OBSESSION, DEFENSE STYLE AND SELF – AWARENESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Adolescence is a period of biological, cognitive and social transition. To overcome the changes of this stage different forms of defence styles are adopted by adolescent students. The main objective of this study was to find out whether there is any relationship between obsessions, defence styles and self- awareness among adolescents. 214 adolescent students in the age group of 15 to 19 years were selected for the study. The Obsession Scale (OS) prepared and validated by Johnson and Jency, 2016, Defence Style Questionnaire (DSQ) by Bond.*et.at.,*1989, an Index of Self- Awareness developed by Sherfy and Raj,1998 and a Personal Data Form were used. The statistical techniques used to analyse the data were t- test, ANOVA and correlation. The result indicated that mature, image distorted and immature defence styles are positively correlated to obsession. Self-awareness is positively correlated to action oriented, image distorted and immature defence styles.

Key words: Obsession, Defence Style, Self-Awareness, Adolescents

Introduction

Psychological effects on an adolescent at the pubertal period depend on how the adolescent and other people in his or her world interpret the accompanying changes. Adolescence is a transitional stage which is full of conflicts, stress, pressures and anxiety. Obsessions are persistent and unwanted thoughts, ideas or images that the person does not intentionally produce. People with obsessive behaviour are unable to get an idea out of their mind. They are preoccupied by sexual, aggressive or religious thoughts. Obsessions usually involve doubts, hesitation, fear of contamination (Sarason, 2005).People with obsession are wracked by self-doubt and often are unable to make even simple decisions. Since the person who is suffering from obsession is in struggle, may develop a number of protective devices which Freud described as defence mechanisms (Hall, 1998).Defence mechanisms are used to avoid, deny or distort sources of threat or anxiety. It helps to maintain an idealized self-image so that one can live comfortably with him/herself. Under the pressure of excessive anxiety, the ego is sometimes forced to take extreme measures to relieve the pressure. These measures are called defence mechanisms. The principal defences are repression, projection, reaction formation, fixation and regression (Hall, 1998). It has a coping power and helps the person to adapt to unfavourable situations. Extreme use of defence mechanisms is a sign of the incompatibility of the personality (Hall, 1998).

Self- awareness is the capacity for self-examination, ability to recognize oneself as an individual separate from the environment and other individuals (Kalaiyarsan, 2016). The level of self-awareness among adolescents enables them to see where their thoughts and emotions take them. Self-awareness is the path to high potential for self-growth and development. Thus an assessment of self-awareness among adolescents is required as it may help making desired changes in the thought and interpretations they make in their minds and in their behaviour as well. Without this awareness if the feelings become uncomfortable enough and the source is undefined, they may seek to numb their emotions with alcohol or other drugs, to overeat or to withdraw and become depressed or may take out their anger on others instead of dealing with their anger in constructive ways (Goleman, 1994).The present study is required to find out whether there is any relationship between obsessions, defence styles and self- awareness among adolescents.

Sample : Sample for the study comprised 214 adolescents of both sex and age ranging from 15 to 19 years who are studying in various educational institutions in Thiruvanathapuram, Kerala state.

Tools: An Obsession Scale developed by Johnson and Jency (2016) was used to measure obsession among normal population. A Defence Style Questionnaire developed by Bond, *et.al.* (1989) was used with the intention to elicit manifestations of a subjects characteristic style of dealing with conflict, either conscious or unconscious. This is based on the assumption that a person can accurately comment on their behaviour from a distance. An Index of Self-awareness, developed by Sherfy and Raj (1998) was used to measure the degree of awareness of one's own self. After explaining the research objectives, the tools were administered individually. The data were analyzed using the following statistical techniques:'t'-test, One-way ANOVA, Post hoc analysis and Correlation.

Results and Discussion

This study was undertaken to determine the effect of obsession on defence styles and self-awareness of adolescents. The results of difference in obsession, defence style and self-awareness on the basis of gender, education and religion are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

Hypotheses-1

There is no significant difference in obsession, defence style and self-awareness of adolescents on the basis of gender**.**

Table.1 *Difference in the study variable on the basis of gender*

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	S.D	Calculated 't'value
Obsession	Female	145	43.29	7.541	1.37
	Male	69	41.83	6.721	
Mature defence style	Female	145	16.70	6.751	0.83
	Male	69	17.48	5.648	
Action oriented defence style	Female	145	31.15	7.750	1.29
	Male	69	29.72	6.974	
Image distorted defence style	Female	145	96.25	21.192	0.08
	Male	69	96.51	17.089	
Immature defence style	Female	145	198.23	41.728	1.58
	Male	69	207.74	39.314	
Self-awareness	Female	145	51.39	5.610	0.74
	Male	69	50.78	5.538	

It is inferred from the above table 1 that there is no significant difference between male and female adolescents in their Obsession, Mature defence style, Action oriented defence style, Image distorted defence style, Immature defence style and Self-awareness. Since both male and female adolescents undergo similar changes, difficulties, struggles and conflicts the differences in Obsession, Mature defence style, Action oriented defence style, Image distorted defence style, Immature defence style and Self-awareness are not significantly different. Both male and female adolescents undergo similar changes in these psychological levels.

Hypotheses-2

There is no significant difference in obsession, defence style and self-awareness of adolescents on the basis of education.

Table.2*Difference in the study variable on the basis of education*

Variables	Education	N	Mean	S.D	Calculated 't'value
Obsession	School	112	42.41	7.07	0.85
	College	102	43.26	7.56	
Mature defence style	School	112	16.71	6.80	0.58
	College	102	17.22	5.97	
Action oriented defence style	School	112	29.12	7.80	3.28
	College	102	32.42	6.83	
Image distorted defence style	School	112	96.45	22.67	0.08
	College	102	96.21	16.48	
Immature defence style	School	112	204.21	40.51	1.08
	College	102	198.09	41.72	
Self-awareness	School	112	50.75	5.89	1.22
	College	102	51.69	5.19	

It is inferred from the above table 2 that there exist a significant difference in action oriented defence style (t= 3.284, p<0.001) between adolescents with respect to their education. The mean scores are 29.12 and 32.42 for college and school going adolescents respectively and it means that college students have higher mean score than school students. Colleges may provide an environment that encourages students to explore their skills and interests along with their academic pursuits and also development of social bonds which enables them to develop and improve their sense of self-awareness. Increase in an action-oriented defence approach among college students may be because they are able to find channels for the rerouting of the psychological distress they face. This creates task orientation and develops abilities of anticipation. Such a defence style is also reinforced by the positive change it creates within the self.

Hypotheses-3

There is no significant difference in obsession, defence style and self-awareness of adolescents on the basis of religion.

Table .3 D*ifferences in the study variable on the basis of religion*

Variable	Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	Calculated 'F' value
Obsession	Between	68.331	2	34.166	0.63
	Within	11293.561	211	53.524	
Mature defence style	Between	28.683	2	14.341	0.34
	Within	8731.752	211	41.383	
Action oriented defence style	Between	80.032	2	40.016	0.70
	Within	11971.612	211	56.737	
Image distorted defence style	Between	7481.775	2	3740.888	10.24
	Within	77051.669	211	365.174	
Immature defence style	Between	28.188	2	14.094	0.08
	Within	360040.265	211	1706.352	
Self -awareness	Between	46.236	2	23.118	0.74
	Within	6589.521	211	31.230	

It is inferred from the above table 3 that here is no significant difference in obsession, defence style and self-awareness of adolescents on the basis of religion. But there exist a significant difference in image distorted defence style of adolescents with respect to their religion.

Table .4 *Multiple comparison of image distorted defence style on the basis of religion.*

Religion	N	Subset of alpha =0.05	
		1	2
Hindu	181	94.8453	
Muslim	25	97.6000	
Christian	8		126.000
			1.000
Sig		.669	

The above table 4 shows the mean scores of adolescents following the regions Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Christians (M= 126.00) use image distorted defence style at a greater rate than those of other religions. Image distorted defence style is characterized by distortions in the image of self, body, or others that may be used to maintain self-esteem. The high scores obtained by Christian for image distorted defence style may be due to their conditioning from an early age to follow a specific perspective of the world as well as themselves based on their religious teachings. The typical views followed by Christians such as, being born as sinners, notions of salvation after death, and effects of repentance may create a habitual tendency toward such a defence style.

Hypotheses-4

There is no significant correlation among obsession, defence style and self-awareness of adolescents.

Table .5.*Correlation between obsession, defence style and self-awareness*

Variables	r value	df	Remark
Mature defence Style	0.175		S
Action oriented defence style	0.075		NS
Image distorted defence style	0.150	212	S
Immature defence style	0.398		S
Self-awareness	0.072		NS

(At 5% level of significance for 212 df the table value of r is 0.113)

(**correlation significant at the 0.01 level, * Correlation significant at the 0.05 level)

It is inferred from the above table 3 that there is significant positive correlation between obsession and mature defence style and the (r= .175, p< 0.01) means that as obsession increases mature defence style also increases and vice versa. Mature defences include sublimation, humour, altruism and anticipation these are positive ways of managing the conflict between the id and superego. From the obtained results it can be inferred that individuals who have obsessive thoughts also have a tendency to employ a mature defence style. The age group under study (15-19 years) is of the adolescent stage. Adolescents often have to deal with conflicts, disappointments and failures for which they may not be aptly equipped. Many adolescents may develop obsessions due to the conflicts and stress they face. However, in spite of this, the results

show that they are still capable of employing a mature defence style to cope with them. Although adolescents' thinking may remain immature in some ways, many are capable of abstract reasoning and sophisticated moral judgments and can plan more realistically for the future (Papalia, 2004).

The above table also shows that there exist a significant positive relation between obsession and image distorted defence style. The Pearson coefficient is .150 which is significant at 0.05 levels. Image distorted defence style include denial, reaction formation and withdrawal. According to Sigmund Freud reaction formation is the defence mechanism used by obsessive compulsive people (Ahuja, 2007). It is observed that the use of image distorted defence style increases as the obsession increases. This may be because some individuals develop obsessional thoughts as a means to protect themselves from threatening or harmful tendencies. Hence, such individuals are more likely to form an image distorted defence style.

The above table reveals a significant positive correlation between obsession and immature defence style. The Pearson correlation coefficient for the variables is significant at 0.001 levels. This value denotes a substantial relationship between the two variables. Immature defences are those that are used in childhood and which some individual continue to use through adolescents (Valliant, 1977). Sigmund Freud explains OCD as a defensive regression to anal-sadistic phase of development with the use of isolation, undoing and displacement. Immature defence style includes these defence mechanisms.

Even though there exists no significant relationship between obsession and action oriented defence styles the Pearson correlation coefficient is found to be -.075. It denotes a negative correlation that is as the one variable increases the other decreases. This may also suggest that those individuals who employ an action oriented defence mechanism have a lesser tendency to develop obsession.

There exists a positive correlation between action oriented defence style and self- awareness. (r= .204, p<0.01) means as action oriented defence style increases self-awareness increases and vice versa. Adolescence is a period in which autonomy in decision-making grows and is largely a time of exploration and choice making, a gradual process of working toward an integrated concept of self (Kaplan,2007). Anticipation and task orientation is the defence mechanism which is included in action oriented defence style.

The Pearson correlation coefficient obtained for image distorted defence style and self-awareness is .197 which is significant at 0.01 levels. It shows a positive correlation between the variables. This may be because some individuals who have self-awareness have a greater tendency to focus on their inabilities, lack of skills, looks and styles. However, this heightened awareness of the negative aspects may be threatening to the self. Hence, such individuals may prefer to employ an image distorted defence style to protect the self. Image distorted defence style includes omnipotence, autistic fantasy, and projective identification.

Conclusion

The study can be concluded that of the four defence styles three are correlated to obsession. Mature, Immature and Image distorted defence styles have positive correlation with obsession. Mature defence style is a healthy defence mechanism whereas immature defence style and image distorted defence style are unhealthy defence mechanisms. This shows that individual with obsession have equal capacity to develop either a healthy or an unhealthy defence mechanism. It implies that the use of defence styles has an effect on obsession and self-awareness of adolescents.

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