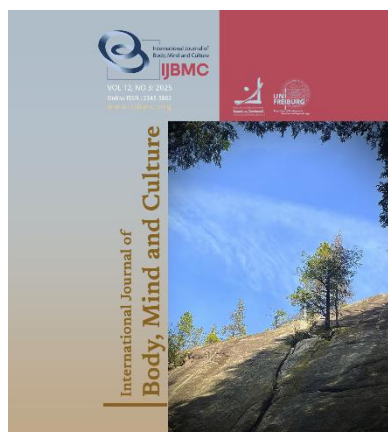


Article type:
Original Research

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Article history:

Received 21 Dec 2024
Revised 19 Feb 2025
Accepted 24 Feb 2025
Published online 27 Mar 2024

How to cite this article:

Khaleghian, R., Ebrahimi Moghadam, H., Pourebrahim, T. (2025). Comparing the Effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy and Happiness Training in Enhancing Self-concept among Adolescents Recovering from Suicide Attempts. *International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture*, 12(3), 211-217.



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Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage characterized by profound physical, psychological, and social transformations. While these changes are natural, they often create stressors that increase vulnerability to mental health challenges. Adolescents are particularly

Comparing the Effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy and Happiness Training in Enhancing Self-concept among Adolescents Recovering from Suicide Attempts

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Adolescents with a history of suicide attempts often experience low self-concept, which negatively impacts their psychological resilience and well-being. This study aimed to compare the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Group Counseling (EFT) and Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training in enhancing self-concept among these adolescents.

Methods and Materials: A quasi-experimental design with pre-test, post-test, and a two-month follow-up was employed. The study population included all male high school students (grades 1 and 2) in District 20 of Tehran during the 2022–23 academic year who had a history of suicide attempts and were referred to the Counseling Center of the Education Department. A total of 45 students meeting the inclusion criteria were purposively selected and randomly assigned to two experimental groups (EFT, Happiness Training) and one control group (15 students per group). Interventions consisted of eight 120-minute sessions conducted twice a week, focusing on emotional regulation (EFT) and fostering positive emotions and meaning (Happiness Training). Self-concept was assessed using Miller's Self-Concept Questionnaire, and data were analyzed using mixed ANOVA.

Findings: The results showed significant improvements in self-concept for both intervention groups compared to the control group at post-test and follow-up ($P < 0.05$). Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training demonstrated greater and more sustained effects than EFT ($P < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training appears to be more effective than EFT in improving self-concept among adolescents with a history of suicide attempts. These findings support the inclusion of positive psychology-based interventions in mental health programs targeting at-risk youth.

Keywords: Emotion-Focused Therapy, Happiness, Suicide, Adolescent.

susceptible to issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-concept, which can lead to risky behaviors, including self-harm and suicide attempts. Globally, suicide is among the leading causes of death in adolescents, representing a significant public health crisis (Aggarwal et al., 2021). In Iran, the suicide rate is approximately 9 per 100,000 individuals, with adolescents accounting for

about 10% of these cases (Miri et al., 2022). These alarming statistics underscore the urgent need for evidence-based interventions to address mental health challenges and reduce suicide risk in this vulnerable group.

Suicide, defined as intentional self-harm to end one's life, often stems from a combination of psychological, social, and environmental factors. Adolescents with a history of suicide attempts frequently report feelings of Self-conceptlessness, isolation, and worthlessness. These emotional states are exacerbated by a negative self-concept, a critical factor that influences how individuals perceive their abilities, worth, and place in the world. Adolescents with a weak self-concept often struggle with decision-making, emotional regulation, and tolerance for failure, which can further aggravate their psychological distress (Farahi & Khalatbari, 2019). Enhancing self-concept is, therefore, a key focus in interventions aimed at improving mental health outcomes for at-risk youth.

Psychological interventions targeting self-concept have shown promise in reducing negative emotions and fostering resilience among adolescents. Two such interventions, Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training, have been widely recognized for their effectiveness. EFT, rooted in emotion theory, emphasizes the critical role of emotions in psychological functioning and change. Developed by Greenberg and colleagues, EFT helps individuals access, process, and regulate their emotions to achieve psychological well-being (Greenberg & Goldman, 2019). This approach integrates elements of client-centered therapy, Gestalt principles, and cognitive-behavioral techniques, making it a comprehensive and adaptive method for addressing emotional challenges. EFT has been found particularly effective in reducing negative automatic thoughts, enhancing emotional awareness, and fostering interpersonal relationships (Motaghi et al., 2018; Nameni et al., 2017).

In contrast, Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training draws on the principles of positive psychology, focusing on cultivating positive emotions, optimism, and a sense of meaning in life. Positive psychology, as a field, emphasizes the enhancement of well-being through the development of strengths rather than solely addressing deficits. Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) define happiness as the balance of positive and negative emotional

experiences over time, characterized by feelings of joy, satisfaction, and optimism about life's meaning. Happiness Training employs strategies such as gratitude exercises, goal setting, and mindfulness to foster a sustainable state of well-being (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Research suggests that positive emotions not only broaden cognitive and behavioral repertoires but also act as protective factors against stress and depression (Nikrahan & Ghasemi, 2019; Seligman, 2019).

Self-concept, a key construct in suicide prevention, is central to this study. Defined as the perceived ability to achieve goals through pathways thinking and agency, Self-concept acts as a protective factor against despair and suicidal ideation. Enhancing Self-concept in adolescents with a history of suicide can significantly improve their resilience, emotional stability, and overall quality of life. Both EFT and Happiness Training have the potential to foster Self-concept, albeit through different mechanisms. EFT focuses on helping individuals identify and manage distressing emotions, enabling them to reframe negative experiences and build a sense of control over their lives (Mahmoudvandi Baher et al., 2017). In contrast, Happiness Training emphasizes the cultivation of positive emotions and the discovery of meaning, which can inspire Self-concept and reduce feelings of helplessness (Moeini et al., 2016).

Despite the growing interest in these interventions, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding their comparative effectiveness, particularly among adolescents recovering from suicide attempts. Most existing studies focus on the individual benefits of these approaches without examining how they might differ in their impact on specific psychological outcomes. Additionally, the cultural and contextual relevance of these interventions for Iranian adolescents remains underexplored. Iran's unique sociocultural environment, which influences adolescents' mental health and help-seeking behaviors, necessitates a localized evaluation of intervention strategies (Miri et al., 2022; Nameni et al., 2017).

This study seeks to address these gaps by comparing the effectiveness of EFT and Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training in enhancing Self-concept among Iranian adolescents with a history of suicide attempts. Given the increasing prevalence of suicide attempts, particularly among adolescents, the limited studies in this area, and the lack of research comparing the effectiveness of these

two interventions on adolescents' self-concept, this study aims to compare the effectiveness of emotion-focused group counseling and Lyubomirsky's happiness training on self-concept among adolescents with a history of suicide.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

The study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, post-test, and follow-up framework, incorporating a control group.

The target population consisted of male high school students aged 13–18 years in District 20 of Tehran during the 2022–23 academic year. A total of 45 participants meeting these criteria were selected and randomly assigned to two experimental groups (EFT and Happiness Training) and one control group, with 15 participants in each group. Participants were purposively selected based on the following inclusion criteria: a documented history of at least one suicide attempt, consent from both the participants and their legal guardians to attend therapy sessions, no severe physical or psychological conditions as self-reported, and no use of psychiatric medications in the past year. Exclusion criteria included: absence from more than two therapy sessions, concurrent participation in other counseling or psychotherapy programs, failure to complete pre-test or post-test assessments, and diagnosis of psychosis within one month before the study.

Participants completed the MHS at three stages: pre-test (before the intervention), post-test (immediately after the intervention), and follow-up (two months after the intervention). Group counseling sessions for the experimental groups were conducted twice a week, while the control group received no intervention during the study period.

Instruments

The Miller Hope Scale (MHS), developed by Miller and Powers in 1988, is a diagnostic questionnaire initially designed to measure hopefulness in cardiac patients in the United States. Originally comprising 40 items, the scale was later expanded to 48 questions, aiming to assess the level of hope in individuals. It evaluates 11

aspects of hopefulness and hopelessness, with responses scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Certain items (11, 13, 16, 18, 25, 27, 28, 31, 33, 34, 38, 39, 47, 48) are reverse-scored. The total score, ranging from 48 to 240, indicates the level of hope, where 48 represents complete despair and 240 signifies maximum hope. The scale's reliability has been confirmed with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.91 (Miller & Powers, 1988) and 0.92 (Jafarian Yassar & Shahidi, 2022). In Iran, Samiei (1989) applied the scale to 30 male nursing students, reporting a test-retest reliability of 0.75 and a validity coefficient of 0.82 (Samiei & Ashayeri, 1989). In the present study, reliability was calculated as 0.77 using Cronbach's alpha, affirming the scale's consistency and applicability.

Interventions

Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT): The EFT intervention consisted of eight weekly sessions, each lasting 120 minutes. The sessions followed Greenberg and Johnson's (2007) model, which integrates client-centered, Gestalt, and cognitive-behavioral principles. The therapy focused on helping participants access, process, and regulate their emotions, fostering self-awareness and emotional resilience. The session structure included: Session 1: Introduction to EFT, pre-test, and group motivation; Sessions 2–4: Identifying key emotions, addressing negative experiences, and cognitive restructuring; Sessions 5–7: Validation, emotion labeling, and creating positive emotional meanings; Session 8: Post-test, feedback, and application of learned techniques in real-life scenarios.

Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training: Happiness Training was based on Lyubomirsky's (2008) positive psychology framework and delivered in eight weekly sessions, each lasting 120 minutes. This intervention emphasized cultivating positive emotions, fostering gratitude, and creating a sense of life meaning. The session structure included: Session 1: Introduction to happiness principles, pre-test, and group motivation; Sessions 2–4: Generating positive emotions from past experiences and promoting active engagement; Sessions 5–7: Strengthening relationships, clarifying personal values, and goal-setting; Session 8: Post-test, feedback, and future application of happiness strategies.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (version 26). Mixed Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to examine the interaction between group and time effects. Before analysis, the normality of data was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p > 0.05$); homogeneity of variances was confirmed with Levene's test ($p > 0.05$), sphericity was tested using Mauchly's test, with Greenhouse-Geisser corrections applied where violations were detected. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests were conducted to identify pairwise differences among the groups at each measurement stage. Effect sizes were calculated to determine the magnitude of intervention effects.

Table 1

Mean and standard deviation of self-concept and its components across pretest, posttest, and follow-up stages

Self-Concept	Pretest		Posttest		Follow-Up	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Group						
Control	13.29	9.34	47.28	7.24	87.28	2.84
Emotion-Focused Therapy	40.30	2.16	33.34	8.05	13.34	7.05
Happiness Training	27.29	4.53	93.46	3.49	87.47	7.89

As shown in [Table 1](#), the mean total self-concept score in the control group did not show significant changes in the posttest and follow-up stages compared to the pretest stage. However, significant increases in self-concept scores were observed in the happiness training and EFT groups during the posttest and follow-up stages compared to the pretest stage. To examine the significance of these changes, a mixed ANOVA was conducted. Before the analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to verify the normal distribution of self-

Findings and Results

The findings regarding the demographic data of the study showed that 45 participants (15 in the happiness training group, 15 in the emotion-focused therapy (EFT) group, and 15 in the control group) were included. The mean and standard deviation of participants' ages were as follows: for the happiness training group, 16.51 and 2.29 years, respectively; for the EFT group, 16.75 and 2.61 years; and the control group, 16.38 and 2.48 years. All participants were male and had a history of at least one suicide attempt in their records.

concept scores across the three measurement stages ($p > 0.05$). Levene's test confirmed the homogeneity of variances at the pretest ($F = 0.186$, $p = 0.20$), posttest ($F = 1.105$, $p = 0.123$), and follow-up ($F = 1.33$, $p = .263$) stages. M-Box testing for covariance matrix homogeneity in self-concept scores ($MBOX = 29.73$, $F = 1.04$, $p = 0.32$) showed non-significant results. However, Mauchly's test indicated a violation of sphericity, so Greenhouse-Geisser corrections were applied.

Table 2

Mixed ANOVA Results for Within-Group and Between-Group Effects

Variable	Factors	Source of Variation	SS	df	Mean Square	F	p	Effect Size
Self-Concept	Within-Group	Time	292.98	1.33	220.53	0.46	0.56	0.01
		Time \times Group	5812.2	2.66	2187.5	4.55	0.01	0.19
	Between-Group	Error	24283.19	50.48	481.02			

The results presented in [Table 2](#) show significant differences in the interaction between group and time for the self-concept variable. This indicates that there were significant differences in self-concept scores across

the pretest, posttest, and follow-up stages among the three groups. To further investigate these differences, pairwise comparisons were conducted using the Bonferroni test. The results are presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3*Bonferroni test results for pairwise comparisons of the self-concept variable*

Comparison	Pretest		Posttest		Follow-Up	
	Mean Diff.	SD	Mean Diff.	SD	Mean Diff.	SD
EFT vs Control	5.200	5.443	-38.067*	4.323	-38.733*	4.291
Happiness Training vs Control	3.400	5.443	-59.200*	4.323	-60.000*	4.291
Happiness Training vs EFT	-3.400	5.443	21.133*	4.323	21.267*	4.291

As shown in Table 3, significant differences were observed in self-concept scores between the EFT and control groups ($p < 0.05$) and between the happiness training and control groups ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, a significant difference was observed between the happiness training and EFT groups ($p < 0.05$). The mean difference in self-concept scores between happiness training and EFT groups was positive at the posttest and follow-up stages, indicating that happiness training was more effective in enhancing self-concept than EFT ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to compare the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) and Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training on self-concept among adolescents with a history of suicide attempts. In the first phase, findings indicated that EFT significantly improved the self-concept of adolescents with a history of suicide. These results are consistent with those of prior studies (Mahmoudvandi Baher et al., 2017; Motaghi et al., 2018; Nameni et al., 2017). EFT enables individuals to enhance emotional awareness, emotional symbolization, and agency in their experiences, thereby helping them manage negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and Self-conceptlessness. These abilities ultimately improve psychological adaptability. By encouraging individuals to question distressing thoughts and develop alternative self-talk strategies, EFT helps mitigate emotional rumination that could lead to psychological distress and suicidal tendencies. This approach emphasizes regulating emotions, which not only improves social skills but also enhances the quality of interpersonal relationships and psychological well-being (Nameni et al., 2017).

The process of change in EFT demonstrates that it enables adolescents to access and express underlying, damaged emotions, thereby breaking dysfunctional

interaction cycles and fostering deeper intimacy and secure attachment bonds (Ghaffari et al., 2022). Addressing these aspects in this study led to improvements in self-concept dimensions, including tolerance for frustration and realistic self-perception. The second finding revealed that Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training was also effective in improving self-concept among adolescents with a history of suicide attempts. This aligns with the prior findings (Huang et al., 2018; Moeini et al., 2016). Positive psychologists such as Lyubomirsky et al. (2011) define happiness as the balance between positive and negative emotional experiences over time. They conceptualize happiness as the experience of optimism, joy, and the belief that life is valuable and meaningful (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Positive emotions expand individuals' cognitive-behavioral repertoires, enhancing focus and engagement, while negative emotions can lead to depression and diminished behavioral options.

Happiness Training empowers adolescents to recognize and cultivate positive emotions, mitigate negative thoughts, and enhance their self-concept. Its techniques, such as stress management and coping strategies, empower adolescents to handle life's challenges more effectively and foster a sense of control. The emphasis on building positive relationships also enhances self-concept by reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation (Nikrahan & Ghasemi, 2019). Finally, the study found that Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training was significantly more effective than EFT in improving self-concept among adolescents with a history of suicide, with these effects persisting during the follow-up stage. Positive psychology interventions work by increasing positive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors while satisfying basic psychological needs, thereby enhancing subjective well-being and happiness (Seligman, 2019). Activities like meditation, integral to Lyubomirsky's program, foster positive emotions that enhance mental health and improve social interactions, ultimately

leading to greater life satisfaction and self-concept improvement (Alam, 2022).

This study highlights the significance of using targeted interventions like EFT and Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training for adolescents with a history of suicide. While both interventions were effective, Happiness Training demonstrated greater impact, offering practical tools to improve self-concept and overall well-being. The purposive sampling of adolescents with a history of suicide from a single city limits external validity. Psychological variables, such as mindset and concurrent stressors, were not controlled during the study, which may have affected internal validity. Future studies should include larger, more diverse samples from multiple locations to enhance generalizability. Additionally, addressing psychological variables and controlling confounding factors will ensure more robust conclusions.

Suicide is a critical public health issue, particularly among adolescents, where it leads to the loss of productive years of life. Adolescents often feel powerless when confronted with personal challenges, perceiving no viable solutions. This study concludes that both EFT and Lyubomirsky's Happiness Training significantly improve self-concept in adolescents with a history of suicide, with Happiness Training being more impactful. These findings emphasize the importance of incorporating these interventions into programs aimed at supporting adolescents with a history of suicide.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their gratitude and appreciation to all participants.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

By the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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