



Research Article

Effects of Self-esteem Improvement Program on Self-esteem and Peer Attachment in Elementary School Children with Observed Problematic Behaviors



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SUMMARY

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a self-esteem improvement program on self-esteem and peer attachment in elementary school children with observed problematic behaviors. **Methods:** This study is a quasi-experimental study with a nonequivalent control group pretest-post-test design. A total of 47 fourth grade elementary school students participated in this study. The program was provided for 45 minutes once a week; a total of 12 sessions were completed with a group in the classroom for the experimental group. Child Problem-Behavior Screening Questionnaire was used to measure problematic behavior. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg's Self-esteem Questionnaire, and peer attachment was measured using the Inventory of Parent and Attachment. Measuring was performed right after the program was done (post 1) and 1 month after the program was finished (post 2). To compare the differences in self-esteem and peer attachment between groups, repeated measures analysis of variance was used.

Results: Most participants in the experimental group were 10 years old (62.5%, range 10–11), male (52.0%) and with middle grade point average (64.0%). The self-esteem scores in the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group ($F = 26.64, p < .001$). The peer attachment scores in the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the control group ($F = 6.48, p = .014$).

Conclusions: The self-esteem improvement program in this study improved the self-esteem and peer attachment in elementary school children. The self-esteem program helped acknowledge the peer's name and increased their connections. The program needs to be considered as a formal and consistent program.

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Introduction

The numbers of divorced, separated and single-parent families have been increasing in South Korea [1]. These changes have brought a decrease in the number of school children also. The number of school children in 2002 was 4,138,366, which decreased to 2,951,995 in 2012 [2]. The changes in the family structure and the decrease in the number of school children are thought to have induced the increase of negative development concerns, including the pathological syndromes of depression, neurosis, complexes and learning disabilities. There are also concerns regarding problematic behavior patterns including lying, hyperactivity and disruptive

behaviors [3]. In South Korea, nearly 60% of the school children have been observed to show various emotional or behavioral problem patterns and 33% of the students have shown various forms of psychosomatic problems in 2006 [4].

Problematic behaviors in a schoolchild are defined as inappropriate behaviors when the personal needs are not satisfied or accepted by others [5]. Children showing problematic behaviors are inclined to exhibit silence and helplessness along with the refusal to participate in school activities. The affected children also show a low level of self-esteem and maladjustment to friends and school life [6,7]. Self-esteem in school children has been observed to be low, between the ages of 11 and 12 years (grade 4–5) if compared with that of grade 1–3 students [8]. This is thought to be because grade 4–5 students are inclined to show a higher level of stress with an increased level of awareness.

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Self-esteem is related to the sense of attachment in feeling safe and stable [9], and this sense of attachment affects the self-esteem in school children [10]. Positive self-esteem and peer attachment are important factors for personal creativeness and productiveness. Negative self-esteem and peer attachment are factors for decreased confidence, helplessness, depression, and risky behaviors [11,12]. Students with a high level of self-esteem and attachment have shown a high level of adjustments to personal challenges and school life [13,14]. Such students have also shown a high level of personal health and stress management [15]. As such, developing and maintaining positive self-esteem as well as increasing the sense of peer attachment are important for the reduction of problematic behaviors.

Many studies have shown the positive outcomes of diverse programs that improve self-esteem and peer attachment, including group art therapy [16], self-esteem programs [17–20], play schemes and bibliotherapy programs for students [21]. However, most of the studies have focused on infants or high school students and were limited to those from low-income brackets or those with learning or intellectual disabilities. Few studies have been conducted for school children showing problematic behaviors [17,19]. In addition, most studies were performed with experimental groups only, and without a control group so that it was difficult to generalize the findings of the studies [20,22]. Thus, the current study is different from previous studies. The program was provided to elementary school children showing the observed problematic behaviors and the effect of the program was compared with a control group. In particular, the program was provided right after class at school. As such, the program was very easily accessible for the students.

The purpose of this study is to test the effects of the self-esteem improvement program on self-esteem and peer attachment in grade 4 elementary school students with problematic behaviors. The research hypotheses of this study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. The students who participate in the self-esteem improvement program (experimental group) show a higher level of self-esteem compared to the students who do not participate in the self-esteem improvement program (control group);

Hypothesis 2. The students who participate in the experimental group show a higher level of peer attachment compared to the students who participated in the control group.

Methods

Study design

This study is a quasi-experimental study with a nonequivalent control group pretest-posttest design. It aims to investigate the effects of a self-esteem improvement program on the self-esteem and peer attachment in elementary school grade 4 students with problematic behaviors.

Setting and samples

A total of 25 students at school A participated in the experimental group and 25 students at school B participated in the control group. The experimental group and control group were randomly determined using pitching pennies. The inclusion criteria of the study are as follows: (a) grade 4 students in an elementary school; (b) score over 13 points on the Child Problem-Behavior Screening Questionnaire (CPSQ) [23]; (c) able to verbally communicate; (d) never participated in a similar program before.

The reasons for providing the program to grade 4 students were that the level of self-esteem in the grade 4 students was lower than

that in others in the elementary school, and that grade 4 is an important period in the formation of a peer group [8]. The study started with 50 students participating in the program (25 in the experimental group and 25 in the control group). Three students in the control group dropped out due to personal reasons such as vacation. Hence, there were 25 students in the experimental group and 22 students in the control group who completed the study. The CPSQ was assessed by the principal investigator (PI) and research assistants. The minimum size for each group was 20, based on the G*Power 3 Program analysis [24] for repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA; with moderate effect size of 0.30, power of .80, and alpha value of .05). Hence, the number of participants in this study satisfied the minimum sample size. The evidence to determine the sample size was also based on the previous studies [20,21].

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the institutional review board committee members at D hospital of K university (No. 12–47). Data collection began after the approval. Participants were informed that they could decline to participate in the study when they felt uncomfortable. All materials including questionnaires and consent forms were stored in a locked file cabinet in the PI's office to ensure the protection of participant confidentiality.

Intervention (experimental group)

The self-esteem improvement program was originally developed by the Samsung Psycho Social Health Research Center to improve self-esteem in school children [25]. The center introduced the self-esteem improvement program to school nurses at school nurse workshops; school nurses were allowed to run the program when they were certified. The program consists of five levels including introduction, self-understanding, personal relationship, sense of purpose/competence improvement and conclusion (Table 1). The intervention consists of 12 sessions and the more specific description of each session is as follows:

Follow the name game

Participant A says his/her name, for example "I am John. I sing well." Participant B says his/her name after restating participant A's name, such as "I am Christina. I enjoy singing and dancing, sitting next to John who sings well." Next, participant C would say his/her name after restating Participant A's and B's names, such as "I am Tiffany. I love caring for dogs, sitting next to Christina who enjoys singing and dancing, next to John singing well."

"It's me" contest

A participant lists his/her name, birth date, happy memory, what he/she is good at or not good at, favorite food, entertainer, songs or physical activity, the best memory in his/her life, the best gift received and so on, and shares the stories related to the lists with others. Present the best list of "It's me."

Write about meaningful persons in his/her life

Remember the meaningful persons in his/her life, list the names and have time to appreciate them. For example, remember a person who listened to his/her worries, a person who consoled him/her when sorrowful, a teacher he/she likes the best, a person who cooks and organizes for him/her, a person who call him/her the most frequently and so on. Share the person's names and stories with other participants.

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