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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Interpretive Structural Modelling of Factors Influencing the Socialization of the Emotion of Shame in Adolescent Girls

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Abstract

Shame, as a fundamental self-conscious emotion, operates beyond an individual feeling in collectivist cultures such as Iran, playing a significant role in regulating social behaviour. The present study aimed to explain and model the structure of factors influencing the socialization of shame among adolescent girls. This exploratory mixed-methods research was conducted within an inductive–deductive framework. In the qualitative phase, factors influencing the socialization of shame were identified through semi-structured interviews with girls aged 12 to 15. In the quantitative phase, to validate and analyse the relationships among these factors, the perspectives of psychology experts and school counsellors were examined using Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM). Findings revealed that fourteen factors, organized across seven hierarchical levels, contribute to the formation and transmission of shame. At the foundational levels, Cultural Norms, Religious–Moral Teachings, and Body Image Issues were identified as the most influential factors, whereas Parenting Strategies in Socialization and Emotional Intelligence Education showed the highest level of susceptibility. Additionally, Internalization of Shame and Suppression of Authenticity were recognized as intermediary and driving factors. The results indicate that the socialization of shame in adolescent girls is a multi-level, dynamic process shaped by the interaction of cultural, familial, and individual factors. These findings provide a foundation for developing preventive and educational interventions in families, schools, and cultural institutions to transform maladaptive experiences of shame into constructive emotional processes that foster a positive sense of identity.

Keywords: Shame; Socialization; Adolescent Girls; Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM)

Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional and sensitive period between childhood and adulthood, typically spanning ages 10 to 19, and marked by profound biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes (Sawyer et al., 2018). During this stage, the need for independence, the search for an individual–social identity, and the desire for peer acceptance become more pronounced, while adolescents face a wide range of intense emotions. When emotional regulation is ineffective, the likelihood of developing emotional–behavioural disorders increases (Paulus et al., 2021). Emotions are inherently social and unavoidable phenomena that play a fundamental role in personality development, interpersonal relationships, and mental health (Keltner et al., 2022). Among self-conscious emotions, shame holds a pivotal position: it is rooted in social self-awareness and becomes more salient as social cognition matures during adolescence. Shame can act as a “social indicator,” prompting individuals to reassess and adjust their behaviour to conform to norms. However, when it becomes chronic and internalized, shame is linked to self-criticism, avoidance, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal (Paulo et al., 2020).

Research confirms this dual nature. Some studies associate shame with moral values, reparative behaviours, empathy, and positive social motivation (Tracy & Robins, 2007; DeHooe et al., 2009; Cohen et al., 2011; Leach & Cuthbert, 2014; Murphy & Coffin-Peterson, 2017). Other findings present shame as a factor in social withdrawal, fear of relationships, and reduced self-esteem (DeHooe et al., 2018). Recent studies have also highlighted the influence of body image and media representation in amplifying or mitigating shame (Frey-Harrison, 2021).

This ambivalence underscores that the process of shame socialization determines whether its adaptive or maladaptive aspects emerge (Morris & Masters, 2014). Emotional socialization is the process by which children and adolescents learn to recognize, label, express, and regulate emotions; families, schools, media, and peer groups each play distinct roles in this trajectory (Eisenberg, Hernandez, & Spinrad, 2017). International research shows that peer support or rejection can modulate the experience of shame (Miller & Densmore, 2016). Domestic studies likewise emphasize that parental training in emotion management can reduce children’s behavioural problems and enhance their psychological competence (Shokri et al., 2023; Zahedi et al., 2024).

In collectivist cultures such as Iran, shame is closely linked to concepts like *hayā* (modesty) and *nejābat* (chastity). Within these societies, girls are especially exposed to both direct and indirect messages about shame and emotional control (Telzer et al., 2020; Collardiu et al., 2023). Domestic studies likewise show that gendered shame and related values become internalized from early childhood (Farahani et al., 2024).

Moreover, interpersonal cognitive capacities such as parental mentalization—the ability to perceive and reflect on mental states—play a key role in shaping and regulating experiences of shame; deficits in this capacity can heighten adolescents’ vulnerability to its negative consequences (Yazdani-Mehr et al., 2023). Evidence indicates that girls encounter shame more

frequently than boys and display stronger emotional reactions to it (Nyström et al., 2018). Parental attention to a child's appearance can also foster body-related shame, even when that attention seems indirect from the child's perspective (Pessini et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, parenting interventions based on mentalization have shown that strengthening this capacity in parents can help prevent children's emotional-behavioural problems and reduce their vulnerability to shame (Gruienkaite-Pavalaite, Byrne, & Barkauskiene, 2023; Alsqvist et al., 2012). Findings also indicate that parents adopt different emotion-socialization styles depending on their cultural background and the child's gender (Jeffrey et al., 2015).

Despite extensive efforts to study the emotion of shame, most research has been conducted in clinical settings, creating a significant gap in understanding the socialization of shame in adolescents (Kekit & Ekström, 2019). Although systematic investigations of the relationship between parental behaviours and children's and adolescents' self-conscious emotions—using ecological paradigms—allow careful observation and analysis of these processes, the precise dimensions of shame experiences, their components, mechanisms, and outcomes in adolescents' lives remain insufficiently explained (Nikolic et al., 2023).

Given shame's importance in regulating interpersonal relationships, its role in moral development, and its impact on mental health, an in-depth exploration of adolescents' lived experiences in this domain is essential. Accordingly, the present study was designed to develop an interpretive structural model of the factors influencing the socialization of shame in adolescent girls, aiming to clarify how this emotion can shift from a harmful experience to a constructive source of resilience, self-efficacy, and the formation of a healthy emotional identity.

Method

The present study is applied in purpose and follows an exploratory mixed-methods design (qualitative–quantitative) within an inductive–deductive framework. The main objective was to identify and explain the relationships among the factors influencing the socialization of shame in adolescent girls. The research design consisted of two main stages: a qualitative phase for identifying the components and a quantitative phase for analyzing the relationships among them.

In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with adolescent girls aged 12 to 15 to identify the factors influencing the socialization of shame. Interview questions were developed based on previous literature and expert consultation to ensure content relevance. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, based on criteria such as previous experiences of shame, verbal ability to articulate those experiences, and informed written consent provided by their parents. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. “Participants represented a diverse range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis with a grounded theory approach, meaning that the data were coded and categorized in three stages: open, axial, and selective coding. To ensure content validity of the qualitative data, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated based on expert evaluations from the fields of psychology and counseling. Reliability was assessed through Cohen's Kappa coefficient between two independent coders; the obtained value (greater than 0.75) indicated a high level of agreement and satisfactory reliability of the qualitative findings.

In the quantitative phase, aimed at validating and ranking the relationships among the extracted factors, the Q-sort method and Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) were employed.

In the first step, a final list of fourteen factors identified in the qualitative phase was prepared and presented as Q-sort cards to a panel of psychology experts and school counselors. The experts (15 participants) were selected using the snowball sampling method and were confirmed based on their professional experience working with adolescents. They were asked to prioritize the factors according to their importance and conceptual relevance. The data obtained from the Q-sort procedure were analyzed to assess content validity and expert consensus. To ensure reliability, the test-retest method was applied: two weeks later, the same cards were redistributed to the same experts, and a correlation coefficient above 0.70 confirmed acceptable stability.

In the next step, the relationships among factors and their hierarchical structuring were analyzed using the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) technique. In this method, variables are compared pairwise, and the output is a hierarchical structure that illustrates the driving and dependent relationships among the influencing factors. The analysis was conducted based on the Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) and the Reachability Matrix (RM), leading to the organization of factors across various levels according to their driving power and dependence.

Throughout all stages of the research, ethical principles were strictly observed. Informed written consent was obtained from both the adolescent participants and their parents. Participants were assured that all information would be used solely for research purposes and that complete data confidentiality would be maintained. In cases where participants experienced emotional distress during interviews, access to a psychologist was provided. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013 revision).

Findings

In the first step, data from the semi-structured interviews were coded using MAXQDA 2020. Analysis revealed 14 main categories and 53 sub-categories representing factors that influence the socialization of shame in adolescent girls. Table 1 presents the complete set of identified factors. These factors served as the foundational inputs for the subsequent quantitative phase using the Interpretive Structural Modelling approach.

To assess the content validity of the interviews, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated and found to be 0.65. Reliability, evaluated with Cohen's Kappa coefficient, was 0.79—both indices indicating satisfactory validity and reliability of the qualitative data.

In the next step, to reduce potential overlap among closely related definitions and to arrive at a shorter, expert-approved list of factors, the Q-sort method was applied. A preliminary list of the identified factors was prepared, and eight experts were asked to indicate whether each factor should be considered an effective indicator of shame socialization in adolescent girls. The percentage of expert agreement was then calculated for each factor. To ensure acceptable content validity, a 65 percent agreement threshold was adopted, following the guideline of Esmaeili-Pour et al. (2016).

Table 1. Factors Influencing the Socialization of Shame

Code	Main Category	Sub-categories
X1	<i>Economy of Acceptance & Peer Pressure</i>	Peer acceptance; Peer judgment; Conformity pressure; Bullying and exclusion; Social approval
X2	<i>Family Dynamics</i>	Family expectations; Emphasis on achievement and perfectionism; Parental mentalizing language; Parent–child interactions
X3	<i>Socio-Cultural Context</i>	Cultural–social norms; Media and digital environment; Gender distinctions in emotional expression and regulation
X4	<i>Social Approval</i>	Sharing personal milestones; Observing correct decisions in others' behavior; Collective validation
X5	<i>Institutional & Educational Settings</i>	Academic competition; Teacher feedback; Popularity hierarchies; Family's role in valuing academic success; Perfectionistic climate
X6	<i>Emotional-Intelligence Education</i>	Accurate perception and recognition; Role-playing; Workshops and activities
X7	<i>Social Isolation & Exclusion</i>	Avoidance of social situations; Loneliness and seclusion
X8	<i>Parenting Strategies in Socialization</i>	Supportive home environment; Parental emotional coaching; Integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)
X9	<i>Internalization of Shame</i>	Feelings of inadequacy; Negative self-image and perception; Struggles with negative thoughts; Past experiences; Self-compassion
X10	<i>Temperament & Personality Traits</i>	Perfectionism; Sensitivity to social evaluation; Rejection sensitivity; Low self-esteem
X11	<i>Body-Image Issues</i>	Gender stereotypes; Sense of worth and self-confidence; Physical appearance; Pubertal changes; Assertiveness or ambition
X12	<i>Religious–Moral Teachings & Cultural Values</i>	Virtue-based shame (<i>hayā</i>); Cultural norms of femininity and family honour; Boundaries of gendered modesty
X13	<i>Suppression of Authenticity & Difficulty in Self-Expression</i>	Barriers to identity and personal interests; Difficulty expressing oneself; Fear of openly sharing thoughts, feelings, and opinions
X14	<i>Bullying & Social Rejection</i>	Being ignored; Silent treatment; Impact on self-esteem and sense of belonging; Negative behaviors

Structural Analysis of the Relationships Among Factors Influencing the Socialization of Shame

To analyze the relationships among the factors identified in the qualitative phase, the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) technique was applied. This method facilitates understanding of the hierarchical structure and causal relationships among the variables and consists of several analytical stages summarized below.

Step 1: Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM)

In this stage, pairwise relationships among the research indicators were analysed. Based on expert judgments, the following symbols were used to denote the direction or absence of influence between any two factors:

- **V** – Factor *i* influences factor *j*
- **A** – Factor *j* influences factor *i*
- **X** – Mutual influence between *i* and *j* (bidirectional)
- **O** – No relationship between *i* and *j*

The Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) compares each pair of factors across these four conceptual relationship types. The table below presents the symbols representing the majority consensus among the experts.

Table 2. SSIM of Factors Influencing the Socialization of Shame

	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12	X13	X14
X1	–	O	O	V	V	O	O	V	O	O	O	V	V	
X2		–	A	V	V	O	O	V	V	O	O	A	V	V
X3			–	O	O	V	O	V	V	V	O	O	O	
X4				–	A	A	A	X	O	A	A	A	A	V
X5					–	A	V	V	V	X	V	V	O	
X6						–	A	V	O	A	O	A	A	O
X7							–	V	O	V	O	O	V	O
X8								–	A	A	A	A	A	V
X9									–	A	V	A	V	
X10										–	O	O	V	V
X11											–	V	V	V
X12												–	X	V
X13													–	V
X14														–

This matrix reflects the collective expert judgment regarding the directional and reciprocal influences among the 14 factors shaping the socialization of shame.

Step 2: Constructing the Initial and Final Reachability Matrix

The initial and final reachability matrix was obtained by converting the SSIM into a binary (0–1) matrix. In each row, the symbols X and V were replaced with 1, and the symbols A and O were replaced with 0. The result is presented below.

Table 3. Summary of the Final Reachability Matrix and the Driving–Dependence Indices of Factors Influencing the Socialization of Shame

Code	Factor	Driving Power	Dependence	Position in the Model
X1	Economy of Acceptance and Peer Pressure	11	1	Highly Influential (Independent)
X2	Family Dynamics	11	7	Linkage
X3	Socio-Cultural Context	11	1	Independent / Main Driving Factor
X4	Social Approval	3	13	Dependent
X5	Institutional and Educational Contexts	11	7	Linkage
X6	Emotional Intelligence Education	4	11	Dependent
X7	Social Isolation and Rejection	11	1	Linkage
X8	Parenting Strategies in Socialization	3	13	Dependent / Main Affected Factor
X9	Internalization of Shame	8	10	Linkage
X10	Temperament and Personality Traits	9	7	Linkage
X11	Body Image Issues	11	5	Independent / Main Driving Factor
X12	Religious and Moral Teachings	8	10	Mediating (Linkage–Mediating)
X13	Suppression of Authenticity and Difficulty in Self-Expression	8	10	Mediating (Linkage–Mediating)
X14	Bullying and Social Rejection	1	14	Dependent

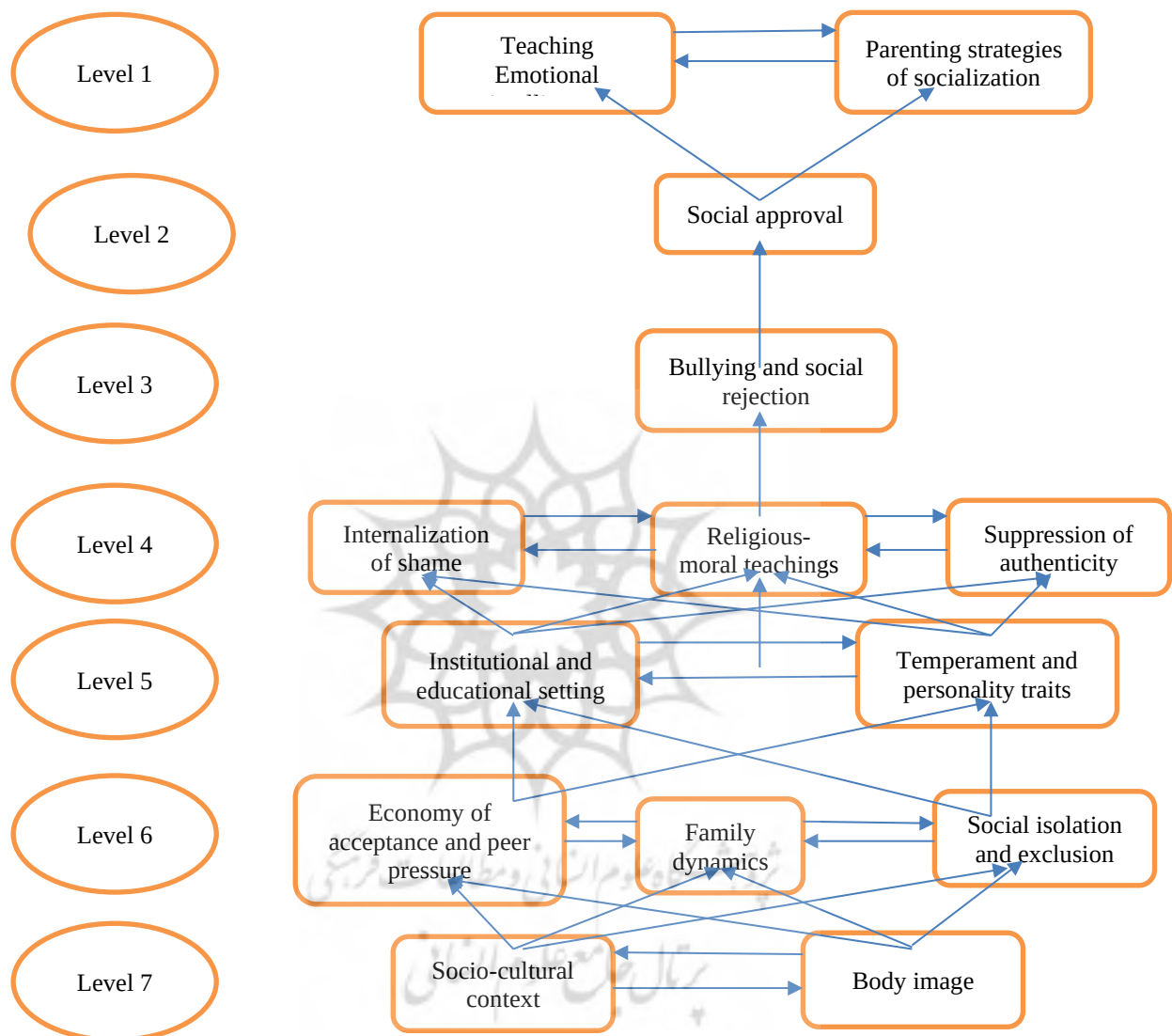
Hierarchical Structuring of Factors Influencing the Socialization of Shame

The hierarchical structure obtained from expert judgments was cross-validated with the qualitative themes to ensure conceptual alignment and theoretical coherence. The analysis of relationships among the identified factors, conducted through Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM), revealed that the process of shame socialization in adolescent girls is organized across seven hierarchical levels. At the highest level, Parenting Strategies and Internalization of Shame emerged as core, highly affected variables representing the final outcomes of the system. At the intermediate levels, factors such as Emotional Intelligence Education, Social Approval, and Suppression of Authenticity function as mediating variables, bridging the gap between broader cultural structures and individual emotional experiences. At the foundational level, Socio-

Cultural Context and Body Image Issues were identified as fundamental and influential variables that define the overall trajectory of the shame socialization process.

The structural model of socialization of the emotion of shame is depicted below.

Figure 1. Structural Model of the Factors Influencing the Socialization of the Emotion of Shame



Step 5: Analysis of Driving Power and Dependence

The MICMAC analysis was performed to evaluate the driving power and dependence of each variable, allowing a more detailed examination of the scope and influence of every factor (Habibi & Afridi, 2022).

After determining the degree of influence and dependence, all variables affecting the socialization of shame in adolescent girls were classified into one of the four standard clusters of the MICMAC method:

1. Autonomous Cluster: Indicators with minimal dependence and minimal driving power. In this study, no indicator was placed in the autonomous cluster.

6														
5													X4	
4												X6		
3													X8	
2											X14			
1	Autonomous												Dependent	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14

Discussion

The present study aimed to identify and explain the relationships among the factors influencing the socialization of shame in adolescent girls. Given the complex and multi-level nature of these relationships, the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) approach was employed in combination with MICMAC analysis for the first time to systematically map the causal network and hierarchical structure of variables. The findings revealed that the socialization of shame is not a linear or straightforward process but rather a dynamic and intertwined structure that originates from broader cultural and social levels and extends into family interactions and internal emotional experiences.

At the seventh level, Socio-Cultural Context and Body Image Issues were positioned as the most influential, independent variables. Consistent with the MICMAC results, these variables demonstrated the highest driving power and the lowest dependence, serving as the main engines that activate the experience of shame. Cultural pressures, honor-related norms, and media representations of physical beauty collectively shape the core emotional landscape in which shame emerges for adolescent girls. Previous research in collectivist cultures has similarly described shame as a social regulator that sustains interpersonal harmony and adherence to group norms (Wong & Tsai, 2007; Morris & Masters, 2014). Moreover, media-driven body ideals have been identified as significant sources of shame and lowered self-esteem among adolescents (Rogers, 2023; Free-Harrison, 2021; Pasini et al., 2023). Within the Iranian context, concepts such as honor and modesty are deeply intertwined with the experience of shame (Farahani et al., 2024).

At the sixth level, three variables—Economy of Acceptance and Peer Pressure, Family Dynamics, and Social Isolation—emerged as highly influential. Among them, Family Dynamics and Peer Pressure play particularly critical roles. Parent–child relationships, parental emotional attunement, and the tone of parental feedback fundamentally shape patterns of shame development. Studies have shown that parental emotional synchrony enhances emotion regulation, whereas controlling or shaming behavior fosters maladaptive shame (Katz, Milliken & Stettler, 2014; Yazdani-Mehr et al., 2023). Authoritarian parenting styles tend to transmit messages of inadequacy, leading to the internalization of shame (Paolo et al., 2020), which aligns with findings by Eisenberg et al. (2017) and Hashemi et al. (2022). On the other hand, positive peer feedback has been shown to buffer against maladaptive shame (Miller & Dunsmore, 2016; Brown & Lewis, 2022). In the same level, Social Isolation functioned as a

linkage variable, being both cause and consequence: it can result from family or peer pressures while simultaneously perpetuating the cycle of shame. Adolescents deprived of supportive networks not only experience higher levels of shame but also lack the means to regulate it (Tangney & Dearing, 2007; Nyström et al., 2018).

At the fifth level, Institutional and Educational Contexts and Temperament and Personality Traits were positioned. Competitive academic environments, perfectionistic school climates, and excessive emphasis on achievement create conditions where failure equals worthlessness (Meshkouri et al., 2024). International studies have similarly described schools as institutions of shame production (Paulus et al., 2021). Additionally, Personality Traits—such as perfectionism, sensitivity to evaluation, and low self-esteem—serve as linkage factors, heightening vulnerability to shame (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Nyström et al., 2018).

The fourth level includes Internalization of Shame, Religious–Moral Teachings, and Suppression of Authenticity, illustrating how cultural and familial pressures become internalized as part of the adolescent's self-concept. When presented in a balanced manner, religious and moral teachings can act as protective mechanisms for emotion regulation; however, when interpreted rigidly, they may promote self-suppression and exacerbate maladaptive shame (Wong & Tsai, 2007; Nussbaum, 2010).

At the third level, Bullying and Social Rejection appear as outcomes of family and institutional conditions, reinforcing feelings of shame (Miller & Dunsmore, 2016; Telzer et al., 2020). The second level is characterized by Social Approval, which represents a fundamental developmental need in adolescence. The quality or absence of such approval determines whether shame develops into empathy and self-improvement or regresses into self-criticism and withdrawal.

Finally, at the first level, Parenting Strategies in Socialization and Emotional Intelligence Education occupy the most dependent positions. Their effectiveness depends largely on the existence of supportive cultural and institutional frameworks (Shokri et al., 2023; Fonagy & Steele, 2012).

The MICMAC analysis further confirmed that no variable belongs to the autonomous cluster, indicating that all factors interact within the shame socialization network and none operates independently. This finding supports the dynamic, reciprocal, and networked nature of shame within the Iranian cultural context.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the socialization of shame in adolescent girls is a multi-directional and networked process that originates in cultural layers and extends through familial, institutional, and individual relationships. Foundational drivers such as Socio-Cultural Context and Body Image serve as the primary activating forces, while other factors act as mediators or outcomes along the path of influence. At the intermediate level, Social Isolation and Personality Traits function as channels through which cultural values and pressures are

transmitted into personal experiences of shame. At the lower levels, Social Approval, Parenting Strategies, and Emotional Intelligence Education operate less as sources and more as reflections of higher-level conditions.

From an applied perspective, the results underscore the necessity of designing multi-level interventions. At the macro level, cultural and media representations of shame and moral values should be critically re-evaluated. At the meso level, school climates should be restructured, and parents should be educated in emotion-focused parenting. At the micro level, enhancing emotional literacy, encouraging open dialogue about shame, and creating safe emotional spaces can transform shame from a destructive experience into a source of moral growth, emotional resilience, and healthy identity formation.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Some participants found it difficult to articulate their experiences of shame; there was a lack of extensive domestic literature; and the multi-level analytical process presented interpretive complexity. Moreover, since this study was conducted within a specific cultural context and focused exclusively on girls aged 12–15, the generalizability of the findings to other age groups, genders, or cultural settings should be approached with caution.

Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples across various Iranian cultural subcontexts and to employ mixed-method designs (qualitative–quantitative) for deeper insight. Additionally, exploring gender differences in the experience and socialization of shame could further illuminate the multidimensional nature of this emotion.

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