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Effectiveness of Behavioral Activation Approach for Children Considering Declaration of a State of Emergency due to COVID-19

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Children are reported to have had high rates of stress reactions such as depression and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic (Samji et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic enforced behavioral restrictions such as school closures and staying at home to combat infection. The stressors associated with the pandemic were essentially difficult to cope with and the coping strategies used thus far were less feasible. As such, the stress management skills learned thus far may not be sufficient for coping with stress. Therefore, in this study, we considered whether stress-coping strategies are feasible in both behaviorally restricting situations and normal life situations. The purpose of this study was to implement a behavioral activation approach in a group of upper elementary school children and determine its effectiveness in behavioral activation/behavioral inhibition (Kasch et al., 2002) and depression.

A total of 91 participants (54 fifth-grade students and 37 sixth-grade students) were included in the study. The target school was an elementary school in Chubu region. The study consisted of a questionnaire survey at Pre in May 2020, the intervention in June 2020, and a questionnaire survey at Post in June 2020. At the same time, a state of emergency was declared in Tokyo. The intervention was implemented in one 45-minute class slot. Specific procedures were based on Koseki et al. (2016), and work was conducted to create a list of pleasant activities and an implementation plan, adding an evaluation perspective of whether the activities could be implemented in life situations outside school, such as at home.

Results of a linear mixed model with DSRS score as the dependent variable showed a significant decrease from Pre to Post ($\beta = 1.19$, 95% CI 0.60 to 1.77, $p = .00$). Results of a linear mixed model with BAS scores as the dependent variable showed an increasing trend from Pre to Post ($\beta = -0.97$, 95% CI -2.01 to 0.08, $p = .07$). Results of the linear mixed model with BIS score as the dependent variable showed a significant decrease from Pre to Post ($\beta = 0.89$, 95% CI 0.26 to 1.50, $p = .01$). Pleasurable activities listed on the worksheet included drawing, reading books, and working on a timetable of participants' choice.

Results of this study indicate improvements in BAS and BIS and a reduction in depression. Therefore, the intervention program implemented in this study, which considered feasibility in

behaviorally restricting situations, was effective in reducing children's stress, and described a behavioral pattern to break the vicious cycle that maintains and worsens depressed mood and brings about a virtuous cycle. Each child then searched for pleasurable activities. When examining the action plans, we evaluated feasibility of activities by dividing them into those that could be performed at school or when going out, and those that could be performed even in a behavior-restricting situation. Thus, the children themselves may be able to learn pleasant activities that can be performed in various situations by being reminded of the specific life situations they actually face.

Effectiveness of Behavioral Activation Approach for Children Considering Declaration of a State of Emergency due to COVID-19

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Introduction

- Children are reported to have had high rates of stress reactions such as depression and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic (Samji et al., 2022).
- The COVID-19 pandemic enforced behavioral restrictions such as school closures and staying at home to combat infection.

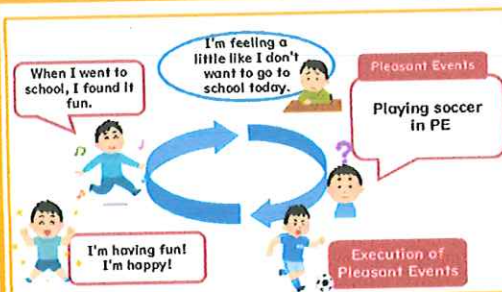


- The stressors associated with the pandemic were essentially difficult to cope with and the coping strategies used thus far were less feasible.
- As such, the stress management skills learned thus far may not be sufficient for coping with stress.

The purpose of this study was to implement a behavioral activation approach in a group of upper elementary school children and determine its effectiveness in behavioral activation/behavioral inhibition (Kasch et al., 2002) and depression.



Intervention



I don't feel refreshed somehow...find pleasant events you can do at school and daily life!

Pleasant events

Talking about the anime I watched yesterday.

When? School: Lunch break
Home: after dinner

Where? School: My class room
Home: My room

Whom? School: Friends in the same class
Home: On the phone with a friend

- Psychological education on the relationship between pleasant events and mood
- Pleasure events list and implementation plan
→Awareness of pleasure events that can be done outside, such as at school, and those that can be done at home (under behavior restrictions)

Method

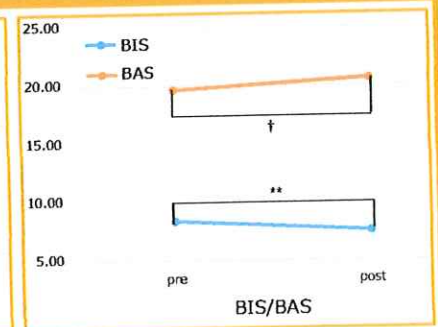
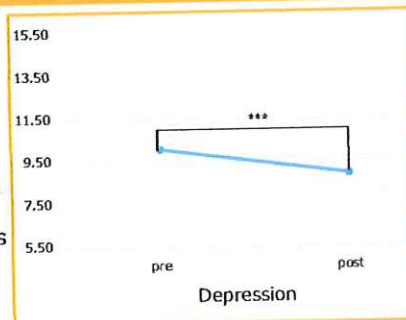
- A total of 91 participants (54 fifth-grade students and 37 sixth-grade students) were included in the study. The target school was an elementary school in Chubu region.
- The study consisted of a questionnaire survey at Pre in May 2020, the intervention in June 2020, and a questionnaire survey at Post in June 2020. At the same time, **a state of emergency was declared in Tokyo.**
- The intervention was implemented in one 45-minute class slot.

Measurements and Analysis

- Depression: DSRS (Murata et al., 1996)
- Behavioral activation/inhibition: BIS/BAS (Koseki et al., 2018)
- Pleasurable activity list and action plan worksheet implemented in the intervention

Results

- Depression scores: Decreased before and after intervention ($\beta=1.19$, 95%CI 0.60 to 1.77, $p<.001$)
- BAS score: Increasing trend before and after intervention ($\beta=-0.97$, 95%CI -2.01 to 0.08, $p=.07$)
- BIS Score: Decreased pre- and post-intervention ($\beta=-0.89$, 95%CI 0.26 to 1.50, $p=.01$)
- Worksheet content: Pleasurable activities such as drawing, reading books, and working on a timetable of one's choice were listed.



Conclusions

- The results of this study suggest improvement in behavioral activation and inhibition and a reduction in depression.
→The intervention program implemented in this study was considered from the viewpoint of whether it was a stress coping strategy that could be implemented in behavior-restricting situations.

- In the work, the feasibility was evaluated by dividing the pleasure events that could be performed at school or outside the home and those that could be performed even in behavior-restricting situations.
- In this way, it is possible that the children themselves were able to learn pleasure events that can be performed under various circumstances by being reminded of daily life situations that they actually face.

This study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee of J. F. Oberlin University (Ethics approval number: 20040).

発表概要報告書

【大会概要】

2023年6月1日から6月4日にかけて開催された、10th World Congress of Cognitive and Behavioral Therapiesに参加した。本会議のテーマである、“Global CBT Dissemination, Accessibility, and New Technology”の通り、認知行動療法の普及と発展のため、医療、産業、学校教育などさまざまな分野の実践家や研究者が、シンポジウム、ワークショップ、ポスター発表などを通して、それぞれの国や地域における最先端の知見を発信していた。

【発表内容の概要】

本発表の演題名は、“Effectiveness of Behavioral Activation Approach for Children Considering Declaration of a State of Emergency due to COVID-19”である。本研究は、COVID-19の流行禍であった2020年5月から6月にかけて、中部地方の小学5年生および6年生91名を対象とした。行動活性化療法の手続きを援用したストレスマネジメントプログラムを実施し、行動賦活および行動抑制傾向の改善と、抑うつ低減効果の検討を行った。

本研究で実施したプログラムの特徴的な点として、学校閉鎖や自宅での自粛を求められるなどの行動制限状況下を考慮して、自宅と学校の両方で実行可能な快活動を見つけることに焦点を当てたことが挙げられる。

【体験記】

ポスター発表は1時間30分の発表時間が設けられた。韓国の学校でストレスマネジメントプログラムを実践している先生から、子どもたちの反応や実践上の工夫などについて質問をいただいた。英語が不慣れであったが、ポスター内に介入資料とワークシートを掲載していたことで、実際にどのように教示を行ったのか具体的に伝えることができたと感じている。ご質問をいただいた先生から、韓国ではストレスマネジメントが重要な問題として注目されており、カリキュラムにも明確に設定されていて授業時間が確保されているという貴重なお話をうかがった。研究知見を学校現場に還元していくための土壌が整っている印象を受けた。現状の日本の学校教育では、ストレスマネジメントを実施していくうえで授業時間が確保されていないなどの制約が多く、普及が課題であると感じた。

このような課題に気づいたことは、異なる国の研究者や実践家から、実際に話をうかがわなければ得られなかった情報であり、大変有意義な学会発表となった。今回の学会参加で得られたことを今後の研究活動および臨床実践に反映させていきたいと考えている。

(日本語 1200 字以内)

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