



## Research Article

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# A Study on Cultural Capital and High-Risk Behaviors of College Students in Iran

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### Abstract

*The term cultural capital has gained a widespread popularity as an analogy with economic capital, and capitalism rules and debates since the early 1970s. Essentially, cultural capital is not inherited, yet it is achieved through personal endeavors. Acquisition of cultural capital demands an incessant and hard work in addition to lifelong learning and acculturation. Hence, the present study examines the relationship between forms of cultural capital and high-risk behaviors of Iranian college students. The impact of each form on the incidence of high-risk behaviors is measured. A survey consisting demographical items, and items assessing cultural capital and tendency towards high-risk behaviors are applied. The results suggest a meaningfully negative relationship between sub-types of cultural capital and high-risk behaviors among undergraduate students in Iran. So, the author concluded that with an increase in cultural capital and the sub-types, the incidence of high-risk behaviors decreases consequently.*

**Keywords:** High- risk behaviors; objectified; institutionalized; embodied cultural capital; drugs

## 1. Introduction

One central purpose of development programs of countries is to diminish social harms, achieving this goal requires identifying the effective factors. College students in any community enclose a broad range of active population, which numerous factors like intrinsic motivations and extrinsic stressful factors can profligate students' social and mental health or face them with different social harms. Many attempts have been globally taken in order to realize various environmental and individual factors creating risk. Abundant psychology, sociology, and health theorists have considered different reasons for risk-taking among adolescents and young adults. Some groups have introduced a couple of personality characteristics, some others have proposed the role of understanding and beliefs and a few scholars have discussed observational learning as ground causes of risk -taking (Bagheri, 2011).

To define, high-risk behaviors are behaviors which augment probability of destructive physical, psychological and social consequences for an individual. These behaviors are evident among adolescents who are extremely dependent upon each other and follow their peers' patterns. Moreover, sexual risk-taking has been recently more highlighted as a reason for such unwanted consequences as pregnancy, infectious diseases, and HIV than other high-risk behaviors (Zadeh Mohamadi et al, 2008).

According to Boyer, the most imperative high-risk behaviors on the basis of frequency, exemplary and inconveniency consist of tobacco and alcohol consumption, unsafe sexual relations, dangerous driving and interpersonal violence (Zadeh Mohamadi et al, 2011).

Jessor (1987) describes examples of high-risk behaviors as smoking, drugs and alcohol abuse, dangerous driving and early sexual relationships.

Although adults similarly experience high-risk behaviors, teens and young adults are more exposed to these behaviors in a way that probability of high-risk behaviors increases from early to mid-adolescence and considerably declines in the late adolescence. Irreparable damages of adolescents' high-risk behaviors and huge financial costs and time to make behavioral changes either individually or socially have introduced prevention the best alternative for reduction of high-risk and threatening behaviors in a society (Zadeh Mohammadi et al, 2008).

Cultural capital is also a sociological term has been extensively used since Bourdieu devised it in 1973. According to him, cultural capital is forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages an individual is qualified for and allows him/her to attain a higher social status (Rohani, 2009).

Bourdieu distinguishes economic wealth and cultural properties. Cultural capital, indeed, can add to society wealth. However, in a knowledge –based society, the necessary skills for using information technology have ameliorated cultural capital standards. As a matter of fact, cultural capital affects individuals' motivations (as the institutional theory discusses) and in conditions cultural capital is rich, it contributes to economic development and consequently different economic production and development on the basis of different cultural capitals will be created (Mir Jalili, 2007).

Accordingly, the present paper is an attempt to investigate the relationship between cultural capital and incidence of high-risk behaviors among students at Kharazmi University. By high-risk behaviors in the current study, it refers to a tendency towards drugs and alcohol abuse, smoking, aggression, opposite sex relation and dangerous driving according to risk- taking the scale of Iranian youths developed by Zadeh Mohammadi et al (2011).

## 2. Background

Considering the previous studies, Mokhtari et al (2013) realized that age, having smoking close friends and mothers' higher level of education show the greatest correlation with smoking.

Working on causes of smoking and using hookah among students of medical sciences university of Tehran revealed that frequency of smoking and using hookah were 22% and 23.3%, respectively. Moreover, the most salient motive for smoking and hookah was to have fun (Reza Khani, 2012). Study on the prevalence and reasons for a tendency towards smoking among college students suggested that the average age of students was  $28 \pm 3.5$  years old and 21.6% of participants were smoking that most of them (80%) were male. The cigarette was the most common used substance and then hookah 31% and pipe 5% were highly prevalent, respectively (Nazemi et al, 2012).

In a similar study, Tavakoli Zadeh et al (2012) evaluated the prevalence of smoking and its relation to self-esteem among college students. The results showed that 9.8% of students were smoking (14.4% boys and 4.1% girls). Also, 33.3% and 14.8% of parents and siblings of the smoking students smoked more than non-smoking students' parents and siblings respectively.

The association of drugs and alcohol abuse, smoking and psychiatric drugs use with academic attainment among college students demonstrated the frequency of psychiatric drugs-use (13.8%), alcohol and drugs abuse (10.8%) and (9.9%) and cigarette (5.7%), respectively. Educational accomplishment among students used cigarette and psychiatric drugs and showed alcohol and drugs abuse was considerably lower than students with no drugs abuse (Shafie, 2012). Ketoja et al (2013) worked on medical students in Finland and stated that totally 33% of participants had a risky usage of alcoholic drinks.

Investigation on 2167 students (31.5% boys and 68.5% girls) at the university of Oulu in Finland indicated that 46% of boys and 63.2% of girls had risky alcohol abuse, and 21.3% of boys and 4.8% of girls had a very risky habit. Furthermore, 14.8% of boys and 12.1% of girls irregularly used tobacco and 4.8% of boys and 4.4% of girls smoked regularly (Salminen et al, 2013). Abayomi et al (2013) examined 443 university students in southwest Nigeria. They reported the prevalence of consuming alcohol 40.6% and heavy episodic drinking 31.1%.

The significance of investigation on alcohol abuse and psychedelic drugs use among

adolescents is first because alcohol and drugs abuse correlate with each other and with other high-risk behaviors like smoking and sexual deviations. Secondly, use of such drugs acutely puts teens' healthiness in danger and leads to various negative social consequences of physical attacks, sexual assault, car crashes, drop-out, run away from school and sexually transmitted diseases. On the other hand, the early appearance of such behaviors increases the risk of constant and further usage of unsafe drugs. Numerous causes account for alcohol abuse and psychedelic drugs use among young adults, which the most prominent ones namely are, parents, friends and peers' achievements, imitating others and records of criminal behaviors. Moreover, alcohol abuse and psychedelic drugs use is remarkably associated with smoking and self-harm behaviors (Mohamad Pour et al, 2008).

For that reason, problems of youths and their preference to high-risk behaviors, today, have become a critical subject. Examination of college students' high-risk behaviors, thus, seems necessary due to providing some solutions to scrutinize and lessen such behaviors.

### 3. Cultural Capital

The concept of cultural capital is close to Weber's concept of lifestyle that contains a few specific skills, attitudes, way of speaking, educational records, and procedures through which the individual distinguishes himself/herself from others (Majdi et al, 2010). According to Bourdieu (1973), cultural capital is one of determining elements in the individual's social status (Alah Hajian, 2011).

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes three types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized as follows (Jenkins, 1992):

#### 3.1 Embodied cultural capital

Consisting of both the consciously acquired and the passively "inherited" properties of one's self, embodied cultural capital is not transmissible instantaneously like a gift or bequest; rather, it is acquired over time as it impresses itself upon one's character and way of thinking, which in turn becomes more attentive to or primed to receive similar influences (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005).

#### 3.2 Objectified cultural capital

Including physical objects that are owned, objectified cultural capital encloses scientific instruments or works of art. These cultural goods can be transmitted both for economic profit and for the purpose of "symbolically" conveying the cultural capital whose acquisition they facilitate (Emirbayer & Williams, 2005).

#### 3.3 Institutionalized cultural capital

Institutional recognition, most often in the form of academic credentials or qualifications held by an individual represent institutionalized cultural capital. This concept plays its most prominent role in the labor market, in which it allows a wide array of cultural capital to be expressed in a single qualitative and quantitative measurement (and compared to others' cultural capital similarly measured)( Emirbayer & Williams, 2005).

Taylor believes that cultural capital comprises several components. For instance, in a western community, the following standards are introduced for cultural capital (Taylor, 1997):

1. Knowledge, language, interests and lifestyles;
2. Something is called the culture of élites;
3. Scope of individuals' lexis;
4. Ability to recognize and identify aristocratic foods and beverages;
5. Choose to play rugby instead of football.

By far, Hayes considers cultural capital as a manifestation of total non-economic forces including family background, social class, different investments, and commitment to education that affect academic (scientific or educational) attainments. Cultural capital is defined as cultural

competence in status, trends, and ideas followed by an important mechanism in the reproduction of social hierarchy. The main focus of cultural capital, in fact, is that culture is transmitted, and encouraged through an educational system that reflects the ruling class culture that finally make the same culture reproduce (Rohani, 2007).

Increasing significance and prevalence of cultural capital in social sciences studies especially in cultural studies are because existing typologies fail to explain the diversity of the social world. Thus, due to changes in theoretical and empirical approaches, it can be concluded that the concept of cultural capital has been replaced with some structural concepts like social class (Ebrahimi et al, 2010).

Accordingly, in the present research, the authors adopted the Bourdieu's theory for measuring the rate of students' cultural capital. That is, three forms of cultural capital (e.g. embodied, objectified, and institutionalized) were examined among the participants and the impact of each sub-type of cultural capital on the incidence of different high-risk behaviors i.e. drugs and alcohol abuse, smoking, aggression, opposite sex relation and dangerous driving was evaluated.

#### 4. The Research Hypotheses

The major hypothesis:

H1. Cultural capital meaningfully associates with high-risk behaviors.

The minor hypotheses:

H1. Embodied cultural capital meaningfully associates with high- risk behaviors.

H2. Objectified cultural capital meaningfully associates with high- risk behaviors.

H3. Institutionalized cultural capital meaningfully associates with high-risk behaviors.

H4. Age meaningfully associates with high-risk behaviors.

H5. Sex meaningfully associates with high- risk behaviors.

H6. Field of study meaningfully associates with high- risk behaviors.

#### 5. Method

All undergraduate students at Kharazmi University with a total size of 10000 participated in the study and through Cochran formula, 384 subjects were selected via proportionate classification method. That is, the number of participants in each major based on a total number of students in that major was randomly selected. Of these participants 54.2% were girls and 45.8% were boys with mean age 19.6 years old. Also, 40.1% of the respondents were studying humanities, 11.7% sciences, 7.6% mathematics, 31.2% engineering, 6.2% natural resources, and 3.1 % art and architecture.

##### 5.1 Instrumentations

###### 5.1.1 The cultural capital inventory

The cultural capital questionnaire consisted of 15 items measuring different sub-types of cultural capital (e.g. embodied: reading books, papers, magazines, use of the internet, and knowing a foreign language, objectified: possessing written cultural products, audio and video products and cultural instruments and institutionalized: a series of educational certificates, attending at art and religious classes and seminars) and 6 items for collecting demographical data. The investigators employed Faraji and Feli (2010) study to design the questionnaire. The Chronbach's  $\alpha = 0.703$ .

###### 5.1.2 The risk-taking survey

The risk-taking questionnaire included 33 items evaluating the occurrence of different high-risk behaviors (e.g. drugs and alcohol abuse, smoking, aggression, opposite sex relation and dangerous driving). To prepare the instrument, we utilized the Iranian teenagers risk scale (ITRS) designed by Zadeh Mohammadi et al (2011). The Chronbach's  $\alpha = 0.949$ .

## 5.2 Data Analysis

Obtained data analyzed through SPSS 16.0 software. Firstly, the relationship between the variables investigated through Pearson's correlation coefficient then the predicting role of cultural capital and sub-types on high- risk behaviors examined through analysis of variance.

## 6. Findings

As can be seen in Table 1, 69% of the students have a strong preference towards different high-risk behaviors, 27.1% have an average preference and 3.9% have a low preference.

**Table 1:** frequency and percentage of preference to high- risk behaviors

Rate of tendency to high risk behaviors	Frequency	Percent
High	265	69
Average	104	27.1
Low	15	3.9
Total	384	100

### 6.1 Test of the research hypotheses:

#### 6.1.1 The relationship between total cultural capital and sub-types, age and high- risk behaviors

Data for the relationship between total cultural capital and sub-types, age and high- risk behaviors are presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2:** Correlation matrix of the study variables

variable	r	P	M	S.D
Embodied	-0.239	0.000**	11.13	2.541
Objectified	-0.061	0.234**	12.18	3.440
Institutionalized	-0.301	0.000**	7.650	2.941
Age	-0.102	0.045**	19.66	5.297
Total cultural capital	-0.255	0.000**	34.28	6.897
High-risk behaviors				

As can be seen from Table 2, high- risk behaviors was significantly and negatively correlated with total cultural capital ( $r = -0.255, p < .05$ ), embodied cultural capital ( $r = -0.23, p < .05$ ), objectified cultural capital ( $r = -0.061, p > .05$ ), institutionalized cultural capital ( $r = -0.301, p < .05$ ) and age ( $r = 0.102, p < .05$ ).

#### 6.1.2 The relationship between sex and high- risk behaviors

Data about the association of sex and high-risk behaviors are presented in Table 3 below:

**Table 3:** t-test for sex and high- risk behaviors

Sex	No.	M	sd	Error of measurement	t	df	P
Boy	208	164.71	33.39	2.321	-6.28	373.53	0.000
Girl	176	145.61	24.56	1.851	-	-	-

Results revealed that the t-test was statistically significant ( $t = -6.28, p > .05$ ). The mean scores of high-risk behaviors for boys and girls are 164.71 and 145.61, respectively. Therefore, the disparity of mean scores is statistically meaningful.

### 6.1.3 The relationship between field of study and high- risk behaviors

**Table4:** variance analysis of high- risk behaviors and majors

Major	No	M	Sd	Standard error of measurement	
Humanities	154	162.7	23.53	1.89	
Sciences	45	153.7	32.55	4.85	
Math	29	147.0	37.74	7.00	
Engineering	120	142.9	33.12	3.02	
Natural resources and desert studies	24	174.3	29.92	6.10	
Art and architecture	12	145.2	31.01	8.95	
Total	384	154.4	31.14	1.59	

  

Variance analysis					
resources	df	SS	MS	F	p
Between groups	5	38585.75	7717.15	8.76	0.000
Within groups	378	333000.20	880.95		
Total	383	371585.95	-		

As demonstrated in Table 4, the average incidence of high-risk behaviors among the students is 162.7 (humanities), 153.7 (sciences), 147.0 (mathematics), 142.9 (engineering), 174.3 (cultural resources and desert studies), and 145.2 (art and architecture). Therefore, the frequency of high-risk behaviors of one group has a meaningful variance with others ( $F= 8.76, P= 0.000 < 0.05$ ).

### 6.2 Disparity between groups

Data about the difference between groups are illustrated in Table 5 below:

**Table 5:** Tukey test for comparison of means

groups	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6
G1: Humanities	-	-	-	*	-	-
G2: Sciences	-	-	-	-	-	-
G3: Math	-	-	-	-	-	-
G4: Engineering	*	-	-	-	-	-
G5: Natural resources and desert studies	*	-	-	-	-	-
G6: Art and architecture	-	-	-	*	-	-

\* Meaningful disparity among the groups

According to Table 5, the variance of incidence of high- risk behaviors is considerably meaningful among the students of humanities and engineering, however, the humanities students indicate a greater rate of high- risk behaviors compared with the engineering students. Moreover, the disparity is meaningful among humanities, natural resources, and desert studies. That is, humanities students have a remarkably higher tendency towards high- risk behavior than students of natural resources and desert studies.

#### 6.2.1 The relationship between entire variables and high-risk behaviors

Table 6 illustrates sum of squares, degree of freedom and mean square for two sources of change, i.e. regression and residues. Since  $F=0.000 < 0.05$ , therefore, the independent variables appropriately account for variance in the dependent variable at 21.4%. Of entire variables, the embodied, and institutionalized cultural capital and sex are meaningful only.

**Table 6:** summary of multivariate regression model for the relationship between different variables and high- risk behaviors

S.E	AdjustR <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup>	R	F
.0328	0.197	0.214	0.463	0.000

## 7. Conclusion

The present research was an attempt to measure Iranian college students' tendency towards different types of high-risk behaviors and their rate of cultural capital, all three types, in order to find factors affecting youths' high-risk behaviors and finally to identify the predictive power of the singular variable. Accordingly, 384 participants (53.9% girls and 45.8% boys) were selected through the proportionate sampling method from whole undergraduate students at Kharazmi University. Since the present study was new in its subject, no independent study has investigated the relationship between cultural capital and high-risk behaviors so far. Hence, the results will be discussed only.

As the results illustrate, the boys and girls' mean scores of high-risk behaviors are 145.61 and 164.71, respectively. So, because the boys' mean score is higher than girls', boys show further preference towards high-risk behaviors. Additionally, the students' age negatively correlates with high-risk behaviors. In word, as students become older the rate of high-risk behaviors goes down, though, younger students are more willing to commit high-risk behaviors. No meaningful correlation, too, was observed between cultural capital, sex, and age. The average rate of high-risk behaviors among different majors was 162.7 (humanities), 153.7 (sciences), 147.0 (mathematics), 142.9 (engineering), 174.3 (natural resources and desert studies) and 145.2 (art and architecture). Furthermore, a negative relationship was identified between cultural capital and high-risk behaviors and we found a meaningfully negative correlation between the embodied, institutionalized and objectified cultural capital with high-risk behaviors.

The embodied cultural capital is extremely personal and consists of a set of competencies and skills the individual acquires, hence, achieving such sub-type of cultural capital engrosses spending time and undertaking training in order to become tangible over the time. This capital has nothing to do with inheritance, buying or making a deal to be transferred to other peoples. Conversely, the objectified cultural capital includes things and materiality. It could be transferred person to person and for measurement, total properties, and cultural goods are being used by the individual should be taken into consideration indicating the person's willingness in consuming cultural products. Thus, the present research results make clear that possession of cultural products and the instrument cannot meaningfully associate to decrease of the individual's tendency towards high-risk behaviors. But, increased intrinsic awareness, competencies, and skills are obtained via training and practice, which is not, in any case, transmittable to others, can significantly minimize individual's preference to high-risk behaviors.

## 8. Recommendations for Future Studies

As Bourdieu (1981) highlights, social groups share similarities in the material capital, yet they vary in cultural capitals. This difference then is produced and reproduced in the next generations and hierarchy of differences demonstrates cultural inequalities. In order to be successful and achieve the goals, either material or cultural capital is required. How cultural capital is distributed would consequently lead to reproduction of social structure or social classes (Ghorouneh, 2010). Similarly, the current research suggests the following recommendations for future studies.

- The concept of cultural capital needs to be investigated either theoretically or empirically to see in what educational system what type of cultural capital need to be utilized.
- Due to the positive impact of cultural capital on diminishing high-risk behaviors, it would be essential for cultural administrative organizations to strengthen college students' participation in different cultural activities.
- It is recommended that the subject of current research extends to investigate families, adolescents, and other social groups or the association of family cultural capital with children's risk taking.
- Improvement function of media as one effective instrument on introduction, training and popularity of types of cultural capital can be greatly influential.
- As parents' awareness and knowledge increase, through holding classes, seminars and cultural and training workshops as well as developing training materials in accordance with

families' interests and education, it would be hopeful that level of culture and cultural capital in families will constantly increase and consequently the rate of risky tendencies will decrease.

### 8.1 Tips for expanding varying forms of cultural capital among college students

As it was mentioned earlier, the embodied cultural capital includes a series of capabilities, mental abilities and practical and behavioral skills are apparent in ways of speaking, beliefs, values and special attitudes of an individual. According to Bourdieu (1986), educational activities in society and the individual's social class play a substantial role in achieving this aspect of cultural capital. In fact, the embodied cultural capital is informally acquired through interactions and diverse activities. Consequently, to increase this sub-type of cultural capital, effective social and individual interactions, as well as doing diverse activities ending to augment of the individual's knowledge and his/her behavioral and practical capacities, will also amplify the embodied cultural capital. Such activities include reading books, papers, and magazines, besides using the internet and learning a foreign language.

- The institutionalized cultural capital is a type of cultural capital is known mostly as an individual's credit or scientific records in the form of educational and academic certificates and so forth. Therefore, the individual's attempt to receive official degrees such as educational degrees, technical certificates, and professionally cultural and art certificates from official association and institutions like the association of music, fine arts etc., can serve as a factor for escalating the institutionalized cultural capital.
- It is suggested that youths and students through applying the mentioned strategies do attempt to maximize the rate of cultural capital. As such, while the level of cultural capital goes up, their behaviors and habits will be shaped under the influence of rate of cultural capital and risk taking, so tendency towards high- risk behaviors will undeniably decrease.

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