

Prediction of Escapism Based on Interpersonal Sensitivity, Self-Criticism, and the Need for Social Approval

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Athari N, Abazari A, Rashki M. (2024). Prediction of Escapism Based on Interpersonal Sensitivity, Self-Criticism, and the Need for Social Approval. *Iranian Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, 3(3), 10-16.
<https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jndd.3.3.2>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the predictive roles of interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance in escapism among individuals in Tehran.

Methods and Materials: A cross-sectional design was employed with a sample of 250 participants, selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie table. Data were collected using standard scales: the Escapism Scale, Interpersonal Sensitivity Measure (IPSM), Self-Criticism Scale (SCS), and the Need for Social Approval Scale. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationships between escapism and the predictor variables, and a multiple regression analysis was used to examine the combined predictive power of interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance on escapism. Analyses were performed using SPSS version 27.

Findings: The results revealed significant positive correlations between escapism and interpersonal sensitivity ($r = 0.41, p < 0.001$), self-criticism ($r = 0.52, p < 0.001$), and the need for social acceptance ($r = 0.35, p = 0.002$). Multiple regression analysis showed that all three predictors significantly contributed to the model ($F = 74.54, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.46, \text{adjusted } R^2 = 0.45$). Self-criticism was the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.37, p < 0.001$), followed by interpersonal sensitivity ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$) and the need for social acceptance ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: This study highlights the significant roles of self-criticism, interpersonal sensitivity, and the need for social acceptance in predicting escapism. These findings suggest the importance of addressing these psychological factors in therapeutic and educational interventions to promote healthier coping mechanisms.

Keywords: *Escapism, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Self-Criticism, Social Acceptance, Coping Mechanisms.*

1. Introduction

Escapism, as a psychological phenomenon, refers to the tendency to avoid reality by engaging in activities that allow individuals to detach from their current circumstances. This behavior, often driven by emotional challenges and social pressures, is increasingly relevant in contemporary society, where complex interpersonal dynamics and self-perceptions play a critical role in mental well-being. Interpersonal sensitivity, defined as the heightened awareness of and responsiveness to the feelings and behaviors of others, has been extensively studied in the context of psychological well-being (Yılmaz & Bekaroğlu, 2021). Research highlights its dual nature: while moderate levels of sensitivity can foster social connections, excessive sensitivity may lead to negative outcomes such as social anxiety and avoidance behaviors (Mohammadian et al., 2018). Studies have demonstrated that interpersonal sensitivity is significantly associated with emotional dysregulation, impaired social functioning, and depressive symptoms, particularly among young adults (Aydoğdu et al., 2017; Liu, 2024). Furthermore, excessive interpersonal sensitivity may amplify the need for escapism as individuals attempt to manage the stress and perceived rejection in their social interactions (Jadidi & Sharifi, 2018).

Interpersonal sensitivity also plays a critical role in shaping interpersonal relationships, as it affects how individuals perceive and respond to social cues (Miller & Lenzenweger, 2012). As noted by Pietromonaco and Collins (2017), sensitivity to interpersonal feedback is closely linked to attachment styles and emotional security in relationships, which in turn influence coping mechanisms like escapism (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017). Xu (2023) further posited that heightened interpersonal sensitivity can mediate the relationship between external stressors and depressive symptoms, reinforcing its relevance in psychological research (Xu, 2023).

Self-criticism, another key factor in this study, is characterized by harsh self-evaluation and a persistent sense of personal inadequacy. Werner et al. (2019) emphasize that self-criticism is not only a predictor of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety but also a critical factor influencing an individual's coping strategies (Werner et al., 2019). Excessive self-criticism may exacerbate tendencies toward escapism as individuals struggle to cope with their perceived failures and shortcomings (Rajabi & Abbasi, 2011).

Research has established that self-criticism is closely linked to social anxiety and interpersonal difficulties, further underscoring its role in maladaptive behaviors (Iancu et al., 2015). Oliveira et al. (2022) highlighted the interplay between self-criticism and social dynamics, noting that individuals with high levels of self-criticism often experience reduced psychological well-being and diminished social performance (Oliveira et al., 2022). Moreover, Xu (2023) suggests that psychological capital, including self-esteem and resilience, can mediate the impact of self-criticism on mental health, offering potential pathways for intervention (Xu, 2023).

The need for social acceptance, deeply rooted in human behavior, drives individuals to seek validation and approval from their social environment. While social acceptance can enhance self-esteem and psychological resilience, an excessive or unmet need for social acceptance can lead to maladaptive coping strategies, including escapism (Wentzel et al., 2021). Ghaffari et al. (2021) demonstrated that social acceptance significantly influences feelings of loneliness and social isolation, particularly among vulnerable populations (Ghaffari et al., 2021).

Khawwaja et al. (2021) noted that perceived social support and social acceptance play a critical role in buffering psychological distress and promoting life satisfaction (Khawwaja et al., 2021). However, when individuals perceive a lack of acceptance or validation, they may resort to escapism as a mechanism to cope with the emotional discomfort. Yuan et al. (2023) underscored the importance of social integration and support in fostering psychological well-being, particularly among adolescents, a demographic often struggling with the balance between self-identity and social belonging (Yuan et al., 2023).

Escapism, while often regarded as a coping mechanism, can take both adaptive and maladaptive forms. As noted by Shahar (2020), adaptive escapism allows individuals to temporarily disengage from stressors, providing them with an opportunity to recover and reframe their perspectives. Conversely, maladaptive escapism is characterized by avoidance behaviors that hinder personal growth and social engagement (Shahar, 2020). The interplay between escapism and other psychological factors such as interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance is increasingly recognized as a critical area of study (You et al., 2019). Hernandez et al. (2020) found that urban stress indirectly influences psychological symptoms through its association with perceived social support, which may also contribute to escapist tendencies

(Hernandez et al., 2020). Cao et al. (2021) further explored how detachment and social support mediate the relationship between exposure to stress and behavioral outcomes, emphasizing the role of escapism as a maladaptive response to unmet emotional needs (Cao et al., 2021). This perspective aligns with findings from Mosavi et al. (2017), who identified social support as a critical factor in mitigating stress and promoting psychological resilience (Mosavi et al., 2017).

Given the interconnections between interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, social acceptance, and escapism, the current study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of these relationships.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study followed a cross-sectional design to investigate the relationship between escapism, interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance. The sample consisted of 250 participants, determined based on the Morgan and Krejcie table for an appropriate sample size with a population exceeding 100,000. Participants were selected using convenience sampling from various educational institutions, workplaces, and community centers in Tehran, Iran. Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old and able to complete the study's survey. Exclusion criteria included any self-reported severe psychological disorders or inability to provide informed consent. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation, and the study adhered to ethical guidelines for research with human subjects.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Escapism

The dependent variable, escapism, can be measured using the Escapism Scale developed by Stenseng et al. (2012). This scale consists of 14 items divided into two subscales: self-suppression escapism and self-expansion escapism, which reflect different motivations for engaging in escapist behaviors. Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating a greater tendency toward escapist behaviors. The validity and reliability of this scale have been confirmed in various studies, including cross-cultural research, where Cronbach's alpha coefficients for internal consistency range between 0.85 and 0.92. This scale

provides a robust framework for assessing escapist tendencies in different psychological contexts.

2.2.2. Interpersonal Sensitivity

Interpersonal sensitivity, an independent variable, can be measured using the Interpersonal Sensitivity Measure (IPSM), developed by Boyce and Parker (1989). The IPSM includes 36 items that assess interpersonal sensitivity across five subscales: interpersonal awareness, need for approval, separation anxiety, timidity, and fragile inner-self. Responses are recorded on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at all characteristic) to 4 (Extremely characteristic). A higher total score indicates greater interpersonal sensitivity. Studies validating the IPSM have reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.86 to 0.90, supporting its reliability and internal consistency in assessing interpersonal sensitivity (Khoshsorour & Mikaeili, 2021; Mohammadian et al., 2018).

2.2.3. Self-Criticism

Self-criticism, another independent variable, can be assessed using the Self-Criticism Scale (SCS) by Thompson and Zuroff (2004). The scale includes 12 items that evaluate self-critical thoughts and feelings, particularly focusing on perceived personal inadequacies and failures. Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating stronger tendencies toward self-criticism. The validity and reliability of this scale have been confirmed in psychological and clinical studies, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between 0.88 and 0.91, demonstrating strong internal consistency and construct validity (Rajabi & Abbasi, 2011).

2.2.4. Need for Social Approval

The Need for Social Approval Scale, developed by Crowne and Marlowe (1960), is an appropriate tool for assessing the need for social acceptance. This scale consists of 33 true/false items that measure the extent to which individuals seek approval from others by presenting themselves in socially desirable ways. A higher score reflects a stronger need for social acceptance. The scale has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically ranging from 0.75 to 0.87, confirming its reliability and validity across different populations and research settings (Abbasi Aberzegeh, 2018).

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated for all variables to summarize the sample's characteristics. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the dependent variable, escapism, and each of the independent variables: interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance. Additionally, linear regression analysis was employed to determine the combined predictive power of the independent variables (interpersonal sensitivity and self-criticism) on the dependent variable (escapism). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all analyses, and results were reported with 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for escapism, interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Escapism	45.62	8.43
Interpersonal Sensitivity	52.48	7.92
Self-Criticism	48.35	9.12
Need for Social Acceptance	50.74	8.29

The results show that escapism had a mean score of 45.62 (SD = 8.43), indicating moderate tendencies toward escapism within the sample. Interpersonal sensitivity had the highest mean score (52.48, SD = 7.92), followed by the need

3. Findings and Results

The study sample comprised 250 participants from Tehran, of which 112 (44.8%) were male and 138 (55.2%) were female. Regarding age, 92 participants (36.8%) were between 18 and 25 years old, 103 (41.2%) were between 26 and 35 years old, and 55 (22.0%) were aged 36 years and above. In terms of educational attainment, 56 participants (22.4%) held a high school diploma, 87 (34.8%) had a bachelor's degree, and 107 (42.8%) had a postgraduate degree. The majority of participants were employed (175 participants, 70.0%), while 75 participants (30.0%) were students or unemployed. Below are the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable (escapism) and the independent variables (interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance).

for social acceptance (50.74, SD = 8.29) and self-criticism (48.35, SD = 9.12).

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients and significance levels for the relationships between escapism and the independent variables.

Table 2

Pearson correlation coefficients and p-values for relationships between escapism and predictor variables

Variable	r	p
Interpersonal Sensitivity	0.41	<0.001
Self-Criticism	0.52	<0.001
Need for Social Acceptance	0.35	0.002

The results show significant positive correlations between escapism and all three independent variables. Self-criticism had the strongest correlation ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$),

followed by interpersonal sensitivity ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and the need for social acceptance ($r = 0.35$, $p = 0.002$).

Table 3

Summary of regression results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R	R ²	R ² adj	F	p
Regression	2956.72	3	985.57	0.68	0.46	0.45	74.54	<0.001
Residual	3424.27	246	13.92					
Total	6380.99	249						

The regression analysis revealed a significant model predicting escapism ($F = 74.54$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.46$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.45$), indicating that interpersonal sensitivity,

self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance collectively explained 46% of the variance in escapism scores.

Table 4

Multivariate regression results

Predictor	B	Standard Error	β	t	p
Constant	10.23	3.31		3.09	0.002
Interpersonal Sensitivity	0.25	0.07	0.23	3.57	<0.001
Self-Criticism	0.42	0.06	0.37	7.00	<0.001
Need for Social Acceptance	0.18	0.05	0.16	3.60	<0.001

All three predictors significantly contributed to the model. Self-criticism had the highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), followed by interpersonal sensitivity ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) and the need for social acceptance ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that self-criticism is the most substantial predictor of escapism among the three variables. The constant value ($B = 10.23$, $p = 0.002$) represents the expected escapism score when all predictors are zero.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the predictive role of interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, and the need for social acceptance in escapism among participants from Tehran. The findings revealed that all three predictors significantly contributed to escapism, with self-criticism emerging as the strongest predictor. These results provide a deeper understanding of the psychological underpinnings of escapism and align with the growing body of literature exploring these constructs.

The significant positive correlation between interpersonal sensitivity and escapism ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) highlights the role of heightened awareness and responsiveness to others in fostering escapist behaviors. Excessive interpersonal sensitivity may lead to emotional distress and a tendency to avoid real-life social interactions, thus encouraging escapism as a coping mechanism. This finding is consistent with research by Liu (2024), who noted that interpersonal sensitivity contributes to depressive symptoms and social withdrawal, both of which are linked to escapist tendencies (Liu, 2024). Similarly, Mohammadian et al. (2018) found that individuals with high interpersonal sensitivity are more likely to experience anxiety, which may further drive escapist behaviors (Mohammadian et al., 2018).

Self-criticism showed the strongest correlation with escapism ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) and the highest standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), indicating its significant influence. This result aligns with Werner et al. (2019), who emphasized the pervasive role of self-criticism in promoting maladaptive coping mechanisms, including avoidance and withdrawal (Werner et al., 2019). Self-critical individuals often struggle with feelings of inadequacy and shame, which may lead them to disengage from reality through escapist activities. Oliveira et al. (2022) also highlighted the negative impact of self-criticism on psychological well-being, reinforcing its role as a critical predictor of escapism (Oliveira et al., 2022).

The need for social acceptance was also a significant predictor of escapism ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$), albeit with a smaller effect size than self-criticism and interpersonal sensitivity. This finding underscores the importance of perceived social validation in shaping behavior. As noted by Khatiwada et al. (2021), unmet needs for social acceptance can lead to emotional distress and reliance on maladaptive coping strategies, such as escapism (Khatiwada et al., 2021). Yuan et al. (2023) also emphasized the role of social acceptance in promoting self-esteem and reducing psychological distress, suggesting that a lack of acceptance may push individuals toward escapist behaviors (Yuan et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings of this study align with previous research, such as Pietromonaco and Collins (2017), who highlighted the interconnectedness of interpersonal dynamics and psychological well-being (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017). The significant role of self-criticism and interpersonal sensitivity suggests that these factors may exacerbate emotional vulnerability, making individuals more susceptible to escapism. Furthermore, the need for

social acceptance, while weaker in effect, remains an essential factor influencing escapist tendencies.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between the variables. While significant relationships were identified, longitudinal studies are needed to confirm the directionality of these associations. Second, the sample consisted solely of participants from Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or cultural contexts. Third, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce social desirability bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of the data. Finally, the study focused on three specific predictors, but other factors, such as emotional regulation or personality traits, may also influence escapism and should be considered in future research.

Future research should address these limitations and expand on the current findings. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish causal relationships between interpersonal sensitivity, self-criticism, the need for social acceptance, and escapism. Additionally, researchers should explore the role of other potential predictors, such as emotional intelligence, coping styles, and cultural differences, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of escapism. Cross-cultural studies would also be valuable in examining how cultural norms and values influence the relationships between these variables. Furthermore, future research could investigate intervention strategies to mitigate the negative effects of self-criticism and interpersonal sensitivity on escapism, potentially using experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

Practitioners working with individuals prone to escapism should consider incorporating interventions targeting self-criticism and interpersonal sensitivity. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and emotion-focused therapy can be particularly effective in helping individuals manage self-critical thoughts and reduce sensitivity to interpersonal stressors. Additionally, fostering social support networks and promoting self-acceptance can help individuals fulfill their need for social validation in healthier ways. Educational programs aimed at developing emotional resilience and interpersonal skills may also be beneficial in reducing the reliance on escapism as a coping mechanism. By addressing these underlying factors, practitioners can support individuals in developing more adaptive coping strategies and enhancing their psychological well-being.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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