



Research paper

## The Effect of Coping Skills Training on Early Maladaptive Schemas, Health- Promoting Lifestyle, and Mental Well-Being in Individual With Borderline Personality Disorder

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### Abstract

This study examined the effect of coping skills training on early maladaptive schemas, health-promoting lifestyle, and mental well-being in individuals with borderline personality disorder. The research design was quasi-experimental, utilizing a pre-test, post-test, and follow-up with a control group. The statistical population included individuals with borderline personality disorder who attended counseling centers and psychiatric clinics in Sanandaj. Thirty individuals were purposefully selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. A pre-test was administered to both groups with these questionnaires: early maladaptive schemas, health-promoting lifestyle, and mental well-being. The experimental group received a coping skills training intervention. Both groups subsequently underwent post-test and follow-up assessments one month later. Results indicated that coping skills training significantly reduced early maladaptive schemas and increased health-promoting lifestyle and psychological well-being. It is recommended that the findings be implemented in counseling and psychotherapy centers.

**Keywords:** Borderline personality disorder, coping skills, health-promoting lifestyle, mental well-being, schemas.

### Introduction

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), often emerging in early adulthood, is characterized by significant instability across various life domains. This instability is closely linked with negative emotions such as anger, depression, and anxiety, which profoundly affect mental well-being and quality of life (Leichsenring et al., 2023). The emotional distress experienced by individuals with BPD decreases mental well-being, making the disorder particularly debilitating. Evidence suggests lifestyle changes may enhance both mental and physical health. A health-promoting lifestyle, aimed at stress reduction and well-being, is influenced by early maladaptive schemas and coping skills (Labadi et al., 2022). Coping skills, essential for managing stress, are crucial for improving health outcomes. Despite the high prevalence of BPD, no studies have explored the impact of coping skills training on early maladaptive schemas, healthy lifestyle promotion, or mental well-being. This study aims to investigate the

effectiveness of coping skills training in reducing early maladaptive schemas, promoting a health-enhancing lifestyle, and improving well-being in individuals with BPD .The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- Coping skills training reduces early maladaptive schemas in individuals with BPD .
- Coping skills training enhances a health-promoting lifestyle in individuals with BPD .
- Coping skills training increases mental well-being in individuals with BPD.

## Method

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, post-test, and a one-month follow-up, including a control group. Thirty participants with BPD from counseling centers and a psychiatric clinic in Sanandaj, Iran, were selected purposefully and assigned randomly to experimental and control groups. Due to dropout, each group ultimately consisted of 13 participants. A preliminary session clarified research objectives and group therapy norms, followed by baseline assessments using questionnaires on early maladaptive schemas, health-promoting lifestyle, and mental well-being. The intervention comprised 12 sessions, held twice weekly, and each session lasted 90 minutes, conducted by a clinical specialist. No intervention was provided to the control group. Post-tests and a one-month follow-up were conducted for all participants. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, and post-study training for the control group. Data were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni post-hoc tests in SPSS-26 Software. Coordination with the centers and ethical approval preceded the intervention. The study was approved by the Kurdistan University Ethics Committee (code: IR.UOK.REC.1402.023).

## Tools

**Young Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-SF):** Developed by Young (1998), this 75-item scale assesses 15 early maladaptive schemas. Waller et al. (2001) reported high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 to 0.96 for the overall scores and 0.62 to 0.93 for subscales in clinical and non-clinical populations. In the present study, the internal consistency by Cronbach's alpha method for the overall score was 0.89, and internal consistency for subscales ranging from 0.72 to 0.87.

**Health-Promoting Lifestyle Questionnaire (HPLQ):** This 54-item questionnaire was developed by Walker et al. (1987), measures health-promoting behaviors with six factors such as nutrition, physical activity, health responsibility, stress management, interpersonal support, self-actualization using exploratory factor analysis, with internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha were 0.70 to 0.90 for subscales and 0.92 for the overall scores. In the present study, the internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha for the overall score was 0.84, and for subscales were ranging from 0.68 to 0.83.

**Mental Well-Being Questionnaire (MWQ):** Keyes & Magyar-Moe (2003) developed this 45-item questionnaire to assess three dimensions of well-being (emotional, psychological, and social), being confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 for the overall scores and 0.78, 0.87, and 0.91 for emotional, psychological, and social well-

being dimensions, respectively. In the present study, the internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha method for the overall scores was 0.83, and for the subscales, were 0.80, 0.76, and 0.81, respectively.

**Coping Skills Intervention Program:** The 12-session coping skills training program by Lewinsohn & Gotlib (1995) was implemented in this study on the experimental group. The program, a combination of cognitive-behavioral theories by Lewinsohn & Gotlib (1995), includes enhancing positive activities, teaching social skills, friendship skills, negotiation, self-expression, clearer communication, and self-control therapy, which involve self-reinforcement and problem-solving skills, relaxation training, halting negative thoughts, and setting realistic goals.

## **Results**

The study involved 30 participants, with an average age of 29.35 years in the experimental group and 27.17 years in the control group. Participants were 65% female and 35% male, with 80% having below high school education. Results from repeated measures ANOVA revealed significant differences between the experimental and control groups in emotional deprivation, abandonment, isolation, shame, dependence, sacrifice, self-discipline, vulnerability, health-promoting lifestyle, and mental well-being ( $p < 0.01$ ). The intervention's effects were sustained over time, with significant differences between pre-test and follow-up measures ( $p < 0.01$ ). No significant effects were found for distrust, entitlement, entrapment, obedience, emotional inhibition, and rigid criteria. Bonferroni post-hoc tests confirmed significant differences between pre-test and post-test, and pre-test and follow-up for the variables mentioned, indicating that coping skills training had a meaningful and lasting impact on these areas for individuals with BPD.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The coping skills training program was effective in reducing maladaptive schemas and improving mental well-being and health-promoting lifestyle behaviors in individuals with BPD. Maladaptive schemas, which are deeply rooted negative beliefs about oneself and the world, often shape emotional instability, impulsive behaviors, and interpersonal difficulties in BPD. Common schemas such as emotional deprivation, abandonment, isolation, shame, and dependency lead to emotional distress, relationship instability, and self-harm. The coping skills program addressed these schemas by teaching participants to challenge unrealistic beliefs, regulate emotions, improve communication, and tolerate distress. Through these strategies, individuals became more aware of their emotional states and developed healthier responses, reducing the impact of maladaptive schemas. Given the effectiveness of the coping skills training program, it is crucial to consider the potential for broader application and further investigation. Recommendations for future research include expanding the sample size to include other clinical populations and implementing the intervention in different clinical settings. It is also suggested that this educational approach be utilized in counseling centers and psychiatric clinics for individuals with borderline personality disorder.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors of this study declare that there is no conflict of interest.



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