

## Looming Style as a Specific Vulnerability Factor for the Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

Mahin Etemadina\*

Parsa Javanmard\*\*

Majid Mahmoud Alilou\*\*\*

Abbas Bakhshipour Roudsari\*\*\*\*

Mansour Bayrami\*\*\*\*\*

### Introduction

The present study evaluated the triple vulnerability model for depression, general anxiety, and social phobia. Depression and anxiety disorders have significant overlap with each other. Emotional disorders occur together because their underlying vulnerability is the same, but this common vulnerability appears heterogeneously as a result of exposure to various environmental influences, genetic-biological factors, etc. Each level of the triple vulnerability model for each disorder was examined with looming vulnerability style as a disorder-specific psychological vulnerability for GAD and social phobia. This model assumes that three components of vulnerability are involved in the etiology of emotional disorders; the first component is the general biological vulnerability, which refers to the genetic dimensions of temperament such as extroversion and introversion, which are related to high levels of anxiety and dependent negative emotions. The second component is

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\* Assistant Professor, Department of psychology, faculty of humanistic sciences, Urmia branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran. *Corresponding Author:* [etemadi.mahin@gmail.com](mailto:etemadi.mahin@gmail.com)

\*\* Master of Clinical Psychology, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran.

\*\*\* Professor, Department of psychology, faculty of educational sciences and psychology, university of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran.

\*\*\*\* Professor, Department of psychology, faculty of educational sciences and psychology, university of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran.

\*\*\*\*\* Professor, Department of psychology, faculty of educational sciences and psychology, university of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran.

general psychological vulnerability, which the triple model of vulnerability indicates that the feeling of unpredictability and uncontrollability of life events and emotional states is considered as psychological vulnerability to mood and anxiety disorders. The third component is disorder-specific vulnerability. The triple vulnerability model postulates that specific psychological vulnerability determines the origin and expression of mood and anxiety disorders through learning experiences that cause a specific focus of disturbance and distress.

### **Method**

This research is a descriptive-correlational study. The statistical population consisted of undergraduate students from Urmia universities, including Government, Azad, Industrial, and Payam Noor universities. Based on the research methodology and data analysis requirements, and following Klain's (2005) recommendation of a minimum of twenty participants per parameter to ensure robust results, 370 participants were initially selected from this population using a convenience sampling method. To account for potential attrition, only 340 completed questionnaires were analyzed after removing those with distorted responses or incomplete answers. These 340 students completed Neuroticism and Extraversion Subscales (Neo-FFI), Anxiety Control Questionnaire (ACQ-R), Looming Maladaptive Style Questionnaire (LMSQ-R), Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS), Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ), and Albany Panic and Phobia Questionnaire (APPQ). The final sample included 177 male and 162 female participants, with a mean age of 20.5 years ( $SD = 2.56$ ) and an age range of 18 to 27.

### **Results**

The results of path analysis indicated that neuroticism had significant direct effects on all three disorders, and holding neuroticism constant, extraversion was inversely associated with depression and social phobia. Perceived control was significantly associated with GAD only, holding neuroticism and extraversion constant. Of the disorder-specific psychological vulnerability, holding general vulnerability dimensions constant, looming vulnerability style was not specific predictor of GAD and social phobia. Based on the results reported in the first model of the study (general bio-vulnerability), the effect coefficients of all variables are significant at the level ( $p < 0.01$ ). In the second model (general psychological vulnerability), the coefficients of the effect of neuroticism and extraversion on all three variables are significant; However, the perceived control pathway coefficient is significant only on pervasive anxiety ( $p < 0.01$ ). In the third model of the research (specific vulnerability with the addition of near-risk perception style), the coefficients of the effect of

neuroticism, extraversion and perceived control on all three variables are significant; However, after maintaining the effect of the dimensions of general vulnerability, namely neuroticism, extraversion, and perceived control, the coefficient of the near-risk perception pathway on social anxiety and depression is significant. Perceived control path's coefficients on social anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder and depression were reported as -0.25, -0.30 and -0.28, respectively ( $p < 0.01$ ). The coefficient of near-risk perception style path's coefficient on social anxiety (0.26) is at the level of 0.01 and the pathway coefficient of near-risk perception style on depression (0.19) is at the level of 0.05; however, the coefficient of near-risk perception style on pervasive anxiety (0.11) is not significant.

### Conclusion

The looming vulnerability style is a broadly shared cognitive vulnerability hypothesized to interact with disorder-specific mechanisms across various anxiety disorders (e.g., fear of social rejection in social phobia, excessive worry and catastrophizing in generalized anxiety disorder). However, the present study's findings, using Barlow's triple model, did not support this hypothesis. One potential explanation may be the limitations in the measurement tool for risk perception style, particularly its insufficient representation of generalized anxiety disorder-related factors. Further research is required to better understand this relationship and refine measurement approaches in this area.

Existing conceptual models suggest that personality dimensions, such as neuroticism and extraversion, contribute to the severity, overlap, and persistence of both depression and anxiety. However, these personality dimensions alone do not fully explain the etiology, progression, and complexity of emotional disorders. Consequently, examining disorder-specific factors within a broader etiological model-one that integrates both shared characteristics and unique dimensions-could enhance our understanding of the causes and differentiation of these disorders.

**Keywords:** Emotional disorder, Extraversion, Looming vulnerability style, Neuroticism, Perceived control

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