



The effect of integrating rational emotive behavior therapy and art therapy on self-esteem and resilience

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the effect of combined rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) and the art therapy (engraving method) on improving self-esteem and resilience. The research method was quasi experimental. The study used the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory (SEI) and the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale as pre- and post-test assessments to assess the effects on a sample of Iranian students. A sample of 24 Iranian university students were randomly placed in two groups, including one experimental group and one control group. This was followed by REBT and art therapy while students in the experimental group were taught for 10 sessions over a 10 weeks period there was no treatment for the control group over this time. The participants in both groups were evaluated before and after 10 sessions. The gathered data were analysed using the *t*-test method through the SPSS package. The results showed that the integration of REBT and art therapy for increase the self-esteem and resilience of students. Further, implications of the study and suggestions for future use are discussed.

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Introduction

Self-esteem is a central feature of the self-concept (Greenwald, Bellezza, & Banaji, 1988). It has been defined as “how much value people place on themselves” (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003, p. 2). One important factor of mental health in university students is self-esteem. Many studies have emphasized that student’s self-esteem is a predictor of different behaviors and psychological adjustments (Leary & MacDonald, 2005). Research findings have shown that there is a significant relationship between low self-esteem and many severe and difficult situations young people face, including dropping out of school (Guillon, Crocq, & Bailey, 2003), and destructive behaviors (Hawton, Rodham, Evans, & Weatherall, 2002). Low self-esteem is considered a factor leading to physical, mental and emotional problems (Kernis, 2005). In addition, high self-esteem inspires a feeling of worthiness and gladness (Branden, 1994). Oguz-Duran and Tezer (2009) described self-esteem as one of the factors that have strong and positive relationships in the well-being of a college student. Saadat, Ghasemzadeh, and Soleimani (2012), indicated that there is a relationship between self-esteem and academic development of

students. In general, low self-esteem can lead to an unpleasant mental state while high self-esteem has many benefits for people (Harter, 1999).

Having a comprehensive understanding of resilience in life can be potentially important for the promotion mental health (Campbell-Sills, Cohan, & Stein, 2006). Resilience has been shown to be a factor of positive well-being in positive psychology. Resilience is defined as the ability of persons to remain healthy when exposed to a negative event (Bonanno, 2004), as well as being able to adapt their conditions according to the problems that challenge them in life (Brenda, 2007). O’Connell Higgins (1994), studied the trait of resilience in adults and expressed that resilient people are proactive, loving, and possess a high level of faith. These people are characterized by optimism, positive coping, hardiness (Connor & Davidson, 2003) and high self-esteem (Rouse, 1998).

Haddadi and Besharat (2010) conducted a study on a sample of 214 university students and revealed that resilience has a positive correlation with mental health and a negative correlation with vulnerability indexes including psychological distress, depression, and anxiety. In contrast, lower and weaker levels of resilience are connected to vulnerability and psychological disorders (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006).

Peng et al. (2012) examined a sample of 1998 students in a survey study to assess the moderating effect of resilience between negative life events and mental health problems, and to investigate the factors that affect the mental health problems of the students.

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Results showed that mental health problems had a positive relationship with negative life events and neuroticism. Mental health problems have also shown a negative correlation with resilience. Researchers suggested that promoting resilience can be useful for the adjustment of university students in stressful situations.

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is described as a broad range of psychological approaches and methods. REBT is considered an important view to CBT as the approach uses cognitive (thinking), emotive (feeling), and behavioral (acting) techniques for the improvement of clients and treatment of mental disorders (Jena, 2008). The REBT approach has been seen as an effective approach for changing the self-esteem among students (Lim et al., 2010). CBT has been used effectively in the treatment and improvement of a broad range of disorders as well as for individuals and groups to treat or improve the level of mental health (Harrington, Whittaker, Shoebrieger, & Campebell, 1998; Jena, 2008). CBT supports clients that are willing to cope, and realize for themselves the challenges in the external world and the problems the future may bring (Chen, Lu, Chang, Chu, & Chou, 2006). Previous research has described the usefulness of CBT, showing marked improvement for depression (Jamal & Kordi, 2006; Scott et al., 2000), increasing self-esteem in depressed clients (Chen et al., 2006), improving aspects of self-awareness, self-esteem, and resilience (Coholic, 2011), raising levels of self-esteem (Lim et al., 2010) while decreasing anxiety disorders (Lorian, Titov, & Grisham, 2012).

Art therapy refers to an application all of arts in therapy with all ages, families, and groups to increase healing, and the well-being in individuals (Malchiodi, 2005). Art therapists frequently report the arts as facilitating self-expression, self-actualization, reaching a more integrated self, preparing a sense of autonomy, decision making, self-worth (e.g., Case & Dalley, 1992; Payne, 1992; Reynolds, 2000, 2002), and increasing self-esteem (Langner, 2009; Mahmoudi, Dalvandi, Rahgoi, Rahgozar, & Zadehmohammadi, 2010). Rubin (2005) argued that the therapeutic effect is within all the arts and many people have found crafts very healing. The art used in this study is called engraving. Engraving is described as the art of filigree and creative engraving upon soft metals is accomplished by cutting grooves into the material with a chisel and hammer (Haghshenas, 2003). Engraving is a 3000 year old art history in Iran (Ramazani, 2001).

Iranians have used arts such as music, storytelling, theater, painting, and cinema to enhance their mental health. Art has had a valuable place in Iranian culture and has been very influential in the lives of Iranians throughout history. Iranian art is meaning centered, cooling and trust worthy. It has always played the role of self-awareness and discovering of creative representations for Iranians. There are a numerous cases in Iranian literature, poetry, drama, traditional arts, handicraft, and music to use in experimental studies in the field of art therapy. Nevertheless, art theory is rarely used in Iran and it seems necessary that Iranian universities should pay more attention to this field of study. Some Iranian researchers in recent years, have carried out investigations on using music, telling story, theater, painting, poetry, and cinema as art therapy techniques in mental health improvement, and they have confirmed the positive effects of art therapy on a wide variety of mental health including depression reduction in university student (Afrooz et al., 2006; Biglari, 2006; Mohammadian et al., 2011); reduction of anxiety and stress (Mohammadian et al., 2011); improving mental health (Arabi, 2006; Toluie et al., 2009); increase self-esteem (Noein, 2009), improvement of self-confidence (Mokhtarnia, 2012).

Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the crafts, especially handy crafts and traditional arts. With the exception of a few cases, handicrafts, such as engraving and miniature are not usually practiced. Research on cross-cultural counseling and psychology recommends that classical approaches of psychotherapy

may be adapted to accommodate different cultures to best serve clients from a various range of backgrounds (Atkinson, Hackett, & Sue, 1995). Art itself can be an essential aspect of culture which plays an important part in psychological functioning (Sato, 2011). Therefore, the interventions designed in this paper have incorporated perspectives and conceptions of engraving as a traditional Iranian art into the methods of psychological intervention (REBT interventions).

Integrating REBT interventions and art therapy

Despite the long history of CBT and art therapy, they have not been widely used in the field of art therapy (Rubin, 2001). Leibowitz-Levy (2005) described art therapy particularly suited to CBT, because making art is an inherently cognitive process. Research has revealed that such an approach has been used with adults suffering a variety of mental health problems, including eating disorders (Matto, 1997), mental retardation (Bowen & Rosal, 1989), chronic pain (Camic, 1999), and grief (Reynolds, 1999).

Coholic (2011) conducted qualitative research in young people to investigate the benefits of integrating CBT (mindfulness approach) and an arts-based approach. Results showed that the integration improved the aspects of self-awareness, self-esteem, and resilience. Degges-White and Davis (2010) described that the arts can be effectively incorporated in a variety of settings from schools to clinical centers and on clients of all ages, children to older adults. This combination can be allowed to be used by counselors to help improve unique creative techniques. Jamal and Kordi (2006) examined the effects of CBT and music therapy on students with depression from Gorgan University. Results showed the integration of CBT and music therapy had a higher impact on reducing depression. Sato (2011) conducted a case study to combine Morita Therapy with an art therapy technique. This treatment was effective and useful for clients and revealed decreased anxiety.

Self-esteem is considered one of the most important psychological concepts (Guillon et al., 2003), and seen in a sense of the ability and capability to undertake and effectively react to everyday life problems (Berk & Churchill, 1996). Some approaches have recommended that high self-esteem leads to adaptive activities and mental health; therefore, they have stressed the importance of increasing a person's self-esteem (Okada, 2010; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Resilience has also been known to support people in their ability to thrive in the face of everyday stress. Improving resilience must be an important goal for healing and overall prevention of stress (Dmitry, Robert, Karen, & Isabelle, 2010). Stressful events in life may cause mental health problems such as depression or anxiety, but a person's high level of resilience may give them the ability to cope with these problems more effectively, and live a healthier life (Peng et al., 2012).

The present quantitative research focuses on the integration of REBT as a means of verbal therapy and art as a medium of nonverbal therapy in order to help improve self-esteem and resilience. The main research hypothesis presented here is as the follows: Combined REBT with art therapy will have a positive effect on improving self-esteem and resilience in university students.

Method

Participants

Twenty-four participants (16 female and 8 male), who were first year undergraduate students admitted into the counseling center at Razi University participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 19 to 24 years, with a mean of 21.5 years (SD=0.79). They were randomly divided into two groups: the experimental group and

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