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Orginal Article

Comparison of Emotional Suppression, Prosocial Behavior and Perceived Competence in Adolescents with and without Childhood Abuse Experience

Arezou Asghari *
Haniyeh Mianabadi

Abstract

The aim of this study was to compare emotional suppression, prosocial behavior, and perceived competence in adolescents with and without childhood abuse experience. This study was a descriptive causal-comparative study. The study population was all first and second grade female students in Gorgan in the academic year 2022-2023. From the research population, 100 students (50 students with childhood abuse experience and 50 students without childhood abuse experience) were selected as a multi-stage cluster sample. Among the research tools, the following can be mentioned: Emotional Suppression Questionnaire: This questionnaire has 84 items and 10 subscales and is used to measure three different constructs including distress, self-control, and defensiveness. The reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was obtained by Cronbach's alpha method of 0.79. Prosocial Behavior Questionnaire: This questionnaire has 30 items and seven subscales that basically measure two factors: empathy towards others and helping. The reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was obtained by Cronbach's alpha method of 0.93. Competence Perception Questionnaire: This questionnaire has 4 subscales and 27 questions in Likert format, which subscales are: behavioral competence, academic competence, social competence and physical competence. The reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was obtained by Cronbach's alpha method of 0.86. Self-Reported Child Abuse Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed in 2000 and has 38 items that measure and evaluate a range of child abuse behavior. The reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was obtained by Cronbach's alpha method of 0.91. The findings showed that the components of emotional suppression, prosocial behavior, and perceived competence were significantly different in adolescents with and without experience of harassment ($P<0.05$). Accordingly, it can be concluded that adolescents who have been harassed are harassed because they think the outside world is unsafe and have a negative view of themselves, others, and the environment. They scored higher on the components

* Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities, Kosar University of Bojnord, Bojnord, Iran. *Corresponding* Author: azasghari@gmail.com
** Ph.D. student, Department of Psychology, Go. C,. Islamic Azad University, Gorgan, Iran.

of emotional suppression, and lower on the components of social behavior and perceived competence.

Keywords: Emotional suppression, experience of harm, perceived competence, prosocial behavior.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Students are considered the most important and fundamental element in the education system. All arrangements and predictions during planning, policy-making, and procurement in this system ultimately lead to students; because preparing and creating the necessary qualifications in them to enter the society that they themselves will be the creators of is the ultimate goal of education. Undoubtedly, in this process, the more attention is paid to and addressed the issues related to students, the more solid and stable the future structure of society will be. Considering the increasing increase in child abuse in the world and Iran and its destructive consequences, as well as the limitations of the research background with the aim of comparing the aforementioned variables in adolescents, this study seeks to address the existing gaps and fill the existing knowledge gap by answering the question: Is there a significant difference between emotional suppression, prosocial behavior, and perception of competence in adolescents with and without childhood abuse experience?

Methods

The present study was a descriptive causal-comparative study. The study population was all female students in the first and second grades of high school in Gorgan in the academic year 2022-2023. From the research population, 100 students (50 students with childhood abuse experience and 50 students without childhood abuse experience) were selected in a multi-stage cluster. According to Delavar (2019), Ali Akbari Dehkordi & Rezaei (2019), in descriptive causal-comparative studies, 30 people in each group are sufficient, 50 people in each group were considered as a sample. And the two groups were matched in terms of age and gender. The inclusion criteria for the study included childhood abuse experience based on the score of the Child Abuse Self-Report Questionnaire, informed consent to participate in the study, secondary education, and exclusion criteria included unwillingness to continue cooperation in the study, and incomplete responses to the questionnaires.

Research tools

To measure emotional suppression, the Weinberger Adjustment Questionnaire was used. This questionnaire was developed by Weinberger in 1971 and has 84 items and 10 subscales. Another tool was the Prosocial Behavior Questionnaire developed by Louise Penner in 2002. Safari Nia and Bajlan (2011) developed a Persian version of this 30-item questionnaire and administered it to 850 students. This questionnaire consists of seven subscales that essentially measure two factors: empathy directed toward others and helping. To measure the perceived competence scale, the perceived competence questionnaire was used, which was developed by Harter (1982), and has 4 subscales and 27 questions in Likert format. Also, the self-report questionnaire on child abuse was developed by Mohammadkhani et al in 2000 and has 38 items that measure and evaluate a range of child abuse behaviors from sexual abuse to emotional, physical, and neglect of the child.

To provide further assurance and to attract the cooperation of the subjects in answering correctly and accurately, they were reminded that there was no need to write down details such as their name and surname. After administering the emotional suppression, prosocial behavior, and perceived competence questionnaires, the data obtained were analyzed using a multivariate analysis of variance test using SPSS version 26 software.

Results

The results of the study showed that the mean of the emotional suppression subscales of adolescents with childhood abuse experience was significantly higher than that of adolescents without childhood abuse experience ($P<0.05$). Also, the mean of the prosocial behavior and perceived competence subscales of adolescents with childhood abuse experience was significantly lower than that of adolescents without childhood abuse experience ($P<0.05$).

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that adolescents with childhood abuse experience had higher levels of emotional suppression and lower levels of prosocial behavior and perceived competence compared to adolescents without this experience. These findings indicate that early traumatic experiences are associated with impaired emotion regulation, weakening adaptive social relationships, and the formation of a negative self-concept. Childhood abuse experience is

associated with a decrease in the ability to express emotions, empathy, social responsibility, and a sense of personal efficacy, and strengthens maladaptive coping patterns. Overall, the research results emphasize the determining role of traumatic childhood experiences in the persistence of emotional, social, and cognitive harms in adolescence.

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