

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Construction and Validation of the Iranian Adolescents' Self-Harming Thoughts Questionnaire

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ABSTRACT

This study proposed to develop and validate a questionnaire on self-harm thoughts among Iranian adolescents. The present research is a quantitative and descriptive study conducted among the population of second-cycle secondary school students in Ardakan city in 1404. Sampling was conducted using convenience sampling. The research instruments included the Self-Harm Thoughts Questionnaire, the Self-Harm Behaviors Questionnaire (Shomali & Barghdari, 1403), and the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Data were analyzed using SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 statistical software. The results of exploratory factor analysis showed that the Self-Harm Thoughts Questionnaire is unidimensional and consists of 8 items. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was calculated by determining the correlation coefficient of each item with the total questionnaire, ranging from 0.372 to 0.737. A significant positive relationship was found between self-harm behaviors and self-harm thoughts, as well as A significant negative relationship was found between between self-esteem and self-harm thoughts, confirming convergent and divergent validity The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated factor loadings above 0.4, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.079, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) of 0.945, comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.958, and χ^2/df value of 2.406, which support the construct validity of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha value was also 0.821, indicating adequate reliability of the questionnaire. Based on the results of this study, the Self-Harm Thoughts Questionnaire for Iranian adolescents is a suitable tool for assessing self-harm thoughts.

KEY WORDS

Construction And Validation, Self-Harming Thoughts, Deliberate Self-Harm, Non-Suicidal Self-Injury .



Introduction

Self-harm thoughts represent cognitive precursors to deliberate self-harm behaviors and are critical for early identification and prevention of self-injurious acts among adolescents. Deliberate self-harm (DSH) encompasses intentional injury to one's body, with or without suicidal intent, and is a major public health concern (Nock, 2010). Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI), a subset of these behaviors, involves direct and deliberate destruction of body tissue without suicidal intent (Nock & Favazza, 2009).

Adolescence is a vulnerable period marked by heightened emotional dysregulation, cognitive distortions, and interpersonal stressors, which contribute to the emergence of self-harming thoughts and behaviors. Prevalence rates of self-harm behaviors among adolescents are notable globally and in Iran, ranging from 3.4% to 37% in Iranian samples, with increases observed post-COVID-19 (Mansouri et al., 1402/2023; Muehlenkamp et al., 2012). Thoughts about self-harm often precede behaviors and serve functions such as emotion regulation, self-punishment, or communication of distress (Klonsky, 2007; McPherson et al., 2022).

Despite the availability of several instruments for assessing self-harm behaviors (e.g., Gratz, 2001; Klonsky & Glenn, 2009), few validated tools specifically target self-harming thoughts, particularly in non-Western, culturally sensitive contexts like Iran. Existing measures often focus on behavioral frequency, include culturally incongruent items, or are too lengthy for screening purposes. Iranian adolescents face unique cultural, religious, and familial pressures that may shape the expression and content of self-harming cognitions.

This study addresses this gap by developing and validating a brief, culturally appropriate questionnaire for Iranian adolescents. It builds upon prior work on self-harm behaviors in Iranian students (Shomali Ahmadabadi & Brkhordari Ahmadabadi, 2025) and integrates theoretical frameworks such as Nock's (2009) functional model of self-injury and cognitive-behavioral perspectives on thought-behavior linkages. The primary objectives were to examine the factor structure, reliability, and validity (construct, convergent, and divergent) of the new instrument.

Method

This psychometric study followed a quantitative descriptive design with an instrument-development focus. The target population included all second-cycle secondary school students in Ardakan, Iran, during the 1403-1404 academic year. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, convenience sampling with strict inclusion/exclusion criteria was employed, yielding a final analytic sample of 223 participants (127 female, 96 male; grades 10–12).

Item generation involved a systematic literature review, semi-structured interviews with adolescents reporting self-harm history, and consultation with experts (3 clinical psychologists and 2 psychometricians). An initial 10-item pool was created, with responses on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = never to 4 = always) referring to the past month. Content validity was assessed by 5 experts using Lawshe's method (CVI values 0.80–1.00; S-CVI/Ave = 0.90). A pilot study (n=81) led to the removal of two low-performing items, resulting in the final 8-item version. Additional measures included the Iranian Adolescents' Self-Harm Behaviors Questionnaire (Shomali Ahmadabadi & Brkhordari Ahmadabadi, 1403; $\alpha = 0.819$ in current sample) for convergent validity and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; $\alpha = 0.827$) for divergent validity.

Data collection was online via virtual school groups after ethical approval, informed consent, and anonymity assurances. Multivariate outliers were screened using Mahalanobis distance. Analyses included item statistics, Cronbach's alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 24 using maximum likelihood estimation.

Results

Participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1 (original article). The mean score on the Self-Harming Thoughts Questionnaire was 10.26 (SD = 5.38). No significant gender difference was observed.

Item analysis showed acceptable corrected item-total correlations (0.372–0.737). Cronbach's α for the 8-item scale was 0.821. EFA (KMO = 0.847; Bartlett's $\chi^2(28) = 526.03$, $p < 0.001$) revealed a clear single-factor solution explaining 48.79% of the total variance, with factor loadings from 0.401 to 0.844 (all > 0.40). The scree plot confirmed the unidimensional structure.

CFA results supported the one-factor model with good fit indices: $\chi^2(17) = 40.91$, $\chi^2/df = 2.406$, RMSEA = 0.079, GFI = 0.945, CFI = 0.958, TLI = 0.959, and NFI = 0.929. All factor loadings exceeded 0.40.

Convergent validity was evidenced by a strong positive correlation with self-harm behaviors ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$). Divergent validity was supported by a significant negative correlation with self-esteem ($r = -0.67$, $p < 0.01$).

Discussion and conclusion

The Iranian Adolescents' Self-Harming Thoughts Questionnaire demonstrates strong psychometric properties as a reliable and valid unidimensional 8-item tool. It fills an important gap by specifically assessing cognitive precursors to self-harm in a culturally relevant manner for Iranian youth. Findings align with functional models of NSSI (Nock, 2009) and cognitive-behavioral theories linking thoughts to behaviors.

The instrument's brevity and strong validity make it suitable for school-based screening, clinical assessment, and research. Practical implications include early identification of at-risk adolescents for targeted emotion-regulation interventions. Limitations include the convenience sampling method, reliance on self-report, and restriction to one geographic area, which warrant caution in generalization. Future studies should examine test-retest reliability, predictive validity, and invariance across genders and regions.

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Authors' Contribution

The sole author was responsible for the study's conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, writing, and final approval of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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