



Effect of positive psychotherapy on psychological well-being of divorce children

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Journal of Research & Health
Social Development & Health Promotion
Research Center
Vol. 8, No. 4, Jul & Aug 2018
Pages: 298- 304
DOI: 10.29252/jrh.8.4.298
Original Article

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Received: 7 Jul 2015

Accepted: 28 Dec 2015

How to cite this article: Sarrami M, Nazari A, Kassayi A. The effectiveness of positive psychotherapy on psychological well-being of children of divorce. *J Research Health* 2018; 8(4): 298- 304.

Abstract

Couples' divorce disrupts family foundation and can cause serious damage on children's growth and formation of healthy personality. Hence, the majority of these children are in need of psychological rehabilitation programs. The aim of this study was to investigate effect of positive group psychotherapy on psychological well-being of divorce children. Two samples of 12 participants randomly for control and experimental groups were selected among all of second high school students of divorce. Participants of experimental group participated in positive-oriented group intervention during 8 sessions of 75 minutes but control group did not receive intervention. Data were collected by using scale of psychological well-being 84-item. experimental group increased in posttest significantly. This means that performed intervention as a group was effective in improving psychological well-being. The findings of this study indicate that positive group psychotherapy can help children of divorce flourish their capabilities better than before and can be used as a good option for psychological rehabilitation of this injured group.

Keywords: Child, Divorce, Psychological, Psychotherapy, Well-Being

Introduction

Individuals' personality forms in family. As much of efflorescence and improvement of human roots in family, also most of mental and behavioral disorders derive from family. Foundation of each family is based on hearty and peaceful relationship between couples and family and children's health is endangered when these relations becomes weak [1]. Divorce is the most important factor of disruption in family structure, a process which is started

with experience of emotional crisis among both couples and would be ended by trying to solve marital conflict through separation or entry into a new situation with different roles and lifestyles [2].

Divorce affected children severely. According to Kalantari's review article, behavioral and mental disorders of children were the main consequence of divorce which was mentioned in 26 percent of conducted studies about

divorce [3].

On the other hand, according to life graph, adolescence is a vital and critical period due to complex curves and fast growth in physical, cognitive and psychosocial areas both in terms of the pressures on individual and effective pedagogical role which parents and other authorities have [4].

According to information obtained from 81,000 people in 37 studies in research of Amato, it has been shown that divorce of parents or possible separation has broad negative impact on quality of life in adolescence. This result includes mental health (depression, low level of life satisfaction), family health (low marital quality), socioeconomic health (drop in education, low job rating and income) and physical health [5,6]. In general, as result of studies, it can be concluded that children of divorce usually need to receive rehabilitation intervention to live better and be able to enter into their youth with more stable identity and more balanced personality. The aim of this research is to investigate whether positive psychotherapy has significant effect on psychological well-being of children of divorce.

Based on different theoretical studies on health psychology, Ryff determined psychological well-being as ability to find all individual talents with 6 components; Autonomy (Sense of competence and the ability to manage one's environment, select or create appropriate personal relationship), Personal growth (having sense of steady growth and openness, new experiences, self-efficacy), Positive relationship with others (having warm, satisfactory and reliable relations, ability of empathy, intimacy and kindness), Purpose in life (having purpose in life, sense of meaning in life in the past), Environmental mastery (sense of effect in mastering circumstances and challenges) and Self-acceptance (positive evaluations of oneself) [7].

Positive psychotherapy intervention is one of interventions which seems to be effective on psychological well-being of children of divorce according to theatrical principles that of course

considered protocol, on the basis of existing knowledge about the kind of problems of this particular society, was designed by the researcher and supervisors.

Positive psychology was established by Seligman in the late 1990s. Seligman assumed psychological well-being based on five-axis: pleasant and enjoyable life, engaged life, meaningful life, achievements and positive relations [8,9]. Seligman and Rashid offered a protocol that has been adjusted based on these five-axis [10]. Positive Psychology was founded on the idea that human need to understand the strengths and weaknesses together for grow and flourish and just learning about the defects and shortcomings will not lead to progress [11,12], but according to Seligman, discovering characteristic abilities, becoming purposeful and finding ways to develop them in organized fashion cause to reach final aim of personal growth and prosperity which is the ultimate goal of positive psychology [13]. Positive psychology is also believed that the importance of positive emotions for human survival and the ability to grow and flourish in life is as much negative emotions. According to this view, presence of positive emotions helps to expand individual approach in dealing with issues [14]. This leads to personal supportive resources and can also neutralize long-term negative emotions [15] and deal with problems of life well and cause environmental mastery [16] and ultimately lead to improved psychological well-being.

Researches also have shown that identifying one's special strengths and ways of using them lead to reduce and control depression [17]. Also positive intervention can decrease dysfunctional attitudes and increase happiness [18]. Optimistic and positive-thinking people are more social and have better interpersonal skills because of high self-esteem [19] and perform better as well as to cope with daily problems and stressful modifiers [20,21]. On the other hand, they also experience fewer emotional and behavioral problems [22].

With rising divorce statistics provided by the Census Organization in 2014-2015, an average

of every 4.4 marriages in Iran one divorce is recorded [23], it is determined the prevalence of this social pathology in today's society are increasing inconveniently and social problems emerges from increasing vulnerability of the family and that is why many experts referred divorce as an important social pathology which can have disturbing consequences [24]. In addition, critical and acute vulnerability of adolescents in this age puts them as one of the main victims of divorce [3]. Therefore health education interventions are necessary to prevent exacerbation of this trauma. On the other hand, positive intervention adapts to the needs of this vulnerable group which also investigated and previously mentioned. Also, by searches of present study's researcher, intervention on psychological well-being of girls of divorce hasn't been investigated yet; therefore, such studies were necessary. Accordingly, the aim of present study was to investigate effect of positive group psychotherapy on psychological well-being of children of divorce

Method

The research method was quasi experimental with pre and posttest and in equal control group. The statistical population included all of second high school adolescents of divorce at Karaj city, the center of Iran, in 2014-2015 academic years. For the purposes of this study, due to lack of access to the full list of members of society, first, among areas of education district 3 was selected by random cluster sampling then in schools of this area by using the same sampling method, 2 high schools were chosen as sample. One of them was considered as experimental group and the other was considered as control group. Interviewings were conducted with each of the students after reviewing names of the students of divorce in these schools. In order to privacy of students and their parents' divorce, interviews were held individually and explained that therapy sessions attempt to improve mental health and progress in their lives as well as research work would be held. Informed consent was raised and then 12 students were placed in each test and

control groups. Treatment protocol based on Seligman and Rashid was in 14 sessions. It was revised according to type of considered issues and was reset in 8 sessions of 75 minutes. This intervention includes programs such as identifying signature strengths, cultivating signature strengths and positive emotions, training forgiveness and gratitude skills, recognizing the signature strengths of family, and directing in the way of being more optimist and hopeful. These sessions were held once a week, but the control group did not receive any intervention.

Scale of psychological well-being: This Scale was prepared by Ryff in 1989 and revised in 2002. The long form of this questionnaire has 84 questions and measures six factors: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth. The sum of these six factors as overall score is calculated psychological well-being. This self-evaluation scale is scoring in six degrees from completely agree to completely disagree [25]. In order to evaluating validity, life satisfaction subscale of Oxford happiness questionnaire and Rosenberg self-esteem scale were used which correlation of these with psychological well-being scale was 47% and 58%. The results showed that this scale is appropriate. Rezayi Dogah and his colleagues obtained internal consistency 85% [26]. Kalantar Kushe and Navarbafi normalized scale in 860 people and Cronbach's alpha was reported 92% so this questionnaire has appropriate reliability and validity [27,28].

After completion of study's performance, data were analyzed in descriptive and inferential level. In descriptive statistics, demographics, means and standard deviations were reported and in inferential statistics, after confirmation of pre-assumptions, data was analyzed using one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) by SPSS 18.

Results

Demographic findings of experimental and control groups show that these two groups were

homogeneous. The mean age was 16 years and 3 months for experimental group and was 15 years and 10 months for control group. The fathers' level of education were as following; 3 participants under diploma, 3 participants diploma and 6 participants had Bachelor in experimental groups and 1 person PhD, 5 participants Bachelor, 4 participants diploma and 2 participants were under diploma in control group. Also for mothers in experimental groups; 3

participants Bachelor, 8 participants diploma and 1 persona was under diploma and about control group; 1 person PhD, 4 participants Bachelor, 6 participants diploma and 1 person was under diploma. Mean difference was evident for psychological well-being variable between pretest and posttest but the difference is insignificant in the control group that this may indicate positive intervention is effective (Table 1).

Table 1 Descriptive indicators of students' performance of experimental and control groups

Variable	Experimental group			Control group			
	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	
Psychological well-being	Pretest	12	278.08	38.60	12	309.42	35.73
	Posttest	12	325.08	32.66	12	308.00	38.33

However, this conclusion is inferred without statistical test but in next closer inspection, lack of significant difference between variance of pretest groups and significant differences variance of groups would be shown in posttest. So in order to investigate the hypothesis, according to dependent variable and possible primary difference between experimental and control groups, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to reduce initial

differences and comparing pretest and posttest that results are reported in following. Before using this test its assumptions including the normal distribution and homogeneity of variances were tested. At first, results of assumptions are presented in separate tables and then results of analysis of covariance are presented in the Table 2.

1) Normalization of data distribution. The result of this assumption is reported in Table 2.

Table 2 The result of Kolmogorov-Smirnov in normalization of data distribution

Variable	Experimental group		Control group		
	Z	Significance level	Z	Significance level	
Psychological well-being	Pretest	0.740	0.644	0.469	0.971
	Posttest	0.996	0.274	0.816	0.518

According to Table 2 since obtained significant level is higher than error rate of 0.05 for psychological well-being variable in pretest and posttest, so that data in this study is normal and parametric tests can be used to analyze them.

2) Homogeneity of variances

The basis of this assumption is that scores of variances are equal and there is no significant difference between them. Levine test is used to test this hypothesis. The results of running this test is provided in Table 3.

Table 3 Levine test result in homogeneity of variances

Variable	F	Degree of freedom 1	Degree of freedom 2	Sig
Psychological well-being	0.085	1	22	0.811

Significance level is higher than 0.05 and this shows that there is homogeneity of variances

for this variable.

The results of one-way analysis of covariance

(ANCOVA) show significant difference for psychological well-being variable in both experimental and control groups after the

implementation of positive psychotherapy. In fact, this intervention has improved mentioned variable ($p < 0.05$, $F = 5.322$).

Table 4 The result of one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of positive psychotherapy effect on psychological well-being

Variable	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level	Partial eta squared
Psychological Well-being	6841.278	1	6841.278	5.322	0.006	0.303
Error	15736.603	21	749.362			
Total	68225.00	24				

Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that positive group psychotherapy can be effective on psychological well-being of children of divorce. The findings of this research are similar to the results of previous studies which are mentioned in the following [19,29-33]. To explain this result it should be noted that presented skills in the field of cognitive abilities and strengths lead clients to their truth instead of permanent focusing on problems and deficiencies that this self-awareness led people to accept and promote their psychological well-being [34]. Although self-acceptance and self-esteem is not quite equal, in self-acceptance both the positive and negative points are considered, but it is correlated with self-esteem [35]. Also depression and negative thoughts about themselves is correlated with low unconditional susceptibility [15]. As Ghasemi Bafghi has stated results of Funter, Rimerman, Zapert and Maton's study in his thesis, positive intervention increases African-American adolescents' academic achievement and self-esteem and also decreases their depression [29].

Exercises such as writing one-page positive introduction, in which the students tell concrete story illustrating their strengths and discovering their 5 signature strengths helps to enhance communication with themselves and this self-knowledge leads to positive emotions and better interpersonal relationships. As Omur concluded in his thesis, optimism has role of mediator in relationship between the dimensions of social support at school, family, peers and others and life satisfaction of youth. In positive intervention, focus on forgiveness

and gratitude exercises and recognition of family signature strengths have a main role in positive relationships between them and cultivation of positive emotions [33]. Boehm and Lyubomirsky [30] showed that there is a relationship between gratitude, one of positive intervention exercise, increasing inner satisfaction and social function and reduction of depression. Overall, identifying self-capabilities and others' lead to create positive emotions and help to emerge of capabilities such as forgiveness and gratitude in relation to others which make close person to oneself and others that this increases psychological well-being [36].

Optimism can change what will happen. Optimism can help individuals reach their predetermined goals. When optimism accompanies with commitment, depression, disappointment and meaninglessness will be abolished. This makes individuals hopeful and purposeful. In positive intervention, optimism and hope therapy exercises help to have meaningful life [33]. Discovering meaning of life helps individuals to choose goals and this process leads to increase psychological well-being. On the other hand, training optimism skills eventuates in internal locus of control and this increases self-esteem and authority [37]. This finding is consistent with Sohrabi and Javanbakhsh's study that showed positive thinking skills cause internalize locus of control in students and influences on increasing self-esteem and authority [15]. Consistent with this study, Samani and his colleagues reported that not only does positive

psychology heighten happiness in life, but also it causes meaningful life [38].

As well as any research, this study had some limitations. The most obvious limitations are about self-evaluated questionnaire and lack of follow up. This study was about female students from high schools in Karaj which it is not enough, therefore the finding of this study should be generalized to other cities and students cautiously. It is suggested to compare this approach with other ones and survey the effect of this intervention on other variables such as happiness, self-esteem, subjective well-being, self-efficacy and etc.

Conclusion

Findings of this study showed positive psychotherapy can help children of divorce with serious trauma to have balanced personality and also can make their life more stable. This intervention helps children of divorce to salvage themselves from these undesirable mental problems.

Acknowledgements

The authors should appreciate head of education department of District 3 of Karaj and staff of education of District 3 of Karaj, also managers and counselors of Shahid Nourozi high school and Allameh Amini vocational school and the participants for their kindness and cooperation.

Contribution

Study Design: MS, AMN

Data collection and analysis: MS, AMN, AK

Manuscript preparation: MS, AK

Conflict of Interest

"The authors declare that they have no competing interests."

Funding

The authors received no financial support for this research.

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