

## Effect of Difficulty in Emotional Regulation on the Quality of School Life of High School Girl Students, Kerman, Iran

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### Abstract

#### Background

Quality of school life is defined as the well-being and general satisfaction of students in terms of the positive and negative experiences in school activities. The present study aims at investigation of the effect of difficulty in emotional regulation on the quality of school life of high school girl students.

#### Materials and Methods

The research method was descriptive correlation using structural equations. The statistical population of the study is 4,734 high school girl students in Kerman, Iran, in 2018-2019. The sample size was determined to be 353 by Cochran's formula using random cluster sampling method. The Ainley and Burke's School Quality of Life Questionnaire and the Gratz and Roemer's Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) were used to collect data. The validity of the questionnaires was calculated and confirmed using factor analysis and the reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical indicators, including simple regression, structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis, using SPSS software version 16.0 and AMOS software version 22.0.

#### Results

Data analysis through structural equation modeling of the results showed the effect of the difficulty in emotional regulation on quality of school life ( $\beta=0.32$ ,  $P<0.001$ ) is significant and inverse and the effect of components of difficulty in emotional regulation on quality of school life is significant and inverse ( $P<0.001$ ).

#### Conclusion

According to the results, the components of difficulty in emotional regulation have significant and inverse effects on the quality of school life and also there is a significant and inverse effect between the components of difficulty in emotional regulation with quality of school life.

**Key Words:** Difficulty in emotional regulation, High school students, Quality of school life.

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## 1- INTRODUCTION

School is one of the most important environments where the adolescents spend most of its time. Therefore, the quality of school life is one of the most important concepts to be considered. Due to the importance of the quality of life of children and adolescents in school, the World Health Organization has recently raised the need for countries to improve school behavior and increase student health in the form of quality of life in school. One of the goals of the school health program presented by this organization is to create a healthy environment in the school in order to respect the dignity of students, their health and well-being, as well as to provide multiple opportunities to facilitate their success and progress (1).

Quality of life in school is an important part of the overall quality of life of students and arises from the interaction of students, family and school (2). Also, the quality of school life is a structure that is defined as the well-being and overall satisfaction of students in terms of the positive and negative experiences gained that are rooted in in-school activities (3). These positive and negative experiences form the general perception of the student about his/her level of welfare, well-being and overall satisfaction with life within the school as well as the level of satisfaction with his/her daily life at school (4).

Difficulty in emotional regulation is one of the issues that can affect the quality of school life of students. Entering school has its own tensions, such as failures, conflicts, pressures and changes. Some students experience psychological problems after entering school that affect their quality of school life and lead to some psychological disturbances. Students' familiarity with emotional regulation strategies can lead to a reduction of anxiety and depression and other emotional issues, because it increases academic motivation and, consequently,

has significant effects on self-esteem, and this promotes mental health among students and increases the quality of their school lives. In general, students who experience short-term emotions use better coping strategies (5). The results show that emotion regulation strategies are associated with reducing negative emotions and emotional events and focusing on positive emotion regulation strategies enhances one's understanding of emotion management (6). According to Aksan, improving emotional self-regulation skills leads to motivational involvement of students. These skills help learners make better choices and become less anxious. Therefore, reducing the difficulty of emotional regulation and increasing the skills of emotional regulation will improve the quality of life of students (7). Research shows that quality of life decreases with increasing difficulty in emotional regulation, or in other words, quality of life increases with increasing emotion regulation skills (8).

School and its environment are good opportunities for strengthening and improving the quality of life of students. Also, the quality of life in school has an essential role in the formation of a healthy personality and academic achievement of students. Therefore, the quality of life in school requires careful evaluation because of its impact on mental and physical health. On the other hand, many studies conducted in different countries on the quality of life of people have focused more on specific areas and people belonging to specific populations, such as patients and middle-aged people, and less on the quality of life of children and adolescents, especially in school, and this is despite the fact that the decrease in the quality of school life threatens a large part of our childhood and adolescents in school and is increasing day by day. More importantly, the role of schools, especially psychologists and counselors in school, is

not only to promote and improve students' academic achievement, but in fact to improve the quality of life and attention to various physical, emotional and social dimensions of students (9). Therefore, it is necessary to study the quality of school life. Since emotional regulation is a central process for all aspects of human functioning and plays a vital role in the ways in which people cope with stressful experiences and happiness, the difficulty in emotional regulation can improve the quality of school life in students. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of difficulty in emotional regulation on the quality of school life of students in Kerman, Iran.

### Research hypotheses

1. The variable of difficulty in emotional regulation has an effect on the quality of school life of high school girl students in Kerman.
2. Components of difficulty in emotional regulation (non-acceptance, difficulty in engaging in purposeful behavior, difficulty in controlling impulse, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, and lack of emotional clarity) is influential on the quality of school life in high school girl students in the city of Kerman.

## 2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2-1. Study design and population

This is a descriptive correlational study using structural equation method and investigates the effect of difficulty in emotional regulation on quality of school life in girl students in Kerman, Iran. The statistical population of the present study consists of 4,734 girl students of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade secondary school in Kerman in the academic year of 2018-2019. Using Cochran's formula and random cluster sampling method, 353 subjects were selected and a questionnaire was given to them.

### 2-2. Measuring tools

#### 2-2-1. Difficulty in Emotional Regulation Scale

Difficulty in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS) was used here. This scale was created in 2001 by Gratz and Roemer with 36 items (10). This scale consists of 6 subscales which are: 1. Non-acceptance, 2. Difficulty in engaging in purposeful behavior (goals), 3. Difficulty in controlling impulse, 4. Lack of emotional awareness (awareness), 5. Limited access to emotion regulation strategies (strategies), and 6. Lack of emotional clarity (clarity). Scoring method: The score of each choice was determined as follows: almost never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4, almost always = 5. Items 7, 6, 2, 1, 8, 10, 17, 20, 22, 24 and 34 had reverse scores. Higher scores mean more difficulty in emotional regulation. The scale has an overall score of the sum of the scores of all items and also 6 scores related to the subscales. Analysis of the results showed that the test questions have a high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

Factor analysis showed the existence of 6 factors: non-acceptance of emotional responses, difficulty in performing purposeful behavior, difficulty in controlling impulse, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotional regulation strategies, lack of emotional clarity. All six subscales of the questionnaire have Cronbach's alpha of over 0.80. Difficulty in emotional regulation also has a significant correlation with NMR scale and Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ, Hayes et al.) (10). In the present study, confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha were used to evaluate the validity and reliability of this scale. The indices obtained from confirmatory factor analysis in the present study (RMSEA = 0.020, CMIN/DF = 1.141, GFI = 0.998, AGFI = 0.978, and CFI = 0.99) showed 0.840 for the appropriate fit of the model with the data

and Cronbach's alpha for this questionnaire, which indicates the confirmation of reliability.

### 2-2-2. Quality of School Life Questionnaire

The Quality of School Life Questionnaire was developed by Ainley and Burke (1999). This questionnaire includes 39 items in 7 dimensions of public satisfaction: Negative emotions; Relationship with the teacher, opportunity, progress; adventure and social cohesion. The scores given by the subjects on the Likert scale to this questionnaire determined the quality of school life. Items 5, 14, 18, 28 and 37 are scored in reverse. In the study of Soltani Shal et al., the convergent validity of the quality of school life questionnaire was calculated and confirmed by examining its correlation with general self-efficacy scales and adolescent coping scale (9). In the present study, confirmatory factor analysis was used to evaluate the validity of this scale. Indicators obtained by confirmatory factor analysis in the present study (RMSEA = 0.000, CMIN / DF = 0.739, GFI = 0.998, AGFI = 0.983, and CFI = 0.99) indicate the appropriate fit of the model with data. Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 for this questionnaire indicates the confirmation of reliability.

### 2-3. Ethical consideration

All participants responded to the questions with satisfaction and were assured that the data would be analyzed in general. It was not necessary to write the name and

surname and participation in the study was voluntary.

### 2-4. Data analysis

To analyze the data, descriptive statistical indices of mean and standard deviation, frequency distribution table and inferential simple regression tests, structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis were used in Amos software version 22.0 and SPSS software version 16.0. P-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## 3- RESULTS

The scores of the variables of difficulty in emotional regulation and quality of school life were obtained by calculating the average scores of the relevant items of the questionnaire and to describe this variable, the scores were divided into five categories: very low, low, medium, high and very high. Out of 355 subjects, 43 (12.1%) had very low scores of emotional regulation difficulty, 161 (45.4%) had low scores, 132 (37.2%) moderate scores, 18 (5.1%) high scores and one person (0.3%) has a very high score of emotional regulation difficulty. A total of 19 (5.4%) subjects have a high (high and very high) difficulty in adjusting their emotions. Out of 355 subjects, 7 (0.2%) believed that their school quality variable score is very low, 34 (9.6%) low, 199 (56.1%) moderate, 94 (26.5%) high and 21 (5.9%) subjects believed it is too much. A total of 115 subjects (32.4%) believed that their quality of school life score is positive (high and very high) (**Table.1**).

**Table-1:** Frequency distribution of research variables.

Variables	Difficulty in emotional regulation	Quality of School Life
Very Low	43 (12.1)	7 (2)
Low	161 (45.6)	34 (9.6)
Moderate	132 (37.2)	199 (56.1)
High	18 (5.1)	94 (26.5)
Very high	1 (0.3)	21 (5.9)
Total		355 (100)

### 3-1. Testing research hypotheses

Components of difficulty in emotional regulation (non-acceptance, difficulty in engaging in purposeful behavior, difficulty in controlling impulse, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, and lack of emotional clarity) have an impact on the quality of school life of high school girl students in Kerman. Before analyzing the data related to the hypotheses, they were examined to ensure that these data could estimate the underlying assumptions of the structural equation model. For this purpose, five assumptions of structural equations, including missing data, outliers, normality, and multi-collinearity were examined and the assumptions of analysis were observed. In addition, variables have a distance scale. To evaluate the validity and adequacy of the data, the KMO index has been used.

With the data of this study, the value of this index was 0.853 for the difficulty in emotional regulation, 0.222 for the Perfectionism Questionnaire and 0.859 for the quality of school life questionnaire, respectively. This index is in the range of zero to one, and the closer the value of this index is to one, the more suitable the sample size data are for factor analysis. The Bartlett test was also used to examine the correlation matrix. The significance of Bartlett test for all three questionnaires, as seen in **Table.2**, is less than the significance level of 0.05 and the assumption that the correlation matrix is uniform is rejected and as a result, the items are sufficiently correlated. In addition, the subscription value of all items is above 0.30 and the rest of the standard items are in the range (3 and -3).

**Table-2:** KMO and Bartlett test statistic values.

Variables	KMO	Bartlett		
Difficulty in emotional regulation	0.853	3987.536 = $\chi^2$	df= 630	Sig=0.000
Quality of School Life	0.859	5478.709 = $\chi^2$	df=741	Sig=0.000

Df: Degree of freedom.

Also, before evaluating the proposed structural model, it is necessary to examine the significance of weighted regression (factor load) of various variables and structures of the questionnaire in predicting the relevant components to determine the fit of measurement models and the acceptability of their markers in measuring structures. This was done using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) technique and AMOS software. Due to the fact that in the fitted CFA model, the weighted regression of all variables, in predicting the components, at the

confidence level of 0.99, had a significant difference with zero, none of the components were excluded from the analysis process. The significance basis of the components is that the significance level is below 0.05 for them. The results of confirmatory factor analysis for the components along with the CFA model fit indices are presented in Tables 3 and 4. These indicators showed a good fit of the measurement models and the significance of the load of each observed variable to the corresponding latent variable was confirmed.

**Table-3:** Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the Difficulty in Emotional Regulation variable.

Variable	Dimensions or measurement indicators (observed variables)	Factor Loading	Statistic	P-value
Difficulty in emotional regulation	Non-acceptance	0.592	-	-
	Differences in purposeful behaviors	0.692	9.413	P<0.001
	Impairment of impulse control	0.627	8.976	P<0.001
	Lack of emotional awareness	0.321	4.591	P<0.001
	Limited access to emotion regulation strategies	0.788	9.909	P<0.001
	Lack of emotional clarity	0.592	8.456	P<0.001
Approved	$\chi^2 = 2.281$ ; $df = 2$ ; $\chi^2 / df = 1.141$ ; CFI= 0.999; TLI=0.997; IFI=0.999; RMR=0.007; GFA=0.998; RMSEA= 0.020; AGFI = 0.978.			

X2: Chi-square, df: Degree of freedom, CFI: Comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker–Lewis index, IFI: Instrumentation facility interface, RMR: Resting metabolic rate, GFA: Genetic Function Approximation, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, AGFI: Adjusted goodness of fit index.

**Table-4:** Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the Quality of School Life variable.

Variable	Dimensions or measurement indicators (observed variables)	Factor Loading	Statistic	P-value
Quality of School Life	Overall satisfaction	0.810	-	-
	Relations with the teacher (report)	0.281	4.761	P<0.001
	Opportunity	0.644	11.314	P<0.001
	Achievement (progress)	0.849	13.777	P<0.001
	Ambition	0.667	11.672	P<0.001
	Social integrity	0.767	15.556	P<0.001
	Negative emotions	0.670	10.290	P<0.001
Approved	$X^2 = 2.216$ ; $df = 3$ ; $\chi^2 / df = 0.739$ ; CFI=0.999; TLI=0.998; IFI=0.999; RMR= 0.007; GFA=0.998; RMSEA=0.000; AGFI = 0.983.			

X2: Chi-square, df: Degree of freedom, CFI: Comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker–Lewis index, IFI: Instrumentation facility interface, RMR: Resting metabolic rate, GFA: Genetic Function Approximation, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, AGFI: Adjusted goodness of fit index.

### 3-2. The variable of difficulty in emotional regulation affects the quality of school life of high- school girl students in Kerman.

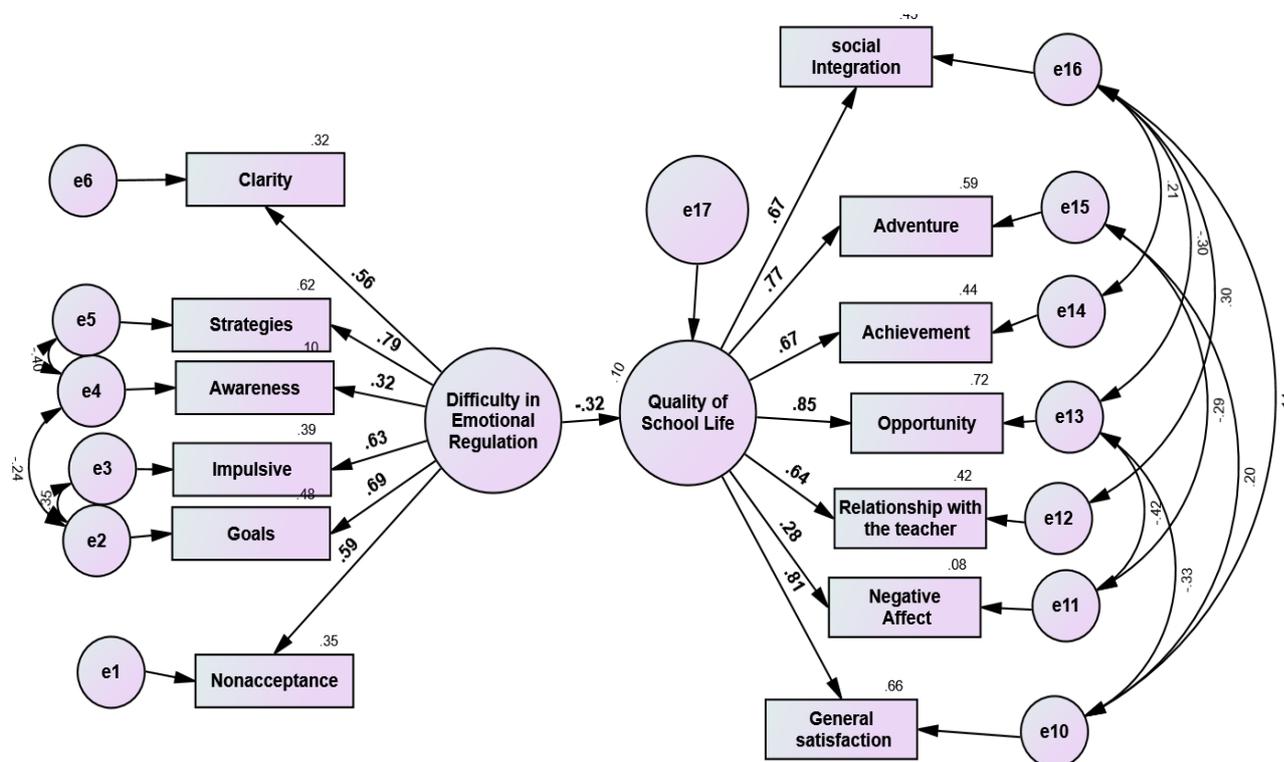
Analysis of data through structural equations shows that the standardized beta coefficient shows the effect of difficulty in emotional regulation on students' quality of school life ( $\beta = -0.32$ ), and because the p-value is 0.000, and less than the significance level of 0.05, it is  $\alpha = 0$ , so, the assumption of "no effect" is rejected and as a result, due to the negative beta coefficient, the difficulty in emotional regulation has a significant and inverse

effect on the quality of school life of high school girl students in Kerman. The coefficient of determination between the two variables is 0.10 ( $R^2 = 0.10$ ). In other words, 10% of changes are common between the two variables (10% of changes in quality of school life of students are justified by the difficulty of emotional regulation). Also, according to the obtained statistics (RMSEA = 0.061, CMIN/DF = 2.311 = 2.311, RMR = 0.069, GFI = 0.953, AGFI = 0.909), the results of the structural equation model have a desirable and acceptable fit (**Table 5 and Figure.1**).

**Table-5:** Summary of the results of measurement parameters the effect of difficulty in emotional regulation on quality of school life in structural equations.

Results	Standard coefficient	Test statistics	P-value
Effect of difficulty in emotional regulation on quality of school life	-0.32	-4.958	P<0.001
Approved	GFI=0.953; RMR=0.069; CMIN/DF=2.311; RMSEA=0.061; AGFI=0.909.		

CFI: Comparative fit index, RMR: Resting metabolic rate, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, AGFI: Adjusted goodness of fit index, CMIN/DF: In case of model fit the value of chi-square.



**Fig.1:** Structural equation model [Structural model and measurement models] the effect of the variable of difficulty in emotional regulation on quality of school life.

Data analysis through simple regression shows that beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ) are components of the effect of difficulty in emotional regulation the quality of school life of students are negative and because the p-value of all components is less than the significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , at this

level, the assumption of "no effect" is rejected and as a result, due to the negative coefficients, the components of difficulty in emotional regulation have a significant and inverse effect on the quality of school life of high school girl students in Kerman (**Table.6**).

**Table-6:** Mean and coefficients of beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ) between research variables.

Variables	Mean (SD)	$\beta$	
		Quality of school life	P-value
Difficulty in Emotional regulation	2.48 (0.55)	-0.338	<0.001
Non-admission	2.15 (0.812)	-0.162	<0.001
Differences in purposeful behaviors	2.83 (0.91)	-0.174	<0.001
Impairment of impulse control	2.55 (0.86)	-0.283	<0.001
Lack of emotional awareness	2.68 (0.74)	-0.217	<0.001
Limited access to emotion regulation strategies	2.42 (0.83)	-0.215	<0.001
Lack of emotional clarity	2.27 (0.73)	-0.272	<0.001

#### 4- DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of difficulty in emotional regulation of quality of school life of students in Kerman. The results showed that the difficulty in emotional regulation on the quality of school life is negative and significant, which is consistent with the research of Rastgoo and Babakhani (8). Emotional regulation is a central process for all aspects of human functioning and plays a vital role in the ways in which people cope with stressful experiences and experience happiness. Emotional regulation is defined as the process of initiating, maintaining, modifying, or changing the occurrence, intensity, or persistence of inner feelings and emotions associated with socio-psychological, physical processes in achieving one's goals (11).

Emotional dysfunction reduces individual and social functioning and life satisfaction and leads to difficulty in emotional regulation (12). Difficulty in emotional regulation can also lead to the formation and spread of internalized psychological problems, such as shyness and social isolation, and external problems, such as aggression and lack of control (13). Fosco and Grych state in his study that students' ability to regulate their emotions plays a significant role in their academic achievement, so subjects who have difficulty in regulating their emotions cannot manage their tasks and get them

done (14). At school, students who do not have the ability to control their emotions cannot control their negative emotions in relation to friends and teachers when they are upset, nor can they focus on their homework, when faced with negative emotions, to complete them. When faced with negative emotions, these students cannot control their behavior, so they experience an unpleasant feeling about the school environment, because the quality of school life shapes the student's overall perception of the level of well-being and general satisfaction with life within the school and is the result of his participation and involvement in school activities and expresses the level of students' satisfaction with daily life in school (15).

When a person has difficulty regulating emotions, he will not be able to control them, so he will not be able to establish a good relationship with the teacher and peers, and his quality of school life will decrease, which is in line with the results of the present study, because the results showed that as the difficulty in emotional regulation increases, so does the quality of school life. The results of the present study show that there is a negative relationship between non-acceptance of emotional responses and students' quality of school life. Refusing to accept emotional responses reflects a tendency to have secondary negative responses to negative emotions, or not accepting reactions to a person's anxiety (15). Therefore, students

who do not accept emotional responses cannot control their negative emotions when distressed, so they will not be able to establish constructive relationship between relationships and two-way interactions between themselves and the teacher and other students, and this causes negative emotions decreases positive ones, thus reducing the student's quality of school life. The results of the current study show that there is a negative relationship between the difficulties of engaging in purposeful behavior and the quality of school life of students. Difficulties in engaging in purposeful behavior reflect the difficulty of concentrating and completing assignments while experiencing negative emotions (15), so students with difficulties in engaging in purposeful behavior when faced with negative emotions are unable to focus on their tasks and complete them.

When students cannot finish their homework, they experience anxiety and stress, so they cannot experience positive experiences in school, and this factor reduces their quality of school life, so the relationship between these two variables can be justified. The results of the present study show that there is a negative relationship between impairment in impulse control and students' quality of school life. Impairment of impulse control reflects the difficulty in controlling a person's behavior while experiencing negative emotions (15).

Therefore, students who have difficulty controlling impulse cannot control their behavior when faced with negative emotions, so they cannot establish healthy relationships with those around them, they do not feel happy and safe, they are dissatisfied with their teacher and do not enjoy learning, they cannot unite with other classmates, and this leads to lower levels of school satisfaction, which is accompanied by behavioral problems, poor progress in school, aversion to school and the growth of unhealthy behaviors in

school. It is related and generally leads to a low quality of school life. Therefore, these two variables is justifiable. The results show that there is a negative relationship between lack of emotional awareness and quality of school life of students. They reflect a lack of emotional awareness as a tendency to pay attention to and recognize emotions. Therefore, students who lack emotional awareness cannot properly identify and reflect their emotions. They do not want to easily express their feelings, thoughts and behavior. This can lead to problems such as inability to communicate properly with others, inability to make decisions and inability to express emotions (15, 16), so it can be said that lack of emotional awareness in school can reduce a person's motivation to be present and progress in the school environment and ultimately reduce the quality of life at school. Therefore, the result obtained with these two variables is justifiable.

The results of the present study show that there is a negative relationship between limited access to emotional regulation strategies and students' quality of school life. Limited access to emotion regulation strategies means that at times of turmoil, there is little that can be done to regulate emotions effectively (15). Therefore, students with limited access to emotion regulation strategies don't do anything to regulate their emotions when they are mentally disturbed, and cannot avoid negative emotions and bad feelings. These negative feelings spread to the school environment and lead to failure in homework, lack of positive and constructive cooperation with the teacher and peers. On the other hand, these students cannot cooperate and assist in school activities and the quality of school life is reduced. The results of the present study show that there is a negative relationship between the lack of emotional transparency and the quality of school life of students. Emotional clarity indicates the

extent to which people are aware of their emotions and the indeed, the clarity of these emotions for them (15). Therefore, students who lack emotional clarity are not aware of their emotions. Self-disability, fear of negative evaluation, and anxiety are characteristics of a lack of emotional clarity. Students who are not aware of their emotions will not be able to express them in a positive way, and this can lead to a lack of motivation to learn and acquire negative emotions, and dissatisfaction with school activities, lack of logical interaction with teachers and classmates, so it can reduce the quality of school life. Therefore, the result obtained with these two variables is justifiable.

#### 4-1. Study Limitations

This study includes challenges and limitations, such as the limited scope of operations in urban areas and the lack of study in rural areas, the study of public school students and the lack of study of non-public school students, limited area of the study (Kerman city, Iran), lack of related research conducted at home and abroad on students, poor cooperation of some school officials with the researcher and conducting research in the students of only one gender.

#### 5- CONCLUSION

The results showed that the variable of difficulty in emotional regulation and its components have a significant and opposite effect on the quality of school life. Also, components of difficulty in emotional regulation (non-acceptance, differences in purposeful behaviors, impaired impulse control, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies and lack of emotional clarity) have an impact on the quality of school life of female high school students in Kerman Students who have difficulty in regulating their emotions and do not experience a good quality of school

life, so it is suggested that teachers, students and parents should be more aware of this variable and those involved in education should have a comprehensive and broad-minded approach tounderstanding and solving students' difficulty in emotional regulation.

**6- CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** None.

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