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

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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
- PSS & PHQ-15
- Covariates

OR

- Journal Positive Experiences

Time 2: Questionnaires

- PSS & PHQ-15
- Covariates

Results

- 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.

Discussion

- Based upon the current study, one should take the findings of articles that show long-term health benefits of small journaling interventions (Burton & King, 2008) with “a grain of salt.”
- Limitations of the current study: The length of the writing prompt was not uniform for all participants due to the setup on Qualtrics (i.e., people timed themselves).
- Suggestions for future research:
  1. Future studies should chart how long the effects of journaling last by more frequently administering questionnaires.
  2. Due to the great variability we found between subjects it would be suggested that future studies only use single-subject design methodologies.

References