



Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Strategies and Social Problem-Solving Skills: How do they interact in the prediction of psychological distress in adolescents?



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- Adolescence is a period of transition between childhood and adulthood, characterized by changes in interpersonal relationships. Adolescents begin to form and value friendships, interaction networks, and romantic relationships more than they do in childhood. These several types of interpersonal relationships allow adolescents to improve their social skills and practice with some of the recently acquired capacities (Collins & Steinberg, 2006).
- However, interpersonal relationships are not just critical for the social functioning of adolescents but also for their emotional development. Because most adolescents utilize support or the presence of others to deal with the difficult emotions (IER) they encounter in their daily lives, given that they experience a wide variety of emotions in an intense fashion as well as changes in their social roles (Scott & Saginak, 2016).
- Even though they use IER strategies to deal with challenging situations, relying too much on others to modify emotions may increase psychological distress (Hofmann et al., 2016), especially among individuals who lack additional resources to deal with problems (Ray-Yol et al., 2020; Schwartz-Mette et al., 2021).
- Individual efforts in identifying and resolving problematic social situations are associated with favorable mental health outcomes in many populations and are referred to as social problem solving (SPS).
- Previous studies on SPS indicate that this capacity has the potential to buffer the negative impact of various risk factors such as difficulties in emotion regulation (Kuzucu, 2016) and hopelessness (Jaffee & D'Zurilla, 2009). Nevertheless, **the effect of individual differences in social problem-solving skills on the outcomes of IER use is yet to be explored.**
- The current study aimed to investigate** the adolescents' use of certain interpersonal resources to deal with stressors encountered in daily life. We specifically examined how different interpersonal emotion regulation (IER) strategies interact with the adolescents' social problem solving (SPS) capacity and predict psychological distress.
- We expected the association of IER strategies with psychological distress to change depending on the level of SPS in adolescents.
- Frequent use of IER by those with low SPS at times of distress might prevent these individuals to practice and acquire adaptive social problem-solving skills on their own and thus contribute to psychological distress. However, for someone with high SPS, the use of IER at times of distress might only be one of the strategies employed depending on the context and may not be related to the perception of inefficacy or lack of problem-solving skills.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation (IER)

Enhancement of Positive Affect (EPA): Seeking other people when one is in a positive mood, with the hope of up regulating the positive emotions of the others

Perspective Taking (PT): Seeking reassurance from others regarding the idea that things are not that bad and there are others who are in much worse conditions

Social Modeling (SM): Checking and perhaps imitating other people's ways of dealing with difficult situations

Soothing (S): Seeking sympathy and compassion from others to deal with difficult emotions

Method

Participants and procedure

Two hundred sixty-nine (141 girls) students in three high schools in İstanbul between ages 13 and 17, filled pen-and-pencil versions of questionnaires. Data collection procedures were completed during class time and supervised by school counselors, teachers, and researchers.

Measures

Turkish versions of the following scales were used for data collection.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) assesses individuals' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in a total of 42 items. The internal consistency coefficient was .958 for all items included.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (IERQ; Hofmann, et al., 2016) is a 20-item 4 subscale measure, designed to assess the regulation of one's emotion by others. The internal consistency coefficient of the subscales in the current study were .673 for EPA, .606 for PT, .587 for S, and .656 for SM.

Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised (SPSI-R; D'Zurilla et al., 2002) consists of 52 items that measure five dimensions: Positive Problem Orientation (PPO), Negative Problem Orientation (NPO), Rational Problem Solving (RPS), Impulsivity/Carelessness Style (ICS), and Avoidance Style (AS).

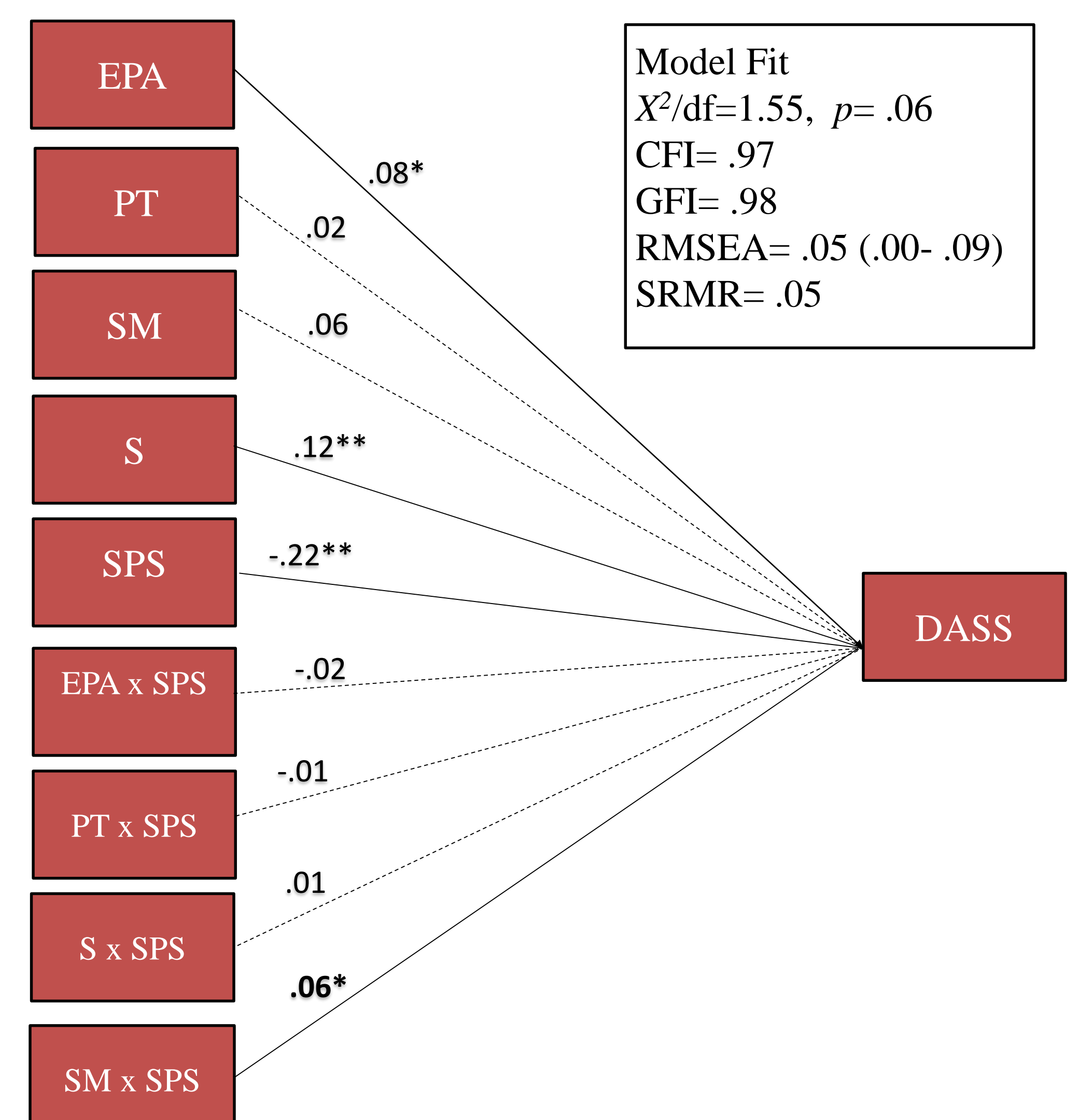
Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, internal consistencies and correlations between study variables.

	M	SD	α	Age	Sex	SPSI-R	EPA	PT	S	SM
Age	14.79	.93								
Sex				.01						
SPSI-R	10.77	2.64	.85	-.25**	.06					
EPA	20.04	3.84	.67	-.11	-.14*	.14*				
PT	13.50	3.76	.61	.01	.19**	.05	.20**			
S	15.09	4.71	.59	.03	-.11	-.10	.49**	.31**		
SM	15.35	4.38	.66	-.03	.06	.08	.49**	.52**	.44**	
DASS	48.93	26.96	.96	.20**	-.02	-.45**	-.03	-.03	.16**	.04

DASS= Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, EPA= Enhancement of Positive Affect, PT= Perspective Taking, S= Soothing, SM= Social Modeling, SPSI-R= Social Problem Solving Inventory-Revised

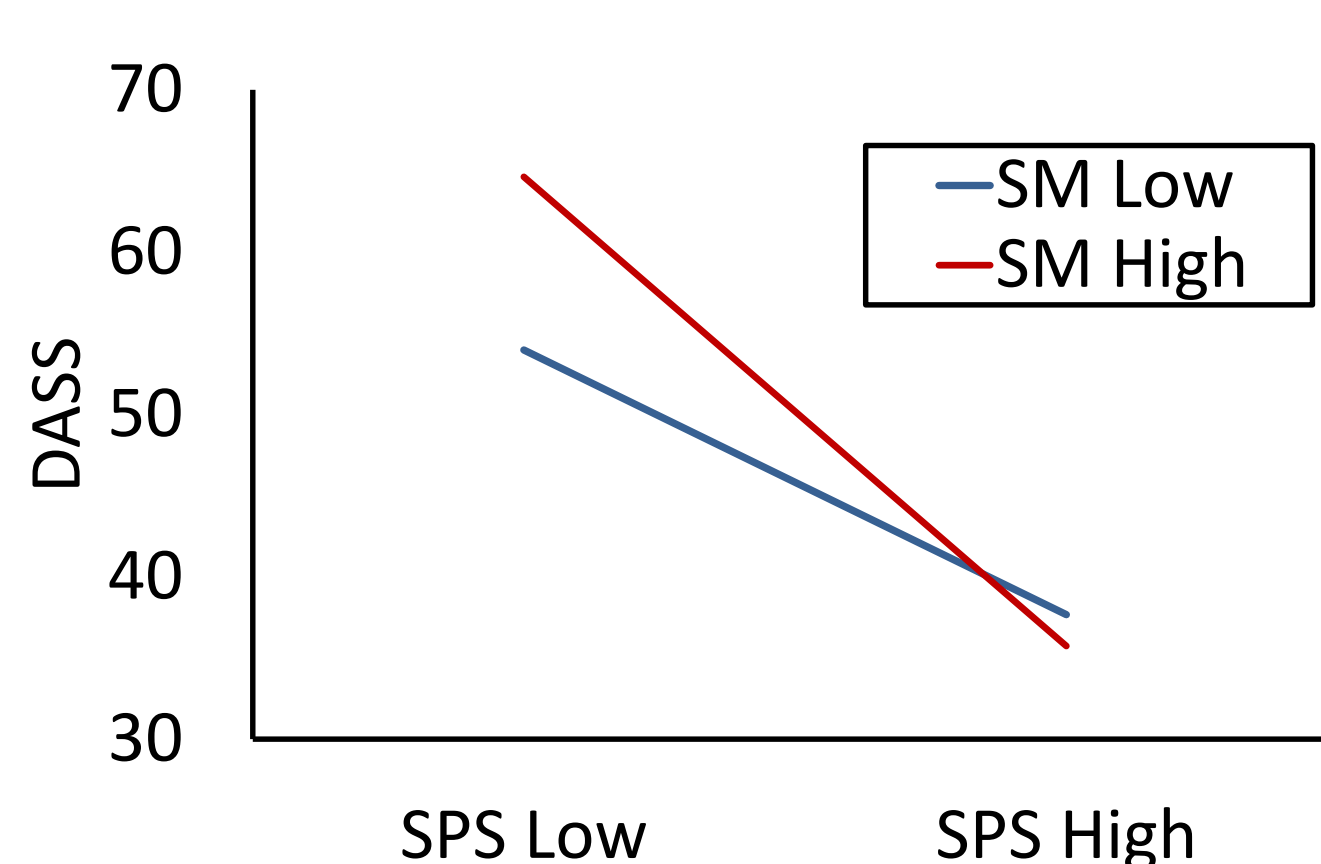
The results indicated that among the dimensions of IER, only social modeling had a significant interaction with SPS. In other words, adolescents with good SPS skills report experiencing lower levels of psychological distress. However, for adolescents with poor SPS skills, the inclination to imitate others' way of dealing with difficult emotions is linked to higher levels of psychological distress.



Discussion

- The current results indicate that frequent reliance on imitating other people's problem-solving strategies by an individual with poor problem-solving confidence and skills may prevent one improve essential problem-solving skills and serve as a safety behavior that confirms the existing beliefs of inefficacy and thus prolong the distress.
- However, in the presence of adequate social problem-solving skills and confidence, the use of Social modeling might not necessarily lead to psychological distress.
- In other words, SPS appears to be a factor that buffers the risk that stems from relying too much on certain IER skills.
- The results of the present study add to the limited literature on IER, with an emphasis on the potentially maladaptive function of the Social modeling dimension among adolescents.

Figure 1
Interactive effects of Social modeling and Social problem-solving on psychological distress.



The level of social problem solving skills moderated the relationship between social modeling and psychological distress.

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