

Identity crisis and its relation to psychological fragility in adolescents: A case of Sudanese refugees in Egypt.

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Abstract

The research aims to examine the nature of the relationship between the identity crisis and psychological fragility in displaced adolescents, exploring gender differences in identity crisis and psychological vulnerability, and whether psychological vulnerability can play a decisive role in helping adolescents navigate identity crises successfully. The researchers employed a descriptive quantitative correlation approach, and the research sample consisted of (158) Male and female Sudanese adolescents who took asylum to Egypt, they were selected through random sampling technique. The researchers used identity crisis and psychological fragility scales, and then data were analyzed by utilizing (SPSS), whereby the following statistical tests were used: one-sample t-test, Mann-Whitney U test, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, and Pearson's correlation. The results showed that adolescents experienced an identity crisis, and Sudanese refugees in Egypt showed high level of psychological fragility as well. The results also showed a significant correlation between identity crisis and mental fragility among adolescents. Furthermore, the results revealed statistically significant differences in identity crisis among adolescents according to gender. At the end of this research there were recommendations and suggestions for further studies as well.

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INTRODUCTION

Asylum seeking is one of the most prominent issues in Arab and international societies is the displacement of millions from their homelands due to conflict, political persecution, or deteriorating economic conditions. According to reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Arab countries, including Egypt, have witnessed a significant influx of refugees from neighboring countries as a result of recurring crises. Sudan, for example, has been experiencing armed conflict since mid-April 2023, resulting in the deaths of thousands and widespread displacement and refuge. Millions are searching for a safe haven and striving to meet their basic human needs. From this context, the concept of identity crisis and psychological fragility has emerged as one of the psychological indicators of an individual's ability to cope with crises and pressures resulting from wars and forced displacement, especially for adolescents.

Most people in adolescence, may experience a critical period known as the adolescent crisis, which is a crisis that most teenagers go through at some point and in which they suffer from not knowing themselves clearly.

During this stage, adolescent boys and girls undergo rapid changes in all aspects of human development (physical, mental, social, emotional, sexual, and moral). If adolescents are unable to adapt to these changes, what is known as an identity crisis occurs.

Displaced adolescents with Sudanese nationality needs to adapt to different situations and changes abroad. They may exhibit psychological fragility, an opposite term for rigidity, psychological well-being is one of the personality traits that helps an individual cope with stress and maintain their physical and mental health. Hence, the issue of this research is identity crisis and its relationship to psychological fragility among refugee adolescents in Egypt.

Statement of the Problem:

- 1-What is the general characteristic of the identity crisis among refugee adolescents in Egypt?
- 2-What is the general characteristic of psychological fragility among refugee adolescents in Egypt?
- 3-What is the relationship between identity crisis and

mental fragility among Sudanese adolescents living in Egypt?

- 4-Is there any significant difference on Identity crisis due to gender among the Sudanese refugees in Egypt?

Objectives:

- 1-Identifying the general trait of the identity crisis among refugee adolescents in Egypt?
- 2-Identifying the general trait of psychological vulnerability among refugee adolescents in Egypt?
- 3-To find out the relationship between identity crisis and mental fragility among the resident refugees in Egypt?
- 4-Understanding the difference in identity crisis among refugee adolescents in Egypt according to the gender.

Importance:

Seeking for data regarding identity crisis in refugees who are adolescents living away from their original country, is considered of highly significance both theoretically and practically.

Hypotheses

- 1- Refugees Sudanese adolescents experience identity crisis in Egypt.
- 2- Refugees Sudanese adolescents suffer mental fragility in Egypt.
- 3- A significant correlation found between identity crisis and mental fragility.
- 4- A significant difference found in identity crisis among refugee adolescents in Egypt according to the gender.

Definition of Terms:

A. Identity Crisis

It is a developmental task in which adolescents struggle to mitigate conflict between their psychological needs and society's demands. (Kroger, J.2007).

B. Mental Fragility

It is a condition of being unable to overcome different challenges facing the individuals. (Hardy, L. (2013).

2- Literature Review

(i) Identity Crisis

It is well-established fact that identity crisis among adolescents is rather complicated issue, however, there are

lots of theories have attempted to focus on the factors that lead to its development.

Factors influencing the development of identity:

Identity formation in adolescents is an ongoing transformation process that continues throughout an individual's life, aiming to refine and improve their personal commitments. Naturally, identity reshaping remains possible wherever the situational contexts in which the individual finds themselves are present.

There are a number of factors that have a broad impact on the development of identity, including:

1.Personality-related factors

Teenagers whose personalities are characterized by flexibility and open-mindedness towards conflicting values and beliefs are often able to develop a mature identity. (Dunlop, L. and Lawrence J.W.2013)

2.Factors related to the family:

The family is the fundamental and important building block of society, sharing common ground with some social and cultural institutions, but it remains the primary building block in which the adolescent's personality is formed. His attitudes and values are revealed in it, and the sense of psychological identity depends on the parents' expectations of the individual's self-perception. Erikson believes that the beginning of the formation of psychological identity is rooted in the child's imitation of the dominant figures in his life, such as the father and mother, whom he imitates at different times and in different situations.

3.Cognitive factors:

A teenager's cognitive abilities are a significant factor in acquiring personal identity because they like to be able to objectively define their potential and capabilities.

Media also influences the socialization process, leading young people to adopt values that differ from those of their parents. These factors lead to those contradictions that may play a negative role in identity formation. (Reynolds.J,2022).

Existential insecurity:

The scientific analysis of identity crises begins with an analysis of the psychological and social phenomena surrounding the individual, namely:

A - Family disintegration:

Individuals need security and a solid foundation of values,

especially during childhood; therefore, family breakdown leads to identity disorders.

b) Exclusion by rejection:

Emotional acceptance is important in building individual identity, according to Fromm. Fromm and Horny argue that forms of individual violence are phenomena based on a situation of readiness and competition, and this reinforces attitudes of rejection towards the child, who is viewed by the family as an unbearable burden and must take care of himself.

C - Emotional destruction:

Emotional harm is manifested in the feeling of a decline in self-worth and a loss of its content, and this means that identity is largely negative and the personality is dominated by feelings.

Erikson's identity crisis Theory:

Adolescence is the fifth stage of the life cycle and is crucial for the psychosocial development of the individual. During this stage (12-20 years old), the individual is neither a child nor an adult. Adolescents face various demands and challenges, as well as fundamental role changes, to meet the challenges of adulthood. In fact, Erikson's theoretical interest in adolescence and its associated problems led him to analyze this stage in greater detail than any other developmental stage.

The adolescent faces challenges, situations, and battles that he has previously won, and he is in this dangerous stage of adolescence. It tests the accumulated abilities and readiness of the ego to complement or combine talents, tendencies, and skills in order to define its identity and unite with thinkers and with the impressions of others about themselves, and they begin in making career choices. (Grotevant, H.1987).

The most dangerous thing at this stage is the ambiguity of role, and the inability to see oneself as a productive and effective member of society., The repeated role confusion manifests itself in the difficulty the adolescent faces in finding a professional identity and negative identity emerges in individuals when they do not find support from society and those around them, and when the necessary environment for developing their inner potential is not available, a negative identity can leave behind negative effects such as crime, social unrest, or changes stemming from prejudice. Or racial discrimination.

Ericsson acknowledges that such developments are important indicators of adolescents' tendency towards ideological commitment. The adolescent who finds himself drawn to the new ideological, economic, or technological trend is very fortunate.

Erikson identified three basic elements for the formation and shaping of the ego Which are:

Individuals should recognize themselves as having the same internal continuity or similarity. That is, they should tell themselves across time that they are still in the present the same people as in the past.

Others in the same social environment should recognize the continuity within the individual. This means that teenagers need others to recognize their inner unity, which they developed early on. The more teenagers are in doubt regarding their self-concepts and their various social images, the more feelings of doubt, confusion, and indifference hinder their emerging sense of identity.

Individuals should have increased confidence in the alignment between internal and external lines of continuity. That is, their self-perceptions should be validated by appropriate feedback from their experiences with others. (Wethington, E.2000)

Consequently, phases of formation of identity can be depicted as follows:

- 1-Trust vs. Mistrust.
- 2- Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt.
- 3- Initiative vs. Guilt.
- 4-Industry vs. Inferiority.
- 5- Identity vs. Role Confusion.
- 6- Intimacy vs. Isolation.
- 7- Generativity vs. Stagnation.
- 8- Integrity vs. Despair.

According to Erikson (1994), failure passing these stages results in enhancing identity crisis.

As a matter of fact, the researchers have adopted Erikson's model to explain the development of identity crisis in adolescence as a developmental phase.

(ii) Mental Fragility:

Mental fragility or vulnerability is a condition of low psychological resilience, often marked with an elevated sensitivity to stress, emotional instability, and inability to cope with life strains and stressors. (Hanton, S and Neil,

R.2003)

It encompasses an inadequate tolerance for discomfort, frequent overwhelming sensations and an inclination to breakdown under pressure rather than adjusting. (Folkman, S.1997).

Theories on mental fragility have emphasized that adolescents strive for coping with stress related disasters, as a result of both genetic and environmental factors.

Innate fragility theory hypothesizes that high stress, poor coping abilities, and lack of social and emotional support can lead to emotional deterioration and thus mental fragility.

Stress vulnerability model believes that people have normally genetic predisposition, however, severe stress can lead to mental fragility.

Fragile Brain theory, proposed that neurological deficiency inhibits neurotransmitters resulting in high level of negative mental stability.

Attachment theory indicated that an anxious or insecure attachment, poor relationships with others, result in long emotional and mental vulnerability.

Cognitive theory views that negative thoughts, which are often learned during early childhood can cause mental fragility.

Alienation theory shows that lack of social integration causing a feeling of loneliness and powerlessness making individuals mentally fragile.

Other factors that may contribute to mental fragility among adolescents as: poor physical health, malnutrition or lack of food, and lack of physical exercise.

Some key aspects for mental fragility include:(Lazarus, R.S.1988)

Lack of resilience: which is the opposite of mental toughness, showing a diminished capacity to deal with change.

High sensitivity: a person may be highly sensitive to criticism or minor stressors.

Cognitive and emotional overwhelming: it is a state of being hopeless and helpless.

Lack of emotional regulation: difficulty managing emotions, extreme mood swings and reactions.

Avoidance behavior: avoiding challenges or difficult situations to prevent

stress. (Anderson, J.R.1982)

Overdependence on coping mechanisms: using unhealthy habits to avoid undesirable emotions. (Grey, J.A.2004)

Low self-esteem: negative look at one's own self-worth characterized by lack of confidence and incompetence. (Christopher, J.M.2006)

Reactivity: easily upset or getting angry with trivial matters.

Signs of psychological fragility among refugee adolescents:

Refugee teenagers may show some signs of mental vulnerability such as hypersensitivity to criticism, severe mood swings, social withdrawal, persistent anxiety or sadness, low self-esteem, difficulty making decisions. Psychological fragility is not always a medical condition, but it can develop into problems such as anxiety or depression if not dealt with properly. Since outbreak of war and displacement can contribute to an increased sense of psychological fragility. Adolescence is a sensitive stage, and psychological support and treatment of identity disorder and psychological fragility can make a big difference in the adolescent's future.

3- Methodology

The nature of this research necessitated the use of descriptive quantitative approach, as the research requires collecting information and using measures to collect data and analyze it statistically to determine the relationship between the research variables.

Population

As a matter of fact, there was no accurate statistics for the number of individuals in the original research population, according to the accredited authorities, the Sudanese Embassy, Human Rights Commission, and the Egyptian government, the researchers tried to rely on a random sample in selecting teenagers from within refugee families in Egypt. Owing to an increasing number of refugees coming from Sudan during war-time.

Research sample

The total study sample consisted of (158) teenagers. They were selected through using a purposive sampling method.

(i) Identity crisis scale

The identity crisis scale consists of (33) items that are answered by teenagers themselves using the following alternatives: always, sometimes, and never happens, prepared by Rasmussen, and translated into Arabic by Abdullah Al-Munayzil (2019).

Face validity of identity crisis scale:

The scale was sent initially given to reviewers in order to determine the suitability of the scale for the current study, and some phrases were deleted and some others were also added.

Table No. (1) shows the statements before and after the amendments

Item	Phrases before modification	Phrases after modification
1	I feel lonely because I have few friends.	I feel isolated because I have few friends.
7	I enjoy the attention and respect of those around me.	I have the respect of those around me.
9	I often feel distracted	I often feel distracted
11	I have a specific goal that I strive to achieve, regardless of the circumstances.	I strive to achieve my goals, no matter how difficult they may be.
13	I feel special and strong when I am among my friends	I feel special when I'm among my friends
14	I feel comfortable when I am in a place where there are members of the opposite sex.	I feel comfortable when I am with members of the opposite sex.
15	I feel attracted to the opposite sex	I feel attracted to the opposite sex
30	My mind wanders while the teacher is explaining subjects I don't like.	It's difficult to concentrate during class.
31	I follow a system in my daily life	I follow a specific routine in my daily life
32	I feel that my teachers are interested in my abilities and talents	I feel cared for by my professors

Psychometric Properties of Identity Crisis Scale:

To determine the standard characteristics of items in the current research, the researchers administered the scale, in its modified form as directed by the experts to a pilot sample comprised (20) respondents who were selected using a simple random method via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The scale was accurate:

The validity of a scale means that the items on the scale measure what they are designed to measure. The researchers obtained the validity of the scale through:

Internal Consistency

Internal consistency refers to the degree to which each item on the scale is consistent with the total score by calculating the correlation coefficients between each item of the scale and the total score of the scale.

Table No. (2) shows the correlation coefficients for each item on the scale:

Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation
1	0.317	12	0.504	23	0.454
2	0.545	13	0.381	24	0.395
3	0.395	14	0.377	25	0.348
4	0.489	15	0.475	26	0.310
5	0.395	16	0.442	27	0.430
6	0.316	17	0.316	28	0.286
7	0.435	18	0.366	29	0.366
8	0.389	19	0.557	30	0.412
9	0.416	20	0.411	31	0.318
10	0.362	21	0.386	32	0.559
11	0.418	22	0.328	33	0.428

*Correlation coefficient is significant at (0.05).

Reliability

It means the stability of the scale's results and that they do not change significantly if it is redistributed to the sample members several times over specific time or period.

Reliability of identity crisis scale was therefore calculated by using Alpha Cronbach's formula = 0.716

(ii) Mental Fragility Scale

The scale made up with (40 items), with three options (always/sometimes/never), prepared and translated by (Imad Mukhaimer, 2002).

Face validity of Mental fragility scale:

The scale was initially also sent to reviewers to see the extent of the scale's suitability for the current study, so that it can be modified.

Psychometric properties of the scale:

To determine the standard characteristics of paragraphs in the current research population. The researchers Then, the scale, in its modified form according to the guidance of the reviewers and consisting of (40) items, was applied to a pilot sample of (20) respondents, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SSPS).

Internal Consistency

It was obtained by calculating the correlation coefficients between each item in the scale and the total score of the scale.

Table No. (3) shows the correlation coefficients:

Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation
1	0.415	16	0.518	31	-0.314*
2	0.528	17	0.492	32	0.621
3	-0.233*	18	0.411	33	0.391
4	0.548	19	0.365	34	0.360
5	0.340	20	0.387	35	0.405
6	0.441	21	0.601	36	0.307
7	0.054*	22	0.344	37	0.481
8	0.612	23	0.380	38	0.341
9	0.341	24	0.302	39	0.517
10	0.428	25	0.402	40	0.477
11	0.384	26	0.328		
12	0.455	27	0.480		
13	0.361	28	0.560		
14	0.660	29	0.362		
15	0.127*	30	0.408		

* Correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.05 level.

*Items 3,7,15, and 31 are deleted.

Reliability

Scale reliability means that the scale gives the same result if it is administered more than once under the same conditions, therefore, reliability of mental fragility scale is determined through Cronbach's alpha coefficient=0.855

Statistical Tests Used

- 1- One-sample t-test.
- 2- Mann-Whitney U test.
- 3- Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.
- 4- Pearson's correlation Coefficient.

4- Results and Discussion

Hypothesis-1

Refugees Sudanese adolescents experience identity crisis in Egypt.

To verify the above-mentioned hypothesis, one-sample t-test is used:

Table (4) Shows the result of one-sample t-test

Identity Crisis	Test value=60				99%Confidence Interval	
	T	D f	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean diff.	lower	Higher
	38.975	157	.000	8.03	30.34	60.45

The result shows that Sudanese refugees in Egypt have high scores on identity crisis, significant at (.000).

Discussion

Identity crisis among adolescent refugees in Egypt. This result was consistent with what Allemand M. Steiger AE, and Fend HA (2014) had found out.

According to researchers, rise in identity crisis during adolescence is due to the significant changes that occur during that stage and the lack of positive look at their future. They are suffering from teenager's lack of self-awareness, which in turn have created feelings of loss, dependency, and ignorance.

Hypothesis-2

Refugees Sudanese adolescents suffer mental fragility in Egypt.

To verify the above-mentioned hypothesis, one-sample t-test was also employed.

Table (5) Shows the result of one-sample t-test

Mental Fragility	Test value=70				99%Confidence Interval	
	T	D f	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean diff.	lower	higher
	46.830	157	.000	9.04	40.34	80.45

The result shows that Sudanese refugees in Egypt have high scores on mental fragility, significant at (.000)

Discussion

The result of the second hypothesis showed a significant high scores of Sudanese adolescent refugees in Egypt, regarding mental fragility scale. This result was inconsistent with the study by conducted study by Zainab Al-Tayeb (2013).

According to the researchers, incidence of mental fragility can be attributed to lack of adolescents' exposure to experiences that would give them greater experience in dealing with problems and pressures they are facing. The researchers also attribute the psychological vulnerability in adolescence to impatience and inability to endure hardship and being irresponsible, in addition to rigidity in decision-making, irritability.

Hypothesis-3

A significant correlation found between identity crisis and mental fragility.

To verify the-above-mentioned hypothesis, Pearson's

correlation was used to test the significance of correlation between two variables: Identity crisis and Mental fragility:

Table No. (6) Shows The result of Pearson's correlation coefficient:

		Identity Crisis	Mental Fragility
Identity	Pearson's Corr.	1	0.441**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000
	N	185	185
Fragility	Pearson's Corr.	0.441**	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	185	185

**Correlation is significant at the 0.000 level (2-tailed)

It is concluded that there is a significant correlation between identity crisis and mental fragility among Sudanese refugees in Egypt.

Discussion

The result revealed that a significant correlation between identity crisis and mental fragility among refugees from Sudan living in Egypt. In comparing this result with previous studies, it agrees with the study of Chen K, Chen S, (2008)

According to researchers, correlation here between identity crisis and mental fragility, can better be explained on the light of the fact that age group in this research indicates a period of time marked with conflicts and crises in which the adolescent feels mentally unstable. Among the psychological factors that help adolescents adapt to different situations and changes during identity formation at teens. Mental fragility is one of the personality traits that helps an individual cope with stress and maintain their physical and mental health.

Adolescence is a time of intense identity development, nevertheless, for many teenagers they feel more like identity deterioration. Studies reveal that anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders can clearly appear during adolescence.

Research has shown that a stable and strong sense of identity is associated with better mental health of adolescents, as well as better emotional and mental well-being of adolescents.

Hypothesis-4

A significant difference found in identity crisis among refugee adolescents in Egypt according to the gender.

To verify the hypothesis, Mann-Whitney U test was used to test the significance of gender difference on identity crisis.

Table (7) Shows the result of the Mann-Whitney U test:

Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Sig.(2-tailed)
Males	36	76.42	2751	-0.195	0.845
Females	122	80.41	9810		
Total	158				

It appears that no significant difference found on identity crisis between males and females.

Discussion

There is statistically significant difference on identity crisis among Sudanese adolescents in Egypt, according to the gender variable. In comparison with previous studies, this result is consistent with Reem Attia's study (2013).

In contrast, this result was not in line with a study carried out by Mukhaimer I, (1997), which found difference that favored males, as far as gender variable is concerned. The reason for this, from our point of view, there is rapid pace of events has changed the way girls are raised at their original homes. life circumstances are similar in terms of living conditions owing to socialization process and its role which plays in the formation of personality.

The researchers believe that adolescent girls have feelings of tenderness and love in a way greater from male teenagers to understand on dealing with problems and circumstances that they encounter.

5-Conclusion

It is quite evident that Sudanese displaced adolescents had suffered enough as asylum seekers during their long stay in Egypt. Their mental health was severely damaged and deteriorated as well, consequently there was an overall breakdown of normal mental balance and emotional stability.

The link between adolescents' identity crisis development and its relationship with mental vulnerability is completely clear. The possible mediating variable or factor that could affect the relationship between the two variables in this

research is also pointed out and accordingly discussed.

Recommendations

1- To help the teenagers facing the challenges with strength and hardness.

Family attention to adolescence and dealing with the adolescent positively until He can get through the stage safely.

2- To design guidance programs to overcome fragility issues in adolescents and their treatment.

3- To offer guidance both parents and those interested in adolescent students about the characteristics of adolescence and how to transition smoothly from it to adulthood and build a positive personality.

4- Paying attention to teenagers and conducting more research on this age group, especially in light of this rapid development in public life and social life in particular.

Suggestions for further studies

1-Identity Crisis as a Predictor for social withdrawal among the youth.

2-Mental Vulnerability at Late Adulthood.

3-Identity Crisis and Its relation to Stigma in Adolescents.

4- The Significance of Healthy Childhood in Developing Positive Personality.

5- Effectiveness of intervention counseling in enhancing mental resilience among war-displaced people in Sudan.

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