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The Effectiveness of Mindfulness Training on Distress Tolerance, Resilience and Emotion Regulation in Students with Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

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Purpose: Generalized anxiety disorder can have many negative psychological consequences. As a result, the aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness training on distress tolerance, resilience and emotion regulation in students with symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder.

Methodology: This study in terms of purpose was applied and in terms of implementation method was a semi-experimental with a pretest, posttest and two-month follow-up design with a control group. The research population consisted of secondary high school female students with symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder in one district of Tehran city, which number of 30 people of them after reviewing the inclusion criteria were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly replaced in two equal groups (each group 15 people). The experimental groups received 8 sessions of 90 minutes with method of Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness training (2003) and during this time the control group did not receive training. The data were collected by short scale of generalized anxiety disorder (Spitzer et al., 2006), distress tolerance scale (Simons and Gaher, 2005), resilience scale (Connor and Davidson, 2003) and emotion regulation questionnaire (Gross and John, 2003) and were analyzed by methods of variance analysis with repeated measurements and LSD post hoc test in SPSS software.

Findings: The findings of the present study showed that mindfulness training led to significant increased the distress tolerance, resilience and emotional reappraisal and significant reduced emotional suppression in students with symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder, and the results remained in the follow-up phase ($P < 0.001$).

Conclusion: According to the results of this study, health professionals and therapists can use the method of mindfulness training along with other methods to improve health-related characteristics such as distress tolerance, resilience and emotion regulation.



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Extended Abstract

Purpose: Anxiety is a part of every human's life and it exists in moderation in all people, but if this anxiety exceeds its moderation, it causes a disorder. Generalized anxiety disorder is one of the most common psychiatric disorders, which is defined as extreme anxiety and uncontrollable mental worry about various issues. About 12% of patients who visit psychiatric clinics have generalized anxiety disorder, and this rate in women is almost twice that of men. The high prevalence, chronic course and coexistence of generalized anxiety disorder with many psychological disorders have made it one of the most important psychological disorders. One of the problems of people with generalized anxiety disorder is the reduction of distress tolerance, which is defined as the capacity to understand or the actual behavioral capacity to resist to challenging, threatening or disgusting situations. Distress tolerance is a construct in the field of affective disorder that indicates a person's ability to experience and tolerate of negative emotional states or persistence on purposeful behavior at the time of experiencing psychological distress. People with low distress tolerance do not have the ability to manage distress, consider emotions unbearable and uncontrollable, show great weakness in managing emotions, deny the existence of emotions or avoid them, and feel ashamed and confused when faced with emotions. Another problem of people with generalized anxiety disorder is the reduction of resilience, which is defined as a dynamic and active activity in the direction of self-repair and assimilation of behavior and actions in order to overcome traumatic and challenging conditions, adapt to disastrous experiences and guide life in a positive way. In fact, resilience refers to the fact that a person can improve his performance and overcome problems and challenges despite being exposed to new pressures and risk factors. Resilience includes a set of personality traits that act as a shield against facing stressful life events and reduce and moderate psychological pressure. Another problem of people with generalized anxiety disorder is the reduction of emotional regulation, which is defined as all the conscious and unconscious strategies used to maintain, increase and decrease the emotional, behavioral and cognitive components of an emotional response. Emotion regulation as a special form of emotional self-regulation refers to effective internal and external processes in reviewing, evaluating, adjusting, intensity and length of emotional reactions. People with problems in emotion regulation, in addition to defects in the cognitive processing of emotional information and emotions regulation, in faced with stressful life events, do not have the ability to regulate and reduce their negative emotions. Emotion regulation has two parts of reappraisal and suppression, which reappraisal includes reinterpreting or reevaluating an emotional response; So that the intensity of its emotional impact is moderated. Also, suppression includes the active inhibition of emotional expression behavior. While emotional reappraisal is positively associated with the having close relationships with friends, fewer depressive symptoms, and greater life satisfaction, but emotional suppression is associated with the experiencing more negative emotions, avoiding of close relationships, disturbed interpersonal interactions, and lower optimism and life satisfaction. One of the methods of improving psychological characteristics derived from the third wave of psychotherapy is the mindfulness training method, which as a form of meditation is rooted in the rituals and teachings of the Buddha religion and means paying attention in a way of specific, purposeful, in the present tense and without judgment and prejudice. Mindfulness means moment-to-moment awareness of the experience created by purposeful attention, with acceptance and without judgment based on the previous experiences, and this mindfulness is a non-judgmental, indescribable and present-based awareness is relative to experience that is within the scope of attention at a particular moment and is accepted. Mindfulness training requires metacognitive learning and new behavioral strategies to focus on attention, prevent rumination and tend to worrisome responses, and causes the expansion of new thoughts and the reduction of negative and unpleasant emotions. This educational method led to increase awareness, decentralization, allowing the appearance of unpleasant thoughts and feelings, awareness of personal values and acting accordingly, paying attention to all emotions and reacting to them in a logical and purposeful way, feeling self-compassion instead of self-blame, improving cognitive and emotional processes and strengthens attention. Generalized anxiety disorder can have many negative psychological consequences. As a result, the aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness training on distress tolerance, resilience and emotion regulation in students with symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder.

Methodology: This study in terms of purpose was applied and in terms of implementation method was a semi-experimental with a pretest, posttest and two-month follow-up design with a control group. The research population consisted of secondary high school female students with symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder in one district of Tehran city, which number of 30 people of them after reviewing the inclusion criteria were selected by purposive sampling method and randomly replaced in two equal groups (each group 15 people). The inclusion criteria were included the scoring higher than 11 on the Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams and Low short scale of generalized anxiety disorder (2006), consent of students and their parents to participate in the intervention sessions, being 15-18 years old, not suffering from other psychological disorders, not taking

psychiatric drugs and living with parents, and the exclusion criteria were included the lack of history of receiving mindfulness training, simultaneous participation in other educational and therapeutic methods, and absence of more than one session. The experimental groups received 8 sessions of 90 minutes with method of Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness training (2003) and during this time the control group did not receive training. The data were collected by short scale of generalized anxiety disorder (Spitzer et al., 2006), distress tolerance scale (Simons and Gaher, 2005), resilience scale (Connor and Davidson, 2003) and emotion regulation questionnaire (Gross and John, 2003) and were analyzed by methods of variance analysis with repeated measurements and LSD post hoc test in SPSS version 22 software.

Findings: The findings of the present study showed that mindfulness training led to significant increased the distress tolerance, resilience and emotional reappraisal and significant reduced emotional suppression in students with symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder, and the results remained in the follow-up phase ($P < 0.001$).

Conclusion: According to the results of this study, health professionals and therapists can use the method of mindfulness training along with other methods to improve health-related characteristics such as distress tolerance, resilience and emotion regulation.