence of clear generational boundaries increases the likelihood of behavioral disorders, including poor school adjustment and difficulty managing social relationships (Wazi & Ben Cheikh, 2024, pp. 25-32).

In contrast, the results revealed that families with weak authority suffer from disturbances in hierarchical organization and poor distribution of power within the family system. This appears in unresolved marital conflicts, alliances between one parent and the adolescent against the other, or assigning children roles and responsibilities beyond their developmental capacities. This imbalance leads to role ambiguity and dysfunction in family performance, directly affecting the adolescent's mental health and school performance, and increasing the likelihood of rebellious or deviant behavior (Boui Ali & Hashani, 2019, pp. 15-20). Studies have also shown that weak authority or inconsistency in its practice leads to increased anxiety and psychological tension among adolescents, which is reflected in lower academic achievement and difficulty forming healthy social relationships at school (Steinberg et al., 1992, p. 1275).

Research in school psychology indicates that parental agreement in exercising authority protects adolescents from family conflicts and enhances their ability to make sound decisions and face academic and social challenges (Alan, 2006, p. 90). In contrast, the absence of such agreement leads to the inappropriate transfer of authority to the adolescent, blurring generational boundaries and negatively affecting independence, generating patterns of apparent compliance or behavioral defiance, sometimes accompanied by psychosomatic symptoms such as eating disorders, irritable bowel syndrome, or running away from home (Kharshi, 2009, pp. 72-73).

Thus, it becomes clear that family authority is not merely an internal organizational framework, but a variable that influences school performance and adolescents' social behavior. Families that achieve a balance between demands and openness, meaning those that provide clear boundaries while respecting adolescents' independence, contribute to developing psychological and social adjustment skills and reducing family conflicts. In contrast, excessive or unbalanced authoritarian patterns lead to behavioral and psychological disorders among children and place the entire family in a vulnerable position in facing daily challenges and life crises (Bermardo, 2010, p. 45; Minuchin, 2011, p. 10; Wazi & Ben Cheikh, 2024, p.).

Conclusion:

The study results indicate that the pattern of authority within the family has a profound impact on adolescents' psychological and behavioral adjustment, as well as on their academic performance and social skills at school. Families characterized by a clear hierarchy and functional parental authority, where parents cooperate in decision-making and appropriately share responsibilities with their children according to their age and level of maturity, provide a stable and psychologically safe environment. This environment enables adolescents to develop self-confidence, problem-solving abilities, and negotiation skills, making them better able to cope with school and social pressures. It was also found that this pattern of authority limits the emergence of aggressive or withdrawal behaviors and enhances positive engagement with teachers and peers, reflecting the importance of proper hierarchical organization as a foundation for sound psychological development and academic success.

On the other hand, the study results reveal that families with weak or inconsistent authority face significant difficulties in guiding their adolescent children. Role ambiguity, marital conflicts, and inappropriate alliances between one parent and the adolescent against the other lead to adolescents' psychological confusion, hesitation in understanding their role, and inability to adapt to family expectations. This pattern is associated with increased rebellious or withdrawal behaviors, poor academic performance, and difficulty engaging positively with teachers and peers, indicating that a disorganized family environment represents a psychological and behavioral risk factor extending its effects to school and influencing students' adjustment and learning ability. The results also showed that the inappropriate transfer of authority from parents to adolescents creates disruption in the hierarchy and increases the likelihood of psychosomatic or psychological symptoms, such as psychogenic loss of

appetite, apparent defiance, or running away from home, reflecting the need for targeted intervention by school psychology to support psychological adjustment in school behavior.

The study indicates that cooperation between the family and the school represents a key strategy for enhancing adolescents' psychological, social, and academic development. School psychology can design counseling programs for parents on effective authority management, clarifying roles within the family, and providing constructive conflict-resolution strategies to create a supportive family environment. Teachers and school counselors can also monitor adolescents' behaviors within the school and provide individual or group support when necessary to enhance social adjustment skills and self-discipline and reduce the effects of stress resulting from an unbalanced family structure.

The study also shows that families with a clear hierarchy provide adolescents with the opportunity to experience responsibility and decision-making within a safe framework and to develop independence in line with their developmental capacities. In contrast, families that do not provide clarity in hierarchy make adolescents feel distracted and confused, negatively affecting their school behavior and interaction with teachers and peers, and increasing the likelihood of engaging in risky or deviant behaviors.

Based on the study results, it can be stated that clarity of family authority and organization of hierarchy represent psychological protective factors for adolescents within school and reflect the family's ability to support academic and social adjustment. Accordingly, school psychology plays a fundamental role in linking the family environment to adolescents' behaviors at school by providing psychological and educational support programs, including counseling sessions for parents on authority distribution and workshops for students to enhance conflict management, negotiation skills, and understanding of authority boundaries, ensuring balanced psychological, social, and academic development for adolescents.

The study further confirms that understanding family authority dynamics is an essential element in school psychology, as teachers and school counselors can use this information to determine individual or group intervention strategies, whether to improve adolescent behavior, strengthen their ability to adapt to school rules, or provide psychological support in facing stress resulting from imbalance in authority distribution within the family. The results indicate that enhancing clarity of authority and cooperation between parents, while providing adolescents with opportunities to develop independence, represents essential preventive criteria to reduce behavioral and deviant problems and achieve academic, psychological, and social success.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that the family constitutes the primary environment for adolescents' psychological and social upbringing, and that school psychology serves as a channel for applying this understanding within schools. Strengthening communication between the family and the school, training parents in effective authority management, and providing psychological and educational support programs for adolescents ensure the provision of a safe and stable educational environment, reduce behavioral problems, and enhance academic and social adjustment, thereby supporting balanced and healthy adolescent development within school and society.

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