

The Effectiveness of the Cognitive Behavioral Counseling Program in Reducing Psychological Stress among Mothers of Autistic Children

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Abstract

The study aimed to build a behavioral cognitive counseling program to reduce psychological stress in a sample of mothers of autistic children, the study sample consisted of (10) mothers in the Amman, and divided the sample into two groups equally experimental and officer, using a scale psychological stress preparation (Elshakhs, Saratawi, 1998) The program was applied to the experimental group only, which consisted of (13) sessions, at the rate of two sessions per week. the results show the effectiveness of the program in lowering the psychological pressure of the experimental group versus the control group, the absence of statistically significant differences between the members of the experimental group and the post in dimensional and follow-up measurement.

Keywords: Cognitive-Behavioral, Psychological stress, Autistic mothers, Counseling.

Introduction

Psychological stress is one of the main symptoms felt by parents during the diagnosis of autism, and it can continue after diagnosis, usually accompanied by feelings of anxiety, depression and tension. Autistic children also suffer from many difficulties that place a great burden on their families, such as: financial burden, work changes, the need for counseling, care services. Mothers face psychological, social and family stress, which require intervention by specialists to help them deal with stressful life problems (Al-Baghdadi and Al-Ashmawi2019). The Kuhn, Ford & Dawalt (2018) study indicated that mothers of autistic children suffer from tension, depression, anxiety, a sense of despair, and limit social relationships.

Problems facing mothers of autistic children

- Lack of information: Failure to provide mothers with the necessary information to obtain services and instructions that help mothers in how to deal with autistic children contributes to increasing their psychological pressure. In addition to the lack of educational information they have regarding autism. For example, one of the

mothers stated, "I had to educate myself, and obtain information about autism and how to deal with autistic children on my own (Badawi, 2014).

- Social and emotional support: The lack of someone to support the mother in caring for an autistic child constitutes a great burden for her, as the mother needs psychological and social support and whoever relieves her the burden of caring for an autistic child in addition to caring for all family members (Landon, Shepherd & Goedeke, 2018)

- Difficulty in diagnosis: the mother faces inaccuracies in diagnosing her child's illness by specialists, and the beginning of guesswork, which raises the anger and suspicion of mothers, and the movement from one specialist to another. This may be due to the lack of appropriate diagnostic tools and the scarcity of autism specialists. One of the mothers' reaction to the service employee was, "Don't tell me what you think I want to hear, I want help"(Morsi, 2018).

- Family and social: The mother suffers from the inferior society view of people with special needs, which affects her social relationship and the feeling of isolation and embarrassment from the questions of those around her. She also suffers from family problems, so she does not find cooperation from her family members in bearing responsibility or accepting the distribution of roles among family members to relieve the burden on them (Al-Baghdadi and Al-Ashmawi, 2019).

Study Problem

Autism disorder negatively affects the normal life of the family, especially when parents face weakness in resources, information, social and moral support, as their thinking is affected, their stress increases, family interactions decrease, and attacks of anger and aggression increase. The researchers noted during field visits to autism care centers and to meet with autistic families, that mothers need skills and strategies for how to deal with their children, and how to cope with the pressures resulting from this disorder. Hence the necessity of the counseling program to help mothers reduce their psychological pressures

Study questions

- 1- There are statistically significant differences in the scores of individuals of the two groups (experimental and control) in psychological stress after applying the program in favor of the experimental group.
- 2- There are statistically significant differences between the grades of the experimental group members in the pre and post measurements on the psychological stress scale in favor of the post measurement.

3- There are no statistically significant differences between the scores of the experimental group members in the post and tracer measurements after the end of the program

Importance of studying

This study will contribute to providing a collective counseling program that helps mothers reduce their psychological pressures, and also helps in conducting more research and studies that focus on autism and its related variables and many psychological factors.

Previous studies

The study of Al-Baghdadi and Al-Ashmawi (2019) aimed to discover the effectiveness of a counseling program in reducing psychological stress among mothers of autistic children. The sample consisted of (10) mothers who were divided equally into two experimental and control groups. The results of the study indicated that there are statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group about the effectiveness of Rational emotional-behavioral counseling program in reducing psychological stress among mothers of autistic children. There were no statistically significant differences between the members of the experimental and control groups in the post and follow-up measurement.

Morsi study (2018) aimed to find out the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral counseling program in reducing social stigma among mothers of autistic children. The sample consisted of (10) mothers of children with autism, and they were divided into two experimental and control groups. The results of the study indicated the effectiveness of the cognitive-behavioral counseling program in reducing the social stigma of mothers of children with autism and reducing their confrontation with psychological pressures resulting from disability.

Badawi's study (2014) aimed to reveal the effectiveness of the rational emotional-behavioral program in reducing psychological stress for mothers of autistic children. The sample consisted of (10) mothers who were divided equally into two experimental and control groups. The results of the study indicated that there are statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group about the effectiveness of Rational emotional-behavioral counseling program in reducing psychological stress among mothers of autistic children.

Methodology and procedures

Methodology:

Quasi experimental design was used.

Sample

The study sample consisted of (10) mothers of autistic children in the Association for Families and Friends of Persons with Disabilities located in Jordan, they were divided into experimental (5) and control (5) groups.

Study tools

The Psychological Stress Scale (Elshakhs, Saratawi, 1998) was used, consisting of 80 items divided into 7 dimensions:(psychological and physical symptoms (1-20) items, feelings of despair and frustration (21-34) items, cognitive problems (35-47) items, social and psychological problems(48- 52) items, future anxiety (53-65) items, independence problems (66-73) items, Inability to bear the child's burdens(74-80) items.

Validity

Face Validity

The scale was presented to (10) specialists in measurement, evaluation and psychological counseling. To know the extent to which the items belong to the dimensions, and the clarity of the item wording. The opinions of specialists were taken into reformulation of some items.

Internal correlation

The scale was applied to a sample of (20) mothers from outside the study sample. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to calculate the items correlation coefficients with dimensions, and with the total degree of the scale, table (1) shows that:

Table (1): items correlation coefficients with dimensions

Psychological and physical symptoms		Feelings of despair and frustration		Cognitive problems		Social and psychological problems		Future anxiety		Independence problems		Inability to bear the child's burdens	
1	**0.654	21	**0.511	35	**0.516	48	**0.752	53	**0.734	66	**0.742	74	**0.794
2	**0.542	22	**0.522	36	**0.523	49	**0.767	54	**0.654	67	**0.575	75	**0.654
3	**0.654	23	**0.547	37	**0.678	50	**0.752	55	*0.454	68	**0.667	76	**0.731
4	**0.632	24	**0.570	38	**0.534	51	**0.699	56	**0.542	69	**0.745	77	**0.772
5	**0.542	25	**0.526	39	**0.670	52	**0.732	57	*0.454	70	**0.562	78	**0.651
6	**0.673	26	**0.544	40	**0.526			58	**0.662	71	**0.721	79	**0.711
7	**0.511	27	**0.521	41	**0.546			59	**0.621	72	**0.542	80	**0.637
8	**0.621	28	**0.607	42	*0.450			60	*0.432	73	**0.562		

9	**0.654	29	**0.711	43	**0.543		61	*0.423		
10	**0.622	30	*0.421	44	**0.752		62	**0.586		
11	**0.632	31	**0.762	45	**0.562		63	**0.578		
12	**0.624	32	*0.465	46	**0.625		64	**0.524		
13	**0.531	33	**0.534	47	*0.451		65	**0.652		
14	**0.654	34	*0.425							
15	**0.624									
16	**0.524									
17	**0.684									
18	**0.623									
19	**0.589									
20	**0.694									

Table (1) shows that all the values of the items correlation coefficients with the dimension are statistically significant, which confirms the validity of the scale.

Reliability

The reliability coefficients were calculated using the Cronbach alpha equation, and the test-retest, by applying the scale to a sample of (20) mothers from outside the study sample, after two weeks the measures were re-applied to the sample itself, table (2) shows that:

Table (2): scale reliability

Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha	test-retest
Psychological and physical symptoms	0.88	0.82
Feelings of despair and frustration	0.83	0.81
Cognitive problems	0.80	0.70
Social and psychological problems	0.81	0.78
Future anxiety	0.82	0.77
Independence problems	0.80	0.79
Inability to bear the child's burdens	0.82	0.80

Table (2) indicates that the scale reliability coefficients are suitable for conducting the study.

Counseling program based on rational emotional behavioral therapy

Program sessions: The number of counseling sessions reached (13) sessions, including the follow-up session.

Program schedule: The program was implemented over a period of eight weeks, with two sessions per week, each session lasting 90 minutes, and the sessions began on March 27, 2019, and ended on May 27, 2019.

Where to apply the program: The program was applied to mothers with autism in a lecture hall at the Association of Families and Friends of People with Disabilities / Amman / Jordan.

The instructional techniques used in the program: The instructional techniques presented in the program are divided into:

Cognitive techniques: It aims to change the client's irrational thoughts and way of thinking and provide him with more rational and logical ways of thinking. Among these techniques are rational reconstruction, structured attention shifting, imagination strategy, and the use of fun and contradictory intent.

2- Emotional techniques: aim to enlighten the client with his feelings and emotions towards different life situations and his responses to those situations. Among these techniques is the attack on wrong actions, and unconditional acceptance.

3- Behavioral techniques: it aims to help the client to get rid of the unwanted behavior, and to help him to modify it and to give him a socially acceptable behavior, and to reinforce it against him. These include behavioral contracting, reinforcement, role playing, and relaxation.

Components of the counseling sessions: Each session consists of a number of the following basic elements:

1- The topic of the session: It is the topic that is discussed in the session.

2- The time period: it is the time period that takes to achieve the goals during the advisory session.

3- The objectives of the counseling session: It is the goal to be achieved during the session, and the clients are introduced to it so that they can cooperate in achieving it.

4- The techniques used: These are the techniques (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) that were mentioned previously.

5- Procedures: These are the skills and techniques that are applied with the clients to achieve the goals.

6- Evaluation: aims to ascertain the extent to which the clients benefit from the session and the degree of achievement of its objectives. This is done through duties, direct observation, and asking questions.

7- Homework: It is a reinforcement training for what was learned during the counseling session, and usually it is discussed at the beginning of the next session.

Results

1-There are statistically significant differences in the scores of individuals of the two groups (experimental and control) in psychological stress after applying the program in favor of the experimental group. The Mann-Whitney test was used, Table (3) shows this:

Table 3: Mann-Whitney test for differences in psychological stress between the two groups in post test

Dimensions	Groups	Mean Ranks	Total Ranks	Mann-Whitney	Sig
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Psychological and physical symptoms	exp	5.55	55.5	0500	**0.00
	Control	15.45	154.5		
Feelings of despair and frustration	exp	5.50	55.0	0.00	**0.00
	Control	15.50	155.0		
Cognitive problems	exp	5.50	55.0	0.00	**0.00
	Control	15.50	155.0		
Social and psychological problems	exp	5.75	57.50	0.00	**0.00
	Control	15.50	155.0		
Future anxiety	exp	5.75	57.50	2.50	**0.00
	Control	15.25	152.5		
Independence problems	exp	5.55	55.50	0.500	**0.00
	Control	15.45	154.5		
Inability to bear the child's burdens	exp	15.50	55.00	0.00	**0.00
	Control	5.50	155.0		

It is evident from the table that there are statistically significant differences in all dimensions of the scale, which indicates that the counseling program contributed to reducing psychological pressures among mothers of autistic children.

2- There are statistically significant differences between the grades of the experimental group members in the pre and post measurements on the psychological stress scale in favor of the post measurement. The Wilkson test was used to find differences in psychological stress, table (4) shows this:

Table 4: Wilkson test to find out differences in psychological stress among the experimental group

Dimensions	Groups	Mean Ranks	Total Ranks	Z	Sig
Psychological and physical symptoms	Pre-exp	6.00	54.0	-2.71	**0.007
	Post-exp	1.00	1.00		
Feelings of despair and frustration	Pre-exp	5.50	55.0	-2.81	**0.005
	Post-exp	0.00	0.00		
Cognitive problems	Pre-exp	5.50	55.0	-2.81	**0.005
	Post-exp	0.00	0.00		
Social and psychological problems	Pre-exp	5.50	55.0	-2.81	**0.005
	Post-exp	0.00	0.00		
Future anxiety	Pre-exp	6.00	54.0	-2.71	**0.007
	Post-exp	1.00	1.00		
Independence problems	Pre-exp	5.50	55.0	-2.81	**0.005
	Post-exp	0.00	0.00		

Inability to bear the child's burdens	Pre-exp	6.00	54.0	-2.71	**0.007
	Post-exp	1.00	1.00		

We note from the table that the averages of the post-measurement are higher than the averages of the pre-measurement in all dimensions of the scale, which indicates the effectiveness of the counseling program in reducing the psychological stress of mothers of autistic children.

3- There are no statistically significant differences between the scores of the experimental group members in the post and tracer measurements after the end of the program. Wilkson was used to find differences in psychological stress, Table (5) shows that:

Table 5: Wilkson test to find out differences in psychological stress among the experimental group in post and follow-up test

Dimensions	Ranks	N	Mean Ranks	Total Ranks	Z	Sig
Psychological and physical symptoms	Negative	-	0.00	0.00	-1.34	Not. sig
	Positive	2	1.5	3		
	Equal ranks	3				
Feelings of despair and frustration	Negative	1	1	1	-1.73	Not. sig
	Positive	3	3	9		
	Equal ranks	1				
Cognitive problems	Negative	1	1	1	-1.46	Not. sig
	Positive	3	3	9		
	Equal ranks	1				
Social and psychological problems	Negative	1	1	1	-1.46	Not. sig
	Positive	3	3	9		
	Equal ranks	1				
Future anxiety	Negative	1	1	1	-1.7	Not. sig
	Positive	4	3.5	14		
	Equal ranks	-				
Independence problems	Negative	-	0.00	0.00	-1.36	Not. sig
	Positive	2	1.5	3		
	Equal ranks	3				
Inability to bear the child's burdens	Negative	1	1	1	-1.3	Not. sig
	Positive	4	3.5	14		

	Equal ranks	-				
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The table indicates that there are no statistically significant differences in the dimensions of the psychological pressure scale of the experimental group on the post and follow-up measurement.

Discussion

The results show the effectiveness of the counseling program in reducing psychological pressures among mothers of autistic children, and this can be explained by the use of dialogue and discussion in defining psychological pressures, their effects and types in the counseling sessions, and encouraging mothers to talk about their realistic pressures and urging emotional discharge without restrictions. In addition, stress symptoms such as fear, avoidance, recollection of unpleasant events were mentioned as natural symptoms that occur as a result of a stressful situation, and researchers also showed sympathy for mothers, which encouraged them to talk about their stress without hesitation.

The researchers also focused on the role of religious counseling in resisting pressures, and the link between pressures and affliction and the reward and reward that accompanies it, and that faith helps the individual to endure and patience, which strengthens his immunity against psychological diseases that may result from psychological stress in the event that he is unable to face it.

The results of this study are consistent with the results of the Al-Baghdadi and Al-Ashmawi studies (2019), Morsi study (2018) and Badawi's study (2014), which concluded the importance of the counseling program in reducing psychological pressures in mothers of autistic children, and the continuity of its positive effect after stopping Program This confirms that the change brought about by the program is not temporary.

Recommendations

- 1- Paying attention to educating parents about the importance of family support to face pressures and deal with them.
- 2- Conducting courses and workshops on psychological pressures resulting from disability and how to face it.
- 3- Educating parents on how to deal with autistic children and accepting disability

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