

Original article

The relationship between individual identities and the mental health among students

Tayebeh Sharifi

Islamic Azad University, Shahrekord, Shahrekord, Iran

Received 17 April 2015, Revised 16 May 2015, Accepted 27 June 2015

© 2015, Sharifi T.

© 2015, Russian Open Medical Journal

Abstract: *Background* — Nowadays, the relationship between Individual Identities and the mental health is as one of the most important matter in developing countries. *Aim* — The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship of Individual Identity and the mental health of the students. *Material and Methods* — The subjects of this study were 1293 undergraduates (age: 22 ± 4 (mean \pm SD)) studying in the fourth region of Islamic Azad University, Iran in the academic year of 2012- 2013. They were selected through random sampling. They completed a questionnaire on mental health and the Bennion-Adams Inventory. It was a descriptive research using correlational methods. *Results* — The results of the study revealed that achievement identity has significantly ($P < 0.05$) negative correlations with mental health. Also, foreclosure identity, moratorium Identity and diffusion identity had significantly ($P < 0.05$) positive correlations with mental health. *Conclusion* — The regression coefficients showed that out of the four dimensions of individual identities, achievement identity (is negatively) and moratorium identity and diffusion Identity (is positively) are the best predictors for mental health.

Keywords: achievement identity, moratorium identity, foreclosure identity, diffusion Identity, mental health

Cite as Sharifi T. The relationship between individual identities and the mental health among students. *Russian Open Medical Journal* 2015; 4: e0301.

Correspondence to Tayebeh Sharifi. E-mail: sharifi_ta@yahoo.com

Introduction

Trying to create and develop a healthy environment for education and taking measures to provide and improved mental, physical and social health of the students as the directors of the future are the important duties of educational and cultural system in any country. The university is not only a place for exchanging knowledge and cultural heritage, but also it is the center of developing potential talents and educating the personality of the students. Mental health is one of the social requirements, as the suitable performance of the society and people requires having good mental health condition [1, 2]. One of the important issues among teenagers and youth is identity forming and self-knowledge. Identity is the necessary requirement of life in different aspects (self / other knowledge, social, cultural, religion, national and etc.) and human being cannot live well without having any framework to determine his identity to communicate as meaningful and stable with each other [3].

Unfortunately, all adolescents and young adults can not completely attain identity with all its importance and due to this fact most of these people face various problems including individual, social and negative reactions from the others in their current and future life. In the study of human personality especially his mental aspect, identity is a basic and internal aspect by which a person is connected to his past and feels integrity and continuity in his life. In the present world, communication era, due to the presence of advanced communication technologies such as internet, the youngsters are encountering with different information that sometimes contradict each other [4]. Everybody knows the importance of dealing with mental and social aspects of

health and its effective components. One of the most important reasons of the importance of investigating mental health is high prevalence and severe and long nature of some of the mental disorders. According to the report of academic associations, about half billion people in the world are suffering from mental and brain disorders. Millions of people are forgotten and bear their pain behind the wall of hopelessness and not only in silence and loneliness, but also in shame, deprivation and death and its outcome can affect human societies and interfere with the society's development [5]. Identity as one of the effective variables in mental health is consisting of environmental, mental and social aspects.

Correlation consequences showed that there is significant positive relationship between diffusion identity style and identity crisis. It means that those who experience the identity crisis they are more trend to diffusion identity crisis. There is also significant correlation between identity crisis and mental health among girls. It means that those girls who experience identity crisis, they are less healthy mentally. While this is different among the boys, those boys who experience identity crisis, they are much healthier mentally. Problem-focused coping, strong need to cognition, cognitive complexity, cognitive decision making, consciousness happiness and openness [6, 7]. So, with regard to the importance of this matter, the main objective of this paper is to find the relationship between individual identities and the mental health among students.

Table 1. Reliability coefficients of individual identity test by split-half method and Cronbach alpha

Individual identity	Reliability coefficients		The number of items
	Split half method	Cronbach alpha	
Achievement Identity	0.68	0.76	16
Foreclosure Identity	0.74	0.78	16
Moratorium Identity	0.60	0.67	16
Diffusion Identity	0.65	0.78	16
Total test	0.69	0.89	64

Table 2. The reliability coefficients of the mental health questionnaire and its subscales in the current research

Variables	Reliability coefficient		
	Split-half method	Cronbach's alpha	Spearman-Brown
Somatization	0.865	0.884	0.874
Obsession	0.845	0.865	0.845
Interpersonal sensitivity	0.875	0.865	0.798
Depression	0.898	0.901	0.899
Anxiety	0.868	0.879	0.898
Hostility	0.795	0.789	0.798
Phobia	0.798	0.789	0.779
Paranoid	0.766	0.786	0.758
Psychoticism	0.863	0.876	0.828
Total measure	0.880	0.987	0.978

Material and Methods

Population

The whole population of this descriptive study were all (male and female) of the undergraduate students (age: 22±4 (mean±SD)) studying in the Islamic Azad University in the Academic Year of 2012-2013 (N=47000), Iran. 1300 subjects were chosen randomly through multi-stage sampling. At first a list of all the universities in the Fourth Region of Islamic Azad University were made via the region, then four universities out of them were randomly selected as research sample and of total sample some in conformity with the population of each university unit were dedicated to it. Then, in each university unit considering the number of the students in each college, with the related ratio, simple random sampling was done.

Instruments

In this study Bennion - Adams Inventory (EOM – EIS, 1989)[8] and a questionnaire on Mental Health (SCL90-R) [9] were used.

1: Bennion-Adams identity status measure

Responses to each item are scored on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 6 (strongly agree), 5 (very agree), 4 (agree) to 3 (disagree), 2 (very disagree), 1 (strongly disagree). Four subscales of this test are including achievement Identity, moratorium Identity, foreclosure Identity, diffusion Identity.

2: Mental Health questionnaire (SCL-90-R)

This questionnaire is consisting of 90 questions to assess mental symptoms and for the first time it was used as a screening measure of general psychiatric symptomatology. 90 questions of this questionnaire include 9 dimensions measuring somatization, obsessive-compulsive, depression, anxiety, phobic anxiety, hostility, interpersonal sensitivity, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism. From right to left, "not at all", "not more than

usual", "more than usual", "more than usual", "much more than usual" and extremely are scored respectively as "zero", "one", "two", "three" and "four".

Protocol

The questionnaires were filled out by the participants. The instruction was explained and made clear for them by the researcher. During the filling out the questionnaire, the researcher and 2 assistants were available to answer to any questions. It was done in the morning around 10 a.m. Procedures were performed in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration for the ethical treatment of human participants. All participants gave written informed consent prior to participation in the study [1]. The research was approved by the University of Shahrekord's Ethic Committee.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics including mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were used to describe the features of research variables. To evaluate the reliability of instruments was investigated using split-half and Cronbach alpha methods. Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple Regression analysis were used to evaluate the relationship among variables.

Results

The reliability coefficients of individual identity, the reliability coefficients of the mental health questionnaire and its subscales, mean, standard deviation, max and min score of the subjects in the research in the achievement identity, foreclosure, moratorium and diffusion and also in mental health variables, accordingly are shown in Tables 1-4.

Correlation coefficients between achievement identity with mental health and also multiple correlation coefficients of different individual identities are shown in Tables 5-6 accordingly.

Discussion

According to the criterion applied by Marcia (1980) [10], the subjects with achievement identity have experienced a period of crisis and they were committed to an occupation or ideology. These individuals were seriously faced with some job choices and made decisions according to their conditions. Even if their final decision was similar to their parent's desire, they have still achievement identity. The important thing here is that these people are faced with various choices and then made decisions on their own. In religious issues, this individual re-evaluates his past belief and find some solutions to prepare him for special act [2, 11]. Thus, he doesn't give up due to sudden environmental changes and unexpected responsibilities.

According to Marcia (1980) [10], some adolescents successfully passed through identity crisis and were committed toward some definite goals. These adolescents actively spend so much time on resolving critical issues of life. This group is flexible and thoughtful, with high self-confidence and they tolerate well in bad stressful conditions. They are rather autonomous individuals who have a sense of humor and they are capable of having friendly relationship with others [10, 12]. Thus, considering the above issues, it seems logical that the achievement identity individuals are less suffering from mental disorders.

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation, max and min score of the subjects in the research in the achievement identity, foreclosure, moratorium and diffusion (in total sample and female and male samples)

Individual identity	Female (N=551)				Male (N=741)				Total (N=1293)			
	Mean	SD	Max	Min	Mean	SD	Max	Min	Mean	SD	Max	Min
Achievement	68.81	10.91	97	19	68.01	10.61	96	16	68.36	10.74	97	16
Moratorium	61.35	10.15	92	18	59.33	10.51	96	16	60.21	10.41	96	16
Foreclosure	49.53	13.98	106	16	46.23	22.14	96	16	47.66	14.22	106	16
Diffusion	46.92	11.94	90	17	47.13	12.10	127	16	47.06	12.05	127	16

Table 4. Mean, standard deviation, max and min score of the subjects in the research in the mental health variable and its subscales (in total sample and female and male samples)

Variables	Female (N=551)				Male (N=741)				Total (N=1293)			
	Mean	SD	Max	Min	Mean	SD	Max	Min	Mean	SD	Max	Min
Somatization	11.28	9.07	47	0	9.08	7.77	45	0	10.02	8.42	47	0
Obsession	10.22	7.44	38	0	9.84	6.70	40	0	9.99	7.02	40	0
Interpersonal sensitivity	9.19	7.14	35	0	7.91	6.06	35	0	8.45	6.57	35	0
Depression	14.43	11.28	50	0	11.48	9.22	49	0	12.73	10.25	50	0
Anxiety	10.13	8.44	40	0	8.31	7.17	40	0	9.07	7.79	40	0
Hostility	5.34	4.86	24	0	4.94	4.28	24	0	5.10	4.54	24	0
Phobia	3.37	3.88	24	0	3.37	3.87	24	0	3.80	4.35	26	0
Paranoid	7.09	5.09	24	0	6.90	4.47	24	0	6.98	4.75	24	0
psychoticism	4.60	4.20	21	0	4.21	3.71	20	0	4.37	3.93	21	0
Total	76.64	55.65	269	0	66.04	46.72	283	0	70.53	50.97	283	283

Table 5. Correlation coefficients between achievement identity with mental health and its subscales

Disorder in mental health	Female (N=551)			Male (N=741)			Total (N=1293)		
	r			r			r		
Somatization	-0.103*			-0.089*			-0.090**		
Obsession	-0.124**			-0.111**			-0.116**		
Interpersonal sensitivity	-0.152**			-0.083**			-0.112**		
Depression	-0.184**			-0.118**			-0.143**		
Anxiety	-0.123**			-0.059			-0.085**		
Hostility	-0.133**			-0.036			-0.079**		
Phobia	-0.141**			-0.080*			-0.104**		
Paranoid	-0.127**			-0.047			-0.084**		
Psychoticism	-0.178**			-0.070*			-0.119**		
Total	-0.158**			-0.094*			-0.120**		

* is P<0.05; ** is P<0.01.

Table 6. Multiple correlation coefficients of different individual identities (achievement, foreclosure, moratorium and diffusion) with mental health by step-wise method

Criterion variable	Variable No.	Predictive variable	Multiple Regression	R-squared of changes	F P	Regression coefficients		symbol	Intercept (a)
						1	2		
Mental health (Total)	1	Moratorium	0.268	0.072	100.124 <0.001	1.314	0.268	B	-8.580
						10.006	0.006	β	
	2	Achievement	0.332	0.104	74.550 <0.001	<0.001	1.496	t	39.512
						0.001	-0.862	P	
						0.305	-0.182	B	
						11.334	-0.747	β	
						<0.001	0.000	t	
								P	

In the above results, gender difference is observed as in girls with foreclosure identity status, it is with more well-being. But this case- the boys with foreclosure identity status are more suffering from mental disorders. According to Waterman (1982) [13], identity formation in girls is not only for personal independence but also for collaboration, intimacy, and caring others. While boys identity is indeed forms for autonomy, competence and individuality.

Marcia [10] believes that in religious beliefs, men are close and women are open. Although some researchers stated that women in fixed identity statuses (achievement and foreclosure) can be adaptive, the studies for men indicated that high level identities (achievement and moratorium) are associated with well-being and adaptability. The results of Sanders [14] researches showed that girls are more inclined to be supervised than boys. To clarify this finding it can be said that patens due to having traditional attitudes toward femininity role, give more autonomy and

innovations to boys than girls and due to this girls are more under the supervision of the parents. Thus, the girls with foreclosure identity, due to high acceptability are healthier mentally. In our countries culture especially the research region location, girls are more expected to be obedient and following beliefs, behaviors and interest of parents and generally the values of others lead into positive improvement. Thus, when they are in foreclosure identity status, others accepted them better and this increased their self-confidence and has positive effect on the improvement of their mental health. But boys are expected to be independent in their deeds and thinking and if a boy follows his parent's values in his beliefs and performance, the peers tease him and he will be rejected by them and this decreases his self-confidence and thus, his mental health is decreased [15].

The most important characteristic of an individual with foreclosure identity is not having crisis experience. They have commitment but hardly can we say that where the parent's goals are finished and where their goals are started. Such a person behaves according to others preferences and behaves according to the others interest especially parents who wants him remain child. In this case the individual without going through a period of exploration and selection is committed to a method and is determined about it. Such a person did not choose his identity among different choices but without any exploration and choice has adopted his favorites' method of life such as his parents [2, 7]. We can say that individuals with moratorium identity try to achieve identity and always they are in a double identity. They are competitive, anxious, chatterbox and they are full of contradictions. Mostly these people have close relationship with their opposite sex parents and they want to have a close relationship with others [16]. But in most of them this is not coming true and it is possible that these contradictions and ambiguities provide mental problems for them. Table 4 indicates that diffusion identity has significantly positive correlation with mental health disorder and its subscales (in total sample, female sample and male sample), it means that the students with diffusion identity status are more suffered from mental disorders. In clarification of these findings, we can say that considering the psychological characteristics of individuals with diffusion identity such a conclusion is expected highly. Erikson (1980) [17] believes that adolescent development in identity versus diffusion role. If the contradiction between identity and role diffusion is not resolved, it leads into identity crisis that is expressed by role diffusion characteristics. These characteristics are including disorder in the roles related to gender and problem in choosing major, choosing future job and diffusion in religious and worldview. According to the findings of psychopathology if these disorders and problems are not treated well in adolescence, they led into pathological problems such as depression, anxiety and etc [18].

Marcia (1980) believes that this group of adolescents is neither engaged in a process of exploration nor have they any commitment toward especial goals. They are carefree people and don't choose any especial goal. In short, they are superficial, unhappy and alone people and they cannot make relationship with others.

Conclusion

The results of this research are totally consistent with the theoretical and research background of the topic. As it was

mentioned above, it seems that individuals with achievement identity status have more mental balance. But individuals in moratorium and diffusion identities due to their busy mind are more inclined to suffered from mental problems. Considering the results of this research, it is recommended to educational system authorities to hold Q & A sessions, educational workshops and etc to help adolescents and youth to achieve their identity rapidly to be kept away from the negative outcome of being exposed to diffusion identity status.

Conflict of Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. There was no grant or funding for this research and it was done by the personal budget of researchers.

References

- Jabarouti R, Shariat A, Shariat A. Effect of Persian classic poetry on the level of stress hormone in retired academicians. *Poetry Therapy* 2014; 27(1): 1–9. (doi: 10.1080/08893675.2014.871809)
- Kamali S, Hassani F. Mental health and its relationship with stress coping strategies and emotional intelligence in female students at pre-university level. *Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 2013; 7(1): 49–56.
- Havenaar JM, Rummyantzeva GM, van den Brink W, Poelijoe NW, van den Bout J, van Engeland H, Koeter MWJ. Long-term mental health effects of the Chernobyl disaster: an epidemiologic survey in two former Soviet regions. *Am J Psychiatry* 1997; 154(11): 1605-1607. (doi: 10.1176/ajp.154.11.1605) (PMID: 9356574)
- Berzonsky MD, Ciecuch J, Duriez B, Soenens B. The how and what of identity formation: Associations between identity styles and value orientations. *Personality and Individual Differences* 2011; 50(2): 295–299. (doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2010.10.007)
- Ghorbani A, Abdullah HB, Jomenia S. Identity styles, mental health and socio-economic status of Iranian late adolescents. *Asian Social Science* 2012; 8(13): 269-274. (doi: 10.5539/ass.v8n13p269)
- Berzonsky MD. A social-cognitive perspective on identity construction. In: *Handbook of identity theory and research*. Springer, 2011: 55–76. (doi: 10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_3)
- Shariat A, Malekpour M, Ghamarani A. The effect of training parents in couples' communication model on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms in 4-9 year-old students in Isfahan. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies* 2013; 1(2): 34–37. (doi: 10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.1n.2p.34)
- Bennion LD, and Adams GR. A revision of the extended version of the objective measure of ego identity status: An identity instrument for use with late adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 1986; 1(2): 183-197. (doi: 10.1177/074355488612005)
- Schmitz N, Kruse J, Heckrath C, Alberti L, Tress W. Diagnosing mental disorders in primary care: the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) and the Symptom Check List (SCL-90-R) as screening instruments. *Social psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 1999; 34(7): 360-366. (doi: 10.1007/s001270050156)
- Marcia JE. Identity in adolescence. *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* 1980; 9: 159–187.
- Kroger J. *Discussions on ego identity*. Psychology Press, 2014.
- Koenig HG. *Is religion good for your health? The effects of religion on physical and mental health*. Routledge, 2013.
- Waterman AS. Identity development from adolescence to adulthood: An extension of theory and a review of research. *Developmental Psychology* 1982; 18(3): 341-358. (doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.18.3.341)
- Sanders JM. Ethnic boundaries and identity in plural societies. *Annual Review of Sociology* 2002; 327–357. (doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.140741)

15. Jespersen K, Kroger J, Martinussen M. Identity status and ego development: A meta-analysis. *Identity* 2013; 13(3): 228–241. (doi: 10.1080/15283488.2013.799433)
16. Rezaei A. Can self-efficacy and self-confidence explain Iranian female students' academic achievement? *Gender and Education* 2012; 24(4): 393–409. (doi: 10.1080/09540253.2011.630314)
17. Erikson EH. Identity and the life cycle. WW Norton & Company, 1980.
18. Yazdanpoor M, Hassanzadeh R, Doosti YA. Comparing fear of success, loneliness, and identity styles in collegiate boys and girls. *Journal of Psychology & Behavioral Studies* 2013; 1(1): 32-39.

Authors:

Tayebeh Sharifi – PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Shahrekord, Shahrekord, Iran.