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The Effect of Schema Therapy-Based Group Counseling on Reducing the Psychological Distress Adolescents of Divorce

Farzaneh Monjezi¹ , Esmail Asadpour^{2*} , Mohsen Rasouli³ , Kianoosh Zahra⁴ 

1. Department of Counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, University of Kharazmi, Tehran, Iran. Email: fm.esfahani@gmail.com
2. Corresponding Author, Department of Counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, University of Kharazmi, Tehran, Iran. Email: dr.iasadpour@khu.ac.ir
3. Department Counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, University of Kharazmi, Tehran, Iran. Email: m.rasouli@khu.ac.ir
4. Department of Counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, University of Kharazmi, Tehran, Iran. Email: dr_zahra@khu.ac.ir

Extended Abstract

Aim

One consequence of divorce is the restructuring of the family, which affects children and leads to psychological distress. Various studies have linked psychological distress to early maladaptive schemas. For example, Kaya & Aydin (2021) found that insecure attachment to mothers and the disconnection/rejection schema area significantly increased symptoms of depression and anxiety. The disconnection/rejection and impaired autonomy schema areas also significantly mediated the relationship between insecure attachment to parents and the development of depression and anxiety symptoms. Similarly, Goodboy et al., (2016) concluded that there is a positive, significant relationship between narcissistic schema and depression in adolescents. The presence of early maladaptive schemas increases vulnerability to mental disorders (Yakin et al., 2020). Carlucci et al. (2018) found significant associations between co-rumination, trait anxiety, and cognitive anxiety, which were mediated by schema domains related to rejection and disconnection, overvigilance and inhibition, and impaired autonomy. Co-rumination and somatic anxiety were mediated by rejection and disconnection, as well as impaired autonomy domains. Nicol et al. (2020) also emphasized that disconnection and rejection schemas are most closely associated with psychological pathology. Shute et al. (2019) identified an indirect effect of rejecting fathering on depressive symptoms through the social isolation schema, supporting Young's theory (1990). Despite significant relationships between parenting, schemas, and emotions, most effects of parenting on emotions were direct. Rejecting fathering directly increased trait anger, while controlling mothering increased symptoms of depression and anxiety. Controlling fathering, however, had a negative effect on anxiety symptoms.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of group counseling based on schema therapy in reducing the psychological distress of adolescents from divorced families.

Methodology

This research employed a semi-experimental pre-test and post-test design, including a control group and follow-up. The study population consisted of all girls' adolescents of divorce aged 13 to 15 in Isfahan city in 2022. A sample of 30 adolescents from divorced families was randomly assigned to either the schema therapy experimental group or the control group (15 participants in each). The experimental group received 20 sessions of 90-minute group counseling based on schema therapy, while the control group received no counseling. Psychological distress was measured using the DASS-21 scale, which assesses depression, anxiety, and stress. Antony et al. (1998) reported Cronbach's

alpha values for these factors as 0.92, 0.95, and 0.97, respectively. For adolescents aged 13 to 18, Heydari (2016) reported Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 for all components. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for adolescents aged 13 to 15 was 0.83 for stress, 0.79 for anxiety, and 0.93 for depression. Data were analyzed using repeated measures analysis of variance with SPSS-20 software.

Findings

The repeated measures analysis of variance indicated that the experimental group experienced significant reductions in depression, anxiety, and stress ($p < 0.01$) compared to the control group. These improvements remained stable during the two-month follow-up period ($p < 0.01$). Pairwise comparisons showed significant differences between the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up stages, indicating that the changes were sustained over time ($p < 0.01$). No significant changes were observed in the control group.

Conclusion

The results suggest that individuals with depression often hold negative views about themselves, the world, and the future (Lau et al., 2010). These negative beliefs are rooted in early maladaptive schemas (Nordahl et al., 2019). During treatment, the adolescents identified the underlying causes of their problems and learned self-regulation techniques. Through experiential techniques, they confronted their schemas at an emotional level. Techniques such as mental imagery and dialogues between different parts of the self-allowed them to express unresolved anger related to childhood experiences (Loose & Graaf, 2016). They also addressed their unmet emotional needs. At a cognitive level, they learned to challenge the validity of their early maladaptive schemas. Overall, schema therapy helped the adolescents replace negative and illogical beliefs with positive and rational thoughts (Faustino & Vasco, 2020), thereby reducing anxiety and depression in the experimental group.

Based on these findings, therapists working with children and adolescents are encouraged to utilize schema therapy to address issues related to depression, anxiety, and stress.

Keywords: Adolescent, Distress Psychological, Divorce, Schema Therapy-Based Group Counseling.

Ethical Considerations

Only school counselors had access to students' records. The purpose and content of the sessions were explained, and both students and parents provided consent.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this article.

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