



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Predictive Role of Emotional Intelligence in Authenticity and Self-Disgust Levels of University Students

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationships between emotional intelligence, authenticity, and self-disgust levels of university students. A total of 555 students, 440 females and 115 males, from different universities in Turkey in the year 2022 were part of the study. The research model of this study is a type of quantitative research called the relational survey model. Demographic Information Form, Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form, Self-Disgust Scale–Revised, and Authenticity Scale were used in the study for data collection. The results of the research state that the subscales of emotional intelligence (well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, and sociability) were significant predictors of authenticity. The subscales of emotional intelligence, including well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, and sociability together explained 53% of the variance in authenticity scores. The results also indicate that the subscales of emotional intelligence and gender were significant predictors of self-disgust. The subscales of emotional intelligence, including well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, sociability, and gender together explained 43% of the variance in self-disgust scores. According to the results obtained, emotional intelligence seems to be effective in increasing authenticity and decreasing self-disgust. For this reason, it is recommended to give importance to increasing emotional intelligence skills in terms of psychological health.

The notion of emotional intelligence has opened a new window on human nature, rejecting the supposed discrepancy between emotion and mind by emphasizing that emotions should work with the mind. Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive and discriminate between one's own emotions and those of others, and to use this emotional information functionally in life (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Individuals with high emotional intelligence have skills such as knowing and effectively expressing their needs and emotions, delaying impulses, distinguishing emotions, understanding and managing others' emotions, resilience to stress, problem-solving, and adaptation (Bar-On, 2006; Goleman, 2006; Salovey et al., 2004). Numerous studies in the literature (Bar-On, 2010; Özer & Deniz, 2014; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2016; Wapaño, 2021; Yüksel et al., 2021) confirm that emotional intelligence is a powerful factor in mental health. Looking at psychotherapy theories it seems that there are therapy goals such as self-knowledge, unconditional self-acceptance, empathy, healthy communication, managing emotions and stress, and self-awareness which show parallelism with emotional intelligence abilities and skills. Emotional intelligence skills have an impact on work-life (Goleman, 2021; Güllüce & İşcan, 2010), marriage (Alp, 2021), social relationships (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), psychological parameters such as psychological resilience, happiness, subjective well-being (Özer & Deniz,

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2014; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2016; Yılmaz Akbaba, 2020), and other areas of life. Therefore, it can be said that studies on emotional intelligence help to determine the essence and solutions to different problems in various areas of life.

Depending on the existence of different views on emotional intelligence, different models of emotional intelligence have emerged (Cooper, 1997; Bar-On, 2006; Goleman, 2006; Salovey et al., 2004). Current emotional intelligence models are mostly classified under two categories: ability and mixed models (Çakar & Arbak, 2004; Livingstone & Day, 2005). Some skills such as perceiving emotions of self and others, empathizing with others, managing emotions, using emotions effectively in interpersonal relationships are common in these models. There is a consensus in emotional intelligence literature that it can be developed (Ciarrochi & Mayer, 2007; Goleman, 2021; Shapiro, 2010). Various studies conducted at different age groups also confirm that emotional intelligence can be improved (Altunbaş & Özabacı, 2019; Gilar-Corbi et al., 2018; Gilar-Corb et al., 2019; Gürsoy & Balcı Çelik, 2020; Karahan & Özçelik, 2006; Sarısoy & Erişen, 2018; Şahin & Ömeroğlu, 2015; Yılmaz, 2021). When examining the evolution of emotional intelligence studies, the focus is on the conceptualization of emotional intelligence and the development of various models and measurement tools in the 1990s. However, since the 21st century, there has been an increase in experimental studies that confirm the theoretical structure (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006).

Authenticity has gained growing attention among researchers as a result of modern life and the rapid changes in daily life. Authenticity is defined as being aware of who you are, accepting your true self and behaving as your true self to others (Wood et al., 2008). Another definition of it is knowing your thoughts, feelings, desires, choices, needs and acting consistently with them (Harter, 2002). Authenticity is about being honest with oneself and due to this fact that individuals can be authentic to the extent that they remain true to themselves (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). Studies carried out in recent years emphasize the benefits of authenticity for personal development and mental health (Zhang, 2022). The studies confirm that authenticity is also related to psychological functionality. For instance, behaving or feeling authentic increases satisfaction with decisions (Schlegel et al., 2013), supports subjective well-being (Goldman & Kernis, 2002), and increases the meaning of life (Schlegel et al., 2009), self-esteem (Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson, 2012) and problem-solving skills (Tekin, 2021). Besides it helps to give more adaptive responses in various contexts and situations (Zhang, 2022).

It is assumed that emotional intelligence skills such as recognizing emotions and thoughts and knowing how emotional situations will lead to effects on oneself can be effective in providing self-awareness required for authenticity. In addition, authentic individuals protect themselves against external influences and avoid acting in line with the expectations of others (Wood et al., 2008). At this point, it is thought that emotional intelligence skills for self-expression in interpersonal relationships and personal and interpersonal skills such as stress management, adaptation, problem solving, understanding and managing others' emotions may be effective. In a variety of studies, emotional intelligence has been found to have a positive relationship with authenticity (Bağdiken, 2021; Kocaoğlu, 2020; Tohme & Joseph, 2020).

Disgust is defined as a reaction that serves mainly to external stimulus (Jin et al., 2020). However, it is inevitable that the feeling of disgust will be directed toward the self when people fail to conform to social standards of behavior (Roberts & Goldenberg, 2007). Self-disgust is a permanent state of disgust reflecting a violent, dysfunctional, and embodied reaction (Jin et al., 2020). Lazuras et al. (2019) stated that self-disgust is an emotional, cognitive, and physiological response to one's permanent self and characteristics. According to this view, self-disgust is triggered by various external stimuli and internal stimuli such as memories, thoughts, and experiences as in schemas. Self-disgust can occur if an individual constantly evaluates oneself and his or her own behavior negatively in a non-objective way. When the development of self-disgust is examined, its origins go back to childhood and adolescence. Exposure to negative criticism, humiliation, and ridicule from parents or others at different developmental periods has a role in the development of self-disgust (Powell et al., 2014). According to the literature, self-disgust is categorized as related feelings such as self-hatred, guilt, and shame (Clarke et al., 2019; Power & Dalgleish, 2016; Robins & Schriber, 2009). Previous studies show that self-disgust is related to negative psychological factors such as depression, loneliness (Ypsilanti et al.,

2019), suicide ideation (Özden, 2021), anxiety (Gao et al., 2022), and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Doğan, 2022).

The ability to control and manage emotions is a very important skill for emotional intelligence (Salovey et al., 2004). This skill helps to experience and manage negative emotions in a controlled way. This can prevent negative emotions from being experienced in unpredictable dimensions and harming the individual. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are more successful at regulating their emotions, including negative emotions such as self-disgust. In addition, accurate observation of emotional disturbances or negative emotions provides early relief from negative effects and distress (Goleman, 2021). It is thought that these features of emotional intelligence may be effective in the experience of self-disgust.

In recent years, various virtual platforms have enabled individuals to present the self they want. Individuals can appear different than they really are. However, this raises questions about authenticity and the true self. Individuals' tendency to show themselves flawless can affect many individuals psychologically negatively. Constantly comparing oneself with others and focusing on one's flaws increases negative criticism against oneself and it is estimated that this will contribute to self-disgust. In studies on self-disgust, it is generally stated that self-disgust is experienced as a result of various behaviours. For instance, it is indicated that negative criticism from the environment, erroneous parenting attitudes (Powell et al., 2014), traumatic experiences (Powell et al., 2015b), and factors related to physical appearance (Palmeira et al., 2019) play a role in the formation of self-disgust. However, this overlooks the possibility that various psychological traits may also be influential in the formation of self-disgust (Lazuras et al., 2019). Therefore, it is clear that psychological factors related to self-disgust have not been adequately examined in the literature. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on psychological mechanisms such as emotional intelligence underlying self-disgust.

Emotional intelligence is a trait that can be improved (Ciarrochi ve Mayer, 2007; Goleman, 2021; Shapiro, 2010). This situation provides an advantage in terms of factors related to emotional intelligence. Because increasing emotional intelligence skills can increase authenticity and reduce self-disgust. Determining the effects of emotional intelligence skills on self-disgust and authenticity seems to be important in terms of leading a more functional life. Research has shown that high levels of authenticity (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Schlegel et al., 2009; Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson, 2012) and low levels of self-disgust (Ypsilanti et al., 2019; Gao et al., 2022) are crucial for a healthy and functional life. It is necessary to investigate the dynamic mechanisms that may be effective in increasing authenticity and decreasing self-disgust. Therefore, this study aims to examine the predictive role of emotional intelligence in authenticity and self-disgust. In addition, the predictive role of gender and income status variables on authenticity and self-disgust is also examined in the study.

Methodology

Research Model

This research was conducted using the relational survey model, which is a type of quantitative research and one of the survey models. Survey models allow a situation to be defined and described as it is in its context. The relational survey model refers to studies that examine at least two variables and how and to what extent the variables change together (Karasar, 2008).

Participants

Participants were selected by convenient sampling method. There are a total of 555 college students in the study group, 440 (79%) female and 115 (21%) male. The age of the students ranged between 17-34 (mean age = 22.53, SD= 3.63). Of the participants were 11% of them stated that they had low income, 85% had medium income and 4% had high income. The distribution according to education level is as follows: associate degree 3%, bachelor's degree 92%, master's degree 4% and doctorate 1%.

Ethics Committee Approval

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University, Social and Human Sciences (Decision no: 2022/325). In addition, the participants answered to the data collection tools after completing the consent form which they declared that they voluntarily participated in the study.

Data Collection Tools

Demographic Information Form: This form is formed by researcher. There are questions about age, gender, income status, department, and educational level in it.

Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form: This scale was developed by Petrides and Furnham (2001) and adapted into Turkish by Deniz, Özer, and Işık (2013). The results of exploratory factor analysis yielded a four-dimensional structure, and confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the four solution structure. It consists of subscales that “well-being,” “self-discipline,” “emotionality,” and “sociability.” The 7-point Likert-type scale contains 20 items. There are 4 items in each subscale. A high score indicates high emotional intelligence. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale is .81. In this study, it was calculated as .68 for well-being, .69 for self-discipline, .70 for emotionality, .70 for sociability and .84. for the whole scale.

Authenticity Scale: This scale was developed by Wood et al. (2008) and adapted into Turkish by İlhan and Özdemir (2013). As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, a three-dimensional structure was revealed. The subscales are “self-alienation,” “accepting external influence,” and “authentic living.” The scale is a 7-point Likert-type scale consisting 12 items. There are 4 items in each subscale. Each subscale is evaluated separately by summing the items belonging to it, and a pure authenticity score is obtained by subtracting the scores of the other two subscales from authentic life. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of the scale were found to be .79 for self-alienation, .67 for accepting external influence, and .70 for authentic living. In this study, it was calculated as .82 for self-alienation, .82 for accepting external influence, .62 authentic living and .70 for the whole scale.

Self-Disgust Scale-Revised: This scale was developed by Overton et al. (2008) considering that self-disgust may be related to depression and revised by Powell et al. (2015). Its adaptation into Turkish was carried out by Bahtiyar and Yıldırım (2019). The two-dimensional structure was confirmed by factor analysis. These subscales are named as “behavioral-based disgust” and “physical appearance-based disgust”. The scale consists of 21 items in total. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be .83. In this study, it was calculated as .82 for behavioral-based disgust, .83 for physical appearance-based disgust and .84 for the whole scale.

Data Analysis

SPSS-21 Packet Program was used for data analysis and multiple regression analysis were carried out. Since the skewness and kurtosis values of the distributions were between -2 and +2, it was determined that they had a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2016). There were no significant outliers in the data distributions. For multiple regression analyses, the Durbin-Watson scores calculated for assumptions of independence of observations were 1.843 and 1.778 and it was seen that there was a linear relationship between the groups. The homoscedasticity assumption was satisfied, and there is no linearity between the independent variables. The inclusion of categorical variables as independent variables in the regression analysis was achieved by the creation of dummy variables . Thus, dummy variables were created using the values "0" and "1" for gender and income status. In order to avoid the dummy variable trap, one dummy variable for each dummy variable type was excluded from the analysis. Male in gender and low income status in income status is considered as the base category.

Findings

The findings obtained as a result of the analysis of the data are given below. Firstly, preliminary analyses were conducted, and descriptive statistics were examined. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Emotional Intelligence						
1. Well-Being	1	.45**	.36**	.46**	.50**	.55**
2. Self-Discipline		1	.38**	.40**	.64**	-.45**
3. Emotionality			1	.37**	.41**	-.37**
4. Sociability				1	.53**	-.48**
5. Authenticity					1	-.58**
6. Self-Disgust						1
\bar{X}	20.58	17.12	19.73	20.36	-2.37	28.68
SD	3.82	4.68	3.7	4.2	10.75	11.12
Skewness	-0.59	-0.11	-0.20	-0.52	-0.22	-0.88
Kurtosis	0.10	-0.56	-0.38	-0.13	-0.44	-0.06

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which the well-being, self-discipline, emotionality and sociability sub-subscales of emotional intelligence, in conjunction with gender and income status, predict authenticity. The regression analysis results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Predictive Role of Emotional Intelligence, Gender and Income Status in Authenticity

Variables	B	Std. Error	β	t	p	F	R^2
Constant	-45.57	2.35		-19.32	0.00		
Well-Being	0.43	0.10	0.15	4.34	0.00		
Self-Discipline	0.98	0.08	0.43	12.30	0.00		
Emotionality	0.28	0.09	0.09	2.97	0.00	88.95	0.53
Sociability	0.62	0.08	0.25	7.13	0.00		
Gender (Female)	-0.39	0.78	-0.01	0.46	0.61		
Income Status (Middle)	-1.02	1.02	-0.34	-1.00	0.31		
Income Status (High)	0.83	1.81	0.00	0.46	0.96		

Note. $F_{(7,547)} = 88.95$ $R = 0.73$

As a result of the multiple regression analysis given in Table 2, it was found that the well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, and sociability subscales of emotional intelligence ($R = 0.73$, $R^2 = 0.53$) were significant predictors of authenticity, $F_{(7,547)} = 88.95$, $p < 0.05$. Well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, and sociability together explain 53% ($R^2 = 0.53$) of the change in authenticity scores. It was found that gender, middle income status and high-income status did not predict authenticity, $p > 0.05$. According to standardized regression coefficients, the order of importance of predictor variables on authenticity is self-discipline ($\beta = 0.43$), sociability ($\beta = -0.25$), well-being ($\beta = -0.15$), and emotionality ($\beta = -0.09$).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which the well-being, self-discipline, emotionality and sociability sub-subscales of emotional intelligence, in conjunction with gender and income status, predict self-disgust. The regression analysis results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Predictive Role of Emotional Intelligence, Gender and Income Status in Self-Disgust

Variables	B	Std. Error	β	t	p	F	R^2
Constant	78.44	2.68		29.23	0.00		
Well-Being	-0.91	0.11	-0.31	-7.98	0.00		
Self-Discipline	-0.42	0.09	-0.17	-4.60	0.00		
Emotionality	-0.30	0.10	-0.10	-2.73	0.00	59.82	0.43
Sociability	-0.63	0.10	-0.24	-6.35	0.00		
Gender (Female)	-3.74	0.89	-1.13	-4.16	0.00		
Income Status (Middle)	-2.03	1.16	-0.06	-1.74	0.08		
Income Status (High)	-3.63	2.06	-0.06	-1.76	0.07		

Note. $F_{(7,547)} = 59.82$ $R = 0.65$ $p < 0.05$

As a result of the multiple regression analysis given in Table 3, it was found that the well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, sociability subscales of emotional intelligence and gender (female) ($R=0.65$, $R^2=0.43$) were significant predictors of self-disgust, $F_{(7-547)}= 59.82$, $p < 0.05$. Well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, sociability and gender (female) together explain 43% ($R^2=0.43$) of the change in self-disgust scores. According to standardized regression coefficients, the order of importance of predictor variables on self-disgust is well-being ($\beta=-0.31$), sociability ($\beta=-0.24$), self-discipline ($\beta=-0.17$), gender ($\beta=-0.13$) and emotionality ($\beta=-0.10$). It was found that middle income status and high-income status did not predict self-disgust, $p > 0.05$.

Conclusion, Discussion and Recommendations

This study examines the predictive role of emotional intelligence and some demographic variables on authenticity and self-disgust. The study findings indicate that emotional intelligence, including well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, and sociability subscales, significantly predicts authenticity. Together, these four factors account for 53% of the variance in authenticity scores. Kumru (2021) discovered similar findings in her research. It is found that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of various subscales of authenticity. Similarly, Tohme and Joseph (2020) found that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and authenticity. Kocaoğlu (2020) found a low and significant positive relationship between authenticity and emotional intelligence variables in the study. Similarly, Günar Eren (2019) discovered that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and authenticity. Bağdiken (2021) found a medium and significant positive relationship between authenticity and emotional intelligence variables in the study. From the theoretical framework, it is seen that authenticity shares many commonalities with emotional intelligence competencies. For instance, self-awareness is a vital competence for the emotionality subscale of emotional intelligence (Goh & Kim, 2021; Goleman, 2021b). Individuals with high emotional intelligence have an increased awareness of their internal processes, including their emotions, thoughts, desires, and needs. They utilize this awareness to guide their actions. It is considered that emotional intelligence's self-awareness skills impact the actions of authentic individuals, and emotional intelligence's self-awareness skills impact the actions of authentic individuals based on their emotions, thoughts, and needs (Bağdiken, 2021). Furthermore, the effective expression of emotions, needs, and desires can be possible in favor of emotional intelligence (Salovey et al., 2004), and these skills are included in emotionality and sociability subscales of emotional intelligence (Goh & Kim, 2021). It could be asserted that these skills are capable of limiting external influences that clash with one's own emotions and thoughts. It is known that authentic people tend to respond to stressful situations in proactive and constructive ways rather than exhibiting avoidant behaviors. Effective stress management skill is an important skill in the self-discipline sub-dimension of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 2006). The well-being subscale is related to utilizing your own potential and high self-esteem (Goh & Kim, 2021). Koole and Kuhl (2003) stated that high self-esteem is important and encouraging for a secure self and authenticity.

The study found that gender did not predict authenticity. In the literature, several studies suggest that there is no disparity in the levels of authenticity between genders (Neff & Harter, 2002; Tekin, 2021; Yılmaz & Gündüz, 2021). Social expectations and values can limit both women and men in different contexts such as work life, marriage and family life. Therefore, it can be considered that gender does not have a distinctive predictive effect on authenticity. Additionally, the study revealed that income status did not predict authenticity. The concept of authenticity is closely linked to one's inner world and their relationship with the self. Consequently, when assessing the authenticity of an individual, it may be more accurate to consider it as a personal and private matter, independent of the material opportunities they possess or their socio-economic background.

In conclusion of the study, it was found that the well-being, self-discipline, emotionality, sociability subscales of emotional intelligence and gender (female) negative impact on self-disgust. Together, these factors account for 43% of the variance in self-disgust scores. It is thought that various aspects of emotional intelligence may be effective in explaining self-disgust with emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence helps to accept painful feelings and transform them into positive ones instead of avoiding or denying them. Therefore, it

ensures efficient coping strategies with a helpful emotional approach. Consequently, emotional intelligence cultivates the growth of self-compassion (Neff, 2003). People act sympathetically and dispensatively towards themselves in favor of self-compassion. However, if an individual fails to exhibit self-compassion and persists in self-criticism, they may develop self-disgust. There is evidence within the literature indicating a negative correlation between self-disgust and self-compassion (Bektaş, 2020; Marques et al., 2021; Özden, 2021). Thanks to emotional intelligence, individuals can regulate their emotions and avoid being controlled by them. As a result, effective management of negative emotions contributes to a more thriving and healthy life (Gerçek, 2020). Through emotion regulation, which is an important skill for emotional intelligence, the effects of events, situations, and thoughts can be reduced, and thus lower levels of self-disgust can develop (Lazarus et al., 2019). There is evidence in the literature that emotion regulation, an essential ability for the emotionality sub-dimension of emotional intelligence, can effectively decrease negative emotions like self-disgust (Gao et al., 2022; Lazarus et al., 2019; Ypsilanti et al., 2019). While self-disgust is commonly associated with psychological disorders and negative experiences in the literature (Brake et al., 2017; Gao et al., 2022; Ille et al., 2014; Ypsilanti et al., 2018), emotional intelligence is widely known to enhance life satisfaction and promote optimism (Bar-On, 2006). In particular, the well-being subscale of emotional intelligence includes the feeling of fully utilizing one's potential, happiness, well-being, and high self-confidence (Goh & Kim, 2021). Therefore, it can be considered that the well-being subscale has an effect on reducing self-disgust. Furthermore, it can be argued that emotional intelligence contributes to the activation of several psychological mechanisms that have a profound impact on self-disgust levels. Specifically, emotional intelligence skills promote self-awareness and enhance an individual's ability to cope more adaptively with negative criticism about themselves (Goleman, 2021b). This may lead to a lower level of self-disgust. Because there are a series of negative evaluations and self-criticism in the formation of self-disgust (Fox et al., 2015). In addition, low scores on the sociability subscale of emotional intelligence indicate being shy and introverted (Goh & Kim, 2021). Therefore, high sociability scores are expected to have an inhibitory effect on emotions such as shame and pride, which are usually associated with self-disgust (Lazarus et al., 2019; Power & Dalgleish, 2016). For these reasons, it can be said that emotional intelligence has a negative predictive effect on self-disgust.

According to this study, being in the female gender negatively predicts self-disgust. In the literature, there are results showing that gender is both unrelated to self-disgust (Kıvrak, 2021; Yıldırım & Bahtiyar, 2022) and related (Atmaca, 2022; Avşaroğlu et al., 2021; Ille et al., 2014; Öz, 2022; Palmeira et al., 2019). Also, it was found that income status did not predict self-disgust. In addition, many studies in the literature have shown that income status is not related to self-disgust (Avşaroğlu et al., 2021; Doğan, 2022; Öz, 2022). The lack of effect of income status on self-disgust can be explained by the fact that self-disgust has a multidimensional nature or that individuals have different coping mechanisms. More studies are needed to explain the mechanisms underlying self-disgust more clearly.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the measurement tools used are based on self-report. This situation may lead to individuals not responding objectively. In addition, the sample of the study is limited to 555 university students. Further research is needed to generalize the results to adolescents and older age groups.

In the literature, there are very few studies examining similar relationships between emotional intelligence, authenticity, and self-disgust variables. To ensure the generalizability of the findings, it is advisable for scholars to conduct studies investigating similar relationships in diverse samples. Furthermore, studies on the psychological formation of self-disgust have typically overlooked the potential influence of various psychological characteristics while focusing on the examination of the impact of certain behaviors and traumatic events. There is a need, therefore, for increased research on the psychological aspects of self-disgust. Many psychological disorders have been linked with psychological factors like authenticity and self-disgust, and it is important to consider these factors in psychological counselling processes. For this reason, it is recommended that practitioners should pay attention to increasing emotional intelligence skills in psychological counselling processes and develop various psycho-education.

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Data Availability. Data are available from the authors upon request.

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