The Effects of a 10-Week Interpersonal Relationships Intervention on Self-Esteem in College Students

Yan Chen¹²

ABSTRACT
To investigate the effects of a 10-week interpersonal relationships intervention on perceived self-esteem and interpersonal relationships in College Students. We carried out a 10-week intervention study in a population sample of 112 College Students aged 9-12 years in Beijing (China) in 2012-2013. We randomly assigned the students at baseline in the intervention and control group. We assessed the variables overall self-esteem, social self-esteem, family self-esteem, and educational self-esteem by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) and the variable interpersonal relationships by the questionnaire the Interpersonal Relationship. As expected, the variables significantly increased in the intervention group at end of intervention and follow-up, but non-significant in the control group. A 10-week interpersonal relationships intervention can protect College Students with 3, 4, and 5th grade from a decrease in perceived self-esteem during the interaction with peers.

Key Words: Interpersonal Relationships, Self-Esteem, College Students, Intervention

Introduction
Student teens, as an influential stratum, play a very significant role in building the future of the country by moving towards the promotion of the scientific level of the country, but since this period is considered as a growth and development period and accompanied by prominent physical and psychological changes, it is referred to as a period of storm, crisis, and pressure. It is noteworthy that the root of many psychological damages in adulthood comes from problems in childhood (Sakyi et al., 2015). Therefore, mental health indicators, such as self-esteem, play an important role in the dynamics and efficiency of a community (Mann et al., 2004).

Self-esteem, as an important structure in the development of the personality of children and adolescents, plays an important role in emotional-social compatibility and mental health of individuals (Gao et al., 2017; Ge et al., 2018; Ge et al., 2017; Li et al., 2018; Liu, 2017; Peng et al., 2017). In fact, self-esteem comes from confirmation, acceptance and having a sense of a sense of self-valuable. James (1890, quoted from Kususanto and Chua, 2012) defined self-esteem as an emotional phenomenon and a dynamic process that was developed by successes and failures. Self-esteem is a self-assessment of the opinions of others based on emotional processes, especially positive and negative feelings about self (Gencer et al., 2017; Golezar et al., 2017; Kevrekidis et al., 2018; Khan and Iqbal, 2018; Monda et al., 2017; Thenmozhi et al., 2018). When individuals become aware that they have failed in their ideals, their self-esteem will decrease. The self-esteem concept is one of the most fundamental factors in the desirable growth of a person's personality, which plays a decisive role in the adaptation of the person to everyday stress and makes the person more confident in these circumstances with these challenges and tensions (Awaad et al., 2018; Babenko et al., 2017; Iqbal et al., 2018; Isik et al., 2017; Park et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2017).

Corresponding author: Yan Chen
Address: ¹Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, 100101, China; ²Guangxi Police Academy, Nanning, 530023, China
e-mail: ‡helen.cy_3@163.com

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The scientific literature suggests that self-esteem is one of the basic needs of individuals and plays a very decisive role in their health and development (Dalgard et al., 2008; Will et al., 2017; Mruk, 2006; Guindon, 2009; Kogler et al., 2017).

Smith and Smoll (1990) argue that overall low self-esteem in both academic and non-academic fields can prevent progression. Weinberg and Gould (1999) say that low self-confidence and self-esteem level leads to adolescent vulnerability to behavioral disorders, and adolescents with high self-confidence and self-esteem are more successful in school assignments and academic achievement, more involved in communities inside and outside the school, more successful in interpersonal relationships, and have higher emotional and social compatibility (Swann et al., 2007). Having the sense of a high self-esteem is a part of the special and necessary needs for all humans, especially adolescents. In addition, evaluating and developing the sense of self-esteem and strengthening self-confidence and individual and social skills are considered as the first and most important step in the treatment and correction of many personality and behavioral disorders, such as shyness, withdrawal, aggression, pertinacity, and Laziness (Afaranean et al., 2017; Aliverti et al., 2017; Bich et al., 2017; Kumar and Jha, 2017; Rao et al., 2017; Tosheva-Daskalova et al., 2017).

Regarding the role of self-esteem in mental health of children and adolescents, clinical and social psychologists emphasize its importance (Bell et al., 2018; Davarnejad et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2018; Nyemb et al., 2018). In this regard, several psychological treatments have been used to increase and improve self-esteem. One of the effective ways to increase and improve self-esteem can be the education of interpersonal relationships. In schools, children form a large part of their self-concept based on the quality of their relationships with others. If a child does not have social skills, he often is rejected or suppressed by his peers (Adamala, 2018; Khan et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2018; Ky dilation et al., 2018; Phantong et al., 2018; Sanchez Camacho and Martinez Morales, 2017; Sandhu et al., 2018). This, in addition to having a negative impact on the child’s self-esteem, leads to educational problems, and as a result, his personal relationships and his self-reflection are overshadowed. The results of previous studies have shown that children and adolescents with poor communication skills are less likely to be accepted by their peers (Gottman et al., 1998).

Scientific evidence from interpersonal relationships interventions with large number of participants of adolescents and children is important for developing effective strategies to increase and improve self-esteem in childhood. Such evidence could be used in the prevention of shyness, withdrawal, aggression, pertinacity and Laziness since childhood. It was the purpose of our randomized controlled study to investigate the effects of a 10-week interpersonal relationships intervention on self-esteem in College Students.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The present data are from the Friendship Adjustment and Self-esteem in Students (FASC) Study, which is a controlled friendship adjustment and self-esteem intervention study in a population sample of students from the city of Beijing, China. We invited 211 students 9-11 years of age who were registered for the 3, 4 and 5th grade in the 7 elementary schools, selected out of all the elementary schools of Beijing, in 2012-2013 (Fig. 1). We received the contact information of students’ parent from the relevant school and sent an invitation letter email to each of them. Of the 211 invited College Students, 120 (57%) participated in our intervention. There was no difference in participants’ age and gender distribution from all students who started the 3, 4 and 5th grade in the elementary schools of Beijing during years 2012-2013. The exclusion criteria were having a severe physical disability and hesitating to participate in our intervention. 8 students were excluded from the study process.

We randomly assigned participants to an intervention group (62 students, 55%) and a control group (50 students, 45%). There were no differences at before the intervention of this study between the groups. Of the 112 College Students who participated at before the intervention, 95 (85%) participated in the 1-year follow-up of the study (Fig. 1). The study protocol was approved by a medical, educational and therapeutic center in Beijing. We received the written informed consent from the parents.

**Intervention group**

The interpersonal relationships intervention aimed at increasing self-esteem in College Students. The interpersonal relationships intervention study in a population sample of students from the city of Beijing, China. We invited 211 students 9-11 years of age who were registered for the 3, 4 and 5th grade in the 7 elementary schools, selected out of all the elementary schools of Beijing, in 2012-2013 (Fig. 1). We received the contact information of students’ parent from the relevant school and sent an invitation letter email to each of them. Of the 211 invited College Students, 120 (57%) participated in our intervention. There was no difference in participants’ age and gender distribution from all students who started the 3, 4 and 5th grade in the elementary schools of Beijing during years 2012-2013. The exclusion criteria were having a severe physical disability and hesitating to participate in our intervention. 8 students were excluded from the study process.

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Table 1. Goals of interpersonal relationship skills intervention

1) Group members familiarization with each other, gaining cooperation and creating good relations, goals expression, need to learn communication skills, creating a motivation to learn skills, description of the procedure of next sessions, and teaching methods of questions and answers and role playing
2) Familiarity with a variety of communication models and their advantages and disadvantages
3) Describing bridges and communication barriers
4) Non-verbal language and its interpretation, physical characteristics and environmental factors in non-verbal communication
5) Precise selection of words, reflection of meanings and emotions
6) Listening types, listening obstacles, mastering listening skills during a relationship
7) Self-assertiveness types, its benefits and functions, decisiveness in behavior along with flexibility
8) Six steps of self-assertiveness and way to express one’s opinion
9) Nurturing power of saying “no”
10) Summarizing the content and motivating members to use the skills learned in life

Students. Students in the intervention group had 10-week interpersonal relationship skills counseling sessions of 90 min. Table 1 shows that according to the goals of the intervention, each counseling session had a specific topic of interpersonal relationship skill. The practical tasks were included on these topics for the students. We encouraged the students to participate in the study process during the intervention (a 10-week follow-up) and after it (a 1-year follow-up).

Control group
The students in the control group received a usual verbal and written advice on interpersonal relationship but no active intervention at baseline.

Assessment of perceived self-esteem
We assessed the perceived self-esteem at baseline and at 1-year follow-up using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI). The inventory consisted of 58 items, covers overall (26 items), social (8 items), family (8 items) and educational (8 items) self-esteem as well as a lie detector subscale (8 items), describes individual's feelings, opinions or reactions, and was answered yes and no. The maximum score of the inventory is 50, a score of 26 and less indicates a low self-esteem, score 27-43 indicates a moderate self-esteem, and score 43 and above indicates a strong self-esteem.

Assessment of interpersonal relationship
We use the scale interpersonal relationship at baseline; end of the intervention and at 1-year follow-up of the questionnaire Interpersonal Relationship. The scale consisted of 7 items and ranged from 1 (lowest value) to 5 (highest value). Empirical evidences support the validity and reliability of the scale.

Figure 1. Flow chart of the FASC Study in College Students between 2012 and 2013 in Beijing
Results

Baseline characteristics

In Table 2, we observed no difference in the gender distribution, educational grade, or ethnicity between the groups at before the intervention of the study (baseline). Students in the intervention group had higher levels of overall self-esteem (p = 0.002), social self-esteem (p = 0.001), family self-esteem (p = 0.003), and educational self-esteem (p = 0.002) than students in the control group adjusted for educational grade and gender at before the intervention of the study (Table 3).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Demographic characteristics and ethnicity at baseline between 2012 and 2013 in Beijing</th>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td><strong>Educational grade</strong></td>
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<td>3rd grade</td>
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<td>4th grade</td>
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<td>5th grade</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Black African</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Indian or Pakistani</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
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Effects of intervention

Mean scores for the variables overall self-esteem, social self-esteem, family self-esteem, educational self-esteem, and interpersonal relationship were the main measure of College Students' self-esteem in this study. After the interpersonal relationships intervention, we found significant differences between the intervention group and control group for the variables overall self-esteem (intervention group: mean = 11.23, SD = 3.44 at end of intervention, mean = 15.37, SD = 2.51 at 1-year follow-up; control group: mean = 7.12, SD = 3.24 at end of intervention, mean = 6.55, SD = 2.62 at 1-year follow-up), social self-esteem (intervention group: mean = 5.13, SD = 1.22 at 1-year follow-up; control group: mean = 2.44, SD = 1.16 at end of intervention, mean = 2.41, SD = 1.02 at 1-year follow-up), and educational self-esteem (intervention group: mean = 3.84, SD = 1.27 at end of intervention, mean = 4.59, SD = 1.34 at 1-year follow-up; control group: mean = 2.29, SD = 1.25 at end of intervention, mean = 2.27, SD = 1.18 at 1-year follow-up).

Discussion

We found that the 10-week interpersonal relationships intervention aimed at increasing self-esteem improved overall self-esteem, social self-esteem, family self-esteem, educational self-esteem, and interpersonal relationship in a population sample of College Students. Previous studies have reported that life skills education including interpersonal relationship increases self-efficacy and self-esteem in Mexican girls (Pick et al., 2003). Wichroski et al. (2000) showed that training the component interpersonal relationship of life skills creates and increases self-esteem. Sadovnikova (2016) showed that adolescents with different types of attachment to parents had specific features of self-esteem and specifics in their interpersonal relations. Yoon, Kim & Kim (2011) in a quasi-experimental study found that interpersonal relationship programs have positive effects for improving interpersonal relationships and self-esteem. Kiviruusu et al. (2016) in a 26-year follow-up suggested that those with low self-esteem are more prone to later interpersonal conflicts. Robertson (2009) found that self-esteem is a predictor for peer and romantic relationships. Self-esteem affects patterns of development, performance, and mental health, which is why it is necessary to positively strengthen one's self. One of the main factors in strengthening self-esteem is social interaction with peers (Kubota & Sasaki, 2002). Peer assessment forms part of self-concept and self-esteem in children.

Table 3. Average scores and standard deviations of the MBSR group and non-MBSR group

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<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention group (n = 62)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall self-esteem</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.26 (2.34)</td>
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<td>2.11 (1.23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.43 (1.17)</td>
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<td>2.21 (1.12)</td>
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One of the effective factors in peer assessment is the type and quality of children's relationships with others. Children and students lacking social skills are often rejected by peers, which leads to negative effects on self-esteem and educational problems. Educational problems also have a negative impact on personal relationships and self-concept. Children and adolescents with poor communication skills are less likely to be admitted by their peers (Gutman, Sameroff & Eccles, 2002). There are various factors relevant to the components of appropriate interpersonal relationships that are effective in promoting self-esteem, such as establishing good communication, self-assertiveness, cooperation, self-disclosure, favorable termination to communication, active listening, reflection of emotions, and clear explanation, and their training helps to prevent many problems in children.

Finally, we can conclude that interpersonal skills training for College Students leads to increased self-esteem in them. We had some limitations in our study. A weakness of the study is that our sample was restricted to 3, 4, and 5th grade in elementary schools. Future research can select a larger sample.

References
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