



APPLICATION OF GROUP PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This study aims to apply the group psychological counselling method to a group consisting of introvert students in order to determine whether it changed the introversion scores of these students and led to a higher levels of extroversion. 7 (58.33%) female and 5 (41.6%) male students participated into the study. The participants of the study include a total of 12 2nd year students studying at Kırıkkale University during the spring 2010-2011 academic year. The data of the study were obtained through the use of Personality Test Based on Adjectives (ABPT). The study revealed that application of the group psychological counselling for ten weeks to a group consisting of introverted students led to a change in these students' introversion scores, resulting in higher levels of extroversion.

Keywords: group; psychological counselling; extroversion

Introduction

Group psychological counselling is a professional therapeutic assistance activity that aims to improve interpersonal relations by focusing on the emotions, values and attitudes of participants, and which helps every participating member to fulfil their behavioral objectives (Voltan-Acar, 1993; *as cited by* Voltan Acar, 2001). Group psychological counselling is generally performed by a psychology counsellor with training of the field. By allowing

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persons to participate to a social process as distinct individuals, group psychological counselling highlights individual personality traits. The basic personality traits of adolescents - which are constant elements from which their individuality stems from - and play an notable role in their ability to gain self-awareness and to develop behaviors in line with their personal goals.

Openness to experience, which is one of the personality types based on the Five Factor Theory, is comprised of intellectual characteristics such as imagination, curiosity, originality, broad-mindedness, and artistic sensitivity. Agreeableness is also known as pleasantness, and its facets are related to kindness, flexibility, trust, good nature, cooperation, forgiveness, and empathy. Conscientiousness is also known as trustworthiness, prudence and compliance, and its facets reflect both trustworthiness and willpower. At the same time, emotional instability/neuroticism is also a reflection of extroversion regarding the temperament of an individual. Each dimension is considered as a continuum (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2003).

Several studies have investigated the personality dimensions of the Five Factor Model process. In their study on an Australian study group aged 15-84, Lucas and Donnellan (2009) found that there is a positive correlation between age and agreeableness, and conscientiousness. However, there is a negative correlation between age and extraversion, emotional instability/neuroticism, and openness to experience. In their study on adolescents and adults aged 10-65, Soto, John, Gosling and Potter (2011) found that five factor personality dimensions vary according to age ranges. Hann, Prienzie and Dekovic (2009) found that agreeableness and extraversion of parents bear more relation with sincerity, and less with over-reaction. Raynor and Levine (2009) determined that conscientiousness and extraversion in college students accompany healthy behaviours. Garcia (2011) found in his study of high school students that there is a correlation between neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness and well-being. Jackson, Dimmock, Gucciardi and Grove (2011) revealed that poor communication and attachment are the reasons for the differences between extraversion and the activity level of late adolescent athletes and trainers. Similarly, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extroversion, and attachment were observed in the relationships between late adolescent trainers and athletes. Contrary to expectations, introversion and extraversion have emerged separately as distinct dimensions (Heaven & Pretorius, 1998). On the other hand, Eryılmaz and Öğülmüş (2010) have demonstrated that extrovert

adolescents have a greater interest in being rewarded in social situations, which also enables them to acquire more social skills.

As suggested by the abovementioned studies, personality traits, and especially extroversion, play an important role in the development of interpersonal relations, and directly affect social skills. During the therapeutic assistance process, the psychological counselor directly or indirectly endeavours to promote the development of social skills among individuals within the group.

In this context, this *aim* of this study was to apply the group psychological counselling method to a group consisting of introvert students in order to determine whether it changed the introversion scores of these students and led to a higher levels of extroversion.

Method

Participants

This study is an experimental study. The study group consisted of a total of 12 2nd year students, 7 of whom were females (58.33%) and 5 of whom were males (41.67%) studying Computer and Instructional Technologies at Kırıkkale University Faculty of Education in Spring Semester of 2010-2011 Academic Year.

Research instruments

Personality Test Based on Adjectives (ABPT): Developed by Bacanlı, İlhan and Aslan (2009) Personality Test based on Adjectives (*ABPT*) is a Likert type scale consisting of 40 pairs of adjectives which can be graded between 1-7. *ABPT* is composed of five dimensions; extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional instability/neuroticism and openness to experience. Five dimensions explain 52.63% of the variance of *ABPT*. The factor loadings of the five dimensions vary between .36 and .79. Test-retest reliability coefficient was found .85 for extroversion, .86 for agreeableness, .71 for conscientiousness, .85 for emotional instability/neuroticism and .68 for openness to experience. Meanwhile Cronbach Alpha coefficient was found .89 for extroversion, .87 for agreeableness, .88 for conscientiousness, .73 for

emotional instability/neuroticism, and .80 for openness to experience. The extroversion dimension consists of nine items. The lowest score that can be obtained with the extraversion dimension is 9, while the highest possible score is 63. A high score for this dimension is indicative of extroversion, while a low score is indicative of introversion.

Data analysis

The extroversion dimension of the Adjective-Based Personality Test was first administered before commencing the group psychological counselling activity. The psychological counselling activity was conducted in ten sessions. After the psychological counselling was completed, the extroversion dimension of the Adjective-Based Personality Test (ABPT) was administered to the group members once again. The change in the students' scores for this dimension was examined. In line with the aim of the study, a group consisting of students with low extroversion scores was formed. However, to prevent any resistance/incompatibility between individuals with similar traits within the same group, a few students with high extroversion scores were also included to this group.

I. Session

The group was informed about the applicable rules, such as confidentiality, and the need for continued attendance. The group members were first introduced to one another. The students were then asked about what they would like to take with them if they were to go abroad for postgraduate studies. Students were then divided into three groups. The students were allowed to discuss between themselves what they would have liked to take abroad with them. Each group member then described to his/her friends what he/she would have liked to take with him/her. Group members mentioned persons and items such as their mother, family, pen, computer, money, card describing Turkey, gifts from their friends, etc. During the group meeting, there was generally a problem with eye contact.

II. Session

The group members were asked if they wanted to say anything to the group, or if they needed anything. Since the group members did not have anything particular to say, they were asked to take part in the activity known as

“walking on a boulevard” - which basically required group members to describe how they feel when they are walking in public at a crowded location. Various group members told to the rest of the group that walking in crowded places with people they do not know led to feelings of unimportance and loneliness; the desire to be in smaller group; or to a awareness of the meaninglessness of life (mentioned by Recep). Tuğçe described that such environments aroused curiosity and a willingness to find a meaning to life. Others mentioned that crowded places alleviated their sense of loneliness (with shoulders brushing against other people), and triggered a desire to know as many people as possible during their brief lives. When asked to express what they feel when they encounter someone they know, the students described that this relieved their sense of loneliness and made them feel happy, and that seeing people who they do not know together with their acquaintances also made them happy. Murat asked the rest of the group if they would react negatively to him “opening himself” to the group. This was asked to every person in the group, who responded that they would see this or react to it negatively. For next week’s session, the students were asked to consider how they feel when they are with people they do not know, and to think back to their previous experiences to identify their prejudices about their own selves.

III. Session

The group members were asked if they wanted to say anything to the group, or if they needed anything. Since the group members did not have anything particular to say, they were asked to take part in the activity known as “from ear to ear”. In this activity, which involved students successively whispering a word into each other’s ears, it was noted that by the time the word reached the last member of the group, it had been distorted through successive misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The group members described the problems they experienced in understanding other and expressing themselves, as well as their concerns about the way these problems limited their social interactions. They noted that this reinforced their shyness, causing them to become even lonelier. Only one of the group members, Murat, described that loneliness made him happy. For the next session, the students were asked to observe their own behaviors to identify the ones which, during their interaction with others and their environment, increased their shyness.

IV. Session

The group leader gave a summary of the previous session. The group members were asked if they wanted to say anything to the group, or if they needed anything. One of the group members, Funda, described that she tends to communicate more with people she does not know than with her friends and family. Aysun, on the other hand, told that her communication with people she does not know is generally very cold. Meanwhile, the rest of the group had difficulties in sharing the behaviors that increased/reinforced their shyness during interactions with their social environment. To understand the dynamics prevailing in the group, the activity known as “group photograph” was carried out, after the students were first informed about what it involved. During this activity, the group members were willing to have their photographs taken with people they felt close to. However, all group members also wanted a copy of the photograph that included the entire group. After this activity was performed, it was observed that there were four sub-groups within the main group.

V. Session

The group leader gave a summary of the previous session. The group members were asked if they wanted to say anything to the group, or if they needed anything. Group members Aysun, Büşra, Dudu, Ahmet and Halil İbrahim described that they did not feel as though they belonged to the group. Following this, the activity known as “Entering Into the Group” was carried out. Group member Halil İbrahim told that he wanted to stay outside the group. After this activity, Halil İbrahim was asked about what he felt when standing outside the group, to which he responded that it did not make him feel anything. Group member Fatma described that being together with the group, hand in hand, made her feel better. Other group members said that leaving Halil İbrahim outside the group felt wrong and was unfair towards him, and that they really wanted to see him within the group.

VI. Session

The group leader gave a summary of the previous session. The group members were asked if they wanted to say anything to the group, or if they needed anything. Tuğçe described that taking part in the group and sharing her feelings last week had allowed her to gain a better understanding of herself.

Dudu told that although she wanted to stop taking part in this group activity, she will continue to do so since she did not want to break her promise. Gaffar said that he wants to be able to express himself as easily as Tuğçe and Halil İbrahim does, but that he has not been successful at this so far. Gaffar was asked to perform the activity named “keep up with your emotions.” Gaffar told that his difficulties in talking were due to the congestion he felt when socially interacting. He said that this congestion is sometimes so intense that his face turns all red. However, by becoming aware of this problem, he said that he had come a step closer to resolving it.

VII. Session

The group leader gave a summary of the previous session. The group members were asked if they wanted to say anything to the group, or if they needed anything. Group member Tuğçe said that she had a dispute this week with her classmate Merve. She said that although she realised how much she hurt Merve, she could not express her feelings about this because of how angry she felt at that moment. After Tuğçe described this incident, she was asked to take part in an activity known as “Finishing Unfinished Tasks - Empty Chair,” to which she agreed. After this activity, Tuğçe said that she now realised that she had been unfair towards Merve. Tuğçe also described that until now, she has never been able to take the first step to talk to someone with whom she had a dispute or similar negative experience. However, following this latest experience, Tuğçe said that she has gained a better awareness of her self, without becoming defensive about her issues. Other group members also commented that people should not allow their prejudices to shape their behaviors.

VIII. Session

The group leader gave a summary of the previous session. The group members were asked if they wanted to say anything to the group, or if they needed anything. Group members were asked to take part in the activity known as “Remembering good events by turning the pages of the calendar backwards”. Following this, the group leader asked every group member to recount the positive events they remembered, and how they felt about these events. As persons or events that trigger positive memories; Aysun mentioned her sister, Fatma mentioned her family, Halil İbrahim mentioned his mother,

Tuğçe mentioned her friend, Gaffar mentioned his father, Büşra mentioned his elder brother, Recep mentioned his maternal uncle, Dudu mentioned the time when her mother was pregnant for her brother, Tülay mentioned the house she lived when she was a child, Muzaffer mentioned his village, Murat mentioned a past summer vacation, and Ahmet mentioned the time he received his first bicycle.

IX. Session

The group leader gave a summary of the previous session. The group members were asked if they wanted to say anything to the group, or if they needed anything. In this session, group members were asked to perform an activity called “Showing what was learned in the group with a good example”. Group members expressed that the group sessions and activities allowed them to gain a greater awareness of themselves.

X. Session

The group counselling sessions were ended following the activity known as “showering with affection”.

Findings

The extroversion dimension of the Adjective-Based Personality Test was first administered before commencing the ten-session group psychological counselling activity. The students’ score with this dimension varied between 29 and 58. After the psychological counselling was completed, the extroversion dimension of the Adjective-Based Personality Test (ABPT) was administered to the group members once again. After the ten sessions, the group members were once again administered the nine items of the Adjective Based Personality Test’s (ABPT’s) extroversion dimension (Bacanlı, İlhan and Aslan, 2009). Following the ten sessions, it was observed the the group members’ score in this dimension varied 35 to 60 points compared to their pre-session score.

Results

In this study, the application of the group psychological counselling for ten weeks to a group consisting of introverted students led to a change in these

students' introversion scores, resulting in higher levels of extroversion. In other words, the activity increased the extroversion levels of the students by helping them gain awareness about their own personality; develop confidence; become aware of their own communication difficulties; establish eye contact; form a sense of bonding within the group; become aware of the need to know one's self and needs; realise what counselees need to do; become more aware of the external support they receive; and develop self-confidence and self-support (Voltan Acar, 2002).

Conclusions

According to the study results:

- During the 1st session, group members generally had problems in establishing eye to eye contact with the other members within the frame of the group activity.
- In the 2nd session, it was determined that the group members' level of self-support had increased, especially in environment with close and familiar people.
- In the 3rd session, activities focused on increasing the group members' level of awareness regarding their communication difficulties.
- In the 4th session, group members were encouraged to discuss the concept of trust.
- In the 5th session, the group members' level of awareness on group unity/cohesion was enhanced in order to strengthen their sense of belonging to the group.
- In the 6th session, activities were conducted to improve the group members' understanding of themselves, and efforts focused on supporting and increasing their level of self-awareness.
- In the 7th session, group members were encouraged to communicate without being defensive and without prejudice. The group members were thus encouraged to change in a way that resolved their communication challenges.
- In the 8th session, efforts focused on enhancing the group members' awareness of the support they receive from their environment.
- In the 9th session, it was observed that the group process, or activity, had a positive impact on the individuals in terms of promoting extraversion.

- In the 10th session, an activity was conducted regarding the conclusion of the group activity by discussing the positive emotions of the group members.

The following recommendations can be made for future studies conducted based on the present study's findings:

- Similar studies, involving psychological counseling activities for groups consisting of introverted students, could be performed in other cultures to determine the effect of cultural factors.

- Psychological counseling activities on groups consisting of introverted students could be performed with students from different regions within the same country.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was that the group members consisted exclusively of second-year university students. Another limitation was the lack of an equal distribution between the two genders within the group. In addition, the members of the psychological counseling group consisted only of students from the computer and learning technologies department, which also represented a limitation. In future studies, group psychological counseling activities could be conducted by including students from other departments and years, and by ensuring a more equal gender distribution.

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