

The effect of Psychodrama practice on the subjective well-being in nursing students: A quasi-experimental study

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Abstract Psychodrama's contribution to raising awareness and developing individuals is well known. It enables the individuals to see the underlying reasons behind their emotions, thoughts and behaviors. In this article of the Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie, the aim of this research is to analyze the effect of psychodrama group practice on the subjective well-being of first grade nursing students. In keeping with this aim, the study was conducted in a quasi-experimental pattern, without a pretest-posttest control group in this research. Methods: in 2018–2019 34 first grade students, from the nursing faculty of health sciences of a university, who had selected psychodrama lessons, agreed to participate in the research. These students formed the research population. The data was collected by an Information Form and Subjective Well-Being Scale (SWS). Both descriptive statistical methods and Paired Sample T-Test were applied in the data analysis. The significance level was evaluated as $p < 0.05$. Results: The mean age of the participants was 20.28 ± 1.3 (min: 19 max: 26). Of the participants, 53.1% ($n = 17$) were female, 46.9% ($n = 15$) were male and 81.7% ($n = 26$) were Turkish citizens. A significant difference was statistically determined with reference to previous psychodrama history in “positive and negative emotions” and “purposes” scales from the SWS subscale for the participants ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, it was also determined that there were developments in “Comparison of his/her Life with his/her own History and Other People's Life, Self-Confidence, Optimism, Activities Being Interested, Looking to Future and Family Relationships” scales and total score; however, these developments were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Conclusion: After the psychodrama group, it was observed that the participants became skillful with their emotional awareness,

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distinguishing personal needs and being aware of these needs. The effectiveness psychodrama on the subjective well-being was also supported by the study results.

Keywords Nursing student · Subjective well-being · Psychodrama · Psychodrama research

Der Einfluss der Psychodrama-Praxis auf das subjektive Wohlbefinden von Studierenden der Krankenpflege: Eine quasi-experimentelle Studie

Zusammenfassung Das Psychodrama leistet einen Beitrag zur Sensibilisierung und Entwicklung des Einzelnen. Es bietet den Individuen die Möglichkeit, die Gründe für einige Emotionen, Gedanken und Verhaltensweisen zu erkennen. In diesem Artikel der Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie besteht der Zweck der Forschung darin, die Auswirkung der Psychodrama-Gruppenpraxis auf das subjektive Wohlbefinden von Studierenden im ersten Studienjahr zu analysieren. Dieser Zielsetzung entsprechend wurde diese Untersuchung im quasi-experimentellen Muster ohne Prä-Test- und Post-Test-Kontrollgruppe durchgeführt. Methodik: 34 Studierende im ersten Studienjahr, die sich für eine Psychodrama-Lektion entschieden und sich bereit erklärten, 2018/2019 an der Forschung der Fakultät für Gesundheitswissenschaften einer Universität teilzunehmen, bildeten die Stichprobe der Forschung. Die Daten wurden mit dem Informationsformular und der Subjektiven Wohlfühlskala (SWS) gesammelt. Bei der Datenanalyse wurden sowohl deskriptive statistische Methoden als auch der Paired Sample T-Test praktiziert. Das Signifikanzniveau wurde mit $p < 0,05$ bestimmt. Ergebnisse: Das Durchschnittsalter der TeilnehmerInnen beträgt $20,28 \pm 1,3$ (min: 19 max: 26). Von den TeilnehmerInnen sind 53,1 % ($n = 17$) weiblich, 46,9 % ($n = 15$) männlich. 81,7 % ($n = 26$) sind türkische StaatsbürgerInnen. Ein signifikanter Unterschied wurde statistisch in Bezug auf die Vorerfahrungen mit Psychodrama in Bezug auf die Skalen „positive und negative Emotionen“ und „Zwecke“ aus der SWS-Subskala für die TeilnehmerInnen festgestellt ($p < 0,05$). In ähnlicher Weise wurde auch festgestellt, dass es Entwicklungen auf den Skalen „Vergleich seines Lebens mit seiner eigenen Geschichte und dem Leben anderer Menschen, Selbstvertrauen, Optimismus, interessierte Aktivitäten, Blick auf die Zukunft und familiäre Beziehungen“ gab Ergebnis; Diese Entwicklungen waren jedoch statistisch nicht signifikant ($p > 0,05$). Schlussfolgerung: Nach der Psychodrama-Anwendung wurde beobachtet, dass die TeilnehmerInnen emotional aufmerksamer wurden, ihre persönlichen Bedürfnisse klarer unterscheiden konnten und diesen Bedürfnissen mehr Aufmerksamkeit widmeten. Die Wirksamkeit des Psychodramas auf das subjektive Wohlbefinden wurde auch durch die Studienergebnisse gestützt.

Schlüsselwörter PflegeschülerInnen · Subjektives Wohlbefinden · Psychodrama · Psychodrama-Forschung

1 Introduction

Well-being is a complex structure that focusses on living and functioning at optimal levels. Generally, researchers accept that well-being has cognitive (how we think about ourselves) and emotional (how we feel about ourselves) components. In a review, in which the concept of well-being was explored, it suggested that the concept of well-being consisted of two perspectives. Firstly, the hedonic perspective focuses on happiness and pain avoidance. The second one is the eudemonic perspective that defines well-being in terms of humans fully functioning, focusing on meaning and self-realization (Ryn and Deci 2001). While conceptional communication, of the hedonic perspective in psychology, is subjective well-being, it is the psychological well-being that is the focus for the Eudemonism perspective (Keyes et al. 2002).

Subjective well-being includes positive emotions, negative emotions and satisfaction with life; while psychological well-being is to have power that will try to redress the balance between the individual and social interests in the life of the person. It is the condition, in which the psychological function is at the highest level (Ryff 1989). Diener et al. (2000) defines the subjective well-being as a combination of high satisfaction with life, a high rate of positive affectivity and a low rate of negative affectivity. Satisfaction with life generally expresses how please we are with our personality characteristics. Satisfaction with life reflects the cognitive aspect of the well-being definition. On the other hand, the emotional components of the other half of well-being focuses on both positive (happy, pleased, excited, and calm) and negative (angry, upset, startled) emotions (Dinner 2000).

The subjective well-being, which is commonly defined as happiness or satisfaction, has been the subject of intensive analysis. Especially in the last ten years. In the studies, conducted in this period, subjective well-being was correlated with health (Pressman et al. 2013; Diener et al. 2018) and physically healthy individuals tend to state higher levels of subjective well-being. An important, second result, emerging from these studie, was the relationship of subjective well-being and social relationships. Diener et al. (2015) determined that the positive affectivity and significant socialability consistently correlated. Kansky et al. (2016) determined that positive affectivity had significant effects in adolescence, in the future, and predicted loneliness and sociability on reaching adulthood. A third important result of the studies was the relationship of well-being and academic and work performance (Tenney et al. 2016; Hart 2016; Diener et al. 2018). In these studies, subjective well-being affected the work performance from small to medium levels. The fourth result of the studies was the relationship of subjective well-being and psychological resilience. Psychological durability is defined as the person's ability to return to negative events and protect his/her mental health as they come up against these negative events. There is a relationship between high level of subjective well-being and low levels of developing possible mental health difficulties (depression, anxiety, loneliness and low self-esteem) (Kansky et al. 2016). Moreover, the studies show that subjective well-being is an important consequence of a satisfactory, healthy and totally functional process; however, they are able to be an important determinant (Diener et al. 2018).

Psychodrama is a method that directs individuals to enact their problems instead of speaking about them (Blatner 2002). Psychodrama sessions, are targeted to provide opportunities to gain insight, to test reality and develop and learn sensible thoughts, and create behavioral change. A psychodrama session consists of warm up, action (game) and sharing (meeting) stages (Dökmen 2013). The basic items of the psychodrama are: stage, protagonist (leading “actor”), auxiliaries (supporting actors), director (leader) and audience. In psychodrama therapy, it is important not only to know these terms but also to practice the psychodrama techniques regularly and properly (Gladding 2003). In Karatas’s study (2014), in which the relationship of psychodrama and well-being was analyzed, the effect of psychodrama practice on subjective well-being and hopelessness was analyzed in forty five (experiment, control and placebo group) university students. The experimental group performed psychodrama therapy for 90–120 min for 12 weeks. The results demonstrated that the subjective well-being scores of the students taking part in the experiment group significantly increased in comparison to the control and placebo groups; hopelessness also significantly decreased. Based on the research results, which reveal the relationship between the subjective well-being and psychological health, it may be said that the evaluation of subjective well-being, through the psychodrama therapy, is important to mental health studies. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of psychodrama group therapy on the subjective well-being in the nursing first grade students. In accordance with this aim, the hypothesis of this study was to assess. Statistically, the significance levels of change in participants’ subjective well-being, following the psychodrama intervention.

2 Material and methods

Participants The research was conducted in the quasi-experimental pattern, without a pretest-posttest control group. There was a potential target research population of 195 students attending the 1st Grade in the department of nursing of faculty of health sciences of a university in 2018/2019 spring semester. First of all, face to face information was given to the students about the research study and psychodrama; students were accessed by entering the classes for sampling purposes. Then, a pretest practice was undertaken; the students, with the general group mean score, gained from the scale, were invited to the psychodrama sessions. 34 students, out of 39, gave written informed consent and chose psychodrama. The informed consent included the aim, terms and practice of the study, collection of the data, participation in the research depended on volunteering. They would be able to leave the research whenever they wished, and their personal details would be kept confidential. In order to practice the research, permission with 903/25 dated 31.01.2019, was obtained from the Ethical Committee of Faculty of Health Sciences. Also, institutional permission was gained from the Department of Nursing of Faculty of Health Sciences of the University, in which the research was undertaken.

3 Data collection instruments

Personal information form The personal information form, prepared by the researcher, included: gender, age and citizenship information of the participants.

Subjective Well-Being Scale The Subjective Well-Being Scale developed by Tuzgöl Dost (2005) consisted of 46 items. The purpose of this scale is to determine subjective well-being levels by specifying frequency and density of the positive and negative emotions of the individuals, who experienced the cognitive evaluations about their lives. The subjective well-being scale consists of individual judgments, related to their living space and the expression of positive and negative emotions. The questionnaire design is five-point Likert scale including “(5) Completely Favorable”, “(4) Mostly Favorable”, “(3) Partly Favorable”, “(2) Bit Favorable”, and “(1) Not Favorable”. The scores of each article vary between “5 and 1”. Of the scale articles, 26 are positive and 20 are negative expressions.

The negative expressions are 2nd, 4th, 6th, 10th 13th, 15th, 17th, 19th, 21st, 24th, 26th, 30th, 32nd, 35th, 37th, 38th, 40th, 43rd and 45th articles. Scoring of the negative expressions is carried out by reversing. While the lowest score will be obtained from the scale is 46, the highest score is 230. The high score indicates that subjective well-being level is high. The scale consists of 12 scales. These scales are the comparison of his/her life with his/her own history and other people's life, positive and negative emotions, purposes, self-confidence, optimism, activities being interested, friendship relations, looking at future, family relations, feeling envy, dealing with the life's difficulties, and pessimism. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the SWS has been found as 0.93. In the present study, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the SWS has been found as 0.84.

4 Process

The experimental group was carried out by the researcher, who completed his/her theoretical training in Abdulkadir Ozbek Psychodrama Institute; the weekly sessions were held over 10 weeks for 90-120 min, with an experienced co-therapist and certificate. The sessions were performed in a big room, with space enough to build a psychodrama stage. The sessions were structured as follows:

The formation of group dynamic was aimed at creating a group dynamic. The participants' expectations related to the group were obtained in the first two sessions and group rules were shared. The aim was to promote self-expression and group cohesion and to create a positive atmosphere. The “getting to know you” and warm up games enabled the group members to recognize each other, understand their different aspects and to enter into different roles.

The period of change-Development involved protagonist and group games which determined the intended needs of group, promoted emotional expression and assessed subjective well-being scales. This period was conducted 7 (between 3. Session

and 9. session) sessions. There was a protagonist in each of the five sessions. (3, 4, 5, 6 and 9. session) and other two sessions (7 and 8. Sessions) was not a protagonist.

Ending the group The farewell session focused on evaluation of the group, the training and themselves. The participants played farewell games, which reflected the emotions and thoughts about belonging to the psychodrama group. The group ended.

5 Experimental sessions

A general summary, about the previous session, was given at the start of each subsequent session, starting from the second session in the psychodrama group.

1. The information described the subject of psychodrama at the beginning of the session; group members informed about group rules (confidentiality, coming on time, respecting to talker, providing feedback etc.) and the members quickly accommodated themselves to the group. Then, the members' warm up to each other came from "similarities" (Altınay 2012) and "Write Your Own Impression" (Sevi 2016)" studies. After the games, feedback was given and the session ended. It was observed that the games caused members to gain knowledge related to them and to strengthen those known by them.
2. The session was started giving the summary from the previous week. Then, participants were asked to share how they spent their week and how they were returning back to the group. The warm up game, called "talking with an unknown person for five minutes" was suggested by the director as members were not disposed to bring some things, so it was played (Altınay 2012). This activity provided the participants with the opportunity to recognize each other more closely and to express themselves more easily.
3. The session was started with sharing, again, about the last week and how they were to be back in the group. One member said that they had something to explore. The member walked about and took to the stage and he/she talked about their fear of dogs. The protagonist was asked to create their scene and select auxiliary egos, for those found in the event, from the group. Action phase followed psychodrama rules. The session ended with the sharing stage, firstly speaking from the role taken and then, sharing about personal moments of identification. There is literature supporting that revealing the repressed emotions of the protagonist is beneficial in terms of psychological well-being (Tavakoly et al. 2014).
4. The session started with the now familiar arrival ritual. Once again a group member said that they want to explore something. The member walked around the stage and described their problem about being prone to falling to sleep. The protagonist set up their own scene and enrolled auxiliaries to play required roles from the group members. The psychodrama action took place and the session was closed following sharing. The protagonist was able to see the reasons behind the increased need for sleep.

5. Following the arrival ritual, a group member came forward expressing a desire to work on the problem of their depressive symptoms. They set the scene and chose auxiliaries to support their psychodrama action. The session ended with the sharing stage. Psychodrama, as a method, is impressive in that it improves the spontaneity and creativity of the members and gains awareness through role change (McVea et al. 2011). During the sharing stage, the protagonist expressed positive feelings.
6. Once the arrival ritual was completed a participant wanted to explore their problem with overeating. They set the scene and chose auxiliaries to support their psychodrama action. The session ended with the sharing stage. The protagonist was able to learn much about yourself and see the reasons behind the overeating through engaging in Moreno's unique techniques (mirroring, doubling, role reversal etc.).
7. It was apparent, after the arrival ritual, that nobody had an issue to bring. So the director proposed the warm up game called "compossibility"¹ (Altinay 2012). This game gives the opportunity to explore personal internal conflicts found in the person's life. The director requested that group members think of the compossibility that create conflicts inside of them during the first year of university and to select those that forced at the furthest by walking around the stage. After completing the selection process, members talked about these aspects and when and why they felt like this by matching two by two. Then, the group was asked if any of them wanted to focus on this issue. The group moved into action with a member who chose to work as protagonist. As per routine for action, they set the scene and chose auxiliaries to support their work. After the action ended, sharing took place, firstly from their roles and then from points of personal identification.
8. After the arrival ritual was completed, there was no potential protagonist, so a warm up game was chosen: "my strengths and weaknesses". The group members were asked to think about their strengths and weaknesses; these they shared with another chosen member of the group. Then, the group members were asked who would like to play his/her strengths and weaknesses with the other member they had studied with. This action enabled the members to look at their strengths and weaknesses and the underlying influences. Thus, the importance of self-respect and accepting both the strengths and weaknesses were emphasized. Sharing took place after action finished.
9. After the arrival ritual, a group member stepped forward wanting to look at their issues related to being over-sensitive, anger and guilt feelings. They built the scene and worked through the issues on the stage with auxiliaries. This was followed by sharing from role and then self. Kellermann defines the psychodrama as "a way of healing that uses action methods that help people cope with their problems, a therapy that enables the growth and development of the personality" (Kellermann 2013). It has been observed that it contributes to the personal development of the protagonist.

¹ compossibility—defined as the ability or possibility of coexisting.

10. This final session had no protagonist coming forward so the group play some games: “living the future” and “give a gift” (Altınay 2012). At the end of the quasi-experimental practice, time had been allocated to undertake a general evaluation and evaluation of all sessions were performed together with the members.

Data collection The pretest routines were applied to the students, who continued their education at the first grade in Department of Nursing of Faculty of Health Sciences of the University. The routine took approximately 10–15 min. The posttest routines were repeated at the last session in accordance with the requirements of the quasi-experimental design of the study.

6 Evaluation of data

The data obtained in the research was evaluated in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 program. Both the definitive statistical methods and Paired Sample T-Test have been applied in the analysis of data. The significance level has been evaluated as $p < 0.05$. The influence quantity was calculated by the Cohen’s d coefficient.

7 Results

7.1 Sampling characterizations

Of the participants, 53.1% ($n = 17$) are female and 46.9% ($n = 15$) are male. The mean age is 20.28 ± 1.3 (min: 19 max: 26). Of them 81.7% are Turkish citizen and 18.3% are not Turkish citizen.

In Table 1, the intragroup mean scores belonging to the SWB have been given in the difference analysis before and after the psychodrama. Accordingly, when the intragroup mean scores were analyzed, it was determined that there was statistically a significant difference in the “positive and negative emotions” and “purposes” sub scales of the participants ($p < 0.05$). It was determined that this difference was greater in the positive and negative emotion scale and had medium greatness in the purpose scale. It showed up that there was statistically significant increment in both scales according to before and after the psychodrama ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, it was determined that there were developments in the “comparison his/her life to his/her history and other people’s life, self-confidence, optimism, activities being interested, looking at the future and family relations” scales and total scores; however, these developments were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

8 Discussion and conclusion

Westwood and Wilensky (2005) state that performing group therapy by making a contract will give university students the space, in which they fearlessly reflect

Table 1 Analysis of Subjective Well-Being Scale Mean Scores Before and After Psychodrama

SWS	Before Psy- chodrama	After Psy- chodrama	<i>Cohens</i>	
	$\bar{X} \pm Sd$	$\bar{X} \pm Sd$	<i>t/p</i>	<i>d</i>
Comparison his/her life to his/her history and other people's life	21.59 $\pm$ 7.37	22.34 $\pm$ 4.59	-0.620;0.540	0.125
Positive and negative emotions	18.09 $\pm$ 0.09	20.09 $\pm$ 5.51	-2.039;0.050*	0.917
Purposes	15 $\pm$ 3.15	16.21 $\pm$ 3.08	-2.256;0.031*	0.389
Self-confidence	16.03 $\pm$ 2.52	16.35 $\pm$ 2.33	-0.698;0.491	0.086
Optimism	25.09 $\pm$ 3.22	25.75 $\pm$ 3.10	-1.019;0.316	0.138
Activities being interested	13.71 $\pm$ 3.13	14.46 $\pm$ 3.02	-1.155;0.257	0.161
Friend relations	14.25 $\pm$ 3.16	14.16 $\pm$ 3.02	0.142;0.888	0.019
Looking at future	12.40 $\pm$ 2.60	12.59 $\pm$ 1.88	-0.505;0.617	0.084
Family relations	12.16 $\pm$ 2.11	12.93 $\pm$ 2.12	-1.870;0.070	0.364
Desiring to other people's life	6.68 $\pm$ 2.13	7.12 $\pm$ 2.23	-1.083;0.287	0.201
Dealing with difficulties of life	12.48 $\pm$ 1.92	12.09 $\pm$ 2.19	-1.007;322	0.190
Pessimism	6.87 $\pm$ 1.73	7.31 $\pm$ 1.92	-1.248;0.221	0.241
SWS Total	174.40 $\pm$ 21.86	181.09 $\pm$ 21.14	-1.766;0.087	0.311

$\bar{X}$ Mean; Sd Standard Deviation; t Paired Sample T Test, $p < 0.05$

their problems; through this, they take advantage of focusing on their life situations by interacting with others, they receive social support, and they hear the words and struggles of other group members. Moreno defined psychodrama as a process, during which life can be explored without being fearful of punishment but being able to take risks. The psychodrama, as an action method with role playing, provides a framework, in which the individuals' reactions to certain problems are analyzed and alternative ways of responding in a supportive environment are explored. Psychodrama techniques are a person-centered approach, which focusses on revealing a positive world-view of the participants (Konopik and Cheung 2012). Therefore, psychodrama provides a safe framework, in which the university students tackle their problems. In the present study, a statistically significant increase was expected in the subjective well-being levels of the participants according to the psychodrama.

The present study's results show that psychodrama group therapy has protective and formative effects on the subjective well-being. There is approximately a four-point difference between the pretest SWS mean scores and posttest measurements of the psychodrama group in our study (Table 1). The university phase is a period, in which a transformation is made from late adolescence to early adulthood and covers 18-25 age range. The expectations of being autonomous with the reduced structure of the university life require students to take more independent decisions. On the one hand this condition supports autonomy, but on the other hand it may be a stressor. They are required to make decisions about the place (dormitory, home, etc.) they will stay. Many students come up against changing life conditions, life styles and environment. It was determined that the psychological well-being was low, since the stressors were high, especially in the first year for the university students (Bewick et al. 2010). University life is filled with the stressful pressures, which contribute to psychological stress and low performance levels. There are

academic expectations that university students come across that include stresses such as adapting to new family and social roles, which will impact negatively on their different social networks, financial changes and mental health (Pidgeon and Pickett 2017). In this sense, not decreasing but showing improvements in the subjective well-being scores, within an approximately three-month period, are remarkable results when the condition of dealing with the stressors mentioned.

In the present study, it was shown that the “positive and negative emotions” and “purposes” scores statistically, and significantly, increased between the pretest and posttest among the intergroup SWS scores in the psychodrama group. Psychodrama has shown big and medium degree of effect on these two scales. Moreover, it determined that there were developments in the “comparison his/her life to his/her own history and other people’s life, self-confidence, optimism, activities being interested, looking at the future and family relations scales for the participants; however, these developments were not statistically significant (Table 1). Karatas (2014) aimed at analyzing effectiveness of psychodrama on the subjective well-being and hopelessness scores of the university students. It showed that the subjective well-being scores of the students taking place in the experiment group significantly increased and their hopelessness scores significantly decreased according to the control and placebo scores. In the follow up test, it observed that the decrease in the subjective well-being scores did not take ten weeks and the decrease in the hopelessness scores took ten weeks. Tavakoly et al. (2014) analyzed the effectiveness of psychodrama based group training on healthy life style, psychological balance, spiritual well-being and optimism for the university students and specified that it significantly impacted on the psychological balance, spiritual well-being and optimism scores of the students taking place in the experiment group. Subjective well-being is interpreted as having a high level of positive affectivity, low level of negative affectivity and high level of life satisfaction. When these three structures are influentially supported, it may be said that the subjective well-being is also high (Deci and Ryan 2008). Support of the subjective well-being scales by the psychodrama practice has been proven by both literature and present study results.

Limitations This study has some limitations. The participants previously knowing each other and the therapist working in the same institution was a possible inhibitor to being spontaneous and self-disclosing. Also, an additional pressure was that they had to continue their education in the same school and same class and staying at the same dormitory and same home. Being a small of the study sampling was another limitation. This condition should be considered while evaluating the results.

Suggestions for practice Psychodrama based group studies should be also applied to the students who will work in the mental health field and study in the different departments and classes of the university and their effects should be evaluated. The psychodrama was used as a method in this study. In addition, to the psychodrama, efficiency of the group studies performed by different two or three methods should be evaluated. The psychodrama may be used as an important instrument in protecting and developing the mental health within the community mental health field.

Conflict of interest F. Kaya declares that he/she has no competing interests.

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