



Journal of Applied Family Therapy



Iranian Association of Women's Studies

The Effectiveness of Positive Psychology Education on Psychological Distress of Adolescents

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Received: 19.02.2023

Acceptance: 04.09.2023

*Journal of
Applied Family Therapy*

eISSN: 2717-2430

<http://Aftj.ir>

Vol. 4, No. 3, Pp: 145-157
Summer 2023 Special Issue

Original research article

How to Cite This Article:

Nazarieh, Z., & Moraveji, M. (2023). The Effectiveness of Positive Psychology Education on Psychological Distress of Adolescents. *Aftj*, 4(2): 145-157.



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Abstract

Aim: The main goal of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of positive psychology education on psychological distress of adolescents in shiraz city.

Methods: The research method of this study was a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test type with a control group. The statistical population of this research was consisted of all male students of Arts and cultural Foundations of Shiraz city, in the year 2022. The statistical sample of this research included 30 boys' students of Cultural and Art Foundation of Vasta in Shiraz City, who were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly placed in two experimental and control groups. The experimental group underwent twelve sessions of 90-minute positive psychology training sessions introduced by Seligman and Rashid (2006), but the control group did not receive any training. The research instruments were the Scale the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale questionnaire (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995). SPSS-26 was used for statistical analysis of data. **Results:** The results of multivariate covariance analysis showed that the training of positive psychological abilities has been able to be significantly effective on the psychological helplessness of adolescents in Shiraz. Also, the results of this research showed that the training of positive psychological abilities had a significant effect on the components of psychological helplessness. **Conclusions:** Therefore, teaching positive psychological abilities can be an effective approach to reduce adolescents' psychological vulnerability and helplessness.

Keywords: *Psychological Distress, Positive Psychology Education, Adolescents, Cultural and Arts Foundations, Shiraz city.*

Introduction

Among the most active and exciting stages in the life cycle is adolescence (Gladding & Gladding, 2018). Adolescence is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood, which is accompanied by cognitive, behavioral and social changes; It may be associated with problems such as worries about the future of education and work, sexual problems, discomfort, depression, conflict with parents and peers (Jackson & Goossens, 2020). Adolescence, like other periods of life, has its own problems, but in terms of the intensity of impact and the type of damage, they are different from other periods of development (Latafabadi, 2018). Statistics have shown that in Thailand, from 2015 to 2019, the number of teenagers who are being treated for depression and anxiety disorders as well as drug use is increasing (Sirisanokaeo, 2020).

One key component of social cognition in adolescents is distress, which is generally associated with depression and anxiety and causes an increase in risky behaviors in a person (Clifford, Nguyen, and Bradshaw, 2021). Anxiety and stress caused by distress are mostly environmental factors, family, friends and peers (Jackson & Goossens, 2020). Therefore, considering that adolescence is the period of growth of abstract thinking and identity, if these challenges are properly guided, they can become opportunities for hopeful planning and pursuing important goals in one's life (Nass et al., 2017). Otherwise, many injuries threaten teenagers, therefore, implementing early interventions and training psychological abilities is a necessary and essential issue for this period of life (Latafabadi, 2018).

Positive psychology looks at human issues and problems from the perspective of strengths and not from weaknesses (Jin et al., 2021). Therefore, while examining the uncomfortable aspects of people's lives, which were in the view of psychologists for many decades, it also examines emotions, strengths and positive elements in the human experience and psyche (Oxford, 2016). Positive psychology looks for the best in each person, focuses on strengths in each person, and promotes people's flourishing and well-being (Lopez, 2008). Positive psychology is concerned not only with people's happiness, but also with growth, empowerment, fulfillment, prosperity and resilience in every aspect of life (Seligman, 2011). Based on the pillars of positive psychology, researchers in this field study emotions at the individual (i.e. positive personality traits or characteristics), mental (i.e. positive emotional experiences) and collective (i.e. positive support provided by institutions and society) levels. (Gabrys-Barker, 2021). These positive mental emotions and related personality factors lead to empathy, pleasure, happiness, optimism, tolerance, love and mindfulness and can cause satisfaction, self-efficacy and success of a person (Seligman, 2011).

Adolescents can benefit greatly from positive educational interventions. The teenager learns new skills and strategies during the intervention process. Focusing on strengths and positive emotions and teaching alternative behaviors can lead teenagers to use efficient coping strategies, regulate and manage their emotions, and overcome their impulsivity and behavioral and performance deviations in the face of tension and negative emotions. Therefore, according to the stated contents, the current research seeks to answer the question whether teaching positive psychological abilities is effective on the psychological distress of adolescents in Shiraz.

Method

The research method of this study was a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test type with a control group. The statistical population of this research was consisted of all male students of Arts and cultural Foundations of Shiraz city, in the year 2022. The statistical sample of this research included 30 boys' students of Cultural and Art Foundation of Vasta in Shiraz City, who were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly placed in two experimental and control groups. The experimental group underwent twelve sessions of 90-minute positive psychology training sessions introduced by Seligman and Rashid (2006), but the control group did not receive any training. The research instruments were the Scale the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale questionnaire (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995). SPSS-26 was used for statistical analysis of data.

Results

The findings showed that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the scores of the anxiety component ($F=38.502$), stress ($F=42.250$), and depression component ($F=35.798$) ($p<0.01$). Therefore, it can be said that the training of positive psychological abilities has been effective on the psychological distress components of Shiraz teenagers and significantly reduced stress, anxiety and depression in the subjects of the experimental group compared to the control group. Therefore, the research hypothesis was confirmed.

Conclusion

The aim of the current research was to explain the effectiveness of teaching positive psychological abilities on psychological distress in teenagers in Shiraz. The findings of the research showed that there is a significant difference in the components of psychological distress (anxiety, stress and depression) between the experimental and control groups.

This research has limitations, including the following. The current research was conducted on a small sample of male students in the three cities of Shiraz; Therefore, caution should be observed in generalizing the research results to other statistical societies. Using a self-report tool and not following up the results in longer periods were other limitations of the present study. According to the results obtained from the research, it is recommended to hold educational workshops with a positive psychology perspective in schools and universities in order to prevent psychosocial injuries. In order to strengthen the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions, these interventions should be implemented on girls as well as other statistical communities. It is clear that in order to achieve greater effectiveness, it is possible to combine or compare positive training with other treatment methods.

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