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Deanship of Scientific Research

The Effectiveness of a Gestalt-Based Counseling Program in Reducing Alexithymia and Enhancing Mental Health Among Working Mothers of Adolescents in Amman

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Abstract

Objectives: This study evaluated the effectiveness of a Gestalt-based counseling program in reducing alexithymia and enhancing the psychological well-being of working mothers of adolescents. It also aimed to develop and validate a new parental mental health scale and assess the program's long-term impact.

Methods: The study involved 20 working mothers of adolescents (ages 14–18) in Amman, randomly assigned to an experimental group receiving the intervention or a control group. The alexithymia scale and a newly developed parental psychological health scale were tested for reliability and validity. The counseling program, consisting of 11 Gestalt therapy-based sessions, was conducted at the Nour Al Hussein Foundation - Family Health Care Institute in 2023.

Results: Statistical analysis showed significant differences between the experimental and control groups in alexithymia and mental health scores. The experimental group demonstrated notable improvements in emotional expression and psychological well-being, with sustained effects observed two weeks post-intervention.

Conclusions: A Gestalt-based counseling program effectively reduces alexithymia and enhances mental health in working mothers of adolescents. The findings underscore the need for therapeutic interventions supporting parental emotional well-being. Future research should explore additional family counseling techniques and larger, more diverse samples.

Keywords: Counseling Program, Gestalt Theory, Alexithymia, Mental Health, Working Mothers, Adolescents.

فاعليَّة برنامج إرشادي قائم على نظرية الجشطالت في خفض الأليكسيثيميا وتعزيز الصِّحة النفسيَّة لدى الأُمَّهات العاملات اللاتي لديهنَّ أبناء مراهقون في عمّان

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ملخّص

الأهداف: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم فاعليَّة برنامج إرشادي قائم على نظرية الجشطالت في خفض الأليكسيثيميا وتعزيز الصحة النفسيَّة لدى الأُمَّهات العاملات اللاتي لديهن أبناء مراهقون. كما سعت إلى تطوير وتطبيق مقياس جديد لقياس الصحة النفسيَّة الوالديَّة، إضافةً إلى فحص الأثر طويل المدى للبرنامج في الأُمَّهات المشاركات.

المنهجيَّة: شملت الدراسة 20 أُمًّا عاملة لأبناء مراهقين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 14 و18 عامًا في عمّان، وقد جرى توزيع المشاركات عشوائيًّا إلى مجموعة تجريبيَّة تلقَّت التدخُّلَ الإرشادي ومجموعة ضابطة لم تتلقَّاه، وجرى استخدام مقياس الأليكسيثيميا، إضافة إلى مقياس الصحة النفسيَّة الوالديَّة المطوَّر لأغراض الدراسة، وكلاهما خضع لاختبارات الصدق والثبات. وتألف البرنامج الإرشادي من 11 جلسة مُستندة إلى مبادئ نظريَّة الجشطالت، وجرى تنفيذه في مؤسسة نور الحسين – معهد العناية بصحة الأُسرة خلال عام 2023.

النتائج: كشفت النتائج عن وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المجموعة التجريبيَّة والمجموعة الضابطة في ما يتعلق بدرجات الأليكسيثيميا ومقياس الصحة النفسيَّة للوالدين، وأظهرت المجموعة التجريبيَّة تحسُّنًا ملحوظًا في التعبير عن الانفعالات والصحة النفسيَّة، كما استمرَّت هذه التأثيرات الإيجابيَّة في قياس المتابعة بعد أسبوعين من انتهاء البرنامج.

الاستنتاجات: تؤكِّدُ النتائج فاعليَّة البرنامج الإرشادي القائم على نظريَّة الجشطالت في خفض الأليكسيثيميا وتحسين الصِّحة النفسيَّة لدى الأُمَّهات العاملات اللاتي لديهن أبناء مراهقون، كما تسلِّطُ الضَّوءَ على أهميَّة دمج الأساليب العلاجيَّة لدعم الصِّحة النفسيَّة، وتوصي بإجراء أبحاث مستقبليَّة لاستكشاف أساليب الإرشاد الأُسري بشكل أكبر وتوسيع نطاق الدراسة لتشمل عينات أكبر وأكثر تنوُّعًا.

الكلمات الدالة: برنامج إرشادي، نظريَّة الجشطالت، الأليكسيثيميا، الصِّحة النفسيَّة، الأُمَّهات العاملات، المراهقون.

Introduction

A supportive family environment plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's personality by fulfilling their psychological and material needs (Ababneh & Al-Sharifain, 2018). The transition from childhood to adolescence is a critical period that requires special parental support, particularly from mothers, who play a fundamental role in providing emotional and psychological care for their children (Wang et al., 2008; Estabrook, 2023).

Studies indicate that family stability contributes to adolescents' ability to express their emotions, thereby enhancing their psychological well-being (Aufseeser, Jekielek, & Brown, 2006; Bischoff et al., 2021). Emotional awareness and the ability to express emotions are key factors in psychological and social adjustment (Dawood, 2016; Omara & Megreya, 2022).

Difficulties in emotional expression are linked to psychological disorders, a condition known as alexithymia, in which individuals struggle to identify and describe their feelings, negatively impacting their social interactions (Estabrook, 2008; Dalokay & Aydin, 2023). Family dynamics play a significant role in this process, as families that express emotions in unhealthy ways may adversely affect their children (Vanheule et al., 2007).

Moreover, working mothers face challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, which can lead to psychological stress that affects their ability to meet their children's emotional needs (Al-Naqeeb, 2022). Accordingly, this study aims to develop a counseling program based on Gestalt theory to enhance mothers' emotional awareness and promote healthy emotional expression, ultimately contributing positively to family and community mental health (Mohammed, 2013).

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

1. The Role of Family in Emotional and Psychological Development

The family serves as the foundational unit in shaping children's emotional and psychological well-being, providing the necessary support for their cognitive and socio-emotional development (Al-Ain & Boutghan, 2022). According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), secure familial bonds contribute to children's ability to regulate emotions and develop adaptive coping mechanisms. Families characterized by warmth and open communication foster emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), whereas environments marked by emotional neglect may predispose children to affective dysregulation, increasing the risk of developing alexithymia (Al-Sayyid Ahmad, 2022).

Empirical studies highlight that children raised in emotionally supportive households exhibit higher psychological resilience and lower stress reactivity (Yassine, 2022, DOI: [Insert DOI Here]). Conversely, dysfunctional family dynamics, including authoritarian parenting styles (Baumrind, 1967), have been linked to inhibited emotional expression and social withdrawal (Janiec, Bratek & Drzyga, 2019).

2. Alexithymia and Its Psychological Implications

Alexithymia, conceptualized as a deficit in emotional processing and expression (Sifneos, 1973), is associated with impaired affect regulation, increased psychological distress, and deficits in social cognition (Taylor & Bagby, 2014). It is a multidimensional construct encompassing difficulty in identifying emotions, externally oriented thinking, and restricted emotional vocabulary (Bagby et al., 1994). Several etiological factors contribute to alexithymia, including early childhood emotional neglect, genetic predisposition, and neurobiological impairments in the limbic system (Yassine, 2022). Clinical research has demonstrated that individuals with alexithymia exhibit higher levels of anxiety, depression, and interpersonal dysfunction, reinforcing its significance as a risk factor for mental health disorders (Janiec, Bratek & Drzyga, 2019).

Longitudinal studies suggest that alexithymia can persist into adulthood, impacting stress resilience, emotional intelligence, and overall well-being (Yassine, 2022). This underscores the necessity of targeted psychological interventions, such as Gestalt therapy or cognitive-emotional training, to mitigate its long-term effects.

3. Mental Health

Mental health is a dynamic state of psychological resilience and emotional regulation that enables individuals to effectively cope with stress, form meaningful relationships, and maintain overall well-being (World Health Organization, 2023). It is not merely the absence of mental illness but a multifaceted construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social functioning (Keyes, 2007). The biopsychosocial model of mental health underscores the interplay between biological

predispositions, psychological coping mechanisms, and social environmental factors (Rajm & Faizi, 2020).

A growing body of research establishes a strong correlation between emotional expression and psychological well-being. Deficiencies in emotional regulation—such as alexithymia or emotional suppression—are linked to heightened stress vulnerability, depression, and diminished quality of life (Rajm & Faizi, 2020). Furthermore, longitudinal studies indicate that enhanced emotional awareness and expression contribute to greater mental health stability, reinforcing the necessity of intervention programs targeting emotional intelligence development (World Health Organization, 2023).

4. Gestalt Theory and Counseling Intervention

Gestalt theory, pioneered by Fritz Perls (1951), posits that awareness of present emotions and thoughts is fundamental to psychological growth and adaptive functioning (Corey, 2016). This phenomenological and humanistic approach emphasizes self-awareness, integration of past experiences, and personal responsibility (Yontef & Jacobs, 2019). Gestalt-based interventions foster emotional expression through experiential techniques such as role-playing, guided imagery, and empty-chair exercises (Dolatpanah et al., 2020).

Empirical studies demonstrate that Gestalt counseling effectively reduces alexithymia, enhances self-regulation, and strengthens interpersonal relationships (Dolatpanah et al., 2020). By promoting authentic emotional expression and cognitive restructuring, this therapeutic approach equips individuals with the skills to navigate psychological distress and improve social adaptability (Yontef & Jacobs, 2019). Building on the foundational principles of mental health and Gestalt counseling, it is crucial to examine how structured intervention programs can mitigate emotional regulation deficits, particularly in populations vulnerable to psychological distress. The following section outlines the previous studies that employed the study's variables:

Studies on Alexithymia

In their study, Kamal, Ismail, and Arfan (2023) explored the effectiveness of a program designed to enhance communication skills and reduce alexithymia among children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The sample consisted of five children aged 6 to 12 years. The researchers utilized various tools, including the Self-Children's Communication Skills Scale, the Self-Child Alexithymia Scale, the Self-Communication Skills Development Programme, the Gilliam Autism Disorder Symptoms Assessment Scale, and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. The results revealed significant improvements in communication skills based on pre- and post-test comparisons, favoring post-test scores. Similarly, significant reductions in alexithymia levels were observed, favoring pre-test results. Notably, there were no significant variations in performance during follow-up assessments for either communication skills or alexithymia.

In his study, Bani Abda (2021) aimed to understand the level of family communication and its relationship with difficulties in emotional expression, known as alexithymia. The sample consisted of 916 male and female students selected using a convenient sampling method. The Family Communication Patterns Scale and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale were used after verifying the psychometric properties of both scales. The results showed high levels of family communication, with family communication ranking first, while communication from the children ranked last. The results also revealed moderate difficulties in emotional expression among university students in general, with gender differences in some aspects, such as lack of emotions and inability to imagine. Furthermore, the results indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between the level of family communication and alexithymia, where higher family communication levels led to lower levels of alexithymia among students at Yarmouk University. This study highlighted the importance of family communication and its impact on individuals' ability to express their emotions.

Sedighrad et al. (2021) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) in addressing impulsive behaviors, alexithymia, and hopelessness among individuals with depressive disorder. The sample included 30 patients from a counseling center in Ahvaz, divided into experimental and control groups, each comprising 15 participants. The CBT program consisted of 11 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. The findings demonstrated that the CBT program effectively reduced impulsivity, alexithymia, and feelings of hopelessness in the experimental group compared to the control group.

Paniccia et al (2018) conducted a study to investigate levels of alexithymia in adolescents with generalized anxiety

disorder (GAD) and their parents, compared to adolescents without GAD and their parents. The study involved a total of 300 participants, including 50 adolescents with GAD, 50 adolescents without GAD, and 100 parents (50 mothers and 50 fathers) from each group. The Toronto Alexithymia Scale (20-item version) was used to measure alexithymia levels among both adolescents and parents. The findings revealed significantly higher levels of alexithymia in adolescents with GAD compared to those without GAD. Similarly, mothers and fathers of adolescents with GAD exhibited higher levels of alexithymia than parents of adolescents without GAD, highlighting the potential familial and relational influence of alexithymia in the context of anxiety disorders.

Daoud (2016) conducted a study aimed at examining the relationship between alexithymia, parenting styles, socio-economic status, family size, and gender among a sample of students from the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Jordan. The sample consisted of 260 male and female students, randomly selected. The Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) and a Parental Perception Scale were used. The results showed no significant relationship between alexithymia and parenting styles, but the low-income group exhibited higher levels of alexithymia. No statistical relationship was found between alexithymia and other factors such as gender, family size, or parental education level. Furthermore, stepwise regression analysis indicated that the mother's parenting style had the greatest impact on the variance in alexithymia, followed by the father's parenting style and then family income. This study provided valuable insights into the factors that may influence alexithymia levels among students.

Studies on Mental Health

Mustafa (2022) conducted a study to explore the relationship between family climate and mental health among students at Dongla University, with a focus on the influence of gender. Using a descriptive analytical methodology, the study involved a randomly selected sample of 100 students. The researcher developed a 36-item mental health scale to collect data. Results revealed that participants exhibited moderate levels of family climate and mental health. Additionally, statistically significant differences in family climate were observed, favoring females, highlighting the role of gender in shaping family dynamics and mental health.

Kadoura et al. (2022) examined the relationship between mental health and self-esteem among students in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in Algeria. The study included a sample of 107 students (52 males and 55 females). Findings demonstrated a significant positive relationship between mental health and self-esteem. Moreover, males scored higher on the mental health scale, indicating statistically significant gender differences, while no significant differences were found in self-esteem scores between males and females.

Phua et al. (2020) investigated the interplay between maternal mental health and child upbringing in a study titled *Mother's Positive Mental Health and Child Upbringing*. The sample comprised 150 mothers selected randomly. The findings underscored that positive maternal psychological well-being enhances the sense of motherhood, thereby improving children's academic, emotional, and social Studies on Indicative Programs Based on Gestalt Theory.

Atak and Rayana (2023) conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of a Gestalt-based counseling program in promoting positive parenting practices among a sample of parents. The study included 36 participants (33 mothers and 3 fathers) divided into three groups: an experimental group of 13 participants who underwent the Gestalt-based program, a second group of 12 participants who received traditional parenting interventions, and a control group of 11 participants who did not participate in any program. The study employed tools such as the Multidimensional Parental Luxury Scale (MPQ), the Parental-Child Relationship Scale (PCRS), the I-Parent Scale (CMPS), and the Parental Care Scale (APQ). Results demonstrated no statistically significant differences between the traditional intervention group and the control group. However, the experimental group exhibited statistically significant improvements across all measures, affirming the effectiveness of the Gestalt-based counseling program in enhancing positive parenting practices.

Kyvelou et al. (2023) explored the impact of a Gestalt-based counseling program on improving mental health, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction among university students in Greece. The study involved 208 students divided into two groups: an experimental group of 147 participants who participated in the program and a control group of 60 students who did not undergo any intervention. The study utilized instruments including the Mindfulness, Attention, and Awareness

Scale (MAAS), the Positive and Negative Impact Scale (PANAS), the Life Satisfaction Scale (SWLS), and the Self-Happiness Measure (SHS). Findings revealed statistically significant improvements in all measured variables for the experimental group, indicating the program's effectiveness in fostering mental and emotional well-being as well as enhancing life satisfaction.

Commentary on Previous Studies

Through a review of previous studies, it was evident that there has been increasing interest in alexithymia, highlighting its significance. Alexithymia has been linked to various variables, such as communication skills and eating disorders, and several group counseling programs have been developed to address it. In relation to mental health, there was a noticeable focus on descriptive studies, while studies involving counseling programs were scarce despite their importance.

The current study shares similarities with previous studies in terms of the measurement scale used. However, despite some similarities, the present study distinguishes itself through the selection of the sample, the research setting, and the development of tools. According to the researcher's knowledge, this is the first Arabic study to assess the effectiveness of a group counseling program based on Gestalt theory to train mothers of adolescents on expressing and being aware of their emotions. This approach helps them deal with alexithymia and enhances their mental health. Notably, this is also the first study to link alexithymia with mental health while targeting an important group: working mothers of adolescents. This focus is a potentially strong factor that adds a unique value to the study, as it reflects a multi-dimensional challenge that can significantly impact the mental health of this demographic and their families.

The study seeks to achieve two simultaneous positive effects: improving mothers' mental health and increasing their emotional awareness while positively influencing adolescents by enhancing the mothers' well-being. Additionally, the comprehensive methods employed in the study are noteworthy, as it utilized Gestalt theory techniques to reduce alexithymia and improve mental health. It is worth mentioning that the variables in this study have not been combined or addressed using Gestalt theory in previous research.

Study Problem

Adolescence is one of the most difficult stages for both children and parents due to teenagers 'challenges to establish their independent identities, which significantly affects their relationship with their parents. Young people often feel that their parents don't fathom them while parents assume their children's desire for authority.

Furthermore, this understanding affects the way parents deal with their children, for instance, some parent express emotions toward their children negatively such as shouting or physical punishment. However, others believe that expressing positive emotions such as love and pride may cause the loss of adolescents' respect, in turn, it causes negative feelings for adolescents and has them feel pressure and Inferiority.

Specifically, adolescence is affected by the relationship with mothers due to they must be the source of emotional support. However, adolescent mothers' working face huge psycho and social pressures which in turn affect their relationship with their children and emotional health (ALsalem et.al 2023). Moreover, Alexithymia which is mainly caused due to life challenges affects the mothers' ability to emotionally support their children.

Through my work with adolescents, I've noticed that their main problems are their Emotional deprivation from their parents, and in turn, it causes feelings of isolation.

This study aims to explore the efficiency of a counseling program based on Gestalt theory to treat this issue through increasing awareness and providing emotional support to mothers in order to enhance their interaction with their children.

Importance of the study

1. Theoretical Importance:

This study contributes to understanding the relationship between alexithymia and mental health by reviewing previous research on the impact of this phenomenon on individuals. It also helps bridge the knowledge gap regarding how alexithymia is linked to different levels of psychological and emotional adaptation, providing a deeper insight into its negative effects.

2. Practical and Applied Importance:

The study aims to develop intervention programs designed to reduce alexithymia levels and enhance emotional expression, particularly among adolescents, through scientifically based training strategies and psychological intervention techniques. Additionally, the findings can be applied in educational institutions and counseling fields to improve mental health and strengthen emotional and social skills.

Study Limitations:

This study faces obstacles related to the accuracy of participants' responses and the difficulty of generalizing the outcomes due to confining the sample within a specific geographical area. Moreover, the various working hours of the participants hinder the coordination of meetings and the implementation of the guidance program.

This study relies on a quasi-experimental approach, which requires sufficient time for data collection and analysis.

Therefore, the study requires a long duration to guarantee accurate and reliable results.

Here is a concise scientific translation of the key concepts from the text:

1. Counseling Program:

A structured, evidence-based program designed to enhance individuals' skills and improve communication.

Consists of 11 sessions, each lasting between 60-75 minutes, incorporating various activities to increase emotional awareness (Corey, 2016).

2. Alexithymia:

A psychological condition characterized by difficulty in identifying and expressing emotions. Involves deficits in recognizing different emotions, as well as challenges in physiological responses to emotional stimuli (Janiec, 2019).

3. Mental Health:

A multidimensional state of psychological well-being, encompassing emotional stability, cognitive clarity, and a sense of security.

Assessed through standardized measures of parental mental health and its impact on adolescents (Qadura, 2022).

4. Adolescence:

A transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, typically spanning from ages 12 to 21.

Marked by significant biological, behavioral, and emotional changes, fostering increasing self-reliance (Al-Jawfan, 2022) (Al Hussaini, M. H., Abbas, M. K., Fatima, R., & Noureen, A. (2023)).

Let me know if you need further refinements!

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a quasi-experimental design, ensuring alignment with its objectives while accommodating demographic diversity. Participants were assigned to experimental and control groups using random selection wherever feasible, enabling robust comparisons. This approach facilitated the evaluation of the Gestalt-based counseling program by examining differences in outcomes through pre-test, post-test, and follow-up assessments.

Study Population and Sample

The target population comprised working mothers with teenage children aged 14-18 years residing in Amman. Participants were recruited with the support of the Noor Al Hussein Foundation/Family Health Care Institute, East Amman branch. Mothers were informed about the study's goals, significance, and the program's implementation mechanism during individual sessions designed to address their concerns and secure consent.

Mothers with high alexithymia levels and low psychological health scores, as identified through pre-distributed scales, were invited to participate. The final sample consisted of 20 mothers, equally divided into experimental and control groups (10 participants each), ensuring demographic equivalence. Participants shared common characteristics, such as age (37-47 years), educational attainment (bachelor's degrees), employment, and middle-income status. This ensured group cohesion and facilitated shared experiences and integration during the program.

Challenges in recruiting a larger sample were encountered due to conflicts between work commitments and counseling

session schedules.

Study Tools

To achieve the research objectives, the following tools were employed:

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20)

The Toronto Alexithymia Scale, developed by Keefer et al. (1994), and later adapted to the Jordanian context by Ziadat and Sharifin (2017), was utilized to assess emotional and social dysfunctions associated with alexithymia. This scale, widely recognized for its reliability, provided a comprehensive measure of participants' alexithymia levels.

Psychological Health Scale

A custom-designed scale was used to evaluate participants' psychological health, focusing on emotional resilience, well-being, and coping mechanisms. This tool complemented the alexithymia scale, providing a holistic understanding of participants' mental health profiles.

Psychometric Properties of the Scales

The content validity of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale was previously established by Ziadat and Sharifin (2017) and adapted for the Jordanian context. Consequently, content validity was not re-evaluated, and the scale was utilized in its original form. Construct validity was assessed by examining correlations between individual items and the total score using a pilot sample of 30 working mothers with teenage children from both within and outside the study community. The correlation coefficients ranged from 0.419 to 0.788, all statistically significant at $\alpha \leq 0.05$. These values exceeded the 0.30 threshold, indicating acceptable item-total score correlations. As a result, the scale retained its original 20 items.

Reliability was established through internal consistency and test-retest methods. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency was 0.871, while the test-retest reliability coefficient, calculated over a two-week interval, was 0.894, demonstrating a high degree of reliability suitable for the study. The scale consists of 20 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "completely applicable" (5 points) to "not applicable at all" (1 point). Total scores range from 20 to 100, with mean responses classified as low (1.00–2.33), moderate (2.34–3.66), or high (3.67–5.00). Items reflecting negative emotions (items 9, 15, 18, and 19) were reverse-scored to ensure consistency in results interpretation.

The Parental Mental Health Scale was developed after an extensive review of theoretical literature and previous studies (e.g., Qadura et al., 2022; Al-Mustafa, 2021; Wahsha, 2021; Phua et al., 2020). Initially, the scale comprised 25 items aimed at capturing various dimensions of parental mental health, presented as a single total score without subscales. To ensure validity, 14 experts in psychological counseling, special education, and measurement and evaluation from universities in Jordan reviewed the scale. They provided feedback on item clarity, linguistic accuracy, cultural relevance, and construct alignment. Based on their recommendations, three items underwent linguistic adjustments, and two were replaced, while no items were deleted, maintaining the scale's 25-item structure. This rigorous validation process ensured the scale's suitability for assessing parental mental health within the Jordanian context.

Construct validity was established by analyzing the correlations between individual items and the total scale score. This was achieved by administering the scale to a pilot sample of 30 mothers of working teenagers, selected from both within and outside the study community. The correlation coefficients between the items and the total score ranged from 0.443 to 0.790, all of which were statistically significant at $\alpha \leq 0.05$ and exceeded the threshold of 0.30. These findings confirm the suitability of the items, ensuring their inclusion in the final version of the scale, which comprised 25 items.

The reliability of the Parental Psychological Health Scale was evaluated using internal consistency and test-retest methods. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, calculated from the initial pilot sample, was 0.886, demonstrating high internal consistency. Additionally, the stability of the scale was verified by re-administering it to the same sample after a two-week interval. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the two administrations was 0.905, indicating strong test-retest reliability. These reliability metrics confirm the scale's robustness and suitability for the study's objectives.

The scale's scoring mechanism employs a five-point Likert scale, with responses rated as follows: Always (5 points), Often (4 points), Sometimes (3 points), Rarely (2 points), and Never (1 point). The total scores range from 25 to 125. To interpret the mean responses objectively, the following classification was applied: low (1.00–2.33), moderate (2.34–3.66),

and high (3.67–5.00). Notably, the scale includes six reverse-coded items (6, 8, 11, 15, 16, 24), which were adjusted during scoring to ensure accurate representation of parental psychological health. This meticulous approach ensures the scale's validity and reliability for assessing the psychological health of working mothers with teenage children.

The Counseling Program based on Gestalt Theory

The counseling program, grounded in Gestalt theory, is a comprehensive and structured intervention designed to support working mothers in addressing alexithymia symptoms and enhancing their relationships with their teenage children. Spanning 11 sessions, the program was conducted from July 25, 2023, to August 29, 2023, and was meticulously tailored to achieve specific objectives within a defined timeframe.

The program's development involved a thorough review of academic literature and studies focusing on alexithymia, mental health, working mothers, and relevant psychological interventions. This research enabled the integration of Gestalt theory's principles, concepts, and therapeutic techniques into the program. Gestalt theory's holistic approach—emphasizing self-awareness, emotional expression, and interconnectedness—served as the foundation for the program's framework and activities.

The program's significance lies in its potential to empower mothers by enhancing their ability to identify and articulate emotions, thereby reducing alexithymia symptoms. This improvement fosters healthier emotional dynamics within the family and contributes to the mental well-being of both mothers and their children. Beyond its immediate application, the program offers a valuable resource for mental health professionals and family therapists seeking evidence-based strategies to address emotional challenges in family settings. Its structured design ensures adaptability and reproducibility for broader implementation in the field of family counseling and mental health.

Justification for Determining 11 Sessions in the Counseling Program

A total of 11 counseling sessions were adopted to ensure the achievement of the program's desired goals based on well-studied scientific foundations. The program aims to create a positive and sustainable change in the behavior and attitudes of the participants. This number was determined based on the following considerations:

- Gradual Counseling Process: Participants need sufficient time to understand their issues, engage with the sessions, and apply new skills in their daily lives.
- Diversity in Counseling Techniques: The program includes various stages such as relationship building, assessment, intervention, and final evaluation, requiring an appropriate number of sessions to ensure the effectiveness of each stage.
- Achieving the Desired Impact: Studies and practical experiences indicate that effective interventions require a suitable number of sessions—neither too few to lose effectiveness nor too many to affect participants' commitment.

Summary of Counseling Program Sessions

Session Number and Title	Objectives	Methods and Activities	Duration of Session
First (Hand in Hand)	1. Introduce group members, break the ice, and build a friendly guiding relationship. 2. Clarify the number of sessions and agree on the timing of each session. 3. Agree with members on the rules and regulations of the group guidance. 4. Introduce members to group guidance and its importance. 5. Discuss members' expectations regarding the group guidance	-Rounds -Dialogue and discussion - Icebreaking - Feedback -PowerPoint - Colors - Colored paper	60 minutes

Session Number and Title	Objectives	Methods and Activities	Duration of Session
	program. 6. Conduct a guiding contract (behavioral)		
Second (Exploration Journey)	1. Clarify the program's objectives and discuss them. 2. Explain the concept of alexithymia. 3. Identify the causes of alexithymia. 4. Discuss the importance of dealing with alexithymia.	- Dialogue and discussion -Questioning - Homework - Colored cards - Rounds - The box - Video	65 minutes
Third (Take a Breath)	1. Understand the concept of mental health. 2. Identify sources of social support within the family. 3. Increase participants' self-awareness and enhance their coping skills. 4. Utilize the latent energies of the participating mothers.	- Rounds - My Treasures Exercise -Dialogue and discussion -Questioning -Homework -Groups - Psychodrama -Colored paper and colors -Encouragement	75minutes
Fourth (Your Child is Your Mirror)	1. Introduce participants to the adolescent stage. 2. Discuss the nature of the relationship between the mother and the adolescent. 3. Talk about the impact of expressing emotions between the mother and the adolescent.	Role-playing -Empty chair - Visualization -Dialogue and discussion	60 minutes
Fifth (The Secret of Successful Relationships)	1. Understand communication patterns and methods. 2. Train on effective communication. 3. Train on listening skills.	- Dialogue and discussion -Communication methods -Use of pronouns -Role-playing -"I" message -Visualization	70 minutes
Sixth (One Heart)	1. Understand the concept of empathy. 2. Train on the skill of empathy.	- "If You Were in My Shoes" activity -Dialogue and discussion -Role-playing	60 minutes
Seventh (Emotions)	1. Understand the concept of emotions. 2. Clarify the sources of emotions. 3. Clarify the components of emotions.	- Dialogue and discussion - Questioning -Homework -Colored cards -Puzzles -Papers	60 minutes

Session Number and Title	Objectives	Methods and Activities	Duration of Session
		-The box -Reenactment	
Eighth (The Empty Cup)	1. Understand their positive and negative emotions. 2. Release the participants' negative emotions.	- Rubber ball - Optimism messages exercise -Multi-colored fabric, oil colors -Here and Now - Hot seat	60 minutes
Ninth (Exploring Emotions)	1. Apply the Here and Now method. 2. Learn how to perceive, name, and release emotions. 3. Practice awareness of emotions and their impact.	- Dialogue and discussion - Here and Now method -Technique of recognizing emotion names and expressing current state -Colored cardboard, colored pencils -Encouragement -Brainstorming	60 minutes
Tenth (The Empty Cup 2)	1. Increase awareness of emotions. 2. Awareness of the method of emotion regulation.	- Yarn ball -Exercise on kindness and compassion towards self - Emotion regulation - A4 paper, pastel or colored pencils -Turn questions into sentences	60 minutes
Eleventh (Every End is a New Beginning)	1. Thank the participants for their contributions during the sessions. 2. Identify the positives and negatives of the program. 3. Express participants' inner feelings. 4. Display drawings and homework to celebrate them and discuss how participants' feelings have evolved throughout the program. 5. End the program. 6. Emphasize the open-door policy. 7. Handle farewell feelings.	- Balloon wish exercise -Collaboration with unresolved feelings -Certificates of appreciation	60 minutes

Study Design

This study employs a quasi-experimental design to rigorously assess the effectiveness of the counseling program. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: the experimental group, which received the Gestalt-based counseling intervention, and the control group, which did not undergo any intervention. This design enables a systematic

comparison of outcomes between the two groups, isolating the impact of the counseling program while controlling for potential confounding variables.

The quasi-experimental framework is particularly well-suited for this research, as it balances methodological rigor with practical considerations inherent to the study's context. By focusing on pre-test and post-test measurements across both groups, the design ensures the reliability of findings and facilitates a robust evaluation of the program's effectiveness in addressing alexithymia symptoms and enhancing parental mental health. The structured approach provides a clear pathway for analyzing changes attributable to the intervention, offering valuable insights into its applicability and scalability in similar settings.

group	No	Pre-measurement	Treatment	Post-measurement	Follow-up measurement
EG	10	O1	X	O2	O3
CG	10	O1	-	O2	-

(O1): Pretest measurement of alexithymia and mental health.

(X): Treatment (applying the program to the experimental group).

(-): Without treatment (without guidance intervention).

(O2): Post-measurement of alexithymia and mental health.

(O3): Follow-up application two weeks after the end of the application of the guidance program to members of the experimental group only.

Study Variables and Procedures

The study examines the relationship between a Gestalt-based counseling program and key psychological outcomes, with the following variables:

1. **Independent Variable:** The counseling program developed based on Gestalt theory.
2. **Dependent Variables:** Participants' scores on the alexithymia and parental mental health scales.

To achieve the study's objectives and address its research questions, a series of meticulously planned procedures were undertaken. First, formal approvals were obtained from the university's committees to conduct the study under the proposed title, ensuring compliance with institutional requirements. A comprehensive review of related literature and previous studies was conducted to establish the theoretical framework and identify best practices for addressing alexithymia and mental health challenges among working mothers.

The study utilized the Parental Mental Health Scale and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale, both of which were adapted, codified, and piloted to evaluate their psychometric properties, including validity and reliability. Following this, a detailed plan for the Gestalt-based counseling program was developed. This plan outlined the program's general objective, specific sub-goals, and session structure, including the number of sessions, associated activities, and the time allocated for each.

Administrative procedures included obtaining official approval from the University of Jordan (Appendix 7) and coordinating with relevant authorities, such as submitting an application to the Nour Al-Hussein Foundation on June 22, 2023. Approval for program implementation was subsequently received on July 16, 2023. A sample of 20 working mothers with adolescent children was then identified based on predefined inclusion criteria. Baseline assessments were conducted for all participants using the alexithymia and parental mental health scales to establish initial conditions.

Statistical Analysis

To rigorously address the study's research questions and ensure the robustness of the findings, a comprehensive statistical approach was employed. Arithmetic means and medians were calculated to evaluate pre- and post-measurements of working mothers' responses to the alexithymia and mental health scales. Additionally, the Mann-Whitney U Test was utilized to assess differences between the experimental and control groups.

The following statistical techniques were applied to ensure validity, reliability, and comparability:

- **Internal Consistency and Reliability:** Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to verify the internal construct

validity of both scales, complemented by test-retest reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficients to ensure consistency and dependability of measurements.

- **Baseline Equivalence:** The Mann-Whitney U Test for two independent samples was used to confirm equality between the experimental and control groups in the pre-application of the alexithymia and mental health scales.
- **Post-Intervention Analysis:** Arithmetic means, medians, and Mann-Whitney U Test analyses were performed to compare the experimental and control groups following the intervention.
- **Longitudinal Comparison:** The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test was employed to analyze differences within the experimental group across post- and follow-up measurements of the alexithymia and mental health scales, ensuring a robust evaluation of the intervention's sustainability.

Results

The study aimed to investigate the first hypothesis, which posits: "There are statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) between the mean performance of university mothers in the experimental and control groups on the alexithymia scale post-intervention due to the applied counseling program."

To evaluate this hypothesis, the arithmetic means and medians of the responses from the experimental group (mothers who participated in the counseling program) and the control group (mothers who did not receive any intervention) were computed. The Mann-Whitney U Test was employed to assess the statistical significance of the differences in alexithymia levels between the two groups following the intervention.

The results, presented in Table 3, provide a detailed comparison of the alexithymia scores between the experimental and control groups, offering insights into the program's effectiveness. These findings underline the impact of the counseling intervention and contribute to the growing evidence supporting the application of Gestalt-based counseling programs in addressing alexithymia among working mothers.

Group	NO	Average Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mean	Median	Mann-Witney	Level of significance
Experimental	10	5.50	55.00	2.21	2.15	0.000	0.000
Control	10	15.50	155.00	4.20	4.33		
Total	20						

The findings presented in Table 3 reveal a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the alexithymia scale. The Mann-Whitney U value was determined to be 0.000, which is statistically significant at the threshold level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). This indicates that the scores of mothers in the experimental group were notably lower than those in the control group following the intervention.

The median alexithymia score for mothers in the experimental group was 2.15, compared to 4.33 for the control group. This substantial difference highlights the effectiveness of the counseling program in reducing alexithymia levels among the mothers who participated in the intervention. These results underscore the program's potential in enhancing emotional expression and awareness, affirming its value as a therapeutic approach for addressing alexithymia in working mothers.

Results related to the second hypothesis: It states that "there are statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the averages of the performance of mothers of adolescents in the experimental and control groups in the post-application on the mental health scale attributable to the counseling program."

Group	NO	Average Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mean	Median	Mann-Witney	Level of significance
Experimental	10	15.50	155	3.23	3.22	0.000	0.000
Control	10	5.50	55	2.17	2.26		
Total	20						

The findings concerning the second hypothesis, which posits that "there are statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the average scores of mothers of adolescents in the experimental and control groups on the post-application of the mental health scale attributable to the counseling program," are presented in Table 4.

The results demonstrate a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the mental health scale, with a Mann-Whitney U value of 0.000, indicating statistical significance at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). This difference was in favor of the experimental group, comprising mothers who participated in the counseling program.

The median mental health score for the experimental group was 3.225, compared to 2.26 for the control group. These findings strongly suggest that the counseling program based on Gestalt theory significantly enhanced the psychological well-being of the mothers in the experimental group. This improvement underscores the program's efficacy in fostering better mental health outcomes for working mothers of adolescents, reinforcing its potential as an effective therapeutic intervention.

Results related to the third hypothesis: **It states that "there are statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the averages of the experimental group's performance in the post- and follow-up applications of the alexithymia scale, which are attributed to the continuity of the effect of the counseling program."**

The findings related to the third hypothesis, which states that "there are statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the averages of the experimental group's performance in the post- and follow-up applications of the alexithymia scale, attributed to the continuity of the counseling program's effect," are summarized in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5, no statistically significant differences were observed between the post- and follow-up measurements for mothers in the experimental group on the alexithymia scale. The calculated value of *g* was -0.70, which was not statistically significant at the ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) level. These findings indicate that the positive effects of the counseling program persisted over time, as there was no regression or significant change in alexithymia levels among the participants after the program concluded.

To test the fourth hypothesis, which posits that "there are statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean performances of the experimental group in the post-application and follow-up application on the parents' mental health scale, attributed to the continuity of the counseling program's impact," the arithmetic mean and median were calculated for the experimental group's scores in the post- and follow-up measurements. The Wilcoxon test for two correlated samples was employed to assess the significance of differences in mental health scale scores between the two time points. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 6.

These findings suggest that the counseling program not only had an immediate impact on improving mental health but also sustained its effectiveness over time, as evidenced by the stability in scores between post-application and follow-up measurements. This highlights the durability of the program's positive influence on the psychological well-being of mothers of adolescents, underscoring its value as a reliable and lasting intervention.

Group	**NO**	**Average Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**	**Median for Dimension**	**Median for Follow-up**	**z**	**Sig**
Negative ranks	3	4.33	13	2.15	2.23	-0.70	0.482
Positive ranks	5	4.60	23				
Ties	2						
total	10						
Group	NO	Average Rank	Sum of Ranks	Median for Dimension	Median for Follow-up	z	Sig
Negative ranks	5	3.80	19.00	3.22	3.21	-0.14	0.888
Positive ranks	3	5.67	17.00				
Ties	2						
total	10						

The findings presented in Table 6 reveal that there were no statistically significant differences between the post- and follow-up measurements for mothers in the experimental group on the mental health scale. The calculated value of *g* was -0.14, which did not reach statistical significance at the ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) level.

These results indicate the sustained positive impact of the counseling program on the psychological health of mothers with adolescents. The stability of mental health scores over time suggests that the program's benefits were not transient but continued to enhance the participants' psychological well-being beyond the immediate post-application phase. This highlights the counseling program's effectiveness as a robust intervention for fostering long-term mental health improvements among working mothers of teenagers.

Discussion of Results and Recommendations

Discussion of Results Related to the First Hypothesis

The first hypothesis proposed statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean performances of mothers in the experimental and control groups on the post-application of the alexithymia scale, attributed to the guidance program. The findings confirmed this hypothesis, with a Mann-Whitney U value of (0.000), statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), favoring the experimental group. Mothers in the experimental group exhibited significantly lower alexithymia levels, affirming the program's effectiveness. Key sessions, such as "Exploring Feelings 1-2" and "The Empty Cup," were instrumental, using techniques like "situation replay" and the "hot seat" to foster emotional awareness and self-expression.

Activities such as empathy and assertiveness training further enhanced participants' ability to recognize and express emotions. Creative exercises like optimistic message sharing and emotional regulation worksheets reinforced these skills beyond sessions. A nurturing environment of trust and respect amplified the program's success, enabling participants to share openly and grow emotionally. These results align with prior studies (e.g., Kamal et al., 2023; Mustafa, 2022), emphasizing the program's efficacy in enhancing emotional awareness and reducing alexithymia among working mothers of adolescents.

Discussion of Results Related to the Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis proposed statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean performances of mothers in the experimental and control groups on the mental health scale, attributed to the guidance program. The findings confirmed this hypothesis, revealing a Mann-Whitney U value of (0.000), statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). The results favored the experimental group, highlighting the program's effectiveness in enhancing mental health. The improvement was attributed to structured sessions focused on self-awareness, stress management, and adaptation skills, such as "Take a Breath," which empowered participants to recognize their strengths and seek support. Interactive techniques, like the round-robin and psychodrama, created a safe space for emotional expression and problem-solving, fostering psychological balance and reducing stress. Participants' testimonials underscored the program's transformative impact, emphasizing the importance of personal time and effective organization. The program also strengthened family harmony by improving communication and empathy through activities like role-playing and perspective-taking. This reciprocal relationship between mental health and family dynamics reinforced the program's long-lasting impact. These results align with Kyvelou et al. (2023), validating the efficacy of counseling interventions in promoting mental health and well-being.

Discussion of Results Related to the Third Hypothesis

The third hypothesis proposed statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean performances of the experimental group in the post-application and follow-up application on the alexithymia scale, attributed to the guidance program's sustained impact. The findings revealed no statistically significant difference between the post-application and follow-up measurements for mothers in the experimental group, with a Z value of (-0.70), indicating the program's continued effectiveness in reducing alexithymia levels among mothers of adolescents. This outcome supports the null hypothesis, demonstrating the sustained impact of the guidance program.The lasting effect of the program may be attributed to its structured activities and skills, such as session-linking through summarization, which reinforced learning.

Participants' commitment to the program and motivation for change further solidified these outcomes. Effective homework assignments, such as emotion management worksheets, enabled participants to integrate learned skills into real-life contexts, fostering improved emotional awareness, expression, and decision-making. This study aligns with findings by Kamal, Ismail, and Arfan (2023) and Sedighra et al. (2021), which also highlighted the enduring efficacy of counseling programs in reducing alexithymia.

Discussion of Results Related to the Fourth Hypothesis:

The fourth hypothesis posited statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the mean performances of the experimental group in the -application and follow-up application on the parental mental health scale, attributed to the guidance program's continuity.The findings indicated no statistically significant difference between the post-application and follow-up measurements, with a Z value of (-0.14), confirming the program's sustained impact on improving mental health among mothers of adolescents. This outcome supports the null hypothesis, demonstrating consistent mental health improvements over time.

The program's continuity effect can be attributed to its structured components, such as self-evaluation techniques that fostered self-confidence and tracked progress, as well as a supportive group atmosphere that encouraged open communication and built lasting relationships. Tools like priority-setting schedules, homework assignments, and the self-care guide worksheet further enabled participants to manage work-family demands, adapt effectively, and improve interactions with their children, thereby enhancing family harmony. These elements collectively contributed to participants' satisfaction with themselves, improved social and familial relationships, and better mental health. The findings align with the results of Kyvelou et al. (2023), affirming the lasting impact of counseling programs in enhancing mental health.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, the researcher presented several recommendations, most notably:

- Enhancing Communication Skills: Focusing on developing communication skills and the ability to express emotions within the family, with training through various methods, emphasizing empathy for oneself and others.
- Educational and Media Activities: Utilizing these skills in extracurricular activities within schools, media outlets, and social media platforms to reinforce their positive impact.
- Expanding Research Scope: Studying the impact of Gestalt theory on different population groups or in various contexts to test the generalizability of the findings.
- Comparing Counseling Programs: Conducting comparative studies between counseling programs based on different theories to identify their strengths and weaknesses.
- Integrating Technology in Counseling: Exploring the possibility of integrating technology, such as smartphone applications and electronic platforms, into counseling programs to enhance their efficiency and improve mental health.

Conclusion

This study underscores the effectiveness of a Gestalt-based counseling program in reducing alexithymia and enhancing the mental health of working mothers of adolescents. The findings reveal significant improvements in the emotional expressiveness and psychological well-being of participants in the experimental group, with the program's positive impact persisting even after the intervention. These results highlight the potential of Gestalt therapy in addressing the unique psychological challenges faced by working mothers, particularly in emotionally demanding parenting contexts.

Given the transformative outcomes observed, future research should explore avenues for integrating digital technology into counseling interventions. The incorporation of online platforms, mobile applications, and artificial intelligence-driven support systems could enhance accessibility, personalization, and long-term effectiveness of such programs. Additionally, longitudinal studies with larger and more diverse samples would provide deeper insights into the sustained impact of Gestalt-based interventions and their applicability across various demographic and cultural contexts. By advancing therapeutic strategies and leveraging modern technological tools, the field of counseling and mental health can further optimize support for individuals navigating complex emotional and social landscapes.

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