



Research paper

Effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy on Levels of Self-Criticism and Suicidal Ideations in Adolescents with Self-Harm

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Abstract

The study aimed the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on levels of self-criticism and suicidal ideations in adolescents with self-harm. The research method was semi-experimental with a pre-test, post-test design and a control group. The statistical population of the research included male adolescents with age range of 13-18 years in Ardabil city in 2022. The research sample consisted of 30 teenagers who were selected by the purposeful sampling method and randomly replaced in 2 experimental and control (15 adolescents in each) groups. The self-criticism level scale and suicidal ideation questionnaire were used to collect data. Data analysis was done with the multivariate analysis of covariance test. The results showed ACT reduced the levels of self-criticism and suicidal ideations in adolescents with self-mutilation. Therefore, counselors and therapists can use this treatment to reduce the levels of self-criticism and suicidal ideations of teenagers.

Keywords: ACT, suicidal ideations, self-mutilation, self-criticism, teenagers.

Introduction

Adolescence is a period of development that may cause certain problems. When adolescents cannot successfully overcome developmental crises and challenges, they will experience psychological distress (Beatriz, et al., 2020). These conditions can lead to self-harming behaviors: self-mutilation (self-injury without suicidal intent). Self-mutilation is an intentional act and is defined as direct damage to one's own skin tissues, usually without suicidal intent (Saab, et al., 2022). Self-mutilation behavior is a compensatory measure to relieve emotions such as anger, anxiety or emotional distress and self-criticism. Self-criticism has two aspects: Comparative and internal. Comparative self-criticism is defined as a negative view and opinion about oneself in front of others. Internal self-criticism is also defined as a negative view and opinion of oneself against one's own personal standards (Thompson, et al., 2004). Suicidal ideations are any thoughts of self-destruction. Considering the prevalence of self-mutilation among teenagers, one of the interventions that can reduce the role of the mentioned variables is acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Li, et al. (2021) pointed out the effectiveness of ACT on reducing psychological distress. Also, Ghadam, et al., (2020) indicated in their research that ACT had a significant effect on reducing self-suicide thoughts. Therefore, the

main hypothesis of the present study was that acceptance and commitment therapy has an effect on the levels of self-criticism and suicidal ideations in adolescents with self-harm.

Method

The method of this research was a semi-experimental type that was carried out with a pre-test and post-test design with a control group. The statistical population of the research included boys between the ages of 13-18 in Ardabil city in the second half of 1400, who had referred to counseling and psychotherapy centers, emergency rooms of Ardabil hospitals and referral offices of the police force for general examinations to obtain a driver's license. After attending the mentioned centers and identifying adolescents with self-mutilation, 85 people were selected with the cooperation of the officials of the centers and hospital files, and after applying the entry and exit criteria, 30 people were selected by purposive sampling. The selected sample was randomly replaced in 2 groups (acceptance and commitment therapy 15 people and control group 15 people). For both groups, a pre-test of implementation and intervention method was held for the training group and the control group remained without any intervention. After the completion of the training sessions and the passing of 8 weeks, the post-test was implemented and the collected data were analyzed by the SPSS20 software using the Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) method.

Tools

Self-Criticism Levels Scale of Thompson and Zaroff (2004): This 22 items scale with 7-degree Likert type response, had two subscales of comparative and internalized self-criticism. Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.84 and 0.88, respectively (Yamaguchil, et al., 2013). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire scale was 0.77.

Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire of Aaron Beck (1961): This scale has 19 items. Its reliability coefficient among evaluators is estimated as 0.89 and 0.83 respectively (Baeken, et al., 2019; Quoted by Maleki 2018). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for total score was 0.71.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Protocol from Hayes (1999): Acceptance and Commitment Therapy training in this study was based on the Hayes (1999) educational/therapeutic package, which includes eight 90-minute sessions held weekly.

Results

The lowest frequency in the control group had 3 suicide attempts (zero percent), and in the experimental group, they had a history of suicide attempts once and twice (66.6 percent). As can be seen in the table, there is a significant difference between the two experimental and control groups in the levels of self-criticism (comparative and internal) and suicidal ideations. Eta square shows that the difference between the two groups for comparative self-criticism ($F=15.919$, $P<0.001$), internal self-criticism ($F=21.79$, $P<0.01$) and suicidal ideations ($F=4.79$, $P<0.38$). This means that the acceptance and commitment therapy has been effective in reducing the levels of self-criticism and suicidal ideations in adolescents with self-mutilation.

Table1. The results of the multivariate covariance analysis of the levels of self-criticism and suicidal ideations

Source	Variable	SS	df	MS	F	P	Eta	OP
Model	Comparative self-criticism	1386.81	4	346.70	40.15	0.000	0.865	1.000
	Internal self-criticism	869.10	4	217.27	6.68	0.001	0.516	0.978
	Suicidal ideations	7.04	4	1.76	2.82	0.047	0.311	0.682
Group	Comparative self-criticism	137.47	1	137.47	15.92	0.001	0.389	0.969
	Internal self-criticism	709.32	1	709.32	21.80	0.000	0.466	0.994
	Suicidal ideations	2.96	1	2.99	4.79	0.038	0.161	0.558
Error	Comparative self-criticism	215.89	25	8.64				
	Internal self-criticism	813.60	25	32.54				
	Suicidal ideations	15.63	25	0.62				

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) on the levels of self-criticism and suicidal ideations in adolescent’s boys with self-mutilation. The obtained results showed that there was a significant difference between the two experimental and control groups in self-criticism (comparative and internal). In this regard, it is important to provide ACT in order to help clients to fully engage with a meaningful and value-based life. The provision of this treatment allowed teenagers to increase their abilities and reduce their attention from comparing themselves with others, which was the basis of self-criticism. Another part of the obtained results showed that there is a significant difference in suicidal ideations between the two experimental and control groups. This means that ACT has been effective in reducing suicidal ideations. In general, the results of this study showed the effectiveness of ACT on the levels of self-criticism and suicidal ideations in adolescents with self-harm. One of the limitations of the current research was its unisex nature and lack of generalization of the findings to other cultures. Therefore, according to the effect of this treatment method, Psychologists and counselors can focus on reducing the problems of adolescents with self-harm by emphasizing the variables of self-criticism and suicidal ideations.

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Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest for the authors of the article.



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