



The Effectiveness of Emotion Focused Therapy on Alexithymia and Psycho-Somatic Complaints in Patients of COVID-19 under Home Treatment

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of emotion focused therapy (EFT) on alexithymia and psychosomatic complaints in patients of COVID-19 under home treatment in Tehran. The method was semi –experimental, in the form of pretest/posttest/follow-up with the control group. By the snowball sampling method, 30 participants who met the inclusion criteria were selected. Research instruments were Takata & Sakata’s psychosomatic questionnaire and Toronto Alexithymia Scale, which were administered in three stages for two groups. After pretest, the experimental group underwent Emotion focused therapy weekly in 10 sessions of 90 minutes. Data were analyzed using repeated measures analysis variance. The results showed, EFT was effective on decreasing psychosomatic complaints, difficult in recognizing feelings, difficult description of emotions and concrete thought and this effect remained stable at follow- up. This treatment method can be used to reduce psychosomatic complaints and alexithymia.

Keywords: EFT, psychosomatic, alexithymia, COVID-19

Introduction

Psychological factors effect on the beginning and intensity of psychosomatic disorder. The epidemic of COVID-19 decreased the sharing of feelings with others and increased social isolation. Also, COVID-19 increased stress, negative emotions and alexithymia. COVID-19 threatened physical and mental health of individuals (Tang, et al., 2020). As, Alexithymia is related to physical complaints (Kocsel, 2022), it is also, related to the psychological reactions of individual to corona virus (Hori & Kim, 2019). According to the role of emotions on psychosomatic disorders, emotion focused therapy(EFT) can effect on treatment of these disorders. The interventions of EFT focuses on the early emotions of adoptive and maladaptive and secondary reaction emotions (Asano, 2019). Emotion focused therapy have three strategies: To correct the affective meaning of maladaptive emotions, to access blocked adaptive emotions and to provide a corrective experience. The purpose of EFT is to help individuals to clarify their feeling and needs. Also, they accept their affects. Emotional experience role essentially plays in adjustment to diseases (Koechlin et al., 2018). To become aware and overcome blocked emotions, emotions must be processed (Nunes, 2021). Expression or writing blocked emotions improves nervous system function and physical health (Goldman & Greenberg, 2015). Therefore, the research hypothesis was: Emotion Focused Therapy decreases alexithymia and psychosomatic disorders in patients of COVID-19 under home treatment.

Method

The research method was a semi-experimental, in the form of pretest/posttest and one month later follow-up with a control group. The statistical population consisted of patients of COVID-19 under home treatment in early 6 months of 2021 in Tehran. Through snowball sampling method, 30 participants who met the inclusion criteria were selected and randomly assigned to two groups of EFT or control ($n_1=n_2=15$). Emotion focused therapy was held in 10 sessions of 90 minutes based on the model of Goldman and Greenberg (2015) weekly for the experimental group. The inclusion criteria were, infection to COVID-19 in early 6 months of 2021, under home treatment, acquisition the score >65 in Psychosomatic Questionnaire, informed consent and non-receiving psychotherapy before participating in the research. The data were collected by administering questionnaires in three stages from two groups. Exclusion criteria were, having a physical disease and two absence sessions. Data were analyzed using mixed repeated measures and Bonferoni tests.

Tools

Takata and Sakata's Psychosomatic Questionnaire: This questionnaire has 30 items. The range of score is from 0 to 90. Cronbach's alpha was 0.93 (Takata and Sakata, 2004). Hajloo (2012) reported concurrent validity 0.68 and retest stability 0.83 and internal consistency 0.85 in Iran. In present research, Cronbach's alpha was 0.86.

Toronto Alexithymia Scale: This Scale developed by Bagby et al. (1994). The scales were difficult in recognizing feelings, difficult in description of emotions and concrete thought. Cronbach's alpha for Alexithymia and its subscales were 0.89, 0.83, 0.78 and 0.81, respectively (Bagby et al, 1994). Cronbach's alpha of alexithymia was 0.85 and Cronbach's alpha for above subscales, were 0.82, 0.75, 0.72, respectively (Ghorbani et al, 2002). In the present research, Cronbach's alpha of alexithymia and its subscales were 0.88, 0.83, 0.84 and 0.87, respectively.

The package of emotion focused therapy: This package developed based on theory of Goldman and Greenberg (2015) for the treatment of psychosomatic disorders. The comments of 5 psychologists and counselors confirmed content validity.

Results

Table 1: The results of mixed repeated measures

Variables	The source of changes	SS	DF	MS	F	Eta
Psychosomatic complaints	time (within group)	573.20	2, 27	286.60	64.21	0.41
	group (between group)	742.16	1, 28	742.16	158.31	0.53
	time* group	342.73	2, 27	171.36	98.02	0.46
Difficult in recognizing feelings	time (within group)	349.34	2, 27	87.33	56.31	0.37
	group (between group)	398.14	1, 28	398.14	141.01	0.49
	time* group	368.17	2, 27	184.08	79.16	0.45
Difficult description of emotions	time (within group)	358.06	2, 27	179.03	46.12	0.34
	group (between group)	401.11	1, 28	401.11	118.28	0.45
	time* group	319.03	2, 27	159.51	67.81	0.39
Concrete thought	time (within group)	339.22	2, 27	169.61	41.98	0.32
	group (between group)	391.03	1, 28	391.03	105.73	0.42
	time* group	372.10	2, 27	186.05	82.43	0.40

The results of table1 showed there were significant differences between the two groups in psychosomatic complaints, in difficult in recognizing, in difficult description and in concrete thought ($p < 0.01$). Also, Emotion focused therapy decreased psychosomatic complaints, difficult in recognizing feelings, difficult description of emotions and concrete thought of participants in experimental group in pretest and the effect of interventions was stable in follow- up stage, ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion and Conclusion

Emotion focused therapy decreases psychosomatic disorders and alexithymia in the patients of COVID-19 under home treatment. Emotion focused therapy helps patients with COVID-19 to change their emotional reactions to stress and adapt more efficiently to negative emotions related to covid-19. In emotions processing, the patients overcome their blocked and repressed emotions by the awareness of blocked emotions and their roots. These changes lead to decrease alexithymia. When individuals learn that manage their emotions reactions, they can experience affects and shorter periods in therapy of psychosomatic disorders. Psychological traits of patients with COVID-19 under EFT, effect on responding to the therapy. These characteristics probably effect on the results of the research, also, it limits the generalizability of the results. Therefore, it is suggested that, the characteristics of cognitive, affective and behavioral of participants should be controlled get into consideration in future studies. Furthermore, this program can be used to reduce emotional dyslexia and psycho-physical complaints.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors did not declare a conflict of interest.



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