Psychological Achievements
Fall & Winter, 2025, *32* (2)
Serial Number 34, 367-396
Rcceived: 07 Feb 2024
Accepted: 10 Mar 2024
DOI: 10.22055/psy.2024.46090.3216
(Psychol Achiev)
Orginal Article

Investigating the Effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on Social physique Anxiety, Impulsive Behaviors, and Emotional Self-Regulation of Obese People

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on body-social anxiety, impulsive behaviors, and emotional self-regulation in individuals with obesity. The statistical population of the study included all obese women aged 20 to 30 living in Tehran in 2022. The research method was a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest and follow-up (one-month) with a control group whereby participants were randomly assigned. Two experimental groups and one control group were compared across three stages: pretest, posttest, and one-month follow-up. To measure the study variables, the Body-Social Anxiety Scale (SPA) by Hart et al. (1989), the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11) by Barratt et al. (2004), and the Emotion Self-Regulation Scale by Hofmann and Kashdan (2010) were employed. Initially, 30 participants were selected through convenience sampling and randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups (15 participants in each group). Then, the experimental group received Acceptance and Commitment Therapy over 8 weekly sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. Both groups were appraised at three time points. The data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with SPSS-22 software. The findings indicated that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy was effective on lowering body-social anxiety and impulsive behaviors, and on improving emotional self-regulation among obese women ($p = 0.05$). This effectiveness remained stable at follow-up. Thus, it can be concluded that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy can be considered an effective intervention for reducing body-social anxiety and impulsive behaviors, as well as ameliorating

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emotional self-regulation in individuals with obesity.

Keywords: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Social physique anxiety, impulsive behaviors, and emotional self-regulation.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The present study was conducted to inspect the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy on Social physique anxiety, impulsive behaviors, and emotional self-regulation of obese people. The statistical population of the research consisted of all obese women living in Tehran in 2022. Recent studies suggest that obesity has reached epidemic proportions in recent years and its prevalence is still growing. Obesity is often associated with many physical diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, premature birth, and arthritis, as well as social and economic harms such as issues in interpersonal communication, reduced productivity, and hope. Indeed, it comes with life and health care costs. Since weight gain causes physical, social, and economic problems, especially in today's age, when there is a different view of obesity and body, obese individuals experience physical and social anxiety in social situations. Physical-social anxiety is a special form of social anxiety defined as the fear of negative evaluation or rejection by others because of one's physical appearance. A person suffering from physical-social anxiety does not feel comfortable with his body and body in social situations and is worried that others will judge his appearance or have a negative evaluation about his appearance. On the other hand, in those with obesity, owing to their physical condition and fear of social evaluations, this condition, in addition to being anxiety-provoking, can lower the patient's tolerance threshold, which is one of the important and fundamental factors in increased impulsivity.

Method

The research method is quasi-experimental with pre-test-post-test design and follow-up (one month) with control group and random assignment of subjects. In order to measure the research variables, social physique anxiety scale (SPA) by Hart et al. (1989), the impulsivity questionnaire (BIS-11) by Barrett et al. (2004) and the emotional self-

regulation scale by Hoffman and Kashdan (2010) were utilized. Initially, 30 people were selected via convenience sampling method and were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (15 people each). Next, the experimental group received Acceptance and Commitment Therapy during 8 therapy sessions, one session of 90 minutes per week. Both groups were measured in three stages: pre-test, post-test and one-month follow-up. The data were analyzed through multivariate variance analysis using SPSS-22 software.

Results

The findings indicated that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy was effective on social physique anxiety, impulsive behaviors, and emotional self-regulation in obese women (p=0/.5). This effectiveness was sustained in the follow-up period. Also, as suggested by the results, the treatment based on acceptance and commitment led to reduction of impulsive behaviors and improvement of emotional self-regulation in those with obesity. Individuals who struggle with problems with emotional self-regulation, delayed gratification, and poor impulse control are more likely to eat high-fat foods when they are available. Indeed, overeating appears to temporarily mitigate negative emotions. The reduction of impulsive behaviors and, hence, the improvement of emotional self-regulation skills following treatment based on acceptance and commitment can be attributed to the three components of acceptance, attention to clients' values, and mindfulness in therapy based on acceptance and commitment. Acceptance as an adaptive emotion regulation strategy does not mean altering the experienced emotions.

Discussion

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy can be applied and improve emotional self-regulation in obese people. Based on the results of statistical analysis, the research hypothesis is confirmed. The findings suggested that the treatment based on acceptance and commitment has been effective on reducing the physical-social anxiety of people with obesity.

It is recommended to establish multidisciplinary treatment teams for women with obesity to provide comprehensive, evidence-based care. Interventions should be integrated into a holistic medical program using various behavioral and emotional strategies rather than a single approach. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) can be employed as a first-line or adjunct treatment alongside medication and dietary interventions

owing to its long-term effectiveness.

Author Contributions: Author 1 was responsible for leading the overall research process. Author 2 was responsible for research plan design, data collection and analysis and all authors discussed the results, reviewed, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments: The authors thank all dear teachers who have helped us in this research.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare there is no conflict of interest in this article.

Funding: This research is not sponsored by any institution and all costs have been borne by the authors