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Orginal Article

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Emotion-focused Therapy on Emotional Balance, Psychological Cohesion, and Self-efficacy in Fibromyalgia Patients

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Abstract

Fibromyalgia is a complex and chronic condition marked by persistent musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, cognitive dysfunction, and emotional disturbances. Patients often experience difficulties in emotion regulation, which intensify pain perception and reduce quality of life. Research has shown that psychotherapeutic interventions, particularly Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT), may help patients process emotional experiences that contribute to chronic stress. This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of EFT on emotional balance, sense of coherence, and self-efficacy in individuals diagnosed with fibromyalgia. This quasi-experimental research employed a pretest-posttest control group design. Thirty female patients diagnosed with fibromyalgia based on clinical criteria were selected through purposive sampling from rheumatology clinics and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (n = 15 each). The experimental group underwent eight 90-minute sessions of EFT over four weeks. Data were collected using standardized questionnaires measuring emotional balance, Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence Scale, and the General Self-Efficacy Scale. Covariance analysis (ANCOVA) was used to analyze post-intervention differences between the groups. The findings demonstrated that participants in the EFT group reported statistically significant increases in emotional balance ($p < 0.01$), sense of coherence ($p < 0.01$), and self-efficacy ($p < 0.05$) compared to the control group. Participants described improved emotional awareness and coping, as well as greater perceived control over stressors. These results indicate that EFT can foster adaptive emotional regulation and promote psychological resilience in chronic pain patients. The observed improvements align with previous studies suggesting that emotional awareness and processing reduce autonomic arousal and physiological tension in fibromyalgia. Enhanced self-efficacy and coherence likely mediate the positive impact of EFT by strengthening patients' internal sense of order and

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manageability. EFT, therefore, can be viewed as a complementary intervention alongside medical treatment. Emotion-Focused Therapy significantly improves emotional and cognitive dimensions of well-being among fibromyalgia patients. It can serve as a valuable psychotherapeutic approach for individuals struggling with chronic pain and emotion regulation difficulties.

Keywords: Emotion-Focused Therapy, Emotional Balance, Sense of Coherence, Self-Efficacy, Fibromyalgia

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Chronic pain is a major global health concern with profound personal, social, and economic consequences. Among widespread chronic pain syndromes, fibromyalgia is one of the most challenging conditions for both patients and clinicians. It is characterized by diffuse musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, sleep disturbance, and cognitive and emotional difficulties, which together significantly impair daily functioning and quality of life. Because symptoms are multifactorial and persistent, many patients experience frustration, hopelessness, and problems in emotion regulation. These difficulties can heighten pain perception, increase psychological distress, and weaken adherence to medical recommendations. In recent years, psychological interventions have increasingly been recommended as part of a multidisciplinary treatment approach. Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) is particularly relevant because it targets maladaptive emotional processes, helps patients access and regulate underlying primary emotions, and promotes the development of more flexible and coherent self-experiences. Given the central role of emotional dysregulation, low sense of coherence and reduced self-efficacy in fibromyalgia, examining the impact of EFT on these variables can provide valuable information for designing comprehensive biopsychosocial interventions for this population.

Method

This quasi-experimental study employed a pretest–posttest design with a control group. The statistical population consisted of patients diagnosed with fibromyalgia who were referred to the Isfahan Medical Sciences Center in 2021. Based on inclusion criteria—having a confirmed clinical diagnosis, being 25–45 years old, possessing basic literacy, and expressing willingness to participate—24 patients were selected using available sampling and then

randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (12 per group). The experimental group attended eight 90-minute group sessions of Emotion-Focused Therapy delivered weekly by a trained therapist, whereas the control group received no psychological intervention during the study period and continued routine medical care. Data were collected using three standardized instruments: Diener's Emotional Balance (SPANE) Scale, Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence Questionnaire, and Sherer's General Self-Efficacy Scale. All participants completed the questionnaires at baseline and again after the intervention. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) in SPSS-26 to control for pretest scores and to assess between-group differences in emotional balance, components of sense of coherence, and general self-efficacy.

Results

The main hypothesis of the study was that Emotion-Focused Therapy would enhance emotional balance, psychological coherence, and self-efficacy among fibromyalgia patients. MANCOVA results supported this hypothesis. After controlling for pretest scores, the EFT group showed significantly higher levels of positive emotions and lower negative emotions than the control group, indicating a more adaptive emotional balance ($p < 0.01$). In addition, EFT produced significant gains in overall sense of coherence, particularly in the dimensions of comprehensibility and manageability ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that patients perceived life events as more structured, predictable, and controllable. Furthermore, general self-efficacy scores increased significantly in the experimental group compared with the control group ($p < 0.05$), reflecting greater confidence in handling daily challenges and illness-related stressors. Effect sizes indicated that a substantial proportion of variance in the posttest scores of the dependent variables was attributable to participation in the EFT program rather than to chance or baseline differences between the groups.

Discussion

The present study examined the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) on emotional balance, sense of coherence, and self-efficacy among patients with fibromyalgia in Isfahan. Findings indicated that EFT significantly increased positive affect, psychological coherence, and self-efficacy, demonstrating its meaningful impact on key psychological components of well-being. These results align with previous research showing that emotion-centered interventions improve mental health and adaptive functioning in individuals with chronic conditions.

EFT enhances emotional awareness, facilitates the processing of avoided

emotions, and helps transform maladaptive emotional responses—such as fear, shame, and loneliness—into more adaptive and constructive feelings. Through empathic engagement and experiential techniques, therapists guide patients to understand their emotional needs, regulate their reactions, and create new meanings from stressful experiences. This process contributes to improved emotional balance and strengthens psychological coherence by enabling individuals to perceive stressors as manageable rather than threatening.

Additionally, EFT promotes self-efficacy by helping patients recognize their capabilities in coping with emotional challenges and chronic symptoms. Greater emotional regulation improves problem-solving, resilience, and overall adjustment to illness.

Despite limitations such as convenience sampling and geographic restriction, the findings suggest that integrating EFT-based emotional training into health-care and educational programs may enhance psychological well-being among individuals with fibromyalgia and other chronic illnesses.

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