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Children's Social Adaptation with the lens of Family Tourism: A case of 6 to 10 years old children in the City of Tehran

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Abstract

One of the emerging fields in tourism is family tourism, which has recently garnered the attention of researchers. Among the various topics explored in this field are the role of children in decision-making, their experiences related to tourism and travel, and the impact of tourism on their mental health and social adaptation. In this context, the present study aims to examine the relationship between family tourism and the social adaptation of children aged 6 to 10 in Tehran. This research follows a descriptive-analytical approach based on quantitative data. The statistical population consists of all children aged 6 to 10 in Tehran, with a sample size of 384, estimated using Cochran's formula. Sampling was conducted using a multi-stage cluster sampling method. Data was collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS software, employing Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical tests, Pearson correlation tests, and both bivariate and multivariate regression analyses. The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between family tourism and children's social adaptation. Additionally, the study reveals that key components such as reducing aggressive and antisocial behaviors, improving physical well-being, enhancing general responsibility, and strengthening social performance exhibit the strongest correlations with the family tourism variable.

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Introduction

One of the fastest-growing segments of tourism today is family tourism, which has recently garnered significant attention from researchers in tourism and social studies. Surveys indicate that family travel and the family tourism market, particularly in Asian countries, have experienced remarkable growth (Lehto et al., 2017). "For instance, family tourism is the most popular form of travel, accounting for 19.64% of domestic tourism and 36.06% of international tourism among Japanese residents. Additionally, many travel agencies offer packages under the title *tabi-iku*, a type of family tourism that has gained significant popularity among Japanese families (Miyakawa & Oguchi, 2022). On the other hand, an important topic in the field of family tourism is the role of children in travel. Survey results indicate that children play a central role in family tourism, making it essential to focus on this segment of the market for the future of the tourism industry. Researchers have examined the positive impact of family tourism in some of the world's most populous countries, such as China, and found that it plays a significant role in strengthening family relationships and enhancing mental well-being (Filep & Laing, 2019).

Mental health is a contributory factor to the growth of family and society. "Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community" (WHO, 2022)¹. Tourism contributes to improved mental well-being. Considering children's mental health can foster family cohesion, enhance communication, and create a positive atmosphere both during and after the trip. Family travel has profound effects on children—effects that may seem simple on the surface but are deeply rooted and reflected in their memories and narratives long after the journey. While many researchers have examined various issues related to tourists, the impact of family tourism on children's social adaptation remains underexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to address the question: Can family tourism play a role in enhancing children's social adaptation?

Literature Review

"In recent years, family tourism has gained increasing attention from researchers as a form of travel that aims to enhance both social and family capital (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). Family tourism provides an opportunity to strengthen bonds, enhance communication, and deepen family relationships. Vacations are often the only extended period when the entire family spends time together, away from the demands of work and school. The motivations behind family vacations differ from those of other tourist groups. Unlike traditional tourism, which is often defined by the desire to escape one's usual

¹. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

environment, family tourism is primarily driven by the goal of spending quality leisure time together, engaging in enjoyable activities, and creating lasting positive memories (Wu et al., 2021).

This perspective emphasizes the role of family tourism in fostering social communication and shaping social identities through connections within a family or social network. Families traveling with children make up a significant portion of tourism industry consumers, accounting for more than a third of tourism-related revenue. Family travel, including trips taken by adults such as grandparents accompanied by children, is projected to grow at a faster rate than other types of leisure travel. This trend is driven in part by its ability to bridge the gap between nuclear families and the increasing preference for spending holidays together, away from work pressures and daily responsibilities (Gao et al., 2018). The rapid pace of urban life and its associated pressures have led parents to place greater importance on spending quality time with their children—fostering meaningful interactions and prioritizing family tourism. As a result, 'family time' has become central to enhancing social communication, shaping social identities, and supporting children's mental well-being through travel (Shaw, 2008).

The importance of family relationships has always been emphasized in the literature related to family tourism (Gram, 2005; Schänzel et al., 2012; Shaw, 2008). "The emphasis on social values, such as family togetherness and interpersonal relationships, has been a consistent theme in family tourism literature. However, similar social interaction needs—such as bonding with friends or business partners—are also relevant to other groups of non-family tourists.

The key concept here is social capital, as proposed by Bourdieu in 1984. The family, as one of the most fundamental sources of social capital, plays a significant role in shaping children's development (Gao et al., 2018). Family tourism can serve as a guiding force for future generations by instilling moral principles and human values in children. It is essential to identify the cultural, infrastructural, and environmental components of tourism destinations that positively impact children's mental health, ensuring their needs are fully considered rather than treating them as mere travel companions. Prioritizing children's well-being—both mental and physical—is fundamental to family travel. Since family tourism plays a crucial role in creating lasting, positive memories for children and addressing families' concerns about growth and empowerment, all these dimensions must be thoughtfully integrated (Pomfret & Varley, 2019).

A review of research across various fields of tourism reveals diverse findings on the impact of tourism on mental health (Cooper & Buckley, 2022). Miyakawa & Oguchi (2022) conducted a study on the impact of family tourism in enhancing parents' well-being and children's general skills. Using a pre-test-post-test design, the research examined the positive effects of family tourism on both groups. The findings revealed that parents experienced improved well-being, while children demonstrated enhanced

general skills following their family tourism experiences. Furthermore, children's memorable travel experiences and skill development were positively linked to changes in parental well-being. On the other hand, regarding the impact of family travel on learning, Fu et al. (2022) conducted a study using the constructivist grounded theory approach and analyzing interview transcripts and travel posts. Adopting the Motivation-Activity-Transformative Learning chain perspective, the research examines pre-trip motivations, activities undertaken during the trip, and transformative learning outcomes post-trip. The findings indicate that family travel is directly linked to the emotional values of the family. From the perspective of family adventure tourism, Pomfret and Varley (2019) examined the role of adventure tourism in family relationships, health, fostering a spirit of adventure, and children's individual development. Their findings suggest that families tend to maintain their usual lifestyle during vacations and gatherings. Moreover, tourism, particularly when framed as an adventure activity, not only enhances interaction among family members but also provides opportunities for recreation, exercise, and health benefits, as well as learning from both natural and cultural environments. These short-term trips allow families to spend uninterrupted, extended time together. The results also indicate that adventurous activities contribute to children's positive personal growth and development, while the act of creating and recalling shared memories strengthens family bonds.

Pomfret (2021) conducted a study examining the motivations that encourage individual family members to engage in adventure tourism during holidays, as well as the well-being benefits derived from these experiences. The research identified key hedonic themes, including heightened positive emotions and relief from distress and boredom. Eudaimonic themes encompassed challenge, negative affect, optimal experiences, accomplishment, and personal development. The findings also revealed that family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping subjective well-being motivations that facilitate adventure participation and influence the benefits gained by different family members. Similarly, Ying Wu et al. (2019) investigated Chinese children's family tourism experiences. The study found that, at least in the schools examined, Chinese children have extensive travel experiences and a clear understanding of what constitutes a memorable family tourism experience. These experiences typically occur within nuclear families and emphasize family togetherness and physical activities. The results also highlighted the significance of encounters with animals, tasting local cuisine, and appreciating both natural and built environments in shaping children's travel memories."

Numerous studies have explored the role of family tourism in children's mental health, focusing on aspects such as social skills, general competencies, learning, and education. Additionally, some researchers have examined the obstacles and challenges in the development of child and family tourism, as well as children's experiences within this context. However, research specifically addressing social adaptation—an essential dimension of children's mental health—and the impact of family tourism on

this aspect remains limited. One notable exception is the study by Kilichenko and Vovchok (2019), which, from an ethnographic tourism perspective, investigates the cultural and social adaptation of migrant children. Given this, there is a clear gap in the literature regarding the relationship between family tourism and children's social adjustment.

Hypothesis formulation:

The main hypothesis of this study is as follows:

'Family tourism has a significant and positive impact on children's social adaptation'.

Based on Dokhanchi's (1998) study on social adjustment and his proposed questionnaire, the conceptual model of the current research is presented in Figure 1. Dokhanchi identified four key dimensions for assessing children's social adjustment: improvement of physical symptoms, development of independence and responsibility, enhancement of social functioning, and reduction of aggressive and antisocial behaviors.

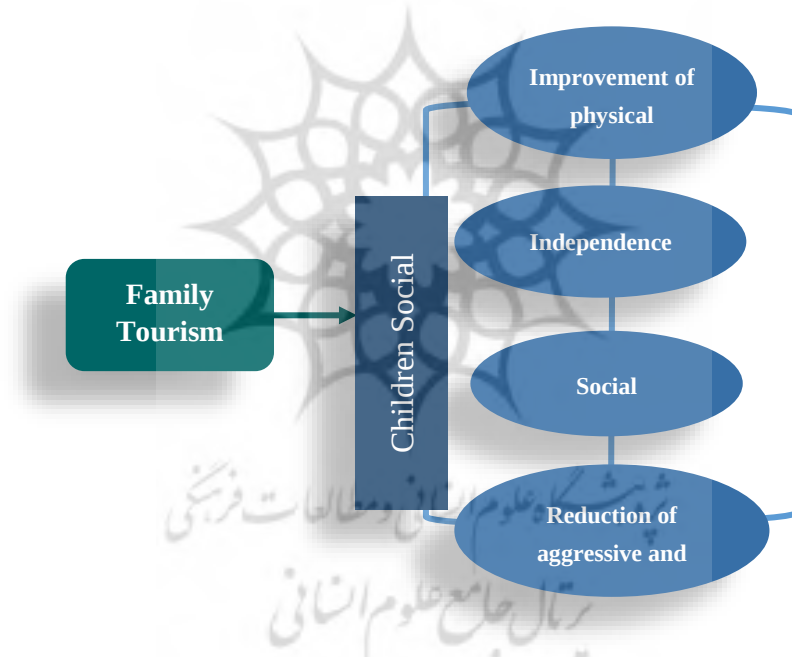


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Research, based on Dokhanchi's (1998) study

According to the conceptual model, four sub-hypotheses can be defined as follows:

1. Family tourism has a significant and positive impact on improving children's physical well-being.
2. Family tourism fosters children's independence and sense of responsibility.
3. Family tourism positively influences children's social performance.
4. Family tourism contributes to the enhancement of social functioning in children by reducing aggressive and antisocial behaviors.

Methodology

The present study is an applied, quantitative research. Data was collected using the standard questionnaire on children's social adjustment developed by Dokhanchi (1998). Additionally, to measure the family tourism variable, a researcher-designed questionnaire was employed, with its validity reviewed and ultimately approved by experts.

The statistical population consisted of students aged 6 to 10 in Tehran in 2023, with at least one recent family tourism experience. The sample size was determined to be 384 based on Cochran's Sample Size Formula. A multi-stage cluster sampling method was used, whereby the city was divided into five clusters: north, south, east, west, and center. One region was randomly selected from each cluster, followed by the selection of three elementary schools per region. Convenience sampling was then applied to select participants from each school. Notably, the questionnaires were completed in the presence of and with participation from the parents.

To analyze the data, Pearson Correlation Test, Multivariate Regression Analysis, and Path Analysis were conducted using the SMART PLS2 approach. From a descriptive statistical perspective, demographic variables such as gender, age, travel frequency, and other relevant factors were examined. Table 1 presents the study's variables and indicators.

Table1. Variables, indicators and the number of questions

variable	indicator	Number of questions
Family Tourism	To reinforce family relationships	3
	To reinforce social relationships	3
	Doing fun activities	3
	Meeting individual needs	3
Children Social Adaptation	improvement of physical symptoms	3
	general responsibility	7
	social performance	9
	reduction of aggressive and antisocial symptoms	17

A pre-test conducted with 30 samples confirmed the reliability of the research instrument. Table 2 presents the corresponding Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient.

Findings

Table 3 indicates demographic profiles of the respondents.

Before conducting statistical tests, the normality of the data distribution must first be determined. Descriptive statistics—including standard deviation, median, mean, mode, and variance—are then evaluated and presented in Table 4.

All variables and indicators were examined in terms of skewness and kurtosis (Table 5).

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

variable	indicator	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (each indicator)	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (each variable)
Family Tourism	To reinforce family relationships	0.697	0.742
	To reinforce social relationships	0.762	
	Doing fun activities	0.748	
	Meeting individual needs	0.681	
Children Social Adaptation	improvement of physical symptoms	0.738	0.759
	general responsibility	0.781	
	social performance	0.846	
	reduction of aggressive and antisocial symptoms	0.787	
Overall	0.756		

Table 3. Demographic profiles of the respondents

variables	N	%
Respondent's role		
Mother	83	22
Father	301	78
Child's gender		
Girl	186	48
Boy	198	52
Age		
6-7	120	31
8-9	137	36
10	127	33
Frequency of family trips in a year		
1	58	15
2	110	29
3	135	35
More than 3	81	21

Table 4. Descriptive statistics

variable	indicator	Mean	standard deviation	Variance
Family Tourism	To reinforce family relationships	3.681	0.5161	0.285
	To reinforce social relationships	3.527	0.5179	0.271
	Doing fun activities	3.649	0.5731	0.465
	Meeting individual needs	3.421	0.6135	0.321
Children Social Adaptation	improvement of physical symptoms	3.540	0.6091	0.421
	general responsibility	3.611	0.6392	0.275
	social performance	3.612	0.6574	0.272
	reduction of aggressive and antisocial symptoms	3.547	0.6381	0.281

Table 5. Skewness and kurtosis of the variables

variable	indicator	skewness	kurtosis
Family Tourism	To reinforce family relationships	-0.810	0.058
	To reinforce social relationships	-.0712	0.152
	Doing fun activities	-0.619	0.175
	Meeting individual needs	-0.689	0.173
Children Social Adaptation	improvement of physical symptoms	-0.578	0.254
	general responsibility	-0.683	0.141
	social performance	-0.535	0.249
	reduction of aggressive and antisocial symptoms	-0.641	0.168

Following the assessment of data distribution normality and skewness, the next step is to conduct the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test to confirm the normality of the data. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test on the study Variables

variable	Significance level	indicator	Number	Significance level
Family Tourism	0.189	To reinforce family relationships	384	0.083
		To reinforce social relationships	384	0.181
		Doing fun activities	384	0.117
		Meeting individual needs	384	0.082
Children Social Adaptation	0.176	improvement of physical symptoms	384	0.125
		general responsibility	384	0.112
		social performance	384	0.119
		reduction of aggressive and antisocial symptoms	384	0.109

First sub-hypothesis

The first sub-hypothesis of the research examines the relationship between family tourism and the improvement of children's physical symptoms. To assess this, the connection between the independent variable and each dependent variable is analyzed. The correlation results are presented in Table 6. The findings indicate a significant relationship between the research variables at a level above 0.05. Furthermore, at a confidence level of 99%, all research variables demonstrate a statistically significant correlation with one another. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test results, examining the relationship between the improvement of children's physical symptoms and various family tourism components, are shown in Table 7. According to the findings, there is a positive and significant correlation between children's physical well-being and the four components of family tourism.

Table 7. The relationship between the components of family tourism and the improvement of children's physical symptoms

Independent variable	N	R	Sig.
Family Tourism	384	0.631	0.001
Components of Family Tourism			
To reinforce family relationships	384	0.621	0.001
To reinforce social relationships	384	0.521	0.006
Doing fun activities	384	0.625	0.003
Meeting individual needs	384	0.489	0.008

Thus, the hypothesis regarding the significant relationship between family tourism and the improvement of children's physical symptoms is confirmed.

Second sub-hypothesis

"The second sub-hypothesis of this study examines the relationship between family tourism and children's sense of general responsibility. The findings are presented in Table 8. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test results, assessing the relationship between children's general responsibility and various family tourism components, are shown in Table 8. The results indicate a significant positive correlation between the development of children's general responsibility and the four components of family tourism.

Table 8. The relationship between the components of family tourism and General Responsibility

Independent variable	N	R	Sig.
Family Tourism	384	0.592	0.000
Components of Family Tourism			
To reinforce family relationships	384	0.511	0.005
To reinforce social relationships	384	0.553	0.003
Doing fun activities	384	0.608	0.001
Meeting individual needs	384	0.524	0.004

Third sub-hypothesis

The third sub-hypothesis of this study examines the relationship between family tourism and children's social performance. The findings are presented in Table 9. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test results, assessing the relationship between children's social performance and various family tourism components, are shown in Table 8. The results indicate a significant positive correlation between children's social performance and the four components of family tourism. Consequently, this hypothesis is confirmed.

Fourth sub-hypothesis

The fourth sub-hypothesis of this study examines the relationship between family tourism and the reduction of aggressive and antisocial symptoms. The findings are presented in Table 10. The results

indicate a significant positive correlation between the reduction of aggressive and antisocial behaviors and the four components of family tourism. Consequently, this hypothesis is confirmed.

Table 9. The relationship between the components of family tourism and Social Performance

Independent variable	N	R	Sig.
Family Tourism	384	0.691	0.001
Components of Family Tourism			
To reinforce family relationships	384	0.631	0.001
To reinforce social relationships	384	0.598	0.003
Doing fun activities	384	0.678	0.007
Meeting individual needs	384	0.621	0.001

Table 10. The relationship between the components of family tourism and reduction of aggressive and antisocial symptoms

Independent variable	N	R	Sig.
Family Tourism	384	0.528	0.001
Components of Family Tourism			
To reinforce family relationships	384	0.583	0.003
To reinforce social relationships	384	0.551	0.001
Doing fun activities	384	0.589	0.004
Meeting individual needs	384	0.462	0.000

Main Hypothesis

To examine the relationship between family tourism and children's social adjustment using multivariable regression, all independent variables were first entered into the regression equation, followed by the components of the dependent variable. The detailed results are presented in Table 11. The statistical findings confirm that family tourism has a positive impact on children's social adjustment.

Table 11. The results of multiple regression analysis between family tourism and children's social adjustment components

Independent Variable	Dependent Variables	Multiple Correlation	R ²	Standard β	β	Standard error	T	Sig.
Family Tourism	improvement of physical symptoms	0.714	0.651	0.53	0.931	0.124	4.42	0.000
	general responsibility			0.48	1.085	0.041	3.84	0.001
	social performance			0.43	1.041	0.138	4.52	0.000
	reduction of aggressive and antisocial symptoms			0.64	0.898	0.081	3.59	0.001

Conclusion and Discussion

To examine the relationship between family tourism and children's social adjustment using multivariable regression, all independent variables were first entered into the regression equation, followed by the components of the dependent variable. The detailed results are presented in Table 11. The statistical findings confirm that family tourism has a positive impact on children's social adjustment.

The findings indicate that family tourism positively contributes to the improvement of children's physical symptoms, aligning with the research findings of Wu et al. (2021), Schanzel (2021), Gao et al. (2018), and Shaw et al. (2008). This correlation suggests that when a family shares strong feelings of solidarity, connection, and emotional commitment, they act as a protective support system for any member experiencing physical or mental distress. This familial support mitigates discomfort and aids in recovery. In general, a united family prevents individuals from feeling isolated, fostering a sense of security and peace of mind by reinforcing the idea that they have a dependable support network. For children, family trips provide relief from everyday pressures, allowing them to engage in enjoyable activities and gain new experiences free from daily stressors. This process encourages emotional and physical well-being, creating a dynamic family atmosphere that enhances productivity beyond expected outcomes. Ultimately, family tourism fosters motivation to improve children's physical health, which in turn contributes to their mental well-being and social adjustment.

Additionally, the findings indicate a significant positive relationship between family tourism and children's sense of responsibility, aligning with the research findings of Wu et al. (2021), Schanzel (2021), Gao et al. (2018), and Shaw et al. (2008). Childhood is a crucial period for development, during which a child's general sense of responsibility begins to take shape. Given the brain's developmental flexibility, children learn quickly, making family tourism a valuable opportunity to instill responsibility. This stage corresponds to the sensitive period of competence versus feelings of inferiority, where children experience a sense of competence when they successfully complete tasks and, conversely, feelings of inferiority when they struggle. Parental support during this phase is essential. Independence and responsibility are key elements of children's personal and social development. A child's ability to accept limitations plays a fundamental role in shaping responsibility, and family tourism provides a structured environment to reinforce these developmental aspects.

The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between family tourism and children's social performance, consistent with the research findings of Wu et al. (2021), Schanzel (2021), Gao et al. (2018), and Shaw et al. (2008). Enhancing children's social performance and their ability to interact with others is crucial at all stages of development. Social skills, which encompass behaviors essential for effective communication, contribute to positive interpersonal interactions. Since the family serves as a

child's first social environment, it plays a fundamental role in shaping their thoughts, tendencies, and social habits. Family tourism offers children opportunities to engage with others in new settings, helping them strengthen their social skills while benefiting from family guidance and supervision.

Additionally, the findings indicate a significant positive relationship between family tourism and the reduction of children's aggressive and antisocial behaviors, aligning with the research findings of Wu et al. (2021), Schanzel (2021), Gao et al. (2018), and Shaw et al. (2008). Children who exhibit aggressive or antisocial behaviors often face social rejection from their peers and struggle with poor social skills. Given that children's behavioral challenges are deeply influenced by family dynamics, family tourism can serve as a valuable opportunity to strengthen familial and social bonds while reducing aggressive and antisocial tendencies.

Overall, the findings highlight the effectiveness of family tourism in enhancing children's social adaptation. Many experts regard social adaptation as a crucial indicator of mental health, with some considering it the most significant criterion—especially those focused on social relationships and the influence of societal factors in shaping individual character and personality. Tourism, particularly family tourism, plays an essential role in fulfilling children's social needs and positively impacting their process of social adaptation.

Limitations and recommendations for future studies

This study has several limitations. One inherent challenge in social science research is the influence of external variables beyond the researcher's control, which can inevitably affect the results. For instance, factors such as the economic and social conditions of families may play a role in shaping outcomes. In this study, the components affecting children's social adaptation were selected based on indicators identified by researchers in the fields of family tourism and mental health. However, this approach means that some dimensions or influencing factors may not have been fully accounted for.

Another limitation of this study is the sampling method. Since convenience sampling was used, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings. This research presents only a partial perspective on the factors influencing children's social adaptation. Future studies should explore additional dimensions and factors affecting children's social adaptation to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of family tourism on children's mental health and social development. Furthermore, this study is limited to children living in Tehran, meaning the findings may not be entirely applicable to other contexts. Researchers are therefore encouraged to expand their investigations into different aspects and settings related to family tourism, mental health, and children's social adaptation.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent

All procedures in this study were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Science and Culture. Informed consent was obtained from all parents whose children participated.

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