

Predicting Social Adjustment in University Students based on Alexithymia and Psychological Vulnerability

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Received 12 August 2019; Accepted 25 September 2019

Abstract

The research has been performed to the aim of predicting social adjustment based on alexithymia and psychological vulnerability of students in Department of Human Sciences of Payam-e Noor University in Sari. Statistical population of the research included all B.A. students from Department of Human Sciences of Payam-e Noor University in Sari in academic year of 2018-19, from among whom 234 individuals have been selected through multi-stage random cluster sampling. To measure research variables, three questionnaires of Toronto alexithymia scale, short form of symptom checklist of mental disorder (SCL-25), and social adjustment of students have been used. Validity and reliability of questionnaires have been respectively checked and confirmed through content validity and Cronbach's alpha. To analyze data, descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, and multivariate regression have been applied via SPSS 24. According to the results obtained, alexithymia along with high level of psychological vulnerability are potential sources of affecting social adjustment in students; and, they directly predict students' social adjustment. So, students' social adjustment can be predicted based on their alexithymia and psychological vulnerability.

Keywords: Social adjustment; Alexithymia; Psychological vulnerability.

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1. Introduction

Social life is not possible with making no adjustment. Social adjustment means sequential adaptation with changes and creating relationship between self and social environment so that maximum self-restraint along with social welfare become possible, while observing rights of the others. This way, social adjustment does not mean to go with the stream; instead, it means identifying this reality that each person has to follow his/her own goals with consideration of socio-cultural frameworks. Social adjustment is a continuous quantity that gradually reaches perfection; and, during life it would be naturally achieved through experiencing. After childhood period and at the beginning of adolescence, social psychosocial development turns from simple evolution to deep and qualitative evolution; and, using social skills, it can find its own status among social interactions so that would be socially accepted. This prevents emotion of loneliness and depression (Rahimi, 2017).

Adjustment is a complicated and multidimensional concept attributed to dynamic processes resulting in appropriate adaptation between an individual and the environment (Ramsy, Jones, and Barker, 2007). The findings from researches performed by Beirami, Nosratabadi, Gargari, Dabiri et al., (2016) showed that social competence training will lead to increase in adjustment followed by improvement of mental health as for a more healthy evolution of students. The results from researches performed by Barzegar Bafrouie (2015) indicated that after controlling pre-test scores, significant difference has been found between the two test and control groups in terms of scores related to empathy, social adjustment, and reduction of violence and its dimensions; and, the research results can provide a ground for improvement of social adjustment and reduction of violence in students. Also, as shown by Stavrinides, Georgiou, Nikiforou, and Kiteri (2011), problems related to psychosocial adjustment are from among emotional problems, defective social skills, and weak academic performance. Following the study performed on relationships between alexithymia and adjustment, reference could be made to the results from researches performed by Moradi (2016) i.e. correlation between alexithymia and social adjustment being statistically significant and their relationship being significant, as well. The findings from researches performed by Amirzadeh,

Bari Zarnagh, and Jafarzadeh Dashbolagh (2016) showed that alexithymia is capable of predicting adjustment of youths with behavioral problems; and, it requires some programs as for training strategies to describe emotion as a tool. In the research performed by Darvishi (2014), reference has been made to significant relationship between alexithymia and marital adjustment. The results from research performed by Falatoni (2012) showed that difficulty in describing emotions, adaptation, and difficulty in identifying emotions are respectively best predictors for all components of social adjustment in students. The results from researches performed by Wastell and Taylor (2002) showed that people suffering from alexithymia are not capable of entering intimate relationships based on empathy; and, they have low level of emotional adjustment.

Following review made on relationships and effects of alexithymia and psychological vulnerability, the results from research performed by Tatar (2018) showed that people with higher scores in terms of alexithymia are more vulnerable, psychologically. In the research performed by Maredpour and Shahrashoub (2018), reference has been made to significant relationship existing between alexithymia and psychological vulnerability; and, alexithymia predicts level of psychological vulnerability. Based on the findings by Safari, Yousefpour, and Amiri (2014), alexithymia can affect interpersonal problems among students; and, through provision of training programs, the way could be paved for prevention of damages and adjustment of emotions so that interpersonal problems would be reduced. The results from researches performed by Rezaie, Karimi, Afshari, and Ramaghani (2017) showed that difficulty in identification and description of emotions as the two components of alexithymia in patients suffering from asthma predicts depression and anxiety. According to the researches performed by Besharat, Masoudi, and Lavasani (2014), it was shown that in time identification of emotional insufficiencies can help prevention of physical and mental damages. The findings from research performed by Abolghasemi and Meisami Bonab (2012) showed that alexithymia explains psychological vulnerability in women with mood disorders; and, first aspect of alexithymia (difficulty in identification of emotions) significantly predicts all symptoms of psychopathology in patients

suffering from major depressive disorder. So, present research intends to see if social adjustment in students can be predicted based on alexithymia and psychological vulnerability?

2. Method

In the research being a field study in terms of its goal, data have been collected in field and library settings; and, they have been analyzed through descriptive method used in correlational researches. Statistical population of the research included all female students in Department of Human Sciences of Payam-e Noor University in academic year of 2018-19; from among whom 234 students have been selected through multi-stage random cluster sampling. To measure research variables, three questionnaires of Toronto alexithymia scale, short form of symptom checklist for mental disorder (SCL-25), and social adjustment of students have been used.

2.1. Toronto Alexithymia Scale

The questionnaire developed by Bagby et al., (1994) includes 20 items and three subscales (difficulty in identifying emotions, difficulty in describing emotions, and objective thinking), based on five-point Likert scale (totally disagree, disagree, no comment, agree, totally agree) respectively from one to five. Validity of alexithymia scale has been confirmed by its developers; and, its reliability has been verified through Cronbach's alpha as being equal to 0.87 by Bagby et al. (1994). In Iran and by Besharat (2008), validity and normality of the whole scales has been 0.75, for difficulty in identifying emotions 0.72, for difficulty in describing emotions 0.72, and thinking with an orientation towards outside has been 0.69. In present research also, validity verified through Cronbach's alpha has been equal to 0.83, 0.87, and 0.91 respectively for objective thinking, difficulty in identifying emotions, and difficulty in describing emotions.

2.2. Social Adjustment to College Questionnaire

The questionnaire developed by Baker and Siryc (1984) includes 19 items measuring social adjustment in students. Each item has been scored based on five-point Likert scale from one (totally disagree) to five (totally agree).

Questions 7, 12, 14, 15, and 17 have been scored, reversely. Reliability coefficient of the questionnaire has been obtained 0.76 for social adjustment in the research performed by Seirafi (2012).

2.3. Symptoms Checklist of Mental Disorders: To measure psychological vulnerability level, short form of SCL-25 (symptoms checklist of mental disorders) has been applied. SCL-25 is a questionnaire with 25 questions that measures eight following factors within the last week: anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sensitivity in interpersonal relationships, somatization, psychose, paranoid imaginations, as well as depression and fear. To obtain score related to each dimension, total scores of its related questions has to be summed up. To obtain overall score of the questionnaire, total scores of all questions would be summed up and higher scores in terms of each dimension shows higher level of that disorder. Short form of SCL-90 has been validated by Nadjarian and Davoudi (2001); and, correlation existing between short and long forms of SCL-90 and SCL-25 has been reported by them. In the research, Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency of SCL-25 for female and male samples have been respectively equal to 0.97 and 0.98; and, for test-retest in the whole sample have been equal to 0.78, while being equal to 0.77 and 0.79 in female and male samples. Simultaneous validity of the scale has been confirmed through generalized anxiety scale in Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and Ahvaz Perfectionism Scale (Besharat et al., 2014). To analyze the results, Pearson Correlation Coefficient and regression have been used.

3. Research Findings

Table1. Mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum of Alexythemia, psychological vulnerability and social adjustment

Variable	At least statistics	Maximum statistics	Average	Standard deviation
Difficulty identifying emotions	8	24	15.91	3.73
Difficulty describing emotions	5	21	13.41	3.73
Objective thinking	8	40	24.76	7.28
Alexithymia	20	84	54.20	13.65
Physical complaints	2	28	20.53	3.59
Obsessive and Practical	2	15	8.03	3.06

Interpersonal sensitivity	4	15	7.91	2.42
Depression	4	9	6.80	1.22
Anxiety	9	14	11.79	1.22
Morbid phobic anxiety	5	12	8.04	1.53
Paranoid Thoughts	1	5	3.42	1.09
Psychosis	6	10	7.66	1.01
Psychological Vulnerability	44	108	77.90	11.73
Social adjustment	35	73	51.38	8.36

Table 2. ANOVA table for predicting social adjustment (criterion variable) based on emotional distress and psychological vulnerability (predictor variables)

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2211.322	2	1105.661	18.140	.000 ^a
Residual	14079.828	231	60.952		
Total	16291.150	233			

The results of the above table show that according to the obtained analysis of variance, social adjustment prediction based on emotional distress and psychological vulnerability is significant at the level of 0.000.

Table 3. Multiple correlation coefficient, regression coefficients, determination coefficient, beta coefficient and data linearity

Model	Standardized Coefficients			VIF	R	R Square	Durbin-Watson
	Beta	t	Sig.				
(Constant)		20.202	.000				
Alexythemia	-.151	-1.766	.079				
Psychological Vulnerability	-.246	-2.873	.004	.509	1.963	.368	.136

The results in Table 3 show the prediction of social adjustment based on emotional distress and psychological vulnerability. Beta values are for psychological vulnerability (-0.246), emotional distress (-15.1) and for t-statistic, mental vulnerability (-2.887) and emotional distress (-1.766). It shows that only psychological vulnerability can predict social adjustment. The Watson camera statistic was used to determine the difference between the

actual values and the values predicted by the regression model and was 1.642. This value in the range of 1 to 3 indicates independent errors. In VIF values, all paths and variables have no variance swelling and have high tolerance coefficients. As a result, high tolerance coefficient and low variance inflation indicate that the regression model is not linear and appropriate.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The research has been aimed at predicting social adjustment based on alexithymia and psychological vulnerability in students of Department of Human Sciences of Payam-e Nour University (Sari). According to the research findings, this can be concluded that variables of psychological vulnerability and alexithymia have been capable of directly predicting social adjustment in students. These results have been in line with those of Tatar (2018), Maredpour and Shahrashoub (2018), Rezaie, Karimi, Afshari, and Ramaghani (2017), Moradi (2017), Amirzadeh, Bari Zarnagh, and Jafarzadeh Dashbolagh (2016), Beirami, Hashemi Nosratabad, Gargari, Dabiri et al. (2016), and Barzegar Bafrouie (2015). According to the findings by Beshart (2008), difficulty in identification and making distinction between emotions in people with high level of psychological vulnerability who are prone to emotional insufficiency and occurrence of maladjusted behaviors. Since these people cannot identify their own emotions correctly, they will be faced with problems in emotional catharsis; and, as far as they are not capable of managing negative emotions, these problematic and disabling negative emotions will be intensified. It was found by Rezaie, Karimi, Afshari, and Hosseini Ramaghani (2017) that showing emotions and sharing them is one of the life skills; and, incapability in this will emerge in form of such symptoms as anxiety, depression, physical complaint, psychose, paranoid thoughts, and interpersonal sensitivity. Those people suffering from alexithymia have undifferentiated feelings and these feelings are accompanied with a physiological arousal; however, due to problem existing in making distinction, description, as well as adjustment and showing emotions, arousal remains active and will not disappear which in turn causes intensification of symptoms. Increased symptoms may be intensified through an automatic feedback cycle and be experienced by individuals as

some symptoms of psychological vulnerability. People with high level of depression and anxiety show more maladaptive behaviors, compared to normal people. From among other dimensions and components of psychological vulnerability reference could be made to phobic anxiety. In a research performed by Silberg, Copeland, Linker, More, Roberson, and York (2016), it was concluded that psychological vulnerability has been accompanied with a wide range of maladjustments in students and young adults. According to the findings of Arbabi (2015), social adjustment is adjustment process between person and society, as well as a reflection of human interaction with others. Considering the point that emotions of a person are determinants of adjustment level of person to the environment; people with alexithymia have some problems in their interaction with social environment. These people usually do not express themselves and they have low level of emotional catharsis due to emotional defect (Kouhi, 2014). Also, people capable of expressing their emotions who have gained lower scores in terms of alexithymia are highly adjusted people in social relations in society (Tavousi, 2010). As a result, it could be suggested that alexithymia along with psychological vulnerability are potential sources of affecting social adjustment of students; and, students' social adjustment can be predicted based on their alexithymia and psychological vulnerability.

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