Adaptation to College and Interpersonal Forgiveness and the Happiness among the University Students

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: Happiness, as one of the most important aspects of students' mental health has a significant influence on their social growth and personality development, and it has always been of interest to the researchers in different fields of psychology.

Methods: In this study, the method of correlation was used and the population of study was all students of Farhangiyan University of Guilan during the academic year 2013-2014 which included 1777 students. Among this population, a sample of 250 students (including 149 women and 101 men) was selected and studied using stratified random sampling method. The student adaptation to college questionnaire (SACQ), interpersonal forgiveness scale (IFS) and Oxford happiness questionnaire (OHI) were used for data collection. The resulting data were analyzed by applying multivariate regression analysis method in SPSS vs. 19.

Results: The results showed a significant and positive relationship between adaptation to college and interpersonal forgiveness with the happiness (at the level of $P<0.01$) and it was concluded that these variables, in combination with each other, were able to account for 58% of the variance of happiness. Among the independent variables, the component of social adjustment had the greatest role in the prediction of happiness among the students.

Conclusion: Since the variables of adaptation to college and interpersonal forgiveness are suitable predictors for happiness, consideration of these variables in the students' mental health promotion programs is highly recommended.

1. Introduction

Happiness, which means being happy and having a positive attitude in life, is one of the most important psychological needs for humans that has a significant influence on the quality of human life. The World Health Organization (WHO) is increasingly focusing on happiness as a component of health (Lin et al., 2010).

The importance of happiness as a psychological health construct has led to numerous research studies on the methods of achieving happiness, strengthening it, and determining the factors affecting this vital need. Studies showed that personality traits; Neuroticism and extroversion (Ehteshamzadeh, 2009); Optimism (Perera & McIlveen, 2014; Seligman, 2006); The level of perceived overall stress and emotional closeness to individuals or social interactions (Singh, 2010); As well as social adjustment and emotional intelligence (Maddahi et al., 2012) are the most important factors affecting happiness.

Many researchers believe that the ability to be happy and satisfied with life is one of the methods of adaptation and a representative of positive mental health (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Happiness affects positively on cognition, social activity, and health and contributes in the formation of personality, especially during the criti-

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cal periods of lifetime like the university time (Zeinali & Navardi, 2012).

In recent years, psychologists have highly focused on the happiness of the students. After entering the university, many students, away from family, face an unexpected situation, experience the independence in decision-making, encounter changes in other's expectations, and should accept the responsibility in different aspects of lives. These challenges make it hard and sometimes problematic for the students to adapt to the existing conditions which may even threaten their mental health.

Adaptation to college is a multidimensional variable; its 4 different aspects are explained here. The first aspect is social adjustment which refers to how an individual deals with interpersonal experiences (Friedlander et al., 2007). Academic adjustment, as the second aspect of adaptation to college, includes perseverance in educational and professional activities, proper mental and physical health and overall satisfaction from academic environment (Lubben et al., 2010). Personal-emotional adjustment refers to successfully dealing with and managing psychological stresses and physical problems resulting from mental issues (Paul & Brier, 2001). The fourth aspect is attachment to the university which is the commitment and the sense of belonging an individual shows towards his or her educational environment (Soucy & Larose, 2000).

Some of the important factors affecting adjustment, especially adaptation to college and happiness among students are communication and social skills (Akbari & Akbari, 2013); the emotional intelligence (Maddahi et al., 2012; Michaeli Manee, 2010); stress management and regulating emotions (Khoshravesh et al., 2015); self-regulation in educational settings, i.e. integrating social values with individual values (Koestner et al., 2010); life style and the quality of familial relationships (Bowlby, 2008); personality and attitude of the students and forgiveness (Omoteso, 2006); as well as optimism, as a source of adaptability, through engagement coping (Perera & McIlveen, 2014).

Adaptation to college plays a significant role in many aspects of student's life. It leads to improvement in public performance, spiritual happiness, self-efficacy, academic motivation, and eventually increases social adjustment of students outside the university (Schmidt & Welsh, 2010; Wintre et al., 2011).

Attending a new environment is also associated with increased interpersonal interactions which make the oc-

currence of disturbing and displeasing interactions inevitable. In certain circumstances, people may intend to either compensate for their resentment using revenge, or to reform their threatened and vulnerable relationships using forgiveness (Ehteshamzadeh, 2009). Forgiveness can also affect adaptation in a positive manner. Forgiveness copes with stress and negative emotions and expands the cognitive and behavioral framework to develop new adaptation techniques (Worthington et al., 2005).

Ehteshamzadeh (2009) defined interpersonal forgiveness as a complex cognitive capacity. She defined 3 subscales for interpersonal forgiveness, including restructure of relationship and control of revenge, pain control and absorbing the thoughts of being a victim, and realistic understanding of human characteristics and circumstances for the occurrence of the error and the ability to have empathy for the wrongdoer.

Previous studies have shown that personality characteristics, communication factors, sociocognitive factors, including empathy (Riek & Mania, 2012; Ehteshamzadeh, 2009), life skills such as anger management (Vatankhah et al., 2013), emotion requlations (Mahmoudzadeh et al., 2015), and religious beliefs (Asgari et al., 2011) are among the factors affecting forgiveness, happiness and well-being. Anger rumination, i.e. long-term thoughts related to anger, has a negative correlation with forgiveness (Barber et al., 2005). Results of a study regarding the contribution of 4 specific psychological characteristics (emotional intelligence abilities, Big Five traits, gratitude, and optimism) to the forgiveness-related motivations (revenge, avoidance) showed a significant relationship between these specific psychological characteristics, in particular, Big Five traits and managing emotions, and the incentive to forgive (Rey et al., 2014). Moreover, results of previous studies revealed a significant and positive relationship between forgiveness and happiness.

Factors and conditions that facilitate adaptation to college environment and provide students' mental health have been subject to less attention in previous studies and so far, no studies have been performed to address the relationship between adaptation to college and interpersonal forgiveness, as predictors of happiness among students. Considering the importance of the happiness and its effects on different aspects of students' life, identifying the relationship between these variables is of great importance. Applying the results of such study to educational and cultural programs among the students, especially those attending Farhangiyan University (who have a substantial influence on accomplishing the goals

of the educational system by playing their role as future teachers) can guarantee the mental health of our society.

The aim of the present study was to investigate the extent and direction of the relationship of adaptation to college and interpersonal forgiveness with the happiness of college students. Determining the contribution of each independent variable in predicting happiness is the most important objective of this research.

2. Methods

In this study, the relationships between variables were investigated to understand how the variables are correlated with each other and how the change in one predictor (independent) variable can affect the dependent variable. The methodology employed in this study was correlational and the data were gathered through library research and field study (using a questionnaire).The population of the study included all undergraduate students of Farhangiyan University of Guilan in academic year 2013-2014. The study population consisted of 1777 people. According to the research method and considering the number of independent variables, the relevant data were obtained from a sample of 250 students (146, 58.4% women and 104, 41.6% men) which were randomly selected based on gender and using randomized stratification method. It should be noted that the sample was selected from undergraduate students who had passed at least their first semester at the university.

After essential arrangements and explaining the aim and necessity of doing such a study as well as the confidentiality of the provided information, the prepared questionnaires were completed by participants. Meanwhile, those who were ill or tired, or not inclined to cooperate for any other reason were replaced. The defaced answer sheets were removed later on and the statistical analysis of information was performed after defining required raw data for the study.

This self-report instrument, was designed by Baker and Siryk in 1984, and consists of 67 questions with 4 subscales of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment to the institution or university. Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, a separate score for each subscale, as well as a total score are calculated.

In the study by Beyers & Goossens (2002), the Cronbach α for all subscales as well as for the total score was above 0.80. In another study by Lanthier and Windham (2004), the Cronbach α was obtained to be in the range of 0.86 to 0.95 for all components. Michaeli Manee (2010) translated SACQ into Persian (Farsi) and the validity of the translated SACQ was confirmed by a team of psychology and language professionals. The values of Cronbach α for all subscales were between 0.69 and 0.90 and the overall value of Cronbach α for adaptation to college was 0.78 in this study.

This 25-item questionnaire was first prepared by Ehteshamzadeh (2009) in Iran and consists of 3 subscales of restructure of relationship and control of revenge, pain control, and realistic understanding. In order to grade, a 4-point scale, from 1 to 4, is assigned to the questions. For some of the questions a reverse order is used for scoring. The maximum obtainable score in this scale is 100 and the minimum is 25. In addition to the total score, 3 separate scores for the subscales can be reported as well.

In the study by Ehteshamzadeh (2009), the values of Cronbach α for the 3 mentioned subscales were between 0.57 and 0.77 and the total value of Cronbach α for interpersonal forgiveness was obtained to be 0.80. The validity of this scale was affirmed using its correlation with other scales measuring other dependent variables on forgiveness such as agreeableness (Berry et al., 2005) and aggressiveness (Maltby et al., 2008).

This inventory was first devised by Argyle, Martin, and Crossland in 1989, and later revised, and since then widely used in England (Carr, 2011). This inventory comprises 29 items, involving 4 different options (a, b, c, and d) for each item which are assigned 3, 2, 1, and 0 points, respectively. Consequently, a total score of 0 to 87 can be obtained. The reliability of this inventory was investigated using the retest method (test-retest reliability approach) after 7 weeks and the reported value was 0.78. According to the psychologists, the validity of this questionnaire was evaluated to be 0.43 and its credibility considering positive affection, satisfaction, and negative affection was reported to be 0.32, 0.57, and -0.52, respectively. In Iran, the reliability and validity of this questionnaire were investigated and the Cronbach α was reported to be 0.93 and the validity of this questionnaire using its correlation with Beck depression inventory was reported to be -0.65 (Alipour & Agah Heris, 2006).

In order to analyze the research assumptions, descriptive statistical methods (e.g. calculation of mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistical methods (e.g. Pearson correlation coefficient and multivariate regression analysis method) were performed by SPSS ver. 19.

3. Results

In this study, 41.6% of the participants were male and 58.4% were female, with an average age of 19.46 years for the entire group. Moreover, 47% of the participants were sophomore and 53% college freshman.

As it can be seen in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation for dependent variable of happiness are 47.68 and 12.268, respectively. Also the highest mean of 87.33 belongs to the subscale "academic adjustment" with the standard deviation of 13.178 and the lowest mean of 17.66 belongs to the subscale "pain control" with the standard deviation of 3.235. Also, there is a significant and positive correlation between the predictor variables and happiness at the level of $P<0.01$.

In order to determine the best predictor for the happiness of students among independent variables and their ability to predict the happiness, multivariate regression analysis for two sets using simultaneous method and partial correlation was performed. The results are shown in Table 2.

Based on the results shown in Table 2, adaptation to college can significantly affect the happiness of students (R^2 Change=0.549, $F_{(4, 245)}$=74.638, $P<0.001$). As a result, students who are more adapted to the college will be happier. Besides, the variable "interpersonal forgiveness" predicted a significant proportion of the variance of happiness after considering the variable "adaptation to college" (R^2 Change=0.036, $F_{(3, 242)}$=7.012, $P<0.001$). As a result, the students with the same level of adaptation to college are more likely to be happy if they have interpersonal forgiveness as a characteristic. According to the results, there is a significant and positive relationship between adaptation to college and interpersonal forgiveness with the happiness at the level of $P<0.01$ (r=0.765, $P<0.001$). Combination of these independent variables can predict and account for 58% of the variance of happiness (squared multiple correlation coefficient=0.585).

As it is shown in Table 3, the partial correlations of the components of social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, institutional attachment, pain control, and realistic understanding with happiness of the students are meaningful ($P<0.05$). Moreover, the results of regression analysis to determine the coefficients and the ability of the independent variables to significantly predict the dependent variable are presented in Table 4. According to this correlation analysis, among all the aforementioned predictors, the component of social adjustment can predict 46% of the variance of happiness (β=0.461). Since the combination of the independent variables could predict and account for 58% of the variance of happiness according to model 2 presented in Table 2, the contribution of the remaining components is 12% (0.58-0.46).

4. Discussion

In the present study, the relationship of adaptation to college and interpersonal forgiveness with the happiness among the students of Farhangiyan University of Guilan was studied. The results of this study, while acknowledging the original hypothesis and secondary research hypotheses, indicate that there is a significant and positive correlation between adaptation to college and interpersonal forgiveness and happiness of students at the level of $P<0.01$ (r=0.765, $P<0.001$) and therefore, any increase in these two variables results in an increase in

Table 1. Descriptive statistical characteristics of the variables (n=250), correlation coefficient of the independent variables with dependent variable (happiness).

	Variable	Mean	SD	1**	2**	3**	4**	5**	6**	7**
Main variable	Happiness	47.68	12.268	0.680	0.633	0.649	0.475	0.389	0.462	0.463
Predictor components of adaptation to college	Social adjustment	73.42	9.791	-	0.740	0.650	0.710	0.317	0.386	0.444
	Academic adjustment	87.33	13.178	-	-	0.742	0.670	0.382	0.393	0.379
	Personal–emotional adjustment	53.49	9.687	-	-	-	0.585	0.310	0.518	0.349
	Institutional attachment	36.82	4.953	-	-	-	-	0.285	0.366	0.310
Predictor components of interpersonal forgiveness	Restructure of relationship and control of revenge	31.87	5.594	-	-	-	-	-	0.454	0.515
	Pain control	17.66	3.235	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.327
	Realistic understanding	20.26	3.086	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: Applies to all results in this table, ** $P<0.01$.

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Table 2. Multiple correlation coefficients and their square for predictors of happiness.

Dependent variable	No. of model	Predictor variable	Multiple correlation coefficient (R)	Multiple correlation coefficient squared (R²)	Adjusted R squared	Generalized R squared	F-change	Sig.
Happiness	1	Academic adjustment Social adjustment Personal-emotional adjustment Institutional attachment	0.741	0.549	0.542	0.549	74.638	0.000
	2	Restructure of relationship and control of revenge Pain control Realistic understanding	0.765	0.585	0.573	0.036	7.012	0.000

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the happiness of students. According to the results, all components together were able to account for 58% of the variance of happiness. Among these components, social adjustment has the strongest correlation with the happiness and can be considered as the best predictor.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research studies, such as the study by Khoshravesh et al., (2015) which considered stress management and regulating emotions as factors improving social adjustment and another study by Singh (2010), introducing emotional closeness to individuals and social interactions as the most important factors contributing to the happiness. Moreover, the results of this study verified those by Maddahi et al. (2012), Akbari & Akbari (2013), and Manee (2010) stating that communication skills and social relationships, as well as emotional intelligence are the main factors affecting the happiness of students and their level of adjustment, especially their adaptation to college. Besides, these results are consistent with those by Vatankhah et al. (2013) expressing the positive effect of skills such as anger management on the happiness.

Entering the university is a transitional stage in life which is associated with new challenges, expectations, and responsibilities. Studies have shown that the way students cope with these challenges is partly affected by students' characteristics and previous experiences as well as the environmental conditions. The inability to cope with this new situation could negatively affect the adaptability of the students and consequently threaten their happiness. Adapting to the university and gaining valuable experiences in the university can lead to the personal and social development of the students.

Social and communication skills have a significant influence on social adjustment of students which is the most effective component of the adaptation to college. This component of adaptation implies that people should pursue their objectives considering the social and cultural frameworks. They need to learn new forms of social relationships and skills to play effectively their new roles and duties as independent and self-governing individuals. Deficiencies in social and communication skills, which are important factors associated with the happiness among students, hinder successful relationships with others at the university. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Koestner et al. (2010) who revealed that self-regulation in educational settings (i.e. integrating social values with individual values) has a significant, positive relationship with the students' adaptation.

Table 3. Partial correlations of the independent variables (predictors) with happiness.

Criterion variable	Predictor variables						
Happiness	Social adjustment	Academic adjustment	Personal-emotional adjustment	Institutional attachment	Restructure of relationship and control of revenge	Pain control	Realistic understanding
	** 0.342	0.106	** 0.238	* -0.145	0.075	* 0.129	* 0.152

* $P<0.05$, ** $P<0.01$.

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Table 4. Standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients for the prediction of happiness.

Dependent variable	Model	Predictor variable	Unstandardized beta coefficient	Standard error	Standardized beta coefficient	t	Significance level
Happiness	1	Constant	-15.793	4.300		-3.673	0.000
		Social adjustment	0.577	0.090	0.461	6.435	0.000
		Academic adjustment	0.136	0.071	0.146	1.919	0.056
		Personal-emotional adjustment	0.408	0.084	0.322	4.880	0.000
		Institutional attachment	-0.342	0.159	-0.138	-2.150	0.033
	2	Constant	-25.651	4.681		-5.480	0.000
		Social adjustment	0.507	0.089	0.405	5.670	0.000
		Academic adjustment	0.116	0.070	0.124	1.653	0.100
		Personal-emotional adjustment	0.329	0.086	0.260	3.812	0.000
		Institutional attachment	-0.351	0.154	-0.142	-2.282	0.023
		Restructure of relationship and control of revenge	0.135	0.116	0.062	1.170	0.243
		Pain control	0.401	0.198	0.106	2.023	0.044
		Realistic understanding	0.491	0.205	0.124	2.396	0.017

Moreover, being interested in the field of study and choosing voluntarily and consciously the educational institution are the main prerequisite for the adaptation to college which lead to academic and educational purposefulness, diligent accomplishment of the tasks, and academic achievements. The results of this study confirmed those by Schmidt and Welsh (2010) and Winter et al. (2011), introducing adaptation to college as a key factor for improving general performance of students, their academic motivation, and the happiness among them.

Besides, the results of this research agree with those of studies by Riek and Mania (2012), Ehteshamzadeh (2009) and Mahmoudzadeh et al. (2015) which investigated the influence of personality traits, communication skills, cognitive and social components such as empathy, emotional regulations, and controlling the anger on forgiveness as well as their positive effect on the happiness and well-being.

Furthermore, the appropriate response to the pressures caused by the presence in the university and management of emotions gives the students the opportunity to control their impulses, works well under stress, and helps them enjoy their studies at the university in an efficient manner. In this way, experiencing interactions causing resentment and the rumination of negative thoughts may lead to consequences such as anger and revenge, which could jeopardize one's happiness and adaptability. In such situations, those who have high levels of cognition, positive attitudes, emotional intelligence, and social and communication skills will be able to comprehend the real situation and by creating an appropriate cognitive-behavioral framework, will be able to manage their emotions and enhance their positive feelings. Besides, interpersonal forgiveness as an adaptive behavior will help them control the resentment and reduce the mental stresses and pressures which will ultimately lead to their happiness and mental health and maintaining their relationships with others.

Happiness, as one of the factors in the creation of an ideal student life, nullifies the negative experiences by producing good feelings and positive thoughts which affects positively on cognition and mental health. It enables one to pursue one's academic and social activities in an easier way by creating incentives and motivations in person. Happiness increases the ability to make suitable decisions, and the compatibility and forgiveness resulted from that will affect every aspects of the life in a positive way.

In this study, due to some age restrictions on university admissions in Farhangian University, research was con-

ducted on students of 19 up to 23 years old. Besides, due to incomplete information provided by some students, those who stayed at dormitory could not be considered separately from other students. Considering the results of this study, it is recommended that cultural plans and counseling be used to help students overcome their difficulties at the early stages of entering the university. This in turn helps students become familiar with this transitional period, and improve communication and social skills, adaptation strategies, forgiveness and their effects. Conducting such studies in other universities in order to compare the results is recommended. Moreover, since the relationship of interpersonal forgiveness and adaptation with happiness of students has not been studied so far, we highly recommend considering it along with other variables in studies performed about students' happiness, as well as investigating the effect of teaching these variables on the mental health of the students.

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