




Examining the Effectiveness of Spirituality-Based Psychological Counseling on Fear of Failure in Female Junior High School Students

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Bahari, S., Hosseininiasab, S. D., & Azmodeh, M. (2024). Examining the Effectiveness of Spirituality-Based Psychological Counseling on Fear of Failure in Female Junior High School Students. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies*, 5(11), 109-115. <http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.5.11.13>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to determine the effectiveness of spirituality-based psychological counseling on fear of failure in female junior high school students in District 3 of Tabriz.

Methods and Materials: The research method was quasi-experimental with a pre-test post-test design, including control and experimental groups and a follow-up period. The statistical population comprised all female junior high school students in District 3 of Tabriz, totaling 8,256 students across 30 schools. The research sample was randomly selected from two schools in this district, and 20 volunteer students from each school were chosen. To measure problem-solving skills, the Heppner and Petersen questionnaire was used, and for the intervention, the spirituality therapy package by Galanter and Siegel was employed. For hypothesis testing, multivariate analysis of variance and Bonferroni's within-group test were used.

Findings: The examination of research hypotheses indicated that spirituality-based psychological counseling is effective and enduring on the components of fear of failure in female junior high school students.

Conclusion: Spirituality-based psychological counseling effectively reduces fear of failure in female junior high school students, demonstrating lasting impacts. This intervention can be a valuable addition to educational support programs, promoting psychological resilience and academic success.

Keywords: spirituality-based psychological counseling; fear of failure; female students.

1. Introduction

Adolescence in girls is a period of turmoil and pressure characterized by various physical and psychological changes. This period has its own unique conditions and needs. Individuals at this age are involved in physical,

emotional, spiritual, and mental health changes. The junior high school period, known as the first stage of secondary education in the new system, is a crucial stage for academic progress. During this period, the subjects become slightly more specialized. Students must strengthen their academic

foundation to avoid fundamental issues in the next stage. However, there are problems and obstacles at this age that can divert students from their main path (Taher et al., 2015).

Academic issues constitute a significant portion of the pressures during adolescence. The difficulty and complexity of subjects, the intense competitive atmosphere among learners, inflexible teachers, unconventional evaluation criteria, and a cold and unempathetic classroom environment are among these pressures. These pressures and challenges, along with the rapid cognitive and social changes occurring during this period, create a difficult situation for adolescent students that may even lead to their failure or withdrawal from education (Rashidzade, 2020). Research shows that individuals who feel anxious during the day focus on anxiety-provoking stimuli and cannot concentrate on the main subject, which in turn increases the fear of failure in performance. Since the fear of failure has different structures and meanings, there is little agreement among psychologists about its structure (Conroy, 2001; Hosseini et al., 2022). Often, the fear of failure seems to be unidimensional, but several multidimensional models for fear of failure have been proposed. From one perspective, these multidimensional models are useful because they identify who experiences the fear of failure. From a cognitive-motivational-relationship perspective, fear of failure is related to an individual's assessment of threatening factors and their ability to achieve important goals when experiencing performance failure (Mahvash et al., 2024; Sudirman et al., 2023). Fear of failure is a major cause of anxiety. In the academic dimension, a student who experiences fear of failure does not feel motivated to succeed in education and scientific progress, considers success and failure in exams as equivalent, and shows no interest in studying. However, if they do not feel anxious about failure, it will likely lead to constructive low-level anxiety during exams (Hosseini et al., 2022; Niaz Azari et al., 2017).

Educational psychologists use various educational methods to address fear of failure and enhance problem-solving skills. One such method is spirituality-based psychological counseling. Humans have different dimensions, and the spiritual dimension is as important as the physical, psychological, and social dimensions. The spiritual dimension creates meaning in life and increases an individual's power to face problems (Hosseini et al., 2022; Memari et al., 2016). Individuals with spiritual health are empowered, strong, possess greater self-control and social support, and without spiritual health, other dimensions of an individual's life, including quality of life, will decline. One

of the educational approaches in the field of problem-solving skills, fear, and anxiety is spirituality-based therapy. Today, many educators recognize faith and spirituality as important sources of health and quality of life, often considering attention to individuals' spiritual issues essential in the treatment process. It can be said that spiritual beliefs are associated with all aspects of an individual's health, guiding daily life habits and serving as sources of support, strength, and recovery (Niaz Azari et al., 2017; Rashidzade, 2020).

Therefore, for educators to have a positive and decisive impact on the physical and psychological health of their clients, they must address the spiritual and religious issues of their clients in the educational process. Spirituality provides a set of words and frameworks through which one can understand the meaning and concept of their life. Spiritual needs seem to have both an intrinsic value and meaning and an external value and meaning (Galanter & Siegel, 2009). In this way, spirituality is considered an effective source for coping with physical and psychological responses. Spirituality can lead to greater psychological adaptation by providing supportive resources for the individual and indirectly influencing hope. According to researchers, religion and spirituality are important sources for individuals to adapt to stressful life events, and spiritual health is a crucial aspect of health that can affect the meaning and quality of life (Ashrafi et al., 2014). Therefore, religious and spiritual resources are important sources of adaptation that should be used throughout life, leading to increased life satisfaction (Memari et al., 2016). The following discusses some of the research conducted on the subject.

Reflecting on Iran's educational system, it becomes evident that there is a significant gap between the current state and what could foster the development of critical thinking and problem-solving in children and adolescents. Therefore, research on the various elements of education and their role in students' fear of failure is of particular importance. Based on the results of previous research mentioned above, the present study aims to fill these research gaps. The research hypothesis is:

Spirituality-based psychological counseling is effective and enduring on the components of fear of failure in female junior high school students.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research method was quasi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test follow-up design, including experimental and

control groups. The statistical population of this study comprised female junior high school students in District 3 of Tabriz, totaling 8,256 students across 30 schools, according to obtained statistics. Two schools were randomly selected from this district, and 20 volunteer students from each school were chosen. The volunteers from one school were randomly assigned to the experimental group and the other to the control group. The dependent variable (fear of failure) questionnaire was administered before the implementation of the spirituality-based psychological counseling, after implementation, and after a two-month follow-up period. The counseling's impact and the differences after implementation and follow-up were calculated.

First, an orientation session was held for the sample individuals to familiarize them with the research design and emphasize the importance of the topic while gaining their cooperation. They completed the fear of failure questionnaire and were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The control group also completed the fear of failure questionnaire. Next, all members of the experimental group were asked to attend all sessions as much as possible. Finally, spirituality therapy programs were implemented for the experimental group, while the control group received no intervention. After the sessions concluded, both groups were assessed using a post-test.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Fear of Failure

The Fear of Failure in Performance Questionnaire by Conroy (2001) consists of 41 items and five subscales: Fear of Experiencing Shame and Embarrassment (8 questions), Fear of Decreasing Self-Esteem (13 questions), Fear of Having an Uncertain Future (7 questions), Fear of Losing Social Influence and Interest of Others (7 questions), and Fear of Upsetting Important Individuals (6 questions). The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale, with options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," scored 1 to 5, respectively. Higher scores indicate greater fear of failure, and lower scores indicate less fear of failure. Conroy (2001) confirmed the validity and reliability of this tool, with Cronbach's alpha values for the subscales ranging from 0.72 to 0.81. Ayadi et al. (2020) also reported reliability for the subscales ranging from 0.66 to 0.83 (Hosseini et al., 2022).

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Spirituality-Based Psychological Counseling

This study used a spirituality therapy program based on Galanter and Siegel's (2009) spirituality therapy program, revised according to the research objectives (Hosseini et al., 2022; Memari et al., 2016; Niaz Azari et al., 2017). The spirituality therapy was conducted over 14 ninety-minute sessions.

Session 1: Introduction

In the first session, the participants are introduced to each other and the counselor. An initial pre-test is administered. The session begins with a discussion about the importance of counseling and the topic at hand. The concepts of spirituality and religion, as well as their impact on life and mental health, are discussed. The similarities and differences between spirituality and religion are explored. The session concludes with a summary by the counselor and an agreement on the next meeting time.

Session 2: Self-awareness and Inner Listening (1)

This session focuses on self-awareness. Participants discuss their positive and negative traits and the various types of self-awareness. They learn methods to achieve self-awareness and are given exercises to practice these techniques.

Session 3: Self-awareness and Inner Listening (2)

The discussion from the previous session on self-awareness and its impacts continues. Participants delve deeper into understanding and enhancing their self-awareness.

Session 4: Insight into Resolving Inner Conflicts and Increasing Environmental Adaptation (1)

Participants discuss conflicts in life, identifying specific examples with the help of group members. They learn how to recognize conflicts and strategies to deal with them, emphasizing the importance of resolving conflicts for better life adaptation.

Session 5: Insight into Resolving Inner Conflicts and Increasing Environmental Adaptation (2)

The discussion on the previous session's topics continues. Participants are given exercises to practice conflict resolution skills.

Session 6: Giving Meaning to Life Events Based on Values, Goals, and Beliefs (1)

Participants share events and incidents from their lives and discuss how they have coped with them. The counselor discusses how values and beliefs can influence the interpretation and impact of life events on the students' lives.

Session 7: Giving Meaning to Life Events Based on Values, Goals, and Beliefs (2)

The discussion from the previous session continues, with further exploration of how values and beliefs shape the meaning of life events.

Session 8: Emphasis on Personal Responsibility in Overcoming Obstacles and Examining Individual Traits (1)

The session focuses on personal responsibility when facing obstacles and the individual differences in this regard. The role of personal traits in overcoming obstacles and taking responsibility in tasks is discussed. Participants are given exercises to practice these concepts.

Session 9: Emphasis on Personal Responsibility in Overcoming Obstacles and Examining Individual Traits (2)

The discussion from the previous session continues, with additional exercises and deeper exploration of the topics.

Session 10: Altruism and Performing Spiritual Acts as a Group

Participants discuss altruism and its impact on health. They share personal experiences related to altruism. The session covers altruism as a benevolent and spiritual act, with examples and practices.

Session 11: Developing Insight to Discover Inner and Outer Gifts and Blessings (1)

Participants are asked to reflect on their abilities, gifts, and attributes and how they have utilized these in their lives. The counselor leads a discussion on this topic and provides a summary.

Session 12: Developing Insight to Discover Inner and Outer Gifts and Blessings (2)

The discussion from the previous session continues, with additional exercises to help participants identify and utilize their inner and outer gifts.

Session 13: Learning Methods of Supporting Others, Empathy, Loving Others, and Learning How to Pray and Express Deep Suffering (1)

Participants share their experiences of giving and receiving support. The counselor discusses empathy, methods of support, and the importance of prayer and receiving support from a higher power. Participants are encouraged to express their inner sufferings, and the session concludes with prayers and meditations to soothe them.

Session 14: Learning Methods of Supporting Others, Empathy, Loving Others, and Learning How to Pray and Express Deep Suffering (2)

2.4. Data analysis

For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation were used. In the inferential section, multivariate analysis of variance and Bonferroni's within-group test were used to analyze the research hypotheses.

3. Findings and Results

To examine and describe the data obtained from the studied groups, several indicators such as mean scores and standard deviations were used. These data are presented in the research findings tables. Based on the results, the mean post-test scores for the fear of failure components were significantly lower than the pre-test scores, showing a decreasing trend. This reduction in scores indicates a decrease in fear of failure among students, which is also evident in the follow-up stage scores compared to the post-test scores. Therefore, in both the experimental and control groups, the fear of failure among students decreases with the intervention of spirituality therapy.

Table 1

Descriptive Scores of Pre-test and Post-test Components of Fear of Failure

Group	Components	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	Follow-up Mean	Follow-up SD
Control Group	Experience of Shame	24.13	12.38	23.54	11.44	22.65	10.82
	Self-esteem	39.31	13.54	38.65	12.36	36.13	11.92
	Uncertain Future	22.87	10.32	20.97	10.12	19.23	9.98
	Social Impact	22.54	10.87	20.25	9.35	19.54	10.49
	Fear of Distress	19.65	9.65	18.34	9.32	17.36	9.54
	Total Fear	124.65	18.87	122.32	17.35	120.54	16.27
Experimental Group	Experience of Shame	23.35	2.23	22.67	2.65	22.13	1.35
	Self-esteem	39.54	12.32	37.23	11.89	36.58	11.12
	Uncertain Future	21.13	10.02	20.58	10.32	19.87	10.12
	Social Impact	21.87	11.41	20.54	9.65	19.67	10.21
	Fear of Distress	21.65	10.68	19.87	10.65	18.54	10.54
	Total Fear	124.73	18.36	122.58	17.98	121.65	10.65

Before testing the hypothesis, the assumption of normality of variable distribution was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results showed that the significance level in the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages was greater than 0.05, indicating a normal distribution of research data across all variables and groups.

For the first hypothesis analysis, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) and Bonferroni's within-group test were used. Before testing the hypothesis, the assumptions of covariance analysis, including homogeneity

of regression slope, Box's test, and Levene's test, were examined. The results showed that the interaction effect of group*pre-test was greater than 0.05, indicating that the homogeneity of the regression slope assumption was met. Therefore, there was a linear relationship between the dependent variable (post-test) and the covariate (pre-test) within the groups. Additionally, Box's test results indicated that the variance-covariance matrices were equal and not significantly different. Thus, MANCOVA could be used.

Table 2

Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance in the Post-test Stage Based on Variables

Dependent Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance	Effect Size
Experience of Shame	18921.900	2	9400.950	408.559	.001	.934
Self-esteem	6190.167	2	3095.083	733.212	.001	.962
Uncertain Future	9866.433	2	4933.217	830.395	.001	.966
Social Impact	10989.133	2	5494.567	2398.531	.001	.968
Fear of Distress	2345.100	2	1172.550	1098.674	.001	.974

As shown in Table 2, the results of between-subject effects for fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, fear of decreased self-esteem, fear of an uncertain future, fear of losing social impact, and fear of distress among important individuals were significant at $P < .05$ across the groups. In other words, spirituality-based psychological

counseling significantly affects the fear of failure among female junior high school students. Furthermore, considering the effect size, the fear of distress among important individuals had the most impact, while the fear of decreased self-esteem had the least impact. Bonferroni's within-group test was used to examine the persistence.

Table 3

Results of Bonferroni Test for Pairwise Mean Comparisons at Different Measurement Stages by Group

Variable	Stages	Experimental Group Mean Difference	Experimental Group Significance	Control Group Mean Difference	Control Group Significance
Experience of Shame	Post-test – Follow-up	0.89	0.159	1.22	0.299
Self-esteem	Post-test – Follow-up	2.52	0.165	0.54	0.231
Uncertain Future	Post-test – Follow-up	1.74	0.173	0.65	0.218
Social Impact	Post-test – Follow-up	0.76	0.214	0.80	0.325
Fear of Distress	Post-test – Follow-up	0.98	0.161	1.33	0.265

According to Table 3, in the experimental group, the difference in the scores of fear of failure components (fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, fear of decreased self-esteem, fear of an uncertain future, fear of losing social impact, and fear of distress among important individuals) between the post-test and follow-up stages is significant. Since no significant difference is observed between the post-test and follow-up scores, the effect of spirituality-based psychological counseling remains stable in the follow-up

stage. In the control group, the difference in the meaning of life scores between the post-test and follow-up stages is not significant, indicating that the effect of spirituality-based psychological counseling on reducing fear of failure among students is lasting.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted on female junior high school students in District 3 of Tabriz. The research is applied and uses a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test design with a control group, an experimental group, and a follow-up period. The research hypotheses analysis indicated that spirituality-based psychological counseling effectively and enduringly reduces fear of failure and enhances problem-solving skills among female junior high school students.

The results of the first hypothesis analysis showed that spirituality-based psychological counseling is effective and enduring in reducing the fear of failure among female junior high school students. These findings align with the results obtained by previous studies (Alavimajd et al., 1970; Ashrafi et al., 2014; Galanter & Siegel, 2009; Hosseini et al., 2022; Memari et al., 2016; Niaz Azari et al., 2017; Rashidzade, 2020).

To explain the findings, it can be said that learners with high achievement motivation strive for success and expect it, which strengthens their self-efficacy and self-confidence. On the other hand, any success nurtures the desire for further achievement and facilitates future success. When these students face failure, they increase their efforts, whereas students with weak achievement motivation act out of fear of failure. In other words, their main concern is avoiding failure, making them often passive and anxious, choosing either easy or sometimes difficult tasks to justify their failures. Atkinson (1996) considered the motivation of fear of failure as a force within the person that makes them avoid achievement-related situations or worry about them. Willis stated that an achievement situation simultaneously triggers both achievement motivation and fear of failure motivation, prompting individuals to defend against the loss of self-esteem, social respect, and fear of embarrassment (Niaz Azari et al., 2017).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

This study faced several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample was limited to female junior high school students in District 3 of Tabriz, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other populations or regions. Additionally, the study's quasi-experimental design, while robust, does not completely eliminate the potential for confounding variables that could influence the outcomes. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported measures, which are subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias. Finally, the

follow-up period was relatively short, which might not capture long-term effects of the spirituality-based psychological counseling intervention.

Future research should aim to address the limitations of the current study by including a more diverse sample that encompasses different regions, age groups, and both genders. Longitudinal studies with extended follow-up periods would provide a better understanding of the long-term effects of spirituality-based psychological counseling on fear of failure and other psychological outcomes. Additionally, employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative measures with qualitative interviews could offer deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceived impacts of the intervention. Researchers should also explore the potential mechanisms through which spirituality-based counseling exerts its effects, examining factors such as changes in coping strategies, resilience, and social support.

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that educational institutions incorporate spirituality-based psychological counseling programs to help students manage fear of failure and improve problem-solving skills. Schools should consider training counselors and educators in spirituality-based therapeutic techniques to provide comprehensive support to students. Additionally, creating a supportive and empathetic school environment that acknowledges and addresses students' spiritual needs could enhance their overall well-being and academic performance. Workshops and training sessions that involve both psychological and religious counselors could be organized to ensure a holistic approach to student development. Implementing these practices could contribute to a more nurturing educational environment that fosters resilience and academic success.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

This article is derived from the doctoral thesis of the first author, with the second author serving as the advisor and the third author as the consultant, at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch. All authors equally contributed to this article.

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