

Original Article

The Role of Hardiness and Moral Intelligence in Predicting the Anxiety of Corona Disease in Students

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The present study investigated the role of hardiness and moral intelligence in Corona disease anxiety in middle school male students of Khalkhal City.

Materials and Methods: This research was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population was all male secondary school students of Khalkhal City in the academic year 2019-2020, and a sample of 265 students was selected using the cluster random sampling method. Alipour et al.'s Corona Disease Anxiety Scale, Lennick and Keil's Moral Intelligence Questionnaire, and Kobasa's Hardiness Scale were used to collect data. The data were analyzed using the Pearson correlation coefficient and Multiple regression analysis in SPSS software version 26.

Results: The findings showed that there is an inverse and significant relationship between predictors of hardiness ($r=-.321$) and moral intelligence ($r=-.668$) with the criterion variable of Corona disease anxiety ($P<0.001$). Also, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that the predictor variables of hardiness and moral intelligence explained a total of 0.56 of the changes in the anxiety variable of Corona disease.

Conclusion: In conclusion, increasing students' resilience and moral intelligence could reduce their anxiety about coronary disease. According to the results of the research, we can state that teachers and managers of educational centers can hold workshops focusing on teaching hardiness and moral intelligence in order to reduce anxiety in these people and improve their level of mental health.

Keywords: Hardiness, Moral intelligence, Anxiety, Corona disease, Students

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Introduction

School closures and home quarantines due to the spread of infectious and contagious diseases, such as COVID-19, could affect the children and adolescents' physical and mental health (1). Research shows that when children and young people are away at weekends or during the summer holidays, they are less physically active, their sleep patterns are disturbed, and they eat improperly. This issue is intensified when children are confined at home and do not have outdoor activities. On the other hand, the emergence of stressful stimuli at home, such as long-term fear of contracting COVID-19, unpleasant thoughts, low communication with classmates, friends, and teachers, lack of suitable space at home, and in some cases, financial and economic problems of parents can have effects, with a lasting impact on the mental health of children and adolescents (2). The noteworthy point is that according to research findings, the average post-traumatic stress index in quarantined children is four times that of non-quarantined children. Therefore, children who are isolated or quarantined due to the current disease conditions (COVID-19) will show more severe psychological symptoms such as acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder, and bereavement. According to reports, 19% of these children show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (3).

Despite the positive consequences, the implementation of health policies has had a negative psychological impact on society. Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors is the anxiety related to the coronavirus disease. Much research focuses on the anxiety of patients; however, the truth is that during an epidemic of a disease like Corona, the fear of disease and the fear of death, along with the confusion of daily tasks, cause healthy people to suffer from disease anxiety, too (4). Anxiety about COVID-19 is common and seems to be due to the unknown and creating cognitive ambiguity in people about this virus in most cases. The fear of the unknown causes a decrease in the perception of safety in humans, which has always been anxiety-provoking for humans. In the case of Corona, the lack of scientific information also aggravates this anxiety (5). At this time, people are looking for more knowledge to relieve their anxiety.

Anxiety can make people unable to distinguish between true and false, and hence, they may be exposed to false news (6). Stress and anxiety can weaken the body's immune system and make it vulnerable to diseases, including the coronavirus (7).

One of the factors that affect anxiety about the Corona disease is the concept of hardiness. Hardiness refers to people who are more resistant to stress and less prone to illness than most people (8). Hardiness as a personality trait is a unique and active way of understanding a person's relationship with others, which consists of three components: challenge, control, and commitment (9). On the other hand, hardiness is defined as a personality trait that prevents the adverse effects of stress on various areas of health. As a combination of thinking, emotions, and behavior, this attribute helps people move in the direction of a dynamic life and enriches the moments of their lives. Hardiness people have a significant sense of curiosity and search and tend to think about their life as an interesting phenomenon and give meaning to it (10). Different experimental backgrounds have been proposed regarding the anxiety of coronadisease and hardiness. The results of Reknes *et al.*'s research (11) showed that hardiness had a negative and significant relationship with anxiety. Another study reported that anxiety and physical symptoms had a negative significant relationship with hardiness (12).

Moral intelligence is another factor affecting the anxiety of Corona disease. Moral intelligence includes seven essential principles: sympathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness (13). From the point of view of some other experts, the structure of moral intelligence includes four main dimensions, including honesty, responsibility, forgiveness, and compassion, with ten sub-sets of competence, including cohesion, honesty, courage, secrecy, fulfillment of individual obligations, self-control, self-centeredness, helping others, caring from others, understanding the feelings of others, and understanding one's spiritual needs (14). Regarding Corona disease and moral intelligence, Gholami, Arezogar, and Abedini (15) have investigated the relationship between motivational beliefs and moral intelligence with anxiety among female students of the first secondary level in Gorgan City. The findings of the research showed that there is an inverse relationship

between moral intelligence and anxiety in female students of the first secondary level. Among the moral intelligence, mindfulness, and motivational beliefs with the anxiety of female students of the first secondary level as predictor variables, only honesty, motivational beliefs, admitting mistakes, forgiving others and moral intelligence with the anxiety of female students of the first secondary level are the predictor variables (15).

The study of the related backgrounds of the research (11, 12, 15) shows that in investigating the role of hardiness and moral intelligence in the anxiety of Corona disease in middle school male students of Khalkhal City, despite the high importance of the variables, there is a research gap; therefore, conducting this study is novel and has an innovative aspect. According to the presented materials, this research attempted to answer the question: "Are hardiness and moral intelligence related to anxiety of Corona disease, and are these variables able to predict anxiety of Corona disease in students?"

Methods

The research method was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population of the present study was all the male secondary school students of Khalkhal City in the second academic semester of 2019-2020. A sample of 265 students was selected using the cluster random sampling method. The study sample was from the above statistical population that participated in the research by stratified random sampling according to the volume of the main areas of study.

The entry criteria included the parents' informed consent for their child's participation in the research, the willingness of the students to participate in the study, and the absence of mental disorders in the participants. The exclusion criteria included completing the questionnaires incompletely, declaring non-satisfaction to continue cooperation in the study, and simultaneous participation of students in educational programs or psychological interventions at school. To carry out this research, the researcher received a letter of introduction from the Khalkhal City Education Department, obtained permission from the Research and Security Department of the Ardabil General Directorate of Education, and went to the

Khalkhal City Education Department after making the necessary arrangements. The second-level secondary school in Khalkhal was referred, and a sample of 265 students was selected from the schools and classes concerned using the random cluster sampling method. After explaining the research purpose to the students, the questionnaires were given to them. Then, the collected data were analyzed using SPSS 22 software. The subjects participated in the research voluntarily and with the knowledge of the research conditions. To comply with research ethics, in addition to fully explaining the research process, students were assured that their information would remain confidential.

Materials

1. Corona disease anxiety scale

This questionnaire was developed by Alipour et al. (16) during the Corona disease epidemic. This scale has 18 items scored based on a 5-point Likert scale. There are two factors in this questionnaire: mental and physical symptoms. Items 1 to 9 assess psychological symptoms, and items 10 to 18 evaluate physical symptoms. This questionnaire is scored on a 5-point Likert scale (never=1, rarely=2, sometimes = 3, most of the time = 4, and always = 5). Therefore, the maximum and minimum score that people get in this questionnaire is between 18 and 90. High scores on this scale indicate a higher level of anxiety in people. Its reliability was confirmed in Alipour et al.'s research (16) with Cronbach's alpha value of 0.92. Also, its validity was confirmed by using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (16).

2. Questionnaire of moral intelligence

In this research, the degree of moral intelligence is measured in three components: honesty, forgiveness, and compassion, using a 20-item questionnaire. Therefore, the highest and lowest score that respondents get in this questionnaire is between 20 and 100. Four items belong to the component of forgiveness, 12 items belong to honesty, and four items belong to compassion. The questionnaire has been validated by Lennick and Kielin (14). This questionnaire has been validated in Ghermezi et al.'s research (17). The face and content validity of the scale has been established, and the alpha values for the subscales are 0.77, 0.81,

and 0.70, respectively, and 0.83 for the whole questionnaire (17).

3. Hardiness Scale

Kobasa, Maddi, and Barton developed this scale. The Personal Views Background Test is a questionnaire used to measure psychological toughness. This test consists of 50 items, and the subject must determine the correctness or incorrectness of the sentences with a 4-point scale. The number zero indicates that the sentence is not true at all, and the number three shows that the particular sentence is correct from the subject's point of view. This test consists of three subscales, fighting, commitment, and control, each with 17, 16, and 17 items, respectively. In Skau's (18) research on the validity of the questionnaire, the relationship between this questionnaire and the pathological subscales of the Minnesota Multifaceted Questionnaire was between 0.16 and 0.53. In Basharat's research (19), between the scores of this questionnaire and the scales of psychological well-being and perfectionism, there was a positive and significant correlation of 0.77 to 0.88, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each of the commitment, control, and challenge subscales were 0.65, 0.71, and 0.78, respectively. The method of collecting data was that after obtaining permission from the university and receiving a letter of introduction from the Department of Education of Khalkhal City, as well as obtaining permission from the Research and Protection Department of the General Directorate of Education in Ardabil, we went to the education departments of Khalkhal city. Making the necessary arrangements, we went to the secondary schools in Khalkhal, and after explaining the objectives of the research to the administrators, teachers, and students, the questionnaires were given to the students. The subjects were assured that the results would remain confidential. Finally, the participants completed the scales with informed consent. After completing the questionnaires, the data were collected and analyzed using SPSS 26 software.

Results

In this study, 265 students participated. The mean and standard deviation of the participant's age were 16.66

and 0.88, respectively. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of parents' education levels separately. Table 2 represents the mean and standard deviation of the variables of Corona anxiety (61.77 & 14.79), hardiness (61.44 & 13.91), and moral intelligence (57.88 & 11.93).

Based on the significance level of the normality test of the variables in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, it is greater than ($P > 0.05$), so we can say with 95% confidence that the distribution of the variables is normal. Therefore, parametric tests were used to test the corresponding hypothesis.

The research findings in Table 2 indicate a negative and significant correlation between corona anxiety and hardiness, subscales of hardiness, moral intelligence, and moral intelligence ($P < 0.001$). Therefore, the research hypothesis regarding the role of hardiness and moral intelligence in students' corona anxiety is confirmed. The results of the multiple regression test in Table 3 indicate that the predictor variables (hardiness and its subscales and moral intelligence and its subscales) are able to predict the corona anxiety of the investigated people in a combined way ($P > 0.001$, $F = 0.00$). Also, the value of the multiple regression coefficients indicates that the predictor variables can predict 56% of the changes related to the anxiety of the people under investigation. To assess the predictive power of each predictor variable, the standardized regression coefficients for the components of hardiness and moral intelligence at work are presented in Table 4. The standardized regression coefficients for the hardiness ($P < 0.001$, $\beta = -0.215$) and subscales of control ($P < 0.001$, $\beta = -0.20$), challenge ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.17$), commitment ($P < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.21$), and moral intelligence ($P < 0.001$, $\beta = -0.630$); subscales of forgiveness ($P < 0.001$, $\beta = -0.33$), honesty ($P < 0.001$, $\beta = -0.25$), and compassion ($P < 0.001$, $\beta = -0.17$) are shown in Table 4. They predict a negative and significant type of anxiety in the people under investigation. Also, the multiple regression coefficients indicate that the subscales of moral intelligence and its total score have a relatively higher contribution in predicting the anxiety of the people under investigation. Finally, the main hypothesis of the current research is confirmed, i.e., the linear combination of hardiness and moral intelligence significantly predicts the corona anxiety of the surveyed people.

Table 1. Demographic indicators in the study group.

Variables		Mean	Standard Deviation
Age		16.66	0.88
variables		Frequency	percentage
Father's education level	cycle	44	16.60
	Diploma	40	15
	Bachelor and above	181	68.30
	Total	265	100
Education level of the mother	cycle	53	20.00
	Diploma	60	22.60
	Bachelor and above	152	57.40
	Total	265	100

Table 2. Descriptive index of research variables, Pearson correlation test results for research variables

Variable		Corona anxiety	M	SD
Moral intelligence	Total score	-0.67**	57.88	11.93
	forgiveness	-0.21**	11.74	2.96
	honesty	-0.60**	34.21	8.64
	compassion	-0.54**	11.92	3.96
Hardiness	Total score	-0.668 **	61.44	13.91
	control	-0.28**	20.35	5.31
	challenge	-0.18*	20.37	5.96
	commitment	-0.32**	20.72	6.74
Corona anxiety		1	61.77	14.79

*p<0.05 & **p<0.01

Table 3. Results of multiple regression analysis of research variables

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F	Sig	R	R ²
Regression	29156.84	6	4859.47	123.649	0.001	0.71	0.505
Remaining	28627.228	258	110.96				
Total	57784.415	264					

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis indicators

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variables	B	SEB	β	t	Sig
Corona Anxiety	Hardiness	0.215-	0.048	0.202-	4.485-	0.001
	control	-0.56	0.16	-0.20	-3.44	0.001
	challenge	-0.28	0.12	-0.17	2.53	0.05
	commitment	-0.24	0.10	-0.21	2.01	0.05
	Moral intelligence	0.780-	0.056	0.630-	13.953-	0.001
	forgiveness	-.63	0.28	-0.33	3.43-	0.001
	honesty	0.59-	0.24	0.25-	2.85-	0.001
	compassion	-0.61	0.26	-0.17	-3.40	0.001

Discussion

The present study was conducted to determine the role of hardiness and moral intelligence in the coronavirus anxiety of students. Based on the obtained results, there is a negative and significant relationship between hardiness and students' Corona anxiety, meaning that with the increase of hardiness in students, their anxiety of Corona decreases. The results of this finding are in line with the research

results of Reknes et al. (11) and Kovács and Borcsa (12). The results of Reknes et al.'s research (11) showed that hardiness had a negative and significant relationship with anxiety. In another study, Kovács and Borcsa (12) reported that anxiety and physical symptoms had a negative and significant relationship with hardiness.

In explaining this finding, it can be said that the term "hardiness" is used for people who are more resistant to mental pressure and are less prone to disease than other people. Hardiness is considered a personality trait, a

unique and active way of understanding a person's relationship with others. People with hardiness have a clear sense of direction, an active approach in stressful situations, and a sense of trust and control that reduce the severity of possible threats and dangers, especially in situations such as anxiety caused by coronavirus (20). The set of these features keeps a person safe despite being exposed to stressful factors. As a result, hardy people have a high ability to deal with stressful factors. A hardy person has a learning mode in dealing with issues and engages with divergent thoughts, which is essential for creativity, and considers different priorities in evaluating the situation. This attitude is the opposite of convergent (one-dimensional) thinking, which is one of the main characteristics of depressed people. To assess the predictive power of each of the predictor variables, the standardized regression coefficients for the components of hardiness and moral intelligence at work are presented separately in Table 4. Based on these findings, we can conclude that students who show hardiness compared to those who do not are less vulnerable to disease due to stressful life conditions (21,22,23). This variable consists of three components: challenge, control, and commitment. The role and importance of hardiness as a protective personality trait against various pressures have been shown in numerous studies. There are theories, assumptions, and imaginations about how this important feature is formed. Also, students with a high degree of hardiness are resistant to academic and environmental pressures (24). Therefore, the presence of hardiness in students reduces the anxiety about Corona disease in them.

Other results of the present study showed a negative and significant relationship between moral intelligence and students' corona anxiety. This finding is consistent with the Gholami *et al.*'s research (15). They have conducted research titled "Investigating the relationship between motivational beliefs and moral intelligence with the anxiety of female students of the first secondary level of Gorgan City." The findings of the research showed that there is an inverse relationship between moral intelligence and anxiety in female students of the first secondary level. Among the intelligence, mindfulness, and motivational beliefs with the anxiety of female students of the first

secondary level as predictor variables, only honesty, motivational beliefs, admitting mistakes, forgiving others, and moral intelligence with the anxiety of female students of the first secondary level are the predictor variables.

In explaining this hypothesis, moral intelligence can be defined as the capacity and ability to understand right from wrong, have strong moral beliefs, and behave in the right direction. Moral intelligence refers to the fact that moral principles are not inherited, but people learn to be good. Moral intelligence acts as a guide for behavior and helps us act intelligently and optimally (25). Many human behaviors are rooted in moral principles and values and are affected by them. People with moral intelligence always link their work with moral principles, which increases commitment and responsibility in individuals and improves individual and group efficiency (Flite and Harman, 26). Someone with moral intelligence is defined as having firm and strong moral beliefs and the ability to act on them so that the person behaves correctly and respectfully. Students who have not acquired moral intelligence for any reason are at serious risk, including Corona disease anxiety. Due to shaky conscience, weakness in restraining desires, underdevelopment of moral sensitivities, and wrongly guided beliefs, these students suffer moral and social backwardness to a great extent and become abnormal and unsuccessful characters in adulthood. Therefore, the most critical point in moral intelligence is that this intelligence is learnable, has no hereditary aspect, and is transmitted to children only through education, a chief part of which is learning in school. Therefore, the presence of moral intelligence in students who have the anxiety of Corona disease reduces their anxiety.

On the other hand, the results related to the subscales of moral intelligence, i.e., forgiveness, honesty, and compassion, also showed that all three variables have a negative and significant relationship with the anxiety of corona disease in students. By increasing the amount of forgiveness, truthfulness, and compassion in students, their anxiety about Corona will decrease. These results are consistent with some studies (27-31) and Perez *et al.*'s (32) in that the relationship between forgiveness and the anxiety of Corona disease is consistent. We can explain that forgiveness frees people from anger and guilt due to unconscious anger. In addition, the person

who forgives is freed from the subtle and unconscious control of the offender, and letting go of others means letting go of oneself.

Those who overlook the mistakes of others and forgive them are people who have a positive attitude about others and try to look at things in life with positive thinking; this can cause happiness and vitality in them and causes the formation of positive emotions and social solidarity and reduces negative psychological consequences such as anxiety. Also, the results of this study are consistent with the results of a study (33) regarding the relationship between honesty and the anxiety of Corona disease. Truthfulness means telling the truth by reality and without distortion or concealment. Being honest has many mental health benefits. Telling the truth creates trust, reduces stress and anxiety, increases self-esteem, and cultivates inner honesty in people. By telling the truth, an honest person shows he is trustworthy and respectable, which increases the feeling of self-worth and self-satisfaction and strengthens psychological structures, such as happiness, positive thinking, and resilience in people. This issue, in turn, reduces students' anxiety.

Finally, the findings of the current research are in line with the results of (34-37), and (38) regarding the relationship between compassion and the anxiety of corona disease. In explaining the finding of how compassion can influence anxiety, compassion-based treatment for Corona anxiety helps to prevent negative thoughts and negative emotions from entering the mind and to tolerate tensions without conflicting with negative experiences and thoughts. High compassion acts as a buffer against the negative effects of anxiety. People with high self-compassion are more willing to accept the role and responsibility in unwanted events and can ruminate on negative events less, as a result, they have less negative emotions, anxiety, and stress when facing their mistakes. Finally, self-compassion provides the necessary platform for the development of positivity.

The results can only be generalized to other geographical areas if the study is not limited to a specific geographical area of Khalkhal City. Using the cross-sectional method will not lead to the stability of the results. The existence of Corona conditions and the design of online questionnaires were also limitations of the present study. Considering the existing

limitations, it is suggested other tools, such as interviews, be used to collect more detailed data in future research. To make it possible to generalize the results, we also suggest that the study be conducted in other geographical areas. Also, considering the relationship between hardiness and moral intelligence with students' corona anxiety, we recommend that educational workshops be held for students to increase hardiness and moral intelligence to improve the general health of these people and increase their ability to deal with stressful and anxiety-provoking situations.

Conclusion

The results of the research showed that strictness and moral intelligence are related to the anxiety of Corona in students, and these two variables can predict the changes in the variable of anxiety of Corona in students. Therefore, it can be concluded that increasing strictness and moral intelligence among students will decrease their anxiety about Corona disease. We recommend that measures be taken in the training field to increase rigor and moral intelligence among students, thereby reducing their anxiety levels. Therefore, experts and people involved in the mental health of students are suggested to emphasize the role of hardiness and moral intelligence variables to reduce the level of anxiety of Corona.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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