

The Relationship between Attachment Style and Negative Perfectionism with Exam Anxiety of Students

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ABSTRACT

This research is conducted to study the relationship between attachment style and negative perfectionism with exam anxiety of male students. The research method was correlation and the samples of this research were 160 male students of high school who suffered from exam anxiety. The research tool included Hazen and Shiver's attachment questionnaire, perfectionist questionnaire of Najjarian et al. and anxiety questionnaire of Abolghasemi et al. Analyzing the data, correlation coefficient and step-by-step regression analysis were used. The correlation efficiency indicated that there is a significant positive relation between insecure attachment (ambivalent, avoidance) and negative perfectionist with exam anxiety. There is a significant negative relation between secure attachment and exam anxiety ($P < 0.01$). Regression analysis showed that insecure and ambivalent attachment style, insecure avoidance, secure style, and negative completion determined 5.43, 3.88, 3.24, 10.49 percent respectively and totally 23.04 percent of common variance of exam anxiety of students. The result of this research in convergence with research findings indicate that attachment style (ambivalent, avoidance, secure) and negative perfectionism has determinant role in the amount of male students anxiety.

Keywords: Attachment Styles (Ambivalent, Avoidance, Secure), Negative Perfectionism, Exam Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly living in this complex life brings a lot of anxiety and stress for people in facing with threatening and stressful situations. These emotions are human natural reactions facing with psychological pressures. If they are not in accordance with time and place circumstances and it disturbs natural and normal life, it is evaluated as abnormality and disorder [1, 2]. Huberty (2010) pinpoints that anxiety is in two forms, mood anxiety and attribute anxiety. Attribute anxiety is always constant and chronic, and it does not depend on a specific event. However, mood anxiety appears in specific situation, and it usually appears by an obvious stimulus. Vayner, Carton (2012) believes that one of the modes of manner anxiety is exam anxiety which is common among students that underlines their educational performance. In fact, exam anxiety is a kind of mental self-engagement which is specified by understating the self and doubt about personal mental abilities which result in negative recognition, lack of concentration of senses, unsuitable physical reactions, and decrease of educational performance [5]. Studies indicated that about 25 percent of students suffer anxiety [6]. These sets of students, despite having the necessary information in their studies, cannot remind their educational knowledge due to exam anxiety [7]. Arjun (2003) believes that exam anxiety appears with stressful thoughts, increase of heart beats, revealing negative emotions before and during exam. In addition, this anxiety sometimes increases to some extent that not only it causes educational failure but also has a negative effect on their performance, their intelligence growth, formation of social and personal identity. In this case, Vayner and Carton (2012) believe that exam anxiety is changed into a constant feature, and its obvious indication is educational downfall. Arefnia et al [8] believe that student's educational downfall is more related to their exam anxiety rather than their intelligence inefficiency. As exam anxiety increase, their educational performance decreases more. Henni et al. [9], Vainer and Carton (2012) pointed to a lot of factors including parents, teachers and other important people expectations, fear of making their family and friends disappointed for their weak educational downfall, the sense of unbalance in their educational status and other factors

related to exam anxiety. Attachment style and perfectionism of students are variables which were related to exam anxiety in recent years. Attachment is one of the psychological concepts which was considered by John Bowlby (1969) which indicates the deep bond between two people. John Bowlby (1969) believes that attachment has a determinant role in adolescent. Gringet *et al.* (2010) defines attachment as follows: deep emotional bond with certain people in life as we interact with them, we feel pleasure, and we feel relieved when we are with them in stressful time. Mary In tort expanded Bowlby's theory. He recognized three styles of secure (feeling secure in most cases) avoidance (lack of peace in unfamiliar situations or showing intensive vulnerability in tense situations) and ambivalent (the flexibility of tendency toward peace source or avoidance from it) [10]. One of the variables which correlated with exam anxiety is perfectionism. Perfectionism is a personal attribute which has two positive and negative aspects. Perfectionism is positive, beneficial, and constructive though negative perfectionism is destructive. The people who have negative perfectionism have unreal aims and expectations, they avoid failing strongly, they are annoyed by others' criticism, and they feel constantly unsatisfied from themselves and others [11]. Several studies indicated that there is a relation between perfectionism; attachment styles with exam anxiety such as Chang, Beta, Chang *et al.* [12] showed in their research that there is a significant positive relation between self-centered and negative perfectionism with psychological symptoms such as exam anxiety, carelessness and educational failure of students. Choy and McInerney studies [13] showed that the students who have negative perfectionism have negative excitement and psychic anxiety before, during and even after doing evaluative tasks. Fear of negative evaluation of others causes that they experience high anxiety during conducting educational tasks. Also, Reiss, Eshbi and Aslami (2009) showed in their studies that those students who have high and negative perfectionism comparing with those who have low perfectionism have more excitement during exam. Abdkhodae *et al.* [14] showed in their studies that the students with negative perfectionism, in evaluative tasks such as school exams have higher anxiety since their fear of failure causes exam anxiety. Hence, Veins *et al.* (2012) in their research with 172 students demonstrated that neurotic perfectionism is centered on irrelevant stimulus such as other expectation and getting higher score in exam situation, and they experience high exam anxiety. Aboulghasemi [15] stated regarding attachment styles that the initial attachment relation has an important role in people's anxiety in their next situations. The people who suffer insecure or ambivalent attachment in their childhood, according to the mood model, anxiety is revealed as exam anxiety as an attribute anxiety. They show more anxiety during exam situations. Hein Shave (1998) pointed in his studies that there is a significant relation between insecure attachment styles and some disorders such as depression and anxiety. In accordance with these studies, Schmidt *et al.* [16] and Vuk [17] pointed in their studies that those people who suffer avoidance insecure attachment have higher anxiety in different situations of life especially threatening situations.

According to the above research and as attachment styles and perfectionism have a determinant role in students' exam anxiety; this study was conducted to study the relation between attachment styles and negative perfectionism with male students' exam result. Achieving to this aim, this research tested this hypothesis: There is a relation between attachment styles and perfectionism with exam anxiety of students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Since the main purpose of this research is to study the relation between attachment styles and perfectionism with exam anxiety of male students, the research method is correlation type. In this research, the variables of attachment styles and perfectionism are as a predictive variable and exam anxiety as a criterion variable. Determining the final sample of this research, the exam anxiety questionnaire was given to 432 male students of high school in Kelardasht in Mazandaran province. It was clarified that 160 students had exam anxiety. Then, the attachment questionnaire of Hazen and Shiver (1987) and Perfectionism questionnaire of Najjarian *et al.* (2001) were given to these 160 students. Completing these questionnaires, the relevant data was extracted and it was assessed by statistical program of SPSS.

Attachment questionnaire of Hazen and Shiver (1987): This questionnaire has 25 questions which each of the questions is scored in Likert scale (nothing 1 score to very much 5 score). The questions of 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 19 assessed secure style, and the questions of 4, 8, 13, 15, 18, 20 avoidance style and the questions of 2, 6, 9, 10, 16, 17, 21 the ambivalent style. The stability correlation was reported by the use of Cronbach alpha for secure, avoidance and ambivalent styles 0.74, 0.72, respectively (reported from Besharat, 2007).

2. Perfectionism questionnaire of Najjarian *et al.* (2001): This questionnaire has 27 questions and each question is scaled from 1 to 4. The minimum score of 27 and the maximum score is 108. As a person's score gets higher, he has higher perfectionism as the score between 27 and 57 shows low perfectionism, the score between 54 and 68 average perfectionism and the score higher than 68 shows high perfectionism. The stability correlation of this questionnaire according to Cronbach alpha was reported 0.89 for male students (Quoted from Farazi *et al.*, 2013).

3. Exam anxiety questionnaire of Abolghasemi *et al.* [20]: this questionnaire has 25 questions which is scored in multiple choice scale (never=0, sometimes=2, often=3). The minimum score of this test is zero and the maximum score is 75. As a

person gets higher score in a test, he has higher exam anxiety. The stability co-efficiency of this questionnaire was reported by the use of Cronbach alpha for male students as 0.92 [20].

RESULTS

Testing research hypothesis as there is a relation between attachment styles and negative perfectionism with exam anxiety, the medium, standard deviation and correlation of the predictive and criterion variable were evaluated.

Table 1. Descriptive criterion and correlation co-efficiency of studied variables

Variable	Average	SD	Correlation	Sig
Exam anxiety		64.64	15.91	-
Secure attachment style		63.72	-0.188	0.0009
Unsecure avoidance attachment style		72.54	0.229	0.0002
Unsecure ambivalent attachment style		25.61	0.296	0.0001
Perfectionism		80.64	0.324	0.0001

As it is demonstrated in table 1 there is a significant positive correlation between unsecure avoidance attachment style, unsecure avoidance attachment style, and negative perfectionism with exam anxiety. There is a negative significant correlation between secure attachment and exam anxiety. In another word, those students who suffer unsecure avoidance, unsecure ambivalent and negative perfectionism have higher exam anxiety. Also, those students who have secure attachment style have lower exam anxiety. Studying and determining the common variance of predictive variables, step-by-step multi-variable regression analysis was used.

Table 2. The summary of regression model and statistical specification of regression of exam anxiety based on predictive variables

Multi-variable predictive model	Correlation (R ²)	Statistics F	Sig	Beta	Sig
Negative perfectionism	0.324	21.49	0.002	0.60	0.000
Unsecure ambivalent style	0.399	15.92	0.000	0.27	0.000
Avoidance unsecure style	0.445	19.8	0.001	0.23	0.001
Secure attachment style	0.48	23.04	0.4	-0.02	0.000

As it is indicated in table 2, R² indicates the common variance of each of the predictive variables in relation with criterion variable (exam anxiety) as R² of negative perfectionism, unsecure ambivalent attachment style, unsecure avoidance attachment style and secure attachment style are 10.49, 5.43, 3.88, 3.24 respectively. Totally, 23.04 percent of common variance of students' exam anxiety was determined. It is good to indicate that Beta positive correlation if negative perfectionism, unsecure ambivalent attachment style, and avoidance unsecure attachment style and avoidance unsecure have higher exam anxiety. Also, Negative correlation of β indicates that as students have more secure attachment style, they have less exam anxiety.

DISCUSSION

These studies tried to analyze the relation of attachment styles and negative perfectionism with exam anxiety. Testing the hypothesis of this research and determining the common variance of each of predictive variables on criterion variable, first two variables correlation and then multi-variable regression analysis was measured step-by-step. The correlation of Pierson and multi-variable regression analysis indicated that each of the predictive variables has significant relation with criterion variable, and totally 23.04 percent of common variance of student's exam anxiety was determined. The results of this research are in parallel with the findings of Chang et al. [12], Coy and MacInery [13], Rice et al. [21], Abdolkahdes et al. [14], Abolghasemi [15], Skimet et al. [16], and Vuk [17].

Determining the research result, some researchers believe that students who have negative perfectionism have higher tendency toward superiority over others. They like to do their jobs without mistake and in the best way. They have high sensitivity to others criticism. They try not to show any weakness. They always have stress to cover their weaknesses and hide from others. These people not only have illogical and higher criterion, they try obsessively to reach to these criterion. If they cannot achieve to these criterion, they feel anxious. The perspective of perfectionist is all or nothing. They believe in complete performance and they always have high expectations from their abilities. These people, facing with stressful situations in life such as exam, think about negative and failing results. This causes stress and anxiety and it disturbs their educational and behavioral performance. In this regard, Frost et al. [22] and Terry-Short et al. [23] relate that perfectionist always suffer high pressure due to their high self-expectations. If they cannot meet the expectations, self-criticism and blaming appear. When they are in evaluative situations such as exam, they have negative thoughts as a small symptom of failure appears. Creating negative thoughts causes dizziness, increase of heart beat, repetitive remediation, shaking hands and legs, sweating or other negative excitements. They are covered with full anxiety, and their educational performance is disturbed. If this happens in

several exams and for longer periods in their educational life, exam anxiety gradually appears as constant attribute, and it causes disorder in educational exams.

Other researchers believe that attachment styles are important factors in exam anxiety of students. These groups of researchers believe that those children who lacks an appropriate attachment style, or they have insecure, ambivalent and preventive attachment styles are always argumentative and nervous. In other words, attachment styles, responses and behavioral patterns of students are affected as students who have insecure attachment style, when they are faced with evaluative situations such as exam, suffer anxiety and they respond disorderly to environment. Balbi (1969, 1988) believe that anxiety and depression moods which occur in adolescent dealing with stressful life situations has relation with their significant and disciplined attachment styles which are formed in childhood. Those who have insecure avoidance ambivalent attachment style are anxious and stressful people in life. When they are faced with evaluative situations such as exam, their anxiety and stress increases to disturb their educational performance. Ouwens et al. [24] indicated in their research that secure attachment style causes security and source of relief for people dealing with life events as people who have this type of attachment, have less anxiety due to feeling valuable, dominance over environment and independence feeling. However, those who suffer insecure attachment have a lot of challenges in their social dealings and they are always worried about their social interactions. Thus, facing with stressful conditions of evaluation, they use the method of keeping distance to control anxiety and concern. So, these people feel less intimate in their relations. In accordance with above research, Yousefi [1] and Ouwens et al. [24] believe that those who have insecure (avoidance, ambivalent) style, they do not trust to themselves and others, they have unreal expectations and they have internal struggle in their personal interactions. Thus, these people, having internal challenges in social interactions, feel anxious and stressful dealing with evaluative situations such as exam. Thus, their performance is lower than their abilities.

Totally, this research indicates that those who have negative perfectionism and insecure avoidance ambivalent attachment style, in stressful situations such as exam, they have low performance due to their higher anxiety. Thus, according to the research results and similar findings, and as attachment style and perfectionism is shaped in lower ages, it is recommended to educational staff and psychotherapists to teach to parents to create secure attachment style and positive perfectionism to be used in their children treatment. Also, workshops must be conducted to relieve the negative side effects of perfectionism in school cultural programs for all students specially those who suffer from anxiety.

Limitation and appreciation: The limitation of this research is related to the gender of statistical population since it is conducted on male students. It requires more analysis in its generalization to female students. There was not the possibility of adding the disturbances for relieving the anxiety. Thus according to these limitations, it is recommended that in future research a comprehensive clinical group of male and female students are employed with psychological interventions to interpret research findings. Finally, we appreciate the cooperation of those students attended in this research and educational staffs who cooperated in this research.

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