Effectiveness of Mindfulness Skills Training on Social Competence and Alexitimia of Children with Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder

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Extended Abstract

Aim
Anxiety disorder is one of the internalized disorders that manifests more prominently during infancy compared to other disorders. Anxiety is a negative affective state exhibited by adolescents in reaction to perceived threats. This perception may originate from an internal or external source, genuine or imagined. Every year, many countries suffer a lot of damage due to the anxiety that exists in children, such as the severe academic drop of students or their dropping out, which confirms the destructive role of anxiety in children's academic performance. Anxiety is one of the most common mental disorders in childhood, which affects 10-27% of children and adolescents. Anxiety significantly impairs a child's performance and leads to adverse outcomes including diminished academic achievement, decreased social acceptability, heightened aggression, and depression. The manifestation of anxiety disorder impairs additional psychological, emotional, and social functioning in children. Social skills are an area in which anxiety disorder hasan impact. The purpose of the current study was to examine the efficacy of mindfulness skills training in enhancing social competence and alleviating anxiety symptoms among children diagnosed with anxiety disorder.

Methodology
With experimental and control groups, a three-stage design (pre-test, post-test, and follow-up) and a two-month follow-up period, the research methodology was semi-experimental. The study's statistical population comprised Tehran-based children in the fourth and fifth grades of primary education during the academic year 2020-2021 who exhibited symptoms consistent with anxiety disorders. A purposive sampling method was employed to select 36 children (21 girls and 15 boys) who exhibited symptoms of anxiety disorder. These children were then randomly assigned to either the experimental or control groups. Ten and a half-hour of mindfulness skills training were allocated to the students in the experimental group. The present investigation employed the Children's Anxiety Scale (CAS), the Alexitimia Questionnaire (IQ), and the Social Competence Scale (SCS). The data were subjected to analysis using mixed ANOVA in the SPSS-23 software.

Findings
Children exhibiting symptoms of anxiety disorder benefit significantly from mindfulness skills training in terms of social competence ($p<0001$, Eta=0.55, F=42.39) and alexitimia ($p<0001$, Eta=0.53, F=38.16), according to the findings. This intervention successfully achieved a notable enhancement in the mean social competence scores and a reduction in alexitimia among children exhibiting symptoms of anxiety disorder. These results remained consistent throughout the follow-up phase.

Conclusion
Based on the results obtained from the present study it can be concluded that mindfulness skills training may serve as an effective approach to enhance social competence and decreace alexitimia of the Children with symptoms of anxiety disorder through acquiring awareness of emotions, awareness of the five main body senses and applying mindfulness in daily life. Therefore, by receiving training in mindfulness skills and dealing with psychological issues and paying attention to the mindfulness strategies of children with symptoms of anxiety disorder, the child successfully regulated their emotions and thoughts during familial and social engagements, prevented themselves from associating with detrimental sentiments and thoughts, and achieved a greater degree of social competence.

Keywords: Alexitimia, Anxiety Disorder, Mindfulness Skills, Social Competence.