

# The impact of sense of coherence and the perceived parental goal emphases on teenagers' anxiety disorder

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### ABSTRACT

The role of the parents is crucial in the children's effective functioning, having a long-term effect on the physical, mental and social health of the individuals. Sense of coherence is one of the most important elements of mental health, having a significant effect on the various aspects of life. So do parental goal emphasis by setting the main directions for the children. The current survey aimed to study the impact of sense of coherence and the perceived parental goal emphasis for teenagers' anxiety disorder. 80 of these students (40 suffering from anxiety disorder and 40 normal individuals) were selected due to a questionnaire about anxiety and sampling method, considering the goal of the research. The sense of coherence questionnaire was filled by students' mothers, and to understand parents', the perceived parental goal emphasis questionnaire was filled by the students themselves. The results were calculated and analysed by a statistical program called SPSS (V.20) with MANOVA on the Dependent variables test. The results indicate that the sense of coherence was different in two groups of mothers and students than anxiety disorder and normal individuals. It shows that sense of coherence had a higher rate in normal students' mothers. Also, the orientation senses of parents and its component had a huge superiority over students with an anxiety disorder than normal.

### KEYWORDS

anxiety disorder, teenagers, parents, coherence

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## INTRODUCTION

Anxiety disorders are one of the common neuroses among children and teenagers. Many of the children suffering from anxiety disorders and ones that experience the anxiety signs in a low dose until the teenager and adulthood age would still have problems to adapt. Anxiety disorders have occurred in an increased rate. Anxiety disorders are a portion in a series of disorders that anxiety is one of the main signs. The parallelism of these disorders is psychological suffering, especially in an anxious mood that shows literally or includes other signs. These disorders upraise for eight or even more years in children. Girls indicate nearly twice the severity than boys in anxiety disorders. This gap exists until the sixth year of birth (McLean, Asnaani, Litz, & Hofmann, 2011).

The constant feeling of vulnerability is the main reason for anxiety disorders. In this case, the person thinks that a bad accident will occur, and one cannot control anything about it. This vulnerability forces the person to believe that one cannot solve the problems and issues that eventually lead to horror concerning problem-solving. For this reason, the person evades situations in which one will face a problem. These types of people refuse to get out of their apartments in case to protect themselves. This particular disorder has a series of signs and cognitive-behavioural and physiological symptoms. The anxiety disorder symptoms in teenagers age according to DSM-5 sorting are: overrated and unreal stress about what is to come (a test for instance), the possibility to get hurt, feeling distressed when facing difficult and uncommon expectations or, anxiety about past behaviours (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Researches indicate that several family factors, such as parents' psychological issues and inefficient breeding methods, have an immense impact on children' and teenagers' psychological problems (Feurer, Hammen, & Gibb, 2016). Some believe that many psychologists must seek the source of character disorders and psychological diseases in basic family relations. Among family members, the mother has an outstanding role in training children's psychological and emotional features and is the reason for sickness or health. Therefore, there is a dual connection between a mother's character disorder and a child's behaviour changes. Therefore, studying the connection between mothers' character factors and children' and teenagers' issues may help us to identify the sources of their problems.

It is also well-known that anxiety a strong relationship can be found between a child's overall health (including anxiety and coping) and academic performance (Kovács, 2020; Kovács & Nagy, 2021). The impact of perceived and self-assessed health is clearly positive, which can be seen in the timely completion of studies, as well as in the resistance to drop-out, across all educational settings. This includes an optimised level of anxiety (Spielberger, 1975). Students with high levels of internalised tension (sadness, anxiety, depression, i.e. distress) show reduced academic functioning, while those who externalise tension (anger, frustration, fear) also report learning difficulties and poor performance. This is of course also related to the learner's coping strategies and resilience (Dinca & Rosnet 2007; Mołodecka, 2021; Nagy & Kovács, 2017).

According to Antonovsky's theory (1993), the sense of adequacy and creating the sources of resistance in childish and teenage times results in a strong sense of coherence in adulthood. Antonovsky defines the sense of coherence as a structure that indicates one's general orientations and sense of self-esteem, and constant mobility in life and the outer world. Sense of coherence results to organise the inside and outside motivations. As well as clarifying and making them more explainable. In a simple way, we can mention that sense of coherence points



to one's senses and emotions for a Comprehensible, manageable and meaningful life (Vastamäki, Moser, & Paul, 2009).

Being comprehensible and clear is considered a cognitive factor and points that an individual's awareness about themselves and their environment is Comprehensible as organised and systematic information. The mentioned factor shows a person's cognitive control over the environment. Being manageable is an essential factor that suggests accessible resources are abundant to respond needs and wants of a person, motivated from inside or out. Mentioned factor represents points of view and resistance resources existing in a person. Being meaningful is a motive feature that shows a specific life problem is the exact result of a person's endeavour and invested time and the mass of engagement in various life areas. In this factor, a person tests some situations and forces him to commit himself to change and growth. Incoherence between family members, especially between the mother and the child, has a devastating effect on children's spirits. In such an environment, the child becomes more and more irritable, anxious, depressed and self-blameful. This leads to preparing fundamental behaviour patterns to be outraged and aggressive (Thomas, De Backer, Peeters, & Lombaerts, 2019). On the opposite side, the sense of coherence in a family results in success in education, pleasant social behaviour and more efficient management of stress in children (Avaznezhad, Ravanipour, Bahreini, & Motamed, 2016).

Another important factor is goal orientation which is a structure that suggests the goals a person considers and is mostly divided into mastery goal orientation and performance-approach goal orientation. Mastery goal orientation concerns educational self-efficiency, taking the effort to succeed, choosing, diligence when facing problems, inner interaction to learn, putting deep processing into action and educational improvement. Individuals with mastery goal orientation seek learning and expertise over subjects, but those with Performance-approach goal orientation have greater trouble with their performance than others (Friedel, Cortina, Turner, & Midgley, 2010). The performance-approach goal orientation types are divided into two categories, considering their goals' value: tendencies and refusal. The students with tendency orientation try to compare their abilities with others, but the refusal performance-approach goal orientation, evade challenging responsibilities, so they do not observe thoughtful inefficiency in themselves (Sebestyén, 2021).

Some researchers suggest that the goals of an individual himself and parental goal emphases may impact students: what kind of advancement goals the parents put on their children and what the children understand from these emphases. Some parents have mastery goal orientation, and some have performance-approach goal orientation (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). As mothers' mental health is an important factor affecting children's mental health, we must examine mothers' with children who have emotional disorders for mental injuries. Therefore, mothers' sense of coherence examinations may absorb vital and helpful information to prepare proper desirable care for their mental health who are struggling with their children's mental disorders. This research aims to seek an answer for the question: Are mothers' goal emphases and sense of coherence have an effect on teenagers' anxiety disorders?

## RESEARCH AND METHODS

### Sample

The current probe is a casual-comparative kind. The statistical population of the study includes teenager boys between 11 and 13 years old in the sixth grade of Gorgan High School. We have used a sample of 40 individuals. The sample is chosen by goal-based accessibility.



To attend this research, we received an introduction letter from Bandar-e-Gaz Islamic Azad University. We travelled to Gorgan's Education Department and made the required inquiries. Then we attended a junior high school in Gorgan and made a list of anxious students, and then we discussed the purpose of the probe and the importance of remaining a classified probe with the school's authorities.

After getting the permission, 40 students who had poor scores and 40 other students who were classmates with normal-level anxiety were asked to fill Perceived Parent Goal Emphases Scale (PPGES). They had similar demography conditions. In the following events, students' mothers were invited and informed of the importance of the probe, the needed secrecy, and that they were free to quit the test if desired. Mothers were to fill the sense of coherence questionnaire. The answers were collected, and the data were analysed by SPSS (V.20) program.

## Instruments

To measure the sense of coherence, the Orientation to Life Questionnaire was created by Antonovsky (1993) and contained 29 questions where items must be evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. The grading method is Likert scaled and inversed for 13 questions (reverse items). The minimum score of the questionnaire is 29, while the maximum is 149. According to research conducted by Antonovsky, the sense of cohesion in life evaluates and examines how to control stress and pressure in life. It is important to know that this control over stress and pressure in life is done by three important things: one of them is being meaningful, the other is managing stress and then understanding stress. The Cronbach alpha measure of internal consistency has ranged from 0.82 to 0.95 (Antonovsky, 1993).

The Perceived Parent Goal Emphases Scale (PPGES) was composed by Friedel, Cortina, Turner, and Midgley (2007). The questionnaire includes ten questions: five of them are related to mastery-goal orientation (1–5), and the other five are related to performance-approach goal orientation (6–10). Grades are sorted with a Likert scale from totally agree (5) to totally disagree (1). In their studies, the Cronbach's Alpha for Parental-mastery goal orientation and parental performance-approach goal are 0.65 and 0.70 in sequence.

The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) is intended to measure the level of anxiety. In 1990, Aron Beck, Epstein, Brown, and Steer (1988) presented a test that focuses on clinical anxiety signs. It is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure teenager and adult anxiety intensity containing 21 questions with four answers for each that presents the anxiety level. The answer is sorted on a 4-point Likert scale (from 0 to 3). Each test question can determine the test score from 0 to 63. Studies approve the validity and reliability of this test. The internal consistency (alpha coefficient) is 0.92. The test's validity for seven days was measured 0/75 by the test-retest method.

## Research questions and hypotheses

The research targeted to investigate the following points:

1. The comparison of sense of coherence in mothers of male teenager students with normal and high level of anxiety
2. The comparison of sense of coherence in male teenager students with normal and high level of anxiety



3. The comparison of perceptions of goal orientation in mothers of male teenager students with normal and high level of anxiety
4. The comparison of perceptions of goal orientation in male teenager students with normal and high level of anxiety

According to the points listed, we hypothesised that a significant difference could be detected concerning both the sense of coherence and the perceptions of the parental goal orientation according to the groups of children categorised based on the level of anxiety.

## RESULTS

In order to analyse the data, SPSS (v.20) statistical program was used. The analyses had been done in two categories: descriptive (standard degrees' average) and inferential (Multivariate MANOVA variance) ones. Students were categorized into two groups according to the level of anxiety (normal and anxious). Tables 1 and 2 introduces the total scores of the sense of coherence and parental goal emphasis of the two groups of students. Information were obtained from descriptive indicators of variables of sense of cohesion and perception of orientation by group.

The scores of the overall sense of coherence questionnaire was significantly higher in the group of children with normal level of anxiety. The same could have been detected concerning

Table 1. Descriptive values of the subscales of the Orientation to Life Questionnaire by groups

Variables	Student groups	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Overall sense of coherence	Normal	99.65	11.14	81	126
	Anxious	89.65	10.86	63	110
Being comprehensible	Normal	37.47	4.44	28	46
	Anxious	32.80	6.35	15	40
Being manageable	Normal	33.40	4.62	22	42
	Anxious	30.62	4.66	23	39
Being meaningful	Normal	28.77	5.63	18	50
	Anxious	26.22	3.88	18	33
	Anxious	19.47	5.76	9	39

Table 2. Descriptive values of the subscales of the Perceived Parent Goal Emphases Scale by groups

Variables	Student groups	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Overall parental goal emphases	Normal	40.55	4.40	30	47
	Anxious	37.25	5.49	25	47
Mastery-goal orientation	Normal	21.25	2.71	13	25
	Anxious	18.92	3.81	10	25
Performance-approach goal orientation	Normal	19.30	3.56	9	25
	Anxious	19.47	5.76	9	39



the subscales of this instrument. Thus, children with normal level of anxiety performed higher scores on the of the being comprehensible, being manageable and being meaningful subscales.

Concerning the overall parental goal emphasis, we also could have seen a higher score among children with normal level of anxiety. This trend was visible concerning the mastery-goal orientation subscale too as children with normal level of anxiety performed higher scores. On the contrary, the scores reached on the performance-approach goal orientation subscale was higher among students with higher level of anxiety.

Considering the results from Levene's test, variances of two groups' coefficients are equal and are not different in meaning: therefore, the equality of the variances defaults are checked and approved in both groups. The observed F for Wilk's lambda is 5.69, which is meaningful with 0.0001 Alpha. It is evident that students with high-level anxiety and normal level anxiety have a meaningful difference (Table 3).

Table 4 shows that sense of cohesion, being comprehensible, manageable and meaningful have differences in scores for both normal and anxious students. Average scores of goal orientation and mastery goal orientation have a meaningful difference ( $P < 0.05$ ). According to mean squares, mothers with normal students have a higher sense of cohesion than mothers with anxious students. Another point concluded that normal students achieve higher scores than anxious ones.

Table 3. The normalisation of research's coefficients

Variables	Groups	Kolmogrov-smirnov test		
		Statistic	Degrees of freedom	Statistical significance
Goal emphases	Normal	0.890	40	0.4
	Anxious	0.620	40	0.8
Sense of coherence	Normal	0.612	40	0.8
	Anxious	0.471	40	0.9

Table 4. Results of variance analysis (MANOVA) on dependent variables of the mothers of anxious and normal students

Dependent variables	Sum of the squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F	Significance level
Sense of cohesion	2,000	1	2,000	16.508	0.001
Being comprehensible	437.113	1	437.113	14.531	0.001
Being manageable	154.012	1	154.012	7.146	0.001
Being meaningful	130.050	1	130.050	5.555	0.001
Goal orientation	217.800	1	217.800	8.796	0.001
Mastery goal orientation	108.113	1	108.113	9.871	0.001
Performance-approach goal orientation	0.612	1	0.612	0.027	0.8



## CONCLUSION

Our studies suggest that significant differences can be detected concerning the overall sense of cohesion, being comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful, according to the student groups based on their level of anxiety. It also shows that mothers who have students with normal level of anxiety have achieved higher scores than anxious students' mothers, according to the mean squares of the test. In addition to that, we can claim that sense of cohesion is a general tendency than being a fundamental personality trait. On the other hand, women biological conditions make them easier to be stressed than men (hormonal changes, giving birth, etc.) This variant preserves one health facing stressful and challenging phenomena in life.

Our researches show that 20% up to 65% of women are anxious, and also due to their relationships with children, they could pass it on to kids (Krijnen-de Bruin et al., 2021). Therefore, anxious mothers have a higher sense of cohesion than normal mothers, which is a useful tool for dealing with tensions and solving problems and developing social coping skills (Fossion et al., 2014). So paying attention to this matter is getting more important because mothers with a strong sense of cohesion can better pass it on to their kids. Sense of cohesion makes people understand and accept the excitements of life and happenings, the better. It gives us the ability to handle both negative and positive emotions and excitements. Previous research results indicate that parent-child cohesion and children's self-esteem have been shown to be closely related to children's academic achievement (e.g., Booth & Gerard, 2011; Jhang, 2017; Wang, Huebner, & Tian, 2021). Therefore, its role is crucial concerning the various aspects of performance including academic achievement and health as non-academic achievement too (Kovács, 2019).

We accept challenges and try to find their personal and social motives. We try so we can get out of an unpleasant situation. Sense of cohesion helps us face the problems in our imaginations better and cope with them better in our heads. It gives us stress relief parallel to our mental health (Mojabi & Kianersi, 2018). Individuals who can choose a suitable strategy when facing stressful excitors have a higher rate of sense of cohesion. We can claim that the sense of cohesion and consistency is not changed incredibly as time passes. It allows us to recognise people vulnerable to danger, but it cannot let us predict that they will be either healthy or diseased and can be only a supporter of our information (Suominen, Helenius, Blomberg, Uutela, & Koskenvuo, 2001). Sense of cohesion is considered an emotional tool and can help people manage some features in themselves, such as ability and capacity, self-esteem and self-value, planning for the future, face challenges however unsolvable they may seem (Savolainen, 2005). According to Antonovski's theory, the sense of cohesion leads to successful coping with stressful matters in life. In other words, this sense makes humans more rational in facing emotions and frustrations in life (1993). Thus, we can conclude that lack of self-control and control over different situations in life and feeling that life events are unpredictable could lead to poor performance facing life problems and stress. You could avoid using the right strategies, or it could increase the possibilities of mental, physical, biological risks. On the opposite point, thinking that events are predictable and manageable could lead to a higher sense of cohesion (Hosseinpoor, Samiei, & Nematolahei, 2016).

Considering the second part of the results, we can mention the Covington and Omelich theory (1992). According to that, parental mastery goal orientation or their real mastery goal orientation does not necessarily mean adopting children mastery goal orientation. In other words, parents can have a specific kind of mastery goal orientation, but their children could have



an entirely different one at the same time. This results in stress in children because of fear, fear of not living up to their parents' expectations and the possibility to pass the exams significantly decreases. Therefore, we can understand that students who think they cannot live up to their parents' expectations due to their intense mastery goal orientations will use evading strategies, such as educational self-disability or requesting evading aid to conserve their confidence (Covington & Omelich, 1992). Parents have an outstanding role in educational thought patterns and beliefs, determining their educational behaviours (Bennet, 2005).

The parents' goal orientation type affects anxious attitude signs. As the probe proved, students with normal-level anxiety achieve better scores in goal orientation and mastery goal orientation components. Parental goal orientation and teachers' goal orientation have an indirect effect on students' beliefs about education. We can say that he who has mastery goal orientation is constantly trying to prove their value, so this applies a competitive spirit. These people are trying to achieve a series of successes, like the best grades and scores, and all of their efforts and focus are channelled to achieve their goals. Because they receive good feedback from others and society, they have better educational performance and are less likely to have psychological disorders like anxiety.

Considering the existentialist approach, we can claim that students who have goal orientation or credit these orientations to their parents or their class' atmosphere find the meaning of life in their grades (Mupira & Ramnarain, 2018). One of this probe's limitations' was the use of self-report. Therefore, the reliability of it must be taken with caution. Some subjects may not be answered as accurately as possible due to the demanded massive information. Regarding researching options, we can say that choosing a clinical issue (anxious students) requires more statistical strategies besides questionnaires and a semi-structured interview. Considering the outcomes of the probe and sense of cohesion lack in mothers with anxious students, the department of education and other related organisations must take further actions and provide medical programs with no purpose but to improve the sense of cohesion and its' consistency in society. Another point is that psychologists and related managers or authorities must pay attention to students with anxiety disorders, especially the mothers.

*Conflict of interest:* The second author is an editor of the journal. Peer review has been handled without her involvement, hence, she does not have a conflict with the review process.

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