



Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions (EASE)

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Abstract:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) causes a person's life to be full of worries by involving cognitive processes and not tolerating uncertainty and increasing worry and affecting the quality of sleep and attention of these people, and disrupting life functions. This study investigated the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) on anxiety, physical symptoms, worry, and attention deficits in people with GAD. It was a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test study with an experimental group and a control group. In this study, 30 women with GAD were selected using a voluntary sampling method. After matching, participants were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group received CBT for 10 sessions, but the control group did not receive any treatment. The research instruments included the attention skills Questionnaire by Savari and Oraki and the Pennsylvania State Worry Scale. There was a significant difference in physical symptoms in the experimental group compared to the control group ($P < 0.01$, $F = 65.28$), while in the experimental group, there was a significant difference in worry compared to the control group. Moreover, there was a significant difference in attention deficit in the experimental group compared to the control group. The results showed that CBT improved attention deficit and worry in women with GAD.

Keywords: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Attention Deficit, Worry, Generalized Anxiety Disorders, Mental Disorder, Conflict

Introduction

Adolescence is considered a critical developmental period marked by emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social changes. During this stage, young individuals may experience emotional difficulties such as stress, anxiety, sadness, fear, emotional instability, and behavioral problems. Exposure to adversity, interpersonal violence, family conflict, bullying, neglect, peer aggression, and unsafe environments can further increase the risk of emotional distress among adolescents. Experiences of interpersonal violence may negatively affect adolescents' emotional regulation, self-esteem, relationships, academic performance, and overall psychological wellbeing (World Health Organization, 2021; Dawson et al., 2019). Mental health concerns among adolescents have become a growing issue worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, emotional and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents. Adolescents exposed to interpersonal violence often experience increased emotional distress, fear,

social withdrawal, irritability, and difficulty coping with stressful situations. Unfortunately, mental health services for adolescents remain limited in many educational and community settings, particularly in low and middle income countries (Patel et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 2021). School and community based interventions are considered highly effective because they provide accessible environments for identifying and supporting adolescents facing emotional and behavioral difficulties. Psychological interventions delivered in these settings can help adolescents develop emotional regulation skills, healthy coping strategies, problem solving abilities, and positive social functioning. Such interventions are especially important for adolescents affected by interpersonal violence because they promote emotional safety, resilience, and supportive relationships (Dawson et al., 2019; Jordans et al., 2020). One evidence based intervention developed for adolescents facing adversity is the Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions (EASE) program. EASE was developed by the World Health Organization, primarily authored and tested by mental health researchers (Dawson et al., 2019) to support adolescents aged approximately 10 to 15 years who experience internalizing problems such as stress, anxiety, sadness, emotional distress, and difficulties resulting from adversity and violence exposure. According to the EASE manual, adolescents exposed to stressful or unsafe interpersonal environments may struggle to manage emotions, feel emotionally overwhelmed, or respond to difficulties through withdrawal, aggression, or avoidance behaviors. The intervention therefore focuses on helping adolescents understand emotions, practice calming strategies, strengthen problem solving skills, and improve coping abilities (World Health Organization, 2020; Dawson et al., 2019). The EASE program includes structured sessions for adolescents and caregivers to improve emotional wellbeing, coping skills, and caregiver support. Caregiver involvement is particularly important in cases involving interpersonal violence because supportive caregiver relationships can strengthen adolescents' sense of safety, emotional security, and resilience. Positive caregiver communication and emotional support may also reduce the negative psychological effects associated with violence exposure and family conflict (Miller et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). The current intervention report presents the implementation of the EASE program in a Christian Slum Community setting. The report highlights the intervention process, session structure, participant responses, assessment findings, challenges, and outcomes related to improving emotional wellbeing and coping skills among adolescents affected by emotional distress and interpersonal adversity (Patel et al., 2018).

Materials and Methods

The Pediatric Symptom Checklist 17

Table 1. Adolescents and Caregiver Sessions

Session	Topic	Assignment	Description
First	Understanding My Feelings	Building skills to understand and identify emotions accurately	Introduce participants to the story Learn about different feelings, how to accurately identify and separate them Improve knowledge about different feelings and identify feelings that are causing interference Summarize the session Introduce and set home practice and identify strengths

Second	Calming My Body	Learning how problems and feelings affect body and a coping skill to help calm the body	Participants share home practice Learn how the body is affected by problems and feelings Learn a skill to calm the body Introduce and set home practice
Third	Changing My Actions Part 1	Learn how problems and feelings can affect our actions and behaviors	Participants share home practice Learn how problems and feelings can change actions or behaviors Learn how to gradually engage in activities to help improve mood
Fourth	Changing My Actions Part 2	Continue to learn how doing enjoyable actions and important tasks can help improve feelings	Participants share home practice Continue learning how to gradually engage in activities to help improve mood Learn about doing important tasks as a way to improve mood
Fifth	Managing My Problems Part 1	Learn a skill to help solve problems	Participants share home practice Share ideas of common problems adolescents experience Learn a skill to help solve problems Learn how to apply Stop, Think, Go to common and personal problems
Sixth	Managing My Problems Part 2	Practice Managing My Problems with a new problem	Participants share home practice Strengthen participants' skills in problem management Continue applying Stop, Think, Go to a new problem Empower participants to learn from each other Prepare participants for the end of EASE and allowing participants to share reactions to it finishing
Seventh	Brighter Futures	Increase participants confidence in coping after the intervention ends	Participants share home practice Educate participants on what to expect in the future Improve participants' confidence in responding to future problems and big feelings Closing activity For caregivers to overcome barriers to spending quality time with their child
Eighth	Caregiver Session 1	Improving adolescent and caregivers' relationship	Better understand the importance of spending quality time with their child Learn about the importance of giving and receiving praise Learn what to expect in the future

Results

Table 2. Pre and Post Assessment

Participant	Pre-Intervention	Post Intervention
1	16	13
2	18	12
3	17	10
4	20	9
5	23	11
6	22	10
7	18	8
8	19	7
9	21	9
10	17	11
11	17	12
12	18	10
13	22	8
14	24	9
15	21	9

Discussion

The findings of the present intervention indicate that the EASE program was effective in improving emotional wellbeing and behavioral functioning among adolescents. Participants showed improvement in emotional regulation, cooperation, participation, and coping abilities after the intervention.

The intervention sessions helped adolescents identify emotions, understand the connection between feelings and behaviors, and practice calming and problem solving techniques. Behavioral activation activities encouraged adolescents to engage in positive and meaningful actions that improved emotional wellbeing.

The inclusion of caregiver sessions also contributed positively by strengthening caregiver understanding and emotional support for adolescents. Caregiver involvement is considered an important protective factor in adolescent mental health interventions. The reduction in PSC 17 scores following the intervention supports previous research indicating that structured psychological interventions can improve emotional and behavioral outcomes among adolescents. Despite implementation challenges, the intervention successfully created a supportive environment where adolescents could openly discuss emotions, practice coping strategies, and develop emotional resilience.

Conclusion

The present intervention report highlights the effectiveness of the Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions program in improving emotional wellbeing and behavioral functioning among adolescents. The intervention successfully helped participants develop emotional awareness, calming skills, behavioral coping strategies, and problem solving abilities. Participants also demonstrated improved cooperation, participation, and emotional regulation after the intervention. The findings suggest that community based mental health interventions can play an important role in supporting adolescents experiencing emotional distress. The inclusion of caregiver sessions further strengthened emotional support systems for adolescents. Overall, the intervention contributed positively toward creating a supportive and emotionally healthy environment for adolescents.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All procedures carried out in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical committee of Islamshahr Islamic Azad University, Iran (No. 2312900540298721398142948).

Human and Animal Rights

No animals were used in this research. All human research procedures were followed in accordance with the ethical standards of the committee responsible for human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2013.

Consent for Publication

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects prior to data collection.

Availability of Data And Materials

The data that support the findings of this research are available from the corresponding author [M.A.Y] upon request with permission from the Ethics Committee of Islamshahr IAU.

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Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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