Effectiveness of Best Possible Self and Gratitude Writing Interventions among the Parents of Troubled Children

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Introduction
- Parents experience emotional distress when dealing with their troubled children with emotional or behavioral problems; however, limited resources exist to support the mental health for affected parents (Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012; Pillemer, Suitor, Riffin, & Gilger, 2017).
- Diary writing has been found to alleviate stress, lower depression, and improve emotional well-being (Alexander, Maltz, & Aloni, 2013; Westberg-Cohen, Suls, & Malott, 2012; Morley, Lerner, & Stephenson, 2013).
- Writing intervention has not been examined in populations of parents affected by children with emotional and behavioral problems (Anthony, Ivins, Verhees, & Capella, 2016).

Expressive Writing (EW)
- Exposure-Based
- Cognitive
- Positive Writing
- Self Regulation

Expressive Writing (Self Regulation)
- Best Possible Self
- Benefit Finding
- Positive Writing
- Self Reflection

Method
To evaluate the effectiveness of BPS and GW interventions on physiological and psychosocial outcomes in a sample of affected parents with teenagers or adult children with emotional or behavioral problems.

Hypotheses:
1. Both BPS and GW groups will demonstrate improved mental health and emotional well-being after 6 weeks of diary writing.
2. Both BPS and GW groups will exhibit decreases in blood pressure and cortisol level after 6 weeks of diary writing.

Sample:
A convenience sample of 37 affected parents of teenagers or adult children with emotional or behavioral problems (Anthony, Ivins, Verhees, & Capella, 2016).

Results
- Total analysis:
  - Age: 55.34 (SD = 8.25), Range: 37-71
  - Mothers: 35 (94.6%)
  - White: 33 (89.2%)
  - Behavioral/Emotional issues: 20 (54.1%)
  - Substance use: 17 (45.9%)
- Design:
  - A quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest design

Baseline Data
- Total analysis:
  - Satisfaction: SWLS 24.57 (SD = 5.46), Range: 5-35
  - Gratitude: GQ-6 33.49 (SD = 4.38), Range: 28-41
  - Optimism: LOT-R 11.12 (SD = 1.84), Range: 4-12
  - Pessimism: LOT-R 9.51 (SD = 2.04), Range: 4-12
  - Stress: PSS 10.14 (SD = 2.89), Range: 0-30
- Design:
  - A quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest design

- Measures:
  - Emotional well-being
  - Satisfaction: With Life Scale (SWLS)
  - Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6)
  - Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R)
  - Depression, stress, and happiness improved over time among the participating women and families (Verhees et al., 2012).
  - The gratitude group reported significantly better mental health than those in the expressive and control groups (Binge et al., 2010).

- Hypothesis 2a: Systolic BP & Diastolic BP

Findings
- Journal Entries
  - 37 completed: GW journal (n=20) & a BPS journal (n=17)
  - An average of 15 times over a 6-week period (M=15.43)
  - No significant associations between number of journal entries and psychosocial outcome variables.

- Hypothesis 1: Effectiveness of 6 Week Writing Journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome variable</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>M(SD)/Range**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>[5-35]</td>
<td>24.57(5.46)/7-32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>GQ-6</td>
<td>[4-42]</td>
<td>33.49(4.38)/28-41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>LOT-R</td>
<td>[0-12]</td>
<td>11.12(1.84)/4-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pessimism</td>
<td>LOT-R</td>
<td>[0-12]</td>
<td>9.51(2.04)/4-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>PSS</td>
<td>[0-40]</td>
<td>10.14(2.89)/0-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>PHQ-9</td>
<td>[0-27]</td>
<td>2.07(3.67)/0-17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>GAD-7</td>
<td>[0-21]</td>
<td>4.47(3.3)/0-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somatic Symptoms</td>
<td>PHQ-S</td>
<td>[0-30]</td>
<td>7.3(3.5)/0-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The mean cortisol level did not significantly differ between time points for either group (p=.094).

Conclusions
- Although preliminary, overall, the current research supports journal writing interventions to improve mental health for this population.
- The BPS and GW journals can be used to promote emotional well-being for affected parents without cost or burden.
- Considering limited resources are available for supporting family members in communities, nurses could recommend writing interventions to clients as a self-help tool for improving mental health.
- Future research should consider using large heterogeneous samples to enable group comparison with statistical power between the best possible self and gratitude writing groups.

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