

A comparative study on the alexithymia and narcissism and borderline personality traits in girls attempting suicide and normal girls in Ilam

Abstract

The present study aimed to compare alexithymia and narcissism and borderline personality traits in girls who attempted suicide and normal girls in Ilam in 2018. The present study was a fundamental, causal-comparative study. The statistical population included all girls with and without a history of suicide in Ilam. The sample size was determined at 100 people (50 girls who attempted suicide and referred to Imam Khomeini Hospital, Mostafa Khomeini Hospital, and Taleghani Hospital in Ilam and 50 normal girls with no history of suicide). Then, the research tools including Toronto Alexithymia Scale, Raskin & Hall Narcissistic Personality Inventory, and Borderline Personality Questionnaire were distributed among girls who attempted suicide and then among normal girls without a history of suicide. Then, the data of all questionnaires were recorded and analyzed in SPSS software using multivariate analysis of variance. The results showed that there was a significant difference between alexithymia and narcissism and borderline personality traits of girls who attempted suicide and normal girls in Ilam. The results showed that the borderline personality trait score in girls attempting suicide was significantly higher than normal girls and girls who attempted suicide had a stronger borderline personality trait. In this regard, hopelessness and impulsivity were the biggest difference between girls who attempted suicide. Also, the score of alexithymia, especially difficulty in expressing feelings and narcissism, was higher in girls who attempted suicide than normal girls.

Keywords: *Alexithymia, Narcissism, Borderline Personality Trait, Suicide.*

Fatemeh Feizi

MA, Department of Clinical Psychology, Ilam Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ilam, Iran
fatemehfeizi1@mailfa.com

Introduction

Nowadays, suicide is considered a multidimensional disorder that results from complex interactions between biological, genetic, psychological, sociological, personality, and environmental factors (WHO, 2011). The World Health Organization estimates that approximately one million people around the world die from suicide annually, and up to 10 to 20 times more attempt suicide. Iran, with a suicide rate of 3.7 per 100,000 people, was ranked 158th in the world in 2011 according to the World Health Organization report 2011. The most critical province in Iran in female suicide is Ilam province with a suicide rate of 35 (Statistical yearbook of the Statistics Center of Iran in 2012). Researchers have examined the relationship between alexithymia and suicide. For example, Shekar Baghbani and khalatbari (2017) investigated the relationship between suicidal ideation in people who attempt suicide and alexithymia in them. They found a significant relationship between alexithymia and suicide attempt in female students so that increasing the level of alexithymia reduces the suicide attempt and vice versa.

Freiburg also believes that alexithymia, as a permanent personality trait, can be a risk factor in the development of psychosomatic, psychiatric, and medical complaints and lead to suicide or self-harm in people (Porcelli et al., 2013). Patients with borderline personality disorder are constantly in crisis and thinking of attempting suicide or self-harm. Their most important problem is mood swings and their feelings and moods. These swings appear in the form of feelings of depression that easily change into feelings of anxiety and then anger (Mohammadzadeh et al., 2015). The suicide rate in

people with borderline personality traits is about 10% (Paris, 2016). This disorder is comparable to other psychiatric disorders such as major depression and schizophrenia in terms of suicide rate. Also, 69 to 75% of people with borderline personality disorder suffer from self-harming behaviors (Clarkin, 2016).

One of the important factors related to suicide is the presence of traces of borderline personalities in people. Among the three clusters of personality disorders, schizotypal personality disorder and borderline personality disorder are among the most important disorders that seem to play a role in thinking about suicide, suicide attempt, and complete suicide (Valikhani, Firoozshahi, 2015). Narcissism is another variable of research. People with narcissism exaggerate their feelings and consider themselves important. They think they are a unique person and they should be treated uniquely. Their sense of entitlement and superiority is quite significant. They do not tolerate criticism and get angry when a person criticizes them, or they may show complete disregard for criticism. They only accept their own opinion and are often greedy for gaining fame and windfall wealth. These patients' self-confidence is fragile and they are prone to depression. Interpersonal problems, job problems, rejection, and the loss of the love of others are among the common psychological pressures that narcissists create for themselves through their behavior, and these are the same pressures that they cannot cope with at all (Kaplan and Sadock, 2009).

The issue of the suicide attempt has been extensively investigated due to its consequences for the individuals and their survivors and its psychological and social impact on the

family and society. Also, the increasing trend of suicide and the importance of borderline personality parameters, narcissism, and alexithymia make it necessary to examine this issue and empower people in this regard, since the investigation of suicide is a specialized and complex and it is usually preventable. Proper intervention moderate or eliminate suicide attempts. Therefore, the present study compared alexithymia and narcissism, and borderline personality traits in girls who attempted suicide and normal girls in Ilam.

Methods

The present study was fundamental in terms of aim and causal-comparative in terms of data collection. The statistical population included all girls with and without a history of suicide in Ilam city. The sample size was determined at 100 people (50 girls attempting suicide referred to Imam Khomeini Hospital, Mostafa Khomeini Hospital, and Taleghani Hospital in Ilam and 50 normal girls with no history of suicide.

In this research, library and field methods were used to collect the data. The main tool for data collection was a questionnaire.

Research tools

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (20-TAS): This scale was developed by Taylor in 1986 to assess alexithymia (Afshari, 2008) and revised in 1994 by Bagbay, Parker, and Taylor. Bagbay et al realized that 20-TAS has three structural factors that were consistent with the structure of alexithymia. Other studies have also supported these results (Bach et al., 1996; Bers et al., 1996, quoted in Afshari, 2008). In this scale, the structure of alexithymia is evaluated in three subscales of difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking. Thinking is evaluated by external orientation. The test is scored on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The

minimum score of the subject in this questionnaire is 20 and the maximum is 100 (Afshari, 2013).

Borderline Personality Assessment Questionnaire (STB): This questionnaire was designed by Rawlings et al. (2011) and then translated into Persian by Mohammadzadeh et al. (2005). In this questionnaire, the Borderline Personality Scale (STB) was made based on the DSM-IV criteria. It includes 22 questions and its purpose is to assess borderline personality disorder from three dimensions (first factor: hopelessness, second factor: impulsivity, third factor: decomposition, and paranoid symptoms). Rawlings et al. reported an alpha coefficient of 0.81 for its reliability. Concurrent validity of the questionnaire with the scales of neuroticism and psychosis in the original culture was reported at 0.64 and 0.44, respectively (Mohammadzadeh et al., 2005).

Raskin & Hall narcissistic personality Inventory (1998): This 40-item version (NPI-40) was first developed by Raskin and Hall in 80- and 54-item versions. The 40-item narcissistic personality inventory was reviewed in 1988 by Raskin and Terry in three separate studies for validation. Later, Amz modified it to NPI-16. The 40-item narcissistic personality inventory version of Raskin and Terry (1988) has seven subscales that assess narcissism based on pairs of items. The respondent must choose one of them. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) reported above 0.74 for all seven subscales of the 40-item narcissistic personality questionnaire by Raskin and Terry (1998). Data were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as dispersion indices and inferential statistics including analysis of variance in SPSS software.

Results

Descriptive indicators

Table 1- Mean and standard deviation of narcissism scale, borderline personality trait, and alexithymia in girls attempting suicide and normal girls

Variable	girls attempting suicide		Normal girls	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Narcissism	48.44	4.44	55.08	8.13
Borderline personality trait	17.50	2.76	7.44	3.51
alexithymia	56.42	10.21	39.54	9.05

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of narcissism, borderline personality traits, and alexithymia in girls who attempt suicide and normal girls.

Table 2- Skewness-Kurtosis test of variables

Examining the normality of variables

Variables	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	error	Statistic	error
Narcissism	1.944	0.241	3.23	0.478
Borderline personality trait	-0.136	0.241	-1.473	0.478
alexithymia	0.320	0.241	0.886	0.478

To test the normality or abnormality of the research variables, the skewness-kurtosis test was used. As shown in Table 2, the value of skewness of the research variables is between -2 and 2 and the value of kurtosis is between -3 and 3, so the total variables are normal.

Testing hypotheses

Hypothesis: There is a significant difference between alexithymia and narcissism and borderline personality traits in girls who attempt suicide and normal girls in Ilam.

Table 3 – Results of Levene’s test to examine the presumption of equality of variance variables (alexithymia, narcissism, and borderline personality traits)

Variables	F	df1	df2	sig
Narcissism	3.799	1	98	0.054
Borderline personality trait	3.073	1	98	0.083
alexithymia	1.382	1	98	0.243

Table 3 shows that the variances of the variables (alexithymia, narcissism, and borderline personality traits) are equal in the two groups and do not differ significantly from each other. This Table (4) Multivariate analysis of variance of group effects on variables (alexithymia, narcissism, and borderline personality traits)

The results of Wilks’ lambda test show that there is a significant difference between the two groups of girls (attempted suicide and normal) in at least one of the variables (alexithymia, narcissism, and borderline personality trait) (F = 122.259 and 0.01). Levene’s test was used to evaluate the assumption of the equality of variance variables (alexithymia, narcissism, and borderline personality traits) in the study groups.

result shows the reliability of subsequent results. According to the results of Wilks’ lambda and Levene’s tests, the analyses related to the effects between the subjects were examined.

sources	Dependent variables	df	Squared mean	F	Sig	Squared Eta
group	Narcissism	1	1102.240	25.658	0.000	0.21
	Borderline personality trait	1	2530.09	253.83	0.000	0.72
	alexithymia	1	7123.360	76.506	0.000	0.43

Based on Table 4, there is a significant difference between the two groups of girls who attempt suicide and normal girls on the narcissism scale (F = 25.658 and p <0.01) so the score of narcissism in normal girls is significantly higher than girls who attempt suicide. The group variable explains 0.21% of the variance of narcissism. Also, there is a significant difference between the two groups on the borderline personality trait scale

(F = 253.83 and p <0.01) so the score of borderline personality trait in girls who attempt suicide is significantly higher than normal girls. The group variable explains 0.72% of the variance of the borderline personality trait. There is a significant difference between the two groups on the scale of alexithymia (F = 76.506 and p <0.01) so the score of alexithymia in normal girls is significantly lower than in girls

who attempt suicide. The group variable explains 0.43% of the variance of alexithymia.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference between alexithymia (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking) in girls who attempt suicide and normal girls in Ilam.

The results of the Wilks' Lambda test show that there is a significant difference between the two groups of girls (girls

Table 5- Results of Levene's test to examine the presumption of equality of variable variances (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking)

Variables	F	df1	df2	sig
difficulty in identification of feelings	1.978	1	98	0.163
difficulty in describing feelings	3.928	1	98	0.050
externally oriented thinking	0.089	1	98	0.766

Table (5) shows that the variances of the components of the alexithymia scale (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking) are equal in the two groups and do not differ

Table (6)-Multivariate analysis of variance of group effects on alexithymia components (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking)

sources	Dependent variables	df	Squared mean	F	Sig	Squared Eta
group	difficulty in identification of feelings	1	846.81	70.80	0.000	0.41
	difficulty in describing feelings	1	590.49	39.84	0.000	0.28
	externally oriented thinking	1	961.00	50.07	0.000	0.33

Based on Table (6), there is a significant difference between the two groups, including the girls who attempt suicide and normal girls, in the components of alexithymia (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking) ($p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference between borderline personality traits (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms) in girls who attempt suicide and normal girls in Ilam.

Table (7) Levene's test results to examine the presumption of equality of variance variances (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms)

Variables	F	df1	df2	sig
hopelessness	0.236	1	98	0.628

who attempted suicide and normal girls) in at least one of the components of alexithymia (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking, $F = 26.407$ and $p < 0.01$), Levene's test was used to examine the presumption of equality of variable variances (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking) in the study groups.

significantly from each other, indicating the reliability of the results. According to the results of Wilk's Lambda and Levene's tests, the analyses related to the effects between the subjects were examined.

The results of Wilks' lambda test show that there is a significant difference between the two groups of girls (attempted suicide and normal) in at least one of the components of borderline personality trait (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms). ($F = 96.707$ and $p < 0.01$). Levene's test was used to examine the assumption of the equality of variances of borderline personality trait variables (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms) in the study groups.

Impulsivity	3.557	1	98	0.062
paranoid symptoms	0.093	1	98	0.761

Table (7) shows that the variances of the components of the borderline personality trait scale (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms) are equal in the two groups and do not differ significantly from each other, indicating the Table (8) Multivariate analysis of variance of group effects on borderline personality traits (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms)

reliability of the results. According to the results of Wilks' lambda and Levene's tests, the analyses related to the effects between the subjects were examined.

Sources	Dependent variables	df	Squared mean	F	Sig	Squared Eta
group	hopelessness	1	412.090	249.87	0.000	0.71
	impulsivity	1	380.250	114.49	0.000	0.53
	paranoid symptoms	1	110.250	81.69	0.000	0.45

According to Table (8), there is a significant difference between the two groups of girls who attempt suicide and normal girls in the components of borderline personality traits (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms) ($p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference between narcissism (power and authority, self-sufficiency, vanity, exhibitionism, superiority, arrogance, entitlement) in girls who attempt suicide and normal girls in Ilam. The results of the Wilks' Lambda test show that there was a significant difference between two groups of girls (suicide attempter and normal girls) at least in one of the components of narcissism ((power and authority, self-sufficiency, vanity, exhibitionism, superiority, arrogance, entitlement) ($F = 5.387$ and $p < 0.01$). To examine the presumption of equality of variance variables ((power and authority, self-sufficiency, vanity, exhibitionism, superiority, arrogance, entitlement) in the groups, Levene's test was used. The results of the Levene's test are shown in Table (4-15):

sufficiency, vanity, exhibitionism, superiority, arrogance, entitlement)

Variables	F	df1	df2	sig
power and authority	1.344	1	98	0.249
self-sufficiency	0.236	1	98	0.628
vanity	1.212	1	98	0.274
exhibitionism	3.400	1	98	0.068
Superiority	0.880	1	98	0.350
Arrogance	2.884	1	98	0.093
Entitlement	0.492	1	98	0.485

Table (9)-Levene's test results to examine the presumption of equality of variance variables (power and authority, self-sufficiency, vanity, exhibitionism, superiority, arrogance, entitlement) in the groups, Levene's test was used. The results of the Levene's test are shown in Table (4-15):

Table 9 shows that the variances of the components of the narcissism scale (power and authority, self-sufficiency, vanity, exhibitionism, superiority, arrogance, entitlement) are equal in the two groups and do not differ significantly. According to the results of Wilks' lambda and Levene's tests, analyses of the effects between the subjects were examined.

Table (10)- Multivariate analysis of variance of group effects on the components of narcissism (power and authority, self-sufficiency, vanity, exhibitionism, superiority, arrogance, entitlement)

sources	Dependent variables	df	Squared mean	F	Sig	Squared Eta
Group	power and authority	1	39.690	17.28	0.000	0.15
	self-sufficiency	1	21.160	10.77	0.001	0.10
	vanity	1	21.160	17.16	0.000	0.15
	exhibitionism	1	64.00	29.72	0.000	0.23
	Superiority	1	10.890	6.62	0.012	0.06
	Arrogance	1	7.290	10.69	0.001	0.10
	Entitlement	1	8.410	3.71	0.057	0.03

Based on Table (10), there is a sign between the two groups of girls who attempt suicide and normal girls in the components of narcissism (power and authority, self-sufficiency, vanity, exhibitionism, superiority, arrogance, entitlement) except for entitlement ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion

There is a significant difference between alexithymia and narcissism and borderline personality traits in girls who attempt suicide and normal in Ilam. The results of Wilks' lambda test show that there was a significant difference between the two groups of girls (attempted suicide and normal) in at least one of the variables (alexithymia, narcissism, and borderline personality trait) ($F = 122.259$ and $p < 0.01$) so that the score of borderline personality trait in girls who attempted suicide is significantly higher than normal girls.

Also, the score of alexithymia in normal girls was significantly lower than in girls who attempted suicide. The results of this hypothesis are in line with the results of studies conducted by Raymond (1987), Chiason (2002), Estorn (2005), Loken et al. (2009), Jeffer et al. (2010), Skinner and Craft (2012) and Cogan (2011), Soler et al. (2015), Daimov et al. (2017), Andrada et al. (2010), Soler et al. (2012), Jaguem Salvar et al. (2012), Melanie et al. (2012), Ahmad Karbalaei et al. (2012), Christophe Korger et al. (2018). In explaining this hypothesis, it can be stated that studies suggest that suicide attempt is related to the level of borderline personality disorder traits. A borderline personality disorder is characterized by symptoms such as emotional instability, disturbed relationships, anger management difficulties, impulsivity, suicidal tendencies, and self-harming behaviors, which are manifestations of specific problems in girls attempting suicide. Alexithymia, difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in describing feelings, and externally oriented thinking of girls have led to suicide in some way. Inability to describe feelings or convey thoughts has been particularly associated with suicide in girls.

Conclusion

There is a significant difference between alexithymia (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in expressing feelings, and externally oriented thinking) in girls who attempt suicide and normal girls in Ilam. The results of this hypothesis after analysis showed that there is a significant difference between girls who attempt suicide and normal girls at least in one of the components of alexithymia (difficulty in identification of feelings, difficulty in expressing feelings, and externally oriented thinking) ($F = 26.407$ and $p < 0.01$). The results of this research are in line with the results of studies conducted by Esmaili, Asadnia, Isazadeh, Sardari, Isazadegan, Ansari (2013), Hadizadeh and Jafari (2013), Saadatjoo, Rezvani, Tabiee, Oudi (2012), Nowruzi (2011) and Javaheri et al. (2010).

There is a significant difference between borderline personality traits (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms) in girls who attempt suicide and normal girls in Ilam. Based on the results, there is a significant difference between at least one of the components of borderline personality traits (hopelessness, impulsivity, and paranoid symptoms) among girls who attempt suicide and normal girls ($F = 96.707$ and $p < 0.01$). The results of this hypothesis are consistent with the results of studies conducted by Berman (2012) and Qashqai and Naziri and Farnam (2014).

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflict of interest

None.

Financial support

None.

Ethics statement

None

References

- Mohammadzadeh, A, Goodarzi, MA, Taghavi, SM, Mollazadeh, J (2015), Examining the Factor Structure, Validity, Reliability, and Standardization of Borderline Personality Scale in Shiraz University Students, Quarterly Journal of Mental Health Principles, Volume 7, Issue 27, pp. 34
- Valikhani, A and Firoozshahi, A (2015). Predicting Suicidal Thoughts Based on Borderline Personality Components, Quarterly Journal of Thought and Behavior in Clinical Psychology - Volume 10, Issue 37, pp. 23
- Clarkin, J. F., Leavy, K.N., Kenneth, O. F., Lenzenweger, M.F. (2016). Evaluating Three treatments for borderline personality disorder. Am J Psychiatry, V.164:922-928
- Paris, J.(2016). Borderline Personality Disorder what is it, what is causes it, and How can we treat it.Canda Leading Medical Journal, V.172(12)
- Porcelli,P., Bagby,R.M., Taylor,G.J., Decarne, M. & Toderello , O. (2013) . Alexithymia as a predictor of treatment outcome in patients With FGIO. Psychosomatic Medicine, 65,911-918
- Raskin, R.N, & Hall, C.S (1998).The narcissistic personality inventory :Alternative From Reliability and further evidence of construct validity. Journal of Personality Assessment,45,159-16.