



Investigating the effect of cognitive-behavioral group counseling on the academic burnout of students

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Background and Aim: From a psychological point of view, students' educational and learning activities in educational situations can lead to burnout as a task. These activities can create characteristics such as fatigue caused by the requirements related to study, growth, and a sense of pessimistic and insensitive attitude towards course materials, as well as a feeling of poor personal progress in coursework and education in students. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of cognitive-behavioral group counseling on students' academic burnout. **Methods:** This research is quasi-experimental, pre-test-post-test, with the selection of two groups, including the control group and the test group, and the statistical population of this research consists of 10th grade students in the 12th district of Tehran in the academic year 2022-2023. The sample size has been considered by simple random sampling method, including 40 students (20 in the experimental group and 20 in the control group). In order to collect data, the academic burnout questionnaire of Salemla-Aru (2009) was used. **Results:** The results of covariance analysis show that group counseling training in a cognitive-behavioral way significantly reduced students' academic burnout in the post-test phase: Excessive fatigue components ($F=9.63$ and $p<0.003$); pessimism ($F=13.33$ and $p<0.001$); Feeling of incompetence ($F=18.43$ and $p<0.001$). **Conclusion:** Therefore, it is suggested to implement extracurricular classes as much as possible to prevent academic burnout for students.



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Introduction

Burnout is a state of mental and emotional fatigue, which is a syndrome of chronic stress, such as role burden, pressure and time limitations, and lack of necessary resources to perform tasks and assignments. In educational situations, it is characterized by features such as fatigue caused by study requirements, the development of a pessimistic and insensitive attitude towards course materials, as well as a sense of poor personal progress in academic and academic affairs (Singh et al., 2021). Many times, by examining the educational status of students, we notice that despite the existence of facilities, many of them do not achieve academic success and growth, which is the ultimate goal of education in any society. In fact, they face the phenomenon of academic burnout (Kuropets et al., 2019). Academic burnout can be both the cause and effect of mental illnesses; If students are prone to mental illness due to certain reasons, they will quickly suffer from mental illness with academic failure, and vice versa, mental illness makes them prone to academic burnout (Tating et al., 2023).

From a psychological point of view, educational and curricular activities of students in educational situations can lead to burnout as a task. They can also cause characteristics such as fatigue caused by the requirements related to study, growth, and a sense of pessimistic and insensitive attitude towards course materials, as well as a feeling of poor personal progress in coursework and education in students (Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, psychological diseases, of course, by disrupting people's cognitive organization, weaken the person's academic performance and also cause the conditions of academic burnout. This fatigue and exhaustion causes the development of a pessimistic and insensitive attitude towards course materials, a feeling of incompetence and weakness in academic affairs (Osan Suproya et al., 2020). Exhaustion leads to mental helplessness such as anxiety, depression, suppression, hostility or fear. People who have academic burnout usually experience symptoms such as lack of enthusiasm for course material, inability to continue attending class, not participating in class activities, frequent absences, and a sense of meaninglessness and incompetence in learning course material. (Madigan and Curran, 2021).

Over the past fifty years, cognitive behavioral therapy has been an important component of effective psychological treatments for many behavioral problems. Cognitive behavioral therapy includes various methods, which all have in common the emphasis on the role of cognitive-behavioral processes in the formation and continuation of psychological disorders and the use of experimental methods based on behaviorism and cognitivism for the treatment and control of incorrect responding. (Ghahremani et al., 2022). Group therapy with a cognitive-behavioral approach is an approach that emphasizes cognitive processes resulting from experience and the role of cognitive processes in behavior by relying on learning foundations. Based on clinical experience, the behavior of people in the group is similar to their behavior in normal life (Khatai, 2020). People enter the group with the same behavior patterns that have created problems in their lives. It won't be long before these behaviors are exhibited within the group. By becoming aware of the behavior of clients' hypotheses, motivations, fantasies, thoughts and imaginations, they can replace their ineffective attitudes and beliefs with more concrete and concrete beliefs (Al-Dahri, 2020). Cognitive behavioral therapy has found much wider applications and many of them are related to cases that cannot be treated simply and effectively using other methods. One of these cases can be considered academic burnout among students.

In this regard, many researches have been conducted based on the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy and the use of group therapy for students in academic and non-academic situations, all of which indicated the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral approach and group therapy. (Asterki et al.; 2022; Farhat et al., 2021; Kiamarathi et al., 2018; Alshobaili et al., 2021; Ezzatpour et al., 2018; Serikam et al., 2017).

Therefore, considering that the growth of any society depends on the educational system of that society; Every year, countries spend significant amounts of their national income on education (Abdollahi, Darbani, and Parsakia, 2022). However, there are some factors, such as academic burnout, that cause a part of these investments to be wasted. In addition to the loss of national income, the main capital of the country, that is, students, as the most important

source of talent and production, are also destroyed and lose their efficiency. Based on what has been said and the important effects of this approach in improving behavioral disorders, this study investigates the effect of cognitive-behavioral group counseling on students' academic burnout. For this purpose, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- Group counseling in a cognitive-behavioral way reduces the academic burnout of students.
- Cognitive-behavioral group counseling reduces the components of academic burnout (excessive fatigue from school activities, pessimism towards the meaning of school, and feelings of incompetence at school) in students.

Method

This research is semi-experimental, pre-test-post-test, with the selection of two groups, including the control group and the test group. The statistical population of this research consists of 160 tenth grade students in Tehran's 12th district in 2022-23. In this research, the sample size included 40 students of the mentioned society (20 people in the experimental group and 20 people in the control group), and the purposive sampling method was used to select them.

Materials

1. School burnout questionnaire by Salemla-Aro et al. (2009): The questionnaire was prepared and compiled by Salemla Aro and his colleagues in 2009 through factor analysis. It consists of 9 items and three factors (the first factor is excessive fatigue from school activities and is composed of 4 items, the second factor is pessimism towards the meaning of school and is composed of 3 items, and the third factor is the feeling of incompetence at school is composed of 2 items). For scoring in this questionnaire, a 6-point Likert scale is used as completely agree (6), agree (5), partially agree (4), disagree (3), somewhat disagree (2) and completely disagree (1). Therefore, the minimum score in this questionnaire is 9 and the maximum score is 54. This questionnaire was translated for the first time by Savari (2009) and was applied to third grade high school students and its Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.64. To determine its validity, Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (2000) perceived self-efficacy questionnaire was used, and its correlation value was -0.16. In this research, to determine the reliability of the burnout questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient measurement method was used, which was obtained as 0.81 for the entire questionnaire, which indicates good reliability coefficients.

2. Group counseling with a cognitive-behavioral approach: In this research, the experimental group underwent 8 sessions of group counseling with a cognitive-behavioral approach as follows:

Table 1. Summary of the content of cognitive-behavioral group counseling sessions

| Session | Content |
|---------|---|
| 1 | After the introduction and welcome, the definition of academic burnout and the factors causing it were discussed. |
| 2 | Trainings were provided on the characteristics of spontaneous thoughts and belief systems. |
| 3 | It was devoted to education related to behavioral and emotional consequences and thoughts and beliefs. |
| 4 | The training of skills to change thoughts of irrational beliefs was done. |
| 5 | Verbal and non-verbal skills of effective communication and assertive behavior were taught. |
| 6 | Relaxation training was given. |
| 7 | Problem solving skill training was done. |
| 8 | It was devoted to a review of the trainings and programs presented in the previous meetings. |

Implementation

The statistical sample of the research was selected from among those who referred to counseling and psychotherapy centers in the 12th region after screening and obtaining a score lower than the mean score in the academic burnout questionnaire of Salemla-Aro et al. (2009). The experimental group underwent group cognitive-behavioral therapy, but the control group did not receive any intervention. After the end of the sessions, both groups completed

the mentioned questionnaire again and the collected data were analyzed through SPSS software and using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. In the descriptive statistics section, mean and standard deviation indicators were used, and in the inferential statistics section, univariate variance analysis and univariate and multivariate one-way covariance analysis were used.

Results

In terms of the demographic characteristics of the present study, there were 9 (60%) boys and 6 (40%) girls in the experimental group. Also,

in the control group, there were 8 boys (53%) and 7 girls (47%). In Table 1, the descriptive results of the research are presented.

Table 2. The mean and standard deviation of students' academic burnout scores in the pre-test and post-test phases

| Variable | Stage | Index | Mean | SD | N |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------|-------|-------|----|
| | | Group | | | |
| Academic burnout | Pre-test | Exp. | 40.24 | 11.50 | 20 |
| | | Control | 38.44 | 14.57 | 20 |
| | Post-test | Exp. | 30.69 | 12.65 | 20 |
| | | Control | 37.19 | 14.55 | 20 |
| Fatigue | Pre-test | Exp. | 25.69 | 5.66 | 20 |
| | | Control | 24.20 | 5.87 | 20 |
| | Post-test | Exp. | 19.53 | 6.48 | 20 |
| | | Control | 22.70 | 6.06 | 20 |
| Pessimism | Pre-test | Exp. | 6.74 | 3.08 | 20 |
| | | Control | 6.24 | 4.47 | 20 |
| | Post-test | Exp. | 4.29 | 3.50 | 20 |
| | | Control | 6.23 | 4.42 | 20 |
| A feeling of inadequacy | Pre-test | Exp. | 5.59 | 3.26 | 20 |
| | | Control | 5.60 | 4.45 | 20 |
| | Post-test | Exp. | 3.79 | 2.78 | 20 |
| | | Control | 5.97 | 4.22 | 20 |

As can be seen, group counseling with a cognitive-behavioral approach is effective on students' academic burnout. The comparison of

the average scores shows that the academic burnout in the experimental group has decreased significantly.

Table 3. The results of univariate analysis of variance on the mean of post-test scores of subjects of two groups with pre-test control

| Source | SS | Df | MS | F | p | Eta ² | Power |
|----------|---------|----|---------|--------|--------|------------------|-------|
| Pre-test | 7107.79 | 1 | 7107.79 | 305.84 | <0.001 | 0.88 | 1.00 |
| Group | 483.15 | 1 | 483.15 | 20.87 | <0.001 | 0.38 | 0.994 |
| Effect | 827.02 | 36 | 21.50 | | | | |

As can be seen, in the pre-test there is not significant difference in the mean of scores of the control and experimental groups, while in the post-test, there is a difference between the mean of scores of the two groups. In the examination of the variable components, a significant difference is observed in the mean of post-test scores of the control group and the experimental group.

Also, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed the normality of the data, and based on the results of Levene's test, the condition of homogeneity of variance is established; Finally, the Mbox test also confirms the covariance matrix. Therefore, it is possible to use the method of multivariate variance analysis with three-step repeated measurements.

Table 4. The results of multivariate one-way analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) on the mean of post-test scores of the academic burnout components of students in the experimental and control groups, with pre-test control

| Test | Value | Df hyp. | Df err. | F | p | Eta ² | Power |
|---------------------------|-------|---------|---------|------|--------|------------------|-------|
| Pillai's trace | 0.462 | 3 | 33 | 9.08 | <0.001 | 0.46 | 0.99 |
| Wilks' Lambda | 0.556 | 3 | 33 | 9.08 | <0.001 | 0.46 | 0.99 |
| Hotelling's trace | 0.834 | 3 | 33 | 9.08 | <0.001 | 0.46 | 0.99 |
| Roy's largest root | 0.837 | 3 | 33 | 9.08 | <0.001 | 0.46 | 0.99 |

As seen in Table 4, with the pre-test control, the significance levels of all tests indicate that there is a significant difference between the students of the experimental and control groups, at least in terms of one of the dependent variables. Therefore, the second hypothesis of the current research is also confirmed. The effect or difference is equal to 0.46, that is, 46% of the

individual differences in the scores after the academic burnout test are related to the effect of group counseling in a cognitive-behavioral way. The statistical power is equal to 0.99, that is, if this research is repeated 100 times, the null hypothesis may be wrongly confirmed only once.

Table 5. Results of one-way analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) on the post-test of the mean of scores of the academic burnout components of the students of the experimental and control groups, with pre-test control

| Variable | Source | SS | Df | MS | F | p | Eta ² | Power |
|--------------------------------|----------|---------|----|---------|--------|--------|------------------|-------|
| Fatigue | Pre-test | 1040.13 | 1 | 1040.13 | 81.65 | <0.001 | 0.71 | 1.00 |
| | Group | 118.22 | 1 | 118.22 | 9.63 | 0.003 | 0.22 | 0.86 |
| | Error | 446.15 | 34 | 11.57 | | | | |
| Pessimism | Pre-test | 361.49 | 1 | 361.49 | 209.78 | <0.001 | 0.86 | 1.00 |
| | Group | 24.47 | 1 | 24.47 | 13.33 | <0.001 | 0.30 | 0.95 |
| | Error | 60.57 | 34 | 1.84 | | | | |
| A feeling of inadequacy | Pre-test | 387.95 | 1 | 387.95 | 198.57 | <0.001 | 0.86 | 1.00 |
| | Group | 37.54 | 1 | 37.54 | 18.43 | <0.001 | 0.36 | 0.99 |
| | Error | 68.71 | 34 | 1.87 | | | | |

As can be seen in the above table, there is a significant difference between the students of the experimental groups and the control group in terms of exhaustion in the field of excessive fatigue ($F=9.63$ and $p<0.003$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed. The effect or difference is equal to 0.22, that is, 22% of the individual differences in the burnout post-test scores in the field of excessive fatigue are related to the effect of cognitive-behavioral group counseling. The statistical power is equal to 0.86, that is, if this research is repeated 100 times, only 14 times the null hypothesis may be wrongly confirmed.

Also, with the pre-test control, there is a significant difference between the students of the experimental groups and the control group in terms of burnout in the field of pessimism

($F=13.33$ and $p<0.001$). As a result, hypothesis 2 is confirmed. The effect rate is equal to 0.30, that is, 30% of individual differences in post-exam burnout scores in the field of pessimism are related to the effect of group counseling in a cognitive-behavioral way. The statistical power is equal to 0.95, that is, if this research is repeated 100 times, only 5 times the null hypothesis may be wrongly confirmed.

With the pre-test control, a significant difference is observed between the students of the experimental groups and the control group in terms of burnout in terms of feelings of incompetence ($F=18.43$ and $p<0.001$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed. The effect rate is equal to 0.36, that is, 36% of the individual differences in the burnout post-test scores in the field of feelings of incompetence

are related to the effect of group counseling in a cognitive-behavioral way. The statistical power is equal to 0.99, that is, if this research is repeated 100 times, only 1 time the null hypothesis may be wrongly confirmed.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of cognitive-behavioral group counseling on students' academic burnout. Based on the obtained results, group counseling in a cognitive-behavioral way reduces academic burnout. The comparison of the mean of scores shows that the level of academic burnout in the experimental group has decreased significantly. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the research is confirmed. By controlling the pre-test, the significance levels of all tests indicate that there is a significant difference between the students of the experimental and control groups, at least in terms of one of the dependent variables (burnout components). Therefore, the second hypothesis of the current research is also confirmed. The findings of this research were consistent with the results of the following studies: Yaqoubian et al. (2021), Grayli Meshkabadi et al. (2021), Afshari et al. (2022), Safari et al. (2022), Alshubaili et al. (2021) and Srikam et al.

In explaining the findings, it can be said that the majority of people's psychological problems and related behaviors are rooted in their irrational statements to themselves when facing events that are not according to their wishes. Those who act irrationally and irrationally when dealing with events against their will, become anxious, worried and depressed more quickly. Among the different approaches of academic performance management in the last two decades, the cognitive-behavioral approach has been more welcomed. Cognitive theory is based on the essential connection of the components of thinking, feeling and behavior. The purpose of therapists is to increase awareness of the feeling of ability, hope and motivation, in order to reduce the possibility of academic burnout (Alshubaili et al., 2021). Academic burnout is a serious problem and can be defined as a negative emotional, physical, and mental reaction to long-term study that leads to burnout, frustration, lack of motivation, and reduced ability in school. Familiarity with the process of burnout, the thoughts and feelings involved in it, and teaching effective methods of

coping will increase people's behavioral self-awareness and this will create motivation to reduce fatigue and academic burnout in them (Sericom et al., 2017).

In further explaining the findings, it can be said that the cognitive-behavioral model has made significant progress due to having strong theoretical and practical foundations and central research in the field of science and scientific thinking. This model uses guidelines such as collaborative cooperation, problem prioritization, goal setting, meeting agenda setting, focusing on the here and now, emphasizing problem solving, changing and modifying thoughts, feelings, and behavior, and designing self-help assignments to increase effectiveness. It also helps a person to create something valuable out of their current unpleasant situation. The skills taught are involved in improving mood issues, solving communication issues, coping with stress, reducing symptoms, increasing self-esteem, reducing fear, and increasing confidence; They help a person feel better and consider himself a valuable person long after he has dealt with his main issues (Afshari et al., 2022). It can also be mentioned that the process of cognitive-behavioral therapy in the way of group counseling includes training and group discussion in which most cognitive-behavioral strategies are used. The cognitive-emotional-behavioral therapist teaches the group members that they are responsible for their own problems and disorders; The therapist helps them to recognize the process of self-talk that perpetuates their problems and disorders, and try to reduce them (Falah Brijstanki et al., 2022). Therefore, it seems that this treatment can be effective in reducing the academic burnout of students.

Examining the obtained results can help experts to find out how much cognitive-behavioral group counseling can improve students' academic burnout; In fact, counseling as a specialized process involves analyzing the problem and finding suitable solutions. Clients get to know themselves better through counseling in an atmosphere full of understanding, learn how to make decisions and finally find a solution to the problem. The capacity to use the cognitive-behavioral method in counseling and group psychotherapy situations is one of the undeniable advantages of this method. This method is cost-effective for

the counselor and the therapist in terms of time, and it also has benefits for the participant, the most obvious of which is support from the group members, learning to substitute and eliminating negative stickers.

In order to carry out future research, it is suggested to conduct a similar research in higher level students and compare the results with the findings of this research. It is also suggested to investigate the effect of this therapeutic approach on other psychological disorders in students. One of the limitations of the research is the non-cooperation of some students and parents.

Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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