

Good for Self-Esteem, Not for Social Skills and Anxiety: Differential Effects of Logotherapy on Adolescent Girls

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the effect of group logotherapy on self-esteem, social skills, and anxiety among adolescent girls in Tehran, Iran. The research was performed in a semi-experimental method with two groups (15 girls per group): one experimental group with logotherapy and one control group with treatment as usual. The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, the Teenage Inventory of Social Skills, and the Beck Anxiety Inventory have been applied to both groups in the pre and post-intervention phases. Data were analyzed using Analysis Of Variance. Our results showed that group logotherapy increased self-esteem, but not the social skills and anxiety of these young girls. This study suggests that group logotherapy may be useful for boosting some aspects of positive functioning of adolescent girls like self-esteem but it may not be useful in improving their social skills or reducing their negative feelings in response to anxiety. Implications of results have been discussed.

Keywords: Logotherapy; Self-Esteem; Social Skills; Anxiety; Adolescence.

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Introduction

Adolescence is the period of puberty, crisis, identity achievement, and meaning-seeking. It is a critical period of life in which the bases of identity, self-esteem, and meaning are rooted (Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, Loftus, & Lutz, 2014). The main social task of adolescents is the search for identity, the ability to answer the questions of “Who am I” and “Where am I going” (Rageliene, 2016). Adolescents develop a stronger sense of self and they seek to forge their own identities (Stangor & Walinga, 2018). A central developmental concern during adolescence revolves around establishing a sense of purpose or meaning (Damon, Menon, & Cotton Bronk, 2003).

Identity refers to an existential position, to an inner organization of needs, abilities, and self-perceptions as well as a sociopolitical stance (Marcia, 1980). Challenges adolescents face with are real; they are truly existential experiences. Humanistic and existential psychologists believe meaning-seeking is a life-long task. It is an essence and primary motive and basic need in everybody’s life. Frankl believed that man’s search for meaning is a primary force in his (or her) life and not a “secondary rationalization” of instinctual drives (Damon et al., 2003). This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him (or her) alone. Questions such as “Who am I”, “Where do I come from”, and “What is the purpose and meaning of life”, which are the main concerns of adolescents, are in fact an initial phase in the process of finding meaning. Identity formation during adolescence is a process of forging a coherent and systematic sense of self (Damon & Gregory, 1997). Moreover, one of the most important changes that occur during adolescence involves the further development of the self-concept (Stangor & Walinga, 2018). Meaning and purpose during youth lead to many desired outcomes, such as prosocial behavior, moral commitment, achievement, and high self-esteem (Damon et al., 2003). Meaning and identity development thus appear to coincide and, as such, are jointly relevant to adolescents as they begin to engage in the process of self-definition before they even reach the period of early adulthood (Kiang & Fuligni, 2010). Finding meaning is associated with self-esteem. Of note here, self-esteem among preteens is relatively unstable but it gradually becomes more stable in late adolescence (Harter, 2003).

Communication with others and social skills are very important for adolescents (Muuss, 1996). The importance of social competence as an index and predictor of healthy psychological adaptation across the lifespan is well documented (Allen, Weissberg, & Hawkins, 1989). Social skills are among the most basic elements of human functioning because they are the cornerstone of strong, healthy interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships and social skills begin and develop through communication. Social skills have a direct impact on the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the quality of these interpersonal relationships often affects how individuals feel about themselves (Erozkan, 2013). Another fundamental concept in existential psychology is anxiety. Anxiety, in existential psychology, is divided into authentic anxiety and inauthentic anxiety. The experience of authentic anxiety is considered to be healing and causes decreasing or relieving inauthentic or abnormal anxiety (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). Adolescence is a critical time in which mental disorders have the potential to manifest themselves, leading to higher risks for chronic mental illnesses in the future (Corrieri, Heider, Conrad, Blume, König, & Riedel-Heller, 2014). Anxiety in school-age children and teenagers is broadly considered to be a normal part of their development and it is a regular experience in adolescence (Barrett, Sonderegger, & Xenos, 2003). Gender is the most consistent factor in childhood that is associated with anxiety (Van Oort, Greaves-Lord, Ormel, Verhulst, and Huizink, 2011). As early as the age of 6, higher rates of anxiety have been found in girls than in boys (Lewinsohn as cited in Van Oort et al., 2011).

Frankl pointed out that the ongoing demand subjecting any form of psychotherapy in general and logotherapy in particular to empirical studies should be seen as an opportunity (Thir and Batthyány, 2016). Logo-therapy techniques, such as paradoxical intention, deflection, and Socratic dialogue have huge potential to become effective therapeutic strategies for improving mental health (Rahgozar and Giménez-Llort, 2020). But few studies discussed the impact of logotherapy techniques on mental health (Cheraghpouran, Soroush, Ziapour, Sharma, Jahanbin, Andayeshgar, & Najafi, 2019), and there are very few studies regarding the effects of this method on increasing self-esteem and social skills. People with better mental health have higher levels of self-esteem and may be more successful than others.

People with low levels of self-esteem may avoid being in public which leads to their isolation (Gharachedaghi, 2019). Logo-therapy may increase self-esteem. Golshan et al. (2020) have shown that logotherapy effectively increases intimacy attitude and self-esteem and decreases depression in physically disabled women. Ningsi, Zulkifli, Mallongi, Syam, and Saleh (2020) found that leprosy patients' self-esteem increased after logotherapy. Engel and Yusuf (2013) showed that logotherapy counseling was effective in self-exploration, self-acceptance, dissociation, self-transcendence, attitudinal values, self-awareness, self-potential, self-activity, and self-evaluation. Amani, Ahmadi, and Hamidi (2017) investigated the effect of group logotherapy on the self-esteem and psychological well-being of female students with love trauma syndrome. Their results have shown that logotherapy had positive effects on increasing self-esteem and psychological well-being. Samavi and Najarpourian (2017) showed that logotherapy, in thalassemia patients, increased their positive self-concept and general health. Setyaningrum and Nur Anganthi (2020) demonstrated that logotherapy improves the self-esteem of patients with paraparesis. Has, Septiana, and Mariyanti (2018) showed that logo-therapy increases self-efficacy and improves blood pressure regulation in patients with hypertension. In another study with female adolescents, Jahanpour, Sareghin, Hosseini, and Tekiyee (2014) showed that logotherapy has a significant effect on self-efficacy, happiness, and social sufficiency. Also, Moein and Houshyar (2015) have shown that group logotherapy has positive effects on social, familial, and general components of self-esteem among people with physical disability. Sarvarian and Taghizadeh (2016) showed that logotherapy increases adolescent girls' self-esteem and happiness by helping them discover their real selves. Cheraghpouran et al. (2019) demonstrated the effects of group logotherapy on self-esteem and communication skills and improving proper responses to stressful events. Breitbart et al. (2010) studied the impact of meaning-centered group psychotherapy on patients with advanced cancer. This therapy resulted in greater improvements in spiritual well-being and sense of meaning. Hosseinzadeh-Khezri et al. (2014) showed that logotherapy eliminated inefficient mechanisms for improving lifestyle and provided a better meaning. Scignaro et al. (2014) found that the search for meaning had direct and indirect effects on anxious preoccupation. The search for meaning was

strongly related to higher levels of anxious preoccupation and hopelessness and lower levels of eudaimonic well-being. Consistent with expectations, the presence of meaning was negatively correlated with hopelessness and anxious preoccupation, and positively correlated with eudaimonic well-being.

Amir, Ahadi, Nikkhah, and Seirafi (2018) demonstrated that logotherapy reduced perceived stress among patients with multiple sclerosis (MS). Shin-Jeong, Kyung-Ah, Sun-Jeong, Myung-Nam, and Young-Hee (2013) considered that logotherapy is effective in improving the meaning of life of early adolescents with cancer. Mohabbat-Bahar, Golzari, Moradi-Joo, and Akbari (2014) showed that group logotherapy was effective in reducing anxiety in women with breast cancer. Rasoli and Borjali (2011) considered that group logotherapy is effective in reducing anxiety and increasing the self-esteem of patients with MS. Elsherbiny and Al Maamari (2018) have shown the effectiveness of logotherapy in mitigating the social isolation of neglected institutionalized older people. Çolak and Koç (2013) found that psychological consultation practice with a logotherapy-oriented group is effective in reducing social anxiety, social avoidance, anxiety of being criticized, and feelings of worthlessness. Delavari and Nasirian (2014) investigated logotherapy's effect on anxiety and depression in mothers of children with cancer and found that the levels of anxiety and depression had decreased after logotherapy training.

Adolescence is one of the most critical periods of life in which various problems may arise. This study aims to find proper logotherapeutic targeting for female adolescents. Since several studies indicated adolescent girls experience higher levels of anxiety, the present study considered this group as the target population. This study is focused on comparing the effectiveness of logotherapy with Treatment As Usual (TAU) as a method to survey whether logotherapy can increase self-esteem and social skills and reduce anxiety in adolescent girls. Such investigations for meaningful or significant effectiveness of logotherapy would assist in the preparation of logo-therapeutic targeting, techniques, and setups.

Method

The present study was a quasi-experimental trial with pre-test, post-test, and TAU groups. There were two groups: logotherapy and TAU

groups. Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Bolton, 2003), the Teenage Inventory of Social Skills (Inderbitzen & Foster, 1992), and the Beck Anxiety Inventory have been applied to both groups. After the pre-test, for both experimental and control groups ten 90-minute sessions were held for two months. After evaluating the baseline in the pre-test, the experimental group attended ten sessions of group logotherapy. During this period, the control group (TAU group) participated in group activities such as book reading and critical thinking practices, and other group activities. Psychological intervention (described in Table 1) was implemented according to Viktor Frankel's logotherapy theory (see: Robotmili et al., 2015). Participants were two groups of 15 girls aged between sixteen and seventeen. Participants were selected by convenience sampling method and randomly divided into two equal groups. Before the intervention, participants were informed about the study objectives, treatment protocol, group rules, time, and number of sessions.

After the end of the sessions, both groups filled out the abovementioned measures of self-esteem, social skills, and anxiety. SPSS software version 18 and the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test have been used to analyze the data. Of note here, if the treatment groups were not “randomly” assigned and we wished to statistically equate groups on the three variables across our two groups then we might have to apply Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), instead of ANOVA.

Table 1. Structure of the logotherapy program

1	Introduction. Logo-therapy basic information and intended course of group logo-therapy. Explanation of Values Awareness Technique. Group exercise: “What I want to be”. Homework: the beginning exploration of Creative Values.
2	Clarification of Creative Values. Discussion about progress/difficulties with homework. Distribution of Values Worksheet. Group exercise: satisfying achievements. Homework: completing the exploration of Creative Values.
3	Clarification of Experiential Values. Discussion about progress/difficulties with homework. Group exercises: Recent Events, Positive Persons, and Artistic Expressions. Homework: completing the exploration of Experiential Values.
4	Clarification of Attitudinal Values. Discussion about progress/difficulties with homework. Group exercise: Proverbs, Taking a Stance, My Obituary.

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	Homework: completing the exploration of Attitudinal Values.
5	Focus on Goals. Discussion about progress/difficulties with homework. Elaboration: Values Hierarchy. Group exercise: Setting Goals. Group exercise: another Perspective on Goals.
6	Fitting goals with values. Discussion about progress/difficulties with homework. Analyzing goals for fit with personal values. Homework: Participants analyze a variety of their goals by the method discussed during this current session. Participants should become aware of any remaining (unmarked) values for short-term goals, intermediate goals, and long-term goals.
7	Setting new goals. Group discussion about Homework results and insights. Setting new goals for remaining values. Homework: Using the method described in this session, participants set a new short-term goal, a new intermediate goal, and a new long-term goal. Participants evaluate each new goal against each value in their Values Hierarchy using the process demonstrated in the previous session. If leftover values remain after the new goals are compared against the Values Hierarchy, then additional goals are set until no values remain.
8	Planning for goal achievement. Goal achievement outline (the goal should be measurable and attainable). Discussion: Ideas related to the topic of establishing plans to achieve goals. Homework: using the method described in this session, participants set goal achievement plans for one short-term goal; a goal achievement plan for one intermediate goal; and a goal achievement plan for one long-term goal.
9	Current status analysis. Group discussion: homework results and insights; each participant shares the three goals for which they have established plans. Group exercise: assets and deficits. Group discussion: it is important to know our deficits as well as our assets because once we are aware of them we are then in a position to choose to change or not change. Homework exercise: incorporating assets and deficits into plans.
10	Summary and Critique. Participants share examples of how they will incorporate their assets and deficits into their plans to achieve their goals. Summarization: what the course of the group has been; any comments about the group. Group discussion: any changes participants see in themselves as a result of attending the group logotherapy. Critique: three best and three worst components of group logotherapy; three suggestions for changes that could improve group logotherapy.

Results

One-way analysis of variance has been used to determine the effectiveness of treatment. Levene's test was used to verify the assumption that each dependent variable has similar variances for the two groups. The value of F Leven's statistic for anxiety, social skills,

and self-esteem variables were .842, .188, and .631 respectively, which is not statistically significant at the level of .05. Therefore, the assumption of the equality of the variances of variables among the groups is respected.

Pretest-posttest scores of anxiety of the two groups were not significant (Table 2). Also, the scores of social skills between the two groups were not significantly different (Table 3).

Table 2. One-way ANOVA for the effect of logotherapy on anxiety

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.03	1	12.03	1.71	.20
Within Groups	196.13	28	7.00		
Total	208.16	29			

Table 3. One-way ANOVA for the effect of logotherapy on social skills

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	28.03	1	28.03	.29	.59
Within Groups	2678.93	28	95.67		
Total	2706.96	29			

The scores of self-esteem in the experimental group were significantly different in comparison with the TAU group showing that logotherapy increases self-esteem in the experimental group. Table 4 shows the within-group means and standard deviations of the means in self-esteem scores in the experimental and control groups at pre-test and post-test. Scores of the experimental group revealed distinct positive changes in self-esteem scores.

Table 4. One-way ANOVA for the effect of on the groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	30.00	1	30.00	6.27	.018
Within Groups	133.86	28	4.78		
Total	163.86	29			

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of group logotherapy on self-esteem, social skills, and anxiety of female adolescents. The results showed that group logotherapy significantly

increased self-esteem but not social skills and anxiety. The positive effect of logotherapy on self-esteem is consistent with previous research (Golshan et al., 2020; Ningsi et.al, 2020; Engel & Yusuf, 2013; Rasoli & Borjali, 2011; Amani et al., 2017; Samavi & Najarpourian, 2017; Setyaningrum & Nur Anganthi, 2020; Moein & Houshyar, 2015; Sarvarian & Taghizadeh, 2016; Cheraghpouran et al., 2019).

Our results indicate that the logo-therapy group doesn't exhibit a meaningful increment in social skills, in comparison with the TAU group. This result is in contradiction with Elsherbiny and Al Maamari (2018), Hosseini and Tekiyee (2014), Colak and Koc (2013), Cheraghpouran et al. (2019), and Delavari and Nasirian's (2014) findings. It should be considered that there are very few empirical studies in this field that have applied a method design with a TAU group and the majority of researchers have used a simple control group approach for verifying experimental group tracks. In fact, using a control group as a comparison tool is equal to comparing a logo-therapy group with a no-treatment group, while there is no doubt about the effect of placebos on human behavior. Moreover, the nature and type of TAU are effective in the interpretation of results (Watts, Turnell, Kladnitski, Newby, & Andrews, 2015). In this study, the TAU group participated in ten sessions of unstructured joyful group activities which would be useful for social skills. Further investigation of the pre-test and post-test scores indicated that social skills increased in both groups, which clarifies the impressiveness of common experiences and group activities in the TAU group. Therefore, considering placebo and usual treatment effect is suggested for studies in research schemes across related fields.

Social skills are one of the most important concerns for adolescents. Adolescence is the stage of transition from family to larger social groups like peers and friends. Social acceptance is a skill that each adolescent should achieve. Whereas young children are most strongly attached to their parents, the most important attachments of adolescents move increasingly away from parents toward peers (Harris, 1998). In adolescence, the peer group becomes extremely important and adolescents concerning their peers experience a high positive mood. Peers have a great influence on adolescent behavior (Larson & Richards 1991). It seems that the activities and exercises presented in the TAU group have been in a way that was effective in

amplifying peer relationships with each other and creating friendship and intimacy between them. In fact, the control group has been practicing communication and social skills during this period, but these exercises were more spontaneous and less structured in comparison with the experimental group. Sarvarian and Taghizadeh (2016) considered that logotherapy increases adolescent girls' self-esteem and happiness. In their study, the scores of total self-esteem, public esteem, educational self-esteem, and family self-esteem were different between the two study groups. But social self-esteem score was not significantly different between the two study groups. The result of this study can be somewhat consistent with our findings that the effect of treatment on social skills was not significant.

Another finding of our research was decreasing anxiety in the experimental group in comparison with the pre-test. But the variation difference between the experimental group and the TAU group was not significantly meaningful, indicating that logotherapy was not more effective in anxiety reduction than usual treatment. In one study, Hosseinzadeh Khezri et al. (2014) evaluated the effect of group logotherapy on mental health and hope-to-live in patients with colorectal cancer receiving chemotherapy. Their results were significant in subscales visualization, performance, depression, and the overall scale of the General Health Questionnaire but not in the anxiety scale. Of course, the result of the present research in this aspect is in contradiction with most previous researches (Breitbart et al. 2010; Mohabbat-Bahar et al., 2014; Rasoli & Borjali, 2011; Çolak & Koç, 2013; Delavari & Nasirian, 2014). However, these treatments, except for Breitbart et al. (2010), used only one control group and did not investigate the effect of placebo, TAU, or any other treatment.

As mentioned earlier, the variables examined in the current study are from existential psychology. The un-effectiveness of logotherapy on anxiety can be interpreted from the fact that the existential school of thought does not deal with all types of anxiety the same. Existentialists believe there is a type of anxiety called "authentic anxiety" which is unavoidable and can affect as a positive power toward self-awareness. It is possible that the instruments applied in this research were not compatible with that type of anxiety. Qualitative case studies indicated that there are some possibilities regarding changing the type of adolescent's anxiety after treatment. For instance, a few subjects stated they have become worried about

the meaninglessness of their parents' lives. Some other girls had declared that if they died tomorrow what would be the value of their life? These statements and reports indicate there have been some types of new anxiety arising from treatment. Concepts such as meaninglessness, responsibility, loneliness, and death can produce anxiety. A more meticulous investigation of this matter requires further studies with more compatible tools or qualitative methods.

Emphasis on the subject's agency and their potential for organizing and giving meaning to a meaningless universe can increase the adolescent's internal power, decrease their confusion, and improve their self-confidence when encountering to ambiguous and fluctuating universe. This can improve the inner locus of control. Existentialism and logotherapy welcome human's difficulties, pains, and affiliations; and interpret them as an opportunity for growth and development. Life without meaning is empty. Meaning is available to each individual under any circumstances. Meaning seeking, can solve difficulties of adolescence and puberty, creating new values and meanings. In this landscape, adolescents regard themselves as the creators of meanings in a meaningless universe. Further application of such a useful method of therapy is necessary.

Future research needs to include adults and participants from both genders, and study people from various cultures. Both science and religion contribute to meaning (Aghababaei, Sohrabi, Eskandari, Borjali, Farrokhi, & Chen, 2016). Thus, future research that examines the interactions of attitudes towards science and religion to logotherapy might help untangle the effects of these two sources of meaning on meaning-related psychotherapies. Investigation of the effectiveness of logotherapy on other aspects of positive functioning is also suggested.

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