

Original Article

The Effect of Choice Theory-Based Group Training on Cognitive Emotion Regulation and Parent-Child Relationship in Male Adolescents

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(Received: 9 Aug. 2020; Revised: 17 Dec. 2020; Accepted: 20 Jan. 2021)

Abstract

Background and Purpose: Adolescence is considered as one of the most critical life periods since adolescents are being exposed to a variety of potential stimuli, whose inappropriate response to such stimuli would prevent their proper performance in society. The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of choice theory-based group training on cognitive emotion regulation and parent-child relationships in male adolescents.

Materials and Methods: The research method was experimental with a pretest-posttest-follow-up design and a control group. The statistical population included all male students of the senior-high school in Dogonbadan city in the academic year 2019. Using the multi-stage cluster sampling method, 30 samples were selected and randomly assigned into experimental and control groups (n=15 per group). The research instrument included Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) and The Parent-Child Relationship Survey. The reality therapy intervention was performed on the experimental group for ten 90-minute sessions. The follow-up was performed after 60 days. Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was then used to analyze the data.

Results: The participants included 30 male adolescents, aged between 15 and 17 years old. The research findings indicated that the choice theory-based group training was effective in promoting cognitive emotion regulation ($F=27.39$, $P=0.0001$) and parent-child relationship ($F=44.32$, $P=0.0001$). Also, their effects were sustainable until the follow-up period ($P=0.0001$).

Conclusion: Choice theory-based group training, as a therapeutic and clinical intervention, can be used as an appropriate and effective technique to promote cognitive emotion regulation and parent-child relationships among adolescents.

Keywords: Cognitive; Emotion; Parent-Child Relationship; Group Training; Choice Theory

Citation: Behmanesh Z, Kheramine SH*, Khosro Ramezani. The Effect of Choice Theory-Based Group Training on Cognitive Emotion Regulation and Parent-Child Relationship in Male Adolescents. Iran J Health Sci. 2019; 9(1): 12-21.

1. Introduction

Human development reaches the critical adolescence stage following childhood. In other words, this stage represents a transition from childhood to adulthood, throughout which adolescents reach sexual and physical maturity, and separate their individual identity from family identity (1). In this period, adolescents are exposed to a variety of complicated emotions never experienced before. From an evolutionary perspective, like many other psychological items, emotions are inherited from early humans and have special functions (2). Individuals always encounter with a range of emotional problems, which need different emotion regulation strategies. Cognitive emotion regulation refers to strategies adopted to decrease, increase, or maintain emotional experiences (3). Garnefski and Kraaij (4) believed that cognitive regulation strategies refer to measures adopted by individuals to cope with stressful situations or unpleasant events. In general, the ability to create and maintain a pleasant relationship requires both detecting and experiencing emotions and the ability to understand and accept the other's emotions. To develop their theories on emotional regulation strategies, Ford (5) mentioned that disorder and interruption in emotions and their regulation would have pathological consequences due to their inherent significance in individuals' daily life. Elhai et al. (6) in their study found out that difficulty in regulating emotions and using ineffective emotion regulation strategies significantly reduce adolescents' mental health.

The main purpose of promoting the quality of the parent-child relationship is to reduce the problems and behavioral disorders of children and increase socially acceptable behaviors (7). A large number of studies

have documented that parent-child relationships have a great impact on a variety of aspects, such as increasing parents' understanding and acceptance of their children, and such relationships play a key role in determining how children communicate with their siblings. Conflicts between parents and children are also a factor leading to the spread of family conflicts (8-10). The more emotional, intimate, and friendly the parent-child relationship is, the more compatible they would be (11). Regarding the fact that parents are the main and primary pillars of each family, their attitudes toward their child or his/her status in the family specifies and directs the form of their child-parent relationships (12). Finally, this type of relationship encompassed a set of nonverbal tendencies, measures, and manifestations specifying the nature of a child's interaction with parents under different conditions (13).

Different psychological approaches can be adopted to promote tensions and problems during adolescence, one of which is reality therapy-based choice theory. That is, on the one hand, this theory makes the adolescents accept the responsibility of his/her choices and, on the other hand, predict the effect of such choices on his/her life (14). In this type of therapy, exposure to reality, accountability, and evaluation of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors are highlighted.

Those who believe that everything is out of their control do not spare their efforts to control their emotions and conditions; however, individuals with an internal control believe that everything is under their control (15). Previous studies have confirmed the positive effects of the reality therapy approach on regulating emotions

and resilience, decreasing parent-female student child conflicts, promoting emotion regulation and happiness in students, and improving parent-student child relationships (16,17). Regarding the adverse effects of behavioral and psychological disorders on adolescents and their effects on cognitive emotion regulation and parent-child relationship as well as their consequences, appropriate psychotherapy interventions applied by therapists would significantly improve the adverse conditions posed by such disorders in adolescents. Previous studies have focused on reality therapy to treat behavioral and psychological disorders; however, most recent studies have revealed that children are significantly influenced by their parents in the family, and that, many of their behavioral problems and disorders are rooted in the family (18,19). Accordingly, different treatment techniques should be compared to detect the most effective and most appropriate intervention. In this regard, the present study aimed to examine the effect of choice theory-based group training on cognitive emotion regulation and parent-child relationships among adolescents. In the present study, the sample of boys was chosen because they have more communication with peers outside home and have more practical freedom than girls. Also, they often face many problems in the parent-child relationship. To this end, the following research question was raised: Does choice theory-based group training have an impact on cognitive emotion regulation and parent-child relationship among male adolescents?

2. *Materials and Methods*

The research method in the present study was experimental with a pre-test, post-test,

and follow-up design and a control group. The period of this research was from September 2018 to January 2019. The statistical population included all male students of the senior high school with an age range of 15 to 17 years in Dogonbadan city (Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, Iran). To conduct the present study, the required permissions were obtained from the Education Department in Dogonbadan County and for ethical considerations, the participants and their parents were provided written informed consent for participation in the research. Afterwards, out of nine boy high schools in Dogonbadan County, three high schools were randomly selected using multi-stage cluster sampling method. Then, 30 students who met the following inclusion criteria were selected as the research sample through purposive sampling: obtaining a score below average from Cognitive Emotion Regulation and Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaires, the willingness of participants and their parents to participate in the study, and their not suffering from psychological disorders. The participants were then randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (n=15 per group). The reality therapy intervention was performed on the experimental group for ten 90-minute sessions, whereas the control group did not receive any intervention. Follow-up was also performed two months after the post-test. The Ethics Review Board of Islamic Azad University of Yasuj Branch approved the present study with the following code: 12020705971007.

The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) designed by Garnefski and Kraaij (4), consists of 18 questions and 6 factors, namely, negative

rejection of emotional responses; difficulty in purposeful behavior in helplessness; difficulty in controlling impulsive behaviors in helplessness; lack of emotional awareness; limited access to emotion regulation strategies; and lack of emotional clarity. Therefore, it was never scored 1, sometimes: 2, almost half cases: 3, most often: 4, and almost always: 5. In a study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.95 for all questions; and convergent validity was 0.69 according to Pearson's correlation with depression (20). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.82 in the present study.

The Parent-Child Relationship Survey developed by Fine in 1985, consists of 48 items assessing the quality of parent-child relationships. The questionnaire is scored based on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. The minimum and maximum

scores of this scale are 48 and 336, respectively. In the current study, reverse scoring was used for Items 9, 13, and 14, and then the scores were added up and divided by the number of options for each factor (the mean of each subscale). The total score is the sum of the scores of all the items (21). Parhizgar et al. (22) reported the reliability of this questionnaire to be equal to 0.89 based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.86 for the questionnaire.

In this study, the therapy sessions were held in accordance with Glaser's reality therapy protocol in ten 90-minute sessions per week for adolescents. The intervention programs in experimental groups were conducted by the first author. Table 1 presents a summary of the sessions.

Table 1. A summary of reality-therapy group training sessions (23)

Sessions	Training procedures
First	Introducing members to each other; setting the rules and regulations of the group by the leader; describing the advantages of forming a group, explaining activities to be done during these ten sessions, and receiving feedbacks from the members; Issuing a written contract to participate in the group; Explaining the choice theory in brief
Second	Presenting a summary of the previous session; emotional involvement among the members and creating a sense of trust among them; elaborating on the concepts of freedom and accountability and analyzing them
Third	Assessing the assignment of the previous session; receiving feedback from the group; describing the five basic needs of human beings and their intensity in oneself and others in accordance with Glaser's survey; Assessing and analyzing the members' behavior to meet their needs
Fourth	Examining the feedbacks of the previous session and detecting how an awareness of one's needs affected the members' behaviors; getting familiar with the concept of general behavior and qualitative world and elaborating on the significance of sharing one's quality world with others and satisfaction; detecting the concepts objectively in behaviors
Fifth	Examining the members' understanding of concepts and elaborating on ambiguities; getting familiar with the concept of external control and its destructive role in intimate relationships; replacing external control with choice; teaching destructive and constructive behaviors.
Sixth	Reviewing and practicing destructive and constructive behaviors once more; analyzing behaviors in this framework
Seventh	Evaluating and detecting ineffective behaviors toward others identified by the members, which were to be changed; detecting techniques to change such behaviors.
Eighth	Teaching the concept of conflict in accordance with the choice theory and implementing the negotiation; practicing circle technique
Ninth	Reviewing negotiation; practicing circle homework; explaining the concept 'creativity' and making member find creativity in life
Tenth	Reviewing and summarizing the group's opinions; removing ambiguities; receiving feedback; post-test

The collected data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, and analysis of covariance. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the normality of distribution of pre-test and post-test, and Levene's test was utilized to investigate the equality of variances. The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was also used to investigate the effectiveness of the intervention programs on cognitive emotion regulation and the parent-child relationship. Cronbach's alpha was then calculated to specify the reliability of the questionnaire. For analyzing the collected data SPSS Version 24.0 was used.

3. Results

The participants included 30 students, aged between 15 and 17 years old. According to the descriptive statistics, the participants in the experimental group were in the age range of 15-16 years (23.33%) and 16-17 years (26.67%), whereas the control group were aged 15-16 years (30.00%) and 16-17 years (20.00%). The demographic variables of the participants are shown in Table 2. Table 3 presents mean and standard deviation of research variables in the experimental and control groups in the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up.

Table 2. Demographic variables of the participants in the experimental and control groups

Age (years)	Experimental group		Control group		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
15-16	7	23.33	9	30.00	16	53.33
16-17	8	26.67	6	20.00	14	46.67
Grade						
Tenth	5	16.67	7	23.34	12	40.00
Eleventh	6	20.00	4	13.33	10	33.33
Twelfth	4	13.33	4	13.33	8	26.67

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation of dependent variables in experimental and control groups in pre-test, post-test and follow-up

Dependent variables	Phases	Experimental group		Control group		P-value
		M	SD	M	SD	
Cognitive emotion regulation	Pre-test	63.80	10.73	69.86	12.29	0.560
	Post-test	48.86	8.29	65.20	11.26	0.0001
	Follow-up	46.73	8.81	60.93	10.79	0.001
Parent-child relationship	Pre-test	167.13	21.96	171.13	20.30	0.420
	Post-test	214.13	32.92	170.06	19.61	0.0001
	Follow-up	220.20	34.74	174.33	18.96	0.0001

Before analyzing the data of the hypotheses, the assumptions were studied to make sure of the fitness of the data to the assumptions of covariance analysis. In this regard, data normality resulted from the insignificant Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z statistic showed that cognitive emotion regulation ($Z=0.155$, $P=0.0.79$) and parent-child relationship ($Z=0.119$, $P=0.200$)

follows a normal distribution. Also, homogeneity of variances (in the experimental and control groups) was studied by Levene's test. The results approved the assumption of homogeneity of variances, and the possibility of using analysis of covariance. After controlling the effect of pre-tests and comparing experimental and control groups with

regard to the post-test scores, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to examine the effect of choice theory-based group-training on emotion regulation and parent-child relationship among male adolescents. The results of MANCOVA

tests for both control and experimental groups in the post-test phase revealed significant differences between the groups in at least one of the dependent variables (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of multivariate analysis of covariance on post-test scores in the experimental and control groups

Tests	Value	Df	Error df	F	P-value	η^2
Pillais Trace	0.675	2	25	25.98	0.0001	0.621
Wilks Lambda	0.325	2	25	25.98	0.0001	0.621
Hotelling's Trace	2.079	2	25	25.98	0.0001	0.621
Roy's Largest Root	2.079	2	25	25.98	0.0001	0.621

Table 5 presents the results of the univariate analysis of covariance of dependent variables for post-test scores. The F-statistics of the univariate covariance analysis of the dependent variables

indicated a significant difference between the two groups group in terms of cognitive emotion regulation and parent-child relationship in the post-test phase.

Table 5. Results of univariate analysis of covariance on the post-test score of the variables

Dependent variables	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	η_p^2	Statistical power
Cognitive emotion regulation	1181.05	1	1181.05	27.39	0.0001	0.51	0.99
Parent-child relationship	9882.95	1	9882.95	44.32	0.0001	0.63	1.00

As shown in Table 6, the results of MANCOVA tests for the two groups in the follow-up stage also represent

significant differences in at least one of the dependent variables.

Table 6. Results of multivariate analysis of covariance on follow-up scores in the experimental and control groups

Tests	Value	Df	Error df	F	P-value	η^2
Pillais Trace	0.703	2	25	29.64	0.0001	0.70
Wilks Lambda	0.297	2	25	29.64	0.0001	0.70
Hotelling's Trace	2.372	2	25	29.64	0.0001	0.70
Roy's Largest Root	2.372	2	25	29.64	0.0001	0.70

Table 7 shows the results of the univariate analysis of covariance for the dependent variables. F-statistic of the univariate covariance analysis for the dependent

variables revealed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of cognitive emotion regulation and parent-child relationship.

Table 7. Results of univariate analysis of covariance on the follow-up score of the variables

Dependent variables	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	η_p^2	Statistical power
Cognitive emotion regulation	1360.87	1	1360.87	27.58	0.0001	0.51	0.99
Parent-child relationship	11473.27	1	11473.27	44.43	0.0001	0.63	1.00

4. Discussion

The choice theory-based group training was effective in promoting cognitive emotion regulation and parent-child relationship, and its effect was still observed in the follow-up phase. Moreover, the choice theory-based group training was effective in enhancing cognitive emotion regulation. This finding was found to be consistent with the research results of Ghoreishi and Behboodi (24), Cahyani et al. (16), and Hadley et al. (25). To explain this finding, it can be stated that emotions play critical role in establishing, maintaining, and terminating interpersonal relationships by regulating the distance among individuals since emotions make individuals close together or away from each other (26). In this regard, it can be noted that the choice theory is mostly effective for adolescents with disorders, such as anxiety and depression, and even the ones who experienced various problems in the past, were destructively damaged as children as well as adolescents who violate school rules and are not motivated to change, making them eager to have further cooperation. Furthermore, emotions play a critical role in life, and emotion regulation is associated with self-esteem and positive social interactions, since it leads to effective meditation on stressful situations, and consequently it enhances performance in response to social situations (27). In this regard, the failure in emotion regulation would decrease mental health indicators as emotion regulation also plays a critical role in the proper management and regulation of emotions, which are considered as the foundations of psychological health.

Regarding the effect of the intervention program on promoting parent-child relationships among male adolescents, the results of the present study were consistent

with the research results of Hossein Panahi and Goodarzi, (28), Sohrabnejad et al. (29), Malka et al. (17), Haskins & Appling, (30), and Gardner, (31). One of the primary objectives of cognitive therapy is to improve self-efficacy. The acquisition of social skills is highly effective in promoting individuals' self-efficacy, and it enhances endurance and patience against problems in adolescence (30). Choice theory-based group training is an attempt making individuals select the choice theory or the psychology of internal control instead of external control and accept that only an individual can do something for himself, and no one can do such without his permission. In addition, they learn to care about others, respect their ideas, and experience the joy of thinking and listening to others. Moreover, they are not afraid to express their opinions because they are rejected. This would make them enjoy meeting their basic needs and consequently obtain life satisfaction, contentment, and improved cognitive regulation (16). Since concentration is lower during adolescence, in addition to the choice theory, a behavioral approach should also be focused, so that not only are thoughts evaluated but also behavioral tasks are performed as treatment complements and increases effectiveness. Studies on the use of reality therapy in adolescents have indicated that this approach improves behavior. A large number of researchers have also confirmed the effect of reality therapy on high school adolescents and considered it to be appropriate to teach communication and social skills to adolescents and decrease the prevalence of emotional problems among this age group. According to the literature, the choice theory is not affected by children's or parents' gender in explaining parent-child

conflicts, as the effect mechanism of choice theory does not change for individuals by gender (17).

5. Conclusion

The findings suggest that the choice theory focuses on an individual's current relationship. In this regard, disregarding the past, not going to extremes in complaining, and considering what clients can do would not only decrease the time required for cognitive emotion regulation and conflicts in interpersonal relationships with parents, but also it would show adolescents that they can manage their lives without conflicts. In the choice theory, the focus is mainly on the present and the choice. Similar studies are suggested to include girls and other age groups and compare the findings with those of the present study. Further studies are also suggested to consider longer follow-ups, larger sample size, and longer research duration to evaluate the persistence of treatment effects. It is also suggested that school counseling centers enhance the impact of reality-therapy sessions by holding counseling sessions for both parents and adolescents.

Limitations

Like most other studies in the field of behavioral sciences, this study had some limitations to be addressed in future research. Since the findings of the present study were obtained for the senior -high school boys in Dogonbadan, the results may not be generalized to female and male students in other cities with different cultures and cultural-personality traits. Another limitation was that girls were not included in the present study.

Acknowledgements

This article was extracted from a part of the PhD dissertation of Zahra Behmanesh in the Department of Psychology, Yasuj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Yasuj, Iran. The researchers wish to thank all the individuals who participated in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interests.

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