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Efficacy of Psychological Capital Training on the Empathy and Life Meaning in the Students with the Signs of Violence

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Extended Abstract

Aim

Unfortunately, in recent years, emotional, psychological, and social problems among students have shown an alarming upward trend (Abdelrahman, 2020). Abnormal phenomena such as mental health vulnerabilities, drug use tendencies, and academic failures have posed serious obstacles to university progress (Meens et al., 2018). Violence is one of the factors that can negatively impact students' academic progress, as well as their personal and social futures (Lu et al., 2021). Statistics reveal that 22 percent of physical violence and conflict incidents were reported on campuses last year. Additionally, 27% of students nationwide are struggling with mental health issues, and 33% of students are dissatisfied with their lives (Noorbakhsh & Molavi, 2017). The emergence of violence leads to severe damage to individuals' psychological, behavioral, emotional, and social processes. Empathy, in particular, is one of the processes negatively affected by violence, as it reduces people's communication, social interactions, and empathy (Espejo-Siles et al., 2020). The occurrence of violence and aggression, along with the decline in social interactions and empathy, gradually leads individuals to experience depression in their personal, social, and family relationships. Meanwhile, maintaining and expanding social and family relationships is considered fundamental to finding meaning in life (Garrosa-Hernández et al., 2013). Given this context, the present study was conducted to investigate the efficacy of psychological capital training on empathy and life meaning among students exhibiting signs of violence.

Methodology

The present study was a semi-experimental design involving both experimental and control groups, with a three-stage approach (pretest, posttest, and follow-up) and a two-month follow-up period. The statistical population consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate psychology students at Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan campus, who exhibited signs of violence during the 2020-2021 academic year. A total of 27 students (18 boys and 9 girls) with signs of violence were selected using a purposive sampling method and were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (14 students) or the control group (13 students).

The experimental group participated in ten sessions of psychological capital training (Farajzadeh et al., 2020), each lasting seventy-five minutes, over a period of one and a half months. The questionnaires used in this study included the Violence Questionnaire (EVQ) (Eysenck & Wilson, 1988, as cited in Noorbakhsh & Molavi, 2017), the Empathy Scale (BES) (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006), and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger & Frazier, 2006). The study's data were analyzed using a mixed ANOVA method via SPSS23 software. Mixed variance analysis was employed because the research involved two groups (experimental and control), each measured at three stages (pretest, posttest, and follow-up).

Findings

The results indicated that psychological capital training had a significant effect on signs of violence ($F = 38.48$; $\eta^2 = 0.60$; $p < 0.001$), empathy ($F = 30.91$; $\eta^2 = 0.55$; $p < 0.001$), and life meaning ($F = 24.08$; $\eta^2 = 0.49$; $p < 0.001$) among students exhibiting signs of violence. This intervention led to a substantial increase in the average scores for both empathy and life meaning, and these improvements remained stable during the follow-up phase. The findings suggest that psychological capital training can significantly enhance empathy and life meaning in students with signs of violence, as observed in both the post-test and follow-up stages. In summary, teaching psychological capital appears to be an effective method for increasing empathy and life meaning among students with violent symptoms.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that psychological capital training is an effective method for reducing signs of violence and enhancing empathy and life meaning in students showing violent tendencies. This method leverages concepts such as optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and mental resilience (Ye et al., 2020). Furthermore, incorporating resilience training emphasizes focusing on the positive aspects of events and life (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020), which can prevent students with violent tendencies from falling into ineffective and unhealthy thought patterns and help them move toward future goals. This process also has the potential to reduce violence by improving social behaviors.

Additionally, psychological capital contributes to better mental health (Kim et al., 2019). Improved mental health helps students with violent symptoms move away from pessimistic, inflexible, and traumatic cognitive processes, leading to enhanced cognitive and affective processes and greater empathy. Finally, one of the core elements of psychological capital training is self-efficacy (Poots & Cassidy, 2020). By gaining self-efficacy through this training, students with violent symptoms can feel more empowered in their psycho-emotional processing, develop more structured life plans, and achieve a greater sense of life meaning.

Keywords: Empathy, Life Meaning, Psychological Capital, Violence.

Ethical Considerations

To adhere to ethical standards in this research, all participating students consented to take part in the intervention program and were fully informed about each step of the process. The students in the control group were assured that they would have access to the intervention program free of charge after the research was completed. Additionally, students in both the experimental and control groups were assured that their personal and family identities would remain confidential, and they were not required to disclose their names.

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Conflict of Interest

This research did not receive financial support from any government or private organization. The authors report no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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