

Group psychological counseling for adolescent inmates' psychological harmony

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Abstract: Objective: To investigate the effect of group psychological counseling on improving the psychological harmony of adolescent inmates. Methods: Twenty participants from a juvenile correctional facility were divided into a control group and an experimental group. The experimental group underwent 10 sessions of group psychological counseling. The National Psychological Harmony Questionnaire was administered for pre-test, post-test, and re-test assessments. Results: After the intervention, significant differences were observed between the experimental and control groups in self-state, family atmosphere, interpersonal relationships, and the total score of psychological harmony ($t=2.656, 4.905, 5.424, 3.536; P<0.01$). The improvement in psychological harmony in the experimental group was significantly greater than that in the control group during the same period ($t=2.920, 4.076, 2.856, 3.397; P<0.01$). Conclusion: Group psychological counseling is effective for enhancing psychological harmony in adolescent inmates, and the effects are sustainable.

Keywords: Educational Psychology, Psychological Harmony, Group Psychological Counseling, Adolescent Inmates

1. Introduction

The Decision on Several Major Issues in Building a Socialist Harmonious Society, adopted at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, emphasized the need to "promote psychological harmony among individuals" in national development. This has since made psychological harmony a prominent focus in the localized study of psychology in China. Current research mainly unfolds in three dimensions: First, theoretical exploration of the connotation and structure of psychological harmony. Lin Chongde posits that psychological harmony encompasses three dimensions: the relationship with oneself, relationships with others, and the relationship with society. Shi Guoxing defines it as "a psychological phenomenon reflecting internal and external psychological relations, embodying the overall coordination, relative stability, and comprehensive manifestation of the relationships among internal psychological elements, between individuals and tasks, interpersonal relationships, and the mind-body connection." The Psychological Harmony Research Project Group of the Chinese Academy of Sciences describes psychological harmony as "the subjective experience and overall feeling of individuals in dealing with issues related to self, family, interpersonal relationships, and society." This study is based on the definition provided by the CAS project group. Second, the development of tools to measure psychological harmony. Examples include the National Psychological Harmony Status Questionnaire compiled by the CAS group; the Psychological Harmony Scale for Persons with Disabilities revised by Zhou Lingang and Zhou Huzeng; the College Students' Psychological Harmony Scale developed by Wu Jiujun and Zheng Richang; the Psychological Harmony Questionnaire for Adolescent Students compiled by Shi Guoxing, Lu Yunqing, and Wang Ziwei; and the Chinese Farmers' Psychological Harmony Scale created by Zhao Zhiliang, and others. Third, investigating the psychological harmony status of different groups and exploring optimization strategies. The CAS group surveyed over 4,000 participants; Li Hui et al. conducted a study involving 1,275 farmers in Yunnan and Henan provinces; He Peiyu researched employees in private enterprises, and so forth. Regarding intervention studies aimed at optimizing psychological harmony, Wu Jiujun and Zheng Richang achieved significant results using group counseling to intervene in the psychological harmony of college students. Wang Min and Zheng Quan utilized sandplay therapy to

enhance psychological harmony in deaf children. Li Ke promoted psychological harmony among college students through Tai Chi Rouli Ball exercises.

A review of existing research reveals a scarcity of studies focusing on the psychological harmony of special populations. Specifically, intervention research employing group psychological counseling with incarcerated adolescents as participants remains unexplored. Incarcerated adolescents are prone to becoming a counterforce affecting social harmony. However, with scientific and effective educational and rehabilitative measures, along with positive psychological interventions, they can potentially be transformed into a constructive force in the building of a harmonious society.

This study applies group psychological counseling to intervene in the psychological harmony of incarcerated adolescents, aiming to address the current gaps in psychological harmony research and provide references for the scientific application of psychology in the education and rehabilitation of incarcerated adolescents within China's prison system.

2. Subjects and methods

2.1. Subjects

Based on practical considerations, this study randomly selected 20 participants from a certain district of a provincial juvenile correctional facility. All participants were male, aged between 16 and 22, with an education level of junior high school or high school. Their sentences primarily ranged from 1 to 5 years. Balanced according to factors such as age, education level, sentence length, and urban/rural residence, 10 participants were assigned to the experimental group and 10 to the control group.

2.2. Methods

This study employed a pretest-posttest control group design. The experimental intervention was conducted in the form of group psychological counseling.

2.2.1. Research instrument

The National Psychological Harmony Status Questionnaire, compiled by the Psychological Harmony Project Group of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was used. This questionnaire consists of 49 items, employing a 5-point Likert self-rating scale. It is divided into four subscales: Self-State, Family Atmosphere, Interpersonal Relationships, and Social Attitude. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the pretests, posttests, and all dimensions of the full sample were all close to or exceeded 0.7, indicating that the use of the National Psychological Harmony Status Questionnaire to measure the psychological harmony of incarcerated adolescents is valid and feasible.

2.2.2. Research procedure

Participants were randomly selected and assigned to the experimental and control groups. A pretest was administered to both the experimental and control groups to assess their homogeneity. Group counseling was implemented for the experimental group. Due to prison conditions, the control group did not receive any intervention. A posttest was administered using the National Psychological Harmony Status Questionnaire to both groups after the group counseling concluded. The experimental group completed a Group Activity Evaluation Form to provide a subjective assessment of the entire group counseling program. Group members were asked to write reflections on their participation. A retest was conducted one month later.

2.2.3. Group counseling program

Based on theories related to group psychological counseling such as group dynamics, interpersonal communication, and social learning, and after consulting relevant experts and drawing on the successful experiences of previous research, a group counseling program was designed. Corresponding to the structure of psychological harmony, four units were designed, following the working process of group psychological counseling (Beginning - Transition - Working - Ending). The specific design is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Group Counseling Program for Incarcerated Adolescents

Unit	Unit Objectives	Main Activities
Interpersonal Interaction: You, Me and Him/ Her	1. Clarify group goals, understand the nature of the group, and promote mutual familiarity. 2. Promote and enhance psychological harmony, deepen members' understanding of each other, feel the power of the collective, learn new models of interpersonal communication, and establish good interpersonal relationships. 3. Examine the group's cohesion and the level of participation of members in the group.	Wish Fairy, Snowball Fight, Beating the Lovers, Love in the Fingertips, Homeless, Noah's Ark
Growing Up in the Family	1. Members recall positive events with constructive significance in the family, helping them understand that the interactive relationship with parents is an important condition for their personality formation. 2. Assist members in understanding the efforts parents have made in their growth process, understand their parents, and make family relationships more harmonious.	You Do I Learn, I and My Parents, The Trilogy of Growth, When I Was Young
Everyone Has Their Own Talents	1. Enhance members' self - confidence and encourage them to face themselves bravely. 2. Members encourage and support each other to improve their self - state and perfect themselves. 3. Learn to cherish what they have and their current life in the experience of loss, learn to be grateful, change their mindset, and become more open - minded.	Passing on Confidence, My Self - portrait, Patting Each Other on the Back, 25 Choices
Integrating into the Big Family of Society	1. Learn to trust and help each other, and realize the importance of integrating into society. 2. The successful state is a win - win one, and learn to be tolerant. 3. Feel that a united group has greater energy. 4. End the group in a friendly and cooperative atmosphere and extend the changes gained in the group to daily life.	Sit - up Together, Trust Journey, Heart Knot, Letter to Myself, A Loving Family

2.3. Statistical analysis

SPSS 19.0 was used for statistical analysis of the survey results. Statistical methods employed included descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and paired samples t-tests.

3. Results

3.1. T-test of pretest scores: Experimental vs. control group

First, the National Psychological Harmony Status Questionnaire was administered to the 20 participants (both experimental and control groups). A comparison with the national norms revealed that the scores of the experimental and control groups on all indicators of psychological harmony were significantly lower than the national norms. This indicates that both the experimental and control groups had significant issues in psychological harmony. The pretest results of the experimental and control groups were compared, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparison of Pretest Scores on Psychological Harmony Status between the Experimental and Control Groups (n=10, M±SD)

Item	Experimental Group	Control Group	t	P
Self - state	2.98±0.26	3.01±0.30	0.239	0.814
Family atmosphere	3.18±0.47	3.28±0.15	0.647	0.525
Interpersonal relationships	3.14±0.59	3.21±0.32	0.328	0.746
Social attitude	2.83±0.45	2.79±0.30	0.232	0.818
Total score of psychological harmony state	3.04±0.43	3.11±0.16	0.484	0.633

3.2. T-test of posttest scores: Experimental vs. control group

As shown in Table 3, after the completion of the intervention experiment, the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group in the remaining three dimensions of harmony and the total psychological harmony score, except for the social attitude dimension.

Table 3 Comparison of Posttest Scores on Psychological Harmony Status between the Experimental and Control Groups (n=10, M±SD)

Item	Experimental Group	Control Group	t	P
Self - state	3.47±0.25	3.09±0.38	2.656	0.016
Family atmosphere	4.15±0.47	3.21±0.39	4.905	0.000
Interpersonal relationships	3.74±0.24	3.25±0.16	5.424	0.000
Social attitude	3.04±0.31	2.85±0.18	1.701	0.106
Total score of psychological harmony state	3.60±0.38	3.13±0.19	3.536	0.002

3.3. Pre Post change comparison: Experimental vs. control

Conducting a t-test on the increments between pre- and post-tests for the experimental group versus the control group is the most effective method for examining the efficacy of the experimental intervention. As shown in Table 4, except for the social attitude dimension, the increments in psychological harmony scores for the experimental group after receiving counseling were significantly higher than the corresponding increments for the control group across all other dimensions and the total score. This indicates that the experimental intervention yielded significant effects.

Table 4 Comparison of Differences in Pre- and Post-Test Scores on Psychological Harmony Status Between the Experimental and Control Groups (n=10, M±SD)

Item	Experimental Group: Pre- vs. Post-Test Difference	Control Group: Pre- vs. Post-Test Difference	t	P
Self - state	0.484±0.282	0.071±0.347	2.920	0.009
Family atmosphere	0.966±0.561	0.081±0.396	4.076	0.001
Interpersonal relationships	0.600±0.511	0.039±0.353	2.856	0.011
Social attitude	0.207±0.432	0.084±0.337	0.710	0.487
Total score of psychological harmony state	0.564±0.443	0.041±0.202	3.397	0.003

3.4. Retest results

To verify the effectiveness of this experiment, a post-test was conducted on the experimental group one month later. As shown in Table 5, the retest results of the experimental group one month later showed no significant differences compared to the measurement results taken one week after the group counseling concluded, across all dimensions and the total score. This indicates that the effects of the group counseling were sustained, and the experimental group maintained the positive psychological harmony status achieved at the end of the intervention.

Table 5 Comparison of Differences Between Retest and Posttest Scores on Psychological Harmony Status in the Experimental Group (n=10, M±SD)

Item	Experimental Group Retest	Experimental Group Posttest	t	P
Self - state	3.43±0.37	3.47±0.25	0.285	0.779
Family atmosphere	4.11±0.41	4.15±0.47	0.203	0.841
Interpersonal relationships	3.71±0.27	3.74±0.24	0.261	0.780
Social attitude	3.02±0.52	3.04±0.31	0.105	0.918
Total score of psychological harmony state	3.57±0.40	3.60±0.38	0.174	0.864

4. Discussion

The pretest using the National Psychological Harmony Status Questionnaire for both the experimental and control groups showed no significant differences in the total psychological harmony score and its individual dimensions, meeting the requirement of homogeneity between the experimental and control groups. After the intervention, the experimental group showed significant differences in the total psychological harmony score, as well as in all dimensions except for social attitude. This indicates that the group counseling had a certain impact on the experimental group. In contrast, the control group showed no significant changes in any dimension or the total score before and after the intervention. The increment in scores for the experimental group after the intervention compared to the increment for the control group without intervention showed significant differences in all dimensions except for social attitude, as well as in the total score. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the experimental intervention. Finally, a follow-up retest of the experimental group participants revealed no significant differences in the total psychological harmony score or any dimension when compared to the post-intervention test results, indicating that the effects of the group counseling in this study were sustained. The author analyzes the main reasons for the intervention's effectiveness as follows:

First, the group psychological counseling program was scientifically designed, reasonable, and targeted, and it received active cooperation from the participants. The program was based on theories related to psychological harmony, addressing the participants' interpersonal relationships, family atmosphere, self-state, and social attitude in a progressive manner. Feedback obtained from participants through a self-designed group activity evaluation form indicated that members recognized the group's working process, actively participated, and felt a warm and friendly group atmosphere. Participants were deeply moved by activities such as "Life Choices," "My Parents and I," and "My Self-Portrait." For example, some members "understood their parents' efforts, gained more self-confidence, and learned to live each day more meaningfully." They expressed thoughts such as: "Cherish everything you have now," "Love everyone around you," and "Be a good father."

Second, the group was well-organized, and the participants had profound experiences. During the activities, the participants felt the unique appeal of group psychological counseling, fully engaging in the group activities. The positive and meaningful experiences were the fundamental reasons for the changes observed in the participants. After the activities, participants wrote about their experiences in the group psychological counseling. For example, one participant wrote: "No matter the time or place, wearing the shoes my mother gave me, her great and selfless love will always be by my side, cheering me on, supporting and motivating me forever." Another wrote: "(I) understand my parents better and recognize their hopes and expectations for me, which strengthens my determination to reform, strive for early release, reduce my sentence, and reunite with my parents." These reflections show that the group psychological counseling in this study deeply resonated with the participants, becoming a rare and valuable experience in their lives. It provided them with an opportunity to re-examine their lives and reposition their goals. Such profound, enriching, and warm inner experiences undoubtedly helped improve their self-state, ease family tensions, enhance interpersonal relationships, adopt a more positive perspective on society, and ultimately optimize their psychological harmony.

5. Conclusion

Regarding the social attitude of the participants, although some changes were observed between the pre-test and post-test after the intervention, the differences in scores were not statistically significant. One possible reason could be the social desirability bias among incarcerated adolescents in the unique prison environment. Additionally, during the research conducted at the juvenile correctional facility, the author observed the meticulous care provided by the facility's leaders and officers toward the incarcerated adolescents. Whether such care has contributed to maintaining a relatively positive social attitude among these adolescents, who have minimal contact with the outside society, remains uncertain. This study did not delve deeply into this aspect, and further research is needed to provide supporting evidence.

6. References

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