



IMPROVING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING THROUGH “HAPPY CLASSES” PROGRAMME

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Abstract: Psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, emotional, cognitive and psychology elements. Several studies identify a series of dimensions of psychological well-being: 16 self-acceptance, mastery of the environment, positive relationships with others, autonomy, personal growth and purpose in life, which contribute significantly to personal self-fulfilment and an eventual transformation of education framework, namely by building psychology contexts through peer interaction between adolescents. In addition, conflicts involving challenges for school coexistence, trigger disturbances of self-esteem, aggressive behaviour and even depression. A whole dynamic that develops in the adolescent stage, when personal identity is established and psychology relations increase, with an impact on the self-concept. Learning to value oneself involves values and psychology skills as very important constructs. Considering this, our study aimed to analyse Psychology Well-being in adolescents and to determine the ways in which the programme Happy Classes for the Strengthening of Personal Relationships and Emotional Autonomy can have a positive impact. The sample consisted of 350 people aged between 12 and 14 from a high school in Madrid. The group followed a course of 5 sessions, 50 minutes each, between March and April of 2021. Overall we found positive improvements.

Keywords: 1 adolescents; autonomy 2; self-esteem 3; Psychology skills; 4 educational; 5 development

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1. Introduction

Affective relationships refer to the connection that individuals establish with others in emotional and psychology terms. These relationships are fundamental to people's emotional and psychology well-being and have a significant impact on their personal and psychology development.

Psychology-affective relationships allow individuals to be part of a community and to establish meaningful connections with other people. Inclusion in psychology networks and group membership are important in preventing psychology exclusion, which in turn can have a negative impact on mental and emotional health. Thus, psychology-emotional relationships are a fundamental component of optimal emotional development. Positive emotional connections with others can help people develop psychology skills, improve their self-esteem and increase their emotional resilience. Díaz-Esterri et al., 2021.

The influence of psychology-affective relationships on personal development is a field of study that has generated great interest in the scientific community in the last decade. These relationships have been found to have a direct connection with several important aspects of life, such as longevity, physical health and professional success; in childhood and youth, socio-affective relationships are essential for the development of a strong identity, autonomy, emotional competences and psychology engagement. These relationships can have a major impact on the personal

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adjustment that occurs at this stage of life, and their importance has been supported by much recent research. Klocke & Stadtmüller, (2019). Psychological well-being plays an important role in the development of personal autonomy during the transition to adulthood; young people experience positive and satisfying feelings in their psychology and emotional environment, are more likely to perceive meaning in their lives and to set their own goals, which promotes their process of personal autonomy.

According to Inguglia et al. (2015), autonomy is a fundamental dimension in shaping the psychological well-being of adolescents and young adults. The ability to make decisions and act independently is negatively correlated with self-perceived loneliness and isolation during this life phase. In other words, young people who have a higher degree of personal autonomy are less likely to feel lonely or isolated. There is a bidirectional relationship between competence in psychology interaction and psychological well-being. Research has found that high levels of self-esteem and low levels of depression positively influence the emergence of cooperative behaviours, decreasing impulsivity and the intention to harm or annoy others. Similarly, cooperative skills have been found to act as predictors of improved levels of well-being. Psychological well-being is a broad concept that includes psychology, subjective and psychological dimensions as well as general health-related behaviours; it is important to foster competence in psychology interaction to improve people's psychological well-being. Strong psychology and emotional skills can help people establish satisfying interpersonal relationships, reduce stress and anxiety, and improve overall mental and physical health. Friedman et al., (2017).

Adolescence is characterised as a period of developmental life between 10 and 15 years entailing a significant physical and intellectual transformation Salas et al., (2017). Moreover, adolescents are seldom referred as living daily mood fluctuations, which raises behavioural problems Echeverri, (2015). Furthermore, each person has different reactions to similar situations Messias, (2017). A crucial aspect of personal identity formation, crucial to adolescents, consists on the development of personal self-acceptance. Briefly, self-acceptance could be defined as a positive attitude towards oneself, with the recognition and acceptance of one's own and a positive feeling towards one's past experiences. In the same sense, Keyes et al. (2002) understand self-acceptance as a positive and stable attitude towards oneself, recognising and accepting the multiple positive and negative aspects that characterise us. The conceptualisation of self-acceptance is a complex process that is associated with mature personalities (Allport, 1961) and is essential for our general well-being and even happiness. Numerous authors have studied from different perspectives the importance of self-acceptance as a key competence for greater well-being of young people (Ryff, & Singer, 2006; Cardona et al., 2014; Schüller et al., 2014; Meléndez et al., 2018 and Mualifah et al., 2019). It should be taken into consideration that self-acceptance (believing and trusting in oneself) is determinant for guiding people to the places they want to be in life, namely self-esteem plays an important role in psychology and professional achievements. Self-esteem, as the overall attitude that a person has towards him/herself, is also important in the process of identity formation. According to Rosenberg et al. (1995) and Neto (2002) self-esteem is a variable that is related to educational outcomes, while low self-esteem can be related to low physical exercise and unbalanced nutrition (Orth, Trzesniewski & Robins, 2010). These factors make people suffering from low self-esteem prone to aggressive behaviours, symptoms of anxiety, hopelessness, depression and even suicidal tendencies Zurita et al., (2017). On the other hand, personal identity is often also related to autonomy; autonomy aims for the individual to have the ability to control his or her life through his or her own decisions by opposing, or facing decisions made by third parties or under coercion, but at the same time being psychologically acceptable. These are capacities stipulated as positive or correct for an appropriate harmony and coexistence in the community where the human being is the author of his or her life (Iosa, 2017). The personal growth of each person is a fundamentally valuable aspiration to pursue the well-being and emotional balance of each person (Ugur et al., 2015, cited in Pinto et al., 2016, p. 94). In the search for the psychological well-being of the adolescent, it is necessary to make efforts and take on challenges that contribute to achieving ones' goals, which are represented in the multidimensional model of (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Following the dimensions of Ryff's scale, the aspect of life purpose reflects in the different spheres of life, as for instance the positive psychological well-being of the person in their ability to set goals, be motivated and give meaning to life De Juanas, et al., (2013). In particular, for the achievement of positive well-being it is important to engage in discussions on the meaning of life, its intentionality and direction (Cuadros, n.d.). Such practice could support meaningful contribution for the person's interests, academic achievement and community service in areas of leadership and art, among others (Bronk, K.C. (2014); López-Pérez, & Fernández-Castilla, 2018; Lombas, A; et al, 2019). A dimension based on Ryff (1989) refers to environment mastery related to management and control of daily responsibilities. Such dimension is associated with the locus of control De Juanas et al., (2013); that is, the

perception that, in this case, young people have of where the causal agent of the events that accompany their behaviour in their daily lives is located. It also refers to self-efficacy and the ability to generate favourable environments that enable the satisfaction of one's own desires and needs.

In any case, we know that education is strongly associated with the formation and transformation of the person, particularly adolescents, who develop in a context defined by psychology interaction, according to the conditioning factors emerging from school and family contexts (Jaramillo, Qui-lindo and Paz, 2017). For example, the conflicts that occur in the various spaces of educational centres mark the context of school coexistence, triggering different types of reaction in adolescents such as depression, school aggression and low self-esteem (Munevas, Burbano and Flórez, 2019). Precisely, considering the forcefulness of the phenomenon, Vásquez and López (2018) suggest the use of a compensatory instrument, such as the organisation of a programme of workshops and activities that promote psychology skills and self-esteem, within the classroom and the family environments. It has been widely recognized that programmes that strengthen positive relationships and personal autonomy are important for the psychological and emotional well-being of young people (Fonseca-Pedrero et al., 2018; Melendro, et al. 2020 and Bernal Romero et al; 2020; Roffey, 2012). While several authors have argued that positive relationships and increased psychological well-being constitute an important source of satisfaction with life in general (Lacunza, 2014; Blanca et al., 2018; Crous et al. 2018). To address adolescents' self-esteem issues, we set ourselves to determine whether it would be possible to improve it through the intervention programme Happy Classes for the Strengthening of Personal Relationships and Emotional Autonomy, developed by Arguís et al. (2012). In line with the programmes' objectives, the following alternative hypotheses were proposed:

Table 1. Study Hypothesis

H1: Adolescents improve psychological well-being in positive relationships, namely in respect of sex differences;	
H1.1.1.: Young people improve in terms of self-acceptance;	H1.2.1.: There are gender differences self-acceptance;
H1.1.2.: Young people improve autonomy;	H1.2.2.: There are gender differences autonomy;
H1.1.3.: Young people improve in terms of personal mastery;	H1.2.3.: There are gender differences personal mastery;
H1.1.4.: Young people improve in terms of life purpose;	H1.2.4.: There are gender differences life purpose;
H1.1.5.: Young people improve in personal growth;	H1.2.5.: There are gender differences personal growth;
H1.1.6.: There are gender differences in positive relationships;	H1.2.6.: There are gender differences positive relationships;

Note: own elaboration

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants

All students attended a public secondary school, located in Madrid, Spain. The sample, obtained by 100 conveniences, consisted of 350 adolescents, 209 boys (59.7%) and 141 girls (40.3%), which is in correspondence with Spanish demographic distribution. As to age, the students ranged from 12 to 14 years old, which is typical for those coursing secondary school.

2.2 Data gathering tools

For the assessment of Psychology Well-being, the Ryff (1989) questionnaire was adapted to a Spanish version, the Escala de Bienestar Psicológico (EBP) (Díaz et al., 2006). The applied instrument consists of 39 items, with a 6-point Likert-type scale with a response interval ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 6 ("Strongly agree"). The study focused on the following dimensions distributed as follows in the questionnaire: Positive relationships: items (2, 8, 14, 20, 26, and 32); Autonomy: items (3, 4, 9, 10, 15, 21, 27, and 33); Mastery of the environment: Items (5, 11, 16, 22, 28, and 39); Purpose in life: items (6, 12, 17, 18, 23, and 29); Self-acceptance: items (1, 7, 19, 25 and 2,31); Personal Growth: items (11, 12, 13, 18, 24, 30, 34, 35, 36, 37 and 38).

2.3 Data gathering procedures

One month earlier to the beginning of the intervention plan and one month later to its accomplishment the questionnaire was applied the complete sample.

2.4 Design

Taking into consideration the stated objective, and in order to contrast the different hypotheses of the study, a quantitative quasi-experimental research design, with one group pre and post-test model was established. Consequently, the researchers applied a psychology well-being questionnaire at the beginning and after the intervention process, i.e., the referred specific programme, expected to generate improvements on the subjects' well-being, as reinforcing autonomy, positive relationships, mastery of the environment and life purposes. The programme was carried out over a period of 3 weeks by teachers during their tutorial hours. From the original 15 activities of the Programme, Happy Classes for the Strengthening of Personal Relationships and Emotional Autonomy, developed by (Arguís et al., 2012), only 3, namely: 1. Full attention - offering a piece of fruit and contemplating it with pleasure, listening to music while enjoying the smell of the food, savouring each piece in the mouths, which allows to develop full attention in order to cultivate the vitality of each moment; 2. Personal strengths – in this case students were asked how they saw themselves in the past and if they foresee to gladly accept themselves in the future; 3. What are my positive behaviours? - in this activity, the students had to write down a list of behaviours presented throughout the day, then a group debate was held to make them understand that positive behaviours depended on themselves, so, finally, a poster collectively elaborated highlighting the positive behaviours. The activities aim to help students acquire competencies for learning to live from the aspects that contribute to each action they carry out during the day. Moreover, it was expected that the activities putted into practice could be integrated as a habit in the students' daily lives, so to enable them to be more optimistic and proactive.

3. Results

The results analysis considered the total score and the dimensions of the Ryff questionnaire. Overall, the t-test for Equality of Means returned significant differences ($p=12.762$; $.001$), equal variances not assumed, between the pre (mean: 86,3862) and post-test (mean: 96,7086). Thus, “H1: Adolescents improve psychological well-being in positive relationships.” is to be retained. When we considered the sub-hypotheses the T-test returned statistically significant differences (equal variances not assumed), only for Self-acceptance ($t=-6,843$; $p:.000$), pre-test mean of 19,1948 against 21,0343 mean of the post-test; Autonomy ($t=-10,041$; $p:.000$), pre-test mean of 26,6590 against 29,6200 mean of the post-test; and Personal Growth ($t=-4,056$; $p:.000$), pre-test mean of 26,1576 against 27,4114 mean of the post-test. So being, “H1.1.1.: Young people improve in terms of self- acceptance” and “H1.1.2. Young people improve autonomy” are to be accepted, along with” H1.1.5.: Young people improve in personal growth.” In the case of Personal Mastery and Purpose in Life we found no significant differences. Nevertheless, we must report significant differences in the case of Positive Relationships, although the post-test registers the higher mean, which is a contradictory outcome considering the expectations.

When we tested the differences according to the sex of the respondents, we verified significant differences ($t=-2.715$; $p:.007$), equal variances not assumed, with higher mean scores in the global post-test for Women (138.7 versus 136.13), an advantage that is repeated only regarding the sub-hypotheses Personal Growth ($t=-2.520$; $p:.012$) and Personal Mastery ($t=-2.319$; $p:.021$), with higher values for Women, 27.26 versus 26.46 and 22.25 versus 21.74, respectively. These results lead to the acceptance of the global hypothesis as well as the sub-hypotheses: “H1.2.3.: There are gender differences personal mastery” and “H1.2.5.: There are gender differences personal growth”

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has focused on the analysis of Ryff's (1989) six dimensions of psychological well-being in young adolescents, a period in which psychologisation gains importance and it is opened to peers. For adolescents, it becomes very important to be with friends but, at the same time, with new friends and new relationships, going beyond the family context (Harris, 2000; Rich, 2003; Lee & Porfeli, 2015). Such was the purpose of the intervention process applied in the development of this study. After the implementation of the “Programme: Happy Classes for the Strengthening of Personal Relationships and Emotional Autonomy”, we found an important overall significant difference between the situations of pre and post undertaking the intervention process. This major outcome was

accompanied of improvements in three dimensions of the scale, namely Self-acceptance, Autonomy and Personal Growth. As to Self-acceptance, it relates to themes as “I like most of the aspects of my personality.”, “Overall I feel proud of who I am and the life I live.” In relation to Autonomy, we could highlight: “I have no fear to express my opinions even if they are contrary to the majority.”, “I appreciate myself on the basis of what I think is important and not because of what others take for valuable.” And finally, in respect to Personal Growth, it concerns themes as: “I was capable of building a home and my own life style”, “I believe I’m an active person undertaking projects I proposed to myself.” These three aspects are key among the age group of the population studied, as it faces strong affirmation challenges and it could be expected that stronger self-acceptance, autonomy and personal growth promotes better psychology well-being and possibly better conditions for developing positive relationships. Nevertheless, we found no significant differences in relation to the dimension of Positive Relationships, which pertains psychologisation, to a greater extent, within the peer group. Also worrying, is the fact that the young people who completed the programme present no improvements in regard to Personal Mastery and Purpose in Life. Hence, we think it is fairly advisable to continue pushing psychological well-being programmes in the classroom.

In relation to the sex variable, some studies report significant differences when using Ryff’s Psychology Well-being scale (Lupano & Castro, 2009; Visani et al., 2011 and Zubieta et al., 2012). In the present study, differences in the means between sexes are observed for some of the questions asked (Personal Growth and Personal Mastery), showing that this variable is of some importance as a component of psychology well-being.

The young people who undertook the programme show improvements in several psychology well-being dimensions. Such results suggest the importance of designing educational programmes on psychology well-being that could facilitate guidance for helping adolescents in their personal growth and to provide valuable information for parents (Jiang et al., 2013), as well as for teachers, namely regarding which dimensions are most affected (or not). This would allow for a better understanding of behaviours with respect to the variables under study. As it seems also advisable to carry out longitudinal studies, or to assess the parameters over a longer period of time. The results of the research involve empirical evidence of the use of the described type of techniques, but we must consider certain types of limitations. On the one hand, the age range of the study sample is relatively short and, therefore, these results should be contrasted with larger samples to verify that they are significant in terms of both age and sex. On the other hand, the activities proposed in the programme should be expanded in the number of dynamics, so to possibly widen and deepen the impact on the participants.

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