Predicting Resilience in Students based on Happiness, Attachment Style, and Religious Attitude

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Nowadays adolescents as the human capital of every society, in addition to the pressures of transition from adolescence period, are affected by environmental pressures, such as poverty, violence, and substance abuse. Given these factors, resilience plays an important role in this period. The present study aimed to investigate the role of happiness, attachment styles, and religious attitudes in predicting the resilience of students.

Methods: This descriptive correlational study was performed on 354 students selected through the multistage cluster sampling method from the students of junior high schools in Najafabad, Iran. Data collection tools included the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (1989), Attachment Style Questionnaire by Hazen and Shaver (1987), Religious Attitude Questionnaire by Barahani and Golriz (1975), and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (2003). In order to analyze the relationships between the variables and predict resilience, the Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise regression analysis were used.

Results: Our findings showed that happiness, religious attitude, and secure attachment style had a significant relationship with the resilience of students (P<0.01). The results of the regression analysis revealed that the strongest predicting variables of resilience in students were happiness, religious attitude, and secure attachment style (P<0.01).

Conclusion: According to the results of this study, happiness, religious attitude, and secure attachment style could be regarded as important factors in the resilience of students.

Keywords: Attachment styles, Happiness, Religious attitude, Resilience, Students.

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Introduction

Adolescence has always been regarded as one of the important stages of life (1). A variety of distresses during this period might elevate the possibility of juvenile delinquency, educational problems, and familial issues (2). Resilience is among the protective factors against environmental pressures (3).

Resilience is a multi-dimensional construct made of favorable attitudes and behaviors. It allows counteracting approaches against chronic and acute stressful events (4-6). Adolescents with a low level of resilience are more prone to psychological disorders, such as depression, behavioral disorders, violence, smoking, drug abuse, and educational failure (7).

Diverse factors play role in resilience, namely intrinsic variables (e.g., emotion regulation), familial factors (e.g., family environment and parenting styles), and social factors (e.g., peer support) (8). Happiness, as an intrinsic factor that affects resilience, is one

of the major positive emotions. Happiness is characterized as the repetitive experience of favorable emotions, lack of unfavorable feelings, and a general feeling of satisfaction with life (9). It is a positive internal experience and is one of the indices of mental health resulting from cognitive and emotional evaluations of people from life (10).

In recent years, positive psychology aimed to recognize constructs and techniques providing well-being and happiness for humans. Therefore, the identification of factors, such as resilience that lead to the higher levels of human compatibility with the needs and threats of life is the most fundamental construct of researches in this approach (11).

Factors related to family are among the environmental variables affecting resilience. Familial factors, including attachment styles and parenting styles, result in positive consequences, such as resilience through cognitive and emotional procedures and mechanisms. Attachment entails the patterns of emotion, thinking, and individual behaviors in close relationships with caretakers, partners, and other intimate people (12).

Bowlby believed that the development of secure attachment depends on regular interaction between the care behaviors of parents and the attachment behaviors of a child. Secure attachment in an individual leads to the growth of self-esteem, positive emotion, satisfying relationship with others, and personal independence (13).

According to the theory of Bowlby, initial interpersonal experiences with attachment illusions (main caretakers) results in the growth of active internal patterns from yourself and others (attachment styles). In the subsequent relations of a person with others and during the confrontation with stressful conditions, this attachment helps to regulate emotions (14).

However, secure attachment is not always possible to develop and a child might experience an insecure attachment style. When a child is anxious and parents are not available, they may react to this condition and repetition might cause insecure attachment styles to develop (15). The literature demonstrated that people with a secure attachment style report lower levels of negative emotions and have higher resilience (13, 16).

Religious attitude is another effective factor in resilience. Religion is one of the oldest and most common manifestations of the human spirit. Therefore, the importance of religious attitude could not be neglected at least in terms of social ad historical aspects (17). Individuals with religious beliefs are less prone to mental pressure, depression, divorce, delinquency, and suicide, compared to society (18). Results of different studies indicated a significant positive relationship between religious orientation and resilience (19).

It seems that religion acts as a defensive system inducing positive psychological impacts in a person (20-23). Current evidence and theories have addressed happiness, attachment styles, religious attitude, and resilience among adolescents along with probable correlations between these constructs in students. However, no balanced and homogenous evidence exists regarding the relationships between these components, mental health, and resilience of students. Consequently, the present study aimed to evaluate the relationship of happiness, attachment styles, and religious attitude with resilience in students and their role in predicting this factor.

Methods

This correlational study with the cross-sectional design was carried out on the statistical population of all the 3745 male students of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades of junior high school in Najaf Abad during 2018-2019. The sample size was obtained as 354 students according to Morgan table and the samples were selected through the multistage cluster sampling method. Regions were divided into three areas to collect the data and omit cultural differences. Next, two schools were selected from each area and three classes of grades seven, eight, and nine were chosen from each school randomly.

The inclusion criteria entailed the tendency of subjects for participation, being a student in

grades seven, eight, and nine, and being generally healthy. The exclusion criterion was the lack of a tendency for continuing cooperation with the researchers. In terms of ethical considerations, the researchers introduced themselves and explained the objectives and methodology of the study followed by receiving informed consent from the individuals. Moreover, the participants were assured regarding the confidentiality of data.

Data collection tools encompassed Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, Attachment Style Questionnaire, Religious Attitude Questionnaire, and Resilience Scale.

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire has 29 items that assess happiness level with the scores of 0, 1, 2, and 3 attributed to always, sometimes, rarely, and never, respectively. The total score of this survey is in the range of 0-87 with a higher score indicating a higher level of happiness. Argayle designed this questionnaire in 1989 based on the Beck Depression Inventory. Twenty-one of the items in this survey were derived from the Beck Depression Inventory to cover the other aspects of mental health.

Each item of Happiness Questionnaire similar to the Beck Depression Inventory has four choices and the participants should choose one choice according to their current condition. Nowadays, this questionnaire is widely used in researches regarding happiness (24). Argayle and Hilss (25) reported the reliability of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire as a Cronbach's alpha of 0.9 and the repeatability of 0.78 during seven weeks. Another investigation found the reliability of this questionnaire as the Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 (24).

In Iran, Alipour and Agha Harris (26) confirmed the convergent and discriminant validities of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire by the Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.48 between this questionnaire and the Beck Depression Inventory. In addition, Cronbach's alpha of this survey was reported as 0.94 in another study (27). We found Cronbach's alpha in the present study as 0.91.

Attachment Style Questionnaire

The attachment style questionnaire was developed by Shaver and Hazen (28) and was normalized in Iran on the students of Tehran University. This survey contains 15 items with five addressing each of the three attachment styles of secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. This questionnaire is scored as very low (score 1) to very high (score 5) and the scores of attachment subscales are obtained by the mean of the five questions of each subscale.

Each of the three attachment styles of secure, avoidant, and ambivalent had five items (29). Shaver and Hazen (28) obtained the repeatability and reliability of the whole questionnaire as 0.8 and Cronbach's alpha of 0.78, respectively. Moreover, they reported face validity and content validity as favorable and construct validity as highly favorable. Rahimian Boogar et al. found favorable reliability for the whole questionnaire, ambivalent, avoidant, and secure styles with the Cronbach's alpha values of 0.75, 0.83, 0.81, and 0.77, respectively.

Religious Attitude Questionnaire

Barahani and Golriz (1975) designed the Religious Attitude Questionnaire. This survey contains 25 questions with each item scored based on a 5-point Likert scale as 0-4 making a total score of 100. The scores are categorized as 76-100, 51-75, 26-50, and < 25 for excellent, good, moderate, and poor religious attitudes, respectively. Allport et al. confirmed this questionnaire as valid by the correlation coefficient of 0.8 (1960) (31). This was reevaluated during the recent years by the Spearman-Brown method reported as 0.63 and the validity of 0.248 (32).

Resilience Scale

The Resilience Scale was developed by Connor and Davidson in 2003. It consists of 25 items scored by a 5-point Likert scale as 0-4 attributed to completely incorrect to completely correct. The range of total scores is 0-100 with a higher score showing higher levels of resilience. They confirmed the content validity and construct validity of the instrument. Furthermore, the reliability of this

questionnaire was reported as the Cronbach's alpha values of 0.89, 0.87, and 0.92 in different studies (8, 33, 6). We found Cronbach's alpha as 0.88 in the present study.

The data in this study were analyzed by descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. In addition, the relationship of research variables with the resilience of students was assessed using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The predictive role of the factors was evaluated by stepwise regression. All the analyses were performed utilizing the SPSS software version 20.

Result

A total of 118, 121, and 115 male students were selected from grades seven, eight, and nine, respectively. The mean values of resilience, religious attitude, happiness, secure attachment, avoidant style, and ambivalent style were found as 61.31±17.86, 63.54±13.78, 82.34±16.5, 3.44±0.88, 2.66±0.85, 2.84±0.9, respectively.

Prior to using the correlation coefficient and stepwise regression, the assumptions were assessed. The normality of data distributions as one of the assumptions was checked based on the lack of significant kurtosis or skewness, in addition to the normal Q-Q plot. Moreover, the Durbin Watson statistic was 1.5-2.5 demonstrating the assumption of autocorrelation.

According to Table 1, religious attitude, happiness, and secure attachment style have a positive significant correlation with resilience (P<0.01). However, avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles did not have a significant relationship with resilience. Results of stepwise regression applied to predict resilience based on religious attitude, happiness, and secure attachment style are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 demonstrates that at the first step, happiness predicts resilience as 0.37. In addition, at the second step, happiness and religious attitude together predict resilience as 0.38 and at the third step; happiness, religious attitude, and secure attachment style altogether predict 0.4 of resilience. As indicated in Table 3, happiness (Beta=0.55, P<0.001), religious

Table 1. Correlation coefficient of happiness, attachment styles, and religious attitude with resilience in the male students of junior high school

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Resilience	1					
Religious attitude	0.23**	1				
Happiness	0.61**	0.2**	1			
Secure attachment style	0.31**	0.21**	0.47**	1		
Avoidant attachment style	0.01	-0.2**	-0.14**	-0.05	1	
Ambivalent attachment style	0.03	-0.1	-0.03	0.19**	0.17**	1

* P < 0.05
** P < 0.01

Table 2. Stepwise regression analysis for predicting resilience

Variable	Changes	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	F	R	R^2	P-value
Happiness	Regression	40996.88	1	40996.88	203.07	0.61	0.37	0.000
	Residual	70659.62	350	201.89				
Happiness	Regression	42459.55	2	21229.77	107.074	0.62	0.38	0.000
Religious attitude	Residual	69196.95	349	198.27				
Happiness	Regression	43546.49	3	14515.5	74.16	0.63	0.40	0.000
Religious attitude	Residual	68110.01	348	195.72				
Secure attachment style								

Table 3. Predicting resilience through predictive variables

Variable	B	SEB	β	t	P-value
Happiness	0.66	0.05	0.61	14.25	0.000
Happiness	0.64	0.05	0.58	13.57	0.000
Religious attitude	0.15	0.06	0.12	2.72	0.007
Happiness	0.61	0.05	0.55	12.89	0.000
Religious attitude	0.13	0.06	0.1	2.12	0.008
Secure attachment style	0.11	0.06	0.09	1.64	0.020

attitude (Beta=0.1, P<0.01), and secure attachment style (Beta=0.09, P<0.05) had a positive significant relationship with resilience among students and could predict resilience.

Discussion

The present study aimed to evaluate the relationship between happiness, attachment styles, and religious attitude and determine the role of these factors in predicting resilience among students. Our findings revealed a positive significant relationship between happiness and resilience and showed that this variable has the potency to predict resilience.

The latter result is in line with a part of the findings of several investigations (6, 34). This could be clarified with the fact that resilient individuals have special skills and attitudes, such as hardworking control. Hard work helps people to convert difficulties to profitable opportunities when confronting stressful conditions.

Moreover, the control means that a person believes in their ability in affecting the results of events, which leads to the feeling of efficiency followed by happiness (35). It seems that happiness results in optimism among people through creating mental and social protective factors. As a result, control and dominance on the environment elevate and causes the performance of the individual to enhance along with increased mental health and resilience.

Furthermore, the results of the current study showed a positive significant relationship between secure attachment style and resilience making this variable a significant predictor for the resilience of students. This finding is consistent with some other studies (8, 16, 36) and could be attributed to the fact that attachment style indicates the quality of the relation of a person with others. People with secure attachment develop schemas based on the previous experiences that others are protective and excessive efforts are not needed to receive their support. In addition, they trust other people and are optimistic regarding their relationships.

Atwool (2006) believes that attachment style and resilience are complementary despite their different paths in psychology. In other words, the

more the attachment styles tend to security, the higher the resilience will be. This author adds that attachment styles augment the resistance and resilience of an individual through influencing self-efficiency and competence (36). Moreover, it seems that people with a secure attachment style can develop a supportive social network in their living environment and enhance their resilience due to the positive consequences they receive from the type of encountering environment.

Furthermore, we did not found avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles to have a significant relationship with resilience. The mentioned result is in line with the findings of Akbari et al. (37). On the other hand, some other investigations reported a negative significant relationship between these two attachment styles and resilience (8, 16).

In terms of the latter result and the existing controversy, we can note that students with ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles indicate better adaptation and discharge their anxiety in other ways. This might be attributed to the feeling of fear from being boycotted by parents, being anxious about not receiving a reciprocal response to their emotions, and stress and anxiety due to ending the relations with parents. In addition, the participants of the present study were students at the ages requiring closer relationships with parents. Therefore, the style of their attachment imposed neither a positive nor a negative impact on their resilience.

Moreover, the results of the present study revealed a positive significant relationship between religious attitude and resilience in students. As a result, religious attitude can be a predictor of resilience. This finding is congruent with some previous investigations (2, 18, 23, 32). Dehghani et al. (2017) concluded from their study that resilience has a significant relationship with religious orientation and spiritual health among the students of the second grade of senior high school (2).

Regarding the clarification of this finding, it could be stated that religiosity and religious attitude might improve resilience through several mechanisms. People with a religious attitude pursue a purposive life by following

religious instructions and training (38). These people have a strong spiritual source in facing problems and failures that facilitate the tolerance of problems, inhibit deviation from social norms, and improve adaptation (39).

Religious people have clear criteria for their behaviors and actions, which can result in satisfaction with life and increased self-confidence and self-esteem as important influential factors in resilience. Consequently, religiosity, on one hand, causes the behavior of the person to be socially accepted and on the other hand, promotes psychological sources, such as self-esteem, self-satisfaction, and self-confidence.

Furthermore, belief and trust in God regarding the outcome of issues results in diminished anxiety, fear, and other negative emotions. In addition, it improves the psychological adaptation of the individual and causes them to apply more suitable methods for confronting problems. Remembering God, thinking of the magnificence of God, god praise, and giving thanks for all blessings leads to peace.

A strong relationship with God can protect a person from any kind of anxiety, stress, and disappointment and gives meaning to life. All these induce the feeling of relying on an eternal power that will always protect them against all problems (2). Therefore, religious attitude with its special results might be effective in creating and enhancing resilience.

One of the limitations of the current study was the cross-sectional design that complicates concluding about causality. Although the tools applied in this investigation are confirmed regarding the psychometric indices, the usage of indices with different cultural principles partly affects the internal consistency of the research.

When generalizing the results of this study it should be taken into consideration that we exclusively evaluated the male students of junior high schools. Further studies concerning the assessment and comparison of these factors between boys and girls in terms of resilience are recommended. Furthermore, the role of mediating variables in resilience is suggested to be investigated using structural equation modeling.

Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, diverse factors, such as happiness, secure attachment style, and religious attitude in students improve their resilience in confronting environmental pressures during adolescence and enhance adaptation with conditions. These three variables create control and dominance on the environment through developing psychological and social support against negative influential factors. Overall, the mentioned variables promote the performance, mental health, and resilience of an individual.

Recommendations

The results of this study are of importance both theoretically and practically. Religion and religious attitude are considered as one of the main bases of planning in Iran. Therefore, our results can be helpful in raising awareness and knowledge in this regard. Considering the fact that a large portion of resilience is acquired and can be trained, the findings of this investigation may assist the authorities of education and training toward improving resilience among students.

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Ethical Considerations

The authors of the current study claim that all the relevant ethical considerations, including the confidentiality of questionnaires data, informed consent of the participants, and optional leaving were followed.

Conflict of interest

The authors of the present study declare no conflicts of interest in this investigation.

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