

Effects of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy on Self-Image and Decision Making among Adolescents

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Introduction

Self-image is a central topic in academic and popular psychological and educational discussions concerning adolescence. According to Baban 2001, Self-image can be defined as the cognitive representation of an individual's own identity or as a structured framework of factual information about oneself that influences social behavior. It is shaped by our perception of our physical, psychological, and emotional characteristics, as well as our ego and social position. The self-image is a crucial aspect of our lives as it impacts our emotional well-being, shapes our understanding of ourselves about others, aids us in organizing this perception into a self-schema, and ultimately contributes to the development of higher levels of self-esteem. (Lupsa & Bratu, 2005) Having a positive and realistic self-image is crucial for making responsible decisions According to Nadina 2022, Young adults and adolescents are faced with a multitude of important choices, such as lifelong learning, personal development, job choice, career advancement, and development. It is crucial for them to approach these alternatives rationally and responsibly by making informed decisions. The decision-making process is a multifaceted one, and it is important to understand that the decision-making abilities of young individuals cannot be simplified. In his research, Grisso (2000) draws a distinction between reasoning and judgment within the context of decision-making. Reasoning refers to cognitive abilities involved in information processing, while judgment involves weighing the significance of different potential outcomes. According to Kambam & Thompson 2009, the decision-making process is influenced by cognitive capacities, while psychosocial immaturity can impact decision-making outcomes in various ways. This immaturity may affect values and preferences, which in turn influence cost-benefit analyses when making choices. Although these effects may not be as overt, they are still significant factors to consider.

Emphasis on Adolescents:

According to Piaget 1970, adolescence is characterized by the emergence of formal operational thinking, which allows for adult-level reasoning. During this stage, adolescents can engage in more complex, abstract, and hypothetical thinking. They are capable of considering various possibilities and can even think realistically about their future. Adolescence is a phase of development that occurs between childhood and adulthood and encompasses significant biological, psychological, and social changes. It is a period marked by numerous transformations, second only to infancy in terms of its impact on an individual's life. (Steinberg, 2005) Due to the numerous changes that occur during adolescence, it is expected that there will be notable differences in the occurrence and nature of psychological disorders compared to childhood. (Holmbeck, Friedman, Abad, & Jandasek, 2006) For certain adolescents, this stage represents a period of adaptation and enhanced mental well-being. However, for others, it is characterized by maladaptation and a rise in psychopathology levels. (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002)

Adolescents can potentially experience positive outcomes through treatment methods that prioritize the modification or advancement of cognitive developmental processes (Shirk, 1999). Such interventions have the potential to impact the effectiveness of treatment overall. For instance, Temple (1997) explores strategies aimed at assisting adolescents in developing skills related to means-ends thinking and perspective-taking.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is frequently employed as an effective framework for adolescents. It has emerged as a highly regarded and extensively researched psychosocial treatment, integrating cognitive therapy and behavioral learning principles. It combines the best of both worlds, bringing together proven techniques from these two traditions. CBT has gained popularity due to its effectiveness and widespread adoption in the field. (Szigethy, 2012) According to Freeman and Reinecke 1995, it is a proactive and goal-oriented approach to treatment that aims to identify and modify dysfunctional beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that contribute to emotional distress. It is widely recognized as a valuable intervention strategy within this demographic, as evidenced by the substantial number of studies we examined, with approximately half of them utilizing this approach (Kendall, 2011).

I firmly believe that directing attention toward the adolescent period with CBT is an exceptionally powerful approach to showcase the significance and practicality of a developmental standpoint. This is because adolescence is marked by constant change, providing ample opportunities to make a positive influence on a system in flux.

In this Research paper, we will look at how Cognitive behavioral therapy may affect the self-image and decision-making of adolescents.

Literature review

One of the widely recognized theories in the behavioral sciences is that adolescence is a phase that disrupts a child's self-image. Hall (1904) initially described this stage as one filled with "storm and stress." According to Erikson (1959), it is a time of identity crisis, during which the child grapples with establishing a stable sense of self. In 1980, Rutter contended that the idea of the "adolescent crisis" has been reevaluated not just as a potential risk factor, but also as a factor that can enhance an individual's capacity to handle future challenging circumstances. Based on the data collected by Simmons 1981, it appears that early adolescents are exhibiting greater levels of self-consciousness compared to younger children. Furthermore, their perception of themselves is becoming increasingly uncertain and unstable. Additionally, there has been a slight decrease in their overall self-esteem. According to Coopersmith 1967, having a positive self-image in adolescence is indicative of high self-esteem, self-acceptance, and positive life perspectives, which in turn leads to effective decision-making. Kambam & Thompson 2009 argued that Adolescents have been found to have more restricted decision-making abilities compared to adults and are more prone to engaging in risky and criminal behaviors. Considering that antisocial behaviors are prevalent during adolescence, it is crucial to note that only a minority of individuals persist with such behaviors into adulthood (Moffitt, 1993, 2002). Erikson's theoretical work (1959) has significantly contributed to the understanding of adolescence as a transitional stage.

Numerous scholarly articles, book chapters, and textbooks have been written to explore the use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in the treatment of adolescents with psychological disorders (Carey, 1993) Additionally, multiple studies have indicated that relapse rates following cognitive therapy are lower compared to the use of antidepressant medications (Evans et al., 199). Case studies have also highlighted the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral interventions with this particular group. (Frame et al, 1982) In their study, Kahn et al. 1990 conducted research on the effectiveness of short-term cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), relaxation techniques, and self-modeling interventions for alleviating depressive symptoms in adolescents. The findings revealed that participants in all three treatment groups experienced a noteworthy reduction in dysphoria levels when compared to the control group.

In 2011, Arip et al. conducted a study that confirmed the efficacy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) intervention using the CBT-MSCM approach in improving self-image among adolescents who have low self-concept. According to Lim et al, (2010) one of the core principles of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) is that evaluative beliefs play a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive and react to events, which consequently influences their emotions, behaviors, and thoughts. Notably, cognitive-behavioral treatment is particularly effective in children when administered before puberty compared to its effectiveness in adults. (Melnik et al., 2006)

Factors That Influence Self-image

The perception of self in adolescence is greatly influenced by gender. In most cases, males tend to have a more positive self-image than females (Laukkanen et al., 2000). Girls, on the other hand, are highly affected by their body image and often experience feelings of insecurity regarding themselves, their physical appearance, and their abilities (Ostrov et al., 1989). Numerous studies have examined the correlation between self-image during adolescence and various factors, such as life events, family history (Lyman and Bird, 1996), social relationships, (Kniveton, 1995) peer relationships, (Harter, 1989) value systems, primary attachment relations, and risky behavior (Laukkanen et al., 2000). These findings provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of these factors and their impact on an individual's self-image.

Cross-cultural research by Offer et al., 1988, indicates that during adolescence, individuals commonly exhibit a predominance of positive emotions toward life and demonstrate a universal sense of compassion and concern for others. Additionally, they possess a genuine appreciation for personal achievements and exhibit self-assurance regarding their sexual identities.

Factors That Influence Decision Making

Adolescence is commonly regarded as a period characterized by heightened impulsivity and the pursuit of exhilarating experiences. In comparison to risk-taking behaviors in adults, those exhibited during adolescence are believed to be influenced to a greater extent by peers. (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005) Kambam 2009 proposed that the observed rise in conformity during early adolescence, despite a general trend of increased resistance to peer influence, may be attributed to heightened peer pressure to conform within this age group. In other words, conformity is influenced by both the external pressure to conform and an individual's ability to resist peer influence. The quality of decision-making is significantly influenced by internal factors. These include the decision-making mechanism, the competence of the decision-maker, the availability and accuracy of information, as well as the recognition of available resources. (Wu & Li, 2020)

Family relationships are also very important in this phase of life. During adolescence, parents need to be responsive to the increasing need for responsibility and decision-making power of their children (American Psychological Association, 2002). Parents who demonstrate inflexibility and lack of adaptability, especially in areas such as strictness and decision-making, often have children who experience less adaptive outcomes. (Kendall, 2011)

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Interventions

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a psychotherapeutic treatment approach that enables individuals to recognize and modify maladaptive or distressing thought patterns that impact their behavior and emotional well-being. Through the utilization of specific techniques, individuals can learn to effectively manage and overcome these negative thought patterns, thereby improving their overall mental health. (Hofmann et al, 2012) The therapeutic action model is illustrated in Figure 1, which summarizes the specific treatment processes, targets, and primary outcomes. Drawing on cognitive-behavioral theory, we hypothesize that increased client participation in cognitive tasks during and outside of therapy sessions will be associated with significant reductions in cognitive distortions. (Shirk, 2013)

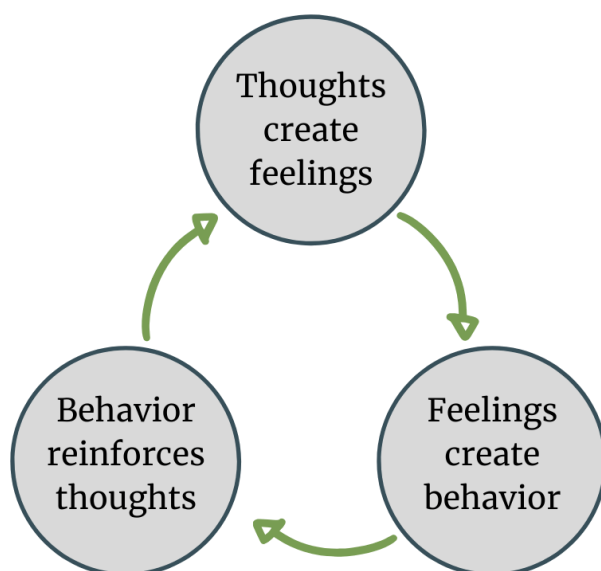


Figure: 1 Therapeutic Model of CBT

Similarly, according to Szigethy 2012, exploring distorted cognitions by examining evidence requires logical and systematic thinking. It involves critically evaluating the evidence for and against a particular belief or thought. This

process requires individuals to analyze the facts objectively, consider different sources of evidence, and think logically about how the evidence fits with their beliefs.

Cognitive Restructuring:

Cognitive restructuring is a well-established technique in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that aims to facilitate schematic change. According to Dobson & Dozois 2010, this therapeutic approach involves a structured and collaborative process where individuals learn to recognize, assess, and modify problematic thoughts, evaluations, and beliefs that contribute to psychological distress, such as low self-image. By addressing these faulty cognitive patterns, individuals can experience significant improvements in their mental well-being.

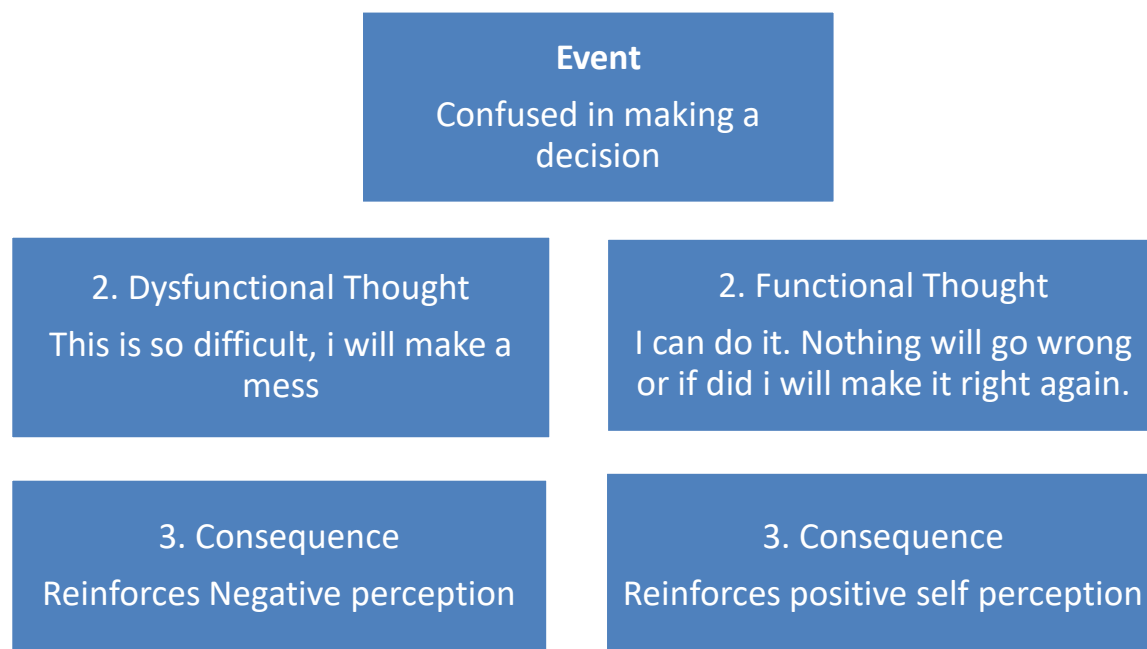


Fig. 02 Cognitive Restructuring Example

Metacognition: It refers to the cognitive process of thinking about one's thinking. According to Keating 1990, during adolescence, individuals begin to develop the ability to monitor their thoughts and recognize their knowledge. Although they may not yet fully understand the implications of this knowledge, they can reflect upon it and acknowledge its existence. This intervention is very significant for adolescents with poor decision-making power. Basu & Dixit, 2022 claimed that Metacognition illustrates both fast and slow decision-making styles.

| |
|---------------|
| I'm Thinking |
| I'm Wondering |
| I'm Feeling |
| I'm Noticing |
| I'm Seeing |

Fig. 03 Metacognitive Thinking

Self-Reflection:

Self-reflection is a crucial skill that allows individuals to apply reasoning and metacognitive abilities to their own beliefs and actions. It plays a significant role in developing a strong self-image, according to Drigas and Papoutsi 2018. By engaging in self-reflection, you gain the capability to recognize and comprehend your own emotions and their influence on your thoughts and behaviors.



Fig 04: Cycle of Self-Reflection

Social-cognitive techniques:

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) encompasses a range of social-cognitive abilities, including perspective-taking, empathy, and pro-social behavior. The development of social perspective-taking skills is crucial for children as it enables them to anticipate the impact of their actions on others. An effective CBT technique often utilized is role-playing, which requires children to tap into their ability to view situations from another person's point of view. (Szigethy, 2012) All these techniques boost children's confidence which increases the capability to make quick and well-informed decisions.

The CBT therapist can use several techniques to support adolescents in managing these challenges. According to Kendall 2011, adolescents could potentially find value in a CBT intervention that prioritizes these specific interventions as they serve as building blocks for the formation of decision-making power and positive self-image.

Conclusion

The research paper aimed to examine the effects of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy on self-image and decision-making in adolescence. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is extensively studied and researched due to its goal-oriented approach and measurable outcomes. The treatment emphasizes clear objectives, which allows for easy assessment of results.

Research on the process of psychotherapy has shown that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a highly effective intervention for enhancing self-image and improving decision-making abilities. Additionally, CBT has been found to have lasting effects on treatment outcomes and can mediate changes in symptoms associated with specific disorders in adolescence (Szigethy, 2012). The overall stance for CBT for adolescents with low self-image and decision-making is promising. Studies have demonstrated positive outcomes in improving their decision-making abilities and self-image.

Researchers in the field should continue their efforts to collect data on the formation of self-image in adolescents. There is also a need for more meticulously designed research studies to effectively explore the influence of process variables on decision-making transformation. Additionally, it will be imperative to examine the mechanisms through which change occurs in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) across various therapy formats, such as individual sessions, group therapy, family therapy, bibliotherapy, and computerized interventions.

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