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Cognitive Distortions and Institutional Misconducts in Juvenile Delinquents

Shannah Gardiner & Jenna Berkstresser

Sponsors: Dr. Di Wu & Dr. David Leitch

Definitions

- Cognitive distortions: Inaccurate attitudes, thoughts, or beliefs concerning one's own or others' social behavior
- How I Think (HIT) questionnaire: Measures four specific cognitive distortions (e.g., Barriga, Hawkins, & Camelia, 2008).
 - self-centered
 - blaming others
 - minimizing/mislabeling
 - assuming the worst

Previous Research

- It has been found that cognitive distortions are correlated with an individual's aggressive or antisocial behaviors.
 - Self-serving cognitive distortions were linked to aggressive and delinquent behavior in troubled adolescents (e.g, Barriga, et al,2008).
 - Compared to other high school students, male delinquents had higher cognitive distortions and self-reported antisocial behaviors, such as fighting and stealing (e.g., Liau, Barriga, & Gibbs,1997).

Previous Research

- Intervention programs with cognitive component are found effective (e.g., Colins et al., 2013)
 - Aggression Replacement Training helped the participants recognize their internal cues for aggression and aggression signals and the program lowered levels of both cognitive distortions and antisocial behaviors (e.g., Gundersen & Svartdal, 2006)
 - A meta-analysis of 46 studies found that intervention programs with a component that dealt with removing cognitive distortions were twice as effective (Izzo & Rossas, cited in Brazao, Motta, & Rijo, 2013)

Present Study

- Research Questions:
 - Was there a correlation between the HIT cognitive distortion scores and antisocial misconduct in the program?
 - Would the HIT scores decrease significantly after the program?
 - Were there correlations between specific misconducts (Serious 1) and specific categories in the HIT questionnaire?

Predictions

- There would be a significant positive correlation between HIT scores and the number of misconducts observed in the participants
- The HIT scores would be significantly lowered at the end of treatment
- Specific misconducts would positively correlate with specific categories of HIT scores.

Method

- Participants:
 - 41 juvenile delinquents in a long-term, secure Midwest juvenile rehabilitation center, which offers a cognitive-behavioral and social skills development program that focuses on treating criminal thinking
 - Age range: 13-19; Mean: 16
 - Male: 29 Female: 12
 - Average days at center: 165

Method

- Measures :
 - HIT questionnaire
 - Misconduct forms (three categories: Minor, Serious I, Serious II)
- Procedures:
 - Participants were given the HIT questionnaire at the beginning of treatment (pretest) and at the end (posttest)
 - Participants were observed daily for the number of misconducts

Results

- Pearson correlation was conducted between the HIT pretest scores & number of misconducts. A positive correlation was found ($r(39)=0.329, p<.05$), revealing a significant linear relationship between the two variables.
- A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the participants' HIT pre- and post-test scores. There were a significant decrease ($t(30)=5.41, p<.001$) from pre- ($M=2.56, sd=0.73$), to post-test ($M=1.82, sd=0.66$).

Results (cont.)

- The Pearson Correlations were calculated to explore the relationships between Serious I misconducts and HIT pre- and post-test scores.
- No significant correlation between Serious I misconducts and Pre-test scores was found.
- A significant positive correlation between the HIT posttest and Serious I misconducts was found ($r(26)=0.412$, $p<0.037$).
- Moreover, a significant positive correlation between the HIT Overt posttest scores and Serious I misconducts was found ($r(26)=0.441$, $p<0.024$).

Discussion

The first two hypotheses were confirmed:

- The higher the HIT pretest scores, the higher amount of misconducts the participant had at the center.
- The Rehabilitation Center was effective in reducing the amount of cognitive distortions in the participants.

The third hypothesis was partially confirmed:

- The higher the HITposttest scores and overt posttest scores in HIT, the higher amount of Serious I misconducts. But these relationships were not found between Serious I misconducts and the HIT pretest scores.

Limitations & Future Directions

Limitations

- Sample size is small
- Low external validity
- Perhaps with more data there would be a significant relationship between HIT pretest scores and Serious I misconducts

Future Directions

- A continuation of studying the relationship between specific cognitive distortions and certain misconducts

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