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Original Research

Proneness to Anxiety among Middle School Students: A Mediating Roles of Emotion Expression

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Abstract

Background: Adolescent anxiety is a serious psychological problem that causes a constant feeling of sadness and loss of interest in activities. They affect the way a teen thinks, feels, and behaves, and can cause emotional, functional, and physical problems.
Aims: The study aimed at assess the anxiety level and its relationship with mediating role (emotional expression) in Nasiriyah City/ Iraq.
Methods: The correlational investigation was carried out on 492 students who were simple randomly selected from different middle schools. The questionnaire's dependability was established through a pilot study, and it was subsequently presented to experts for validation. The information was collected through the use of self-report techniques and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.
Results: The age 13 and 14 years old and each for them (33.5%), the female students were predominated (58.3%), the first stage students were records the highest percentage (37.2%), (49%) of students expressed a high level of anxiety, majority of (94.7%) expressed poor emotional expression. There is highly significant correlation (positive) between emotional expression with regard to anxiety (r=0.332; p=0.000).
Conclusion: Middle schools students expressed a high level of anxiety due to lack schools mental health programs. Mental health counseling need to be set up in schools and to provide professional counselors to prevent serious anxiety for students and need to reduce students' academic pressure.
Key-wards: Anxiety, Middle School Students, Emotional Expression.

Introduction:

The term "anxiety", is considered as a series of psychological and behavioral responses when individual concern about possible failure on the exam or similar assessment situation [1]. It can occur at any phase of exam. According to psychologists and experts in education [2], an average level of anxiety is useful as an effective motivational factor can enhance one's performance for more effort. While for some, taking excessive anxiety has an adverse effect on mental health and generates negative feelings for individuals, such as the sense of fear, stress, helplessness, anger, and so on [3]. Notably, test anxiety has a high prevalence all over the world [4,5,6].Emotion expression is defined as the process "by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these

emotions" [7]. In general, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression are two commonly investigated strategies that have been associated with emotional responses and cognition processes [8]. According to the occurring time in which a strategy play a great role in the emotion regulation process, Previous studies [9,10] suggested that cognitive reappraisal, as an adaptive emotion regulation strategy, not only reduced negative emotion experience, but also decreased the sympathetic activity in the limbic brain system. Conversely, expressive suppression possibly was associated with negative emotion, even influenced physiological response including skin conductance level, and heart rate, and these symptoms might persist for some time [11].

Based on the above literature analysis, emotional expression are considered to be protective components for mental health and may have a synergistic effect on anxiety. If the above factor are proved to influence anxiety, their improvement could cause better outcomes in the prevention of anxiety. Therefore, thus study aimed at assess the anxiety level and its relationship with mediating role (emotional expression).

Methodology:

A correlational study design is conducted in Nasiriyah City among middle school students. A probability (simple random sample of 492 students under taken in the present study. The questionnaire is one of the means to help collect data that contribute to achieving the results expected by the study, so the researcher designed this questionnaire, which aims to clarify the study's goal and significance by obtaining answers to the study's questions. Include the Child Anxiety Scales a screening tools to identify those who are likely to have anxiety or not, as developed by Klaufus et al. (2020) [12]. Validity was given to a panel of 11 arbitrators, including nursing science experts. Arbitrators were asked to offer their opinions and suggestions on each of the study questionnaire's components in terms of language appropriateness, association with the dimension of study variables to which it was assigned, and suitability for the study population. To assess the questionnaire's reliability, data were collected from middle school students, and the test was administered to 40 people from the study population who were not part of the original sample. Cronbach's alpha was discovered to be 0.87. The SPSS version 20.0 software application was used to conduct statistical analysis (SPSS). The information was evenly spread. One-way analysis of variance and correlation coefficient were used to examine variations in variables based on socio-demographic characteristics. For continuous variables, descriptive data is reported as mean standard deviation, and for categorical variables, it is shown as number (percent). Statistical significance was defined as a p 0.05.

Results:

Findings in table (1) show participants age, the mean age is 13, the most age 13 and 14 years old and each for them (n=165; 33.5%), and followed by those who are aged ≥15 years and old (n=162; 33%). Respect with students gender, the female students were predominated (n=287; 58.3%), compared with those who are male (n=205; 41.7%). In terms of grade, the first stage students were records the highest percentage (n=183; 37.2%), followed by those who are second stage (n=159; 32.3%), and followed by those who are third stage (n=150; 30.5%).

Table (1) Characteristics of the study Sample

Age/years (M + SD=28+4.112)	Classification	Freq.	%
	13 years old	165	33.5
	14 years old	165	33.6
	≥15 years old	162	32.9
Gender	Male	205	41.7
	Female	287	58.3
Grade	First	183	37.2
	Second	159	32.3
	Third	150	30.5

The analysis in table (2) of anxiety was demonstrate at M ± SD= 14.69±10.699; and according to the study criteria, middle school students expressed a high level of anxiety (n=241; %=49.0).

Table (2): Anxiety among Middle School Students

Anxiety level	Freq.	%	M ± SD
High (M=0-15)	241	49.0	14.69±10.699
Moderate (M=16-30)	222	45.1	
Low (M=31-45)	29	5.9	
Total	492	100.0	

M: Mean for total score, SD: Standard Deviation for total score

The analysis in table (3) of emotional expression was demonstrate at M ± SD= 33.27±5.924; and according to the study criteria, the majority middle school students were poor emotional expression (n=466; %= 94.7).

Table (3) Emotional Expression among Middle School Students

Emotional expression	Freq.	%	M ± SD
Poor (M=16-37)	466	94.7	33.27±5.924
Moderate (M=38-58)	25	5.1	
Good (M=59-80)	1	0.2	
Total	492	100.0	

M: Mean for total score, SD: Standard Deviation for total score

Findings in table (4) exhibit that there is highly significant correlation (positive) between emotional expression with regard to anxiety (r=0.332; p=0.000).

Table (4) Correlation between Mediating Roles (Emotion Expression) with regard to Students' Anxiety Level (n=492)

Emotional Expression	Correlations	Anxiety
	Spearman's rho	0.332**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion:

One of the most important stages of life is adolescence, and since it is so important we should focus our efforts to solve the challenging conditions like anxiety. Findings show participants age, the mean age is 13.99+0.816, the most age 13 and 14 years old and each for them, and followed by those who are aged ≥15 years and old. Because this age group was intended by the researcher. This findings supported by Al-Yateem et al. (2020), who stated in their findings that the mean age 15.9 ± 1.6 among students less that 15 years old due to selected in the same education stage and hold the similar ages [13].

In regard with students gender, the female students were predominated, compared with those who are male. This findings come in line with Torrano et al. (2020), who reported in their findings that female students were a higher percentage than the male students due to girls in a high number [14]. According to study of Mohamad et al. (2021), among 1821 middle school students among those number 1138 were girls because girls are more likely to attend school than the boys [15].

In terms of grade, the first stage students were records the highest percentage, followed by those who are second stage, and followed by those who are third stage. Because the middle stage of the education is the three stages covered by the study. As the students in the first stage showed more desire to participate in the study. Higher anxiety percentage could affect the individual mental health both in short and long run which could hinder the academic growth as well as personal growth of students. The analysis of anxiety was demonstrate at Mean± SD= 14.69 ±10.699; and according to the study criteria, middle school students expressed a high level of anxiety (Table 2). This findings come in agreement with Bhardwaj et al. (2020), who demonstrated in their findings a majority of students, 26.5% had high level of anxiety, 25.3% had moderate level of anxiety and 21.5% had low level of anxiety. The mean score of anxiety came out to be 14.09±6.7 [16].

Adolescents need to be assessed periodically to identify the symptoms of general anxiety, for earlier management and also to provide health education related to coping strategies which will be beneficial to adolescent students to manage general anxiety. in Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu the mean value is 52.97 and 61% of students had sever anxiety, 20% of students had moderate anxiety, 8% of them mild anxiety and 11% of students had very severe anxiety [17].

Some surveys have shown that school-related factors play a significant role in adolescent mental health [18, 19]. Severe anxiety may disturb the study and life of adolescents. However, adolescents often do not receive counseling services when they have psychological problems (e.g., severe anxiety) [20].

A study revealed that school students were at higher risk for severe anxiety when school mental health work was adequate. Schools should strengthen communication and carry out psychological counseling and psychotherapy (Liao et al., 2019). The school develops mental health programs which can improve students' positive psychological state and prevent severe anxiety [17].

A study in America revealed that students poor at academic performance are at higher risk at severe anxiety. The probability of severe anxiety in students whose academic performance was good was 0.362 times than students whose academic performance failed [21].

Researcher point of view, in order to prevent students from severe anxiety, a psychological consultation room should be set up at the school. At the same time, psychological consultation should be with professional psychological counselors. Based on related above studies, all it recommended that mental health counseling be set up in schools and to provide professional counselors to prevent serious anxiety for students and need to reduce students' academic pressure. The analysis of poor awareness was demonstrate at M ± SD= 19.44±3.867; and according to the study criteria, middle school students expressed a moderate emotional expression related to poor awareness (Table 3). This findings come with findings Factor et al. (2016), find that the students

with impaired awareness [22]. Most of students were poor awareness in the Fantini-Hauwel et al. (2012), suggested that more impaired emotional self-awareness was strongly associated with the diagnosis of a comorbid externalizing disorder. Hierarchical regression analyses strongly supported the relation of poor emotional awareness to reactivity-driven externalizing behavior, but not to proactive externalizing behavior. These effects were evident across reporters [23].

There were positive correlation in emotional expression with regard to anxiety (r= 0.332; p=0.000). Current findings indicated that a lack of positive strategies to regulate emotions, as well as the presence of negative emotion expression, were associated with anxious symptoms. The results are in line with the work by Kovacs and Yaroslavsky (2014), who found deficits in emotion regulation to be evident in children at risk for depression [24], and with Schneider et al. (2018), who found negative emotion regulation skills to be a risk factor for anxiety symptoms [25]. Our results show the same tendency as the findings from the longitudinal study of Kim-Spoon et al. (2013), who found low positive emotion regulation and high dysregulation to be independent predictors of internalizing symptoms in children [26]. By separating the measurement of anxiety and depression, the present study further elaborated these findings. The results from the present study are also supported by theories that underlying deficits in emotion regulation are a risk factor for anxiety [27]. Our study is based on correlational data, and therefore we can state the direction of the relationships. poor Emotion Expression might weaken the middle school students emotion regulation capacities, leading to repeated failure to downregulate negative feelings and upregulate positive feelings, thus weakening the child's belief in their capability to influence their own feelings. Worsening of internalizing symptoms might also increase the intensity of emotions and thereby the child's difficulties in regulating them. There is not necessarily a contradiction between deficits in emotion regulation being a potential risk factor for the disorder and increased difficulties with emotion regulation over the course of the disorder. Transactional relationships between several factors working together in developing and maintaining disorders are a widely accepted theory within the field of child psychopathology [28].

Conclusions:

Middle schools students expressed a high level of anxiety due to lack schools mental health programs. Mental health counseling need to be set up in schools and to provide professional counselors to prevent serious anxiety for students and need to reduce students' academic pressure.

Financial disclosure

There is no financial disclosure.

Conflict of interest

None to declare.

Ethical Clearance

All experimental protocols were approved under the Education Directorate, Iraq and all experiments were carried out in accordance with approved guidelines".

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