Coping and Diary Writing Experience in Mothers of Troubled Teenagers and Adult Children
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AUTHORS

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OBJECTIVES/FINDING:

- Diary writing practice can improve the level of emotional well-being or the affected mothers.
- Implementing a positive writing intervention is a practical means to encourage adaptive coping strategies for affected mothers/
Parents experience emotional distress when dealing with their troubled children with emotional and/or behavioral problems; however, limited resources exist to support the mental health for affected parents (Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012; Pillemer, Suitor, Riffin, & Gilligan, 2017).

Writing intervention has not been examined in populations of mother affected by children with emotional and behavioral problems. (Orford, Velleman, Natera, Templeton, & Copello, 2013).
3 Factors of adaptive coping (Folkman, 1997, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem-focused</th>
<th>Emotion-focused coping</th>
<th>Meaning-focused coping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • to do something for dealing with the source of the stress | • to reduce or manage negative emotions | • focusing on positive meaning
  • Religiosity
  • Religious coping |
Expressive Writing (EW) (Pennebaker, 2013 & Nazarian & Smyth, 2013)

- Exposure Based
- Cognitive Processing
- Self Regulation

Positive Writing
- Best Possible Self
- Gratitude
- Benefit Finding
Positive Writing (Self Regulation)

**BEST POSSIBLE SELF (BPS)**
- developing goals for and visualizing a best possible future self. (Meshberg-Cohen et al., 2011).
- increased satisfaction with life, positive affect, optimism, and overall well-being (Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2011; Peters, Meevissen, & Hanssen, 2013).
- significantly boosted positive emotions and flow, and marginally increased a sense of relatedness. (Layous, Nelson, and Lyubomirsky, 2013)

**GRATITUDE**
- expressing what one is grateful for over a period of time. (Lomas, Froh, Emmons, Mishra, & Bono, 2014)
- depression, stress, and happiness improved over time among the participating women (O’Leary and Dockray, 2015).
- in the gratitude group reported significantly better mental health than those in the expressive and control groups (Wong et al., 2016).
Coping and Diary Writing Experience in Mothers of Troubled Teenagers and Adult Children

- To explore the benefits of a six week diary writing intervention.
- To understand the coping strategies utilized among mothers of troubled teenagers and adult children.
Design

**QUANTITATIVE**
- A quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest design
  - Pre-test
  - 6 week Home writing
  - Post-test

**QUALITATIVE**
- Commonly used coping strategies (pre-test)
- Experiences of a diary writing intervention (post-test).
Sample & Power Analysis

**Sample:** 34 affected mothers of teenagers or adult children with emotional or behavioral problems.

**Power Analysis: G*Power**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Large Effect</th>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Alpha (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paired T-test</td>
<td>$d=0.5$</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-test Measures

**RELIGIOSITY**

- **Religious involvement** (Koenig & Büssing, 2010).

  The Duke University Religion Index (DUREL) (5 items)
  - Organizational religious activity (ORA Subscale)
  - Non-organizational religious activity (NORA Subscale),
  - Intrinsic religiosity (or subjective religiosity) (IR Subscale)

**RELIGIOUS COPING**

- **Efforts to understand and deal with life stressors in ways related to the sacred** (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011).

  Brief RCOPE (14 items)
  - Positive religious coping (PRC)
  - Negative religious coping (NRC)
### Procedure/Measures

**Pre-test**
- Demographic Qs
- Religiosity (DUREL)
- Religious coping (Brief RCOPE)
- Emotional well-being
  - Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)
  - Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6)
  - Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) (Optimism & Pessimism)
- 5 most commonly used coping methods

**Home Writing**
- Gratitude journal
- Best possible self journal
  - A journal book (about 15-20 minutes for each journal entry)
  - Weekly prompts
  - Entries at least 3 times per week for 6 weeks.
  - Confidential Journal

**Post-test**
- Exit Questionnaire
- Emotional well-being
  - 5 Open ended questions
  - How do you feel about completing the 6-week journal?
  - What are the most beneficial experiences for you?
  - What are the most unpleasant experiences for you?
  - If you have experiences and difficulties while making journal entries, can you share them?
  - Do you have any additional thoughts or comments about the writing experience?
Results

Mothers’ Characteristics and Issues of Their Children

- N=34
  - teenagers (n=7)
  - adult aged children (n=27)

- Ages
  - ranged 37 to 71 years
  - mean of 55.32

- white (n=30, 88.2%), & married (n=26, 76.5%).

- Religion
  - Protestants (n=13, 38.2%)
  - Catholics (n=9, 26.5%),
  - Others (n=12, 35.3%)

- Issues of Children
  - n=18 (52.9%)
    - emotional and behavioral issues
  - n=16 (47.1%)
    - substance use problems
### Quantitative Findings

**Religiosity and religious coping: pre-test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All (n=34)</th>
<th>Group A (n=16)</th>
<th>Group B (n=18)</th>
<th>T (df), p</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ORA</td>
<td>4.03 (1.56)</td>
<td>4.25 (1.88)</td>
<td>3.89 (1.28)</td>
<td>.661 (df=32), p=.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORA</td>
<td>4.14 (1.63)</td>
<td>4.25 (1.82)</td>
<td>4.11 (1.41)</td>
<td>.243(df=32), p =.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>12.83 (2.67)</td>
<td>12.88 (3.30)</td>
<td>12.78 (2.16)</td>
<td>.102 (df=32), p=.92</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>21.31 (6.64)</td>
<td>22.00 (7.19)</td>
<td>20.78 (6.46)</td>
<td>.52 (df=32), p=.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRC</td>
<td>8.74 (2.55)</td>
<td>8.86 (2.85)</td>
<td>8.72 (2.41)</td>
<td>.145 (df=30), p=.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ORA</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. NORA</td>
<td>.842</td>
<td>.000**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.000**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. IR</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>.000**</td>
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<td>4. PRC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.000**</td>
<td>.000**</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.588</td>
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<td>5. NRC</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.133</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.588</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.462</td>
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<td>6. Life Satisfaction</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
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<td>.04</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Optimism</td>
<td>.401</td>
<td>.356</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.01*</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.02*</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Pessimism</td>
<td>.205</td>
<td>.313</td>
<td>.318</td>
<td>.282</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Post-test (n=34) (M=15.31)

BEST POSSIBLE SELF (BPS) JOURNAL
= n= 17

GRATITUDE (GW) JOURNAL
= n=17

✓ All (N=34): At an average of 15.31 times over a 6-week period
✓ t-test: no statistical difference in number of journal entries between the BPS group (M= 14.18) and the GW group (M=16.39).
✓ Pearson correlation analyses: no statistical correlations between the number of journal entries and all emotional well-being scores (life satisfaction, gratitude, optimism and pessimism).
## Mean Differences of Emotional Well-being: Pre-and Posttest (N=34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total (n=34)</th>
<th>BPS (n=17)</th>
<th>Gratitude (n=17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>p value</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SWLS</strong></td>
<td>24.18</td>
<td>25.62</td>
<td>.134</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GQ-6</strong></td>
<td>33.41</td>
<td>34.79</td>
<td>.013*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optimism</strong></td>
<td>9.32</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>.007**</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pessimism</strong></td>
<td>9.41</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>.189</td>
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</table>

*Significant at .05 level
**Significant at .01 level
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Coping Methods</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem- Focused</td>
<td>Active coping</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical recreation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking relaxing diversion (hobbies)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking of instrumental social support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solution focused coping</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Focused</td>
<td>Seeking of emotional support</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional relaxation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expressing emotion</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Focused</td>
<td>Religious coping</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benefit Reminding</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boundary Interpretation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reordering Priorities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Rapid Turnaround Analysis: journaling experience

### 3 major themes (7 sub-themes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive thinking (27)</th>
<th>Emotional well-being (38)</th>
<th>Self-therapy (24)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Focus (13)</td>
<td>• Gratitude (14)</td>
<td>• Therapeutic experience (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changing perspective (14)</td>
<td>• Positive emotion (11)</td>
<td>• Stress management (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relaxation (13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: Positive Thinking (n=27)

**FOCUS (N=13)**

- Able to quiet my mind and focus on one thought or life issue at a time.” (Participant 4).

- It kept me focused on the goals that I have for myself. I feel very good about myself. It caused me to ‘stay in the moment’ and appreciate all the good and positive things that happened to me.” (Participant 21).

**CHANGING PERSPECTIVE (N=14)**

- “looking beyond the situation, seeking the Lord’s purpose. I see my environment with a new light, and because of this, I function with more ease.” (Participant 5).

- Able to clearly process my thoughts, so I do not react to situations, rather I am able to get a different perspective....” (Participant 2).

- Increase “the awareness of God’s goodness in my troubles.” (Participant 13).
Theme 2 Emotional Well-being (n=38)

**GRATITUDE (N=14)**

- “gratitude was at the forefront of my daily activities and decisions. It was a gentle reminder to think about and acknowledge all that I am grateful for.” (Participant 235).
- “It was very rewarding to show how grateful I was for everything in my life. God is so good and I am thankful, really looking at the gratitude and also talking to my family about how grateful I am for her [daughter] and everyone. She [daughter] is also looking at journaling and wants a spiritual relationship with God...... it does make you look at gratitude in a new light- we are blessed.” (Participant 22).

**POSITIVE EMOTION (N=11)**

- “I actually felt more positive and uplifted. I have never been one to keep a diary or journal before, but I definitely see the impact it can have.” (Participant 19).
- “even though I struggled at times, I believe I came out on top. I always felt better.” (Participant 5).
- “it was refreshing and made me feel good to have spent the extra time with God.” (Participant 6).
Theme 2 Emotional Well-being (n=38)

*Relaxation (n=13)*

- “[it] is nice because everything seems so busy all the time. By taking a pause, I did feel more calm in that moment. However, there were times that I felt it was another thing on my ‘to do’ list. Taking that pause and recognizing everything I’ve been blessed with. Journaling would lead me into mindfulness which is very beneficial.” (Participant 16).

- “it allowed me to have ‘me’ time, and time to consider my feelings, to have time for introspection and how I really feel and think about things both happening in my life and what the future may look like, and how I may get there. Journaling provided me with relaxation and focus.” (Participant 28).
Theme 3: Self-Therapy (n=24)

**THERAPEUTIC EXPERIENCE (N=11)**
- “it was a cathartic experience and an excellent way to express my emotions, rather than talking to someone else about my feelings.” (Participant 4)
- “Journaling allows me to free my mind of recurring thoughts related to problems .... It’s somehow cathartic to write down, verbalize thoughts on paper. It’s the ultimate private meeting or conversation where no one will be offended by your intimate conversation. Journaling helps me to center and ‘talk through’ my thoughts- good and bad.” (Participant 34).
- “writing helps me to look deeper! Think of what I am doing and how I can do or be better self-improvement.” (Participant 20).

**STRESS MANAGEMENT (N=13)**
- “this was an enlightening experience. It was valuable to spend time concentrating on what is worthy in my current and future life. It was a nice way to give myself a glimpse of positivity and my best future. .... It was good to just sit down and specifically share what I am thankful for when I often spend time stressing.” (Participant 23).
- “Developing a sense of letting go and not focusing on the negative worrisome possibilities that may not ever happen. ...I feel I’d be further at getting thoughts down- for me my best was stress decreasing gradually and being in sunshine.” (Participant 31).
Discussion

Coping Methods

- Qualitative Findings
  1. Emotion F (40%)
  2. Meaning F (34.84%)
  3. Problem F (25.16%)
  (Folkman, 2008)

- Top Ranks
  1. Religious coping (48%)
  2. Seeking emotional support (37%)
  3. Distraction strategies (28%)
  4. Active coping (13%)

- Quantitative Findings
  - Positive religious coping (21.54) >
  - Negative religious coping (8.74)

- Religiosity and Positive religious coping
  - Religious mothers with problematic children might rely on more positive religious coping strategies (Sharak, Bonab, & Jahed, 2017).
Discussion

Benefits of Diary Writing

- **Quantitative Findings**
  - The level of **optimism and gratitude** statistically significantly increased after the writing intervention
  - BPS Group: increases in **life satisfaction and optimism**

- **Qualitative Findings**
  1. **cultivating positive thinking** by
     1. focusing on positive thought and
     2. changing perspectives
  2. **improving emotional well-being** by
     1. increasing awareness of gratitude, and
     2. uplifting emotions and
     3. providing relaxation
  3. **serving as self-therapy** by
     1. providing therapeutic experience and
     2. stress management.
Limitations & Conclusions

- Sample characteristics
  - Caucasian background (89.2%) & religious mothers (64.7%)
  - Self-selection of women
Questions?

Coping and Diary Writing Experience in Mothers

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