



The Role of Adolescents' Achievement Goals in Their Development of Depressive Symptoms: A Latent Class Growth Analysis

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Abstract

Students' achievement goals are usually associated with their depressive symptoms. Specially, mastery goals are negatively related to depressive symptoms, performance-avoidance goals are linked to increased depressive symptoms, and the effect of performance-approach goals is less consistent. However, limited research has explored the relationship between adolescents' achievement goals and their development of depressive symptoms. This study aimed to explore students' developmental trajectories of depressive symptoms, and how their achievement goals related to trajectory memberships. Participants included 2273 Chinese secondary school students (Mage at Time 1 = 13.39, SD = 0.60, 50.7% boys). Three waves of data were collected at six-month intervals. Latent class growth analysis identified three trajectories of depressive symptoms: a low-decreasing group (47.73%), a high-stable group (12.19%), and a moderate-stable group (40.08%). Multinomial logistic regression analyses revealed that mastery goals increased the likelihood of being in a more adaptive group, while performance-avoidance goals increased the risk of being in a less adaptive group. Performance-approach goals reduced the risk of being in the high-stable group, but could not differentiate the low-decreasing group from the moderate-stable group. This research supports the facilitating effect of mastery goals in adolescent mental health development, as well as the hindering effect of performance-avoidance goals. It also indicates the role of performance-approach goals as a limited protective factor, which can prevent students from the highest risk of depression, but fails to promote students with moderate depressive symptoms to a better development.

Keywords: achievement goals; adolescence; depressive symptoms; development trajectories; mental health