

An Empirical Study of Group Counseling of College Students' Internet Dependence Based on Tran theoretical Model

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Abstract: College students' excessive dependence on Internet does great harm to their adaptability to environment and physical and mental health. Based on the Tran theoretical model of behavior change, this study designs group counseling for Internet-dependent college students, in order to help college students develop positive and healthy Internet habits.

1. Introduction

In the “Internet Plus” era, Internet is indispensable in college students' life for it provides much convenience, such as information search, social contact, and course learning. [1] When the focus of learning and entertainment are shifted to the Internet, some students become unable to restrain themselves and even indulged in the Internet. Moreover, the Internet is often used by college students to express their grievances, relax, or escape from reality in face of stressful academic competition, strained interpersonal relationships, and other difficulties. However, the more they indulge themselves in the Internet, the more difficult it will be to solve problems. This vicious circle leads to their increasing indulgence of the Internet. [2] Internet dependence causes college students' wasting time and social withdrawal with lower motivation and efficiency of study, which will impair their adaptability to environment and physical and mental health. Studies at home and abroad have found close relations between Internet Addiction Disorder and the personality characteristics of Internet users. Some studies illustrated that the Internet can affect users' cognition and mode of thinking; excessive use of the Internet may bring negative emotional experiences to them. In clinical work, mental health problems in different degrees have been found in college students with Internet addiction. [3] The group counseling of Internet dependence aims to explore interventions in college students' Internet dependence, and find suitable and effective intervention methods to help college students develop positive and healthy Internet habits.

2. Theoretical basis – the Tran theoretical model

The Tran theoretical model (TIM) is a behavior change model with specific purpose, focusing on individual decision-making abilities in terms of behavioral change. It proposes that individual behavior change is a continuous process rather than a single event; before people change their behaviors, it develops toward a series of dynamic and cyclical changing process. [4] This model divides the process of human behavior change into five stages, i.e. precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. [5] These stages usually experience ten process of change, such as consciousness-raising, self-reevaluation, stimulus control, and reinforcement management, which are divided into two categories – experience process and behavior process.

3. Group counseling design of Internet dependence in Tran theoretical model

The group counseling design of Internet dependence in Tran theoretical model consists of six units, i.e. Me and Internet: identification; Physiological Effects: network evaluation; Weighing up:

value exploration; Decision Balance: analysis of pros and cons; Confidence Building: role coping; Conclusion: solving problems. This design is adapted from *Substance Abuse Treatment and the Stages of Change* (2002), written by Gerard J. Connors, Mary Marden Velasquez, Dennis M. Donovan, and Carlo C. DiClemente.

The group counseling is made in a closed, structured and growing group. The size of the group is 8-12 people with 2 hours for each unit for a total of 6 counseling.

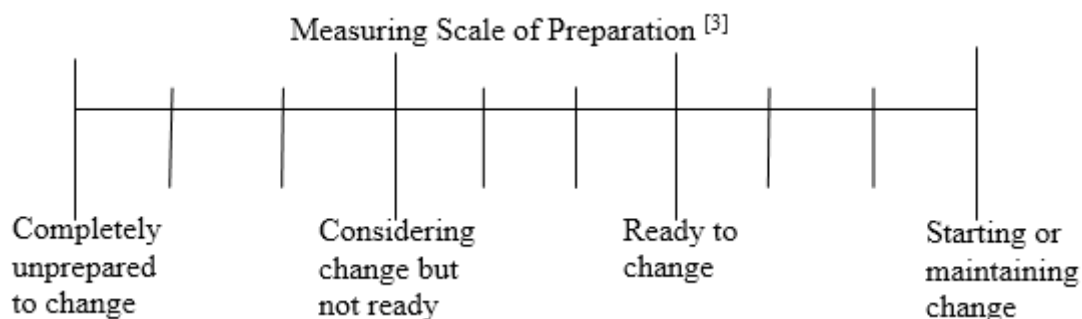
Recruitment advertisements were published through the website and WeChat, and then the applicants accepted interviews. A total of 10-12 students who use computers and mobile phones for a long time everyday were selected to participate in the group counseling themed as “Growing up with the Internet”.

The motivation-orientated Group helps participants change each other through mutual support and avoid confrontation. They understand and accept each other, respecting individual differences. The goal of group counseling is mainly to help them better understand themselves and decide if they want to make any changes. It is themselves that achieve any successful change. They should take responsibility for the change because the leader will not force them to change in any way. Each member plays a very important role in the group.

4. Results of group counseling

4.1 Assessment Tool

The pre-evaluation of the case was conducted before the group counseling started, and the case evaluation was done at the end. The group was evaluated by Measuring Scale of Preparation before and after the group intervention. By questioning group members, the degree of readiness for Internet use and the extent of their actual changes after group counseling are known, through which the actual results of group counseling is assessed.



After the original selection of applicants, 15 were asked to conduct face-to-face interviews to identify those with emotional instability and psychological crisis conditions. Eventually 10 applicants who excessively use computers and mobile phones in daily life were confirmed to participate in the group counseling. Two students quit the group before the counseling started because their arrangement of courses.

4.2 Results and findings

The statistics on the readiness of all members (8 in total) found that 3 (37.5%) were “completely unprepared to change”, that is, the stage of precontemplation. They know very little about the consequences of Internet dependence, and do not realize this problem, indicating their low self-awareness of Internet dependence. Four members (50%) are “considering change but not ready”, that is, the stage of contemplation. They have already self-aware of their dependence on the Internet, realizing a positive benefit can be attained through change and begin to consider whether to act. One participant (12.5%) is “ready to change”, that is, the stage of preparation. This participant, who is trying to find ways to get rid of his/her Internet dependence, has attempted (for example, making specific plans, etc.) to prepare for real change and intends to act soon.

In the process of group counseling, one participant from the School of Computing terminated after two counseling, although both the leader (me) and the group members have found his

abnormal independence on the Internet. The reason of his dropout has been discussed in the group. He misunderstood that the goal of this group counseling is to learn how to utilize the Internet, rather than discuss Internet independence. Some participants believed that he should continue the activity because the counseling is useful for his faster perception of Internet dependence, while others held that he has the freedom to decide whether to continue or not and we should respect him. Most participants expressed their understanding of his dropout.

In the counseling, the members' self-awareness of Internet use was developed through the program *Life in One Day*. Most of them found in amazement that they use Internet much longer than that in their own subjective imagination. Besides, the Revised Chen Internet Addiction Scale (CIAS-R) was also conducted to further promote such self-awareness. After the assessment (8 people in total), 2 members (25%) found that their Internet dependence was not as serious as they thought they were, which made them felt relieved. One participant (12.5%) found the result was consistent with his/her self-assessment. Five (62.5%) found that their actual Internet dependence was higher than what they perceived before, which means 62.5% participants found themselves more dependent on the Internet than their subjective imagination. The results of the test are basically in conformity with that of the self-awareness in *Life in a Day*.

After the group counseling, the readiness of the members (7 in total, except 1 dropout) was measured again by Measuring Scale of Preparation. The results suggested that the group in general had high self-awareness of Internet use: 43% members are in the preparation stage, that is, they have made specific plans to prepare for real changes and they intend to act soon; 57% are in the stage of change, that is, they have made actions to change their lifestyle significantly. This indicates that the group counseling under the Tran theoretical model proved to be effective interventions for students' Internet independence.

The data before and after the group counseling is as follows:

	Before counseling (8 in total)		After counseling (7 in total)	
	Number of participants	Proportion	Number of participants	Proportion
Precontemplation	3	37.5%	0	0
Contemplation	4	50%	0	0
Preparation	1	12.5%	3	43%
Action/Maintenance	0	0	4	57%

4.3 Feedback from the team members

Each time before the counseling, the group members reported their one-week changes or updated conditions. YUN (the dropout), from the School of Computing, uses the Internet in daily life for plenty of time. Although he did not finish the group counseling, he shared in the second group counseling that he had started reading a book of psychology, which is, a new change in his life. CHEN said that he/she has gradually opened his/her heart, and his/her self-awareness has expanded to such other fields as interpersonal relationships, time management, and problem solutions, not merely the use of the Internet. ZHOU, who knew more about different lifestyles and values through communication with other members with an open heart, not only formed a deeper self-understanding, but also attained relaxation and relief of stress. ZHEN shared that after the counseling he became busy with a lot of things and spent less time on mobile phones and the Internet, which makes him feel good. ZHANG said that through the counseling he had a better understanding of many aspects of the Internet. For example, he learned many ways to make proper use of the Internet. FANG, who shared her life with people who has similar experiences, has learned different methods and processes of different people in the face of dilemma. DING has understood through the counseling that everyone lives with pressure, and everyone has a lot of ideas, interests, and relies on mobile phones as well. WANG shared that the group counseling was different from what he/she had imagined before. At the beginning WANG consider himself/herself as a rational Internet user, but after the counseling he/she found that his/her dependence on the Internet,

especially on mobile phones, is much heavier than he/she thought. He/she is making plans to manage time by decreasing his/her reliance on mobile phone, and do more meaningful things.

5. Conclusion

In this research, psychological intervention is conducted to improve college students' Internet independence by means of group counseling. The results suggested that the intervention is effective. Still, many aspects of the research need to be improved. For instance, firstly, the standard of applicants' selection can be raised, that is, in addition to students with Internet independence, those with Internet addiction can also be selected for group counseling. Secondly, the frequency of group counseling can be adjusted. From to once a week from twice a week, so that the longer-term effects of group counseling can be observed. Thirdly, the effect evaluation tools, such as follow-up quizzes, gathering and interviews, should be increased to test whether the effect of group counseling can maintain or not.

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