A Self Psychological Therapy Tool Based on Psychodrama Methodology

Hidetsugu Suto * and Jun Maeda **

Abstract : In the last decade, diversification of communication systems is increasing with the information technology development, and our human relationships are getting more and more complex. Sometimes, we need helps to overcome a difficult situation that we must face in such complicated relationships. Psychodrama is one of the effective counseling methods which are used for finding hints to solve human relationship problems. Despite many advantages of psychodrama have been reported, some weak points also have been pointed out. The first one is that, before conducting a psychodrama event, the participants have to adjust their schedules. The second one is that, some participants may hesitate to talk their problems of human relationships in a public space. These factors make it difficult to conduct psychodrama events easily and comfortably. In this paper, a self psychological therapy tool is proposed as an approach for the problems. The proposed tool aims to provide similar effects with creating social network diagram, which is a basic technique of psychodrama. Experiments have been conducted in order to evaluate the proposed tool. The results show that the proposed tool can provide some hints for the users who had troubles in current human relationships and want to change the situations.

Key Words : group therapy, psychotherapy, social network diagram.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, information technology has developed rapidly and various communication systems have been pervasive in our everyday life. With increasing diversification of communication systems, our human relationships are also getting more and more complex. In such complicated society, we are always exposed to mental loads because human relationship is one of the well-known stressors despite it is quite important for our daily life [1]. Sometime, this fact could lead us to mental illnesses.

Mental illnesses could cause damages on our life because they give us both objective side effects, e.g., unemployment and social ostracism, and subjective psychological effects, e.g., increasing level of depression and reducing hopefulness and self-esteem [2]. Thus precaution and early detection are strongly expected.

Counseling with clinical psychologists is a highly effective way to relieve pressure and stress in human relationships. Counseling is a process of assisting persons who have any mental anguishes carried out by counselors through various number of service approaches [3].

Psychodrama is one of the hopeful counseling methods which are used for solving several problems in human relationships. Psychodrama is a kind of group psychological therapy conducted with a director who facilitates the session. Despite many advantages of psychodrama has been reported [4]–[6], it is not so easy for us to conduct psychodrama events frequently because of the reasons described below: The first, before conducting a psychodrama event, the participants have to adjust

their schedules. The second, some people do not want to talk about their human relationship problems to other people. These factors make it difficult for us to conduct psychodrama events easily. In this paper, a self psychological therapy tool is proposed as an approach for the problems. The proposed tool is designed based on the idea of a social network diagram which is a basic technique of psychodrama. It aims to produce similar results with creating social network diagrams.

The outline of psychodrama is introduced in Section 2. Next, the proposed tool is explained in Section 3. In Section 4, experiments conducted for showing the effects of the tool and the results are described. Finally, the outcome of the proposed tool are discussed and concluded in Sections 5 and 6.

2. Psychodrama

Psychodrama is a group psychological therapy method developed by Jacob Moreno [7] in the early 1900s. The scope of the method is problems of relationships with one or more people, e.g., members of a family, friends, acquaintances and colleagues, and relationships between groups.

A goal of psychodrama is to make clients who have some mental problems in human relationships understand their own problems deeply. In classical psychodrama, clients are encouraged to continue and complete their tasks through dramatization, role playing, and dramatic self-presentation. A number of scenes, for example, memories of specific events in the past, unfinished situations, inner drama, fantasies, dreams, preparations for future risk-taking situations, and simply unrehearsed expressions of mental states, are recreated [8]. Both verbal and nonverbal communications are utilized in these activities.

Psychodrama sessions are often performed as weekly group therapy sessions, typically comprised of 8 to 12 members. Usually, a session lasts between 90 minutes and 2 hours. In each psychodrama session, a member's event in which he/she feels some problems is focused on, with group members taking on roles to recreate a scene of the event as needed [9].

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To perform a psychodrama session, the below four roles and an element are required:

Director A person who controls and facilitates the session. Director has to support the members to achieve the goals.

Protagonist A person who has a trouble in his/her human relationships and wants to solve it.

Auxiliary A person who acts as a significant person of the protagonist.

Audience Persons who watch the drama. Sometimes, One of them plays as an auxiliary ego.

Stage A scene of the drama, e.g., a living room in a house, a class room in a school, etc.

A psychodrama session consists of three phases, i.e., warm-up phase, action phase, and sharing phase. The details are shown below:

Warm-up phase The goals of the warm-up phase are building trusted relationships among the members, strengthening unity of the members, and relaxing the members. Usually, all members introduce themselves followed by conducting small communication games.

Action phase After the warm-up phase, a topic related to human relationship problems is provided by the director. A participant who has troubles about the topic becomes the protagonist of the session. Then the director instructs the protagonist to recreate a scene in the past which causes the troubles in the protagonist's mind. Auxiliary members will be chosen by the protagonist to play all the elements in the scene. The rest of the group members act as audiences. The following four techniques are commonly used in the action phase:

Role-reversal The protagonist enacts the role of a significant person (auxiliary), while an auxiliary plays the roles as a protagonist. With this technique, the protagonist can understand the other persons' role and get new perspectives on the underlying personal issues.

Mirroring The protagonist becomes an observer while an auxiliary takes the place of the protagonist on the stage. This technique enables the protagonist to be an observer of his/her issues and the scenes surrounding him/her.

Doubling A group member acts the protagonist's ego. The member guesses the protagonist's feelings and thoughts, and expresses them aloud with emotion. This technique helps members build empathy for the protagonist.

Soliloquy The protagonist walks around the stage with saying anything he/she noticed aloud. The physical activity, i.e., walking and saying, facilitates to express ideas and emotions intuitively.

Various types of activities have been proposed for the action phase. Creating **social network diagrams** is one of the effective activities for the mirroring technique. By creating social network diagrams, participants can visualize their human relationships. The authors have chosen the activity as an useful method for self psychological therapy.
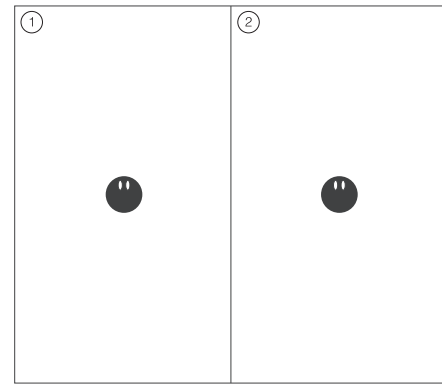

Fig. 1   An image of work sheet of the proposed tool.

Sharing phase The sharing phase provides participants a time for sharing ideas and realizing things though the action phase. Participants can exchange their experiences which are evoked from the drama that took place in the action phase [10].

Because psychodrama can help people look at themselves and their situations from an objective perspective, psychodrama sessions often can be "a sandbox" for them to explore new solutions for difficulties or challenges [11].

3.   Self Psychological Therapy Tool

In this paper, A self psychological therapy tool is proposed based on the idea of social network diagram used in actual psychodrama. By using this tool, users can visualize their human relationships as association diagrams, and they can have experiences in the same way as from the mirroring technique in the action phase. The aim of this tool is to help users to grasp their problems from objective perspectives.

The proposed tool consists of a work sheet which have two spaces for making association diagrams and stickers on which a mark of eyes is printed. Figure 1 shows an image of the work sheet. The marks indicated by a black circle with a mark of eyes stand for the user. Each sticker stands for a dominant person of the user. The users shape two association diagrams which reprenst human relationships by putting stickers around the marks of the user.

The utilization procedure is shown below:

1. Imagine a situation in which the user has a problem of human relationships

2. Create an association diagram which represents the current human relationships in the left side indicated by ①

3. Consider whether he/she wants to change the situation with looking at the created diagram

4. If he/she wants to change the situation, create another association diagram which represents ideal human relationships in the right side indicated by ②

Here, users follow the following basic rules:

- Each mark of eyes stands for mental directions of a person. It represents an attitude of the person.

- Each distance between a sticker and the mark of a user stands for the mental distance between the two persons. It represents a level of affinity with others that the user feels.
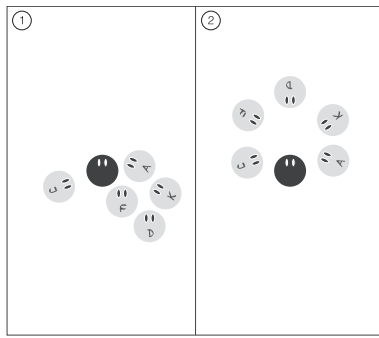
- I could make my thoughts clear easily because I can review the current situation as a diagram and see my mind as visual information.

- I feel I can do something with thinking what I should do to make the ideal situation.

- I became lighthearted slightly.

- I could think the current situation rationally.

Fig. 2   Examples of association diagrams (1).
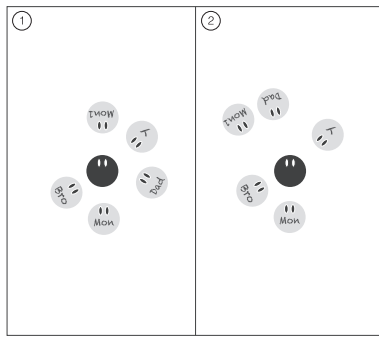
- I feel I can face the problem that I avoided.

- I thought I could do nothing for the problem, but now I feel I can do something step by step.

- I was made to realize once again that keeping distances of human relationships is difficult by making the association diagrams.

Fig. 3   Examples of association diagrams (2).

- Identify the dominant persons by putting an initials on each sticker.

Figures 2 to 5 show examples of association diagrams and comments obtained in interviews after making the diagrams. These diagrams were made by 22 year old female students of a nursing school.

The advantages of the proposed tool are: (1) The user can conduct psychological therapy by themselves any time, and (2) the user is not forced to be a subject of therapies. Occasionally, existence of others causes peer pressure, and the participants might feel forced to do the activities. With the proposed tool, such risks can be avoided.

4.   Evaluation of the Proposed Tool

To evaluate the proposed tool, an experiment has been conducted. In this experiment, volunteers were asked to use the tool and fill out subjective questionnaires about usability of the tool. Details of the experiment are shown below:

- Date and time: December 21, 2016

- Time: 17:25-17:40
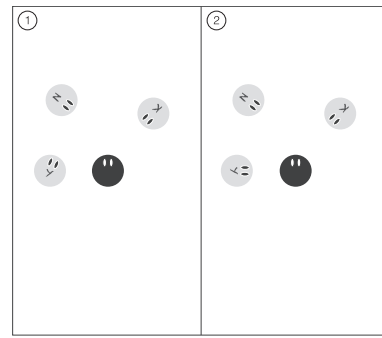
- It was making me feel better about the problem.

- I have an inclination to think the human relationship subjectively. I could grasp my human relationship objectively with the tool.

Fig. 4   Examples of association diagrams (3).
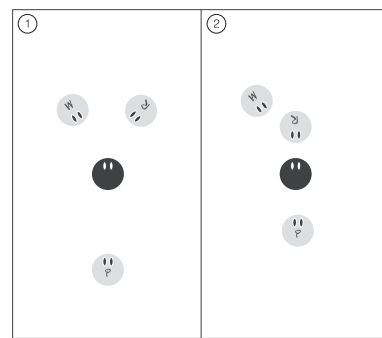
- I was distressed by relationships with old friends, P and M, because I have became intimate with new friend, R.

- I can notice that I avoided P and M unconsciously. I feel I do not know anything about P and M.

- I finally feel that I can face to the problem.

Fig. 5   Examples of association diagrams (4).

- Place: Muroran Institute of Technology (Japan)

- Volunteers: 119 Japanese students (from 19 to 21 years old)

- Evaluation method: Subjective questionnaires

Because the tool is implemented for Japanese, all informations were given in Japanese.

The following five closed questions were given for all volunteers:

Q1 Drawing the association diagrams was easy (strongly disagree/disagree/agree/strongly agree).

Q2 You could find something in the current human relationships (strongly disagree/disagree/agree/strongly agree).

Q3 You could find some hints for improving your human relationships (strongly disagree/disagree/agree/strongly agree).

Q4 This tool helps you understand your current human relationships (strongly disagree/disagree/agree/strongly agree).

Q5 What did you understand by making the association dia-

grams?

For the first four questions, the volunteers were asked to choose one option. For the last question, they were asked to select suitable ones from the options; 1. ways to solve the problem, 2. presence of your supporters, 3. presence of your important people, 4. relationships that you want to change, 5. relationships that you do not want to change, 6. you can do something for the problem, 7. you can do nothing for the problem, 8. you need help, 9. others.
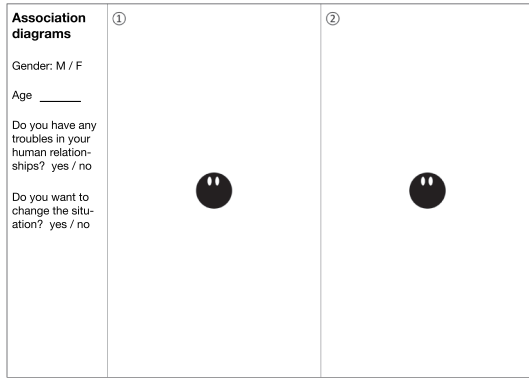

Fig. 6   An image of sheets used in the experiment.

The procedure of the experiment is shown below:

1. Each volunteer receives a sheet used in the experiment, and gets instructions. An image of the sheet is shown in Fig. 6.

2. Each volunteer fills out his/her personal data (gender, age, present or absence of a trouble in human relationships) in the left area of the sheet.

3. Each volunteer makes an association diagram which represents the current relationships in the area indicated by ①.

4. Each volunteer considers whether he/she wants to change the current relationships or not by referring the created diagram.

5. Volunteers who want to change the situation make another association diagram which represents an ideal relationships in the area indicated by ②. Volunteers who do not want to change the current relationships do not have to conduct this step.

6. Each volunteer marks an option whether he/she wanted to change the current relationships in the left side of the sheet.

7. Fill out the subjective questionnaires.

5.   Results and Discussions

In the 119 volunteers, there were 42 volunteers who had troubles with their human relationships and 28 volunteers who wanted to change their current relationships.

The graphs shown in Fig. 7 represent the results of the first four closed questions described in the previous section.

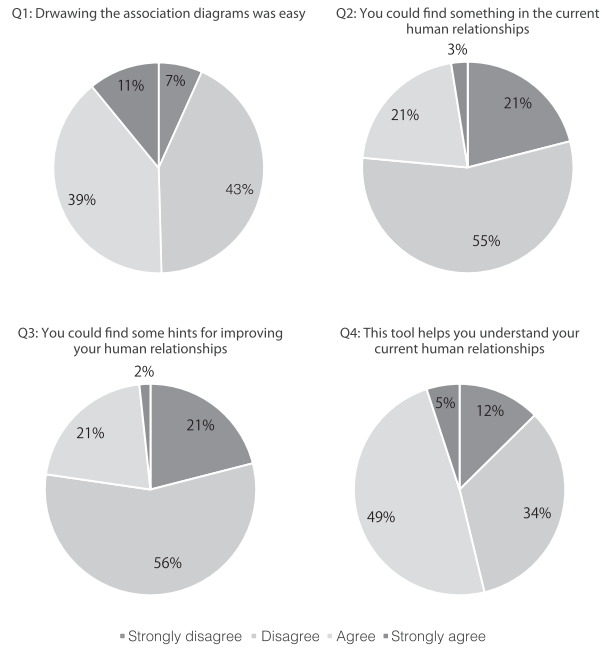For Q1, 50% of the volunteers answered positively. The us-

Fig. 7   The results of statistics analysis for the questions 1 to 4 (all 119 members).
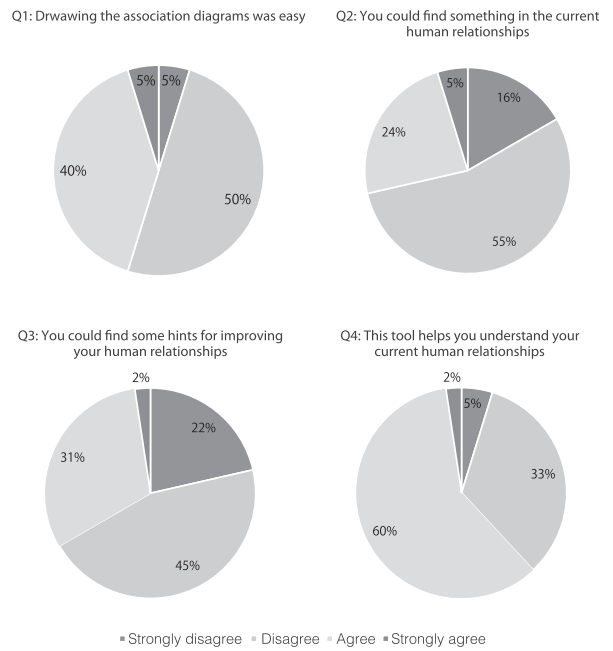

Fig. 8   The results of statistics analysis for the questions 1 to 4 (42 volunteers who have troubles in current human relationships).

ability should be improved despite the results do not reflect the usabilities of the tool directly because some volunteers felt difficulty to recall the current situations. Especially, the volunteers could not make diagrams by trial and error because stickers are employed for indicating persons. It could make the results worse.

For Q2 and Q3, more than 75% of the volunteers answered negatively. Usually, finding something in the current relationships is not so easy for us. Finding hints for improving relationships is also difficult. Therefore, such results have been obtained from the questions.

For Q4, more than half of the volunteers answered positively. Thus the proposed tool is expected for a supporting tool to recognize the users' current relationships.

The proposed tool is designed for persons who have some troubles with their human relationship. Thus, in order to investigate the usefulness of the proposed tool in realistic situations, the results from the volunteers who had troubles in the current human relationships are focused on. The results of the questions 1 to 4 from the volunteers who had troubles in current human relationships are shown in Fig. 8 as graphs and in Tables 1 to 4. In the tables, the label of "want to change" means the volunteers who wanted to change the current human relationships (20 persons), and the label of "do not want to change" means the other volunteers (22 persons).

We can see that all of the results shown in Fig. 8 are better than the results shown in Fig. 7 except the results of Q1. The results shows that the proposed tool works effectively for persons who have some troubles in their human relations.

Table 1   Results of Q1: drawing the association diagrams was easy (42 volunteers who have troubles in current human relationships).

	Positive	Negative
Want to change	45.0%	55.0%
Do not want to change	45.5%	54.5%

Table 1 shows us that more than one half of the volunteers answered negatively for Q1. The reason is estimated that many of them did not feel difficulty for the operations but for recalling about their own human relationships. In comparison with Fig. 7, Fig. 8 shows worse results. The fact supports the above assumption because the volunteers who have troubles tend to have complex human relationships, and recalling the structures was more difficult than for others.

Table 2   Results of Q2: you could find something in the current human relationships (42 volunteers who have troubles in current human relationships).

	Positive	Negative
Want to change	25.0%	75.0%
Do not want to change	45.5%	54.5%

Table 2 shows that many of the volunteers answered negatively for Q2. Persons who have a trouble must already have thought about their human relationships and it could be difficult for them to find something new in the relationships.

Table 3   Results of Q3: you could find some hints for improving your human relationships (42 volunteers who have troubles in current human relationships).

	Positive	Negative
Want to change	50.0%	50.0%
Do not want to change	18.2%	81.8%

From the graph Q3 shown in Fig. 8, we can know that finding hints for improving current relationships is not so easy even for the persons who have a trouble in their human relationships. However, Table 3 shows that a half of the volunteers who wanted to change the current relationships answered positively for the question. The results show that the tool could work effectually if the user has a solvable problem in his/her human relationships.

Table 4 shows that more than one half of the volunteers answered positively for Q4. Especially, 70% of the volunteers who wanted to change the current situation answered positively.

Table 4   Results of Q4: this tool helps you understand your current human relationships (42 volunteers who have troubles in current human relationships).

	Positive	Negative
Want to change	70.0%	30.0%
Do not want to change	54.5%	45.5%

It shows that the volunteers could understand the current relationships well by using the proposed tool.

The graphs in Fig. 9 shows the results of Q5. We can see that many volunteers selected "presence of your supporters," "presence of your important people," "relations that you want to change," and "relations that you do not want to change" as what they have understood through making the diagrams.

First, the results of the volunteers who have a trouble in their relationships are discussed. About 30% of the volunteers selected "presence of your important people," "relations that you want to change," and "relations that you do not want to change." Many of the volunteers who wanted to change the current relationships selected "relations that you want to change" and many of the volunteers who did not want to change the current relationships selected "relations that you do not want to change." These results show that the tool works to help them understand the current relationships.

Second, the results of the volunteers who do not have any troubles in their relationships are discussed. About 40% of them selected "presence of your supporters," and "presence of your important people." Awareness of existence of such people helps them improve their human relationships even if they do not face actual problems. Thus the proposed tool is effective also for the people who do not have troubles in their human relationships.

6. Conclusion

A self psychological therapy tool has been proposed. The proposed tool is designed based on the mirroring technique used in the action phase of psychodrama sessions. It aims to provide similar effects with creating social network diagrams.

To evaluate the proposed tool, an experiment has been conducted. In the experiment, volunteers used the proposed tool and answered the subjective questionnaires. The results had been analyzed and discussed.

The results show that the proposed tool could work well for the users. Especially, it provides some hints for the persons who have a trouble in their human relationships and need to improve the relationships. These results must be compared with the effects of the mirroring technique in future work.

Some weak points also have been found. The results show that the users may feel difficult to recall their human relationships when they are complex. Some mechanism which supports to recall them are expected. Another problem, namely the users cannot make diagrams in a trial and error manner, has also been found. The problem can be solved by implementing a new system based on the idea of the proposed tool on electronic devices such as tablet PC with a touch screen device.

The proposed tool has been designed as a self psychological therapy tool, and the scope is a preceding step of communications among members in the action phase. However, interactiveness is one of the important factors of psychodrama because protagonists could get mental support through interactions with
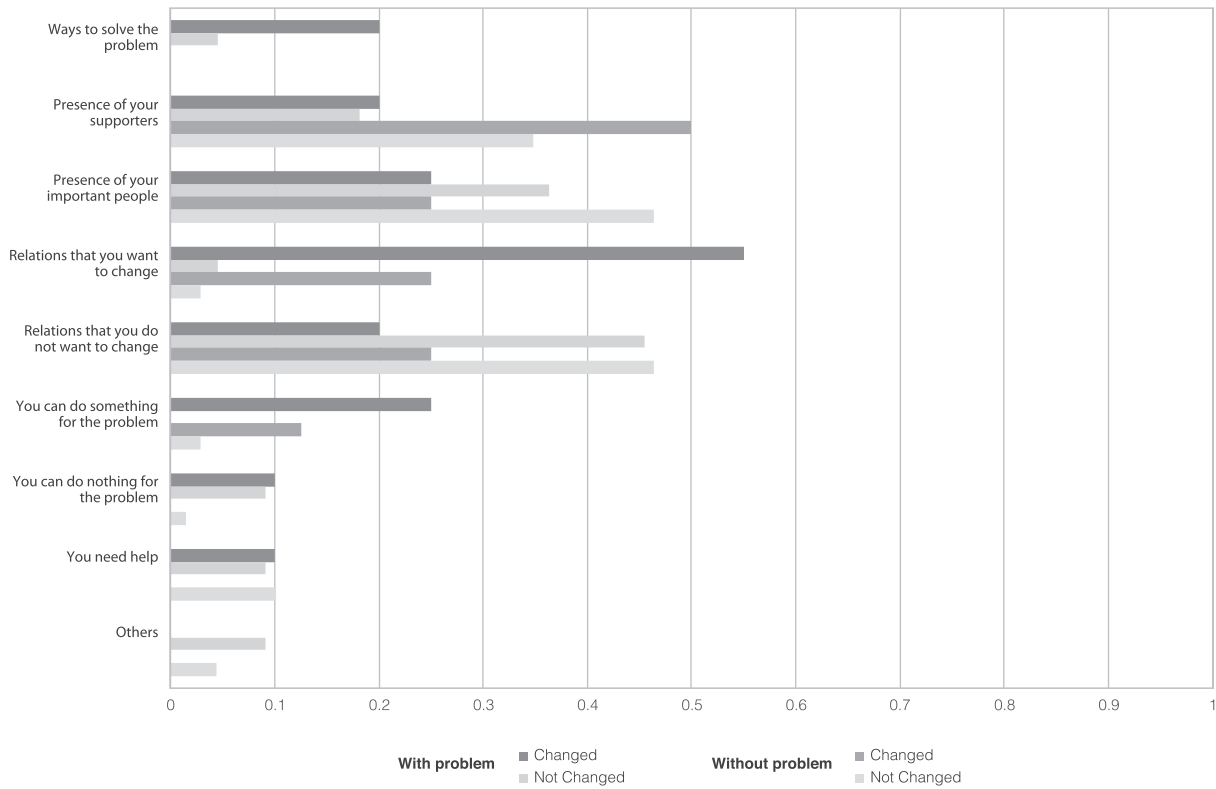
Fig. 9   The results of the question 5.

others. It is also expected to extend as a communication tool by a new system on electronic devices.

Acknowledgments

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