

The Role of Cognitive Behavioral Group Counseling on Aggression among Prisoners

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Abstract

The present study examined the role of Cognitive Behavioral Group counseling on aggression among prisoners. The study was conducted at Sodo and Arba Minch prisons, Ethiopia. This quasi-experimental study used a pre and post-test research design with a control group. The participants were assigned into experimental group (N = 54) and control group (N = 48) through census sampling. The Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) was used to measure aggression. Participants in the experimental group received group counseling for eight weeks, one day per week, for an hour per session with a total of 8 sessions. Results of paired and independent t-tests indicated that, after treatment, participants engaged in experimental group showed statistically significant reduction in the level of aggression ($p = 0.00$). This study concludes that cognitive behavioral group counseling is a good therapy for reducing aggression among prisoners.

Keywords: Prisoners; Cognitive Behavioral Group Counseling; Aggression

Introduction

Mankind is facing the most serious issue of aggression. Measuring aggressiveness in somebody is important clinically [1-4]. To assess a suspects behavior, judgment of expert is required in the court or prison to judge the premeditate nature of an offence [5]. Many researchers have defined aggression through various classification systems but none of them could define it comprehensively. According to most widely used definition "aggression is an overt behavior involving intent to inflict noxious stimulation or to behave destructively toward another organism" [6,7].

Major public health problems such as aggression, anger, crime, violence, sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, suicide, homicide etc. have a strong contribution of human aggressive behavior and are cause of stress for the patients themselves, their caregivers and their family members. Contrary to aggressive behavior studies in animals, studies on human aggressive behavior are easier because psychological and social factors are intricately related to neurochemistry or physiology of human behavior [6].

Cognitive behavioural approaches for the inmates have received empirical support for the effectiveness in reducing behavioural problems and improved coping in diverse correctional populations including offenders, substance abusers, sex offenders and juvenile offenders [8-12]. Following the study conducted by Akbari, Abolghasemi, Taghizadeh and Dastaran [13] on male prisoners, showed that there were significant differences between the experimental and the control groups on aggression and crime after intervention.

Prison is a place of confinement especially for lawbreakers which can have an impact on mental health including aggression. Yet, very few studies examined aggression among prison inmates in Ethiopia.

Aim of the Study

This study aimed to determine the role of cognitive behavioral group counseling on aggression among prisoners.

General Objective

The general objective of this study is to find out whether cognitive Behavioral Therapy brings significant change in reducing aggression among prisoners.

Methods

Research design

The present study employed quasi experimental research design (pre and post-test with a control group) to assess the role of cognitive behavioral group counseling on aggression. Paired t-test and independent t-test were used to analyze the data. Among the variables in the study, aggression was considered as the dependent variable while counseling program as independent variable.

Population

Data for study was collected from two prisons in Ethiopia. These are Wolaita Sodo and Arba Minch prisons. Wolaita is a town and administrative center of Wolaita zone in South-Central Ethiopia. Arba Minch is a town and administrative center of Gamo zone in Southern Ethiopia. Wolaita zone is bordered on the South by Gamo zone. Basically, 1202 prisoners were located in Wolaita Sodo prison. Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) [14] was administered to the total prisoners and 54 (38 males and 16 females) were found to have a high level of aggression. These 54 (38 males and 16 females) were then selected as experimental group. On the other hand, 48 (36 males and 12 females) inmates of Arba Minch prison with high level of aggression were assigned into control group.

Instruments

The Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) [14] is a self-report measure which uses 5 point rating scales to measure aggression. This questionnaire consisted of 29 items. The Aggression Questionnaire consists of four subscales namely anger, physical aggression, verbal aggression, and hostility. The internal consistency for the four subscales and total score range from 0.72 (verbal aggression) to 0.89 (total AQ score). The retest reliability for the AQ over a nine weeks period is also satisfactory (correlations ranged from 0.72 for anger to 0.80 for physical aggression and for the total score [14]). In the present study, only total AQ score was selected. The internal consistency of total AQ for the inmates as measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient were 0.87.

Procedure

During the first stage, the administrative permission and ethical clearance from the prison authority was obtained. This researcher selected prisoners that match the purpose of the present research from the data base in the institution. Having done this, date is appointed to make the first contact with the participants of the research. Participants were not asked for their names or any other personal information to reduce the chance of biased responses. Written and signed consent from the participants were obtained prior to their participation in the said research study. Before the treatment begins, participants were asked for their permission to complete the self-report questionnaire for Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) [14]. The result was kept confidential and opened only after post-test evaluation. The researcher conducted the group counseling sessions. The interventions were based on Cognitive behavioral group counseling (CBT) model. Duration of the intervention was for 8 weeks, 1 session per week.

Immediately after group counseling, the questionnaire booklet was given to each participant and post-test was administered and scored by using the same tools. SPSS version 20 was used for data analysis. Paired and independent t-tests were used to reveal the effects of

group counseling on aggressive behavior. P-value less than 0.05 considered significant.

At the end of the treatment, participants were thanked for their participation in the research practice. They were also informed that the counselor is ready to help participants in the study for any difficulty that might happen in the future.

Research hypothesis

This study tested the following research hypothesis:

- There will be statistically significant difference in the level of aggression of experimental group, which results due to the treatment effect.

Results

The major purpose of the present study was to examine the role of cognitive behavioral group counseling on aggression. This study included 54 (38 males and 16 females) prisoners in experimental group and 48 (36 males and 12 females) in the control group. There was no drop out in the treatment group. Totally, the treatment group received 8 hours of treatment.

Variable	Group	Test	Mean	N	SD	t-value	P-value
Aggression	Arba Minch	Pre-test	39.75	48	12.78	0.81	0.41
		Post-test	42.20	48	16.28		

Table 1: Paired t-test of Aggression score in the pre and post-test in the control group (Arba Minch prison).

The above table indicate that there is no statistically significant mean difference between the two mean scores of Aggression (P = 0.41) of control groups before and after group counseling.

Variable	Group	Test	Mean	N	SD	t-value	P-value
Aggression	Sodo	Pre-test	39.79	54	12.29	34.22	0.00
		Post-test	1.24	54	14.83		

Table 2: Paired t-test of Aggression score in the pre and post-test in the experimental group (Sodo prison).

As shown in table 2, there is statistically significant mean difference between the two mean scores of Aggression (P = 0.00) of experimental groups before and after group counseling. It is believed by the researcher to have been so due to the treatment effect and not by chance.

Variable	Group	Test	Mean	N	SD	t-value	P-value
Aggression	Sodo	Pre-test	39.79	54	12.29	0.01	0.98
	Arba Minch		39.75	48	12.78		

Table 3: Independent t-test of Aggression score in the pre-test of both experimental and control groups.

In the above table, the t-value 0.01 for the mean difference in Aggression score between the prisoners at Sodo and Arba Minch prisons after group counseling were not statistically significant (P = 0.98). The mean Aggression score of prisoners of Sodo and Arba Minch prisons were 39.79 and 39.75 respectively. It reveals that Aggression score of both Sodo and Arba Minch prisons were almost similar before group counseling.

Variable	Group	Test	Mean	N	SD	t-value	P-value
Aggression	Sodo	Post test	1.24	54	14.83	26.64	0.00
	Arba Minch		42.20	48	16.28		

Table 4: Independent t-test of Aggression score in the post-test of both experimental and control groups.

In the above table, the t-value 26.64 for the mean difference in Aggression score between the prisoners at Sodo and Arba Minch prisons after group counseling were statistically significant (P = 0.00). The mean Aggression score of prisoners of Sodo and Arba Minch prisons were 1.24 and 42.20 respectively. It reveals that Aggression of the prisoners at Sodo prison reduced significantly when compared to prisoners of Arba Minch prison. Hence, it ensures that cognitive behavioral group counseling make an impact in reducing impulsivity.

Discussion

As stated earlier, the objective of this study was to examine the role of cognitive behavioral group counseling on aggression among prisoners. The results of the present study showed that there is significant reduction in aggression score observed after receiving group counseling. This finding supports the results of the previous studies that were carried out by other researchers which showed that cognitive behavioral group intervention would contribute to reducing the level of aggression among the inmates in a correctional setting [9,10,13,15-17]. It can be said that after undergoing group counseling, subjects become more aware of their aggression behavior and they were able to control their negative emotions and behavior by using the techniques provided. The cognitive behavioral group counseling usually offers training on cognitive and behavioral and enables members to use these techniques in their real life situation. Therefore, based on the findings of the present research the researcher accepted the hypothesis. Largely, the findings of this study can be used by others to show that group counseling is a valued tool used in reducing aggression [18-20].

Conclusion

Overall, the results and findings of this study can be used by others to show that one of the approaches to reduce aggression is cognitive behavioral group counseling, as a valued tool used in reducing aggression. The findings also can serve as a stepping-stone for further future studies. Finally, it can be concluded that cognitive behavioral group counseling has a significant impact and can be used effectively to reduce aggression among the inmates.

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