



Original Article

## The effectiveness of spirituality-based group counseling on purpose in life and personal growth in girls of divorced families

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Spirituality therapy means considering peoples spiritual beliefs in the therapy process, which guides them towards transcendental source. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of spirituality-based group counseling on purpose in life and personal growth in girls with divorced parents.

**Materials and Methods:** In this clinical trial conducted in 2018, 20 girl students of divorced families in Karaj city selected through convenience sampling method and randomly were assigned in the experimental and control groups (10 individuals per each group). Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Questionnaire was used to collect data. The experimental group received spirituality-based group interventions on purpose in life and personal growth for 8 sessions (2 hours per session). At the end of interventions, post-test was administered for the both groups. Analysis of covariance test was used to analyze data by applying SPSS Software program (v. 23).

**Results:** The results showed that spirituality-based group counseling had a significant effect on purpose in life and personal growth in girls of divorced families ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** According to the findings, it seems that spiritual intervention is effective to increase purpose in life and personal growth in girls of divorced families. So, spirituality therapy can be used as a primary and/or add-on therapy to increases of psychological well-being in adolescents of divorced families.

**Keywords:** Counseling, Divorce, Personal growth, Purpose, Spirituality

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### Introduction

Parental divorce creates familial wide changes that affect the child's adjustment over time. These changes endanger the couples' adjustment and the psychological balance of children and the related individuals. Meanwhile, one of the primary victims of the parents' decision is children (1). It can be said that the most apparent result of divorce is the effect on the children. These children experience more failures in

marriage, education, economic, social, and psychological issues (2). Divorced children do not enjoy psychological and emotional security (3,4). Research evidence suggests that adverse life events can disrupt psychological wellbeing (5). Ryff considers the purpose in life and personal growth as the most critical aspects of psychological wellbeing. The goal is the ability to find meaning and orientation in life and to

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nurture them (6), and personal growth, to see themselves growing, to be open to new experiences, to have a sense of recognition, to flourish her/his potential ability (7); strengths and talents, all of which are in opposition to happiness (6). Children of divorced families have lower psychological wellbeing and mental health than children in ordinary families (8). So, these children need to receive interventions. Research evidence has shown that spiritual activities lead to better outcomes in mental health (9,10). Spirituality is one of the human abilities that provide them with ways of coping and problem-solving strategies, and as a source of social support. It creates a sense of meaning against confusion and disaster. It also gives people a sense of indirect control over events (11). Spirituality therapy is a form of psychotherapy that utilizes specific principles by applying spiritual and religious practices to help patients attain a meta-perception of themselves, the world, events, and phenomena, and achieve health and growth through the connection with this world (12). Azizmohamadi and Mojtabai, in a study entitled "the effectiveness of group spirituality therapy on psychological wellbeing and action for students' personal growth," showed that group spirituality therapy was effective in psychological wellbeing and action for students' personal growth (13). Nadi and Sajjadian indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between spiritual meaning and spiritual wellbeing, mental happiness, life satisfaction, psychological flourish, hope for the future, and purposefulness in life (14). Yonker et al. assessed the relationship between spirituality and religiosity with psychological outcomes in adolescents. They indicated that the adolescents with a higher spiritual and religious orientation exhibit less risky behaviors and enjoy more psychological wellbeing and self-esteem (15). Asefi et al. compared the effectiveness of spirituality therapy and schema therapy on students' depression, showed that spirituality therapy and schema therapy significantly improved depression in students (16). Rezaei investigated the effectiveness of group religious-spiritual therapy on increasing psychological wellbeing and happiness of Afghan immigrant women, showed that group religious-spiritual therapy was effective in increasing psychological wellbeing and happiness in these women (17). Good found that using spirituality therapy effectively reduced symptoms of depression

(18). Many specialists believe that the world today is in a crisis of spirituality. Spirituality therapy has been very effective in creating a spiritual lifestyle, increasing coping skills and emotional support, and creating meaning and purpose in life in the healing and prevention of many diseases. Religious and spiritual interventions have also been very effective in helping individuals cope with stressful problems and events. Given the rising divorce rate in the country and the lack of research investigating the effectiveness of spirituality therapy on the children of a divorced family, interventions are needed to overcome the problems arising from divorce and their effects on the children of divorced families and provide a satisfying life design. In this regard, the present study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of spirituality-based group counseling to enhance purposefulness in later life and girls' personal growth with divorced parents.

### Materials and Methods

The present study was approved by ethical committee of Shahid Beheshti University (Code 92661/d/2019). The statistical population of this study included all girls aged 12-16 years with divorced parents. They were educating in Karaj schools in the academic year 2017-2018. Twenty-two individuals were selected through the convenience sampling method and were divided into the experimental and control groups (10 persons in each group). Inclusion criteria included: aged 12-16 years, divorce in family, and willingness to participation. Exclusion criteria included: participation in other training classes. Ethical considerations were conducted such as the perfect informing about the quality of the research, considering willingness to participate or continuation, observing confidentiality for each participant. Then, the intervention was conducted in 10 two-hour sessions (twice a week). In this study, the spirituality-based group counseling program was designed according to the scientific literature and information sources. The articles that were most consistent with the purpose of the present research program were thoroughly studied and summarized as sources of information relevant to the purpose of the program. Spiritual Skills Training books (19) and the training for spiritual skills (20) were analyzed, and a spirituality-based group counseling program was developed. In this program, group counseling was presented

according to counseling standards to empower the clients to discover their problems. Also, it was attempted to encourage the members to act and share the problems with others and receive the experiences of the others. The emphasis was on stating the problems in the group rather than solely dealing with their problems individually. For this group, using the spirituality interventions identified in the sources cited above, their feedbacks, orientations, clarifications, and preferences were used to drive the sessions. The group counseling sessions were held as follows; at the first session, the group members were introduced, and the group rules were presented. Also, the spirituality-related materials were introduced, and the group members' common issues about parental separation were dealt with. Then, the interventions were performed using spiritual components, and in each session, the tasks related to spirituality were provided in session intervals (Table 1).

#### Research instrument

A) *Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Questionnaire*: It was used to evaluate psychological wellbeing. This questionnaire has been designed to measure psychological wellbeing.

The reliability coefficient of the Ryff psychological wellbeing scale was 0.81 to 0.85. Its coefficient was 0.87 for the subscale of personal growth and 0.90 for a purposeful life (21). Bayani et al. standardized this scale in Iran on 140 students of Azad-Shahr Islamic Azad University. The reliability coefficient of Ryff psychological wellbeing scale was obtained equal to 0.82 through the test-retest method and 0.70 and 0.78 for the subscales of a purposeful life and personal growth, respectively (22).

The central indices of mean and standard deviation were used to describe the data. Statistical analysis was performed using covariance analysis through SPSS software (version 23).

**Table 1.** Training sessions conducted for the experimental group

Sessions	Content
First session	-Introducing the group members to each other
	-Introducing the group rules
	-Talking about self-awareness and understanding the self-spiritual dimension
	-Presenting the practices and tasks related to the first session
Second session	-Learning the meaning of life and setting goals in life
	-Presenting the practices and tasks related to the second session
Third session	-Talking about members' problems and the identification of divorce issues in the group
Fourth session	-Identifying the common problems related to the members' parental divorce
	-Feedback and training according to emotion-based and problem-based coping in relation with common issues of the members
	-Presenting the practices and tasks related to the fourth session
Fifth session	-Following up the tasks presented in the previous session
	-Feedback and training according to emotion-based and problem-based coping in relation with common issues of the members
	-Presenting the practices and tasks related to the fifth session
Sixth session	-Following up the tasks presented in the previous session
	-Feedback and training based on resort and trust in relation with common issues of the members
	-Presenting the practices and tasks related to the sixth session
Seventh session	-Following up the tasks presented in the previous session
	-Feedback and training based on forgiveness in relation with common issues of the members
	-Presenting the practices and tasks related to the seventh session
Eighth session	-Feedback and training based on remembrance in relation with common issues of the members
	-Summing up the sessions and the final session
	-Administrating post-test

## Results

In term of demographic variables, the mean age of the participants was 14.4 years. The educational level and age groups were presented in Table 2.

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of the purpose in life and personal growth in the experimental and control groups in two phases.

**Table 2.** Demographic information of the subjects

Demographic information		Number	Frequency percentage
Age (Year)	12-14	11	55%
	14-16	9	45%
Education level	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	6	30%
	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	5	25%
	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	5	25%
	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	4	20%

**Table 3.** Mean and standard deviation of the research variables in the experimental and control groups

Variables	Pretest		Post-test	
	Experimental group	Control group	Experimental group	Control group
	Mean (standard deviation)	Mean (standard deviation)	Mean (standard deviation)	Mean (standard deviation)
Purpose in life	64.10 (8.62)	55.90 (13.37)	71.50 (9.09)	54.10 (6.38)
Personal growth	60.40 (5.69)	53.20 (8.57)	71.20 (4.20)	56.40 (6.14)

For assumptions, the normality of data was evaluated by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results indicated that the significance level is higher than 0.05, so the normality assumption of the data distribution was satisfied. Also, analysis of the assumption of the equality of variances by the Levin test showed a significant difference between the variances of the two groups in pretest and post-test ( $F=0.26$ ;  $P=0.87$ ).

There were also significant differences between the variances of the two groups in pretest and post-test for the personal growth variable ( $F=2.34$ ;  $P=0.23$ ) and the purpose in life ( $F=0.002$ ;  $P=0.14$ ). According to the results in Table 4 ( $F=8.77$ ;  $P<0.001$ ), after modifying the pretest scores, the difference between the experimental and control groups for the personal growth variable was significant at an alpha level of 0.05. Thus, spirituality-based

group counseling effectively affects the girls' personal growth after the parental divorce at confidence level of 0.95 and 0.59 of variance changes in post-test scores results from it.

Therefore, it can be claimed that spirituality-based group counseling is effective on girls' personal growth after the parental divorce. According to the results of Table 5 ( $F=8.77$ ;  $P<0.001$ ), after modifying the pretest scores, the difference between the experimental and control groups for the purpose in life variable was significant at an alpha level of 0.05. Consequently, spirituality-based group counseling effectively affects the girls' purpose in life after the parental divorce at confidence level of 0.95 and 0.56 of variance changes in post-test scores results from it. Therefore, spirituality-based group counseling is effective on girls' purpose in life after the parental divorce.

**Table 4.** The results of univariate analysis of covariance for the modified scores of the personal growth

Source of changes	The sum of squares	Df	F	Sig.	Effect size	Test power
Pretest for personal growth	108.95	1	4.48	0.05	0.20	0.51
Group	601.31	1	24.74	0.0001	0.59	0.99
Error	1028.06	17				
Total	83026.00	20				
Total	81492.00	20				

**Table 5.** The results of univariate analysis of covariance for the modified scores of the purpose in life

Source of changes	The sum of squares	Df	F	Sig.	Effect size	Test power
Pretest for purpose in life	9.79	1	0.15	0.70	0.009	0.06
Group	1401.91	1	21.83	0.0001	0.56	0.99
Error	1091.60	17				
Total	81492.00	20				

## Discussion

The present study investigated the effectiveness of spirituality-based group counseling on purpose in life and personal growth of girls after parental divorce.

The findings showed that spirituality-based group counseling is effective on girls' purpose in life after parental divorce. This result is consistent with the results by Nadi and Sajjadian, Yonker et al., and Asefi et al. (14-16). To explain this finding, it can be said that parental divorce and living in a single-parent family are associated with an increased stressful events, and adjustment problems in children (23). Research shows that adverse life events can disrupt psychological wellbeing and lead to psychological problems such as depression and anxiety (5).

Most studies show that children in divorced families have lower level of psychological wellbeing and mental health, while they have more problems in emotional, behavioral, and academic fields than children in ordinary families; also, they show higher psychological incompatibility, lower self-esteem, and more significant social problems (24,25).

The ability to find meaning and orientation in life, and having a purpose are important aspects of wellbeing. Those who think about the future, have a purpose in the future and seek meaning

can easily tolerate difficult environmental conditions (26). Spirituality therapy is an intervention in which the individuals give meaning to their illness by emphasizing the meta-material belief of life, interpret it, understand the meaning of life, feel duty and commitment in the form of a life mission, and create new meanings through spiritual and human values such as patience, altruism, resort, and forgiveness (27). This improves the psychological wellbeing and feel happiness in the interactions (28). Spirituality therapy causes the value and existential problems to be solved, and life is established in a safe, prosperous, vast, and meaningful framework by applying the spiritual principles of life correctly (29). In this regard, Nadi and Sajjadian showed that spiritual meaning influences spiritual belief, spiritual tranquility, psychological flourishing, and hope for the future by purposefulness in life (14). Gwyther also studied the role of spirituality in the improvement of family conditions and stated that spirituality, faith, and religion help struggling and disadvantaged families find meaning and purpose in life and considered spirituality as the major factor of identity and the basis for coping with changes rather than shortages and limitations (30).

Our findings also show that spirituality-based group counseling effectively affects girls'

personal growth after parental divorce. The percentage of variance changes in post-test scores result from spirituality-based group counseling. This finding is consistent with the results of Aziz-Mohammadi and Mojtabae, Yonker et al., and Rezaei (13,15,17).

In explaining this finding, personal growth is the acquisition of new abilities that requires facing difficult conditions and all these factors cause the individuals to act to realize their potentials and abilities and encounter positive consequences. These individuals recognize more experiences that are enjoyable and are less affected by unpleasant emotions. Overall, there is a positive association between psychological wellbeing with increased quality of life, increased levels of life satisfaction, and hopefulness (31). Psychological wellbeing is very effective in integrating and conjunction in life and balance and overall satisfaction with life (33). The individuals who have experienced a divorce crisis show anxiety reactions because they understand divorce as a threat to their basic needs or integrity (33). Spiritual interventions help individuals know about their current situation and the necessity to choose and accept responsibility, and attempt for personal growth

(34). Spirituality plays a central role in one's identity (18), and integrating and unifying the personality than any other factor (35). In this regard, Ivtzan et al. state that the higher level of spirituality is associated with high self-consciousness, meaning in life and initiative, and personal growth (36).

One of the main limitations of the present study was the sample included the girls of divorced families. So, we should be cautious about generalizing its results to the boys. Considering the impact of spirituality therapy on children of divorced families, it is suggested that spirituality intervention is used to enhance personal growth and purpose in life for these children in all schools and psychotherapy and counseling clinics.

### Conclusion

According to the findings, it seems that spiritual intervention is effective to increase purpose in life and personal growth in girls of divorced families. So, spirituality therapy can be used as a primary and/or add-on therapy to increase psychological well-being in adolescents of divorced families.

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