S. M. Alsubaie

The effectiveness of a cognitive behavioral counseling program in improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behaviors among university students

Introduction. Social skills are considered an influential factor in the adaptation of individuals and their enjoyment of mental health, and the lack of these skills negatively affects the individual's various performances: professional, academic, family, and societal, which may lead individuals to isolation, introversion and a feeling of inferiority and inferiority. Cognitive-behavioral therapy contributes to developing communication skills, training to solve problems in an effective manner, and reducing behavioral problems in particular, represented by isolation and introversion.

The current study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral counseling program in improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behaviors among university students.

Study participants and methods. The study sample consisted of (24) first-year students who obtained high scores on the isolation scale and low scores on the social skills scale used in the current study. The study sample was divided into two groups: an experimental group (n=12), and its members received a group counseling program based on cognitive behavioral therapy for a period of (7) weeks, with two sessions per week, and a control group (n=12) students, whose individuals did not receive the cognitive behavioral counseling program. The performance of members of the experimental and control groups was measured on the social skills scale and the isolation scale pre and post the counseling intervention.

Results. The results of the study showed the effectiveness of the counseling program in improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behaviors in favor of the members of the experimental group. The results of the study showed that there were significant statistical difference between the experimental group and the control group in the post-measurement of the social skills (p=0.04) and the isolation behaviors (p=0.05) in favor of the experimental group who received the cognitive behavioral training program. Based on these results, the researcher recommends working on developing and building counseling programs aimed at improving the level of social skills and reducing Isolation on the basis of other therapeutic and counseling approaches, such as narrative therapy, emotion-centered therapy, and psychological drama, and work on building counseling programs targeting parents and families with the aim of educating parents and teachers about the importance of developing social skills, and the seriousness of the shortcomings of those social skills.

Practical significance. This study investigated the effectiveness of a cognitive behavioral program on improving social skills and reducing isolation behaviors among university students. The significance of this study stems from providing an interventional procedure that might improve the social skills and the adjustment of a significant category in the community, which is the youth category in higher education institutions.

Keywords: cognitive behavioral therapy, social skills, isolation behaviors, group counseling program

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Introduction

By nature, man is considered a social being who lives most of its time in a group that influences and revolts with them, and the individual develops since its childhood an effective ability to establish social relations with others [1; 2], where it begins its first interaction with its mother and father and then with the rest of the family, and then this interaction extends to include other groups, from attending school to leaving the large community [3].

Social skills are among the important skills in an individual’s life, as they help the individual to integrate with others [4], which is one of the most important indicators of an individual’s enjoyment of mental health, and that a defect or an individual’s lack of social skills may be a major obstacle that can lead to prevent the individual from satisfying its psychological needs [5].

The definition of social skills differs from one scholar to another. However, this difference is due to the difference of opinions between scholars and specialists in education and mental health, the different social situations, and the interaction that takes place in them to achieve the desired goal based on the individual’s awareness of the situation it is facing [6; 7]. This is on the grounds that the skill is a set of individual performance responses whose results can be measured in terms of speed, accuracy, mastery, effort and time based on the type of response that requires a specific mental and emotional performance to help the individual continue social interaction successfully [6; 8].

The lack of social skills, with all associated weaknesses in social interaction, is one of the main causes of social isolation among university students [9], and this deficiency may appear in the future in the form of various psychological problems and disorders, as in cases of social anxiety, shyness, lack of self-confidence, and fear of expressing positive emotions, such as the inability to show love, affection and concern for others, or negativity, such as the inability to express protest or reject aggression [9; 10].

Social isolation occurs as a result of the lack of motivation towards carrying out social tasks, in addition to the lack or absence of positive support for the conditional response, and the person’s social environment is one of the most important sources of support [11; 12], as the individual acquires social skills and the ability to extract positive support from others. Impairment or lack of social skills, in turn, leads to social isolation, due to the individual's lack of social support from others [13; 14].

Among the guiding theories that focused on the development of social skills is the cognitive behavioral theory [15], as the founders of this approach see that social skills are the ability to organize cognitive components and behavioral elements and integrate them in the context of an action directed towards achieving social goals in ways consistent with social standards and a persistent tendency to evaluate and modify to direct it towards a goal, which increases the odds of achieving it [16].

The cognitive behavioral theory also emphasizes that social skills are the individual's ability to show behavioral patterns and positively supported activities that depend on the environment and benefit in the process of positive interaction with others, and in establishing various social relationships in socially acceptable ways within the personal and social levels [17; 18].

The current study gains its importance from the lack of counseling programs based on cognitive behavioral therapy in developing social skills and reducing isolation behaviors.
among university students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study is also concerned with building a cognitive behavioral counseling program that can benefit specialists and workers in the psychological field in general and psychological counseling in particular, which enhances professional practice in this field. The study also gains its significance from addressing an important group of society groups, which is the university youth category, which is the most responsible category for building the nation and advancing its various institutions, and accordingly, the researcher decided to perform this study throughout developing a training program based on cognitive behavioral therapy and testing its effectiveness in improving social skills and reducing isolation behaviors among a sample of Hafr Al-Batin University students. Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following question: How effective is cognitive behavioral therapy in improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behaviors among university students?

Theoretical background

Social skills are an important factor in the psychological adjustment of students at the personal and societal level [19]. They determine the circle of relationships and the nature of the daily interactions of the person with those around. Social skills are also a manifestation of communication, social interaction, and the ability to share others, and influence them in a positive way [20]. Social skills are essential and necessary for the growth of the social relations of the individual as they contribute to the formation of the ability to solve problems, take responsibility, refine the personality, and self-esteem of the individual, as it achieves the person a distinct social position [21; 22].

Sherif [23] believes that the development of social skills contributes to building and managing social and work relations in an effective manner, avoids individuals various conflicts, and helps in training them to solve and deal with them. Social skills also aim to develop discussion and dialogue to achieve effective communication with others. Hawkins & Weins [24] reported that social skills are considered a necessary and useful method in the proper behavior and effective management of crises in different situations, contribute to the development of individuals' abilities to effectively social performance in different situations, and increases individuals' control over their behavior, and increases their ability to deal appropriately with unethical or undesired behaviors of other people.

The individual's acquisition of social skills goes through a set of stages, namely: the realization stage, during which the individual tries to understand the performance instructions, the necessary tasks and the demands of those tasks, and the stabilization stage [25]. It leads to a gradual reduction of errors, while the stage of independence depends on the self-development of the skill through the repetition of its practices [26].

Al-Najjar [27] confirms that social skills are interactive skills different from the interpersonal interaction of individuals, which achieves a set of goals for the individual without leaving negative effects or causing harm to others [28], and this leads to an increase in the occurrence of Positive responses and reactions, and this is done by observation, modeling, repetition, or feedback [29].

Febriantini et al. [30] considers that social skills are cognitive behaviors used by the individual in its interactions with others, which range between non-verbal behaviors, such as eye contact or body gestures, and complex verbal behaviors, such as providing solutions that satisfy the needs of everyone.
Jahja et al. [31] emphasized that acquiring social skills is of importance to the individual and society, as it helps individuals learn how to exchange feelings with others, and use effective methods to cope with everyday situations and struggles in life, and help individuals acquire communication skills when they face new situations, which helps them in the future to get the job they desire, and helps them to progress from different professions. In addition, Gates et al [32] confirmed that the acquisition of social skills improves the level of awareness of the rights of others, and increases the level of personal adjustment among individuals, which in turn leads to adjustment with society and the environment.

Research hypothesis
The present study sought to test the following hypotheses:
1. There are no statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the mean scores of social skills and isolation behaviors between the experimental group and the control group on the pre-measurement.
2. There are statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the mean scores of social skills and isolation behaviors between the experimental group and the control group on the post-measurement.
3. There are no statistically significant differences at the significance level (0.05) in the mean scores of social skills and isolation behaviors between the pre- and post-measurement of the experimental group in favor of the post-measurement.
4. There are no statistically significant differences at the significance level (0.05) in the averages of social skills and isolation behaviors between the pre- and post-measurement of the control group.

Research Method

Research population and sample
The study population consisted of all students of the faculties of education and business administration at the University of Hafr Al-Batin, who were registered during the second semester of the academic year 2021/2022. The study sample was chosen after applying the social skills scale and the isolation scale to students, where the researcher selected a sample of (24) students who obtained the lowest scores on the social skills scale, and the highest scores on the isolation scale, and then they were randomly distributed equally into two groups, an experimental group (n=12), which received a counseling program based on cognitive behavioral therapy to improve the level of social skill and reduce isolation behaviors, and a control group (n=12), which did not receive the counseling program. The level of social skills and the level of isolation behaviors were measured pre and post implementation of the counseling intervention for members of the two groups. The study sample consisted of first-year students enrolled in the Department of Psychology and Counseling during the second semester of the academic year 2021/2021, within the age group (18-19) years.

Data collection tools
Social Skills Scale
The researcher used the Social Skills Scale prepared by Rigo [33], where Rigot extracted the validity of the scale using construct validity, factorial validity, and discriminatory validity, and also calculated the reliability of the scale by extracting the coefficient of the internal
consistency of the scale using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of internal consistency and test-retest method. The scale has a five-point scoring scale, and it also includes items with positive formulation, items with negative formulation. The positive items were (1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 17, 20, 23, 24, 25, 28, and 34). Those statements were scored using the following scoring key: Completely apply (5), apply to a high degree (4), apply to some extent (3), does not apply much (2), and completely does not apply (1). As for the negative statements (6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 40, 42), they were scored in the opposite way, as follows: Completely apply (1), apply to a high degree (2), apply to some extent (3), does not apply much (4), and completely does not apply (5). In addition, for the purposes of the current study, the researcher re-extracted the validity and reliability of the tool using the following methods:

Face validity: The scale was presented to ten arbitrators with specialization in psychology and who hold a doctorate degree in this field, in order to identify the appropriateness of the scale’s statements for the variables to be measured, its sufficiency in terms of number, and the extent of its linguistic integrity. A total of (30) items were deleted from the original scale statements as they did not fulfill the terms of arbitration of the scale.

Construct validity: The scale was distributed to a sample of (50) male and female students from the University of Hafr Al-Batn, who were excluded from the original study sample. The correlation of each of the scale’s statements with the total score of the scale was calculated, whereby the validity was maintained. The statements that are related to their overall score by more than (0.25) were kept. The correlation coefficient of the scale’s statements ranged between (0.25-0.35). Accordingly, a total of 18 items were deleted as they did not achieve this criterion. Finally, the scale, in its final version, consisted of 42 statements.

Reliability

The researcher ensured the reliability of the scale according to the following:

- Calculation of the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of internal consistency for the statements of the social skills scale, and the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of reliability of the scale according to the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of internal consistency (0.83), which is a good reliability coefficient, and meets the purposes of the current study.
- Test-retest method: The researcher applied the scale to a sample of (50) male and female students from the University of Hafr Al-Batn, then the scale was re-administered with a time period of three weeks. After that, the Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated to identify the correlation between the statements in the test and re-test steps, it was (0.75), which is a good correlation coefficient and satisfies the purpose of the current study.

Isolation Behavior Scale

The researcher used the Psychological Unity Scale prepared by Alzyoudi et al [9]. The researcher ensured the validity of the scale using both construct validity and factorial validity. To ensure the reliability of the scale, the researcher used the internal consistency coefficient through Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient and test-retest method. The final version of the scale consisted of 34 items that were scored using 5-point scoring system as follows: Completely apply (5), apply to a high degree (4), apply to some extent (3), does not apply much (2), and completely does not apply (1). For the purposes of the current study, the researcher re-extracted the validity and reliability of the tool using the following methods:

- The validity of the scale: The researcher calculated the indicators of the validity of the isolation behaviors scale by following the following methods:
1. Facial validity: The scale was presented to ten arbitrators with specialization in psychology and who hold a doctorate degree in this field, in order to identify the appropriateness of the scale’s statements for the variables to be measured, its sufficiency in terms of number, and the extent of its linguistic integrity. All of the original scale items met that criterion, and all were retained.

2. Construct validity: The scale was distributed to a sample of (50) male and female students from the University of Hafr Al-Batin, who were excluded from the original study sample, where the correlation of each of the scale’s statement with the total score of the scale was calculated. The statements having a correlation factor with the total scale higher than 0.25 were maintained. The correlation coefficients of the statements with the total scale ranged between 0.25 and 0.35. Therefore, all the scale statements were maintained as they met the criterion. Thus, the final version of the scale consisted of 34 statements.

- The reliability of the scale: The researcher calculated the reliability of the scale according to the following:
  1. Calculation of the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of internal consistency for the statements of the isolation behaviors scale. The coefficient of reliability of the scale according to the alpha coefficient of internal consistency was (0.83), which is a good reliability coefficient, and meets the purposes of the current study.
  2. Test-retest method: The researcher applied the scale to a sample of (50) male and female students from the University of Hafr Al-Batin, who were excluded from the original study sample. Then, the scale was re-applied with a period of three weeks. After that, the Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated to identify the correlation between the statements in the test and re-test steps, it was (0.75), which is a good correlation coefficient and satisfies the purpose of the current study.

The cognitive behavioral program

The researcher built and developed a counseling program based on cognitive behavioral therapy to improve social skills and reduce isolation behaviors among university students, making use of the theoretical and applied literature in this field, especially the counseling program prepared by Soleimani Sefat et al. [34]. The program consisted of fourteen counseling sessions. Each session included a goal, a remedial exercise, and a homework.

The first session aimed to get acquainted with the members and the counselor, familiarize the participants with the program and its objectives, agree on the location of the sessions, identify the feelings of the members of the guiding group, and try to link that with the behaviors. It also aimed to discuss the participants’ expectations from the program and enhance positive expectations.

As for the second session, it aimed to identify the concept of social skills, the concept of isolation, and to identify the relationship between thinking and behavior, and how thinking affects behavior and emotions. It also aimed at identifying patterns of irrational behaviors related to isolation behaviors and lack of social skills.

The third and fourth sessions aimed to introduce participants to the ABCDEF model in thinking and cognitive behavioral therapy, helping members refute ideas according to that model, and identifying the relationship between behavior, thinking and emotion, and its impact on isolation behaviors and lack of social skills for them.

The fifth session aimed to identify the concept of self-affirmation, and the differences between assertive behavior, withdrawal behavior, and aggressive behavior. In addition,
the sixth session aimed at training members on affirmative methods: the broken cylinder and defusing the fuse. The seventh session aimed to complete the training of the group members on other affirmative methods, namely; transforming the subject into a process and affirmative questioning. The eighth session aimed to train members to use the following affirmative methods: affirmative approval, affirmative delay.

The ninth session aimed to introduce members to the concept of problem solving, and the steps to solve the problem, in addition to training members to use that technique. The tenth session aimed at introducing members to the concept of communication, its obstacles, effective communication and ways to achieve it.

The eleventh session aimed to train members in the skills and mechanisms of effective listening, and the use of Johari technique in communication. As for the twelfth session, it aimed to train members to relax, both muscular and mental, and its role in improving social skills and reducing isolation behaviors. The thirteenth session aimed at introducing participants to the concept of conflict management, and using the settlement or cooperation strategy to solve problems.

As for the closing session, it aimed to complete any unfinished work among the members of the guidance group, by discussing the feelings and experiences they experienced during the various counseling sessions. The program and the extent to which it met their expectations, as the post measurement was taken in this session.

Validity of the program: The researcher presented the cognitive behavioral counseling program to a group of specialized experts and referees who hold a doctorate degree in psychological counseling to identify the appropriateness of the program, its sessions, its objectives and the exercises used in each session for the intended therapeutic purpose, which is to raise the level of the social skill and reducing isolation behaviors among university students.

**Research procedure**

After defining the study population, which are students of the Faculties of education and business administration at the University of Hafr Al-Batin, the university’s approval was obtained to conduct the study, then the study tools were distributed to students of the Faculties of Education and business administration at the University of Hafr Al-Batin. A sample of first-year students who obtained the highest scores on the isolation scale, and the lowest scores on the social skills scale, a sample of (24) students were selected from these students, representing the current study sample, and they were randomly distributed into two groups: a control group, which did not receive the counseling program, and an experimental group. They were informed of the general objective of the program, which is to improve the level of social skills and reduce the isolation behavior of the participants, and after taking their written consent to participate in the program, Their performance was measured before and after the counseling intervention, which lasted for two months from the date of May 15th to July 15th at two sessions per week, for a period of (90) minutes for each meeting. The counseling meetings were held in the campus of the university of Hafr Al Batin in a large hall equipped for training purposes. and guidance, and equivalence and control were achieved in the current study by selecting a random sample of the students of the university of Hafr Al Batin who obtained high scores on the social isolation scale, And low scores on the social skills scale. The study also used the design of the experimental and control groups, as indicated by the following symbols:
Data analysis

- To answer the research question and test the study hypotheses, the study used the independent samples t-test to examine the significance of the differences between the experimental group and the control group in social skills and isolation behavior on the tribal measurement.
- The independent samples t-test to examine the significance of the differences between the experimental group and the control group in social skills and isolation behavior on the post-measurement.
- Paired samples t-test to examine the significance of the differences in social skills and isolation behaviors between the two measurements: pre and post, for the experimental group that received the extension program.
- Pearson correlation coefficient to extract construct validity by examining the correlation between the paragraphs of the two scales of isolation behaviors and social skills and the total score for each scale.
- Pearson correlation coefficient to extract repetition stability by examining the correlation between the two times of applying the measures of isolation behaviors and social skills.
- Cronbach’s alpha equation for internal consistency to extract stability measures of social skills and isolation behaviors.

Study Results

Results related to the first research hypothesis: There are no significant statistical difference at significance level 0.05 in the pre-test mean scores of social skills and isolation behaviors between the control group and the experimental group.

To test this hypothesis, the statistical differences between the students’ mean scores were calculated before implementing the interventional counselling program. The results presented in Table 1 showed that there was no significant statistical difference in the social skills mean scores between the experimental group (2.41±0.420) and the control group (2.72±0.510), (t=1.63, p=0.17). In addition, there was no significant statistical difference in the isolation behaviors mean scores between the experimental group (2.80±0.50) and the control group (2.83±0.40), (t=0.16, p=0.88).

Results related to the second research hypothesis: There are significant statistical differences at significance level 0.05 in the post-test mean scores of social skills and isolation behaviors between the control group and the experimental group.
Table 1
Mean and standard deviation scores of the pre-measurement of the control and experimental groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.420</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>0.510</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation behaviors</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results presented in Table 2 showed that there was significant statistical difference in the social skills mean scores between the experimental group (3.36±0.65) and the control group (2.70±0.45), (t=2.43, p=0.04). In addition, it was found that there was significant statistical difference in the isolation behaviors mean scores between the experimental group (2.08±0.66) and the control group (2.76±0.44), (t=2.95, p=0.05).

Table 2
Mean and standard deviation scores of the post-measurement of the control and experimental groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Df</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
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<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation behaviors</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.44</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Results related to the third research hypothesis: There are significant statistical differences at significance level 0.05 in the post-test mean scores of social skills and isolation skills among the experimental group members who received the cognitive behavioral program.

The results presented in Table 3 show that there was significant statistical difference in the experimental group members’ mean scores on the social skills scale between the pre-intervention (2.41±0.42) and the post-intervention (3.36±0.76), (t=2.63, p=0.02). In addition, it was found that there was significant statistical difference in the mean scores on the isolation behaviors scale between the pre-intervention (2.80±0.50) and the post-intervention (2.08±0.66), (t=2.57, p=0.01).

Table 3
Pre and post Mean and standard deviation scores of the experimental group members on the study scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
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<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
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<td>0.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isolation behaviors</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>0.66</td>
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</table>
Results related to the fourth research hypothesis: there are no significant statistical differences at significance level 0.05 in the mean scores of social skills and isolation behaviors between the pre and post measurements among the control group members who did not receive the cognitive behavioral program.

The results presented in Table 4 show that there was no significant statistical difference in the control group members’ mean scores on the social skills scale between the pre-intervention (2.72±0.51) and the post-intervention (2.70±0.45), (t=0.55, p=0.59). In addition, it was found that there was no significant statistical difference in the mean scores on the isolation behaviors scale between the pre-intervention (2.83±0.40) and the post-intervention (2.76±0.44), (t=2.15, p=0.06).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.59</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
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<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Isolation behaviors</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.44</td>
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</table>

Discussion

This study aimed to reveal the effectiveness of a cognitive behavioral counseling program in improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behavior among a sample of the University of Hafr Al-Batin students. The results of the study indicated the effectiveness of the cognitive behavioral counseling program in improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behaviors among university students, as the results showed that there were statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group compared with the control group in reducing isolation behavior and improving social skills.

The results of the first hypothesis showed that there were no statistically significant differences at the significance level (α≤0.05) in the level of social skills and isolation behavior between the experimental group and the control group on the pre-measurement. The results of the study are in line with the findings reported by Al-Najjar [27], Weshahi [35]. Siahkalroudi & Bahr [36] who examined the performance of members of the experimental and control groups on the pre-measurement according to the study variables: isolation behaviors, and social skills, and the results of those studies indicated the equivalence of the experimental and control group with regard to the level of isolation and social skills, which indicates a high level of experimental control.

The researcher attributed the result of the current study to the equivalence levels between the experimental and control groups, and the effectiveness of the experimental control used, which is random selection and random distribution to groups. This equivalence enhances the internal consistency of the research, which is represented in the reliability of the elements of the research procedures, and the study can accurately verify the effectiveness of the counselling intervention in improving the level of skills and reducing isolation behaviors among university students. In addition, this result also
indicates that the level of the social skills among the study sample was low, and the isolation behaviors were high for them, which enhances the importance and value of the intervention used with the study sample members.

The results related to the second hypothesis showed that there were statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the experimental group and the control group in the level of social skills and the isolation behaviors of the study individuals on the post-measurement, and in favor of the experimental group, and thus the result of this hypothesis agrees with the findings reported by Soleimani Sefat et al. [34] and Siahkalroudi & Bahr [36] who reported the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy in improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behaviors among the participants, as these studies were interested in examining the performance of members of the groups after the counseling intervention.

The researcher attributed the result of the current study to the collective experience of the cognitive behavioral counseling program and the exercises and techniques that were used, as the interaction of the members of the counseling group within the group with all what this interaction means of expression of feelings and experiences, contributes to improving the participants' level of social skills, and the reduction in their isolation behaviors. Social isolation and poor effective communication with others represent a real problem with regard to social skills., and the collective experience contributes to finding effective communication and constructive social interaction between members of the counseling group, and this communication and social interaction is reinforced by the facilitator of the guiding group, which organizes the process of communication, talking, expressing feelings, and rebuilding the knowledge of the members of the guiding group, which contributes to a decrease in the behavior of isolation and other negative behaviors among the members of the guiding group, and enhances the building of the guiding group, and makes it an effective place for acquiring and developing various social skills such as affirmative and positive self-expression, developing problem-solving skills, and managing conflict effectively, communicating effectively with oneself and with others.

The results related to the third hypothesis showed that there were statistically significant differences at the level of 0.05 in the level of social skills and isolation behaviors of the experimental group between the pre- and post-measurement, and in favor of the post-measurement. The result of this hypothesis agrees with the findings reported by Soleimani Sefat et al [34] and Edward [37] who reported that there are statistically significant differences in the level of social skills and isolation behaviors in favor of the post-measurement.

The researcher attributed the result of the current study to the effectiveness of the cognitive behavioral counseling program, which contributed to improving the level of social skills among the members of the experimental group. As this result ensured the effectiveness and appropriateness of the cognitive behavioral methods, with its contents of objectives, techniques and cognitive behavioral methods that contributed to enhancing and developing the social skills of the members of the experimental group, especially those skills related to self-assertion, positive talk, effective conflict management methods, and cognitive reconstruction. The program also contributed in reducing the isolation behavior of the participants, and this indicates that the collective experience, including openness, positive expression and self-disclosure, contributed to reducing the isolation behavior of the participants in the program.

The researcher believes that participation in the guidance group was a real opportunity for the group members to express themselves and the various problems and emotions in
a positive way, and also to review the different thinking patterns that they adopt towards different life situations, and the behavioral methods that they are entrusted to use when facing life situations related to their social relations with others, the program enabled them, through its sessions, remedial exercises and various home duties, to review many situations, life experiences and ways to solve problems, and try to discuss those methods and means in a constructive and rational manner, and thus adopt a new rational philosophy of thinking that contributed to the adoption of new behavioral patterns, focused on improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behavior, which is one of the most serious problems facing young people in general, and university students in particular, as isolation may lead to different types of behavioral problems and psychological disorders.

The results that were reached with regard to the fourth hypothesis showed that there were no statistically significant differences at the level of 0.05 in the level of social skills and isolation behaviors of the control group between the pre- and post-measurement, and thus the result of this hypothesis agrees with the results reported by Deffenbacher et al [39], as the results of those studies indicated that there were no significant differences between the pre- and post-measurement with regard to the level of social skills of the control group.

The result of the current study can be explained in the light of the control group not receiving any therapeutic or training intervention in order to improve social skills and reduce their isolation behaviors. This result also indicates that the level of social skills and isolation behaviors remained constant without change, and the researcher attributed this result as well to the absence of significant social events or experiences that contributed to a change in the level of social skills and isolation behaviors during the period of conducting the study. In addition, the result also reflects the need for students to have collective counseling intervention programs to enhance the level of social skills and reduce isolation behaviors among university students, as it is not possible to develop these skills without working with different intervention programs targeting members of that category. The problem of isolation also requires specialists to make various interventions to reduce the negative effects of it, such as collective meetings, orientation classes, and awareness and educational meetings that deal with this problem and its effects on the individual and societal levels.

Limitations

The limitations of the current study are represented by the study sample, which was tested by students of the Faculties of Education and business administration at the University of Hafr Al-Batin, so there is a need to conduct the study with more representative samples. In addition, the current study was limited to the design of the two groups: experimental and control, so there is a need for future research that uses other research designs.

The study relied mainly on self-report measures, as the students' answers are influenced by many considerations, which calls into question their credibility, so there is a need to conduct studies that rely on other research tools.

Despite the positive results of the current studies, it should be noted that there are some things that affected the results of the study, including the time period of the program. Given that we are dealing with a form of psychotherapy, the training was limited to members of the experimental group only, while members of the control group did not receive any treatment.
Conclusion

The study aimed to examine the effectiveness of a counseling program based on cognitive behavioral therapy in reducing isolation behaviors and improving the level of social skills among university students. The study concluded that there were statistically significant differences in the level of social skills and isolation behaviors between the experimental and control group on the post-measurement, and in favor of the experimental group whose members received a counseling program based on cognitive behavioral therapy.

The results of the study conclude the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy in improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behaviors among university students.

In light of the results of the current study, it can be said that cognitive behavioral therapy is appropriate for different counseling groups in Saudi society, and the most prominent of these groups is the university youth category. Cognitive behavioral therapy requires a good cognitive and mental ability of the person receiving treatment. University students, with their cognitive abilities that qualify them to enroll in university education, are considered among the appropriate categories for this type of treatment.

It also concludes from the current study that isolation and introversion are among the problems facing university students, especially junior students, which are related to many personal, family, and societal variables, and that facing this problem requires building many awareness and counseling programs, and training programs aimed at enhancing and developing social skills among university youth, which is no less important than education and academic preparation for students.

It also concludes from the current study that social skills, such as constructive dialogue, effective communication, and rational thinking are one of the main pillars upon which a normal and mentally healthy personality is based. Also, Family education and educational curricula must be concerned with enhancing those skills in children, leading to adaptation and community mental health.

Recommendations

Building counseling programs aimed at improving the level of social skills for other counseling groups whose members may suffer from low levels of those skills, such as abused children, victims of bullying and bullies, battered women, and traumatized children.

Working on building guiding programs aimed at reducing the level of isolating behaviors among some guiding groups whose members may suffer from isolation behaviors, such as the sad, heart and cancer patients, and people with physical disabilities.

Work on developing and building counseling programs aimed at improving the level of social skills and reducing isolation behaviors based on other therapeutic and counseling directions, such as narrative therapy, emotion-centered therapy, and psychological drama.
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Information about the author
Salman Mutlaq Alsubaie
(Saudi Arabia, Hafr Al Batin city)
Assistant Professor,
Department of Education and Psychology
College of Education
University of Hafr Al Batin
E-mail: Dr.salman@uhb.edu.sa
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5486-1450