

Prediction of School Anxiety Based on Emotion Regulation Strategies and Fear of Positive Evaluation in Female Students

Abdollah Ghasempour ^{1*}, Reza Ilbeigy Ghale Nei ², Abutaleb Tavakoli ³, Maryam Rostami ⁴

1. MA in General Psychology, Young Researcher Club, Islamic Azad University, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Amol, Mazandaran, Iran.

2. PhD Student in General Psychology, Department of Psychology, School of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Mohaghegh Ardabili University, Ardabil, Iran.

3. MA in General Psychology, Department of Psychology, School of Education Sciences and Psychology, Mohaghegh Ardabili University, Ardabil, Iran.

4. MA in Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology, School of Education Sciences and Psychology, Mohaghegh Ardabili University, Ardabil, Iran.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: It seems that emotion regulation strategies and fear of positive evaluation are among psychological components. Which play critical role in anxiety disorders. The present study predicted school anxiety based on emotion regulation strategies and fear of positive evaluation in female students in Savadkouh Iran.

Methods: This study is a descriptive-correlative research. A total of 110 first grade high school female students in Savadkouh City participated in this study from 2012 to 2013. The study sample was randomly selected using multiple-stage clustering. The participants filled out Emotion Regulation questionnaire, Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale and Anxiety School Subscale of The Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders. Then, the collected data were analyzed by SPSS 21 and Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis were calculated.

Results: The results of regression analysis showed that Suppression and fear of positive evaluation could predict girl students' school anxiety as positive and significant.

Conclusion: We concluded that emotion regulation strategies and fear of positive evaluation play critical role in predicting school anxiety in female high school students.

1. Introduction

School anxiety is one of the anxieties of childhood period. This is a mental-social issue appearing in terms of regular child's absence from school. This absence must continue about 5 days – as the basic time. It accompanies with intensive anxiety signs and physical complaints like nausea, abdominal pains, and headache. In fact, it is not a real fear. Rather, it result from separation from mother and home. There are two types of school anxiety: social and educational. Anxious child may experience social or educational anxiety or both (Lyneham, Street, Abbott

& Rapee, 2008). School anxiety can negatively affect child's life and threaten his mental health. Furthermore, this disorder adversely affects his efficiency, talent actualization, personality formation, and social identity (Johnson & Burrows, 1983). If a child is not treated, his or her condition will gradually lead to despair, unworthiness, frustration, isolation, and finally depression and suicide. Which results in irreversible damages to the family (Khosravi & Bigdely, 2008). Strategies of the emotion regulation and fear of positive evaluation can be considered the main psychological factors affective school anxiety.

* Corresponding Author:

Abdollah Ghasempour, MA

Address: Young Researcher Club, Islamic Azad University, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Amol, Mazandaran, Iran.

Tel: +98 (114) 3247268

E-mail: a_gh_1985@yahoo.com

Emotion regulation strategies are among psychological subjects of extensive studies on childhood and adolescence disorders (Garnefski, Rieffe, Jellesma, Terwogt & Kraaij, 2007). These strategies comprise awareness, understanding and accepting emotions, ability to control impulsive behaviors, behavior in accordance with personal goals where negative emotions are experienced, and behavior fitting the situation. It is noted that lack of each strategy can lead to the disruption of this process (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Based on new evidence concerning psychological disorders, emotion regulation problem may be an important factor in the creation and continuation of these types of disorders (Hasani, Sheikhan, Aryanakia & Mahmoodzadeh, 2013). In a study by Romero, Master, Paunesku, Dweck and Gross (2014) they showed that failure in emotion management, control, and regulation is the key factor in the lack of high school students' educational achievements. Mohiyeddini, Opacka-Juffry and Gross (2014) realized that too much use of emotional suppression as a non-adaptive strategy of emotion regulation has positive relationship with early life stress infection. In their study Kim and Page (2013) concluded that inefficient emotion regulation strategies like emotional instability and sign of unprocessed emotions have positive relationship with aggressive, rule breaking behavior and social problems in primary school truant students.

Similarly, emotional instability and signs of unprocessed emotion can positively predict these behaviors and problems. Moreover, results from various studies show that children and adolescents with high levels of anxiety are less skillful in using reappraisal and focusing on planning; as the main elements of emotion regulation (Hasani et al., 2013; Garnefski et al., 2007) and less able to regulate worries, sadness, and anger compared to non-anxious children (Brown & Whiteside, 2008). It is also noteworthy that in some studies, no significant correlation was observed between efficient emotion regulation strategies and psychological maladjustment in adolescence (Garnefski, Kraaij & Rebeco, 2009).

The second psychological component which can be important in the etiology of school anxiety is the fear of positive evaluation. This is associated with receiving positive social feedback and weaker belief in the correctness of the feedback. Fear of positive evaluation mediates the relationship between social anxiety and uneasiness in positive social feedback (Davoudi, Salahian & Veisy, 2012). Evidence indicates relationship between social anxiety disorder and fear of positive evaluation (Weeks, Heimberg, Rodebaugh & Norton, 2008). Lipton, Augenstein, Weeks and Los Reyes (2013) in a study

on adolescents suffering from social anxiety disorder, found out that fear of positive evaluation has positive and significant association with the intensity of this disorder signs. Davoudi et al. (2012) proved that fear of positive evaluation is affective regardless of negative evaluation regarding social anxiety. They also showed that these two constructions may associate with a variety of anxiety signs. In addition, based on previous studies, the level of fear of positive evaluation in individuals suffering from social anxiety disorder is higher than normal individuals (Niquee & Samadi, 2013) and again, fear of positive evaluation is able to predict social anxiety signs (Weeks, Jakatdard, Richard & Heimberg, 2010).

In summary, a review of literature indicates relationship between anxiety disorders and several field and personality variables such as emotion regulation strategies and fear of positive evaluation. Despite the significant role of these two psychological components in anxiety disorders, no studies (in Iran or out of Iran) has been conducted on the relationship between these two variables school anxiety in children and adolescents. Besides according to the results of Garnefski et al. (2009) study, the relationship between efficient emotion regulation strategies and psychological maladjustment in adolescence has not been clearly specified; therefore the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotion regulation strategies, fear of positive evaluation, and school anxiety in female students.

2. Methods

The present study is descriptive – correlational. The study sample consisted of all female first grade high school students of Savadkouh between 2012 and 2013. In correlative studies, the larger the sample size is, the smaller the amounts of statistically false correlation will be. Hence, the sample size between 30 and 100 is suitable for the correlation studies (Hajloo & Babapour, 2013). Regarding this point and the probability of some participants drop out, 120 students were selected using multiple-stage clustering. First, Savadkouh city was divided into five geographical areas (North, South, East, West, and Center).

Among these areas, two (North and Center) areas were selected by complete random method. Then, among female high schools, two were randomly selected. From each of these high schools, 30 eighth and ninth grade students were randomly selected and examined. These students were selected based on variables such as age (between 13 and 15 years) and similar education (60 in eighth grade and 60 in ninth grade). Questionnaires were

Table 1. Descriptive indicators of research variables (n=110).

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
School anxiety	3.181	2.151	0	9
Fear of positive evaluation	25.638	15.898	0	62
Suppression	14.612	5.464	4	28
Reappraisal	28.257	6.422	6	40

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filled out in the classroom in the present of the researcher. Finally, after omission of the incorrect questionnaires, 110 remaining ones were statistically analyzed. To meet the ethics and increase participation, participants were informed about the subject and objective of the study to the extent that does not affect the results. After reassuring participants regarding the matter that they would never be examined individually and can leave the research anytime, they entered into the study. It must be noted that participants were not asked for their names or passwords (except in cases where some participants asked for the result of the study).

Questionnaires used in this study comprised the following sections

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire: This scale has 10 items and was designed by Gross and John (2003). The scale has two subscales: reappraisal (6 items), and suppression (4 items). Answers are scored on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree), through (neutral) 4 to (strongly agree) 7. Cronbach α coefficient for reappraisal and suppression was 0.79 and 0.73 respectively. Test-retest reliability after 3-months was reported at 0.69 for the total scale (3).

Also Gullone and Taffe (2012) reported Cronbach α coefficient for reappraisal in the range of 0.82 to 0.86 and for suppression in the range of 0.69 to 0.79 in adolescent samples. The researchers also stated that the questionnaire had a good construct and convergent validity in adolescent samples (Gullone & Taffe, 2012). Reappraisal and suppression reliability in this study using Cronbach α coefficient were obtained at 0.79 and 0.81, respectively.

The Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPES): This scale has 10 items and is designed by Weeks, Heimberg and Rodebaugh (2008). The scoring is based on 10-point Likert-type rating scale, ranging from 0 (not at all true) to 9 (very true). Items 5 and 10 do not count in the scoring. The total score is obtained by summing the scores of 8 other items. Weeks et al., (2008) reported that scale

scores have good internal consistency and 5-week test-retest reliability (intraclass correlation coefficient = 0.70) in undergraduate samples (Weeks et al., 2008). The reliability of the scale in this study using Cronbach α coefficient was obtained at 0.80.

The Anxiety School Subscale of the Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED-41): This test is a self-reporting scale that designed by Bimamer (1999; quotes Crocetti, Hale, Fermani, Raaijmakers & Meeus, 2009) to assess symptoms of anxiety disorders according to DSM-4 criteria in children of 8 to 18 years old.

This test has 41 items that comprise a general anxiety scale and five subscales including panic (13 items; 16, 9,12,15,18,19,22,24,27,34,38); general anxiety disorder (9 items; 5,7,14,21,23,28,33,35,37); separation anxiety disorder (8 items; 4,8,13,16,20,25,29,31); social anxiety disorder (7 items; 3,10,26,32,40,41) and school anxiety disorder (4 items; 2,11,17,36). Answers is on a 3-point scale (0= not true or hardly ever true, 1= sometimes true, and 2= true or often true). Repeated studies have shown that major scale and subscales of this questionnaire have high correlations with scale and subscales of other instruments, which measure anxiety in children such as Spence Anxiety Scale, Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for children which indicates the convergent validity of this scale. General anxiety scale internal consistency (Cronbach α coefficient) is 0.90 and school anxiety subscale internal consistency is 0.87 (Crocetti et al., 2009). School anxiety subscale reliability in this study using Cronbach α coefficient was obtained at 0.74.

Procedure: Emotion Regulation Strategies and Fear of Positive Evaluation were considered as predictor variables (independent) and school anxiety was considered as the criterion variable (dependent). After sampling, questionnaires were distributed among participants. During procedure, researcher had close contact with respondents and answered their probable questions. In order to analyze the data were used SPSS (version 21) Partial correlation coefficient and multiple regression

Table 2. Partial correlation coefficients between research variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4
School anxiety (1)	1.00			
Fear of positive evaluation (2)	0.289**	1.00		
Suppression (3)	0.205*	0.117	1.00	
Reappraisal (4)	-0.401**	-0.116	-0.143	1.00

*P=0.05 **P=0.01

analysis were carried out. Level of statistical and $P < 0.05$ was considered as statistically significant.

3. Results

In this study the information of 110 first grade high school girl students was analyzed. Participants' mean age was 13.98 ± 0.70 year. Results showed that 43.6% (48) students were the first child of family, 25.5% (28) students the second, 22.7% (25) the third, and 8.2% (9) fourth. Table 1 presents the participants' mean, SD, minimum, and maximum scores regarding the variables under study.

As seen in table 1, the highest mean $28.257 \pm (6.422)$ belongs to reappraisal and lowest mean $3.181 \pm (2.151)$ to school anxiety. As seen in table 2, there is a positive and significant relationship between school anxiety in female students with fear of positive evaluation ($r = 0.289$, $P = 0.01$) and suppression as a non-adaptive strategy of emotion regulation ($r = 0.205$, $P = 0.05$). There is a negative and significant relationship between school anxiety

in female students with reappraisal as an adaptive strategy of emotion regulation ($r = -0.401$, $P = 0.01$).

Figure 1 shows the standardized residue of regression in P-P diagram. As seen, residues in P-P are the function of 45 degree ° line. Accordingly, regression normality hypothesis is not rejected and normality assumption is approved. To use the regression model, its defaults were examined. Hence, Durbin-Watson test was used for errors independence, and multicollinearity test was applied to examine two indices (tolerance and variance inflation factor). Results showed that Durbin-Watson test value was 1.691 indicating errors' independence. Other qualities of regression and multicollinearity assumptions are seen in Table 3. Multicollinearity indices showed no relationship between variables predicting that multicollinearity and results from regression model are reliable.

Results in table 3 show that $F = 13.219$ is significant ($P = 0.001$). Again, 27% variance of female students' school anxiety is explained by fear of positive evaluation and emotion regulation strategies ($R^2 = 0.272$). Based on t-statistics, effect coefficients (B) of variables under study show that reappraisal ($B = -0.132$) (as an adaptive strategy of emotion regulation) and fear of positive evaluation ($B = 0.034$) and suppression ($B = 0.069$) (as a non-adaptive strategy of emotion regulation) can provide negative and positive significant prediction of female students' school anxiety, respectively. The regression equation would be $Y = 5.548 + -0.132x_1 + 0.034x_2 + 0.069x_3$

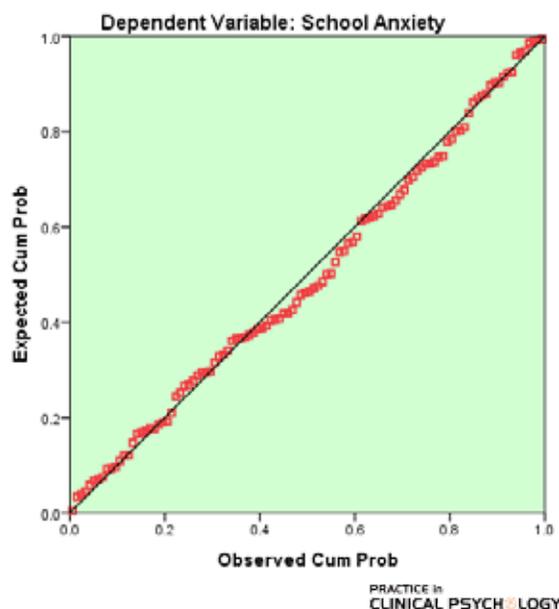


Figure 1. Regression standardized residual.

4. Discussion

This study examined the relationship between emotion regulation strategies and fear of positive evaluation in female students' school anxiety. Results showed a positive relationship between school anxiety and suppression – as a non-adaptive strategy of emotion regulation. Nonetheless, it had negative relationship with reappraisal – as an adaptive strategy of emotion regulation. Regression analysis results also showed that suppression and reappraisal provide direct and reverse predictions of students' school anxiety. That is, further use of emotion regulation

Table 3. Regression coefficient characteristic by enter method to predict school anxiety based on fear of positive evaluation and emotion regulation strategies.

Predictors variables	B	Std. error	Beta	t	P-value	R ²	F	P-value
Reappraisal	-0.132	0.029	-0.393	-4.744	0.001			
Fear of positive evaluation	0.034	0.012	0.253	3.033	0.003	0.272	13.219	0.001
Suppression	0.069	0.014	0.176	2.103	0.038			

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non-adaptive strategies leads to significant increase in students' school anxiety, respectively. At the same time, further use of emotion regulation adaptive strategies results in significant reduction in students' school anxiety. These results correlate with the results reported by other researchers like Romero et al., (2014), Mohiyeddini et al., (2014), Kim and Page (2013), Garnefski et al., (2007) and Hasani et al., (2013). These researchers found out that emotion regulation ability is associated with a number of physical, social, and physiological consequences.

On the other hand, failure in emotion regulation is the basic mechanism of various psychological disorders and social problems including anxiety, rule breaking behaviors, truant, and educational failure. These results can be explained by the general model of emotion regulation strategies (Hasani et al., 2013). In this model, non-adaptive strategies of emotion regulation lead to the emergence and continuance of various mental pathologies. However, the adaptive strategies of emotion regulation act as protective factors. Results of different studies in this regard have shown that adolescents suffering from anxiety disorders think more about emotions related to the negative incidences of life as compared to normal individuals. They focus more on the negative aspects of their experiences (Garnefski et al., 2007).

Garnefski et al., (2007) also found that the non-adaptive strategies of emotion regulations have a positive relationship and reappraisal (as an adaptive strategy of emotion regulation) has a negative and significant relationship with fear. There is a relationship between thoughts clearly emphasizing the fear of an experience and negative evaluation by others as well as mental occupation about feelings and thoughts related to the negative event and anxiety increase.

Again, the adaptive and non-adaptive strategies of emotion regulation are related to anxiety signs in children and adolescents population (Hasani et al., 2013; Ghasempour, Akbari, Azimi, Ilbeigy & Hasanzade, 2013). Emotions' reappraisal is associated with the increase in positive emotions and psychological adaptability (Mohi-

yeddini et al., 2014). Yet, emotions suppression is related to negative suppression and psychological dysfunction (Mohiyeddini et al., 2014). Hence, it can be concluded that reappraisal is inversely related to students' school anxiety, whereas suppression is directly related to that. These are among the main constituents of this disorder.

In addition to what was said, results can be explained by this fact that individuals with high levels of anxiety and worries use a set of inefficient emotional strategies. For instance, continuous thinking about future events leads to a sort of judgment regarding these thoughts. This, in turn, prevents emotion awareness and acceptance. Getting involved in the anxious content of their thoughts, these individuals are also prevented from the reappraisal of positive or safe views.

Although anxious individuals use anxiety and oppression process as a problem-solving strategy, it cannot be considered as an effective strategy, because in an effective problem-solving process, the problem must first be defined objectively. Then, all alternatives must be determined via brainstorming. They should be examined in terms of being useful or useless. In the first place, anxiety and oppression are related to a vague future and cannot be objectively identified. Secondly, its content is not problem-based. Rather, it is in terms of "what if" questions. These questions not only do not solve the problem but also result in a void loop in the individual increasing and stabilizing anxiety in them (Soltan Mohammadlou, Gharraee, Fathali Lvasani & Gohari, 2013).

Based on the results of this study, there is a positive relationship between fear of positive evaluation and female students' school anxiety. Fear of positive evaluation can positively and significantly predict female students' school anxiety. Although no studies has exactly examined the relationship between fear of positive evaluation and school anxiety, these results are correlated with Lipton et al., (2013), Niquee and Samadi (2013) and Davoudi et al., (2012) results regarding the positive relationship between fear of positive evaluation and social anxiety as well as fear of positive evaluation role in

creating and intensifying social anxiety signs. Weeks et al., (2010) showed that fear of positive evaluation continuously predicts social interaction anxiety. These results indicate that students suffering from school anxiety not only feel uneasy if they are considered to have weak and ridiculous performance but also if they are encouraged and praised. These results can be explained based on Swann's self-approval theory.

According to this theory, when individuals receive feedback not fitting their self-view, they feel distressed (Davoudi et al., 2012). As a result, students with high level of school anxiety who have a sort of negative social orientation and cognition toward their educational, learning, and social status and performance and expect negative and stressful events regarding school tasks and in social communication feel uneasy when receive a positive social feedback (Lyneham et al., 2008). Because they find no logical relationship between positive information and their expectation concerning undesirable weak educational status and performance in instructional and social statuses. Besides Lyneham et al., (2008) believe that students with school anxiety are more likely to have the diagnostic measures of social anxiety. Hence, these students underestimate their positive characteristics. These students fear if family and school staff's (especially, teachers) positive evaluation surpasses their expectations they cannot meet these expectations in future.

In general, results of the present study showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between reappraisal (as an adaptive strategy of emotion regulation) and school anxiety. Reappraisal can negatively and significantly predict students' school anxiety. Similarly, there was a positive and significant relationship between suppression (as a non-adaptive strategy of emotion regulation) and fear of positive evaluation with students' school anxiety. Suppression and fear of positive evaluation could positively and significantly predict female students' school anxiety. Based on these results, some theoretical and practical achievements can be implied. Theoretically, results can lead to better identification of factors inducing and stabilizing students' school anxiety. This study can contribute to the examination of variables like emotion regulation strategies related to individual's wellbeing and the promotion of effective interpersonal relationships.

Practically, regarding the role of emotion regulation strategies and fear of positive evaluation in predicting students' school and educational centers anxiety, it is suggested that further studies are conducted focusing on how these psychological factors affect school anxiety

and the process of this effect when planning and examining how to reduce and prevent students' school and educational center anxiety. Necessary consultative and instructional actions are also taken to enhance students' mental health level so that students' school anxiety can be relieved, predicted, and inhibited. The findings of this study in terms of its applicability are as follows: the systematic relationship between emotion regulation strategies, fear of positive evaluation, and school anxiety in students can help education practitioners identify risk factors and allocate necessary facilities to reduce different types of anxiety disorders such as school anxiety. On the other hand, the findings of this study can be considered as an appropriate empirical basis for developing intervention and health programs within the framework of training cognitive strategies based on emotion regulation and management.

Since this study is only conducted on the first grade high school female students, it is suggested that students from other educational grades (including primary school students) and other gender (male students) are studied in further research. This study should be repeated regarding the first grade high school students of other cities to see whether results are correlated. Among research limitations, was the small sample size (Savadkough first grade high school female students).

This factor limits the generalization of results. Research method (correlation) also puts limitations regarding the interpretations and etiological predications of variables under study. This must be considered too. In addition, data were collected based on self-report scales. These reports are apt to be twisted due to subconscious defenses and prejudice in responding. Also, the method of this research is of correlation studies which restrain the conclusion on the findings.

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