The Effect of Early Maladaptive Schemas on Self-Handicapping: The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem Instability

1. Majid Ghaffari[*], 2. Hoda Abbaszadeh

1. Corresponding author: Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran
Email: m.qaffari@umz.ac.ir

2. MA in educational psychology, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran. Email: abbaszadeh_hoda@yahoo.com

Abstract

The aim of the study was to test the mediating role of self-esteem instability on the relationship between early maladaptive schemas, and self-handicapping components. The research method was a correlational design. The participants were 309 female students from University of Mazandaran, were selected by multi-stage clustered sampling. They completed the demographic form, Self-Handicapping Scale, Instability of Self-Esteem Scale, and Early Maladaptive Schemas S.F. Questionnaires. Results from path analysis showed that the model fitted the data well, and unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness, failure, and defectiveness/ shame schemas through the mediating role of instability of self-esteem, had positive and significant effect on claimed and behavioral self-handicapping. Accordingly, it could be concluded that unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness, failure, and defectiveness/shame schemas can predict self-handicapping. These results by clarifying the mediating role, can be used to design counseling and therapeutic programs for students.

Keywords: Early maladaptive schemas, instability of self-esteem, self-handicapping

Introduction

Self-handicapping is a prevention strategy which is used by the self-handicapping person to create some barriers in order to self-assess, so that he can attribute his potential failure to those barriers and keep his reputation (Wusik and Axsom, 2016). There is a difference between behavioral self-handicapping and claimed self-handicapping (Clarke and MacCann, 2016). In the framework of current study, according to the theoretical conceptualization of a variety of early maladaptive schemas (Young, Klosko, and Weishaar, 2011), unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness, failure, and defectiveness/shame schemas are anticipated as self-handicapping predictors. On the other hand, longitudinal studies show that people with self-esteem instability (SEI) tend to show self-handicapping behaviors. People with SEI, pay more attention to threatening aspects and unpleasant interpersonal events and this threatening feeling results in the occurrence of self-handicapping behavior (Arab Mohebi Shahrabi et al., 2017). According to Howard's report (2017), unstable self-esteem is described as a tendency to show instability and viability in self-feelings during various times. Magro et al., (2018) and Daemi and Janbozorgi (2012), have found out that the amount of SEI is more prevalent in children whose parents are highly critical and use guilt, negative problem-solving styles, and emotional deprivation to control the child. The evolving root of early maladaptive schemas lies in the traumatic experiences of childhood and usually comes from the family (Young et al., 2011). Therefore, in the present study, the hypothesis of the mediating role of the unstable self-esteem in relationship between the unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness, failure, and defectiveness/shame schemas and self-handicapping components, was tested.

Method

In this correlational study, 309 female students were selected by multi-stage clustered sampling from University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran, in the academic year of 2016-2017. Before the administration of the instruments, the participants received a brief introduction about the psychological nature of the research, and ethical requirements for confidentiality.

Instruments

The Self-Handicapping Scale (SHS): This scale was developed by Jones and Rhodewalt (1982). In the present study, construct validity of the SHS was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis,and internal consistency coefficient by Cronbach's α, 0.77.

The Instability of Self-Esteem Scale (ISES): This scale was developed by Chabrol, et al. (2006). Azadi, et al. (2013) investigated the psychometric (α = 0.62, test-retest = 0.87) of the ISES in Iranian population. The of the ISES, in this study was reasonable (α = 0.83).

The Early Maladaptive Schemas Questionnaire–Short Form: This questionnaire was developed by Young (1998). In the present study, construct validity of this questionnaire was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis, the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach's alpha for defectiveness/shame, failure, and unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness schemas, were 0.71, 0.78, and 0.83, respectively.

Data analysis- The model tested through path analysis using Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation and bootstrap procedure (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Relative chi-square statistic (χ^2/DF), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used to investigate the fit indices (Byrne, 2010). Data analyses was performed using SPSS 22.0, and AMOS 20.0.

Results

The age mean of the participants was 21.19 (*SD* = 3.14) years. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, and the correlation matrix between the model variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of the model variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Defectiveness/blame	1					
Failure	0.48**	1				
Unrelenting standards	0.19**	0.14**	1			
Instability of self-esteem	0.35**	0.44**	0.23**	1		
Claimed self-handicapping	0.29**	0.25**	0.50**	0.49**	1	
Behavioral self-handicapping	0.35**	0.32**	0.37**	0.56**	0.85**	1
M	8.44	8.86	18.75	10.14	58.18	60.44
SD	3.78	3.96	5.18	2.77	9.83	11.33

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; $N = 309$

As shown in Table 1, there were significant and positive correlations between all variables of the model. Results from path analysis showed that the proposed model fitted the data well and the fit indices were reasonable (Byrne, 2010). Since d^2 values were not distinctively apart, the multivariate outliers were not a problem. Figure 1, shows standardized direct effect coefficients. As shown in figure 1, defectiveness/blame ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.03$), failure ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$), and unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.02$), has positive direct effect on instability of self-esteem. Unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness, has positive direct effect on behavioral self-handicapping ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), and claimed self-handicapping ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$). Instability of self-esteem has positive direct effect on behavioral self-handicapping ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), and claimed self-handicapping ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$). Table 2, shows standardized indirect and total effect coefficients.
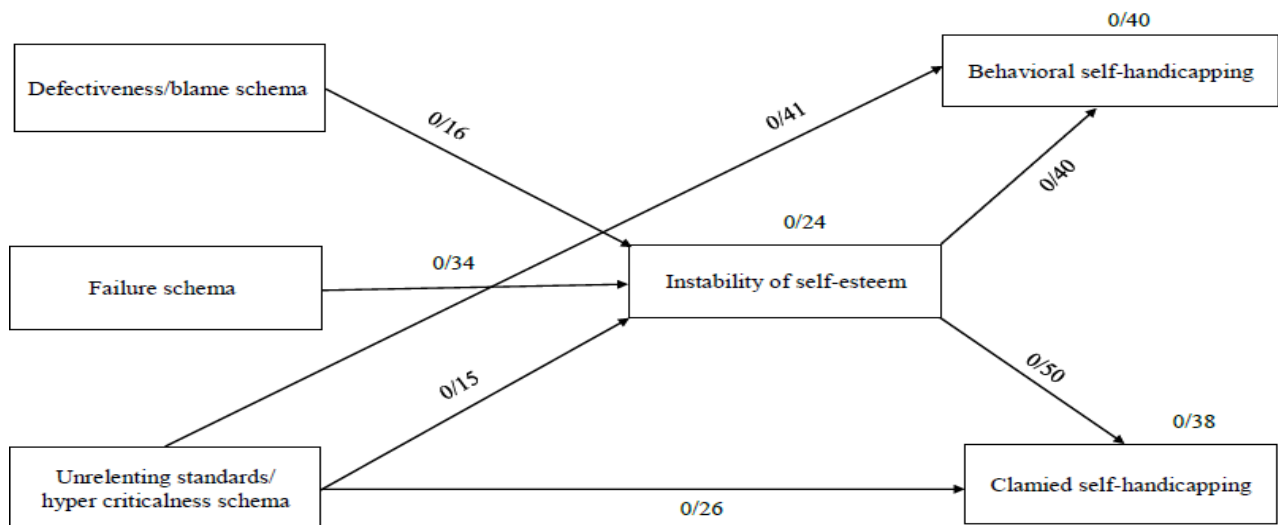
Figure 1. Standardized direct effect coefficients and squared multiple correlations
Note: $\chi^2/\text{DF} = 1.88$, $p < 0.011$, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.067

Table 2. The standardized indirect and total effect coefficients of the model (BC 95%)

Variable		Standardized indirect effect	Standardized total effect
Predictive	**Criterion**		
Unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness	Instability of self-esteem		0.15
Unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness	Claimed self-handicapping	0.07 (CI: .009-.14, $p < .03$)	0.33
Unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness	Behavioral self-handicapping	0.06 (CI: .008-.11, $p < .02$)	0.47
Failure	Instability of self-esteem		0.34
Failure	Claimed self-handicapping	0.17 (CI: .10-.25, $p < .001$)	0.17
Failure	Behavioral self-handicapping	0.13 (CI: .07-.20, $p < .001$)	0.14
Defectiveness/blame	Instability of self-esteem		0.16
Defectiveness/blame	Claimed self-handicapping	0.08 (CI: .02-.16, $p < .01$)	0.08
Defectiveness/blame	Behavioral self-handicapping	0.06 (CI: .01-.13, $p < .03$)	0.06
Instability of self-esteem	Claimed self-handicapping		0.50
Instability of self-esteem	Behavioral self-handicapping		0.40

According to the findings presented in table 2, the mediator role of instability of self-esteem on the relationship between defectiveness/blame, failure, and unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness maladaptive schemas and self-handicapping was confirmed.

Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, the research hypothesis was confirmed. In explaining the effect of mentioned maladaptive schemas on self-handicapping, fear of failure, and fear of being assessed can be mentioned as fundamental factors of self-handicapping. Also, the findings of this study were in line with research on the relationship between self-esteem instability and self-handicapping (Arab Mohebbi -Shahrabi et al., 2016). According to the previous studies, people with self-esteem instability often have poor self-concept. They tend to focus on the threatening aspects of the situations and unpleasant interpersonal events. They are more sensitive towards assessment feedback and are more concerned about the way they present themselves. So, it is not surprising for them to use self-handicapping in order to protect their self-esteem. The effect of unrelenting standards/hyper criticalness, failure, and defectiveness/shame maladaptive schemas on instability of self-esteem is consistent with the findings of Magro et al. (2018). Statistical population and self-report measures were the limitations of this study. No causal relationships can be implied due to the correlational nature of this study. It is recommended to educate parents and

families about the process of formation of early maladaptive schemas in children among family and its negative consequences.

References

Arab Mohebi Shahrabi, A., Pakdaman, S., and Heidari, M. (2017). The relationship between self handicapping and unstable self-esteem: The mediating role of fear of negative evaluation. *Developmental Psychology: Iranian Psychologists,* 13(50): 143-155. (Text in Persian)

Azadi, E., Fathabadi, J., and Heydari, M. (2013). The relation of self-esteem instability and fear of negative evaluation with self-handicapping in adolescent students. *Educational Psychology,* 29(9): 23-46. (Text in Persian)

Byrne, B. M. (2010). *Structural equation modeling with AMOS (2nd ed.).* New York: Routledge.

Clarke, I. E., and MacCann, C. (2016). Internal and external aspects of self-handicapping reflect the distinction between motivation and behaviors: Evidence from Self-Handicapping Scale. *Personality and Individual Differences, 100,* 6-11. doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.03.080

Chabrol, H., Rousseau, A., and Callahan, S. (2006). Preliminary results of a scale assessing instability of self-esteem. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science, 38*(2): 136-141.

Daemi, F., and Janbozorgi, M. (2011). The effect of parenting style and early maladaptive schemas on children's self-esteem. *Journal of Behavioral Sciences,* 5(2): 165-172. (Text in Persian)

Howard, M. C. (2017). Measuring self-esteem instability through a single-administration scale: Still a fruitless endeavor? *Personality and Individual Differences,* 104, 522-532. doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.09.011

Jones, E. E., & Rhodewalt, F. (1982). The Self-handicapping Scale. Salt Lake City, UT: Department of Psychology, University of Utah.

Magro, S. W., Utesch, T., Dreikamper, D., & Wagner, J. (2018). Self-esteem development in middle childhood: Support for sciometer theory. *International Journal of Behavioral Development,* 1-10.

Pauwels, E., Dierckx, E., Smits, D., Janssen, R., & Cleas, L. (2018). Validation of the Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form in a Flemish community sample. *Psychologia Belgica,* 58(1): 34-50.

Preacher, K. J., and Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods,* 40(3): 879-891.

Wusik, M. F., and Axsom, D. (2016). Socially positive behaviors as self-handicapping. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology,* 35(6): 494-509.

Young, J. E. (1998). *Young Schema Questionnaire Short Form* (1st ed.). New York: Cognitive Therapy Center.

Young, J. E., Klosko, J. S., and Weishaar, M. E. (2011). Schema therapy: A practitioners Guide. New York: The Guilford press.