Healing Through Helping

How Acts of Kindness and Volunteering can Promote Social Well-Being

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World Health Organization, 1946: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”
CBT & Social Functioning

- Hofmann et al, 2014 meta-analysis on CBT for anxiety disorders
  - Large ES for anxiety symptoms: $g = 0.95$, 95% CI [0.80 – 1.10]
  - Small ES for social well-being: $g = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.15 – 0.32]
Need for alternative intervention?
• Acts of kindness - actions that benefit others or make others happy, typically at some cost to oneself
N = 122 pts. with mild-to-severe depression symptoms

Randomly assigned to 5-week intervention:
- Acts of kindness (n = 40)
- Social activities (n = 41)
- Thought records (n = 41)
Results Summary

- Acts of kindness superior for DASS symptoms, life satisfaction

- Only acts of kindness showed significant improvement for social connection
Extending findings to Veterans with an SMI diagnosis
Healing Through Helping PRRC Group

- 8-session group based on acts of kindness and volunteerism

- Recruited Veterans with an SMI in the PRRC clinic

Group Workbook

Stepping Stones – Psychosocial Rehabilitation & Recovery Center
South Texas Veterans Health Care System

Developed for the South Texas Veterans Health Care System by David Cregg, Ph.D., Betsy Davis, Ph.D., & Patrick Smith, Ph.D.

Based on material from Cregg, D. R., & Cheavens, J. S. (2021). Healing through helping: An experimental investigation of kindness, social activities, and reappraisal as well-being interventions [Manuscript in preparation].
Key Principles of Group

• All people have potential to make positive contributions
  • “No matter who you are, no matter what the past has held, you can make a profound impact on other people.”

• Not a contest – people differ in time & resources to help others

• Benefits to self de-emphasized. Focus shifted to others
  • EX: “Feeling good or happy may or may not happen, but you can be sure of impacting others’ lives in a positive way.”
**Group Structure**

Session 1: Welcome & Instructions for Acts of Kindness

Sessions 2 – 4: Performing Acts of Kindness

*Session 5 (optional): Benefits of Volunteering & Exploring Ideas

*Session 6 (optional): Making a Volunteer Action Plan

*Session 7 (optional): Reflecting on Experiences & Next Steps

Session 8: Follow-up Discussion (3 weeks after Session 7)

*Note: Sessions 5 – 7 are optional (but highly encouraged!) for individuals who are interested in trying out a volunteer activity.
Results

• All participants reported engagement in acts of kindness
  • EX: homeless outreach, baking food, assisting with transportation, texting words of encouragement

• Engagement in volunteering (e.g., community gardening, senior center)

• Qualitative reports that group reduced depression, enhanced sense of meaning
Thank You!

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