Examining the Effectiveness of Sense of Humor on Mental Health in Students of Tehran

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Abstract
The present study was conducted with the aim of examining the effectiveness of humorous behaviors on mental health in male and female students of Tehran. High school male and female students in academic year of 2015-2016 consisted the statistical population of the study. After coordination with the Department of Education in Tehran, 100 individuals were selected randomly. Sense of Humor Scale by Martin & Lefurt and Psychological Symptoms SCL25-R Questionnaire by Greeson were the questionnaires used in the present study. The results were analyzed and evaluated by SPSS software. The results showed there is a significant relationship between mental health and sense of humor so that individuals with mental health are significantly more witty (0.05).

Keywords: Mental health, Sense of humor, Students, Humorous behavior, Students of Tehran.

Introduction
Sense of humor, as one of the humans' personality traits, is a quality unique for humans. Although giving a precise definition of the sense of humor is difficult, but various definitions can be found from primeval ages. As an example, there is an advice in Old Testament that says: "A cheerful heart functions as well as a physician". Plato, Aristotle and other thinkers and philosophers of the ages have expressed their ideas about sense of humor.

In the context of Islamic traditions, there are some traditions of the Prophet and the Imams that indicate the positive effects of sense of humor in the lives of the believers. Prophet Mohammad said: "Just those who are witty are the real believers". It seems Torance has presented more general definition of the sense of the humor. Torance believes that witty persons are those who their creativity results into giving funny ideas, stories and plays. Persons with sense of humor are those who see themselves and the others from beyond and more separated and are able to laugh at themselves and the happenings of life and at the same time remain connected with people and events (Torance, 1993).

Recent psychological texts have focused on the role of sense of humor in adapting and coping with stress on one hand and their effects on increasing the improvement of the quality of life on the other hand (Najarian, Barati & Ibrahimi Ghavam, 1994). Psychologists consider sense of humor as one of humans' personality traits and have examined it from different point of views. In 1960s psychologists' interests had been attracted to criticizing and examining the sense of humor and laughter for humans. Some psychologists believe that sense of humor and laughter are of high importance for humans and their lives (Cortkov, 1991; Mindes & Curbin, 1985).

The main point of view about the role of psychology of sense of humor believes that sense of humor is a kind of adaptation and compatibility style. Freud (1916) believes that sense of humor is one of the defensive mechanisms of "I" and a kind of economic attempt to spend psychological energy. Arity (1975) believes that there is a close relationship between guessing the sense of humor and the amount of creativity in individuals. Plachil (1981) shows in many of initial researches of William Gordon et al. in group that strong solutions have often been accompanied with an environment of playing. This kind of play have included a lot of sense of humor but when attempts of teaching creating the environment of playing, it was not successful. Despite, it has been clear that playing with similarities creates secondary changes that create appropriate environment for humor, laughter and play. Observations of Torance show that this phenomenon frequently happens both in applying the similarities and in time of intellectual onslaught for solving the problems creatively.

The concept of mental health is an aspect of the general concept of physical, mental and social health. Despite the attempts of pioneers of mental health in world in order to ensure greater human health, there is not still a definite criteria in case of defining mental health in individuals. Attending to thought and mental health had been common gradually in some European universities after the first world war since in 1944, 19 European and American countries had some fans of mental hygiene. But after the second world war and revealing its horrific events, the issue of thought health and mental hygiene with emphasis on quality of the humans' relationship were seriously and deeply attended by sages, philosophers, doctors, experts, educators, scientists, clerics and scholars in social sciences. In 1948, with the participation of representatives of 48 countries, including Iran, "the
International Federation, thought health” was founded in London and it was decided each 4 years, the international congress of thought health be held with the participation of representatives of different countries and with the aim of examining the issues related to individuals’ relationship with family, with the society, with the issues and problems of modern life, etc. Mental health, in addition to the healthy body, needs healthy environment and life condition.

The issue that how environment and its various factors affect individuals' mental structure and mental health and how individuals cope with the environmental struggles, are the issues that various psychological approaches have explained with their special viewpoints about the nature of humans and their motivational power.

For example, some of these approaches have considered mental health as a continuous process and some of them have searched it in terms of norms and following customs and some other groups have attended its both aspects. For examples, psychiatry and clinical psychology have emphasized on the principle of normal human in psychopathology and considered normality or mental health equal to the lack of the symptoms of disease but the current state of psychology of the world indicates considerable attention of psychologists to the concept of mental health in a case beyond normality and lack of the symptoms of disease( Khoda Rahimi, 1995).

Other various definitions of mental health are presented. Definitions by Milanifar, Fadaee, Saatchi, Patty & Jahora are of them. Mental health includes individuals' compatibility with the world at the maximum level so that causes happiness and useful and effective perception in individuals( Milanifar, 1994). Mental health includes individuals' ability to achieve goals that have considered for themselves( Patty, 1994). Mental health includes a state in which individuals' mental functions such as thoughts, emotions, perceptions and behaviors are not impaired, their relationship with themselves, family and society be coordinated and close and do their responsibilities toward family and society well( Fadaee, 1994). Mental health includes having adequate adaptation and feeling of being good in case of psychological point of view, in accordance with acceptable standards of humane relations and the community( Saatchi, 1996). Mental health includes pleasant, proportional and continuous reactions of humane characteristics in various conditions that is the guide for individuals' behavioral changes toward discomfort or internal and external pressures( Jahora, 1982). Mental health includes individuals' ability to achieve goals that have assigned for themselves( Patty, 1994).

**Base of the research**

Roskin( 1985) has explained the psychological theories of sense of humor shortly in his article and has examined three main theoretical psychological approaches in explaining the psychological reasons of sense of humor.

**A: Theory of insult:**This theory has origins in ancient ideas. Based on insult theory, humor is primarily a way to express the wrath. Thus, the aim of wit is insulting the audience
or the third person. Scholars in this approach believe that sense of humor is considered positive and acceptable because it is a good substitute for more aggressive and impolite ways of expressing aggression such as insulting and cursing. Such issues can be seen in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Hobbes (Roskin, 1985).

Baron, Bern & Grifit (1974) have shown that forcing angry individuals to laugh with creating the feeling of entertainment and amusement, modifies aggressive tendencies in them significantly.

**Theory of emotional catharsis and relief:** Fans of this theory believe that wit and laughter result into opening the mood and appeasing the mental energy and therefore, result into mental balance and relief. May be the most famous theory of catharsis and relief is related to Freud. Freud (1916) expresses in the book named "Jokes and their relationship with unconsciousness" that sense of humor is a way to get rid of inhibitory and censored behaviors and thoughts. Based on Freud' theory (1916), catharsis of mental energy through sense of humor is a kind of economic, calculated and parsimony but unconscious attempt for giving the tension out. He believes that there are a lot of similarities between dreams and sense of humor and in both of them, the individuals unconsciously and in a symbolic way satisfy their repressed desires.

**The theory of dissonance and contrast:** Fans of this theory believe that a wit person puts two or more concepts together and compares them with each other and in that way the wit appears. Psychologists who believe this approach believe that understanding the similarities and differences of issues is the cause of wit and since wit usually changes a logical discussion into an irrelevant and vain one and therefore it becomes funny. It is clear that this idea is consistent with new cognitive ideas in psychology. Roskin (1985) believes that in the point of view of the fans of this theory, in stressful conditions, sense of humor expands the individuals' point of view toward solving the problems effectively and higher compatibility to the environment and the stresses. According to this point of view, sense of humor in stressful situations increases the feeling of mastery, self-esteem and self-confidence (Ruskin, 1985). Sarason & Sarason (1987) also believe that sense of humor can be used as a way to achieve mental relief in stressful and troublesome situations. In recent years, other theories are presented by psychologists about sense of humor that a theory by Roskin (1985) is one of them. Roskin's theory is based on semantics. This theory does not focus on the subject or the cause of laughter but deals with the issue that how a text, behavior or issue is considered as a wit.

There are various theories about sense of humor and all of them can be used in searching for the clues that promote growth of creativity. The theory of superiority indicates that sense of humor is rooted in conquering the others. Theory of incongruity indicates that sense of humor is resulted from making irrelevant and inappropriate pairs of ideas or situations that arise from common practices. According to the theory of surprise, factors of surprise, sudden panic or shock or surprise are the necessary conditions for humor. Theory of two aspects indicates that the base of sense of humor is the simultaneous occurrence of
incompatible feelings or emotions. Theory of relieving indicates that the base of sense of humor is relieving from tension or limitation or releasing additional tension. According to the theory of configuration, sense of humor happens when the factors which were considered irrelevant at first become related to each other suddenly. Theory of psychoanalysis indicates that sense of humor is a kind of saving emotions and not using them. In other words, sense of humor is a happening that occurring it usually changes something that causes pain into something unimportant.

Researchers have mainly attended the psychological and physical functions of sense of humor in examining the function of sense of humor. Examining the primary texts of sense of humor indicates that considering the supportive aspects of psychophysical of sense of humor, this phenomenon is considered as a facilitating factor of spiritual and physical health (Martin & Lacjford, 1983).

Alport (1950) believed that neurotic persons that learn to laugh at themselves may become able to control themselves and thus become treated. Farhan Casnis (1979) has interesting and supportive examinations in case of role of sense of humor, especially in relation to the physical diseases. He believed that serious infectious disease can be treated through laughter and humor and also using special vitamins. He believes that by laughing loudly for 10 minutes, the patient can have a comfortable and without pain sleep for two hours. Based on these theories, some authors thought that laughter may have the same effect as endorphin or other androgenic substances of brain (Quoted by Martin Wolfkort, 1983). Dixon and Martin Wolfkort (1983) believe that sense of humor is applied as a coping strategy for compatibility with stress. Researchers believe that there is a high correlation between distress and mood turmoil and negative happenings of life in case of sense of humor in persons who are less humorous, (Martin Wolfkort, 1983; Martin & Dobin, 1988; Nezo & Blist, 1988). In researches by these researchers and other conducted researches, it was emphasized on the role of sense of humor as a kind of effective strategy of adaptation and compatibility with hard situation (Dixon, 1980; Goldstein, 1982). In other words, sense of humor is considered as a moderator and pacifier of negative emotional responses such as anxiety or depression. Recent researches emphasize on the role of sense of humor in modifying the mental pressures and claim that its role is ignored in other part of emotional continuum. Kioper, Martin and Danse (1992) showed in a study that sense of humor has a kind of positive role in enriching and enriching the experiences of life and thus improving the quality of life. Researches that emphasize on this aspect of role of sense of humor, believe that sense of humor cooperates in improving quality of life.

For example, Lefkurt & Martin (1986) showed that sense of humor results into a self-concept more positive than itself. Another recent research also indicates that having higher scores in assessments related to the sense of humor is related to the higher levels of self-esteem, more positive self-ranking (based on the capacity of being sociable) and more convergence between ideal self-concept and real self-concept (Kioper & Martin, Quoted by Kioper et al., 1992).
A lot of theories have been presented so far in which mental health was attended. Some of the most famous ones will be mentioned here (Quoted by Khoda Rahimi, 1995).

Freud believes that most people are neurotic in various degree and mental health is an ideal and not a statistical norm (Hogan, 1976). According to the theory by Freud, some special characteristics are necessary for mental health. The first characteristic is self-awareness. It means that everything that may cause problem in unconscious should become conscious and real consciousness is not possible unless unreal and unnecessary or very high control (super ego) disappear. Freud believes that self-awareness is the main component, but not the adequate component, of mental health (Korsini, 1973). Freud considers logical alienation of the interests and general enthusiasms as the final criteria of mental health (Goldstine, 1939).

Moorie (1983) believes that healthy persons are adequately aware of their mental structure and while there is no conflict between their various needs, they use different types of needs adequately. In normal healthy person, there is not that much distance between super ego and ideal I. Moorie believes that in normal human first the ego, then the super ego and then the I have a main role in controlling the behavior and the pulses of the ego acceptedly become fulfilled with wisely observation of I and caring super ego. Moorie believes that all humans have complex with different severity and weaknesses. But just extreme and severe complexes cause abnormality and disease. Moorie believes that imagination and creativity are of the most important characteristics of mental health.

Adler (1973) believes that mental health means having specific goals in life, having a strong and solid philosophy for living, having pleasant and stable family and social relationship, being useful for mankind, having the gut, courage and decisiveness for acting to achieve the goal, having control on emotions and feelings, having the ultimate purpose of perfection and self-realization, accepting the problems and trying as much as possible to solve them.

Ferum (1968) believes that persons with mental health are those who love deeply, are creative, have developed the ability to reason and wisdom in themselves completely, understand themselves and their world deeply, have true and stable feeling, are connected to the world and have root and originality in it and are the sovereign of their destiny. Ferum believes that healthy persons have fertile orientation. It is that kind of orientation in which they are able to apply all their potential talents and powers.

Maslow (1968) believes that individuals who have mental health, have fulfilled low-level needs and do not have psychological disorders, they know who they are, what they are and where they are going to. Understanding of a healthy person of reality is correct. They understand the world objectively. These individuals are self-motivated, healthy and natural and they show their emotions honestly and without resentment of the others. Healthy individuals need privacy and autonomy, their functions are connected, they have mystical
experiences or soar and these experiences cause promotion and feeling of power and decisiveness.

Skinner (1973) believes that mental health and healthy person equals to the behavior in accordance with the rules and regulations of the society. Such persons, when they face a problem, use behavior modification strategy to improve and normalize the behaviors of themselves and the people around them and continue it till when it reaches at the level of norm that is accepted by the society. Healthy persons are those who receive more social approval because of their appropriate behaviors from the environment and the people around them.

Yung believes that psychological health and self-knowing are the same. Self-actualization is identified with three criteria. At first, repression catharsis must happen, the tension between functions and unconscious and conscious attitudes must change into relief and the individual must be able to reach internal relief and purity. At the second, the individual must understand the symbolic expression of the unconsciousness. At the third, individual must be able to approach to the personal symbol or myth of self-knowing through personal faith. Yung believes that self-knowing is the state of avoiding from 'being' and tendency for 'becoming'. Yung believes Buddha and Christ are individuals who have reached individuation finally. Yung believed that the alchemy of medieval means the attempt to transmutation of low elements to post higher elements such as gold, allegory and visualization of the attempt of human psyche to unite low and post higher elements of their psyche. This is an inherent psychological process and its meaning is the same as the process of individuation. The process of individuation is a kind of internal attempt for self-realization. Through this process, the totality of the personality fulfills. He believes neuroticism is of the disorders of individuation, so the focus in his psychotherapy was on the natural route of this process (Hizpaak, 1996).

Methods

All male and female students of region 4 in Tehran in academic year of 2015-2016 consisted the statistical population of the study. Among them 100 individuals were selected as the sample of the study by available sampling method and then all questionnaires were gathered using needed planning and appropriate implementation.

Three weeks later, participants were examined using re-test method.

Revised Questionnaire of Psychological Symptoms( SCL25-R) and Sense of Humor( Wit) Scale by Martin & Lefkurt were the tools used in the present study.

The revised Questionnaire of Psychological Symptoms( SCL25-R):This questionnaire has 25 items and was presented and normalized by Najarian in 2000. This questionnaire is not validated for psychotic patients, individuals with brain damage and individuals who are mentally retarded. The items of the questionnaire evaluate individuals'
state from one week before the time of completing the questionnaire. Answers given to each items of the questionnaire are recorded using the crosshairs by participants in a 5-point scale from none (grade zero) to very severe (grade 4). In addition, lower scores of the individual are the indicator of mental health and higher scores are the indicator of not having mental health.

**Sense of Humor (Wit) Scale by Martin & Lefkurt:** This questionnaire has 7 items and was presented by Martin & Lefkurt in 1983. The answers given to each items of the questionnaire are recorded using the crosshairs by participants in a 5-point scale from none (grade zero) to very severe (grade 4). In addition, scoring the items 1 and 4 are opposite of the other items.

Implementing the research was in a way that in special day and time that students were in school, questionnaires were distributed and participants were said to give back the questionnaires after 30 minutes with no name on them. In addition, the participants were taken verbal commitment to have needed cooperation with the researcher three weeks later.

After collecting the questionnaires and making sure of their completeness, the personal features and obtained data were coded, the codes were entered the computer based on a special pattern and were analyzed using SPSS software. Statistical analysis are as follow:

- Methods of descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, percentage, frequency and the minimum and maximum of the scores.
- Measuring the reliability coefficient of the questionnaires.
- Measuring the simple correlation coefficients between scores of desired variables. In addition, the level of significance was considered \( r=0.05 \) in order to testing the assumptions.

**Findings:**

Mean, standard deviation, the minimum score of wit (humor) and mental health in male and female students of schools of region 4 in Tehran in academic year of 2015-2016 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, the minimum score of wit (humor) and mental health in male and female students of schools of region 4 in Tehran.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical indices of variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>The minimum of score</th>
<th>The maximum of score</th>
<th>numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index
Table 1 shows the mean of scores of sense of humor in the first stage of test and also the minimum and maximum of score compared to the second sense of humor(re-test) is lower and just the standard deviation of the first sense of humor(test) is higher than the second sense of humor( re-test). In the scores of the first mental health( test), mean and standard deviation and the minimum score are higher compared to the second mental health( re-test), it is while in the second mental health( re-test) only the minimum of score is higher compared to the first mental health.

Table 2. Examining the reliability of mental health in male and female students of region 4 in Tehran
Table 2 shows the reliability is 0.6879 for mental health using re-test method and is 0.6450 for wit( sense of humor). In addition, the correlations between mental health and wit( sense of humor)( r=0.20) is significant at the level of 0.05. It should be explained that the test measures mental health and lack of mental health.

**Conclusion**

According to the examination of the questionnaires, it can be concluded that there is a negative significant relationship between lack of mental health and wit( sense of humor) in male and female students of region 4 in Tehran in academic year of 2015-2016.

The results of Table 2 show that there is a negative significant relationship between lack of mental health and wit( sense of humor) at the level of 0.05.

Considering the results, it can be concluded that there is a negative relationship between lack of mental health and sense of humor at the level of 0.05. It indicates the more the mental health, the less the wit or sense of humor and the more the mental health, the more the wit( sense of humor). It can be said of the other aspect that sense of humor can be used as a shield for coping with mental and environmental distresses and reduce the pressure of the individuals.

It is recommended sense of humor be presented and trained as one of those strategies for increasing mental health and coping the problems and obstacles which per se lack any credibility and value.
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