

Predicting Social Adjustment Based on the Ability to Solve Social Problems and Self-compassion in Adolescents

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Abstract

Background: This study aimed to predict social adjustment based on the ability to solve social problems and self-compassion in adolescents.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional study. The statistical population of this study includes all high school students in Shiraz in 2018. The statistical sample consisted of 800 students (400 girls and 400 boys) selected by random cluster sampling. The author used questionnaires of the California Social Adjustment Test, Self-Compassion Scale, and Short Form of Social Problem-Solving Questionnaire (SPSI-R: SF) to collect information from the sample group.

Results: There is a positive and significant relationship between social adjustment and the ability to solve social problems ($r=0.23$, $P<0.01$). Also, there is a positive and significant relationship between social adjustment and self-compassion ($r=0.017$, $P<0.01$). Regression coefficients indicate that problem-solving ability ($P=0.34$) and self-compassion ($P=0.30$) can positively and significantly predict social adjustment and problem-solving ability has a stronger role in explaining social adjustment than self-compassion.

Conclusion: Problem-solving training was used as an effective way to create general, emotional, social, and educational adjustment of adolescents. People who have a high problem-solving ability can control their stress in normal and stressful situations.

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Introduction

Social adjustment in adolescents as the most important sign of their mental health is one of the topics that has attracted the attention of many sociologists and psychologists in recent decades.¹ The period undergoes extremely intense emotional, physical, and mental changes. It is not yet fully developed, so delays in emotional maturity may lead to serious interpersonal problems and social challenges for adolescents.² It is gradually perfected, and achieved naturally throughout life and in dealing with experiences. Adolescents can

use their social skills to position themselves among relationships.³ Success in social acceptance leads to social adjustment. Social adaptation is the adaptation of a person to the social environment or changing the environment to satisfy his needs and motivations.⁴

One of the important cognitive-behavioral components that play a role in adaptation is social problem solving.⁵ Adolescents use different problem-solving styles when faced with a problem. Adolescents experience various emotions such as confusion, bitterness, denial, depression, self-blame, despair, and many different negative emotions, leading to

the internal and external undesirable factors such as despair, hopelessness, fatigue, negative emotional factors, and other environmental disturbances. These negative aspects cause unfavorable conditions that make adolescents unable to control the situation when dealing with a problem which affects the adolescents' problem-solving skills and adjustment.^{6,7}

Identifying effective solutions to the specific challenges that people face in their daily lives is necessary to solve social problems. This process makes available a variety of potentially effective responses to dealing with the problematic situation and increases the possibility of choosing the most effective response from these alternating solutions. Problem-solving is a skill that all adolescents need because adolescents are constantly faced with a problem in their life.⁸ Problem-solving is a cognitive-behavioral process that provides potentially effective responses to difficult situations and increases the likelihood of choosing the most effective response from multiple responses. The more problem-solving techniques they use, the more they can cope with life's challenges, stress, and problems, and those, who learn to solve problems, can cope more effectively with stress.⁹

Another component that can play an important role in adaptation is compassion.¹⁰ Compassion is defined as a three-component instrument, including kindness to oneself versus self-judgment, human sharing versus isolation, and mindfulness versus extreme assimilation.¹¹ Kindness to oneself is self-understanding rather than self-judgment and a kind of support for one's shortcomings and inadequacies. Acknowledging that all human beings are flawed, making mistakes, and engaging in unhealthy behaviors has many positive psychological consequences, such as greater motivation to resolve interpersonal conflicts, constructive problem-solving, and readiness for shame. As a result, less fear of failure, less negative self-esteem, less depression, less anxiety, and less psychological trauma associated with traumatic stress result in more significant social adjustment.^{12,13}

A study found that self-compassion not only makes a person happier and healthier but is also a good predictor of relationship compatibility. They showed that kindness helps people to have more support for those we are interested in.¹¹ A study also showed that people with their compassion show more compromise in situations of conflict with others, while people without compassion cannot have this compromise. These people easily apologize to others and seek to improve the harmful aspects of their relationship.¹⁴ Therefore, considering that social adjustment is recognized as one of the basic factors in adolescence, it is necessary to take measures to increase adolescents' social adjustment. However, to achieve this, we must first identify the factors affecting it; so that, we can take appropriate measures

to create, maintain, and enhance social adjustment in adolescents. Therefore, this study aimed to predict social adjustment based on the ability to solve social problems and self-compassion.

Methods

This study has a descriptive-analytic design. The statistical population of this study includes all high school students (Ninth to twelfth grade) in Shiraz in 2018. The statistical sample includes 800 students (400 girls and 400 boys) selected by random cluster sampling. Eight schools from four Shiraz districts were randomly selected as 8 clusters (4 high schools for boys and 4 high schools for girls) from different high schools. Adolescents aged 15-18 years were randomly selected. The author selected the number of participants in each educational level equally. Inclusion criteria were: age between 15 to 18 years, no mental health problems and depression according to the student's record, and willingness to participate in the study. The exclusion criterion was the unwillingness to participate in the study. After obtaining permission from the university and the high school principal to carry out the project, the author explained the research purpose to students and obtained the written from the students who entered the study. The approval code is 107226 from Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht branch.

Data Collection Tools

A) California Social Adjustment Test

This test measures the profile of individual and social adjustment and was first published in 1939 and revised in 1953. The test has two main dimensions: "self-adjustment" and "social adjustment". In this study, the author used social adjustment section of the test that has 90 questions. This part of the test has six subscales as follows: Social forms, Social skills, Antisocial tendency, Family relationships, Educational relations, and Community Relations. In a study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole test was 0.98.¹⁵ In the present study, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire through Cronbach's alpha was equal to 0.84.

B) Self-compassion scale

This tool is a 28-item self-report scale developed to measure compassion and consists of 6 subscales: self-kindness (5 articles), self-judgment (5 articles), human sharing (6 articles), Isolation (4 articles), mindfulness (4 articles), and extreme assimilation (4 articles) measure the quality of a person's relationship with his experiences. The scoring method of this scale is based on a 5-point Likert scale from almost never (zero) to almost always (five). The subscales questions of extreme self-judgment, isolation, and assimilation are scored in reverse. In Iran, Basharpour(2013)

standardized this questionnaire ,and the internal consistency of this questionnaire has been reported by Cronbach’s alpha method 0.93. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients for the whole scale were 0.92 and for subscales from 0.75 to 0.81, the retest reliability coefficient (two weeks apart) was 0.93 (Nef, 2003).

C) Short form of Social Problem-Solving Questionnaire - Revised (SPSI-R: SF)

It is a 25-item self-report scale based on the social problem-solving model of Desorilla et al. to measure individuals’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to real-life problems (Desorilla et al., 2003). This questionnaire consists of 5 subscales: Positive Problem Orientation (PPO), Negative Problem Orientation (NPO), Logical Problem Solving (RPS), Accelerated / Irresponsible Style (ICS), and Avoidance Style (AS). Each subscale consists of 5 items, some of which are positive. For example, when I encounter a problem, I usually believe there is a solution. And some others are negative, for example, “A difficult problem worries me.” Subjects rate their response on a 5-point Likert scale. The test-retest reliability coefficient for this questionnaire was between 0.68 to 0.91 and its alpha coefficient between 0.69 to 0.95.

The construct validity of this questionnaire has also been confirmed by using heuristic factor analysis and correlation with other scales of problem-solving and overlapping psychological structures.¹⁶ In Mokhberi, Dartaj, and Darreh Kurdi (2010), the alpha coefficient was 0.85 for five factors, and the test-retest reliability coefficient was 0.88 for the shortened social problem-solving questionnaire. Also, in this research, the study of factor structure indicates the five factors mentioned above. All narrative analyzes have confirmed SPSI as a social problem-solving scale.

Results

In this study, 800 adolescents aged 15-18 years (50% girls, 50% boys) participated in the ninth to the twelfth grade of high school. The girls’ age mean and SD was (16±4.5) and the boy’s mean and SD was (17±3.3). The normality of the scores was checked and confirmed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to investigate the simple relationship between social problem-solving ability and social adjustment, self-compassion and social adjustment, and social problem-solving ability and self-compassion. Table 1 presents the results. There was no significant difference between girls and boys in mean scores(P=0.7).

Table 2 shows a positive and significant relationship between social adjustment and the ability to solve social problems (r=0. 23, P<0.01). It means that social adjustment increases when the ability to solve social problems increases. Furthermore, there is a positive and significant relationship between social adjustment and self-compassion (r=0. 17, P<0.01) which indicates increasing self-compassion leads to higher social adjustment. The correlation between Social adjustment with social problem-solving ability and Self-compassion(P=0.39) did not show any significant differences between males and females.

To examine the prediction of social adjustment through the ability to solve social problems and self-compassion, the author used multiple regression as reflected in Table 3. But before using regression, regression assumptions were tested. Watson’s camera test was used to test the normality of the residual distribution for histogram independence. The value of Watson’s camera in predicting social adjustment from the overall scores of social problem-solving ability and

Table 1: Descriptive statistic of social adjustment variables, social problem-solving ability, and self-compassion (N=800)

Variable	Girls	Boys
	Mean±SD	Mean±SD
Social adjustment	102.20±18.33	104.20±98.37
Social problem-solving	116.20±77.50	118.30±86.50
Self-compassion	113.73±244.11	114.23±263.12

Table 2: Correlation between Social adjustment with the social problem-solving ability and Self-compassion (N=800)

Variable	R		P value	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Social problem-solving	0.23	0.26	0.005	0.005
Self-compassion	0.17	0.19	0.004	0.003

Table 3: Results of regression analysis, ability to solve social problems and self-compassion with social adjustment by simultaneous entry method

Criterion Variable	Predictive variable	β	B	t	sig	R ²	R	F	sig	Watson Camera
Social adjustment	Ability to solve social problems	0.34	0.36	9.20	0.05	0.14	0.35	54.07	0.05	1.18
	Compassion for yourself	0.30	0.34	7.86						

self-compassion was 1.18, which shows a lack of self-solidarity. Furthermore, the histogram showed that the residual values had an almost normal distribution, and the P-P diagram showed that the data followed a perfectly normal distribution. The sample size was also sufficient for regression analysis. In general, the results confirmed the existence of regression assumptions.

According to Table 3, the results show that the value of the F test to investigate the effect of social problem-solving ability and self-compassion on social adjustment was 54.07, which is significant at the level of 0.05. A look at 2 R shows that 14% of the variance in social adjustment is explained by the ability to solve social problems and compassion. Regression coefficients indicate that problem-solving ability ($P=0.34$) and self-compassion ($P=0.30$) can positively and significantly predict social adjustment and problem-solving ability has a stronger role in explaining social adjustment than self-compassion.

Discussion

The results of this study showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between the ability to solve social problems and social adjustment. The results of this research are in line with the studies conducted by Ghasemzadeh et al.,¹⁷ Arkhodi et al.,¹⁸ Attari,¹⁹ and Faris Abadi et al.²⁰ These studies showed that Compassion Focused Therapy is effective on social adjustment. It means that people who have a high ability to solve problems in general and stressful situations, have lower levels of stress and are fully acquainted with the environmental resources around them. Moreover, their interpersonal skills are more than people who are unable to solve problems or do not have a good understanding of their ability to solve problems. People who evaluate themselves as capable of solving problems or have a good understanding of their ability to solve problems have fewer irrational beliefs and high adequacy in decision making. They are less prone to conflicts and incompatibilities.⁵

The results also showed a positive and significant relationship between self-compassion and social adjustment of adolescents, which is consistent with the results of research by Saadati et al. conducted on eighty students of the University of Tehran (26 males, 54 females). The results showed that participants in the inducing self-compassion group reported lower shame and other unpleasant emotions rather than those who were in inducing self-esteem group.²¹ Also, a study consisted of bullying and victim male high school students in second and third grades in Abarkooh in the academic year 2015-2016 showed that increasing social interest is certainly a beginning toward positive direction and would encourage the individual to create a lifestyle based on empathy,

responsibility, and cooperation goals. These would increase the probability of successfully solving the life task problems.²² It means that through compassion, a person creates emotional security that can see himself clearly without fear of being blamed.²³ People with high self-compassion resolve their interpersonal conflicts by considering their needs and those of others. Because self-compassion requires a conscious awareness of one's emotions, painful and upsetting feelings are no longer avoided, but the individual approaches them with kindness, understanding, and feelings of human commonalities. Thus, negative emotions become more positive and allow the individual to more accurately understand the situation and choose effective actions to change himself or herself or the situation effectively and appropriately.²⁴ It can be said that when people internalize a sense of kindness, they will have a loving and kind approach to all the opposite and reciprocal behaviors that exist towards them. Moreover, compassion acts as a positive emotion regulation style, removing negative emotions and attitudes, including revenge. In this approach, negative emotions are reduced and positive emotions are replaced.²⁵ Therefore, based on this emotional self-regulation, one's forgiveness increases. In this regard, with the help of self-compassion, a person becomes more courageous than the past and can question the vicious cycle of self-criticism. A person can expect himself or herself maximally and experience a new perspective and compassionate towards himself. A person can redesign realistic standards and achievable expectations that do not require hardship or harassment; Therefore, an increase in forgiveness is not unexpected.²⁶ Regardless of these explanations, Gilbert Mini's view is that self-compassion reduces psychological problems by increasing inner awareness, acceptance without judgment, empathy, and constant attention to inner feelings.²⁷ The findings of a study are somewhat consistent with the present study results, which show that having a compassionate attitude helps people feel a connection between themselves and others. Therefore, people with higher compassion have more social adjustment.²⁸ In this study, social adjustment was assessed based on the ability to solve social problems and self-compassion in adolescents, while previous studies focused only on problem-solving and social adjustment. Compassion is an important component of adaptation. Therefore, paying attention to the component of compassion makes a person live happier and healthier.

Conclusion

Problem-solving training was used as an effective way to create general, emotional, social, and educational adjustment of adolescents. People who have high problem-solving ability have lower levels of stress in normal or stressful situations. Through self-compassion,

one creates emotional security that allows seeing oneself clearly without fear of being blamed. Moreover, the person has the opportunity to understand more accurately and correct maladaptive thought and emotional, and behavioral patterns.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the present study was the impossibility of matching in terms of the economic, social and cultural status of patients in the two groups.

Application of Research

Using the results of this study, it is possible to identify, prevent, and eliminate disruptive factors for students through face-to-face and Absenteeism training. Officials are advised to develop problem-solving skills training programs for teachers and educators to adapt when teaching materials.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

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