Benefits and Applications of Journaling: Exploring the Lower Boundary for Effective Dosage in Non-clinical Populations

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The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.
Benefits and Applications of Journaling: Exploring the Lower Boundary for Effective Dosage in Non-clinical Populations

Introduction

• Written expressions of emotion have been shown to produce favorable outcomes in both spheres of physical health and mental health (Murray, 2009; Pennebaker, 2000).
• Although scientists have identified to some degree what the effects of journaling are, much less is known regarding exactly when this impact is most likely to occur (Pennebaker, 2000).
• Several studies have shown clinically significant benefits for brief journaling interventions (e.g., Greenberg, Wortman, & Stone, 1996; Burton and King, 2008), but the long-term benefits and the lowest dosages necessary for these benefits are debatable.
• The current study provides an opportunity to assay the therapeutic effects of a brief journaling intervention.
• The author proposes that a 15-minute journaling intervention will lead to significant health benefits, which will still be apparent after two weeks.

Methods

Design: An empirical study administered using SONA and Qualtrics.

Participants: 61 BYU undergraduate students (21 male, 40 female).

Measures:
Perceived Stress Questionnaire – A psychosocial measure.
Patient Health Questionnaire, 15-item version (PHQ-15) – A perceived biological measure.

Procedure:

Time 1: Questionnaires

Demographics
Covariates

OR

Questionnaires

Journal Positive Experiences

PSS & PHQ-15

Covariates

Time 2: Questionnaires

14-18 Days

PSS & PHQ-15

Health Measures Over Time

Stress

Physical Symptoms

Data Analysis

Dependent Variable

Age 19.8 (2.2) 20.8 (5.5) .35
Gender (% Female) 67 65 .86
Ethnicity (% White) 93 97 .53

Covariates

Manipulation Check

Positive Emotion Expression 3.80 (1.98) 1.71 (.91) .00**
Negative Emotion Expression 1.13 (.94) .53 (.52) .00**

Experimental Control p value

Stress

Pre versus Post -3.17 (3.95) -.52 (3.74) .01*
Post versus 2 weeks -1.07 (5.56) .52 (7.26) .34

Physical Symptoms

Pre versus Post -1.07 (1.57) -.13 (1.93) .04*
Post versus 2 weeks .13 (2.86) -.16 (3.26) .71

Discussion

• No significant differences were found between groups for relevant demographic variables and covariates.
• Manipulation check showed both positive and negative emotion words increased for the experimental group as anticipated.
• Journaling significantly benefited health (in terms of both stress and physical symptoms) in the short-term, but failed to significantly benefit participants in the long-term.

References