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GROUP TRAINING OF STUDENTS WITH PROBLEMS IN ORGANISING STUDY AND DIFFICULTIES OF ATTENTION

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PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Study at the level of higher education, in combination with extended adolescence or post-adolescence on the one hand, and the intellectual nature of student life which catalyzes the tension of intra- and the inter-personal conflicts on the other hand, create conditions for the potential development of psychological problems in 15-20% of the student population [Glotz & Malanowski, 1982; Kalantzi-Azizi, 1987]. Consequently, psychological counselling for students aims to provide psycho-social support so as to enable the students to overcome adaptation difficulties in the new «environment», that is the University, in the fastest and best possible manner, and additionally to find new ways of solving their post-adolescence quests [Kalantzi-Azizi, 1987]. The ultimate purpose, therefore, of psychological counselling for students is the prevention of psychological disorders [Krainz, 1984].

Due to the fact that 4% of the students, according to Krainz (1984) suffer from severe psychopathology, it is claimed that within the psychological counselling framework, a systematic psychotherapeutical support could be provided, according to the preferred psychotherapy of the practitioner. A number of intervention models have been put forward, for example the psychodynamic [Lacher, 1984], the behavioural [Knauer & Massoth, 1984], the Rogerian [Strigl, 1984], and, additionally, short psychotherapy interventions for particular groups of students, for example that of the Medical School [Adamo & Valerio, 1991].

Moreover, group psychological training programmes may be run specially for problems of student populations, for example psychological programmes against test anxiety [Erlacher, 1984; Depreew, in press], programmes for organising study and difficulties of attention [Haas & Massoth, 1984], for self-knowledge [Krainz & Lacher, 1984; Held et al., 1983], for self-management [Ziesing, 1989], etc. The above programmes are all based on behavioural therapy.

Although psychological counselling in other countries started under the

umbrella of organised Counselling Centres for students, the first Counselling Centre in Greece was only founded in 1989 in the University of Thessaloniki [Vassiliadis et al., 1989], followed by the Counselling Centre of the University of Ioannina [Navridis et al., 1990], and the Counselling Centre of the University of Athens [Kalantzi-Azizi, 1991]. In this presentation, we will talk about the «Behavioural Programme for Psychological Needs of Students» of the Counselling Centre of the University of Athens, and we will describe our first experiences with regards to a group training programme.

In Table 1, there is a brief diagrammatical presentation of the framework and the aims of the General Behavioural Programme for Psychological Needs of Students. The theoretical background and the special intervention techniques used are influenced by the latest developments in the area of behavioural therapy, and include cognitive-behavioural strategies. The self-management concept predominates (Kanfer, 1991) so as to enable the student to manage him/herself, facilitated by the knowledge and practice of the above mentioned techniques [e.g. Held et al. (1983), Haas & Massoth (1984), Ziesing, F. (1989), Depreew & van Acker (1991)].

Research in several countries [Krainz, 1984] as well as in Greece [Kalantzi-Azizi, 1991; Maikiossi-Loizos, 1992] has revealed that the main problems students face are associated with their tense intellectual activities and their developmental post-adolescence processes. For that reason, we focus on the points on Table 1 (I). A detailed description of the group training of students with problems in organising study and difficulties of attention will follow. For the group training of students with psychosomatic disorders and the drop-outs the theoretical training of the trainers has already started.

Besides the provision of psychological help within the group training framework, we aim to offer training on the behaviour-therapy techniques to the potential Psychologists-Counsellors for students (we have already experienced some of it during the above mentioned group training) (II) and for the Psychology students to practise these techniques (III). At this point, it is quite appropriate to mention that during the past 5 years the students of the Department of Psychology have been acquainted with the self-management issue through the module of Communication Psychology (5 hours per week for 1 semester) — theoretical structure and practice in self-management programme [Kalantzi-Azizi, 1991].

Finally, great emphasis will be placed on keeping records of the experiences, so as to enable the publication of Training Manuals for behavioural therapists which work in Counselling Centres for students (e.g. the manuals of Held et al., or that of Liesing) (IV).

DESCRIPTION OF SELF-MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The self-management programme for attention difficulties was completed in 9 sessions; each session lasted for 1 hour and 45 minutes. The sessions were held weekly in the period between 7/4/1992 and 2/7/1992. There was an interval of three weeks between the 2nd and the 3rd sessions because of Easter vacation. Five female students from the Department of Philosophy-Pedagogics-Psychology participated in the programme. The fact that the programme participants were only females was only coincidental. Although the programme was open to all students, there were only female candidates, probably due to the fact that approximately 83% of the students of the Department are females.

There was an announcement made by the Department of Psychology for the launching of the programme, and all participation was voluntary. The selection of the participants was made after (1) an interview on a one-to-one basis, aimed to detect the motives of the student for participating in the programme, and (2) a test package including the following questionnaires:

(a) Questionnaire for the Assessment of Attention Difficulties [Held et al., 1983].

(b) Attribution Style Questionnaire [Peterson et al., 1982].

(c) Personality Scale of Manifest Anxiety [Taylor, 1953].

(d) Psychosomatic Health Scale [Langner, 1969].

(e) Self-Control Questionnaire [Teegen, 1976].

The questionnaire package was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, to detect and exclude from the programme students with severe psychopathological symptoms, and secondly, to utilise the figures statistically for the research purposes and the evaluation of the programme. For the latter reason, the same questionnaire package was administered to the programme participants during the last session, which concerned the programme evaluation (A-B-A design).

Through the above two procedures, i.e. the interview and the questionnaire package, 7 out of the 13 volunteers were selected as the programme participants, from which only 5 followed throughout the whole programme. The students that were thought to be suffering from some kind of psychological problem were referred to the Clinical Psychologists of the University Counselling Centre for Students.

PROGRAMME CONTENT

The self-management programme for difficulties of attention was based on a series of 23 exercises [Kalantzi-Azizi, 3rd ed., 1991], which were given to the participants at the beginning of the programme in a test-book form (see Table 2). The exercises were structured around self observation of the unwanted behaviour and the emotional expression. The procedure that the subject usually goes through involves a progressive, step-by-step recognition and analysis in him/herself of the reinforcers, the consequences and the cognitions that exist in the unwanted behaviour; gradually, the individual conceives and pictures the wanted behaviour and what needs to be changed. The end product of the exercises is the creation of a personally planned self-management programme for the attention difficulties which is based on gradual changes and rewards. The programme included some exercises for neuromuscular relaxation [Jacobson, 1932, translated by Kalantzi-Azizi], which went through the last 20 minutes of each session. The relaxation exercises were considered essential, for the anxiety levels of the participant students were medium to high (see Table 3).

The programme was coordinated and carried through by a female Psychologist with a First Degree from the University of Athens, Department of Psychology, and Master's Degree in General Psychology from the University of Liverpool (U.K.), who specialises in behavioural therapy in the Institute of Behavioural Therapy in Athens. Every fortnight, a follow up meeting was held with the programme supervisor, a supervisor of the Institute.

A Ph.D. student in the Department of Psychology, specialising in behaviour therapy and counselling, was in the programme as an observer and in order to develop the appropriate skills for counselling (Table 1, II). She operated as a source of information about the programme proceedings and evaluation and about the skills of the programme coordinator, a procedure carried through by discussion at the end of each session (Figure 1a, Figure 1b).

GENERAL PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Table 3 shows the data of the evaluation phase using tests before and after the programme. When looking at the results, we must always keep in mind that the data is only from 5 subjects. For this reason, the figures are only indicative of the pre- and post-measurement situation of the subjects. Generally, the results do not reveal any differences between the pre- and post-measurements, with the exception of the Langner Scale and the

Concentration Time. The psychosomatic scale (Langner) indicates that there is a difference before (mean = 6.40) and after (mean = 3.40), which means that although there were psychosomatic symptoms at the beginning of the programme, there were not any at the end. Also noticeable is the pre and post difference in concentration time; the concentration time raised from a mean of 14.4 minutes at the beginning to a mean of 31 minutes at the end (Figure 2).

Apart from the above data, we also have the evaluation of the programme in the form of written comments (Table 4), focusing around the positive and negative points of the programme. With regards to positive points, it seems that the main benefit is related to the techniques of self-observation, to the realisation through written expression and analysis of the problem, as well as to the group character of the procedure (dialogue, exchange of experiences in the group; Table 5). The rest of the positive points show that the programme, in a satisfactory degree, managed to communicate to the participants the spirit and the philosophy of self-management.

Concerning the negative comments about the programme, we believe that the programme should not last any longer than it did; actually, other similar experiences last for no more than 7 sessions [Haas & Massoth, 1984; Held et al., 1983]. We believe that a request for a longer programme duration might reveal the need for external direction from the part of the programme participants, something that goes against the idea of self-management, or might be a consequence of other kinds of problems that emerged through the meetings. A proper way to handle the latter issue could be the setting of a form of a «contract» before the beginning of the programme, whereby the aims and the content of the programme could be clearly stated, and a new group could be formed, that is a new programme, which could deal with some other kind of adaptation difficulties. The comments concerning unclear instructions of some exercises and the improper timing of the programme (the exams period started after the 8th session) will be seriously taken into account in order to better the future applications of the programme.

Finally, it should be noticed that the follow-up of the programme will take place at the end of September, after two intervening exams periods, one in June and one in September. Adding the follow-up data to the experiences so far, we will be able to utilise them all together for the improvement of future relevant programmes.

COMMENTARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although our experiences are few for the time being, some of the positive indications of our experiences are in line with other relevant experiences in the field of research and intervention attempts [Haas & Massoth, 1984; Held et al., 1983; Depreew & van Acker, 1991]. It seems, therefore, that structured behavioural techniques that empower self-control and, generally, self-management, lead to the following:

(a) Enrichment of the special skills that the student needs to cope with a totally new way of knowledge acquisition; in other words, there is no more compulsory study, neither strict high-school programmes, not the everyday teachers' control. The higher education student has to programme for him/herself the way to study, to structure time, to write up projects, etc.

(b) Structured behavioural techniques operate positively in preventing test anxiety skimming from improper way of study and concentration difficulties, low self-esteem because of serial failures, etc.

Finally, as it will be shown from the follow-up of this study and further research, it could be proved that through generalisation of these special skills and improvement of intrapersonal control, the structured behavioural techniques might help the student to be able to overcome other kind of difficulties, of intra- and inter-personal post-adolescence adaptation.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Α. Καλαντζή - Αζίζι, Ι. Μασσακά, Ομαδικές ασκήσεις με φοιτητές που έχουν προβλήματα στην οργάνωση της μελέτης και δυσκολίες στη συγκέντρωση

Η ψυχολογική συμβουλευτική στην τριτοβάθμια εκπαίδευση έχει να παρουσιάσει τα τελευταία χρόνια αξιόλογα μοντέλα παρέμβασης τόσο σε ατομική όσο και σε ομαδική βάση, τα οποία είναι επηρεασμένα από διαφορετικά συμβουλευτικά - ψυχοθεραπευτικά πρότυπα. Η παρούσα ερευνητική εργασία έχει ως θεωρητικό πλαίσιο τις νεοσυμπεριστροφικές αρχές της αυτοδιαχείρισης (self management, του F. H. KANFER κ. α. 1991). Στους φοιτητές που δηλώνουν ότι έχουν προβλήματα στην οργάνωση της μελέτης και δυσκολεύονται να συγκεντρωθούν, γίνεται μία δομημένη ομαδική παρέμβαση 9 συνεδριών ανά μία ώρα και 45', η οποία βασίζεται σ' ένα πρόγραμμα αυτοελέγχου με 23 ασκήσεις (ΚΑΛΑΝΤΖΗ-ΑΖΙΖΙ Α., 1991, γ'). Σκοπός της ομαδικής παρέμβασης είναι η δημιουργία προσωπικού ατομικού προγράμματος αυτοελέγχου βελτίωσης / αντιμετώπισης δυσκολιών οργάνωσης μελέτης και συγκέντρωσης της προσοχής.

Πρὶν αρχίσει το πρόγραμμα γίνεται εκτίμηση της προβληματικής συμπεριφοράς μέσω ερωτηματολογίων και αυτοκαταγραφών. Το ομαδικό πρόγραμμα εφαρμόστηκε κατά το εαρινό εξάμηνο 1991/92 σε μια ομάδα 5 φοιτητών από τους οποίους έχουμε δεδομένα των τέστς και των αυτοκαταγραφών πρὶν από την παρέμβαση και από ένα επανέλεγχο.

Ακολουθήθηκε ως μέθοδος στατιστικής ανάλυσης συγκρίσεις των μέσων όρων από τα τέστς και από τις αυτοκαταγραφές σχετικά με τον χρόνο συγκέντρωσης ανάμεσα σε όλα τα ζεύγη μετρήσεων (πρὶν και μία φορά μετά την παρέμβαση). (A-B-A).

Τόσο οι συγκρίσεις των μέσων όρων, όσο και οι αυτοαξιολογήσεις του προγράμματος από τους ίδιους τους φοιτητές δίνουν τη δυνατότητα ελέγχου της αποτελεσματικότητας αυτής της ομαδικής παρέμβασης.

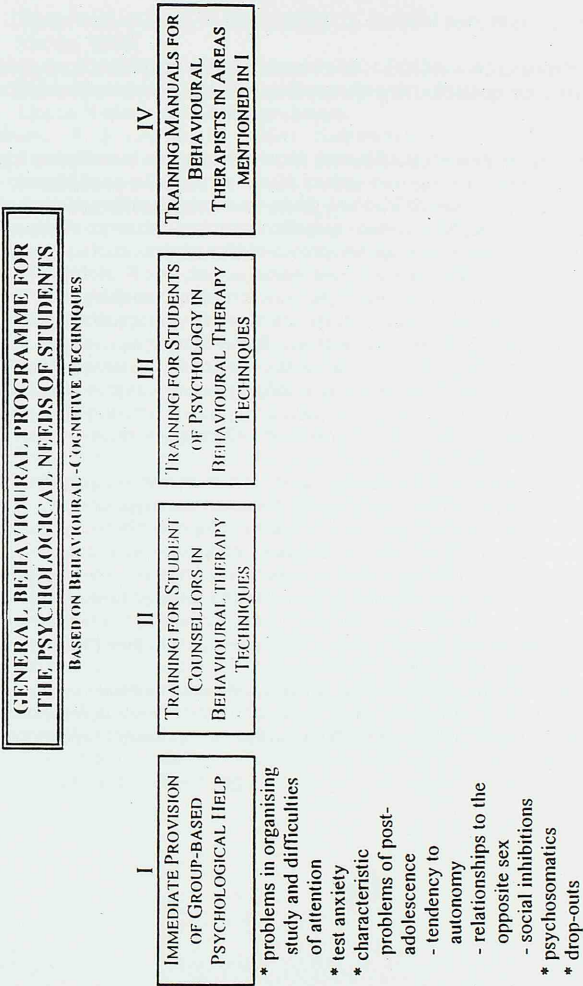


TABLE 2 STRUCTURE AND DURATION OF THE PROGRAMME

No of SESSION	No of EXERC.	SHORT DESCRIPTION
Preliminary Meeting		5-test Package (Screening)
1	1	Self-Control
2	2,3	General Self Behaviour Observation
3	4-6	Stimuli & Response Observation of the Unwanted Behaviour
4	7-10	Motivation for Change of the Unwanted Behaviour; Step-by-Step Observation of Unwanted/Wanted Behaviour
5	11-13	Plan for Self-Management Programme; Target-Reinforcements Procedure
6	14-18	Emotional Expression
7	19-21	Self-Management for Emotional Expression
8	22,23	Final Self-Management Programme; Contract with "Myself"
9		Evaluation; 5-test Package

Table 3

CODE	A				S				Q			
	INTERNAL				STABLE				GLOBAL			
	PRE		POST		PRE		POST		PRE		POST	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
01	22	27	24	27	26	25	29	21	31	28	28	30
02	29	24	31	31	35	28	36	25	35	26	29	30
03	32	22	31	26	33	25	34	29	35	30	34	33
04	26	27	23	29	33	27	30	28	25	27	26	26
05	23	29	35	25	23	28	34	29	18	29	24	20
MEAN	26.4	25.8	28.8	27.6	30.0	26.6	32.6	26.4	28.8	28.0	28.2	27.8
S.D.	4.16	2.77	5.12	2.41	5.20	1.52	2.97	3.44	7.29	1.58	3.77	5.02

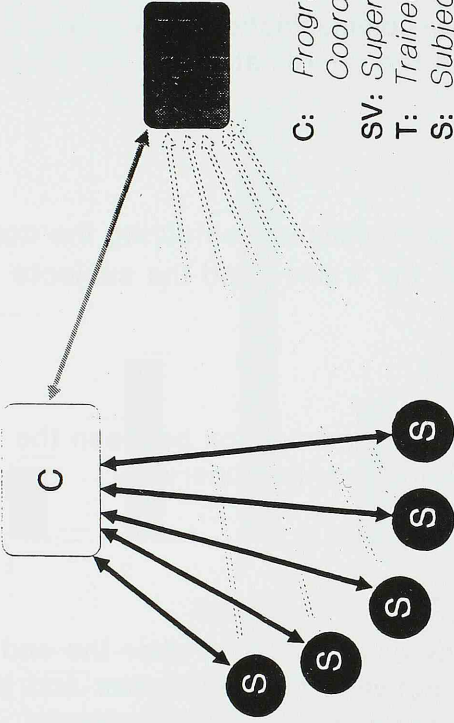
CODE	TAYLOR		LANGNER		TEEGEN		CONCENTRATION TIME & TARGET			
							TIME A *1		TIME B *2	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
01	22	21	02	05	08	08	30m	10m	3h	30m
02	26	25	02	01	07	09	17m	25m	4h 30m	4h 30m
03	23	26	07	03	14	13	5m	60m	6h	6h
04	31	28	09	04	10	14	15m	20m	4h	6h
05	31	28	12	04	08	10	5m	40m	5h	4h
MEAN	26.6	25.6	6.40	3.40	9.40	10.8	14.4m	31m	4h 30m	4h 48m
S.D.	4.28	2.88	4.39	1.52	2.79	2.59	10.3m	19.5m	1h 7m	1h 9m

* 1 TIME A = CONCENTRATION TIME

* 2 TIME B = TARGET TIME

Lines of Communication within the Programme

SV

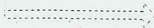


- C:** Programme Coordinator
- SV:** Supervisor
- T:** Trainee
- S:** Subjects

Figure 1a



Two-way communication during the course
between the coordinator and the subjects



One-way communication during the course
between the trainee and the subjects



Two-way communication between the
coordinator and the supervisor
every 14 days



Two-way communication after the end of the
course between the coordinator and the trainee

Figure 1b

PRE- AND POST-MEASUREMENT CONCENTRATION TIME

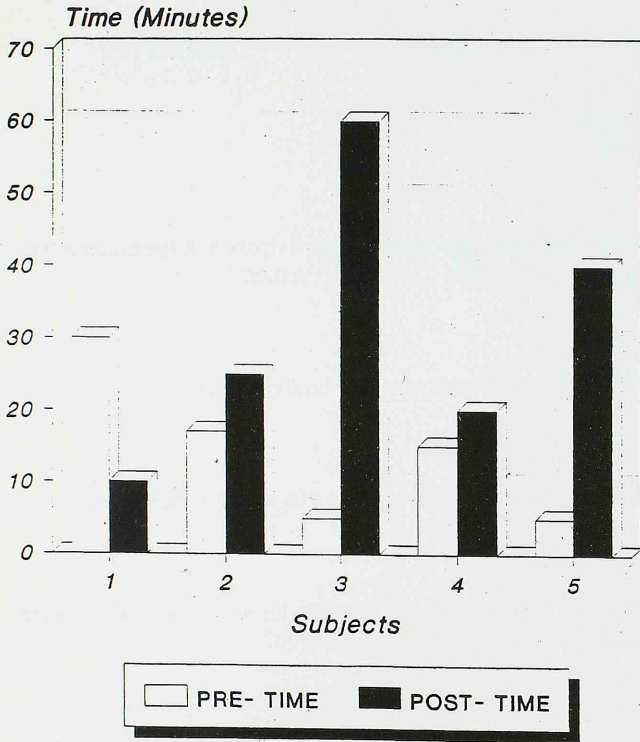


Figure 2

Table 4

"SELF-MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME" EVALUATION

1) Which were the positive and the negative points of the programme?

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

2) After experiencing your active participation in the programme, what do you suggest for its improvement?

3)(a) Which were the reasons that brought you to the programme?

(b) Were there any other reasons that emerged due course?

4) Do you think there was any benefit for you? If yes, which were specifically the main benefits for you?

5) Would you like to participate in self-control groups in the future, which would contribute to the dissemination of self-management techniques?

Table 5

PROGRAMME EVALUATION BY THE SUBJECTS

<i>POSITIVE POINTS OF THE PROGRAMME</i>	Frequency
* realisation, written expression, and analysis of the problem	4
* interaction with people facing the same problem (exchange of ideas and experiences, group-work)	4
* self-observation	3
* concept of reinforcement	1
* pleasant and relaxed atmosphere of the meetings	1
* spirit of optimism	1
* realisation of other problems	1
* realisation of capability of change	1
* facilitating and counselling attitude of the programme manager	1
<i>NEGATIVE POINTS OF THE PROGRAMME</i>	
* duration too short; more time needed for the analysis of each case and its possible solutions	2
* improper timing of the programme - the exams period started just after the 8th session	2
* ambivalence of the instructions of some of the exercises	2
* problem orientation and its partial handling	1
* homework and meetings before the exams period were considered as overload	1