

Investigating the Effect of Existential Therapy on Feelings of Helplessness and Failure, Feelings of Old age and Emptiness, and Feelings of Confusion and Conflict in Retired Teachers

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Abstract

Background: Retirement may cause some problems in people and cause incompatibility and symptoms called retirement syndrome.

Objectives: The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of existential therapy on the feeling of helplessness and failure, the feeling of old age and emptiness, and the feeling of confusion and conflict in retired teachers.

Methods: This study was semi-experimental with a pre-test and post-test design with a control group. The statistical population included all retired teachers in Kermanshah, Iran. Among them, 40 teachers were selected by available sampling method and randomly assigned into two experimental and control groups. The participants completed the retirement syndrome questionnaire in two phases: pre-test and post-test. Multivariate covariance analysis method was used to analyze the data.

Results: There is a difference differences between the retired teachers of the existential therapy group and the retired teachers of the control group in the variables of feelings of helplessness and failure ($p=0.0001$, $f=10.11$), feelings of aging and emptiness ($p=0.0001$, $f=10.10$) and feelings of confusion and conflict ($p=0.0001$, $f=10.11$). Existential therapy led to a decrease in the mean score of the participants of the experimental group in the variables of retirement syndrome.

Conclusion: The current findings showed that the holding of existential therapy sessions had a positive effect on reducing the symptoms of retirement syndrome in retired teachers, and with the training of existential therapy in old age, it is possible to deal with or reduce the symptoms of retirement syndrome by creating preparation for retirement.

Keywords: Existential Therapy, Helplessness, Failure, Emptiness, Retired.

Introduction

Retirement and old age are related phenomena that overlap with each other in a time symmetry.¹ Retirement means passing from another role and moving to a new stage of life, which creates a deep interruption in one's life, retirement is a sudden end in one's working life.^{2,3}

This stage occurs while work has a central concept for many people in self-definition, identity, purposefulness, time structure, social communication and social participation, and it affects their social relationships, family and leisure time.⁴

Research has shown a series of positive and negative psychological and social changes such as fear, stress,

anger, threat to identity and fear of changing relationships or a sense of lack of role in retirement, which if these changes are not managed correctly, will reduce the quality of life and satisfaction with life leads to a decrease in general health and psychosomatic diseases and even death.⁴⁻⁶

During retirement and after retirement, the amount of physical and mental pressure is significantly higher than in the pre-retirement period, which can be the foundation of incompatibility and negative symptoms in retirement, which is called retirement syndrome. Retirement syndrome includes a set of symptoms such as the feeling of reaching the end of the line, possible emptiness and

aimlessness, anxiety, depression, fear of rejection and other concerns that people experience in different ways after retirement.⁷ This syndrome affects the mental health of the elderly. Mental health has a special place among the health issues of the elderly and it is a state in which a person is aware of self-abilities and can well manage the natural stresses of life and communicate with the society.⁸

Adaptability to the transition to retirement is largely unknown. Most retirement plans for employees treat this issue as a single event rather than a complex adjustment process that requires planning.⁹ Adaptation to retirement plays a major and sometimes vital role for continuing work and activity, satisfaction and health, reducing retirement syndrome and in general the mental and physical health of retirees. Factors such as readiness for retirement, favorable social and economic status, family and marital status, as well as community support and efficient social communication, can be effective in the adaptation of retirees.²

One of the things that can possibly facilitate a person's adaptation to retirement is existential therapy. Existential psychotherapy focuses on free will, self-determination and the search for meaning within the individual.¹⁰ This approach emphasizes the individual's capacity to make rational decisions and reach maximum potential.¹¹ Existential therapy is another therapy that can be used to increase and improve the life expectancy and self-care behaviors of these people. This therapeutic approach is a well-known and widespread paradigm that changes the meaning of life and reduces psychological distress. This treatment includes different approaches such as existential analysis, existential-humanistic therapy, existential-phenomenological therapy and meaning therapy.¹² Existential therapies emphasize responsibility, conscious choice, freedom, awareness, authenticity, and participation. The main goals of these treatments are to help people to take responsibility, be independent and autonomous, make moral decisions, manage anxiety, express their conscious intention, participate with others and establish intimate relationships.¹³ The effect of existential therapies on various aspects of life, such as people's attitude to life,¹⁴ self-confidence and feelings of worthlessness,¹⁵ has been confirmed. Others showed that

this group of treatments is effective on anxiety, hope and depression.¹⁶

Considering the fact that the phenomenon of retirement and its complications, especially from a psychosocial point of view, considering the cultural background, has not been specifically investigated in detail, and there has not been a written and specific plan for the support and care of the elderly in the transition to retirement in Iran.

Objectives

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of existential therapy on the feeling of helplessness and failure, the feeling of old age and emptiness, and the feeling of confusion and conflict in retired teachers.

Methods

This study was semi-experimental with a pre-test and post-test design with a control group. The statistical population included all retired teachers in Kermanshah, Iran. Among them, 40 retired teachers were selected by available sampling method and randomly assigned into two experimental and control groups. The participants completed the retirement syndrome questionnaire of Bozorgmehri et al. in two phases: pre-test and post-test. The experimental group underwent existential therapy in 8 sessions of 90 minutes, but the control group was not given any training.

The inclusion criteria were women; retired; teacher; resident in Kermanshah and the exclusion criteria were retired teachers returning to teaching after retirement and teachers who retired due to physical illness.

The tools used in this research included the Retirement Syndrome Questionnaire, which is an Iranian questionnaire based on the conditions of Iranian elderly retirees, and its validity and reliability have been confirmed by Bozorgmehri et al. This questionnaire contains 40 questions and confirms four factors. These four factors are: the feeling of helplessness and failure (18 questions), the feeling of old age and emptiness (11 questions), the feeling of effort and new orientation (6 questions), and the feeling of confusion and conflict (5 questions). In this tool, questions 1, 2, 4, 9, 24, 31, 32, 36,

37, 38 and 40 are reverse scored. The scale of responding to the questionnaire is considered as five options (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always). Cronbach's alpha of the whole questionnaire was 0.71. The mean of each dimension was measured and analyzed separately, and a higher score indicated more symptoms of retirement syndrome in the individual.¹⁷

Existential therapy: Yalom's existential therapy protocol was used for the existential therapy of the retired teachers in 8 sessions of 90 minutes for one month (Table-1).

Statistical analysis

The continuous variables were expressed as the mean \pm

SD, and the categorical variables were presented as a percentage and frequency. Multivariate covariance analysis method was used to analyze the data. All statistical analyses were performed with SPSS (version 16.0, SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL, USA). A "P-value" less than 0.05 was considered significant.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained. All participants signed an informed consent form.

Table-1. Content of existential therapy sessions

	Description
First	Group members swimming with each other, stating the rules governing group counseling, introducing the group and the number of meetings, the commitment of confidentiality of the members with the aim of creating a safe and reliable environment for the members, stating the goals of participating in the group, creating a context of group solidarity and communication together
Second	Establishing communication and increasing solidarity and participation of members, strengthening presence here and now and increasing self-awareness
Third	Encouraging members to self-disclose more, deepening self-awareness
Fourth	Getting to know the psychological concepts of freedom and choice, knowing the place and consequences of freedom and choice in mental health or lack of health
Fifth	Getting to know the concept of responsibility, increasing responsibility towards oneself and others and improving the relationship with oneself and others
Sixth	Understanding and accepting loneliness as an inevitable reality, understanding that loneliness does not conflict with being close to others, understanding the role of intimacy in enduring the feeling of loneliness, accepting the reality of death, understanding the importance of the reality of death for the fulfillment of life.
Seventh	Understanding the meaning and purpose in life, discovering the hidden and obvious meanings in the life of the members, committing to a specific goal in the future life, understanding the concept of self-actualization and excellence, getting to know the characteristics of self-actualization
Eighth	Integrating and explaining the contents of the previous sessions, explaining the treatment experience as the beginning of a new and healthy relationship with others, ending the treatment process.

Results

The total number of participants in the present study were 40 retired female teachers. The mean age of the experimental and control groups were 53.07 ± 5.56 and 52.11 ± 5.67 years, respectively. There was no significant difference between the two groups in the age variable ($p < 0.91$, $f = 0.041$). There was no significant difference between the two experimental and control groups in marital status ($p = 0.73$, $\chi^2 = 3.03$). Also, there was no

significant difference in the education level between the two experimental and control groups ($p = 0.47$, $\chi^2 = 4.51$, 2). Table-2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the research variables.

The data distribution was normal in all variables ($p < 0.05$). The results of the box test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance ($p = 0.655$, $df_2 = 241453$, $df_1 = 3$, $f = 0.67$, $M s'Box = 2.14$) was established.

Table-2. Descriptive indices related to research variables to separate groups

		Experimental group	Control group
		Mean± SD	Mean± SD
Feeling of helplessness and failure	Pre-test	41.41±7.52	40.89±6.90
	Post-test	31.01±6.33	40.02±5.13
Feeling of old age and emptiness	Pre-test	23.33±4.09	19.97±5
	Post-test	23.80±4.12	22.23±4.21
Feeling of confusion and conflict	Pre-test	13.21±3.00	10.02±4.01
	Post-test	13.23±4.03	13.65±4.30

Discussion

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of existential therapy on the feeling of helplessness and failure, the feeling of old age and emptiness, and the feeling of confusion and conflict in retired teachers. The results showed that there was no difference in the score of retirement syndrome before the intervention in the two groups, and similar symptoms were observed in both the control and experimental groups.

The transition from work to retirement is a special stage in people's lives and has significant effects on daily life activities, social interactions, family and social roles, self-confidence and identity,⁹ the consequences of retirement cause mental health disorders, reduced social relationships, decrease in life expectancy and feeling of loneliness, increase in stress, change the social status.¹⁸ In other studies, the negative effects of this period, such as socioeconomic changes, loss of social status and personal identity, reduction of job-related relationships, loneliness, and high probability of depression, stress, and anxiety have been mentioned.^{19,20} Thyer and Wodarski states that retirement has been introduced as a stressor in old age, which has been largely neglected.²¹

In the current study, the mean score of helplessness and failure in the experimental group had a significant difference after the training compared to before, which can indicate the reduction of the feeling of helplessness and failure in these people by doing existential therapy training.

The results of Nobahar et al.'s study showed that if the nurses get the necessary preparation before retirement, they will face a better retirement and the threats and reactions related to retirement will be prevented.²² It is

necessary to prepare people for transition to retirement.⁹

A statistically significant difference was observed in the field of feelings of old age and emptiness in the experimental and control groups, before and after the training. It seems that the content of helplessness, failure, old age, and idleness revolves around disappointment, despair, fruitlessness, and similar things, and the nature of all these things is psychological.⁷

Changing this dimension requires longer interventions. The lack of significant change in the sense of old age and unemployment may be due to entering old age and passing through the mid-life crisis and the fear of change and the anxiety of spending half of one's life. According to the study of Movahed and Hosseini, the cultural image that is presented from middle age means the beginning of aging and the changes and deterioration of the body, and this issue affects mental and social health.²³

In general, the results of the present study showed that the total score of retirement syndrome has decreased compared to before the intervention and the symptoms of retirement syndrome have changed according to the mean scores of retirement syndrome before and after the intervention. According to Eruki et al.'s study, existential therapy increases physical and mental health and social relationships, and physical and mental health and proper social relationships can keep the level of hope and happiness and quality of life in the elderly at an optimal level.²⁴

The study of Ng et al., shows that retirement is an important phenomenon that needs attention and preparation, especially the first few months after retirement are challenging and deserve special attention. In this study, the training program "Active and Interested Counselor Plan" reduced depression and anxiety among

retirees, and the training and planning of retirees was emphasized.²⁰

In the study of Zarimoghadam et al., it was reported that existential therapy training strengthens a person's sense of worth and perception of himself. Existential therapy training includes relationships with peers, management of emotional relationships and taking care of mental and physical health status, it can be effective in increasing a person's mental health.²⁵

This finding is consistent with the results of the present study. After retirement, the need for social support is essential. Since retirement is associated with psychosocial tensions for retired people and the effects of these tensions have an impact on their health, social support can play an important role against these tensions. Social supports can improve health and protect the elderly against diseases and death.¹⁷

Due to the fact that this research was conducted on retired female teachers, therefore, it has limitations in generalizing to retired men, and in addition, it is suggested that this research be conducted on retirees from other organizations and compare the results.

Conclusions

The results of the present study showed that the holding of existential therapy sessions had a positive effect on reducing the symptoms of retirement syndrome in retired female teachers, and with the training of existential therapy in old age, it is possible to deal with or reduce the symptoms of retirement syndrome by developing preparation for retirement.

Acknowledgment

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Abbreviations

None.

Authors' contributions

The author read and approved the final manuscript. She

take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis.

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Availability of data and materials

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained. All participants signed an informed consent form.

Consent for publication

By submitting this document, the authors declare their consent for the final accepted version of the manuscript to be considered for publication.

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