

The Effectiveness of Compassion-Focused Group Counseling with Imagery and Chair Work Techniques to Increase Students' Self-Esteem

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Abstract

Self-esteem is significant for an individual's life due to its ability to direct oneself in valuing something, deciding proper attitudes towards different interpersonal relationships, and motivating the development of self-potential. Regarding this urgency, the present study attempted to examine the effectiveness of compassion-focused group counseling using imagery and chair work techniques to increase the self-esteem of students at SMP IT Al-Multazam 2, Kuningan. It was an experimental research taht used a randomized pretest-posttest comparison group design. Here, 12 students were randomly selected using a purposive sampling technique from 72 students whose self-esteem was low. They were further grouped into two experimental groups. Based on the results of Wilcoxon and Mann Whitney tests, the compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques has been effective to increase students' self-esteem. Moreover, the study implications, findings, and discussion are deeply explained in the discussion section.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is a form of attitudes evaluation based on an individual's self-worth feelings, including both positive and negative (Murk, 2006). Self-esteem affects an action that individuals about to take and the execution of it (Guindon, 2010). Therefore, self-esteem turns into a determining factor in the success or failure of all adolescents' life tasks (Boden, Ferfusson & Horwood, 2008).

Any self-esteem problems arisen in adolescents' lives will affect their development due to the gap between their ideals and actual views (Murk, 2006). This gap can trigger someone to present particular behavior he wishes to exhibit to people because self-esteem is correlated with self-confidence, in other words, whenever one's self-confidence is low, so is his self-esteem (Wang & Ollendick, 2001).

Adolescents need good self-esteem to succeed in the aspects of academic, social, and mental health. Bos, Murriss, Mulken & Schaalma (2006) state that self-esteem is an important construct that correlates with academic achievement, social relationships and psychopathology problems in children and adolescents. Regarding academic achievement, some studies show that individuals with low self-esteem achieves poor success in school (Mann, Hosman, et al., in Bos, Murriss, Mulken & Schaalma, 2006).

A study by Doodman, Zadeh, da Changizi (2017) found students with low self-esteem often achieve lower academic outcomes than those with the high one due to the ability of self-esteem that motivates students to study, remain focused, and be eager to take risks.

In line with the above study, another investigation by Trzesniewski (in Fishbein & Azjen, 1975) shows that adolescents with low self-esteem are vulnerable to experiencing physical and mental health problems in adulthood. Also, they have a greater chance to experience mental health and substance abuse compared to those with high self-esteem. This happens because self-esteem has a stronger effect on behavior change and more specifically has

many similarities with the concept of self-efficacy.

Some counseling can be possibly applied to increase counselees' self-esteem. It is recorded in several previous studies that have attempted to show the effectiveness of several counseling approaches in dealing with this issue, such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) (Amalia & Hildayani, 2018; Waite, McManus & Shafran, 2012; Wanders, Serra & de Jongh, 2008), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Moradi, et al., 2020), and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) (Soleimania, Ghasemzadeh & Ebrahimnezhad, 2012).

Of the various approaches described above, there are counseling approaches that can overcome shame and self-hatred which are often related to self-esteem problems. Those teach how to develop a more comprehensive understanding of oneself, which can help a person feel more positive about himself in a compassionate way. This approach is known as Compassion-focused Therapy (hereinafter abbreviated as CFT). CFT is increasingly favoured as an intervention for a variety of psychological disorders, including depression, anxiety and schizophrenia, in which clinical psychology is increasingly recognized (Spring & Neville, 2011).

CFT recognizes that compassion flows in three directions, the one that we can feel for others, from others to ourselves, and direct towards ourselves (self-compassion). (Gilbert, 2014). Self-compassion manages negative affect through caring behavior and communicating feelings of warmth and security. Several studies have investigated the relationship between self-compassion and well-being. A survey study using self-compassion scales shows self-compassion is correlated with quality of life (Van Dam et al. 2011), well-being (Neff et al. 2007; Neely et al. 2009) and family functioning (Neff & McGehee, 2010). An increase in self-compassion has been found to be related to a decrease in psychiatric symptoms, interpersonal problems and personality pathology (Schanche et al. 2011). Some studies have also found that

self-compassion and self-esteem are correlated (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2008).

CFT has several techniques, two of which are compassionate imagery and compassionate chair work. Compassionate imagery is the visualization of compassion towards other people, or imagining people, places or objects that direct compassion towards oneself (Gilbert, 2010). Compassionate imagery experiments in non-clinical populations result in reduced negative emotions, increased self-esteem, and changes in defensive behavior (Lincoln, Hohenhaus, & Hartmann, 2013; Rockliff, Gilbert, McEwan, Lightma, & Glover, 2008). Compassionate chair work focuses on chairs, their positions, and the client's movements between them, for a variety of therapeutic purposes. Compassionate chair work interventions are usually classified as 'empty chair' or 'two chair' techniques (Kellogg, 2015). The empty chair technique often involves the client with a remembered or imagined 'other person' in the empty chair. The technique is

associated with resolving 'unfinished business', such as problematic grief or emotional conflict (Tobin, 1976).

Regarding the findings and discussion of the previous studies, there has been no experimental study regarding the effectiveness of compassion-focused group counseling using imagery and chair work techniques to increase students' self-esteem.

METHODS

The subjects in this study were 72 students at SMPIT Al-Multazam 2. They were grouped using a random assignment with the number of students taken being 12. In this study, the number of participants in grade VII at SMPIT Al-Multazam 2 Kuningan was grouped into an experimental group in which each consisted of 6 students per group. Samples were taken using purposive sampling with the criteria presented in table 1:

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Current students in grade VII at SMPIT Al-Multazam 2 in the academic year of 2023/2024	Current students in grade VII at SMPIT Al-Multazam 2 in the academic year of 2023/2024
Having low self-esteem	Having high self-esteem
Never join compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques	Ever join compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques
Willing to join compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques	Unwilling to join compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques

In collecting the data, the instrument used was a self-esteem scale developed by the researchers based on Coopersmith's (1981) theory. Aspects of self-esteem include power, significance, virtuousness, and competence. Items in the self-esteem scale have 4 scaling options for favorable measurements (1= strongly disagree (STS); 4= strongly agree (SS) and unfavorable measurements (1= strongly disagree (SS); 4= strongly agree (STS). Based on the results of the item validity test, 26 validity items were declared valid, while the rests were not. In terms of reliability, the self-esteem scale obtained a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82.

A randomized pretest-posttest comparison group experimental design was employed by the researchers in conducting this study. In this way, two groups were involved (imagery group and chair work group). Each group was given a pretest. In the imagery group, after carrying out the pretest, intervention was provided in the form of imagery technique. Meanwhile, the chair work group was given intervention using the chair work technique.

Several stages were carried out in this study. First, the self-esteem scale pretest was administered. Second, there were counseling interventions in the compassion-focused to the imagery technique group and the chair work technique group for 6 sessions with a duration of 2x40 minutes. The stages of compassion-focused group counseling consisted of psychoeducation stage, mindfulness stage, compassion stage and imagery stage. The imagery technique intervention was carried out at the imagery stage and the chair work group was treated using the chair work technique.

Imagery technique intervention involves visualization and expressing emotions in the form of images or writing. Clients are directed to imagine mental images that are calming, safe, and full of love. They are also asked to describe visualizations and expressions. On the other

hand, the chair work technique intervention focuses on the chair, its position, and the client's movements. Clients are directed to imagine situations or events that trigger negative emotions or thoughts in him. Then, they are asked to act out various roles within themselves, such as the role of the party who feels hurt and the role of the party who provides support and understanding. Third, the posttest was given by administering a self-esteem scale to the imagery group and the chair work group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the pretest score obtained from the self-esteem scale, the imagery group obtained the mean of 37.33 (SD= 3.14), while the chair work of 38.17 (SD= 38.17).

Following the intervention of compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques to the students with low self-esteem, the posttest scores mean of students increased, namely 68 (SD= 10.64) for the imagery group and 74.33 (SD= 12.48) for the chair work group.

Furthermore, to determine the effectiveness of compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques, Wilcoxon test was carried out. The results showed that the effectiveness attained by the imagery technique was ($Z = -2.201$, $p < 0.05$), while the chair work technique was ($Z = -2.201$, $p < 0.05$), proving both have been effective in increasing students' self-esteem.

In terms of the Mann Whitney test, there was no higher level difference between the imagery group and the chair work group at the posttest ($Z = -0.12$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, the compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques gained the same effectiveness in increasing students' self-esteem at SMPIT Al-Multazam 2.

Table 2. The Effectiveness of Compassion-Focused Group Counseling with Imagery and Chair Work Techniques to Increase Students' Self-Esteem

Group	Pretest		Posttest		Z1
	M	SD	M	SD	
Imagery	37.33	3.14	68	10.64	- 2.201*
Chair Work	38.17	2.78	74.33	12.48	- 2.201*
Z2	-0.56		-0.12		

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, T1: Pretest, T2: Posttest, Z1: Wilcoxon Test Values, Z2: Mann-Whitney Test Values, VT: Dependent Variable.

According to the findings, the compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques has been effective in increasing students' self-esteem. It is in line with the study by Saadati et al. (2017) which found the effectiveness of compassion focused therapy in strengthening and increasing self-esteem. Then, the results of Ashworth, Gracey & Gilbert's (2011) single case study are consistent with meta-analysis findings with compassion-focused therapy promoting clinically meaningful changes in self-esteem.

The results showed that the implementation of compassion-focused group counseling with both imagery techniques and chair work techniques were equally effective in increasing self-esteem, and there was no significant difference between the two. With no difference in both techniques, the future counselors may choose one of which to be implemented in the compassion-focused group counseling.

In compassion-focused therapy (Gilbert, 2010), imagery technique is used to increase levels of compassion and regulate feelings of threat. A study by Lincoln et al. (2013) concludes that imagery technique leads to increases in self-esteem. In addition, chair work technique represents a group of applied interventions in which clients engage in imaginal dialogue (Perls, 1973). The main goal of the chair work technique is to explore underlying and meaningful feelings to achieve resolution of

personal difficulties through an intervention process (Greenberg et al., 1993; Perls, 1973). Arimitsu (2016) conducted a study using the chair work technique and revealed a significant increase in the aspect of self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the explanation in the results and discussions session, this study was conducted to examine whether the compassion-focused group counseling with imagery and chair work techniques can improve the students' self-esteem at SMPIT Al-Multazam 2 Kuningan.

After the discussion, it is expected that the present study can be a reference for school counselors to implement the compassion-focused group counseling to increase low self-esteem in students using imagery and chair work techniques. Moreover, the future researchers can further observe changes in the implementation of compassion-focused counseling from other approaches, such as cognitive behavior therapy or mindfulness-based cognitive therapy to increase more varied subjects of the study, such as senior high school students or university students. Also, there is a possibility to add a control group and follow-up.

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