APPLICATION OF COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING TECHNIQUES ON FEMALE ADOLESCENT WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Mohd Wafiy Akmal Ahmad Khadri  
School of Educational Studies  
Universiti Sains Malaysia  
Penang, Malaysia  
wafiy.akmal@gmail.com

Nor Shafrin Ahmad, Ph.D  
School of Educational Studies  
Universiti Sains Malaysia  
Penang Malaysia  
sham@usm.my

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to identify the self-esteem level, symptoms and the effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique (CRT) in improving self-esteem. This is a single case study involving a 17-year-old female adolescent selected via purposive sampling. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in data collection. Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES) was used to identify the client's self-esteem level, while interviews and observations using Mental Status Examination (MSE) were conducted to gather in-depth data on symptoms and the effectiveness of CRT. Six counseling sessions were conducted with the client. The difference between pre-test and post-test level was analyzed while categories and themes from qualitative data were developed using content analysis. Results showed that there was an increase in the client's self-esteem level as in post-test II, the score level of self-esteem was moderate while in post-test III, the score level was high. Three categories of self-esteem symptoms were identified which are emotion, cognitive and behavior. Results also showed that CRT is effective in helping female adolescent with low self-esteem.

Keywords: Cognitive Restructuring Technique, Adolescent, Female, Self-Esteem

I. INTRODUCTION

Each individual has their judgments and perceptions on their own self, which can be positive or negative. The age of adolescence is an age level where they begin to find their own identity and shape their personalities based on life experiences. So, adolescence is the stage where teens are struggling to identify self-identity, embrace physical changes, learn healthy lifestyle, build their characters or personal values, contribute to society and choose future career [3]. Individual self-assessment and self-perception is understood as self-esteem, which indicates to what extent an individual likes or dislikes his or her own self [12]. Previous studies found that most adolescents deal with low self-esteem issue at the beginning of adolescence [12]. It shows that adolescence is a critical period where teens start to build lifelong perception and trust, hold value and practice them in their life [3].

Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs [3] stated that self-esteem is important in instilling a healthy personality development for an individual. Self-esteem is portrayed as how individuals value themselves or being valued via self-assessment, which can be positive or negative [3]. Williams and Currie [24] explain that self-esteem among early teens is influenced by physical factors, when they begin to assess their body image and body satisfaction. Furthermore, to succeed in any area, an individual must have a high self-esteem level and be confident with their own ability [19]. Highly self-esteem individuals see themselves positively, they can control the negative emotions and be happy with their life, being respected by others [11]. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem are associated with a life filled with sadness, loneliness and disappointment [18]. In addition, low self-esteem adolescents view the world through negative lense, with hatred of themselves and this forms
negative perception of what is going on around [10]. According to Mahaffy [16], females tend to have lower self-esteem than males due to low academic achievement as well as declining work performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Cognitive Behavioral Approach

Cognitive behavioral approach is a combination of cognitive approach and behavioral approach. According to Knapp and Beck [15], this approach focuses on the influence of distorted thinking and unrealistic cognitive appraisal toward individual emotions, feelings and behavior. This approach has three basic principles. First, the role of mediation or cognitive deflection. It means how individuals’ cognition processes their experience and evaluate the events thus affecting their response to those events. Second, cognitive activities can be monitored. Third, behavioral changes occur due to mediated cognitive appraisals, which indirectly alter individual cognitive or thought.

In this approach, the focus is to restructure cognitive process and modify behaviour of an individual, from the irrational, maladaptive and negative thinking and behavior, to be more rational, adaptive and positive [17]. Maladaptive behavior, as well as disturbance of feelings and emotions in an individual is resulted from inappropriate judging toward an event, known as automatic thoughts. Beck [4] notes that dysfunctional thoughts that influence individual emotions and behavior are common for all psychological disorders. When an individual learns to evaluate their thinking in a more rational, realistic and adaptive way, they will experience improved emotional state and behavior.

B. Cognitive Restructuring Techniques

Adolescents, especially the high school students with low self-esteem level have different characteristics than those with high self-esteem level. Heatherton and Wyland [10] stated that most behavioral and social problems such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, violence, academic and criminal failures are attributed by low self-esteem. In this case, cognitive behavioral approach using cognitive restructuring techniques is applied by the researchers to female adolescents to help them improve their self-esteem. Individuals with high self-esteem level have higher academic achievement than those with low self-esteem [21]. Addison, Antwi and Avonokadzi [1] found that cognitive restructuring technique can help to improve students’ self-esteem and academic achievement. This is proven when the researchers find that self-esteem level is strongly correlated with academic achievement for the university students [2].

A study was done by Deacon, Fawzy, Lickel and Wolitzky-Taylor [9] to examine the effectiveness of two cognitive techniques (cognitive defusion and cognitive restructuring) in reducing negative thought among university students. The findings showed that the two techniques are efficient in curbing low self-esteem among students. This is in line with the previous study which found that cognitive restructuring techniques can improve self-esteem and reduce depression among college students [7].

Cognitive Behavioral Approach therapists argue that the best way to change maladaptive emotions and behavior is to tweak the dysfunctional thoughts [8]. In this technique, it is used to deal with psychological, emotional and behavioral issues of an individual. Knapp and Beck [15] mentioned the steps to carry out this technique; first, therapist needs to monitor and identify the automatic thoughts that exist in the mind of an individual. Second, therapist helps the individual to identify the relationship between automatic thought, cognition, emotion and behavior. Third, therapist then examines the authenticity of the automatic thought and core beliefs inherent to the individual. In this case, therapist asks the individual, from 1 to 10, to what extent his belief to the automatic thought and core beliefs. Fourth, therapist needs to assist the individual to identify his maladaptive thoughts and help the client to form a new, more realistic and adaptive kind of thinking. Lastly, the therapist helps the client to change his core beliefs and negative assumptions about himself.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study was conducted with the aim to achieve these three objectives: (a) To identify the client’s self-esteem level before and after counseling sessions are conducted one-to-one; (b) To identify the symptoms of low self-esteem level shown by the client; and (c) To measure the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques in improving the client’s self-esteem.
IV. METHODS

This study used quantitative and qualitative approach with a single-case study. Via quantitative approach, an instrument is used to measure changes in the self-esteem level before and after the client underwent six counseling sessions.

This study used the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) questionnaire developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965 [11] to collect descriptive data on the client’s self-esteem level. It is a self-reported inventory with 10 items and has the reliability and validity to measure self-esteem level with Cronbach’s alpha (α) between .88 and .89 [13]. The scoring method uses Likert Scale, with the overall score ranging from 0 to 30 for all the items. The higher the score, the higher the individual self-esteem level.

In qualitative approach, the low self-esteem symptoms were identified through counseling sessions and observation on client’s behavior and emotions. The observation is known as Mental Status Examination (MSE) [20].

A. Sample of Study

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the study sample. Therefore, a female adolescent with low self-esteem scores in the RSES pre-test was selected in this study.

B. Case Study

1) Client’s Background

The client is the third of five children. She was 17 years old and a high school student. Currently, the client lives with her parents who work as civil servants. She went to two prestigious schools in Northern Peninsular Malaysia and used to be an outstanding student. In terms of characteristics, she is polite and educated. She had attended a group counseling session with a counselor before and then requested to have an individual session for some reasons.

2) Presenting Problems

The client shared her problems, that she always felt guilty of herself. In the previous school, the client was accused by her friends of stealing her friend’s belonging, which led her to be isolated from her close friends. Even when she moved to a new school, the client’s relationship with her close friends kept getting worse and she blamed herself for thing she did not commit. Because of being accused by her friends in the previous school, the client felt depressed and when she was there, she had attempted suicide by winding the rope firmly around her wrist, but her action was halted by her teacher. She had a strained relationship with her family. Her achievements and efforts to help her family were often underestimated and this caused her to feel useless, unworthy and unwanted by her family. Due to the lack of moral support and motivation from her family, the client had no heart in doing something and this affects her academic performance in the new school. The client experienced loss of mood, disappointment, loss of interest and motivation in doing activities that she used to enjoy, kept blaming herself, being antisocial, stressed out and felt inferior.

3) Intervention

The Cognitive Restructuring Technique procedures used in this study are adapted from Burns [6], using a checklist throughout the sessions. The client was asked to list the situations, events or circumstances that led her to negative experiences. Next, the client had to express her feelings attributed to each event or negative experience associated with it. Once the client had identified the feelings, she had to identify the automatic thoughts that make up the negative perception and negative thinking of herself. In the meantime, for each stage, the client must specify the scale of her belief to negative thoughts based on what she had expressed. The last stage in the Cognitive Restructuring Technique is that the client needs to restructure or alter the maladaptive and negative thoughts to the new, more rational, positive, and adaptive ones.

Figure 1 explains the study procedures which was conducted with the client in six counseling sessions. Each session was recorded with client’s consent and then transcribed to facilitate the data analysis.
4) **Data Analysis**

Self esteem level was analyzed by measuring the RSES scores based on the Pre-Test, Post-Test I, Post-Test II and Post-Test III. For qualitative data, observation via Mental Status Examination (MSE) and verbatim content analysis were conducted to identify low self-esteem symptoms and the effectiveness of CRT to improve the client’s self-esteem. Verbatim content analysis was carried out by identifying the themes that reflect the low self-esteem level. Data triangulation between the client’s test scores, verbatim analysis and observation was done so that the results obtained are accurate and reliable.

V. **RESULTS**

A. **Self-Esteem Level Before and After Intervention**

Table 1 shows the client’s RSES test scores (Pre-Test, Post-Test I, Post-Test II and Post-Test III) during the pre-session, second, fourth and sixth counseling sessions. The Pre-Test score is 13 (Mean = .43), which indicates low self-esteem level. This score is used as a baseline to identify the changes in self-esteem level in the next tests. The Post-Test I score showed a slight increase, 14 (Mean = .47) but this still indicates low self-esteem level. The client’s self-esteem level improved to moderate level in the Post-test II with the score of 18 (Mean = .60). In the Post-Test III, the score showed improvement to high self-esteem level, with the score of 25 (Mean = .83).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Self-Esteem Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Test</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>Pre-Session</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test I</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test II</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test III</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>Session 6</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* RSES total score is 30

B. **Low Self-Esteem Symptoms**

Submit Date: 10.07.2018, Acceptance Date: 22.08.2018, DOI NO: 10.7456/1080SSE/199

**Research Article** - This article was checked by Turnitin

Copyright © The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art and Communication
1) Verbatim Content Analysis

The low self-esteem symptoms reflected by the client are categorized into several themes such as cognitive (inferiority, self-blame, worthless), emotional (stress, disappointment, sadness) and behavioral (suicidal ideation, antisocial, aggressiveness, demotivated in study) symptoms.

2) Observation Analysis (Using MSE)

From the observation, several symptoms that show low self-esteem level were identified by the researcher. The symptoms are split into five domains, which are voice tone, emotion, behavior, body gesture and facial expression. Based on the Mental Status Examination (MSE), it was found that there was improvement in the client’s self-esteem level throughout the six sessions.

Based on the observation on emotion, it was found that the client’s self-esteem got improved from one session to the next. From a frustrated, sad, stressful and resentful person, the client had improved to be more calm, confident and happy with herself. In terms of voice tone domain, the client’s voice tone at the beginning was slow and quavered with fear, but it changed from the third session onward, where her voice tone became clearer and calmer.

Looking at the behavior and body gesture domains, it was found that the client’s self-esteem had improved over the six sessions. At the beginning, the client looked passive, unfocused, uninterested, awkward, restless, jumpy and had less eye-contact in the earlier sessions. However, the client started to show improvement in behavior and body gesture, where she became more active, attentive, focused, better eye-contact, calm and relax. When it comes to facial expression, at the beginning, the client looked grim, sad, demotivated and unconfident. The client’s facial expression started to improve from the fourth session onward, where the client became cheerful, happy, confident, calm and easy to smile. Overall, using Mental Status Examination (MSE), it was found that there are improvements in the client’s voice tone, emotion, behavior, body gesture and facial expression at the end of the sessions.

3) Effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring Techniques (CRT)

The data used for triangulation was from the client’s Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSES) test score, verbatim and observation during the sessions. Also, the method was used to verify that the results obtained from the study are reliable. The client’s RSES test scores show consistent improvement from the Post-Test I to the Post-Test III.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCE (%) OF RSES TEST SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Test – Post-Test I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test I – Post-Test II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test II – Post-Test III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test III – Pre-Test</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* RSES total score is 30

Table 2 shows the percentage difference of RSES test scores between Pre-Test and Post-Test I, Post-Test I and Post-Test II, Post-Test II and Post-Test III. From the results, it shows that the percentage difference is 3% between Pre-Test and Post-Test I, 13% between Post-Test I and Post-Test II, and 23% between Post-Test II and Post-Test III. Based on Table 3, the total percentage difference between the Pre-Test and the Post-Test III is 40%, this means from the Pre-Test to the Post-Test III, the client’s self-esteem level increased by 40%. This indicates that CRT is effective in improving the client’s self-esteem level via the six counseling sessions.

Based on the verbatim analysis, the results show that CRT is effective in increasing the client’s self-esteem level (Session 3: Line 131-132, Session 4: Line 8). CRT also helps the client to be happier (Session 6: lines 10-12) and positive in her daily life (Session 6: line 50). From the MSE observation, it was found that the client showed improvement in terms of voice tone, emotion, behavior, body
VI. DISCUSSION

Based on the study findings, the client’s self-esteem has increased after she attended six counseling sessions with a counselor. This indicates that CRT is effective in helping adolescents to improve their self-esteem level. It was found that intervention via counseling works well to help clients to improve their self-esteem level, by tweaking the negative beliefs about themselves, to be more positive, realistic and adaptive. Most individuals with low self-esteem tend to have a better self-esteem after attending counseling or therapy sessions with counselors or therapists [23].

The study has also identified low self-esteem symptoms presented by the client from the transcription analysis of verbatim session conducted with the counselor. Symptoms shown are more on cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects. For the cognitive symptoms, it is found that the clients with low self-esteem level feel inferior and unworthy, and show self-blaming pattern. Kaur and Kaur [14] found that adolescents with dysfunctional thoughts and often blame themselves have issue with self-esteem. In this study, the researcher found that the client had low self-esteem and felt useless, where she thought she is nothing compared to her classmates. This is supported by van Zyl, Cronjé and Payze [22], which found that negative beliefs and perceptions about oneself contribute to low self-esteem level. From emotional the aspect, the client showed symptoms such as stress, disappointment and sadness. Emotional instability due to individual disheartening experiences also contributes to low self-esteem level. Brown [5] found that individuals with high self-esteem level experience lesser emotional stress when they face a negative situation or event. On the contrary, those with low self-esteem level tend to have higher emotional stress. Meanwhile from the behavioral aspect, the client showed symptoms such as being suicidal, aggressive, antisocial and lost interest in learning.

In terms of CRT effectiveness in improving the client’s self-esteem, this technique has helped to increase the client’s self-esteem level. The effectiveness is based on the reliability change index, of the graphs obtained from the RSES questionnaire when the client underwent six counseling sessions with the researcher. There was 40% increase in the self-esteem level and the client’s final score in the Post-Test III shows that she had high self-esteem, with a total score of 25 out of 30. In addition, based on the transcription analysis during the six counseling sessions, the client responded with positivity about herself (Session 6: lines 10-12, 22, 24, 50 and line 52) and from the fourth session onward, she responded and cooperated well with the researcher to improve her self-esteem. This has also made her realises that she can use this technique to handle her emotions and thoughts in the future.

VII. CONCLUSION

Overall, CRT is an effective intervention technique that can be used by counselors, psychotherapist and psychologist to improve adolescents’ self-esteem, especially among females. The effectiveness of this technique is proven via a study conducted by Deacon, Fawzy, Lickel and Wolitzky-Taylor [9], when the effectiveness of two cognitive techniques (cognitive recovery and cognitive restructuring) in reducing negative self-esteem among university students was examined. Both techniques, including the Restructuring Technique, are efficient in improving self-esteem level of an individual. In fact, this technique is also effective to reduce depression among students [7]. The intervention techniques used in the study provide some insights to the client to enjoy life with positivity, which leads to a better life quality.

The results of this study are expected to give an overview and knowledge to future researchers, counselors, psychologists, teachers and parents about what are the symptoms of low self-esteem among female adolescents. Moreover, from the identifiable low self-esteem symptoms, it is hoped that CRT can explain how these problems can be overcome, therefore intervention programs can be developed in order to enhance the level of self-esteem among female adolescents to a better and more positive stage.

References


Submit Date: 10.07.2018, Acceptance Date: 22.08.2018, DOI NO: 10.7456/1080SSE/199

Research Article - This article was checked by Turnitin

Copyright © The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art and Communication


