

The Effectiveness of a Psychological–Educational Psychological Empowerment Intervention Package on Intimacy among University Students Who Are Children of Divorce

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E d i t o r

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R e v i e w e r s

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the final sentence of the Introduction, the authors state that the study aimed “to determine the effectiveness of a psychological–educational psychological empowerment intervention package in improving intimacy.” This wording presupposes improvement and may introduce confirmatory bias. The aim should be phrased neutrally as examining the effect of the intervention on intimacy. The authors should also state an explicit directional hypothesis, identify the expected time-by-group interaction, and clarify whether maintenance at follow-up constituted a separate hypothesis.

The Introduction defines intimacy broadly as “the capacity to establish and maintain emotionally close, trusting, reciprocal, and meaningful relationships,” whereas the selected Walker and Thompson scale appears to have been developed in relation to family affection and emotional closeness. The authors must clarify the precise operational meaning of intimacy in this study. It is currently unclear whether the outcome represents family intimacy, general interpersonal intimacy, romantic intimacy, or

perceived emotional closeness across relationships. This conceptual ambiguity affects the alignment among the title, theoretical framework, intervention content, measurement instrument, and interpretation of the findings.

The eligibility criteria include “not to be using psychiatric medication” and “not to have a reported history of substance or psychotropic drug use,” but the assessment method is not described. The authors should explain whether these criteria were evaluated through self-report, clinical interview, medical records, or a structured screening form. They should also justify excluding all psychiatric medication use, because stable medication does not necessarily prevent participation in psychoeducational research and such exclusion may reduce external validity.

The ethics reporting is incomplete. The Methods mention informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, but the manuscript should provide the institutional ethics committee name, ethics approval code, approval date, and any trial-registration information. The authors should also explain whether participants in the control group were offered the intervention after completion of follow-up, particularly because they were selected on the basis of low intimacy scores. Procedures for responding to distress, disclosures of family conflict, or requests for psychological support should also be reported.

The psychometric description of the Walker and Thompson Intimacy Scale contains an important scoring inconsistency. The Methods state that “the total score is obtained by summing the responses to all 17 items, producing a possible score between 17 and 119,” which is mathematically correct, but earlier source material also indicated that the sum may be divided by 17, which would yield a range of 1 to 7 rather than 17 to 119. The authors must verify the scoring method used in the dataset, report whether any items are reverse-scored, and ensure that all descriptive values, thresholds, and interpretations are based on the same scoring convention.

The authors should report the internal consistency of the intimacy scale in the present sample rather than relying exclusively on coefficients from previous Iranian studies. The Data Collection Tool paragraph provides historical Cronbach’s alpha and test–retest coefficients, but no reliability estimate is reported for the current participants. Cronbach’s alpha or preferably McDonald’s omega should be calculated for the pretest administration, with confidence intervals if possible. Given the small sample, the authors should interpret the estimate cautiously but still provide it.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The Introduction relies heavily on general consequences of parental divorce but does not sufficiently establish why dentistry students at Islamic Azad University constitute a theoretically or clinically distinctive population. The paragraph beginning “The university years are a particularly important period for studying these consequences” should be expanded to explain whether dentistry students experience specific academic stressors, clinical training demands, time pressures, or interpersonal challenges that may interact with parental-divorce history. Alternatively, the authors should acknowledge that the selection of dentistry students was based primarily on accessibility and should avoid implying that the findings characterize all university students from divorced families.

The Introduction cites several intervention studies, including cognitive-behavioral treatment, acceptance and commitment therapy, positive psychology, compassion-focused therapy, and the Children of Divorce Intervention Program, but it does not clearly distinguish the present empowerment intervention from these established approaches. The paragraph stating that “psychological empowerment provides a useful integrative framework” should specify the theoretical model of empowerment adopted, identify its core dimensions, and explain how each dimension informed the intervention. Without a defined theoretical foundation, the intervention risks appearing as an eclectic collection of common psychoeducational techniques rather than a coherent psychological empowerment program.

In the Methods section, the sentence “No qualitative phase, intervention-development process, or protocol-validation stage formed part of the present study” is useful but insufficient. Because the intervention is described as a “package,” readers need to know its origin, prior validation status, manualization, and evidence base. The authors should specify whether the package

had previously been developed and validated in another study, whether permission was obtained to use it, and whether the current research tested an existing finalized protocol. This information can be provided without presenting a protocol-development phase as part of the current quantitative article.

The sampling procedure requires greater methodological precision. The Methods state that “87 students from the target population were assessed” and that “30 students who obtained comparatively low intimacy scores” were selected. The authors must define the cutoff used to identify low intimacy, explain whether it was based on normative thresholds, a percentile criterion, or sample-dependent ranking, and report how many of the 87 screened individuals met each eligibility criterion. A participant-flow diagram should be added showing the numbers assessed, excluded, eligible, randomized, lost to posttest, and included in the final analysis.

The description of random assignment is incomplete. The authors state that participants were assigned “through simple random allocation,” but they do not describe how the random sequence was generated, who generated it, whether allocation was concealed, or whether the researcher delivering the intervention was involved in enrollment. The authors should report the exact randomization procedure, such as a computer-generated sequence or sealed envelopes, and discuss the potential for selection bias if allocation concealment was not implemented.

The inclusion criterion requiring “a low score on the intimacy scale” may produce regression-to-the-mean effects, particularly when participants are selected from the lower end of a screening distribution and reassessed using the same instrument. The authors should discuss this risk explicitly and explain how random allocation and the control group address, but do not completely eliminate, it. The manuscript should also indicate whether the pretest used in the analysis was the same administration used for screening or whether the questionnaire was administered again after participant selection.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.