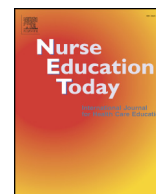




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Interpersonal sensitivity, coping ways and automatic thoughts of nursing students before and after a cognitive-behavioral group counseling program

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SUMMARY

Background: In order to provide optimal professional care to patients, nurses must possess a positive self-image and professional identity. High interpersonal sensitivity, coping problems and dysfunctional automatic thoughts can prevent nursing students to be self-confident and successful nurses. Helping nursing students experiencing interpersonal sensitivity problems via cognitive-behavioral counseling strategies can contribute to shape good nurses.

Objectives: This study aims to evaluate interpersonal sensitivity, ways of coping and automatic thoughts of nursing students before and after a cognitive behavioral group counseling program.

Design: An intervention study with 43 nursing students. Measurements were done before the counseling program, at the end of the program and 4.5 months after the program.

Settings: The students were chosen from a faculty of nursing in Turkey.

Participants: 43 second and third year nursing students who were experiencing interpersonal sensitivity problems constituted the sample.

Methods: Brief Symptom Inventory, Ways of Coping Inventory and Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire were used for data collection.

Results: The students' scores of "interpersonal sensitivity", "hopeless" and "submissive" copings and "automatic thoughts" were significantly lower at the end of and 4.5 months after the program than the scores before the program (Interpersonal sensitivity $F = 52.903$, $p = 0.001$; hopeless approach $F = 19.213$, $p = 0.001$; submissive approach $F = 4.326$, $p = 0.016$; automatic thoughts $F = 45.471$, $p = 0.001$). Scores of "self-confident", "optimistic" and "seeking social support" copings were higher at the end of and 4.5 months after the program than the scores before the program (Self confident $F = 11.640$, $p = 0.001$; optimistic $F = 10.860$, $p = 0.001$; seeking social support $F = 10.411$, $p = 0.001$).

Conclusions: This program helped the students to have better results at interpersonal sensitivity, ways of coping and automatic thoughts at the end of and 4.5 months after the program. We have reached the aim of the study. We suggest that such counseling programs should be regular and integrated into the services provided for students.

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Introduction

Nursing is a profession based on interpersonal interactions (Peplau, 1991; Travelbee, 1971). An important aspect of interpersonal interactions is interpersonal sensitivity which is defined by Boyce and Parker (1989) as an excessive awareness of and sensitivity to the behavior and feelings of others. Individuals with this trait are preoccupied with their interpersonal relationships, vigilant to the behavior and moods

of others, and overly sensitive to the vicissitudes of any interpersonal interaction (Boyce and Parker, 1989). Increased interpersonal sensitivity can challenge relationships, negatively affect communication and cause conflicts (Barnett and Gotlib, 1988). According to research, interpersonal sensitivity elicits depression, anxiety, paranoia, and stress, and avoidant coping strategies such as social withdrawal and self medication with alcohol and drugs (Masillo et al., 2012; Freeman et al., 2010; Vidyanidhi and Sudhir, 2009). Interpersonally sensitive people are generally focused to comply with others' expectations so as to minimize the risk of criticism or rejection (Boyce and Parker, 1989). Research has revealed a positive correlation between interpersonal sensitivity and sociotrophy which is the opposite of autonomy and causes rejection and abolishment stress and a strong need for close emotional

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relationships (Otani et al., 2012). Also, negative self concept and low self esteem have proven to be related to interpersonal sensitivity (O'Connor et al., 2002; McCabe et al., 1999).

Self-doubt, feelings of personal inadequacy, a sense of inferiority, and interpersonal avoidance are characteristics of individuals with interpersonal sensitivity (Bell and Freeman, 2014; Derogatis and Melisaratos, 1983). Feelings of uneasiness, self-deprecation and marked discomfort during interpersonal interactions can be observed in highly interpersonally sensitive people (Derogatis and Melisaratos, 1983). These are dysfunctional thoughts and coping behaviors. Whereas, nurses are the professionals who are expected to have functional thinking and effective communication and coping strategies, and not to have distorted beliefs and negative psychological well-being which are frequently present in interpersonal sensitivity. In order to provide optimal professional care to patients, nurses must possess a positive self-image and professional identity (Ohlen and Segesten, 1998). Nurses generally work in crisis conditions and they are expected to manage these conditions. For managing such conditions efficiently, they also need to possess high self-efficacy because individuals with high self-efficacy handle current situations well and decrease their level of stress as well as negative emotions (Bandura, 1994).

Helping nursing students to overcome difficulties about interpersonal sensitivity and self issues is an important component in the training and development of self-efficient and effectively coping future nurses. During clinical training as nursing students, after graduation as nurses, they work in a wide variety of settings where they experience various levels of challenges to provide quality patient care. The more psychologically healthy the nursing students are, the more likely they will be productive and successful in their academic and clinical trainings. As a consequence, healthy and productive nurses will be able to handle the challenges of the nursing profession and provide good patient care as well as to contribute to the nursing profession (Ratanasiripong and Wang, 2011). Therefore, decreasing nursing students' interpersonal sensitivity and sustaining their coping and mental health should become an important goal for the faculty who prepares nurses of the future.

One of the most useful counseling theories for helping nursing students about interpersonal sensitivity and related issues is cognitive-behavioral theory. In cognitive behavioral theory, it is hypothesized that stress is largely determined not by the unpleasant events or stressors people experience in their lives, but mainly by their irrational beliefs about what is happening to them (Beck, 1995; Beck, 1964). In this approach, a person's dysfunctional thoughts and beliefs, their reactions to these thoughts and beliefs, and their view about themselves, other people, the world, and their future are identified (Beck, 1964). The goal of this approach is to ensure that the individual develops awareness and takes responsibility for their thoughts and beliefs. The next step is to help the person replace his/her dysfunctional thoughts and beliefs with functional ones. Cognitive behavioral oriented counseling has helped university students develop self-awareness, reduces their negative automatic thoughts, increases their self-esteem, develops more effective stress management skills, and decreases various mental illness syndromes (Peden et al., 2000; Hamamci, 2002; Duy, 2005; Bozanoğlu, 2005; Willert et al., 2009).

Although nursing schools try to provide some kind of counseling services for their students, these services are generally at individual level and evidences about the results of this kind of efforts are so limited. Because of these reasons, intervention studies are needed to contribute to the evidence-based practices in this area. In this study, in an attempt to decrease interpersonally sensitive nursing students' interpersonal sensitivity and negative automatic thoughts and to enhance stress coping skills, we constructed a cognitive behavioral counseling program for nursing students and examined the results of this program. Also, this study is the first to examine interpersonal sensitivity, automatic thoughts and coping ways of interpersonally sensitive nursing students before and after cognitive behavioral group counseling.

Aim

The aim of our study was exploring interpersonal sensitivity, dysfunctional automatic thoughts, and coping ways of nursing students before, at the end of and 4.5 months after the cognitive behavioral group counseling program. The hypotheses of the study were:

1. Interpersonal sensitivity of Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI), hopeless and submissive approaches of Ways of Coping Inventory (WCI) and Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ) scores of the students will be lower at the end of the cognitive behavioral counseling program and 4.5 months after the program than the scores before the program.
2. Self-confident, optimistic and seeking social support approach scores of WCI will be higher at the end of the cognitive behavioral counseling program and 4.5 months after the program than the scores before the program.

Methods

Design

The study was conducted as an intervention study with a nursing student group. Data collection inventories were collected two weeks before the cognitive behavioral counseling program began, at the end of the 12-session program and 4.5 months after sessions were terminated. Timeline and student selection process are shown in Fig. 1.

Participants

The population of the study consisted of 182 nursing students from a large faculty of nursing from the capital city of Turkey, Ankara. The students were second (n = 95) and third-year (n = 87) students who were expected to have handled a variety of adaptation problems like living away from their families and home cities, adapting to an entirely new environment, and the nursing education. In this faculty, undergraduate nursing education takes four year. In first term of a first year, students take theoretical courses like anatomy, physiology, histology, and microbiology and they don't start patient care practices. Thus, this first term becomes a slight transition into nursing education besides the efforts of adapting to university life. In second term of a first year, they take fundamentals of nursing course. By this way, their nurse-patient interaction and patient care practice process start. In following years, they take medical-surgical, obstetric, pediatric, psychiatric and community health nursing courses respectively. As the years pass by they get more experience in nursing education and patient care. At the last year they also get prepared for their professional life after graduation by defining their preferences and getting ready for them. In this faculty, when the students have psychosocial problems they can have individual counseling from faculty members of psychiatric nursing division but this is not a regular program and as the faculty members have limited time for these services, it isn't known to all students who need this kind of help can acquire it. Also, there isn't a regular group counseling program for nursing students in this school.

To determine eligible students for the study, firstly all of the 182 nursing students were given information about the study and asked for their consent to participate. After their oral and written consent were taken, the data collection tools (BSI, WCI and ATQ) were distributed. After gathering the data, BSI scores of all students were calculated and the students who took a score of 1.00 or above on the "Interpersonal Sensitivity" Subscale of the BSI were determined. Thus, of the 182 students 57 were eligible for participation into the study. Then interviews were hold with these 57 students about the study. The aim of the study and the importance of attending sessions on a regular basis were told and their consent was asked. Among these 57 eligible students 5 did not want to participate; 9 were excluded because they

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