# The Effects of Attachment Styles and Personality Characteristics of Mothers on Anxiety in Gifted Adolescents

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*Abstract: The present study deals with the effects of attachment styles and personality characteristics of mothers on anxiety in gifted adolescents. The study is a descriptive-survey research and the study population included all the gifted high school students in 2016-2017 academic years. Out of the study population, 120 gifted high school students were selected using Cochran formula based on a purposive and convenience method. Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-Adolescents Restructured was distributed amongst the girls and Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-Adults Restructured and Bartholomew's attachment styles were administered to the mothers. The central tendency, scattering and distribution indices were calculated and multivariate regression model was utilized to predict anxiety through personality characteristics and attachment styles of the mothers. The study results indicated that amongst attachment styles, there is a significant relationship between "avoidant attachment style" and "anxious attachment style" of the mothers with the anxiety in gifted adolescents in α=0.01 and α=0.05 levels, respectively. Also, amongst the mothers' personality characteristics, a significant relationship was found between threefold impairment (clinical, physical and cognitive), internalization, externalization, interpersonal, interests and pathology of the mothers' personalities with anxiety in the gifted adolescents in α=0.01 level.*

*Keywords: Attachment Styles, Mothers' Personality Characteristics, Anxiety, Gifted Adolescents*

## INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a dispersed, very unpleasant and, most often, ambiguous feeling of worriment that bears the news of an abrupt and contingent danger and makes the individual ready to cope with the threat (Kaplan and Sadock, cited in Pour Afkary, 2002). Anxiety disorders are amongst the most common psychiatric impairments amongst the adolescents. In psychological and behavioral levels, anxiety can be realized in the form of anger, emotional instability and attention deficit and motor disorders. In its higher and stable levels, it is accompanied by severe damage and reactivity of the individual and it can be actualized in avoiding accomplishing school-related activities, relationship with others of the same age and attainment of evolutionary levels in proportion to the child's age. Perceptual symptoms of anxiety are worriedness, fear, absent-mindedness, insomnia, impatience and irritability (Ahmadi, 2001). The psychological signs of anxiety are: feeling of distress and perception of the discomfort by the brain cortex (Raw cited in Vahhabzadeh, 2001). Anxiety disorders are the most common type of clinical problems during adolescence and childhood and nearly 5% out of over 20% of the anxious individuals

are found with anxiety-related clinical problems before their 16 years of age. In adolescence, anxiety disorder may be expressed with clear signs (state) or latent (characteristic) (Bairon and Khazanchi, 2011). The anxiety disorder, especially separation anxiety disorder, is very much common amongst children and adolescents. Attachment includes deep affective bond established between certain individuals in life in such a manner that one feels happy and delighted upon meeting the ones s/he is attached to and feels comfortable with having them at his or her side upon the emergence of a stressful situation. Attachment styles encompass emotional bond between two individuals and bind them in physical and spatial terms and become persistent. There are four attachment styles, including secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure -anxious, insecure-ambivalent (distressful)

The personality of every individual incorporates the collection of the behaviors constituting the individuality of him or her and makes him appear different from the others. Personality theoreticians deal with the human beings in whole. Therefore, the complex relationships between the various aspects of human reaction, including emotion, leaning, perception and motivation, are also investigated. Also, personality embraces recognition and thought processes, affections or emotions and evident behaviors and this means that personality cares too much for the complex relationship between the cognitive, emotional, affective and behavioral processes of an individual. So, certain patterns of behavior and thinking methods determining the individual's way of adapting to the environment are intended by personality (Kaplan and Sadock, 2003, tr. Pour Afkary, 2006).

The gifted students who are distinguished as brilliant talents in the country from the other students are recognized as the important human capitals worldwide. Mothers of the gifted children have been realized as being more intelligent, more gifted, more dutiful, more eager, more independent and more self-efficient than all the other women. In the meantime, these individuals prefer to make decisions on their own.

Derakhshanpoor and Izadyar (2016) investigated the anxiety level of the students from Gorgan schools and concluded that anxiety disorders are very common amongst the children and adolescents. Siavasha'ei et al (2014) in a study called "the determinative role of variables related to mothers' personality characteristics in loneliness and anxiety rates of Tehran's adolescent high school girls from District 1 and 7" concluded that there is a significant relationship between the various personality characteristics of mothers and anxiety in their daughters (P<0.05). Sarvghad et al (2012) conducted a study titled "the relationship between attachment styles and personality characteristics with anxiety in pre-university students from Shiraz". Their results indicated that anxious attachment style is positively and significantly associated with anxiety; moreover, a positive and significant relationship was evidenced between such a personality characteristic as neuroticism and anxiety. In addition, a negative and significant relationship was documented between extroversion, responsibility, flexibility and anxiety and it was found out that only anxious attachment style can predict anxiety. It was concluded in the study carried out by Mimi Vollistij (2010) in England under the title of "the role of attachment styles on the path to being a gifted student" that although being gifted and secure attachment style are well correlated with advanced language speaking and emotional and social adjustment, it does not hold for all the gifted students and not all the gifted individuals employ secure attachment styles. Joyce and Meredith (2007) showed that personality plays a crucial role in effective and efficient affective and emotional performance.

The present study has been undertaken to explore the effects of attachment styles and personality characteristics of mothers on anxiety of gifted adolescents.

## Study Method:

The present study is a descriptive-survey research. The study sample volume included 120 first grade and second grade high school gifted students from schools for the gifted in District 5 of Tehran. The study participants were selected based on a purposive and convenience method. The instrument used for measuring the attachment styles was close relationship experiences evaluation scale that was designed by Bartholomew in regard of fourfold attachment style. The restructured Minnesota multiphasic personality inventory (MMPI-RF-2) was translated by Kamkary and Shokrzadeh (2009) in Iran and adjusted to fit Iranian population. The

validity coefficient for clinical scales was found over 80.0 using Cronbach's alpha and halving methods and the stability coefficient was obtained with an emphasis on test-retest method and it was indicative of the credibility of the study instrument. The test contains 338 questions and it is scored in a rather quick pace using advanced software. Descriptive statistics tables were applied to describe the variables pertaining to anxiety symptoms as well as mothers' personality characteristics and attachment styles. In the descriptive analysis, exponent and median and mean were calculated as the indicators of central tendency and variation scope and variance and standard deviation were computed as the indicators of scattering, standard error and finally kurtosis and skewness coefficients were obtained as indicators of distribution. Inferential statistics and multivariate regression model were utilized to predict anxiety through personality characteristics and attachment styles of the mothers.

## Findings:

According to the following tables and with an emphasis on the idea that there is a tiny difference between exponent, median and mean and considering the fact that the kurtosis and skewness coefficients are found below unity, it can be stated that the normality condition holds for the data distribution so the mean can be applied as an indicator of central tendency and parametric statistical models can be employed.

**Table 1:** descriptive statistics of the axes of "attachment styles" of gifted students' mothers

| Axes | Central tendency indicators | | | Scattering indices | | | Distribution indices | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Exponent | Median | Mean | Variation scope | Variance | Standard deviation | Standard error | Skewness | Kurtosis |
| Avoidant | 73 | 74 | 69.49 | 65 | 281.43 | 16.77 | 1.60 | 0.38 | 0.08 |
| Anxiety | 92 | 79 | 80.65 | 55 | 144.35 | 12.01 | 1.14 | -0.56 | 0.05 |

**Table 2:** descriptive statistics of "threefold impairment" and clinical scales of the gifted students' mothers

| Scale | | Central tendency indicators | | | Scattering indices | | | Distribution indices | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Exponent | Median | Mean | Variation scope | Variance | Standard deviation | Standard error | Skewness | Kurtosis |
| Threefold impairment | Emotional impairment | 21 | 20 | 19.40 | 18 | 15.35 | 3.91 | 0.35 | -0.75 | 0.57 |
| | Thinking impairment | 8 | 7 | 6.64 | 12 | 6.92 | 2.63 | 0.24 | 0.35 | 0.16 |
| | Behavioral impairment | 6 | 6 | 6.15 | 13 | 7.59 | 2.75 | 0.25 | 0.38 | 0.27 |
| | Spirit weakness | 9 | 9 | 9.97 | 20 | 14.64 | 3.82 | 0.34 | 0.28 | 0.76 |
| | Physical complaints | 13 | 11 | 10.45 | 11 | 7.66 | 2.76 | 0.25 | -0.19 | -0.85 |
| Clinical | Low positive emotions | 11 | 9 | 8.89 | 13 | 8.19 | 2.86 | 0.26 | -0.49 | -0.20 |
| | Pessimism | 6 | 6 | 6.63 | 8 | 3.96 | 1.99 | 0.18 | 0.14 | -0.60 |
| | Antisocial behavior | 8 | 6 | 5.97 | 12 | 7.31 | 2.70 | 0.24 | 0.09 | -0.13 |
| | Harm and annoyance opinions | 2 | 4 | 4.22 | 10 | 5.31 | 2.30 | 0.21 | 0.44 | -0.35 |
| | Disrupting negative emotions | 10 | 11 | 11.39 | 16 | 10.67 | 3.26 | 0.29 | -0.21 | 0.06 |
| | Weird and odd experiences | 6 | 5 | 4.97 | 8 | 2.79 | 1.67 | 0.15 | -0.30 | 0.13 |
| | Hypomanic activities | 10 | 11 | 10.70 | 17 | 13.65 | 3.69 | 0.33 | 0.12 | -0.84 |

Table (3) presents the descriptive statistics of "physical/cognitive and internalization" scales of the gifted students' mothers

**Table 3:** descriptive statistics of "physical/cognitive and internalization" scales of the gifted students' mothers

| Scale | Central tendency indicators | | | Scattering indices | | | Distribution indices | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Exponent | Median | Mean | Variation scope | Variance | Standard deviation | Standard error | Skewness | Kurtosis |
| Sickness | 3 | 4 | 3.87 | 6 | 2.24 | 1.49 | 0.13 | 0.24 | -0.12 |
| Digestive complaints | 1 | 1 | 1.31 | 3 | 0.90 | 0.95 | 0.08 | 0.21 | -0.86 |
| Headache | 2 | 2 | 1.88 | 5 | 1.34 | 1.16 | 0.10 | 0.39 | -0.02 |
| Neurological complaints | 3 | 4 | 3.80 | 6 | 2.44 | 1.56 | 0.14 | 0.16 | -0.73 |
| Cognitive complaints | 3 | 3 | 3.80 | 8 | 4.19 | 2.04 | 0.18 | 0.53 | -0.38 |
| Death and suicide thoughts | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.10 | 1 | 0.09 | 0.30 | 0.02 | 0.70 | 0.38 |
| Frustration-desolation | 2 | 2 | 2.17 | 4 | 0.73 | 0.85 | 0.07 | 0.22 | 0.12 |
| Self-doubt | 1 | 1 | 1.33 | 4 | 1.58 | 1.25 | 0.11 | 0.68 | -0.43 |
| Inefficiency | 5 | 5 | 4.97 | 6 | 1.82 | 1.35 | 0.12 | -0.03 | -0.39 |
| Psychological pressure-worriedness | 5 | 4 | 3.89 | 4 | 1.19 | 1.09 | 0.09 | -0.73 | -0.29 |
| Anxiety | 3 | 3 | 2.41 | 5 | 1.74 | 1.31 | 0.12 | -0.22 | -0.51 |
| Anger proneness | 5 | 5 | 4.28 | 7 | 3.86 | 1.96 | 0.17 | -0.64 | -0.32 |
| Behavior limiting fears | 4 | 4 | 4.10 | 6 | 2.37 | 1.54 | 0.14 | 0.08 | -0.72 |
| Clear multiple fears | 6 | 6 | 5.77 | 5 | 1.58 | 1.26 | 0.11 | 0.10 | -0.62 |

Table 4 gives the descriptive statistics pertaining to "externalization, interpersonal and interest" scales and "personality pathology" of the gifted students' mothers

**Table 4:** descriptive statistics of "externalization, interpersonal and interest" scales and "personality pathology" of the gifted students' mothers

| | Scale | Central tendency indicators | | | Scattering indices | | | Distribution indices | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Exponent | Median | Mean | Variation scope | Variance | Standard deviation | Standard error | Skewness | Kurtosis |
| Externalization, interpersonal and interests | Conduct problems of adolescence | 1 | 1 | 1.23 | 5 | 1.65 | 1.28 | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.61 |
| | Drug abuse | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.56 | 2 | 0.39 | 0.63 | 0.05 | 0.66 | -0.52 |
| | Aggression | 3 | 3 | 3.37 | 6 | 2.72 | 1.65 | 0.15 | -0.27 | -0.30 |
| | Emotionality | 2 | 2 | 2.17 | 7 | 3.27 | 1.80 | 0.16 | 0.54 | -0.44 |
| | Familial problems | 2 | 2 | 2.17 | 7 | 3.27 | 1.80 | 0.16 | 0.54 | -0.44 |
| | Interpersonal passivity | 5 | 5 | 5.38 | 7 | 2.12 | 1.45 | 0.13 | -0.56 | 0.40 |
| | Social avoidance | 6 | 5 | 5.15 | 9 | 3.32 | 1.82 | 0.16 | -0.04 | 0.38 |
| | Bashfulness | 3 | 3 | 2.72 | 5 | 1.61 | 1.26 | 0.11 | -0.29 | -0.22 |
| | Distantness | 2 | 2.50 | 2.60 | 3 | 0.62 | 0.79 | 0.07 | 0.30 | -0.61 |
| | Literary-aesthetical interests | 3 | 3 | 3.49 | 13 | 4.21 | 2.05 | 0.18 | 0.47 | 0.51 |
| | Mechanical-physical interests | 1 | 2 | 1.97 | 5 | 1.72 | 1.31 | 0.11 | 0.38 | -0.54 |
| Personality pathology | Internal aggressiveness | 8 | 8 | 7.68 | 9 | 4.52 | 2.12 | 0.19 | 0.01 | -0.61 |
| | Psychosis | 7 | 6 | 6.11 | 11 | 5.49 | 2.34 | 0.21 | 0.49 | 0.30 |
| | Irresponsibility | 4 | 4 | 4.25 | 9 | 5.06 | 2.25 | 0.20 | 0.49 | -0.20 |
| | Psychoneurosis | 13 | 11 | 10.46 | 10 | 7.29 | 2.70 | 0.24 | -0.24 | -0.01 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Introversion | 12 | 11 | 11.10 | 17 | 10.49 | 3.23 | 0.29 | 0.28 | 0.54 |

Table (5) summarizes the descriptive statistics pertinent to "anxiety" in gifted adolescents.

**Table 5:** descriptive statistics of "anxiety" in gifted adolescents

| Central tendency indicators | | | Scattering indicators | | | Distribution indicators | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Exponent | Median | Mean | Variations scope | Variance | Standard deviation | Standard error | Skewness | Kurtosis |
| 3 | 3 | 2.40 | 4 | 1.35 | 1.16 | 0.10 | -0.37 | -0.81 |

According to table (6) and with an emphasis on the amount of F-statistic obtained using multivariate regression analysis based on simultaneous insertion, it can be stated that there is observed a significant relationship between "avoidant attachment style" and "anxious attachment style" of the mothers with the "anxiety" in the gifted adolescents in $\alpha=0.01$ and $\alpha=0.05$ level, respectively.

**Table 6:** univariate regression for predicting gifted adolescents' "anxiety" through "avoidant attachment style" and mothers' "anxious attachment style"

| Variable | Source of variation | Squares sum | Degree of freedom | Squares mean | F-value | Significance level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avoidant attachment style | Regression | 48.66 | 1 | 48.66 | 50.47 | 0.001 |
| | Residual | 103.15 | 107 | 0.96 | | |
| Anxious attachment style | Regression | 8.01 | 1 | 8.01 | 6.01 | 0.016 |
| | Residual | 145.24 | 109 | 1.33 | | |

### Discussion and Conclusion:

The results of the present study are reflective of the idea that the attachment styles and personality characteristics of the mothers have been able to positively and significantly predict the anxiety in gifted adolescents. The results of the studies carried out during the previous years both inside and outside the country, including the ones conducted by Derakhshanpoor and Izadyar (2016), Karimi and Sepahvand (2015), Sivasha'ei et al (2014), Sarvghad et al (2012), Brown et al (2010), Benisomer and Mehmet (2015) are consistent with the findings of the present study. The personality characteristics and communication patterns and attachment styles of the mothers play a very important role in adolescents' interpretation and perception of the environmental incidents, sensitivity to threatening stimuli, acquisition of skills for coping with unpredictable events, adaptability and exploration of new environments all of which are the focal point of the theories pertaining to the emergence of the anxiety disorders. The explication of the effects of attachment styles and personality characteristics of mothers on anxiety in the adolescents can eventually lead to the individuals' far greater recognition of the various life issues, tendencies and problem confrontation and it can also help the adolescents correctly deal with their real problems. It can also cause the deepening of the gifted adolescents' awareness and perception thereby to encourage them to more hopefully, more promptly and more happily continue their lives (Hurkov, 2012).

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