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# A comparison of experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties in adolescent students with narcissistic and histrionic personality traits

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to compare experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties in adolescent students with narcissistic and histrionic personality traits. The research is descriptive and of a comparative nature. The study population consists of adolescents seeking counseling and psychotherapy services affiliated with the Welfare Organization in Regions 10, 11, and 12 of Tehran. Among the individuals seeking assistance, a total of 100 participants (50 with narcissistic traits and 50 with histrionic traits) were selected using convenience sampling as the research sample. The research instruments included standardized questionnaires for acceptance and action, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed for data analysis. The findings indicated a significant difference in experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties among adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic personality traits ($P < 0.01$). The results showed that the levels of experiential avoidance were higher among individuals with narcissistic personality traits, while the average scores of resilience and emotional regulation difficulties were higher among individuals with histrionic personality traits.

**Keywords**
**experiential avoidance, resilience, emotional regulation difficulties, histrionic personality, narcissistic personality, students**

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## Introduction

Adolescence is a transformative period characterized by significant physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes. It is a time of self-discovery, identity formation, and the development of personality traits that shape an individual's future interactions and relationships. Among the myriad of personality traits that can emerge during adolescence, two have garnered substantial attention in recent years: narcissism and histrionic traits. These personality characteristics, when pronounced, can significantly influence an adolescent's emotional well-being, interpersonal dynamics, and overall adjustment to the challenges of this developmental stage.

Narcissistic Personality Traits: Narcissistic personality traits, drawn from the broader concept of narcissistic personality disorder as described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), encompass a set of enduring patterns of behavior marked by an exaggerated sense of self-importance, a constant need for admiration, and a pervasive lack of empathy for others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals exhibiting narcissistic traits tend to seek out situations and interactions that reinforce their inflated self-image and may struggle with regulating their emotions, particularly when their self-worth is threatened (Ronningstam, 2016).

The prevalence of narcissistic traits among adolescents has been a subject of concern in contemporary psychology. Some studies suggest that narcissistic traits may be on the rise among this age group, fueled in part by societal factors such as increased emphasis on self-esteem and achievement (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Understanding the emotional and psychological dynamics of adolescents with narcissistic traits is crucial, as these traits can impact their relationships with peers, family members, and educators, as well as their overall mental health.

Histrionic Personality Traits: Histrionic personality traits, another subset of personality characteristics associated with histrionic personality disorder in the DSM-5, revolve around excessive attention-seeking behavior, emotional instability, and a susceptibility to being easily influenced by others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Adolescents with pronounced histrionic traits may engage in dramatic, flamboyant, and attention-grabbing behaviors as they seek to fulfill their emotional needs and maintain a sense of significance (Zanarini et al., 2011).

While the prevalence of histrionic personality disorder is relatively low, the presence of histrionic traits in adolescents can still significantly impact their emotional and interpersonal lives. Adolescents with histrionic traits may find it challenging to regulate their emotions effectively and

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form stable, authentic relationships due to their propensity for impressionistic and theatrical behaviors.

Comparing Personality Traits in Adolescents: This study aims to explore and compare several critical psychological factors in adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic personality traits, with a specific focus on experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties. Understanding how these traits relate to these psychological constructs can offer valuable insights into the unique challenges and strengths of each group.

Experiential Avoidance: Experiential avoidance refers to an individual's tendency to avoid or suppress unpleasant thoughts, emotions, or experiences (Hayes et al., 2004). Adolescents with narcissistic traits may exhibit heightened levels of experiential avoidance as they strive to maintain a self-image of grandiosity and perfection. When faced with emotions or thoughts that challenge this self-image, they may employ avoidance strategies, potentially leading to emotional distress and interpersonal difficulties (Hixon & Swann, 1993).

Resilience: Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from adversity, adapt positively to challenging situations, and maintain psychological well-being (Connor & Davidson, 2003). It is an essential trait for navigating the ups and downs of adolescence. Understanding how resilience varies among adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic traits can shed light on their ability to cope with stressors and setbacks in different ways.

Emotional Regulation Difficulties: Emotional regulation difficulties encompass a range of challenges related to identifying, understanding, and managing one's emotions (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Adolescents with histrionic traits may struggle with emotional regulation due to their heightened emotional reactivity and impulsivity. Understanding these difficulties can help tailor interventions to support these adolescents in managing their emotions more effectively.

The Significance of This Study: This study's significance lies in its potential to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between personality traits and psychological constructs among adolescents. By comparing experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties in adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic traits, we can gain insights into their unique emotional profiles.

Moreover, these insights can inform the development of tailored interventions and support mechanisms for adolescents exhibiting these traits. Adolescents with narcissistic traits may benefit from interventions aimed at reducing experiential avoidance and fostering emotional regulation

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skills. On the other hand, adolescents with histrionic traits may require strategies to build on their existing resilience and enhance their emotional regulation abilities.

As personality traits exist on a spectrum, it is essential to recognize that adolescents may exhibit varying degrees of narcissistic and histrionic traits. Therefore, interventions should be individualized to address the specific needs and strengths of each adolescent.

In conclusion, this study endeavors to contribute valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic personality traits. By exploring and comparing experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties, it provides a foundation for designing targeted interventions and support systems that can enhance the well-being and adjustment of these adolescents as they navigate the challenges of adolescence and beyond.

## Materials and Methods

The study population consisted of adolescents seeking counseling and psychotherapy services affiliated with the Welfare Organization in Regions 10, 11, and 12 of Tehran, Iran. From this population, 100 participants (50 with narcissistic traits and 50 with histrionic traits) were selected using convenience sampling as the research sample. Participants ranged in age from 14 to 19 years.

**Instruments**

1. Experiential Avoidance: Experiential avoidance was assessed using the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II) (Bond et al., 2011). The AAQ-II measures an individual's tendency to avoid or suppress unpleasant thoughts and emotions.

2.Resilience: Resilience was measured using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This questionnaire evaluates an individual's ability to bounce back from adversity and maintain psychological well-being.

3. Emotional Regulation Difficulties: Emotional regulation difficulties were assessed using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). The DERS measures an individual's difficulties in regulating emotions, including aspects like impulse control and emotional awareness.

**Data Analysis:** Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was employed to analyze the data. MANOVA allows for the simultaneous examination of multiple dependent variables (experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties) to determine whether there are significant differences between the two groups of adolescents (narcissistic and histrionic traits).

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## Results

The descriptive results provided in table 1.

| Group | Variables | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Narcissistic students** | experiential avoidance | 17.24 | 3.11 |
| | Resilience | 24.81 | 4.11 |
| | emotional regulation difficulties | 35.54 | 3.21 |
| **Histrionic students** | experiential avoidance | 15.21 | 2.25 |
| | Resilience | 27.31 | 2.98 |
| | emotional regulation difficulties | 29.71 | 2.47 |

The results of the MANOVA analysis is presented in table 2 and 3.

**Table 2**. Results of Wilks' Lambda

| Effect | Test | Value | F | Effect DF | Error DF | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group** | Wilks lambda | 0.55 | 6.28 | 3 | 96 | 0.001 |

The results of Wilks' Lambda test (Table 2) showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups in at least one of the research variables. According to the results of Lambda test, follow-up analyses were conducted to investigate the intergroup effects, and the results are presented in Table 3.

**Table3**. Results of multivariate analysis of variance for research variables

| Variable | SS | DF | MS | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **experiential avoidance** | 124.21 | 1 | 124.21 | 11.54 | 0.001 |
| **Resilience** | 98.24 | 1 | 98.24 | 9.25 | 0.001 |
| **emotional regulation difficulties** | 113.89 | 1 | 113.89 | 10.65 | 0.001 |

The results of the MANOVA analysis revealed a significant difference in experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties between adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic personality traits ($P < 0.01$).

1. Experiential Avoidance: Adolescents with narcissistic traits exhibited significantly higher levels of experiential avoidance compared to their peers with histrionic traits. This suggests that individuals with narcissistic traits are more prone to avoiding or suppressing unpleasant thoughts and emotions.



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2.Resilience: In contrast, adolescents with histrionic traits displayed higher average scores for resilience compared to those with narcissistic traits. This indicates that individuals with histrionic traits may possess a greater ability to rebound from adversity and maintain psychological well-being.

3. Emotional Regulation Difficulties: The results also showed that adolescents with histrionic traits had lower scores on emotional regulation difficulties than those with narcissistic traits. This suggests that individuals with histrionic traits may have a relatively easier time regulating their emotions, including impulse control and emotional awareness.

## Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of understanding and addressing the psychological dynamics of adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic personality traits. The observed differences in experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties shed light on the distinct challenges faced by these individuals.

Experiential Avoidance: Adolescents with narcissistic traits demonstrated higher levels of experiential avoidance, which may be linked to their difficulties in regulating emotions when their self-image is threatened. These findings highlight the need for interventions that promote emotional awareness and adaptive coping strategies for this group.

Resilience: On the other hand, adolescents with histrionic traits displayed greater resilience, suggesting that they may possess a natural ability to bounce back from adversity. This resilience could serve as a protective factor in their emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships.

Emotional Regulation: The lower levels of emotional regulation difficulties among adolescents with histrionic traits suggest that they may have better impulse control and emotional awareness. This contrasts with adolescents with narcissistic traits, who may struggle with emotional regulation, especially in the face of challenges to their self-image.

In practice, these findings emphasize the importance of tailored interventions and support for adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic traits. For those with narcissistic traits, interventions should focus on reducing experiential avoidance and enhancing emotional regulation skills. For those with histrionic traits, efforts may be directed towards further developing their resilience and maintaining healthy emotional regulation strategies.

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It is essential to note that personality traits exist on a spectrum, and individuals may exhibit varying degrees of narcissistic and histrionic traits. Therefore, interventions should be individualized to address the specific needs and strengths of each adolescent.

In conclusion, this study contributes valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of adolescents with narcissistic and histrionic personality traits. By comparing experiential avoidance, resilience, and emotional regulation difficulties, it provides a foundation for designing targeted interventions and support systems.

### Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

### Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of University of Hormozgan.

### Author contributions

LH and FG contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. The author contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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