

Design and Validation of a Psychological Empowerment Program for University Students from Divorced Families

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Methods section, the study is described as employing “a qualitative developmental design.” This label requires clarification and methodological support. The authors should identify the specific qualitative tradition used in the study and explain whether the design is best characterized as qualitative intervention development, thematic analysis, qualitative descriptive research, or a design-and-development study. Because Attride-Stirling’s thematic-network approach was used analytically, the manuscript should distinguish the overall research design from the method of data analysis.

The Methods paragraph stating that “The primary participants consisted of 15 university students whose parents had divorced” does not provide sufficient information about the sampling context. The manuscript should report the university or institutional setting, recruitment channels, geographic location, duration since parental divorce, age at the time of divorce, living arrangements after divorce, parental remarriage status, and whether participants had previous counseling experience. These contextual characteristics may materially shape the lived experience of divorce and are necessary for evaluating the transferability of the findings.

All 15 participants were dentistry students, as reported in Table 1, yet the title and conclusions refer broadly to “university students from divorced families.” The authors should justify why the sample was limited to a single highly selective academic

field and discuss how the demanding educational structure, socioeconomic profile, and professional trajectory of dentistry students may have shaped the findings. The population claims should either be narrowed to dentistry students or supported by a convincing argument that the themes are transferable to a wider student population.

The Findings section occasionally moves beyond qualitative reporting into causal or efficacy-oriented interpretation. For example, the sentence “These resources enabled participants to regain psychological balance” implies an established causal effect, although the data were based on retrospective interviews rather than longitudinal or experimental evidence. Such statements should be revised to indicate that participants perceived these strategies as helpful or associated them with improved adjustment. Similar causal phrasing should be reviewed throughout the Findings and Discussion sections.

The transition from qualitative themes to the ten-session intervention package is insufficiently transparent. In Table 4, the program includes session titles, theoretical content, exercises, homework, and evaluation indicators, but the manuscript does not show precisely how each session was derived from the 79 basic themes and 15 organizing themes. The authors should provide a theme-to-session mapping matrix or a detailed narrative explaining which themes informed each session and how decisions were made when multiple themes were combined, prioritized, or excluded.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The Methods section indicates that sampling continued until “theoretical and thematic saturation was achieved,” but the analysis was thematic rather than grounded-theory based. The authors should avoid using “theoretical saturation” unless they conducted constant comparative grounded-theory analysis aimed at theory generation. They should instead define thematic or meaning saturation, describe how saturation was monitored, indicate after which interview no substantively new themes emerged, and explain whether additional interviews were conducted to confirm saturation.

The interview guide is described broadly in the paragraph beginning, “Data were collected primarily through semi-structured, in-depth interviews.” The authors should provide the core interview questions and representative probes, either within the Methods section or as supplementary material. They should also describe how the interview guide was developed, whether it underwent expert review or pilot testing, who conducted the interviews, the interviewer’s qualifications and relationship to participants, the average interview duration, and whether repeat interviews were conducted.

The manuscript states that “field notes were also prepared during and immediately after each interview,” but it does not explain how these notes informed the analysis. The authors should clarify whether field notes were coded, used to contextualize verbal data, incorporated into reflexive memos, or employed only as procedural records. They should also describe the researcher’s positionality and reflexive practices, particularly because interpretations concerning divorce, family conflict, and psychological empowerment may be influenced by the analyst’s professional assumptions and personal beliefs.

The Data Analysis section describes repeated reading, initial coding, and theme construction, but it does not provide sufficient detail about coding responsibility and analytic reliability. The authors should report how many researchers coded the interviews, whether coding was independent or collaborative, how disagreements were resolved, and whether a codebook was developed and revised. If only one researcher coded the data, the manuscript should explain what procedures were used to reduce interpretive bias, such as peer debriefing, external auditing, or systematic review of coding decisions.

The statement that “Member reflection was used where appropriate by discussing summaries or interpretations with selected participants” is too vague to support a credibility claim. The authors should specify how many participants took part in member checking, what materials they reviewed, what questions they were asked, whether they confirmed or challenged the interpretations, and how their feedback altered the thematic structure. If member checking was not conducted systematically, the claim should be moderated and described as informal participant feedback rather than a formal validation procedure.

The Findings section reports “397 initial codes, 79 basic themes, 15 organizing themes, and five global themes,” but the distinction between an initial code and a basic theme is not always analytically clear. Several listed basic themes, such as “high stress,” “deep breathing,” and “professional networking,” resemble descriptive codes or intervention techniques rather than

themes. The authors should provide explicit criteria for each analytic level and include a transparent example showing the progression from transcript excerpt to initial code, basic theme, organizing theme, and global theme.

Table 2 requires substantial conceptual refinement because several categories are overlapping or duplicated. For example, “confronting fears” and “coping with personal fears” are both placed under emotional management; “networking in the university environment” appears under interpersonal relationships, while “professional networking” appears under strong support networks; and conflict management is conceptually repeated within the communication domain. The authors should merge redundant items, clarify category boundaries, and ensure that the reported total of 79 basic themes corresponds exactly to the unique themes listed in the table.

The global theme titled “Lived experience of difficulties associated with parental divorce” is conceptually different from the other four global themes, which primarily represent resources or intervention targets. The manuscript should explain the theoretical logic of placing problems, capacities, skills, development, and support within the same hierarchical thematic level. A more coherent model might distinguish antecedent needs or experienced difficulties from empowerment domains and intervention mechanisms rather than presenting all five as equivalent global themes.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.