Mental Health of High School Students: Sense of Coherence and Self-esteem

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We studied sense of coherence (SOC), self-esteem (SE) and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) in Japanese high school students. Subjects were 338 students in local high schools. Results indicated that 47.6% of subjects were mentally unhealthy and negative correlation was found between GHQ and SOC or SE. There was a high correlation between SOC and SE. These results suggest that SOC is one of the factors for mental health in high school students.

Key Words: high school students, mental health, sense of coherence, self esteem,

Introduction

There is an increasing concern about the mental health of the adolescents in Japan. Several reports and the media in general assert that the prevalence of depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and substance related disorders are increasing in adolescents. The reason why mental health of adolescence in Japan is worsening is still open questions. Psychosocial factors in Japan have been discussed.

By the way, Antonofski (1979) found about 30% of survivors in Nazi’s concentration camp has been mentally healthy even they have suffered very poor environment. Antonofski (1993, 1996) investigated the feature of the mentally healthy survivors and coined this feature as sense of coherence (SOC). Not a few studies were conducted between the SOC and mental health. However, there are not any study of SOC and mental health in high school students in Japan. Therefore, we conducted the relationships between SOC and GHQ or Self-esteem in high school students.

Sense of coherence: SOC

Salutogenic resources available to individuals (Protective factor for stressful condition). Mobilization of coping and adaptive resources that suppress the deleterious effects of stress

How individuals appraise a stressful situation and choose to handle it. There are three main components of SOC, that is, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.
1) Comprehensibility: the course of the stressor is structured, predictable and explicable
2) Manageability: the individual has the necessary resources available to meet his/her demand
3) Meaningfulness: these demands are worthy of Investment and engagement

**Self-esteem**

A stable sense of personal worth or worthiness, measurable by self-report testing, and very old concept of basic factor of mental health. (Rosenberg 1965)

**Purpose of study**

Investigate mental health of High school students in Japan. Examine Relationships among GHQ, SE and SOC.

**Methods**

Participants were the students in a local high school in Hyogo prefecture. The grade was 11th grade. Among 350 students 345 students answered the test battery. After removal of irrelevant and invalid answers, 338 subjects (97%) answered the test battery fully. Male 172, and female 166. To these subjects we conducted three questionnaires, that is, GHQ-28, Self-esteem scale (Rosenberg) and Sense of coherence scale (SOC).

**Results:**

1) Mental health of high school students:
Cut off of GHQ-28 is 7/8. That means unhealthy students were 47.6%, male 52.6% and female 42.5%. Male students were unhealthier.

![Mental Health of High school students](image)

2) Mean score of Sense of coherence:
Total SOC score of male was 49.8 compatible with female score.
Subscale of SOC was also measured. Manageability, comprehensibility and meaningfulness were compatible with male and female.

Mean score of Sense of coherence

3) Mean score of self esteem:
Mean score of SE in male was 30.7 and in female 29.2, statistically no difference.

Mean score of Self esteem

4) Correlation between GHQ score and SOC:
Negative correlation was found between SOC and GHQ-28 score. \( r = -0.64, p < 0.01 \)
5) Correlation between GHQ score and SE:
Negative correlation was found between SE and GHQ-28 score. \(r=-0.51, p<0.01\)

6) Correlation between SOC score and SE:
Correlation was found between SE and SOC score. \(r=0.53, p<0.01\)

Discussion

Firstly we found that almost half of Japanese high school students were mentally unhealthy. And Male students were relatively unhealthier. These results are consistent with past reports. The reason why high school students are unhealthy is still controversial issue. Probably not a few factors might be related but psychosocial factors are discussed. Previous studies have suggested that a supportive and accepting school environment can be a resource of student’s mental health, while a non-supportive and negative school environment can be a risk factor. Since students spend their time in the school setting almost all day, they have a large stake. Lack of social support was significantly related to more stress responses, such as depression and anxiety (Okayasu et al. 1992, Takakura et al. 2005).

Secondary, this study demonstrated that GHQ in high school students were negatively correlated with SOC score and SE score. These results suggest that SE and SOC might be protecting factors of mental health in high school students. SE is very popular concept for
Mental health and there are several approaches to be better self-esteem. That is, rebut inner critic, practice self-nurturing and getting help from others. These findings show there might be self-improving might be possible in SE. In contrast with SE, SOC is also stress protective factor but more biological base they might have. Further examinations must be done in SOC.

Lastly, we should like to mention Japanese mental health system. Unfortunately we have so many problems. For examples, we do not give students enough psycho educations for students, teachers and parents. Moreover, our school based mental health system is now constructing, especially intervention in crisis situation is not functioning. Furthermore, CBT program for students have not yet developed. As Schools are controlled by Ministry of education and it is very hard to cooperate with clinics and hospitals, because of sectionalism. We hope these obstacles of school mental health is resolved in the near future.

Conclusion

We found almost half of high school students are mentally unhealthy and SOC and SE might be related with mental health of students. However, This study has limiting number of cases and more large scale of study must be done in the near future.

References

高校生の精神健康と首尾一貫性および自尊感情

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高校生の精神健康と首尾一貫性および自尊感情について調査した。その結果、47.6%の高校生は精神的に健康ではなかった。さらに、GHQと首尾一貫性および自尊感情との相関をみたところ、GHQは首尾一貫性および自尊感情と逆相関しており、首尾一貫性と自尊感情には相関が見られた。この結果は、首尾一貫性が日本の高校生の精神健康に影響する可能性を示唆する。

キーワード：高校生，精神健康，首尾一貫性，自尊感情