

The Research of Medical Science Review

Received: 20 December, 2024
Accepted: 20 January, 2025
Published: 27 January, 2025

ISSN: 3007-1208 | 3007-1216
Volume 3, Issue 1, 2025

DO ANGER AND WORRY MEDIATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTOLERANT BEHAVIOR AND SADNESS? A STUDY IN SCHOOL CHILDREN

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14749882>

ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Emotional disturbance is being increased in school children globally, which is alarming for all of us. Therefore, the current study investigates the relationship between intolerant behavior and sadness with the mediating role of anger and worry among children with minor emotional disturbances.

Material and Methods: The current study was conducted from October 2019 to September 2020 among different schools of district Faisalabad, Pakistan. A total of 600 participants we targeted, 400 participants met the study inclusion and exclusion criteria. In the sample, boys were 200) and girls were 200. In our study, the participants' age range was 9 - 14 years. The Distress Tolerance Scale and Children Emotional Management Scale were administered. Data were analyzed using SPSS-V 26.

Results: Results reveal that inhibition, dysregulation emotion, and coping subscales of anger, worry, and sadness significantly correlate with appraisal ($p < .001$), regulation ($p < .001$), tolerance ($p < .001$), and absorption ($p < .001$). Hierarchical regression analysis indicates subscales of distress tolerance, anger, and worry predicts sad emotions ($R^2 = .51$; $F = 20.78$; $p < .001$). Furthermore, the results indicate that anger and worry significantly mediate between intolerant behavior and sadness in emotionally disturbed school children ($R^2 = .425$; $F(5,394) = 58.125$, $p < .001$).

Conclusion: It is concluded that low tolerance behavior increases the degree of anger and worry-related emotions high degree of anger and worry predicts the intensity of sadness in children.

Keywords: Intolerant Behavior, Sadness Emotion, Anger and Worried Behavior, Children

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INTRODUCTION

Children's emotional disturbance is a common problem for parents, teachers, and mental health professionals (1). It is observed, for three-decade, the emotional and behavioral issues in children are increasing globally, especially in low developed countries (2). In non-school children, the Prevalence of emotional disturbance was estimated at 0.7-2.0, which is relatively higher (3). In China, emotional and behavioral problems are estimated at 17.6% in children, and Prevalence was found higher in boys (18.6%) as compared to girls (16.6%) (4). Similarly, in Malaysian children, an emotional disturbance was reported by parents (9.3%), teachers (8.5%), and the child was 3.9% (5). In a sample of Sub-Saharan Africa, 14.3% of children were found emotionally disturbed (6).

Distress tolerance is one of the reasons for emotional disturbance, which initially causes behavioral problems and then psychiatric illness (7) (8). Distress tolerance is a negative state that reflects some negative emotions in a child, usually critical and unfavorable (9). If a child feels unable to manage the situation, it causes emotional problems in children, which resulted in poor outcomes (4). Although children have different temperaments and attitudes toward the response; however, children feel more vulnerable in an intense situation and usually perceive emotional disturbance, which significantly affects the social and academic performance of the children. Distress induces different negative cognitions, behaviors, and emotions in children, which later cause severe emotional problems, negative personality growth, or psychiatric disorders (10).

Worry is related to negative things that a person fears might happen in the future (11). The abundance of the literature suggests that prejudiced behavior and worry are significantly associated with each other, and the supporting role of anger increases the intensity of sadness in children (12). A high level of intolerance sustains worry (13) and contributes to other problematic cognitive processes, including poor problem orientation and cognitive avoidance, which conjointly and paradoxically maintain worries in children (5). The Meta-analysis showed a strong association between distress tolerance, anxiety, and worry-related behaviors in children (15). A study suggests heightened distress regarding failure and uncertain events may be more central to maintaining worry (16). Female children showed higher levels of worry than males and mediated the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and worry (17). Sadness is an emotional pain characterized by feelings of disadvantage, loss, despair, grief, helplessness, disappointment, and sorrow (18). A study demonstrates worry is more related to children's purchase intention for social status than sadness as it induced consumers to follow their perceptions associated with hedonic (19).

Anger is a negative emotion, which triggers feelings of discomfort, hostility, provocation, and threat in children (20). Furthermore, high anger causes internalizing and externalizing symptoms (21). Low distress tolerance significantly correlates with anger in children, and it may be prolonged throughout life as personality temperament if it is not managed at an early stage of life (22). It is further explained that low distress tolerance influences children's emotional ability to recognize different emotions (i.e., anger, worry, sadness). When its intensity increases, children inhibit coping skills and exhibit adverse emotional problems (21). It is observed, the irrational belief of intolerance leads to frustration and anger, which reflects in the domain of physical and verbal aggression (23).

The current study primarily sought to examine the impact of distress tolerance on children's emotional disturbance and how anger and worry-related behaviors enhance the level of sadness. The study also focuses that the components of distress tolerance relate to the aspects of anger, worry, and sadness in emotionally disturbed school children.

Materials and Methods

Research Design: The correlational research design was used in this study. This current study was completed in 2018-2020, and its protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Government College University Faisalabad. Participants were recruited from different schools of the distract hang, Faisalabad and Lahore of the Punjab Province.

Sample Size and Sampling: The study sample size was estimated using G-Power software (version 3.1.9.4) with an effect size of 0.40, α error 0.001 with a power of 0.95 (24). G-Power calculator generated a sample

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size of 396 participants. In this study, we recruited more than 600 schoolchildren. 400 out of 600 meet the study inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants were approached through a purposive sampling technique. Both boys $n=200$ and girls $n=200$ with an age range of 12 - 18 years (i.e., $M\pm SD=16.57\pm 1.18$) were included in the study. The participants were taken from all socio-economic statuses. Participants' educational level was between middle and intermediate.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Only those participants who were included met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Children were identified based on few set criteria. For example, teachers highlighted the student he/she has feeling difficulty in the study, lack of participation in the classroom activities, avoidance from social activities, parents noticed the child is feeling emotional and stubborn, or visit to clinician seeking help for the child regarding his/her mental health were included in the study. The children who have minor emotional, behavioral, social, and academic problems were included in the study. The children who have mild psychological problems were excluded from the study. Children with intellectual disability, medical illness, or psychiatric illness were excluded.

Demographic information and In-depth interview: First of all, detailed demographic information were taken from the child, patients and their teachers in term of academic, personal and daily living activities. In addition, an in-depth clinical interview was conducted with the patients and teachers to explore the child's problems in academic, intellectual, emotional, behavioral, and socialization.

The Distress Tolerance Scale: The DTS, a self-report measure, was used to assess the intolerant behavior among children (8). The DTS comprises fifteen items based on four dimensions, i.e., tolerance, appraisal, absorption, and regulation. Each statement is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree =5 to strongly agree=1. High scores represent high distress tolerance among participants. It is comprised of four subscales. The tolerance subscale is comprised of 3 items (1, 3, and 5), the appraisal subscale has six items (6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12), and the absorption subscale is based on three items (2, 4, and 15) and regulation subscale is comprised on three items (8, 13, and 14). The reliability estimation of the original scale is calculated at .82, and for subscales, it is estimated at .72, .82, .78, and .70, respectively.

The Children Emotional Management Scale: The CEMS is categorized into three main dimensions, i.e., worry, anger, and sadness (25). Each scale domain is categorized into three subscales (i.e., emotional regulation coping, inhibition, & dysregulated-expressions). Each statement is scored on a 3-points Likert type scale, such as hardly ever=1, sometimes=2, and often=3. Children's Worry Management subscale consists of 10 items, i.e., regulation coping composed of three items with reliability .69, inhibition consist of four items with reliability is .74, and dysregulated expression comprised of three items with the reliability of .72. Children's Anger Management subscale consists of 11 items that are further categorized into three subscales, i.e., coping composed of 4 items with a reliability coefficient of .73, inhibition comprised of four items with the reliability of .69, and dysregulated expressions are composed of three items with the reliability of .68. Similarly, the Children's Sadness Management Subscale is comprised of 12 items. Such as emotional regulation coping comprised of five items, inhibition comprised of four items, and dysregulated expressions composed of three items with reliability estimation of .62, .77, and .60, respectively.

Results

Table 1

Demographics Statistics of the Sample (N = 400)

Basic Characteristics	Boys (200) M ± SD	Girls (200) M ± SD	t	p	95% CI LL, UL
Age	17.96 ± 2.05	18.29 ± 2.00	-1.62	>.05	-.73, .07
Residence	1.74 ± 0.44	1.83 ± 0.38	-2.06	<.05	-.16, -.00
Education	1.98 ± 0.66	2.01 ± 0.64	-0.45	>.05	-.15, .98
Parents education	2.33 ± 0.86	2.25 ± 0.80	0.96	>.05	-.08, .24
Father occupation	1.66 ± 0.36	1.10 ± 0.30	1.65	>.05	-.01, .12
Monthly income	2.50 ± 1.26	2.33 ± 1.15	1.44	>.05	-.06, .41

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Siblings	3.76 ±1.70	3.76 ±1.61	0.00	>.05	-.32, .32
Birth order	2.59 ±1.46	2.53 ±1.38	0.45	>.05	-.21, .34
Family income	1.56 ±0.49	1.65 ±0.48	-1.73	>.05	-.18, .01
Tolerance	7.17 ±3.14	7.17 ±2.66	-0.01	>.05	-.57, .56
Absorption	9.09 ±2.59	9.20 ±2.42	-0.41	>.05	-.59, .38
Regulation	6.94 ±2.56	7.29 ±2.39	-1.43	>.05	-.84, .13
Appraisal	16.42 ±4.24	16.59 ±3.76	-0.42	>.05	-.98, .63
Intolerant behavior	39.61 ±12.11	40.25 ±10.82	-0.45	>.05	-2.89, 1.61
Inhibition	6.93 ±1.24	7.01 ±1.10	-0.68	>.05	-.31, .14
Dys. Emotions	6.12 ±1.13	6.14 ±1.17	-0.21	>.05	-.25, .20
Coping	8.07 ±1.67	7.86 ±1.54	1.27	>.05	-.11, .52
Worry	21.11 ±1.25	21.01 ±0.95	0.89	>.05	-.11, .31
Inhibition	8.87 ±1.61	8.81 ±1.39	0.43	>.05	-.23, .36
Dys. Emotions	6.13 ±1.342	6.07 ±1.29	0.49	>.05	-.19, .32
Coping	7.67 ±1.74	7.62 ±1.65	0.29	>.05	-.28, .38
Anger	22.67 ±1.82	22.49 ±1.44	1.09	>.05	-.14, .50
Inhibition	8.32 ±1.84	8.50 ±1.58	-1.01	>.05	-.51, .16
Dys. Emotions	10.71 ±2.23	10.60 ±1.99	0.49	>.05	-.31, .52
Coping	5.59 ±1.39	5.49 ±1.29	0.78	>.05	-.15, .36
Sadness	24.62 ±2.83	24.58 ±2.51	0.13	>.05	-.49, .56

$p < .05$; Dys.= Dysregulated

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Demographic Characteristics, Distress Tolerance Scale with Anger, Worry and Sadness among Emotional Disturbed School Children (N=400)

Variables	B	t	Sig.	95% CI for β		R	R ²	Adj R ²	ΔR^2	F	p
				LL	UL						
1 (Constant)		22.917	.000	27.04	32.11	.52	.27	.25	.27***	20.78	.000
AGE	-0.02	-0.51	.611	-0.14	0.08						
GEN	0.03	0.89	.370	-0.24	0.66						
EDU	0.03	0.78	.433	-0.21	0.49						
TOL	0.35	2.76	.006	0.09	0.55						
ABS	-0.11	-0.89	.371	-0.38	0.14						
REG	-0.53	-5.40	.000	-0.79	-0.36						
APP	-0.20	-1.81	.071	-0.27	0.01						
2 (Constant)		9.84	.000	24.84	37.24	.61	.37	.35	.10***	23.16	.000
AGE	-0.00	-0.10	.917	-0.11	0.10						
GEN	0.02	0.69	.486	-0.27	0.58						
EDU	0.04	0.98	.325	-0.16	0.49						
TOL	0.47	3.91	.000	0.21	0.64						
ABS	-0.00	-0.06	.947	-0.25	0.23						
REG	-0.49	-5.24	.000	-0.73	-0.33						
APP	-0.24	-2.31	.021	-0.29	-0.02						
INHA	0.13	1.70	.089	-0.03	0.51						
DYNA	-0.10	-1.34	.181	-0.50	0.09						

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3	COPA	-0.36	-5.02	.000	-0.79	-0.34						
	(Constant)		5.37	.000	10.71	23.08	.70	.50	.48	.12***	35.63	.000
	AGE	-0.00	-0.12	.902	-0.10	0.08						
	GEN	0.00	0.13	.895	-0.35	0.40						
	EDU	0.03	0.86	.389	-0.16	0.42						
	TOL	0.44	4.18	.000	0.21	0.60						
	ABS	-0.07	-0.70	.482	-0.29	0.14						
	REG	-0.36	-4.25	.000	-0.57	-0.21						
	APP	-0.07	-0.77	.437	-0.17	0.07						
	INHA	0.11	1.58	.114	-0.04	0.44						
	DYNA	-0.02	-0.29	.767	-0.30	0.22						
	COPA	-0.07	-1.07	.284	-0.33	0.09						
4	INHW	0.52	10.04	.000	0.95	1.42						
	(Constant)		5.91	.000	12.21	24.38	.72	.52	.51	.02***	35.68	.000
	AGE	-0.00	-0.20	.838	-0.10	0.08						
	GEN	0.01	0.38	.702	-0.30	0.44						
	EDU	0.03	0.93	.351	-0.15	0.42						
	TOL	0.26	2.35	.019	0.04	0.44						
	ABS	-0.05	-0.50	.613	-0.27	0.16						
	REG	-0.34	-4.13	.000	-0.54	-0.19						
	APP	-0.09	-1.04	.299	-0.18	0.05						
	INHA	-0.01	-1.52	.879	-0.27	0.23						
	DYNA	-0.10	-1.46	.145	-0.47	0.07						
	COPA	-0.35	-3.74	.000	-0.84	-0.26						
5	INHW	0.61	11.13	.000	1.14	1.64						
	COPW	0.33	4.30	.000	0.30	0.81						
	(Constant)		4.39	.000	8.31	21.78	.72	.53	.51	.00***	33.61	.000
	AGE	-0.01	-0.39	.694	-0.11	0.07						
	GEN	0.01	0.53	.592	-0.27	0.47						
	EDU	0.03	0.92	.356	-0.15	0.42						
	TOL	0.28	2.53	.012	0.05	0.46						
	ABS	-0.09	-0.88	.378	-0.31	0.12						
	REG	-0.37	-4.40	.000	-0.57	-0.22						
	APP	-0.05	-0.61	.541	-0.16	0.08						
	INHA	-0.01	-0.15	.881	-0.27	0.23						
	DYNA	-0.13	-1.87	.062	-0.54	0.01						
COPA	-0.30	-3.22	.001	-0.78	-0.19							
5	INHW	0.61	11.20	.000	1.15	1.64						
	COPW	0.41	4.83	.000	0.40	0.97						
5	DYSW	0.15	2.16	.031	0.03	0.68						

Note. GEN = Gender; EDU = Education; SIB = No. of Siblings. BO = Birth Order; FI = Family Income; APP = Appraisal; REG = Regulation; ABS = Absorption; TOL = Tolerance; IB = Intolerant Behavior; INHW = Inhibition Subscale Worry; COPW = Coping Subscale Worry; DYSW = Dysregulated Emotion Worry; WOR = Worry; INHA = Inhibition Subscale Anger; DYSA = Dysregulated Emotion Anger; COPA = Coping Subscale Anger; ANG = Anger; INHS = Inhibition subscale Sadness; DYSS = Dysregulated

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*Emotion Sadness; COPS = Coping Subscale Sadness; SAD = Sadness; SD, Standard Deviation. *P<0.05; **P<0.01; ***p<0.001*

Table 2 shows the findings of hierarchical regression analysis of subscales of the distress tolerance scale with anger, worry, and sadness. In step 1, the R² value is .27 showed that tolerance and regulation explained a 27% variance in sadness. In step 2, the R² value is .37, which revealed that coping anger indicates a 37% variance in developing sadness. In step 3, the R² value is .50 indicates inhibition explained 50% variance in sadness. In step-4, the R² value is .52, indicating coping anger and worry subscale and inhibition worry predict sadness. In step 5, the R² value is .53, which explains 53% variance to predict sadness by coping with anger and worry, inhibition, and dysregulated worry in children.

Discussion

Our study findings reported that intolerant behavior strongly associates with sadness which is the primary reason for emotional disturbance in children (22). Anger and worry significantly mediate between intolerant behavior and sadness, which trigger the intensity of emotional disturbance in children (13). Low distress tolerance makes the children more worried and emotionally unstable, which negatively influenced children's level of academic performance. At the early stage, anxious and worried behavior might cause severe psychopathology in children (27).

The study findings reveal that distress tolerance is associated with anger among children with emotional disturbance (28). Similarly, distress tolerance significantly negatively correlates with worry-related behaviors in emotionally disturbed children (29). Consistent anger and worry-related behaviors usually enhance unhealthy emotions and unhelpful coping behaviors, which leads to depressive symptoms in children (30). Distress tolerant behavior significantly associates with anger, and anger is moderate with depressive symptoms (31). Similarly, excessive worries promote depressive symptoms in children, which causes emotional disturbance (32) and positively correlates with inhibition (33).

Extreme stressful conditions and worries inhibit positive emotions, which decreases coping skills and enhances dysregulation emotions (34). In addition, emotionally disturbed children used avoidance coping which promotes the level of distress in children (35). Children become sensitive due to emotional disturbance, and they shatter their confidence and attitudes (36). While low anxiety and sadness behaviors in children enhance children's level of confidence, negatively associates with depressive symptoms, and positively associates with coping mechanisms (37). On the other end, worry, anger, and sadness significantly associate with each other and develop psychopathological behaviors in children (17). Hierarchical regression analysis showed distress tolerance is posited a significant impact on an emotion such as anger, worry, and sadness (38).

Our findings indicate that anger and worry significantly positively correlate with sadness in children (39). Tolerant behavior supports the individual to cope with negative emotions and promotes the person to live with equality, indiscrimination, freedom, or other social rights (40). Intolerance strongly associates with worry, which leads to anxiety-related symptoms in children. However, we do not know whether children are more likely to sadden due to distress tolerance, or this relationship is better explained by other emotions such as worry and anger (41).

The overall study findings represent a more significant role of tolerance to prevent emotional disturbance in children. Low tolerance manifests high and anger and worries-related emotions in children, which predict different negative behaviors. High anger and worry-related emotions enhance the tendency of sad emotion in children, which is the one major causes of emotional disturbance among children. Children with early teenage or with teenage when going through a transition period if they have low tolerance and high anger, worry, and sad emotion perceive significant crisis at this stage which may cause severe psychiatric illness.

Conclusion:

It is concluded that children with minor emotional problems perceive low tolerance and high sadness. Anger and worry-related emotions were found higher, and they increase the intensity of feelings of sadness. It is also concluded that distress tolerance is significantly associated with anger, worry, and sadness.

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Limitation and Implications:

To enhance the generalizability of the study, sample data should be collected throughout Pakistan as our current sample was limited. We only targeted the children with minor emotional disturbance, so the study did not sufficiently explain the role of anger and worry in severe psychiatric problems. The current study provides rich information to policymakers, teachers, counselors, parents, and clinicians to understand, develop and address the emotional problems through advanced techniques, interventions and modalities.

Acknowledgment:

The authors would like to thank the participants for their active participation. Furthermore, the authors would also thank the parents and teachers who facilitate and give precious time for the detailed history of the child.

Financial Support and Sponsorship: None

Conflict of Interest: None

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