The role of identity crisis and emotional intelligence in predicting substance abuse among high-school students

Hamidreza Jamshidi[1], Ali Asghar Asgharnejad-Farid[2]

1 Clinical Psychology, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
2 Mental Health Research Center, Tehran Psychiatric Institute, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

Original Article

BACKGROUND: This study was carried out aiming to investigate the identity crisis and emotional intelligence in prediction of addiction susceptibility among students.

METHODS: This study was a correlational-descriptive design with the population consisting of all high school students of Tehran City, Iran, in 2017-2018. 358 high school students were selected by cluster sampling method. Instruments for gathering data were identity crisis questionnaire (Ahmadi), emotional intelligence questionnaire (Bradbury-Graves), and tendency to substance use scale. Then, the data were analyzed using SPSS software and statistical tests such as Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise regression analysis.

RESULTS: Based on study findings, there was a statistically significant relationship between identity crisis and emotional intelligence with addiction susceptibility among students. In addition, the results of stepwise regression analysis indicated that social awareness, identity crisis, and relation management significantly predicted 26% of changes in addiction susceptibility.

CONCLUSION: By designing psychological interventions based on these variables, one can diminish the probability of substance use in at-risk groups. Theoretical and practical implications of the results presented have been discussed.

KEYWORDS: Identity Crisis, Peer Influence, Emotional Intelligence, Substance-Related Disorders, Adolescents

Introduction

Adolescence is the most important developmental period associated with the onset and aggravated consumption of substances.[1] The high prevalence of drug use in adolescents, together with the potential consequences of such use, highlights the importance of preventing the onset of drug use, since awareness of the substance abuse problems in adolescents is necessary for the development and improvement of preventive interventions.[2] There is no specific agreement on the root causes of addiction susceptibility, so that the factors associated with substance use and substance abuse are diverse and include individual contexts, family characteristics, and social and environmental factors.[3]

An effective factor in this regard is the identity crisis. The identity crisis is an instrument used by Ericsson to describe the inability of individuals to accept the role that the society expects from them. Moreover, the failure of an individual to shape his or her identity, whether due to undesirable experiences of childhood or the current unfavorable situation, creates a crisis called the identity crisis or loss.[4]

The theoretical basis for the identity of substance users was first introduced in a study on rehabilitation of addicts by Biernack.[5] He

Corresponding Author:
Ali Asghar Asgharnejad-Farid
Email: asgharnejad.ali@gmail.com

believed that for a person to recover from addiction, it is necessary to shape identity, perspective, and a new social world. In the same vein, McKeganey et al. reviewed the story of the recovery of 70 addicted individuals and concluded that the identity of addicts was badly damaged.[6]

In addition, emotional intelligence is associated with drug use problems.[7] In this regard, Trinidad and Johnson found that teenagers who were deficient in emotional intelligence skills used alcohol and tobacco more than other teenagers.[8] Hence, the lack of emotional intelligence has been recognized and documented as a potential indicator of alcohol and other substances.[9,10]

Studies conducted in domestic and foreign literature also confirm the importance of the role of emotional intelligence in increasing the likelihood of drug use. In one of these studies, Karimi examined the emotional intelligence among addicted and normal individuals in Tehran, Iran, and concluded that there was a significant difference between the mean of emotional intelligence of addicts and ordinary individuals, so that addicts had a lower mean rate compared to normal people.[11]

Given the above issue, the study of risk (identity crisis) and protective (emotional intelligence) factors in addiction potential among the adolescents can be an effective step in preventing the prevalence of drug use among students. Accordingly, the main question of the present study was whether the identity crisis and emotional intelligence could predict the changes in adolescent addiction potential?

Materials and Methods

The present study was retrospective in terms of fundamental purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of data collection type. The statistical population of the study comprised of all the students studying in the public high schools in Tehran during the school years 2013-2019. The whole number of

the students was estimated to be more than 150 thousand according to the report of the Directorate of Education in Tehran. To determine the sample size, Krejcie and Morgan[12] table was used. The sample size was estimated to be 384 individuals using the cluster random sampling method. For this purpose, at first, Tehran was divided into four geographic regions: North, South, East, and west, then a school was randomly selected from each region. In the next step, among the schools selected, classes were randomly selected from each field of study.

In order to conduct a field study, the researcher received the necessary permission from the relevant vice presidents by referring to the research, planning, and staffing department of the Education Department and providing explanations on how to conduct the study. After coordination with the selected high school executives, the samples were adopted and the study was carried out on them. In the next step, the researcher presented the nature and objectives of the study to the students and they declared their full satisfaction with collaboration in the study. In addition, all participants were assured that, given the anonymity of the questionnaires, their information and their answers would remain completely confidential, and thus, all individuals entered the research process with informed consent. In order to prevent sample loss, 390 questionnaires were distributed among the subjects.

Completion of each questionnaire lasted about 15 minutes. During the time students were completing the questionnaires, the researcher answered their probable questions. For the field study, in the fall of 2017, questionnaires were distributed to the statistical samples for two weeks. The features of each of the tools used to gather information are presented below.

Ahmadi's identity-crisis questionnaire: Ahmadi and Rezvani Nejhad[13] conducted this

test on 60 high school students in Isfahan, Iran, for validation and confirmed its comprehensibility, expressive and clear questions, and verbal validity. They calculated the reliability coefficient as 0.87 using Split-half method. The questionnaire was again distributed among 30 students and a value of 0.89 was obtained for the correlation coefficient. Then using Spearman-Brown Split Half Reliability Coefficient, the coefficient of validity of the personal identity test was calculated to be 0.92.[13]

Bradbury-Graves exponential intelligence scale: The Bradbury and Graves[14] emotional intelligence questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part on self-knowledge and self-management skills (individual ability), and the second part on social awareness and relationship management skills focusing on the individual relationships with others (social function). This test consisted of 28 questions each with 6 choices, the answers of which were never, rarely, sometimes, usually, almost always, and always. The validity and reliability of this test in Iran was performed by Hamza Ganji,[15] so that its reliability through re-testing in a group of 36 individuals for the four skills of emotional intelligence and total emotional intelligence was 0.78, 0.86, 0.00, 0.73 and 0.89, respectively. In the other group, the test was performed only once, and its reliability coefficient was obtained as 0.88 for boys and girls and 0.88 for the whole group using Cronbach's alpha.[15]

Addiction tolerance questionnaire: This questionnaire included 16 questions and its overall objective was to measure the inclination to addiction from three social, individual, and environmental dimensions in different individuals. The 5-point Likert scale was used and the range of scores varied between 16 and 80. Achieving a higher score on this scale reflected an individual's increased risk of addiction. Mikaeili[16] in a study on students, calculated the Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire to be 0.65. After collecting questionnaires, they were scaled and according to the hypotheses, appropriate statistical tests were performed on the data. Considering the conditions for completing the questionnaire including answering all the scales and not using the special order in answering the questions, 358 questionnaires were in a standard condition that were statistically analyzed. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS software (version 23, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA), Pearson correlation coefficient, and regression analysis.

Results

358 students participated in this study. The mean ± standard deviation (SD) of the ages of the students was 17.100 ± 0.224. In terms of education, the degree of most of the fathers and mothers of the students was 41.1% and 50.0%, respectively. Moreover, fathers of 9 (2.5%) and mothers of 3 (0.9%) of the students were not alive. The descriptive findings of the study variables are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive indexes of study variables

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean ± SD
Addiction susceptibility	17	61	41.11 ± 10.15
Identity crisis	14	47	30.40 ± 7.47
Self-awareness	2	20	10.61 ± 3.92
Self-management	2	20	10.16 ± 4.02
Social awareness	7	27	17.70 ± 4.70
Relationship management	7	28	18.03 ± 4.64
Emotional intelligence	21	89	56.51 ± 14.92

SD: Standard deviation

Table 2. Correlation matrix of study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Identity crisis	1						
2. Self-awareness	-0.036	1					
3. Self-management	-0.143[*]	0.708[*]	1				
4. Social awareness	-0.186[*]	0.579[*]	0.659[*]	1			
5. Relationship management	-0.077[*]	0.555[*]	0.645[*]	0.788[*]	1		
6. Emotional intelligence	-0.131[*]	-0.809[*]	-0.864[*]	-0.890[*]	-0.879[*]	1	
7. Addiction susceptibility	0.381[*]	-0.194[*]	-0.311[*]	-0.385[*]	-0.352[*]	-0.366[*]	1

[*] $P < 0.010$

To investigate the relationship between two variables, Pearson correlation coefficient was used for parametric test. The results of Pearson correlation matrix indicated a significant relationship between predictive variables with the variable of addiction tendency criterion. Moreover, there was a positive and significant relationship between student identity crisis and student addiction. Furthermore, the relationship between emotional intelligence and its components with negative attitude was significant (Table 2).

Regression analysis was employed to determine the contribution of each of the predictor variables in explaining the variance of students' addiction (Table 3).

The results showed that in the third step, the variable predicting the relationship management (a subscale of emotional intelligence) was the last variable included in the analysis. The correlation coefficient calculated in this step was 0.511, with a coefficient of determination (COD) of 0.261. The obtained F-value showed that the calculated regression model was significant at 99% confidence level.

The addiction susceptibility was explained by three variables: social consciousness predictor, identity crisis, and relationship management. The beta value was used to predict the direct identity crisis, social awareness, and management of relationships in the direction of addiction susceptibility. In other words, by increasing social awareness and managing relationships, the amount of addiction tendency in the sample group of the study was reduced, and as the identity crisis rose, the addiction tended to increase alongside it.

Table 3. Results of stepwise regression analysis in predicting addiction tendency based on predictive variables

Step	Predictors variables	B	β	R	R^2	F	P	Collinearity	
								Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	55.79	-					-	-
	Social awareness	-0.829	-0.385	0.385	0.148	61.77	< 0.001	1.000	1.000
2	Constant	40.27	-					-	-
	Social awareness	-0.700	-0.325	0.497	0.247	58.24	< 0.001	0.965	1.036
	Identity crisis	0.435	0.321					0.965	1.036
3	Constant	41.39	-					-	-
	Social awareness	-0.370	-0.172					0.363	2.755
	Identity crisis	0.454	0.334	0.511	0.261	41.60	< 0.001	0.952	1.050
	Relationship management	-0.418	-0.191					0.374	2.675

VIF: Variance inflation factor

Discussion

Based on the characteristics of individuals with identity crisis, it can be concluded that due to problems in coping styles and ability to solve problems and lack of a clear path to their lives, as well as lack of codified program to achieve goals in life among these individuals, tendency to drug abuse is not unexpected.[17] Given other findings of this study, there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and tendency to drug abuse among adolescents. The results of the studies by Karimi[11] and Nehra et al.[18] also revealed the effect of emotional intelligence on substance use, which was consistent with the findings of the present study. Dunn believes that one of the great benefits of emotional intelligence is avoiding isolation.[19] This means that establishing new relationships and maintaining the effective relationships of the past through empathy and communicative skills will provide a context for avoiding isolation and addiction potential and preventing individuals from resorting to drug use. Individuals lacking ability to use their emotional intelligence skills are more likely to use other methods that are less effective to manage their mood, and they are likely to become anxious, depressed, and addicted to drugs. In fact, high emotional intelligence is an important supportive factor against stress. Regarding addiction, as declared in the study by Bradbury and Graves,[14] when people are pushed by friends, effective emotional management as one of the components of emotional intelligence reduces the potential of consumption. The ability to manage excitements makes it possible for an individual to use coping strategies in high-risk recipients. People with high emotional intelligence are more likely to predict the wishes of others (social awareness). They better understand unwanted pressures from their peers and their excitement, and thus resist to drug use; on the other hand, those with low emotional intelligence generally tend to substance abuse to relieve their negative emotions.[8] In the regression model of the present study, both emotional intelligence and identity crisis could explain the variance of the variables of addiction tendency criterion.

Conclusion

Considering identity as its specific definition including the values, goals, and beliefs that a person is committed to, one can explain the interaction between the identity crisis and the emotional intelligence. In the context of the study limitations, the use of self-assessment tools in the field of addiction and associated problems can always be accompanied by a bias in response, which can potentially impact the results.

Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

Acknowledgments

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