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Effectiveness of Self-Differentiation Training on Sensation Seeking and Impulsivity in Divorced Students with Tendency toward High Risk Behaviors

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Extended Abstract

Aim

Children of divorced parents face various social challenges, including cognitive, emotional, identity, and social issues, which can hinder their proper integration into society. Economically, they are also more likely to experience poverty and deprivation compared to their peers (Stapp et al., 2020). One behavioral problem that often arises for children of divorce, especially during adolescence, is a tendency towards risky behaviors (Najafpour et al., 2016). The emergence of risky behaviors in adolescents can have various underlying causes. One potential factor is sensation-seeking or impulsivity (Herman et al., 2018). Sensation-seeking is one of the most important factors influencing individuals' inclination to engage in risky behaviors stemming from psychological distress. It is defined as the need for novel, complex experiences and emotions, along with a willingness to accept physical and social risks to achieve such experiences (Zhang et al., 2022). Impulsivity, on the other hand, refers to the tendency to react quickly and without careful planning to internal or external stimuli, regardless of the potential negative consequences for oneself or others (Pivarunas & Conner, 2015). Given these considerations, self-differentiation training appears to be a promising intervention to influence sensation-seeking and impulsivity. The goal of self-differentiation training is to help individuals manage their emotions and thoughts independently, based on their own personality rather than being influenced by others. It also aims to help individuals identify how anxiety and various pressures manifest in themselves and learn to cope with psychological stress effectively from the outset (Doba et al., 2018).

Thus, considering the impact of divorce on the psychological, relational, social, emotional, and educational aspects of children, this research aims to explore a new approach to addressing the psychological challenges faced by adolescents with divorced parents. Specifically, it examines the use of self-differentiation training to influence sensation-seeking and impulsivity in children of divorce who are prone to risky behaviors, an area that has not been extensively addressed in previous studies. Therefore, the central focus of this research is to assess the effectiveness of self-differentiation training in reducing sensation-seeking and impulsivity in adolescents from divorced families who are inclined towards risky behaviors.

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with both experimental and control groups, using a three-phase approach (pre-test, post-test, and follow-up). The statistical population of the study included students from divorced families inclined towards risky behaviors who were studying in the first and second grades of high school during the 2021-2022 academic year in Bandar Abbas. A total of 35 students (26 boys and 9 girls) were selected through purposive sampling and randomly assigned to either the experimental group (18 students) or the control group (17 students). Students in the

experimental group participated in ten 75-minute sessions over the course of ten weeks to receive self-differentiation training (Bayati Eshkaftaki et al., 2021).

The study utilized three instruments: the Risky Behavior Questionnaire (HRBQ) (Mohammadkhani (2007) using the Risk Behavior Prevention Center Questionnaire (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009)), the Sensation-Seeking Questionnaire (SSQ) (Zuckerman et al., 1978), and the Impulsivity Questionnaire (BIS) (Barratt et al., 1997). The data obtained were analyzed using mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) with SPSS version 23.

Findings

The results indicated that self-differentiation training had a significant effect on both sensation-seeking ($p < 0.0001$; $\eta^2 = 0.57$; $F = 43.55$) and impulsivity ($p < 0.0001$; $\eta^2 = 0.46$; $F = 28.71$) in students from divorced families with a tendency toward risky behaviors. Additionally, the interaction effect between the type of intervention (self-differentiation training) and the time factor was found to significantly influence the sensation-seeking and impulsivity scores of these students ($p < 0.001$).

Therefore, it can be concluded that self-differentiation training significantly reduced sensation-seeking and impulsivity in students from divorced families with a tendency toward risky behaviors, accounting for 57% and 46% of the variance, respectively, across the different assessment stages. The Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed significant differences between the mean scores of the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up phases for both sensation-seeking and impulsivity. This indicates that self-differentiation training significantly impacted the post-test and follow-up scores compared to the pre-test.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the effectiveness of self-differentiation training in reducing sensation-seeking and impulsivity in adolescents from divorced families with a tendency toward risky behaviors. The results demonstrated that self-differentiation training had a significant impact on both sensation-seeking and impulsivity, effectively reducing these behaviors. The first finding aligns with previous research, such as Bayati Ashkaftaki et al. (2022) and Shokri & Mehrinia (2020), which showed that self-differentiation training positively influences psychological aspects like emotional dysregulation and attachment quality. The second finding, regarding impulsivity, is also consistent with earlier studies, including Kim et al. (2020), who highlighted the role of self-differentiation in improving mental health and emotional regulation.

Self-differentiation helps individuals manage their emotions and thoughts independently, leading to better emotional, cognitive, and behavioral control, especially in the face of challenges like parental divorce. This process enables adolescents to separate their feelings from their thoughts, reducing impulsive behavior and increasing problem-solving abilities. The study emphasizes that self-differentiation can create a balance between emotions and cognition, fostering healthier emotional responses and reducing risky behaviors.

However, the study has some limitations, such as the sample being limited to male students from Bandar Abbas and not controlling for environmental and family factors. Future research should consider diverse populations, including different gender groups and students with various psychological disorders, and use random sampling to enhance generalizability. Based on the positive results, it is recommended that self-differentiation training be implemented practically through brochures and booklets for counselors, teachers, and educational experts, to help reduce sensation-seeking and impulsivity in adolescents from divorced families.

Keywords: Divorce, High Risk Behaviors, Impulsivity, Self-Differentiation, Sensation Seeking.

Ethical Considerations

This article is based on the first author's doctoral dissertation in general psychology at the Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas Branch. To adhere to ethical standards, data collection was conducted only after obtaining informed consent from the participants. They were

assured of the confidentiality of their personal information, with the understanding that the results would be presented anonymously, without the disclosure of names or identifying details.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the results of this research.

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