

# THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLEXIBILITY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE HASSLES AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS IN ADOLESCENCE

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## INTRODUCTION

Empirical evidence demonstrates that psychological inflexibility is a major issue of social and emotional functioning in several mental disorders. It is also well-established that everyday life hassles are associated with psychological maladjustment and depression. However, there are still unanswered questions about the role of psychological inflexibility in the relationship between recent life hassles and depression among adolescents.

## OBJECTIVES

(1) Examine the relationships between life hassles, psychological inflexibility and depressive symptoms; (2) Test whether psychological inflexibility mediates the relationship between life hassles and depressive symptoms.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 787 adolescents, with 371 boys (47%) and 416 girls (53%), with ages between 12-18 years old ( $M = 14.89$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ). The mean of years of education was 9.46 ( $SD = 1.61$ ) ranging between 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. No sex differences were found for age,  $t(785) = 1.197$ ,  $p = .232$ , except for years of education,  $t(785) = 2.551$ ,  $p = .011$ . Girls had more years of education ( $M = 9.59$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) than boys ( $M = 9.30$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ).

### Procedures

This adolescents' samples was collected from middle and secondary schools in center region of Portugal. Ethical and deontological requirements were followed. Confidentiality, voluntarily and anonymity were guaranteed.

### Instruments

**Daily Hassles Microsystems Scale (DHMS;** Seidman et al., 1995; Paiva, 2009) is a 28-items scale that assesses daily hassles within four microsystems. Each item is rated on a 4 point scale (1-4), with higher scores representing greater perception of daily hassles. In the present study it was only considered school (4 items;  $\alpha = .66$ ) and peer hassles (4 items;  $\alpha = .73$ ) subscales.

**Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth (AFQ-Y;** Greco, Lambert, & Baer, 2008; Cunha & Santos, 2011) assesses psychological inflexibility fostered by cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance. This scale comprises 17 items that are rated on a 5 point scale (0-4), with higher scores indicating high levels of psychological inflexibility. In the present study the Cronbach's alpha was good ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21;** Lovidond & Lovibond, 1995) is a 21-item scale that assesses depression, anxiety and stress. Each item is rated on a 4 point scale (0-3), with higher scores representing high levels of depression, anxiety and stress symptoms. Only Depression subscale was used ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

## RESULTS

### 1. Sex differences for all variables in study

Table 1  
 Means (M), standard deviations (SD) and independent samples t-test for sex differences among variables in study (N = 787)

Variables	Total sample (N = 787) M (SD)	Boys (n = 371) M (SD)	Girls (n = 416) M (SD)	T(df)
Daily school hassles (DHMS)	8.15 (2.63)	7.75 (2.45)	8.51 (2.73)	4.128 *** (784.983)
Daily peer hassles (DHMS)	5.55 (2.19)	5.17 (1.86)	5.89 (2.39)	4.734 *** (771.133)
Psychological Inflexibility (AFQ-Y)	33.95 (13.28)	30.43 (12.97)	37.08 (12.78)	7.231 *** (785)
Depression (DASS-21)	4.91 (5.05)	3.96 (4.48)	5.75 (5.37)	5.113 *** (781.644)

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$

## RESULTS

### 2. Correlations Analyses

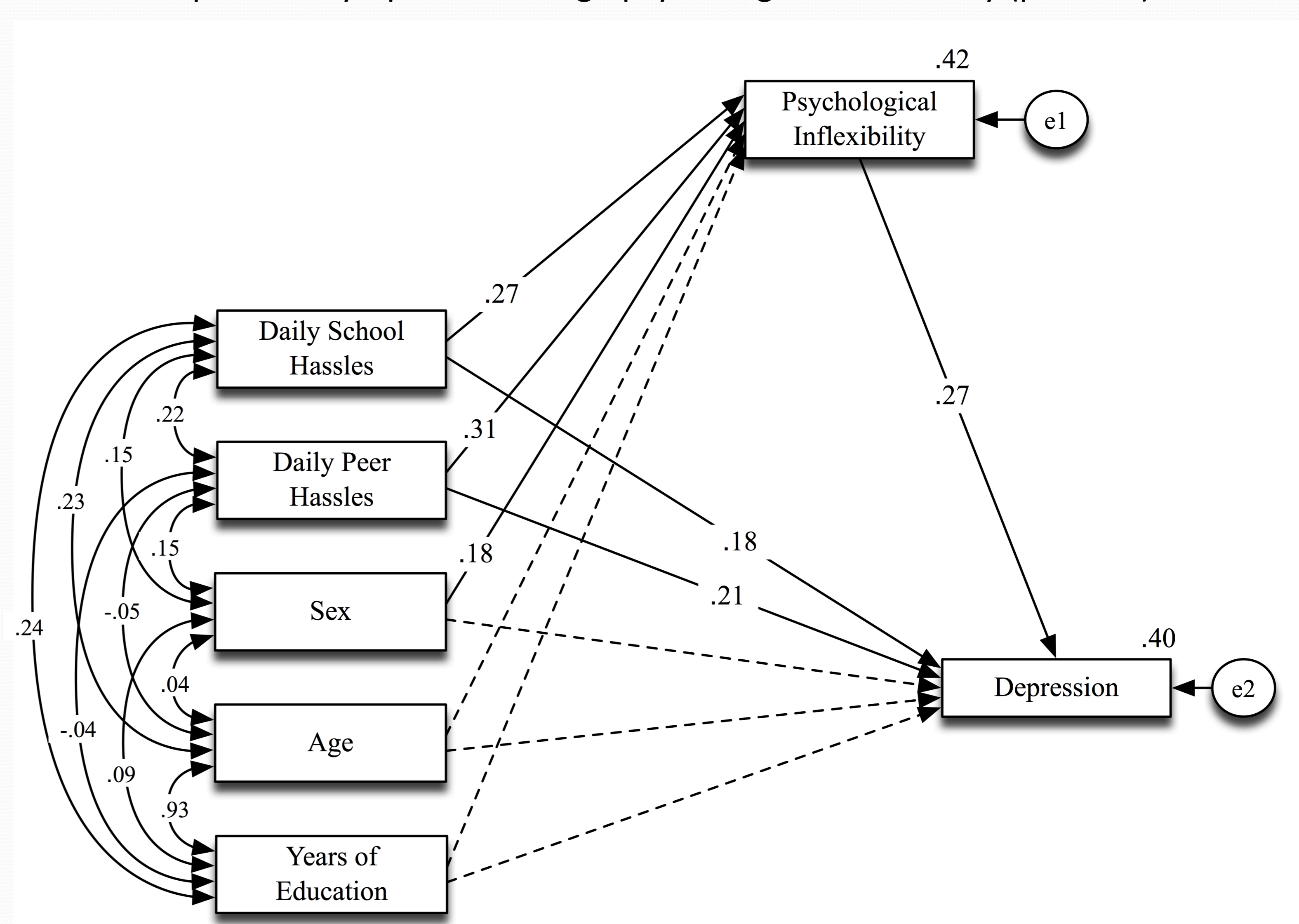
Table 2  
 Intercorrelations between all variables for male (above the diagonal) and female (below the diagonal) adolescents

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Age	-	.92***	.14**	ns	ns	ns
2.Years of education	.93***	-	.12*	ns	-.14**	ns
3.Daily school hassles	.31***	.31***	-	.23***	.35***	.39***
4.Daily peer hassles	ns	ns	.20***	-	.41***	.43***
5.AFQ-Y	ns	ns	.27***	.35***	-	.55***
6.Depression	ns	.11*	.35***	.40***	.54***	-

Note. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ . ns = non-significant

### 3. Path Analysis

The model depicted below represents a mediation analysis. The model explain 40% of the variance of depression. Sex, age and years of education were included as covariate variables. All paths are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), except the paths drawn in dotted line. The Bootstrap analysis confirm the indirect effects of daily school and peer hassles on depressive symptoms through psychological inflexibility ( $p < .001$ ).



## DISCUSSION

These results indicate that daily school and peer hassles indirectly predicted depressive symptoms, through their effect in psychological inflexibility. It seems that adolescents who perceived more daily school and peer hassles tend to deal with it in an inflexible and avoidant way, which in turn impacts upon increased levels of depressive symptoms.

## CONCLUSION

Psychological inflexibility seems to be a process that exacerbates the impact of life hassles on depression among adolescents. Preventive and intervention actions should promote a more accepting and mindful attitude towards daily disruptions in order to improve psychological flexibility and decrease psychopathology.