

Threat appraisals of teachers' fear appeals and test anxiety:

The mediating role of experiential avoidance and mindfulness skills

Cláudia P. Pires^{1a}, David W. Putwain², Stefan G. Hofmann³, & Maria do Céu Salvador¹

¹University of Coimbra, Portugal, CINEICC – Center for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences

²Liverpool John Moores University, UK, School of Education

³Boston University, USA, Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences

^aclaudia.ppires@gmail.com



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INTRODUCTION

- Fear appeals are persuasive loss-focused messages to promote behavioral change, particularly to avoid an unwanted outcome;
- Secondary school teachers use fear appeals as a form of motivating students by stressing the consequences of examination failure, which is usually appraised by students as a threat;
- Threat appraisals of teachers' fear appeals are one of the predictors of test anxiety, a higher prevalent condition in secondary school students;
- Experiential avoidance (i.e., attempts to avoid thoughts, feelings, memories, physical sensations, and other internal experiences, even when doing so keeps one from pursuing valued ends) and mindfulness skills (i.e., paying attention, on purpose, to the internal and external experience that occurs moment by moment, non-judgmentally) are important processes in test anxiety manifestation;
- No study has yet explored if experiential avoidance and mindfulness skills mediate the link between threat appraisals of teacher's fear appeals and test anxiety.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- Cross-sectional study with 328 adolescents (aged 14-19), who completed a set of self-report questionnaires:
 - Teacher's Use of Fear Appeals Questionnaire (TUFAQ; Putwain et al., 2019): **threat appraisals of teachers' fear appeals**;
 - Reactions to Tests (RT; Sarason, 1984): **test anxiety**;
 - Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth (AFQ-Y; Greco et al., 2008): **experiential avoidance**;
 - Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM; Greco et al., 2011): **mindfulness skills**.
- A parallel multiple mediator model was estimated, testing the mediating role of experiential avoidance and mindfulness skills in the relationship between threat appraisals of teachers' fear appeals and test anxiety.

AIM

To test the **mediating role of experiential avoidance and mindfulness skills** in the relationship between **threat appraisals of teachers' fear appeals and test anxiety** in secondary school students.

RESULTS

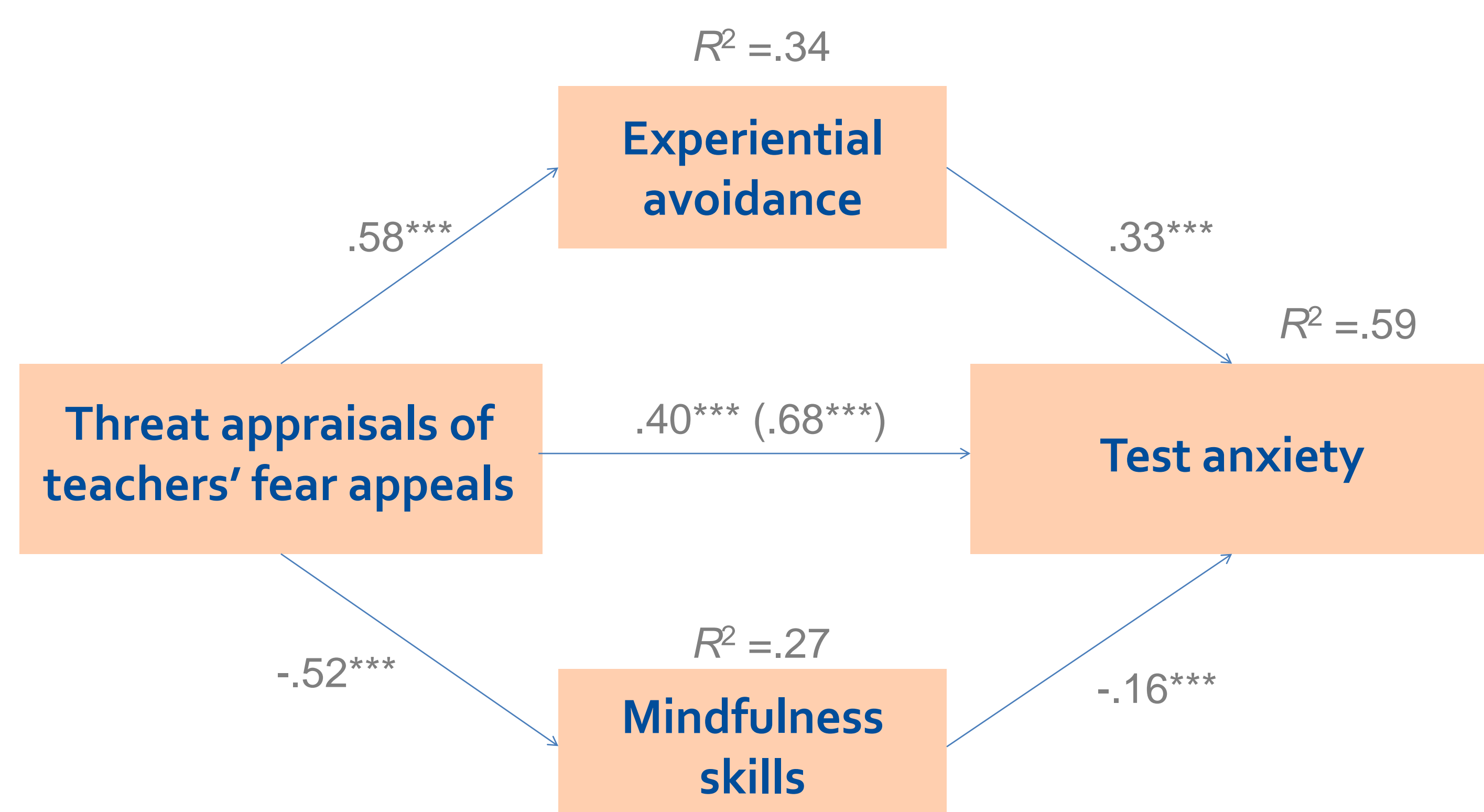


Figure 1. Parallel multiple mediator model diagram. Path values represent standardized regression coefficients. Values inside parenthesis represent the total effect of X on Y. *** $p < .001$.

The model explained 59% of variance in test anxiety. Threat appraisals of teachers' fear appeals were directly associated to test anxiety, but also indirectly associated, through higher experiential avoidance and lower mindfulness skills (.28, 95% CI [.21, .34]).

DISCUSSION

Results suggest that interpreting teacher's fear appeals as threats (**threat appraisals of teachers' fear appeals**) (probably overestimating tests difficulty, underestimating personal resources to cope with them and/or overestimating how negative this anticipated failure will be), together with students' difficulty in simply noticing their internal experiences (thoughts, feelings, body sensations) as they are, without judgment (**lack of mindfulness skills**), and consequent attempts to avoid or control them (**experiential avoidance**) are important variables in understanding test anxiety. These findings point out the importance of working these processes in psychological and educational interventions with both students and teachers.

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