

The Effects of an Emotion Strengthening Training Program on the Optimism Level of Nurses

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of emotion strengthening as a training programme for optimistic for nurses. The experimental and control group of this research has totally composed of 20 nurses. A pre-test post-test research model with control group was been used in this research. Nurses' optimistic levels have been measured by 'Optimistic Scale' which was developed by Balci and Yılmaz (2002). In order to test that, meaningful differences between the scores of pre-test and post-test within both control and experimental group Mann Whitey U and Wilcoxon Signed Rank test were applied for statistical analysis. It was found that this emotional strengthening training had positive effects on levels of optimistic for nurses. The findings have been discussed in the light of literature, and some suggestions have been made.

Key Words

Emotion Strengthening Training Program, Nurse, Optimistic, Optimistic Scale.

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As internal mechanisms emotions are psychological signs of how an individual feels. They develop in situations which call for an individual's life style or behavioral pattern. The aim here would be to change the situation for the individual's benefit. For an individual who tries various mechanisms before to fulfill this aim or does not believe in finding other ways of fulfilling the aim, emotions find their ways as obvious and strong actions (Adler, 1995). Being aware of our emotions and putting them into words are important, but as a result of various reasons, there might be difficulties to make this happen (Dökmen, 2002). Emotions are not events full of mystery which are impossible to solve. They are simply internal psychological mechanisms and mainly direct our feelings. This mechanism prepares the individual for how to behave under difficult circumstances (Goleman, 1998).

Basically, individuals' emotional states significantly affect their important life events and motivations. As a result, emotional states play an important role in self motivation and are important factors helping reach goals and cope with stress, which in turn brings hope to an individual's life (Schette, 1996; Schweizer, & Koch, 2001). When individuals feel good about themselves they lead a happy and satisfactory life. However, the state of feeling good, in other words, thinking optimistic varies from person to person (Brown, Ryan, & McPartland, 1996; Scheier, & Carver, 1992).

While optimism can be associated with positive emotions, high morale, ambition, efficient problem solving, success in academia, military and professional life, popularity, living a long and healthy life, coping with trauma, and pessimism, its opposite is considered as a reflection of depression, being passive, failure, social inefficiency, sickness, and death (Seligman, 1998). Whereas optimism is defined as a characteristic of being able to adapt to life, pessimism is seen more as a psychological deficiency (Daco, 1989).

An optimistic attitude protects individuals against indifference, hopelessness, and depression. Optimists go through the life experiences similar to pessimists. The difference between optimists and pessimists is that optimists can cope with life experiences more easily, learn from their experiences, and have a higher resiliency after failure. Optimists have more positive emotional states than pessimists. One can conclude that people who have healthy emotions and behaviors would have better interaction skills compared to those who do not have these characte-

ristics (Türküm, 1999b). If an individual is faced with a negative life event, the way he or she explains this situation would influence the way of coping with the situation. It may not only decrease an individual's ambition to fight or his/her motivation for solving the problems, but it may also enable one to solve his problem with greater ease.

Nursing is one of the professions, which involves helping people directly. Therefore, it is very important for nurses to understand people. The main focus of nursing profession is human being. In order to understand human psychology, one has to understand the person completely and must be able to reach the person at a complete level. Reaching someone at a complete level is possible through understanding that person's feelings and thoughts. Nursing profession is clearly associated with people's conditions related to self, health and illness, health care, and general life conditions (Atalay, 1997).

In today's society, what is expected from nurses is a planned and goal-oriented approach which will help the patient compared to more of a kind, attentive, caring, and nurturing traditional approach. As a result of that the nurse (helper)-in order to be able to have the communication skills necessary to help the patient- needs to have the following: knowing his own values, emotions and responsibilities, knowing effective communication skills and problem solving techniques, establishing trust, providing empathy, and evaluating the outcomes of the relationship (Terakye, 1994). Achieving all of the above mentioned skills depends on the individual's awareness of his or her own feelings and having active communication skills and self expression. Therefore, the aim of the emotion strengthening training program provided in the current study is to increase the optimism level of the nurses so that they can be helpful to themselves and to their patients in an extensive way.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the goals of the research the following hypotheses have been tested.

1. The total optimism scores of the nurses who attended the Emotion Strengthening Training Program would be higher than the nurses who did not attend this program.
2. The post-test scores for the level of optimism among nurses who attended the Emotion Strengthening Training Program will be higher than their pre-test scores.

Method

Population and sample

One hundred eight nurses who work at Samsun birth center were informed that there would be an Emotion Strengthening Training program which will aim at increasing the optimism levels of the nursing professionals. Forty nurses who indicated willingness to participate in such a training program were administered the relevant measures. According to their scores on the optimism scale and socio-demographic characteristics, 20 nurses were randomly chosen for the study group. Ten nurses who said that they could attend the program at the specified day and time were chosen for the experimental group and 10 nurses who were not able to attend the program at the specified day and time were chosen for the control group. Those nurses who were placed in the control group were told that they would be able to attend a workshop in the future.

The mean age of the nurses in the experimental group was 30.44 years and the range of their length of work was 10-15 years. The mean age of the nurses in the control group was 28.20 years and the range of their length of work was 8-13 years. The educational level of the nurses in both groups was college and graduate education.

Research Design

In this experimental study, effects of an Emotion Strengthening Training Program among nurses' optimism levels were investigated. This program is designed for recognizing feelings, expressing them, and acquiring emotional communication skills. In the study, a pre-test, post-test with control group experimental model was used. The independent variable of the study is the Emotion Strengthening Training Program and the dependent variable is the levels of optimism.

Data Collection Instrument

In this study, the nurses' level of optimism was measured by the Optimism Scale developed by Balci and Yilmaz (2002). The validity and reliability of the scale was studied with 290 university students. The internal reliability coefficient of the optimism scale (Cronbach alpha) was .96, the test-retest reliability was .61, and split-half reliability correlation score between the two halves was .91. The validity was studied by

correlating the scale with the Life Orientation Test developed by Aydın and Tezer (1991). Correlation coefficient between the two measures was found to be .55. Factor analysis results with horizontal varimax rotation revealed that the scale has a single dimension.

Procedure

The Emotion Strengthening Training Program has lasted for 10 weeks, 2-hour meetings per week. During the first meeting the experimental group took the Optimism Scale as a pre-test. The control group took the Optimism Scale during the same week as well. While the experimental group met during the 10 week period, the control group gathered as well but discussed different topics. After ten weeks, both the experimental and control groups took the Optimism Scale again as a post-test. The training program in the study was developed based on both national and international literature (Balci, 1996; Burnard, 1992; Erkan, 2000; Konrad, & Hendl, 2001; Merlevede, Bridoux, & Vandamme, 2001). For each meeting, goals were established and these goals were attempted.

During the first few group meetings of emotion strengthening training for nurses, the activities related to communication skills took place (such as active listening, using the words of you and I, and empathy). During the later meetings, the following activities took place: raising awareness, being able to express emotions, understanding emotions through observation, noticing emotional conflicts, focusing on emotions and communicating through feelings. At the end of each meeting, nurses were asked about their impressions of the meeting, how they would apply what they learnt to everyday life. At the beginning of the following meeting, nurses were asked how they applied what they learnt to everyday life. (see Appendix 1. Sample of Sessions)

Data Analysis

The data collected for the study were analyzed using nonparametric statistical methods. In order to compare two groups, Mann-Whitney U Test was used. In order to compare the differences between experimental and control groups, Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test was used (Gamgam, 1998). The data were analyzed using Windows 12.0 statistical package with a computer. The results were interpreted at .05 significance level.

Results and Discussion

Strengthening emotions is very important in terms of knowing emotions. It is also very important for an individual to communicate with himself and others in a healthy way. In this study, the effect of an Emotion Strengthening Training Program on nurses' optimism level was investigated. In order to reach this goal, experimental and control groups consisting of 10 people were each given the Emotion Strengthening Training for 10 weeks. Results showed that optimism levels of nurses in the experimental group who took the ten week training program increased significantly as compared to those in the control group. These results supported our hypothesis. In the literature, no similar experimental research was found related to optimism. Therefore, the present study was a first attempt on the topic. However, Balcı (2003, 2004) found that the emotion strengthening training program was effective on the emotional intelligence, self awareness and emotional self regulation. The power of positive thinking, in other words, optimism and hope are focused as topics in psychotherapy by many authors. Both psychodynamic and cognitive therapists emphasize that optimistic thinking reduces negative (pessimistic) thinking. Patients with psychological disturbances start having less negative thoughts during their psychotherapy sessions and are able to change that with positive/optimistic thinking. In another study, it was found that the psychiatrist's optimism was the best preventing mechanism for patients with depression during their first few days of therapy (Hoffart, & Sexton, 2002; Plomin et al., 1992). In these studies, adults who were pessimistic and anxious had higher blood pressure levels compared to adults who were optimistic and less anxious. They also experienced less positive and more negative emotions. The optimists, on the other hand, had rarely experienced negative feelings and their blood pressures went up as high as the pessimists (Raikkönen, Matthews, Flory, Owens, & Gump, 1999).

In a study conducted at Pennsylvania University, it was found that optimists are happier than pessimists (Nolen-Hoeksema, Girgus, & Seligman, 1986), that they use a problem-focused and social support seeking technique when faced with stress, and that there is a negative correlation between optimism and avoiding coping. In addition, people with higher optimism levels are more willing to show their negative emotions causing them disappointment or to express their anger more (Hart, & Hittner, 1995). When faced with a stressful situation, optimists have

better coping mechanisms than pessimists (Schweizer, & Koch, 2001) and they fight with stress factors rather than avoiding them, having also lower levels of depression and anxiety (Puskar, Sereika, Lamb, Tusaie-Mumford, & McGuinness, 1999; Türküm, 1999b; Wenglert, & Rosen 2000). Optimists are more successful at their schools, have longer and happier marriages, are more attached to their children, are healthier live longer and have more positive emotional states (Segerstrom, et al., 1998; McGinnis, 1998) and that optimists are less complanatory of physical symptoms (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Optimism lowers health risks and is an important factor for fast recovery (Kivimaki, et al., 2005; Carver et al., 2005). There is positive correlation between optimism and life adaptation (Chang, Maydeu-Olivares, & D'zurilla, 1997). Optimism is an important factor which protects one against difficulties in life and prevents people from professional burnout. They believe to have control of basic situation in their lives (Darvill & Johnson, 1991; Anderson, 1996; Chang, Rand, & Strung, 2000). Aspinwall and Taylor (1992 cited in Türküm, 1999a) found that individuals whose optimism levels are higher have a more social tendency, more positive social relationships and easier emotional and physical functioning. Optimism is also found to have an effect on self respect, perception of control, psychological well-being, motivation, and health.

Baker, Blacher and Olsson (2005) found that mothers who have low level optimism have higher risk of depression than the ones who have high level optimism. El-Anzi (2005) found that there is a positive correlation between academic success and optimism. Üstündağ-Budak and Mocan-Aydın (2005) found that there is a meaningful relationship between the level of optimism and seeking medical support. Bacanlı and Ercan (2006) eighteen months after the earthquake, when investigated, have come to the conclusion that there is no significant difference between the styles of coping with the earthquake stress, optimism and the sex variables of the university students who had experienced earthquake disaster.

As a whole, according to the results obtained in this study, it was concluded that the emotion strengthening program increased nurses' level of optimism.

Based on this result the following were suggested below.

1. Nurses who participated in the meetings showed negative automatic thoughts. Therefore, new meetings can be added in which individuals can gain awareness of their negative automatic thoughts and replace them with positive automatic thoughts.
2. Studies can be conducted to evaluate long term effects of emotion strengthening training program.
3. This program was conducted with nurses who have been in the profession for a long time. To have such a program during their studies (while getting nursing degree) would be beneficial to students to go through such a training program in order to know themselves better.
4. The effects of the program can be studied in different sample groups and with different variables (such as personality, coping, depression, anger).

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Ek 1.**Duyguları Güçlendirme Eğitimi Programı'ndan Oturum Örnekleri****1. Oturum:**

Amaç: Grup üyelerine grubun çalışmasıyla ilgili bilgi verilmesi ve grup üyelerinin birbirleriyle tanışması.

Aktiviteler: Top oyunu

2. Oturum

Amaç: İkincil duygu tepkilerini ifade edebilme.

Aktiviteler: Sen-ben dili alıştırması, Duygu ifadeleri alıştırması

4. ve 5. Oturumlar

Amaç: Kendisini başkasının yerine koyarak onun duygu ve düşüncelerini anlama becerisi.

Aktiviteler: Empati tombalası, Empati alıştırması

9. Oturum

Amaç: Duyguların farkına varma, duyguları oluşmadan anlayabilme.

Aktiviteler: Yüz ifadelerinin farkına varma, Günlük yaşamda hissedilen duyguların farkına varma.

10. Oturum

Amaç: Son oturumda duygu ve düşünceler grupla paylaşılır ve program değerlendirilir.

Aktiviteler: Bütün oturumların değerlendirilmesi.