

The Effect of Emotion Regulation-Based Group Therapy (ERBGT) on Alexithymia and Experiential Avoidance (EA) in Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Patients, with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of group therapy based on emotion regulation on mood swings and Experiential avoidance in substance user patient with comorbidity of borderline personality disorder. The statistical population of this study was consisted of patients with AUD and BPD in a psychiatric hospital of Shiraz city; 30 persons (male) were selected using purposive sampling method and randomly assigned in the study: One experimental and one control group (15 males each). The tools used in this study were Toronto-20 mood disorder questionnaire and Second Edition Acceptance and Practice Questionnaire to assess EA. The results showed that the scores of mood aversion and EA significantly decreased after the treatment. Therefore, it is suggested that in addition to pharmacological treatments, psychological treatment methods may also be used to increase the effectiveness of treatment on drug users.

Keywords: Alexithymia, borderline personality disorder, emotion regulation, experiential avoidance, substance abuse disorder.

Introduction

Substance use disorder (SUD) has become a major problem for youth and researches indicates a significant relationship between emotional problems and using drugs (Zimmermann, et al, 2017). In this study we investigated the effect of group-based therapy on alexithymia and experiential avoidance in SUDs patients.

Focused emotional therapy is one of the most effective intervention for substance use (Borjali, et al, 2015). Also, SUD is considered to be a common disorder among personality disorders. SUD have a high comorbidity with borderline personality disorder (BPD) at approximately 13.7% (Barral, et al, 2017). Emotion dysregulation is the main character for BPD and studies illustrates a high comorbidity with SUD which makes it a critical issue(Sloan, et al, 2017).

Alexithymia and experiential avoidance are components related to the BPD. Alexithymia is a

disability in expressing and diagnosing emotions (Taylor, et al, 2016) and researches indicate a significant correlation between alexithymia and emotion irregularity among BPD (Meaney, et al, 2016). In addition, experiential avoidance is a mental situation that individual is unable to cope with negative feelings (Brereton & McGlinchey, 2020). Researches indicate effective results with BPD patients and experiential avoidance (Cavicchioli, et al, 2020). The main purpose for this study was to study the effect of Gross intervention on SUD patients comorbid with BPD. Based on this, first hypothesis for this research was, emotional regulation-group based therapy was effective on alexithymia in SUD patients comorbid with BPDs. Second hypothesis was that emotional regulation-group based therapy was effective on experiential avoidance in SUD patients comorbid with BPDs.

Method

The research design was quasi-experimental with two experimental and control groups including pre-test and post-test. The statistical population of this study was consisted of patients with substance abuse disorder and borderline personality in a psychiatric hospital of Shiraz city; 30 males who were hospitalized, were recruited for this study. The entry criteria for this study were borderline personality disorder diagnosis with substance abuse and methadone maintenance treatment. The tools used in this study were Toronto-20 questionnaire made by (Bagby, et al, 1994). Reliability for this questionnaire was 0.81 and validity were -0.80, 0.78, -0.44 with EQ, well-being and helplessness respectively. Also, the Second Edition of Acceptance and Practice Questionnaire was used to assess Experiential avoidance (Bond, et al, 2011). The test retest reliability method for scores this tool after 3rd and 12th months were 0.81 and 0.79 respectively, Exploratory validity was conducted for this tool and the results were significant.

Finally, emotional regulation-based group therapist (Gross, 2002), which was assessed by James Gross and was designed as 2 hours sessions during 8 weeks. Data were analyzed using covariance analysis and descriptive statistics.

Results

Descriptive statistics indicate a mean age of 31.06 and 32.06 for experimental and control group respectively.

Table 1. Mean scores of alexithymia and experiential avoidance of both groups in different stages

Variable	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	pre		post		pre		Post	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Alexithymi	77.47	5.30	74.4	6.66	69.4	1.56	52.93	1.10
Experientia avoidance	24.13	3.37	23.87	3.92	27.13	1.56	35.27	1.10

Levin's Test was conducted and covariance pre assumption and there was not a significant difference between the components. The condition for normality of distribution was confirmed ($P>0.05$). findings indicate that Alexithymia and experiential avoidance scores were significantly decreased, which can be related to the effect of the group-based intervention.

Table 2. the effectiveness experimental avoidance therapy

Variables	DF	Mean Square	F	P value	Partial ETA square
Alexithymia	1	1334.60	81.12	0.001	0.75
Experiential avoidanc	1	721.50	20.39	0.001	0.43

Conclusion

Results indicated the effect of emotion regulation group-base therapy on alexithymia and experiential avoidance, which can be used in the hospital context on SUD patients comorbid with BPD. Results are consistent with previous findings (Lee, et al, 2019), indicating emotion regulation interventions reduce negative feelings and improve mood and play an important role in personality and mood disorders. Also, this kind of therapy reduce emotional avoidance in BPDs reducing the level of craving and substance use (Cavicchioli, et al, 2020).

Limitations are mentioned as participants were at a mental hospital, in addition sampling was not accidental which can bias the generalizing process. We suggest that other researchers conduct more group-base treatments on other contexts related with this disorder with larger

samples. Besides, it is recommended to compare group-base intervention with other types of psychological interventions.

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Conflict of interests

There was no conflict of interest for this study.

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