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Examining the Efficacy of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Training on Experiential Avoidance and Impulsivity in Female Students with Difficulty in Emotional Regulation

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Extended Abstract

Aim

Most individuals navigate the teenage stage without significant issues. However, recent studies conducted over the last decade indicate a rising trend in the number of teenagers displaying signs of behavioral or emotional distress (Trent et al., 2019). Challenges in emotional regulation often manifest as a consequence of puberty onset and the associated psychological transformations during this period (Hatkevich, Penner, & Sharp, 2019). Emotional regulation difficulty is characterized by maladaptive responses to emotions (Rufino et al., 2020). Several studies suggest a correlation between emotional regulation difficulties and various disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse (Zhang et al., 2020). Research findings consistently demonstrate that individuals experiencing challenges in emotional self-regulation tend to exhibit higher levels of anxiety and depression (Ouellet et al., 2019), leading to avoidance behaviors among teenagers. Moreover, sensation-seeking and impulsivity represent additional hurdles for teenagers grappling with emotional self-regulation issues (Richmond, Tull & Gratz, 2020). Therefore, the present study aims to explore the efficacy of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in addressing experiential avoidance and impulsivity among female students confronting difficulties in emotional regulation.

Methodology

The research adopted a quasi-experimental design encompassing pretest, posttest, and control group components, alongside a three-month follow-up stage. The statistical population comprised female high school students encountering emotional regulation difficulties in Tehran during the academic year 2020-2021. Thirty-one students were purposefully sampled and randomly allocated to either experimental or control groups. The experimental group engaged in online MBSR sessions, comprising 10 sessions lasting 75 minutes each per month. The study employed three questionnaires: the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ) (Bond et al., 2011), the Barratt Impulsiveness Questionnaire (BIQ) (Barratt, Stanford, Kent, & Felthous, 1997), and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Data analysis involved Mixed ANOVA conducted using SPSS software version 23.

Findings

The results demonstrated a notable impact of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on experiential avoidance ($F=56.75$; $\eta^2=0.66$; $P<0.001$) and impulsivity ($F=55.70$; $\eta^2=0.65$; $P<0.001$) among female students experiencing emotional regulation challenges. Consequently, this intervention led to a reduction in perceived stress levels and mitigated experiential avoidance and impulsivity among the

targeted students. Notably, these effects persisted during the follow-up phase, indicating the sustainability of the intervention's benefits.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings underscore the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction as a valuable intervention for diminishing experiential avoidance and impulsivity among students grappling with emotional regulation difficulties. This approach encompasses various techniques, including fostering awareness of bodily sensations, emotions, muscle function, and present-moment consciousness. Importantly, individuals undergoing mindfulness training come to recognize their thoughts and emotions as normal phenomena, devoid of catastrophic implications. They cultivate a non-judgmental stance towards their inner experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of their feelings and emotions as they arise, thereby alleviating intense emotional reactions. Consequently, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction serves as a preventive measure against anxiety and stress by encouraging individuals to engage with their thoughts and desires consciously, thereby enabling them to focus on their thoughts and inclinations in a conscious state, providing the opportunity for individuals to become aware of their own actions or thoughts and to perceive them as a passing flow that should not be paid attention to (Asli Azad, Manshaei, Ghamarani, 2019). By enhancing awareness of actions, thoughts, emotions, and conscious behaviors, individuals can augment their understanding of emotional and cognitive processes, including emotion regulation, expression, and cognitive control. Ultimately, this heightened awareness contributes to the reduction of experiential avoidance and impulsivity among adolescents.

Keywords: Difficulty in Emotional Regulation, Experimental Avoidance, Impulsivity, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Training.

Ethical Considerations

In adherence to ethical standards in research, explicit consent was obtained from both the students and their parents prior to their participation in the intervention program. Comprehensive information regarding all stages of the intervention was provided to ensure informed consent. Additionally, participants in the control group were assured of receiving the same interventions upon completion of the research process. Confidentiality of participant information was strictly maintained.

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Conflict of Interest

In this study, no conflicts of interest have been reported by the authors.

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