

## Education of self differentiation to reduce the rate of anxiety in Adolescents of the divorced families

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to find the effects of the education of self-differentiation on reducing the rate of anxiety in divorced children in Tehran, Iran. It was an experimental study using pre- and post-test on two groups of experiment and control. At the first, we selected randomly one school among the schools in region 6 in Tehran and then we listed the names of divorced children and selected 16 person among 27 divorced children. 16 female students of divorced families in the age of 13-14 years were randomly divided into two groups of experiment and control. Cattle anxiety Inventory was used for data collection. The independent variable was ten sessions of the education of self-differentiation conducted for the experiment group and the dependent variable was students' scores of the questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the one-sided variance test. The results showed that with 95% certainty, the education of self-differentiation has been effective on reducing anxiety of the experiment group.

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### Introduction

The experience of divorce is a threat for basic needs and leads to anxiety as a natural response to critical position (Legrand,1988). In divorced families, there is double anxiety, including child's fear of being abandoned, changing in conditions of life, shame, sin, concerns about later separation and continuing fear about later unknown problems (Miller, 2006). Anxiety in childhood has various consequences such as depression and various physical illnesses (Legrand, 1988). Anxiety is normal to some extent as adaptation response but when it increases due to not being adapted with the situation, it will be a clinical disorder and it can derange the person's functioning. It

is clear that such personality disorder has bad consequences for the family and society and it is dangerous for mental health of the society (Legrand,1988). Therefore, it is necessary for therapeutic intervention to deal with this disorder.

Studies have showed that the rate of anxiety in adolescents of divorce is more than other adolescents. For example, Bemouras (2003) found that adolescents of divorce in elementary schools have more anxiety than other adolescents. Hoyt and Cowen (1990) contrasted 49 students in second and third class in divorced families with 83 students in undivorced families and concluded that divorce was a stressing process for adolescents and led to anxiety. Bell (2010) found that

adolescents of divorce in forth to sixth grades have more anxiety than unadolescents of divorce. The results of Fatemy's study (2010) on 150 students of undivorced families showed that the problem of anxiety in adolescents of divorce was significantly higher than other adolescents.

Bowen's approach in family therapy is one of therapeutic methods, which has attracted researchers in recent decades, because its basic principle is the existence of chronic anxiety throughout the life. Bowen emphasizes on the concept of self-differentiation, which shows the chronic anxiety in low level. For Bowen, the concept of self-differentiation is not only a process but also a therapeutic technique (Yoo Ya Yoon, 2009). Bowen believed that the concept of self-differentiation has frequently been misunderstood in the literature of family therapy and is considered equal to individualism. Although these two are similar in some aspects, individualism is not the same as self-differentiation. For Bowen, self-differentiation is the ability to decrease emotional response to significant people so that everyone declares his or her thoughts and beliefs without social pressures. Bowen believes that self-differentiation is a concept used to describe transactional patterns to regulate the distance between family members and make a good balance between individuality and intimacy regarding age (Yoo Ya Yoon, 2009). Self-differentiation includes two aspects: interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal aspect in self-differentiation is the ability for intellectual thinking about emotional issues in the family and leads to the development of self-regulation patterns to understand "who we are", "who we are not" and "what life is" (Yoo Ya Yoon, 2009). Intrapersonal aspect of self-differentiation is the ability for gaining emotional control while staying in the disturbance of family emotional conditions.

Marquard (2009) emphasizes that people need to separate from unresolved emotional attachment for maturity and self-actualizing. He realized that adolescents of divorce often faced mental-problems because they grew up with emotional ties to parents and concluded that unresolved emotional attachment to family of origin could lead to increasing anxiety in adolescents of divorce. In regard to the underlying hypothesis of Bowen's theory

that uncontrolled anxiety leads to dysfunction of family, it is necessary to educate students about self-differentiation in different contexts. The process of self-differentiation needs the education of thinking, so that a person can think independent from the pressure of group (Marquard 2009). Therefore, in this study it was attempted to provide maturity for adolescents with education of self-differentiation. Bowen believed that adolescents just as adolescents can differentiate feeling from thinking (Smith, 2006).

Shakibaeay's research (2009) showed that the education of self-differentiation effected on increasing mental adjustment by teaching how to separate thinking from feelings. Sckowron and Friedlander (2005) found that self-differentiated people had more ability to take "I position". The ability to take "I position" is associated with less chronic anxiety and high mental adjustment. These results confirm Bowen's hypothesis about self-differentiation. Pleg-popko (2002) found that the rate of differentiation in the family reduces depression. Based on these studies, education of self-differentiation can also be helpful in reducing anxiety. Since the purpose of self-differentiation is to increase adjustment to the changes of life and reduce anxiety, therefore the hypothesis is that the education of self-differentiation can reduce anxiety in adolescents of divorce.

The education of self-differentiation is a suitable therapy to deal with problems because the purpose of this therapy is to increase adjustments to the changes of life. As it was mentioned above, studies show that adolescents of divorced families who feel guilty for the divorce have more anxiety than normal population. By education of self-differentiation, they can differentiate their thinking and feeling from their parents and this can help reducing their anxiety. This study aims to find the effects of the education of self-differentiation on reducing anxiety in adolescents of divorce in Tehran, Iran.

## Method

The study hypothesis said that the education of self-differentiation effects on reducing anxiety in adolescents of divorce. At the first, we selected randomly one school among the schools in region 6 in Tehran and then we listed the names of divorced children and

selected 16 person among 27 divorced children. Sixteen female students who were 13-14 years of age and adolescents of divorce were randomly divided into two groups (n = 8) of experiment and control. Therapy interventions were performed for 10 sessions, twice per week and each 45 minutes.

The study was experimental with a pre- and post-test design using a control group.

T2 x T1 RG1

T2 - T1 RG2

Study process included random selection of students for the two groups of experiment and control, performing pre-test to collect data, performing independent variable for the experiment group, conducting post-test and collecting data, analyzing data and preparing the research report.

All 16 students in the study completed "Cattle anxiety" questionnaire. This questionnaire includes 40 self-reporting item assessing overall anxiety. The first 20 items assess

anxiety state and the next 20 items assess anxiety trait, i.e. in general how the person feels. This questionnaire is designed based on Lickert scale. For items 1 to 20 each of state and trait forms have minimum 20 and maximum 40 scores. Therefore, the score of each subject in each form ranges from 20 to 40. The Persian version of this inventory was standardized in Tehran by Esmaeily (2010), who reported %86 reliability and %67 validity for this questionnaire.

#### Data Analysis

After scoring the questionnaires filled by the subjects in both groups, the results were analyzed in level of inferential statistics. one-sided variance test was used to compare the difference between means in the two groups of experiment and control in pre and post-tests to determine the effects of the education of self-differentiation on reducing anxiety of students in adolescents of divorce.

## Results

In this research one-sided variance analysis method was used to analyze the data

**table No.1**

F	ms	d.f	Ss	
875/15	677/722	1	677/722	SSb
	522/45	13	789/591	SSw
		16	00/2368	M
			1	

According to the results in the chart (1) the calculated f is 15/875 and it's bigger that f of the chart at 0/05 level(4/67) so assumption zero is rejected and we can conclude with a percentage of 95% being sure that the education of self-differentiation influenced on reducing the rate of general anxiety in divorced children

**table No.2**

F	Ms	d.f	Ss	
121/5	636/67	1	636/67	SSb
	209/13	13	711/171	SSw
		16	00/6594	M

According to the results in the chart (2) the calculated f is 5/121 and it's bigger that f of the chart at 0/05 level(4/67) so assumption zero is rejected and we can conclude with a percentage of 95% being sure that the education of self-differentiation influenced on reducing the rate of state anxiety in divorced children.

**Table No.3**

F	Ms	d.f	Ss	
699/5	106/253	1	106/253	SSb
	411/44	13	349/577	SSw
		16		M
			00/5681	

According to the results in the chart (3) the calculated  $f$  is  $5/699$  and it's bigger than  $f$  of the chart at  $0/05$  level ( $4/67$ ) so assumption zero is rejected and we can conclude with a percentage of 95% being sure that the education of self-differentiation influenced on reducing the rate of trait anxiety in divorced children.

### Discussion

From the perspective of family therapy systems, if the rate of self-differentiation is low in the family, there will be a fusion-self (reducing individuality and equality between thinking and feelings) among members of family. If divorce occurs in this family, everyone will lose the fusion-self and engage with the loss of self and anxiety (Harber, 1990).

The education of self-differentiation is a method for separating thinking from feelings and it leads to reducing anxiety. This reduction of anxiety paves the way for developing "I position". Family members can view their experience from different perspectives by the education of self-differentiation and reduce the negative effects of family experiences because the divorce of parents occurred and the equality of relationships between parents and adolescents could not be changed.

By educating differentiation, adolescents who have the sense of guilt for the divorce can differentiate their thinking and feeling from their parents and this can reduce their anxiety. Also the results of one-sided variance showed that the education of self-differentiation reduced anxiety. Legrand (1988) in a research found that those who experience divorce crisis represented reactions of state anxiety

because they understand the divorce as a threat to their basic needs. The present study showed that the education of self-differentiation leads to reduce the rate of anxiety in adolescents of divorce. The basis of self differentiation process is the conscious control of anxiety. Friedman concluded that anxiety can be the source of despair and hopelessness by

following reactive patterns of past generations, although it can be the source of growing and change by knowing these patterns (yo ya yon, 2009). No one can change others but there is a potential ability in people to change their own behavior. If people with the education of self-differentiation view the events and others' behavior, they will find a different meaning. Those people, who have low state anxiety, surely will show low trait anxiety. In this study, these two kinds of anxiety were reduced by increasing the rate of self-differentiation. Anxiety, either trait or state anxiety should be decreased in order to gain self-differentiation. Generally Bowen emphasizes on the concept of self-differentiation which is in a low level to show chronic anxiety. Bowen believed that anxiety is an influential reason for deranging development of differentiation unless there are basic interventions (Chabot & Light, 2006). Generally, when encountering problems, the education of self-differentiation is a suitable therapy to deal with problems because the purpose of this therapy is to increase adjustments to the changes of life by decreasing the anxiety.

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