The Effectiveness of Positive Psychology on Improving the Happiness of Women Heading the Family

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Abstract

The present study was conducted as a quasi-experimental research with pre-test and post-test with unequal experimental and control groups to evaluate the effectiveness of positivistic psychology on improving happiness among the women who were heads of the family. The statistical population of the present study consisted of all women heading the family whose specifications had been recorded in Birjand Social Welfare Organization and Birjand Imam Khomeini (RA) Relief Committee, and were the heads of the families resulted from divorce that among them 30 people were selected through convenience sampling method and assigned to experimental group (n=15) and control group (n=15). In order to measure happiness, Oxford Happiness Questionnaire was used. Also, to study the effectiveness of positivistic psychology, intervention method was used so that the experimental group received ten 90-minute sessions of training over a period of three months. To analyze data, covariance analysis and multivariate analysis of covariance were used. The results showed that the positivistic psychology effects on increasing of happiness of mother-child among female-headed families.

Keywords: Positivistic psychology, Happiness, Women heading the family.

Introduction

The term female heading the family is a new expression that has been used due to higher participation of women in the cultural, social, economic and political arenas. Today, mental health is one of the fundamental rights of citizens, and women heading the family and their children are considered as the vulnerable strata that must be supported in order to ensure social mental health. Studies conducted on the topic of women heading the family show that women heading the family are more vulnerable to physical, psychological, social, legal and economic stressors than other women; therefore, to ensure family mental health, it is necessary that attention is paid to psychological issues related to women heading the family [1].

Low income and poverty, multiple and conflicting roles, lack of social support, and negative attitudes toward women heading the family cause stress, exhaustion and disability in this group of women. This, in turn, can lead to their mental disorders. The survey conducted on women heading the family showed that women often find emotional and affectionate problems in everyday life due to the loss of their spouse and the disappearance of the family-friendly relationships [2].

Seligman [3] by studying situational various factors such as income level, marital status, educational subject, place of residence, social life, etc., concludes that undoubtedly you have noticed that the situational factors are various and range from lack of possibility to change happiness to the possibility of change; but even if you can change all of these external conditions, you will not get much benefit because they all explain only 8% to 15% of the variance of happiness. There are, of course, very good news that there are a number of internal conditions that are likely to be effective and can be applied to people. These variables, which are under your control, are a variable set which if you decide to change them (and of course none of these changes will not be achieved without effort), you will probably be able to change your happiness level steadily.

Happiness is essentially a mental affair and is based on the individuals' subjective judgment and, as previously stated, it can be examined from two philosophical approaches of hedonism and
prosperity seeking. In hedonistic approach, happiness means maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain and suffering [4]; while the prosperity seeking approach recognizes the true happiness as identification of the virtues and personal abilities and creation of them in self, and then living in accordance with these virtues and abilities.

Over the past decade, positive psychology has become one of the major trends in psychology and has quickly emerged in a good position in this field. The pace of this trend in conversion into a pragmatic and evidence-based approach is not comparable with the background of any other trend.

This pace is noticeable, especially in terms of the methods and interventions that have been developed and used in positive psychology. Applying positive interventions is to improve the quality of life, more pleasure of life, happiness, enjoyment and subjective well-being and, in brief, eudaimonia. The extension of these applications has been to the point that in recent years some have talked about positive therapy [5].

Dakworth et al. [6] believe that those who tolerate the most severe psychological pressures are looking for something more than just relieving the pain and suffering in life. People suffering difficulty are seeking for more happiness, more pleasure and more satisfaction than reducing grief and worry. They seek to build strengths, not to modify their weaknesses; they seek meaningful and purposeful life. Obviously, these conditions are not easily achieved by relieving pain and discomfort.

It can be said that according to the increase of divorce rate [7] and the problems with which the women heading family with children are faced in the current Iranian society, the present study was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of positive psychology training on the happiness of woman heading family by training positive thinking to take steps to reduce the problems of this group of people.

**Research Method**

The present study is a quasi-experimental one with a pre-test and post-test design and control group. The statistical population consisted of women heading the family in the city of Birjand that had enrolled at the Welfare Organization and Imam Khomeini (RA) Relief Committee, and all were the heads of families due to divorce. Of these, 30 were selected by convenience sampling method and were assigned to experimental group (n=15) and control group (n=15). In this research, training the positive thinking skills means training some cognitive and behavioral positive thinking skills that was presented by the researcher for 10 sessions of 2 hours for 10 consecutive weeks that the procedure is presented in the table below.

**A brief description of positive thinking training sessions (Quilliam, 2011; Seligman et al., 2012)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Brief description of the content of the session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Introduction, expressing group regulations and brief explanations about thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Main concepts in positive thinking; identification of signs and symptoms of positive thinking; analyzing the individual’s viewpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Fighting negative thoughts; changing mental images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>The use of informative language and words; rethinking beliefs; maintaining positive behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>To love the self; self-respect; internal enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Creating optimism; creating euphoria; creating self-confidence; objective-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Control of feelings and emotions (Avoiding guilty feelings, controlling anger, coping with anxiety, avoiding jealousy, expressing existence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>The basic steps to express the self; saying &quot;no&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>Creating a positive environment; maintaining health and its impact on positivism; establishing good relationships with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Dealing with everyday life problems; control of life events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Finding**

**Table 1: Summary of ANCOVA to determine the effectiveness of positive psychology on improvement of women’s happiness by controlling the happiness pre-test score**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of changes</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>D²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness pre-test scores</td>
<td>2.548</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.548</td>
<td>3.340</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effect (training)</td>
<td>3.886</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.886</td>
<td>21.482</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual error</td>
<td>1.058</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANCOVA results show that by eliminating the effect of happiness scores in pre-test as a covariate variable, the main effect of training variable on post-test happiness scores is significant. In other words, the table shows that the difference observed between the mean scores of happiness in the experimental group and the control in terms of group membership in the post-test is significant at 99% confidence (P<0.01). The effect of this intervention is 0.50.
The adjusted means show that the mean score of happiness was higher compared to that of the control group, which indicated an improvement in the happiness of women heading the family.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of covariance analysis showed that positive psychology training was effective in improving the happiness of women heading the family. In explaining the result obtained from the present study, it may be said that teaching positive thinking skills is beneficial for individuals in order to strengthen and improve their positive relationship with oneself, to communicate with others and the world of life, and to increase their happiness, and it causes that individuals recognize themselves better and also recognize their positive experience and identify their role in increasing and improving their self-esteem, as well as be acquainted with the positive aspects of others that improve their attitudes towards others and the life, and this in turn can be effective on increasing the individual's happiness.

In another explanation of the present research, it can be said that the positive approach changes the attitude of individuals towards events by creating a positive view of the cases. Positive psychology says that focusing on problems is useless in solving human problems. Human is not a machine that we can measure the causes of problems in it with a linear causality and solve the problems by finding the cause and fixing it. Positive psychology says that sometimes even we cannot solve the problem by finding the cause, so instead of focusing on the problem it is better to focus on the goal. The central thrust of positive psychology is that when one is asked to describe psychology, s/he describes it more with negative words and psychiatric disorders, while psychology must try to focus on the goal and create a positive goal and focus on individual's talents and abilities to solve the problems [8]; therefore, we expect participants to find positive attitudes to their situations in positive thinking sessions, and this will help them improve their happiness.

The results of Sergeant and Mongrain [9] , Lyubomirsky and Layous [10], Kar [11], Nofrasti et al.[12] and BaratiSadeh [13], which showed that positive psychology could be effective on happiness and the feeling of psychological well-being of patients undergoing treatment, are consistent with the results of the present study.

Although the use of self-report questionnaire and lack of follow-up studies due to time constraints can be mentioned as the limitation of the present study, given the importance of intervention of training the positive psychology skills in happiness and reduction of parent-child conflicts, it is suggested that the results of the research to be considered as a good way to develop other researches in other groups of women and even parents in order to pave the way for psychological interventions.

References


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