

Romantic Relationship and Mental Health among Payame Noor University Students in East Azarbayjan

Ali Akbar Malekirad

Ph.D. in Cognitive Neuroscience, Department of Biology,
Payame Noor University, Iran

Aiatollah Fathi

Ph.D. student in Educational Psychology, Faculty of Educational and Psychology,
Tabriz University, Tabriz, Iran

Mehdi Aghapoor Bishak

Academic member, Payame Noor University, Iran

Fatemeh Azammofidi

MS student in Animal Biosystematics, Islamic Azad University (IAU),
Damghan Branch, Iran

Kobra Rahzani (Correspondence author)

K.rahzani@yahoo.com

Ph.D in Nursing, Department of Nursing and Midwifery,
Arak University of Medical Sciences, Arak, Iran

Abstract

Students are the most active population of our country. In all countries around the world and specially in our country, academic problems and psychological problems between students have a broad range. It seems that several factors are endangering their psychological health. With respect to importance of this subject, the aim of this study was surveying the mental health among girl and boy students with romantic relationship in comparison to non-romantic relationship. For this purpose, 400 undergraduate student (196 boys & 204 girls) completed the mental health (GHQ) and demographic questionnaire. The results of multivariate analysis of variance indicated that in the two subscales of mental health including somatic symptoms, and anxiety, the effect is significant, but in two other subscales including depression and social disfunction, the effect is not significant. Also, the effect of gender on mental health component is significant except for social disfunction. The effect of gender- romantic relationship interaction on mental health component is significant, too. With respect to the grading of items, we can conclude that the students with romantic relationship have grater somatic symptoms and anxiety. Therefore, the families and administrators should know the psychological circumstance of youths.

Keywords: mental health, romantic relationship, gender, interaction

Introduction

Students, particularly those in late adolescence and early adolescence and those who are fresh to the university can influence the activity that are causing variations in population because of the transitional nature of life. These factors can be combined with internal stimuli such as personality and beliefs that underlie the failure to difficulties and external factors such as stress and environmental problems. Excessive stress among students often cause academic failure,

unemployment, health problems, poor performance, dropout, and in some cases can lead to more severe mental disorders (Monk et al¹, 1999).

Mental health is defined as a relatively good compatibility mode, sense of well-being, prosperity, power and individual talents. The term is generally applied to someone having high levels of behavioral and emotional adaptation not merely someone who is not sick (Boldero² and Fallon³, 1995). In other words, mental health is absolute mental and social health not the absence of disease (Bananno et al⁴, 2007). Today's, positivism psychology approach oriented special attention to mental health and believes that they should have a good and healthy physical, social and psychological state. In terms of this approach, the component of mental health is an individual's ability to enjoy life (Bananno et al, 2007). Erich Fromm believes on normal human psychological characteristic that a person's mental health is greatly influenced by social cultures and is a social issue. If this attributes opportunity of prosperity and creativity to the people and they should be able to satisfy their psychological needs, they are mentally healthy, and are associated with other factors such as the fertilizing ability, creativity, and love not in order to satisfy one-way needs (Forum, 1359).

Kaplan and Sadock¹ (1993) has defined mental health as well. It means having a sense when the person comes into social interaction, feels the individual's sense of self. Hence, they are more focused on social activity about mental health.

Mental health is one of the fundamental variables of life, and affect all aspects of human life, and is one of the factors affecting the quality of life. Mental health is important not only for the individual but also for the community, because of the individual's mental health contribute with dynamism and vitality of the community. Therefore, investigation of factors influencing mental health are also essential. One of the factors that affect the mental health of adolescents and young adults in college are relationship with the opposite sex and how it is related (Muth², 2008).

During adolescence, friendship and intimacy with gay people is important in the early years because female and male coeval groups are formed, and the heart of their bonds of friendship with their peers in opposite sex buds and grows up. Thriving in connection with such romantic relationship with a non-gay individual starts and then gets married.

Culture and romance of the West is so common and widespread. It may be assumed that it dates back to long time ago and has been regarded as one of their cultures while this is a brief history of the culture. Before the beginning of the twentieth century, the boys and girls meet each other for marriage and talked several times with each other even before the girls are being allowed by their parents or relatives, for the boys who were suitable candidates were married (as cited in Golzari, 2006).

It seems that this phenomenon is partly influenced by the culture of the West like Freud and Erikson's thoughts that has influenced the psychological aspects and human sexuality, and believe that a healthy person should have an interest in the opposite sex who is a teenager and has the ability to communicate properly with. Freud believes sexual impulses of adolescence should be in a natural way than man grow psychologically and sexually (Freud¹, 1961).

Erickson² (1968) also describes the psychological - social processes. He insisted that the young man on stage is intimacy level vs. isolation. The greater intimacy appears to be with the opposite sex and those who are unable to maintain the intimacy being marginalized.

Relations between the sexes in Iran like other countries has a long history because it is related to human nature and tension between the two sexes. It seems that, due to cultural and religious issues in our country, social and personal injury of this type of communication is more than other countries, because the cultures of these types, media communications and other factors related to

this type of relationship is inevitable and the important point is that this kind of romantic or sexual relationships or relationships is being done secretly, without the knowledge of parents, and because of this damage, the risks are greater.

Street friendships and romantic arrangements among the Iranian youth is on the rise. For this, in the last three years, some researches were done in a number of high schools with about 8,000 students in Tehran, Qom and Gachsaran and 1300 girls who were living in student's dormitories in Tehran. 30-70 percent of respondents said they had a cordial relationship with the opposite sex and have romance dating. This is done because the friendship with the opposite sex is not allowed in Iran, where a culture that is rooted in faith, not only it is not useful for the Iranian young people trained in this field but also for parents, school officials and police without a certain degree of relationship such as friendship with the opposite sex of the people involved with various mental and physical abuse, and the friendship, which is being drawn to the quiet and secret contacts with suffering and anger and rebel against adults. As a result, it can influence adolescents, especially girls than all the moral and psychological damage (as cited in Gulzar, 2006).

Therefore, due to the importance of the threat and with regard to this point that in our country, majority of these relations between two sexes are being done secretly, the review of psychological factors are warranted between this two groups (Group holds a relationship sincerely with opposite sex and group not holding any relation with opposite sex)

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and Procedure

There were 196 male and 204 female undergraduate students at the University of payame Noor, who completed the mental health questioner (GHQ). The Japanese version of the GHQ-28 was used to assess the mental health status. The GHQ-28 has four subscales, each consisting of seven items. The items were scored using a Likert-type scoring system, i.e., 1, 2, 3, and 4. The sum of the scores can be interpreted as an indicator of the severity of psychological distress.

The questionnaire has four subscales including somatic complaints, anxiety – in-somnia, social dysfunction, and major depression. The results for general health questionnaire (GHQ 28) were obtained by adding responses on all the items and summing them up. A higher score implies more mental health problems in the form of depression, anxiety, somatic complaints or social dysfunction (Suda, Nakayama and Morimoto, 2007). Finally, to understand the romantic relationship, self-reported demographic questioner where used.

3. Result and Discussion

MANOVA was used to compare the romantic relationship status (with romantic relationship or non-romantic relationship) means of students for the four subscales of GHQ including depression, anxiety, somatic complaints, and social dysfunction. The results revealed a significant main effect of the manipulation of romantic relationship at an alpha of .01, Wilks' Lambda =.94, $F(4, 396) = 5.86$, $p = .001$. Table 1 below shows that anxiety and somatic complaints is significant in romantic relationship. According to mean table, the means for Anxiety and Somatic complaints is higher in students with romantic relationship.

Table 1. The Multivariate Analysis of romantic relationship in general health

variable	With romantic relationship		Non romantic relationship		F	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD		
Somatic complaints	6.79	4.32	5.44	3.72	10.94	.001
Anxiety	7.38	4.38	5.80	3.78	14.78	.001
Social dysfunction	7.05	3.11	7.04	3.05	1.05	.235
Depression	5.74	5.28	4.95	4.69	2.45	.118

Conclusion

The most critical developmental stages are adolescence and youths that come along with the development of social and romantic relationships. In particular, they are the most important transition periods in life, which comes with the transition from school to college, the family to social and community friends networks.

Massive changes in the mental, moral, physical and puberty occur at this stage. It is here that the search for the biological and psychosocial issues tends to be in the opposite sex relationship together on behalf of girls and young boys. If these relationships pass the correct path to our mental health over the community, it can bring social support, self-esteem to people and most importantly, prepare young people for adult relationships and their sincerity in adulthood growth (Collins, 2003).

Brace White¹ et al (2010), in their research, concluded that students, who are involved in romantic relationships along with a commitment to the opposite side, enjoyment, welfare, and mental health more than students who are not involved in these relationships.

Although the romantic relationship teens and young adults can cause emotional and social performance improvements, they can be used as a source of stress as well. Unfavorable romantic relationships at this time can be used as a predictor of emotional properties such as anxiety, nervousness, depression and jealousy. This point is particularly important among girls, because girls are prone to these properties more than boys in romantic relationships (Davila², Steinberg³, Kachadourian⁴, Cobb⁵, Fincham⁶ 2004).

Alongside the benefits that psychologists have for friendship with the opposite sex, many of them have expressed the pests and the losses in this kind of relationship including emotional disorders and negative impressions of their appearance, especially in those establishing the short-term relations, hiding and distorting the identity, incidence of jealousy, alcohol and drug consumption trends, drop, unwanted pregnancy, the increase of violence in romantic appointments, catching sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS, sexual assaults or rapes in the familiar romantic appointments, get down to early marriages, in contrast to the misdemeanor and committing severe behavioral and family conflicts (Kenny, 1997, Hills, 1999, Davis and Windel, 2000, Lee Hei, 1998, Bamister, 2001, James, 2002, Woong, 2003, Otavebrijes, 2004, as cited in Golzari, 2006).

Especially, in our country, these relationships have social and ethical restrictions due to cultural reasons, and this is usually done in the form of covert relations and the issue caused reduplication of damage of these relations in our country, too. Previous investigations have concluded that if there is a commitment and attachment in romantic relationships between boys and

girls, it can bring less personal health for both sides together. Also, studies have shown that covert relationship leads to low self-esteem and lack of mental health syndrome. (Lehmiller¹, 2009)

Foster² and Campbell³ (2005) have concluded that keeping secret romantic relationships with the opposite sex has negative effects on mental health of individuals.

The result of the present research also suggests that students having a romantic relationship with the opposite sex have physical symptoms of anxiety, morbid-more and less overall mental health. As it was already mentioned, the romantic relationship among students with less social support in the community and their concerns of whether parents or other members of society might be aware of these relationships can increase depression and anxiety and risk their mental health. The results of this study is in congruent with the research of Joyner⁴ and- Udry⁵ (2000), Steinberg⁶ and Davila (2006), Doyle⁷ et al (2003), La-Greca⁸ and Harrison⁹ (2005), and Davila¹⁰ et al (2006).

Like this study, Aghapour et al (2010) studied the identity base in students with romantic relationship and concluded that students who have a romantic relationship with the opposite sex with students who do not have a romantic relationship have the comparison of disturbed and confused identity. Since our community has less young people in adolescence and even their identity cannot be formed, it seems to be the confusion of identity that can threaten the mental health of students.

Results also showed that there is a significant difference between girls and boys in terms of the components of the mental health of a student, except in social functioning and this difference is in favor of the girls, which means that female student have less mental health than male students .

The results are in concurrent with Khorram Abadi (2010), in which he concluded that more women than men suspected to have mental disorder. Mus (2008) also stated that the gender differences in mental health can be caused by genetic differences, personality, social support and their properties. Also, a romantic relationship interaction with the opposite sex and gender, as well as in all the components of the mental health is significant. By comparing the means, it can be concluded that the female students who have romantic relationship with the opposite sex towards male students and female students who did not have a romantic relationship with opposite sex have higher gain scores. History of research shows that girls and women are more prone to depression and anxiety in terms of cognitive environment. In this regard, Wenzel¹ et al. (2005), Altemus² (2006), and Pilar³ (2006) asserted that women's mental health in traumatic situations is more threatening. The results of the research indicates this fact that students who begin to create romantic relationships with the opposite sex, they may suffer from psychological problems.

References

Altemus, M. (2006). Sex differences in depression and anxiety disorders: Potential biological determinants. *Hormones and Behavior*. 50 (4), 534-538.

Bananno, G. A., Galea, S., Bucchiareli, A. & Vlahov, D. (2007). What Predicts Psychological Resilience After Disaster? The role of demographics, resources and life stress. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 75 (5), 671-682

Braithwaite, R. Delevi R., and Fincham, D.(2010). Romantic relationships and the physical and mental health of college students. *Personal Relationships*, 17, 1-12.

Boldero, J., Fallon, B. (1995). Adolescent Help- seeking: what do they get for and from whom. *Journal of Adolescence*. 18, 193-202

Collins, W.A. (2003). More than myth: The developmental significance of romantic relationships during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 13, 1-24.

Davila, J., Steinberg, S.J., Kachadourian, L., Cobb, R., & Fincham, F. (2004). Romantic involvement and depressive symptoms in early and late adolescence: The role of preoccupied relational style. *Personal Relationships*, 11, 161-178.

Davila, J., Steinberg, S. J., Ramsay, M., Stroud, C. B., Starr, L., & Yoneda, A. (2006). Defining and measuring romantic competence in early adolescence: The Romantic Competence Interview. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, San Francisco, CA.

Doyle, A. B., Brendgen, M., Markiewicz, D., Kamkar, K. (2003). Family relationships as moderators of the association between romantic relationships and adjustment in early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 23, 316-340.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth, and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Foster, C. A., & Campbell, W. K. (2005). The adversity of secret relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 12, 125-143.

Freud, S. (1961). The future of an illusion. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 21, pp. 1-56). London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis. (Original work published 1927)

Kaplan, H. L., & Sadock, B. J. (1993). *Comprehensive glossary of psychiatry and psychology*. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins.

La Greca, A.M. & Harrison, H.M. (2005). Adolescent peer relations, friendships, and romantic relationships: Do they predict social anxiety and depression? *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 34, 49-61.

Lehmiller, J.,(2009). Secret Romantic Relationships: Consequences for Personal and Relational Well-Being. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull.* 1452-1466.

Joyner, K. & Udry, R. (2000). You don't bring me anything but down: Adolescent romance and depression. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 41, 369-391.

Golzari, M, (2006). Education and consul of adolescences with romantic relationship. *Journal of psychology*.122-155.

Monk, EM, Mahmood,Z.(1999). Student mental health: a pilot study. *Couns psycho.* 12(2). 199-214.

Muth, E.,(2008). Gender differences in physiological, psychological, and mental health. Rostock Center for the Study of Demographic Change.

Pilar Matud, M., K. Guerrero and R. G. Matías (2006). Relevancia de las variables sociodemográficas en las diferencias de género en depresión. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology*, 6 (1), 7-21.

Steinberg, S. J., & Davila, J. (2006). Adolescent romantic functioning and depression: The moderating role of parental emotional availability. Manuscript in preparation.

Suda, M, nakayama, K, morimoto, K.(2007). Relationship between Behavioral Lifestyle and Mental Health Status Evaluated Using the GHQ-28 and SDS Questionnaires in Japanese Factory Workers. *Industrial Health*, 45, 467-473.

Wenzel, A., R. A. Steer and A. T. Beck (2005). Are there any gender differences in frequency of self-reported somatic symptoms of depression? *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 89 (1-3), 177-181.