

The Effectiveness of Schema Therapy on Flexibility and Perfectionism of Physical Appearance in Body Deformity Disorder: A Pilot Study

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Received: 8 June 2021

Accepted: 31 July 2021

Published: 18 April 2022

How to cite this article:

Ghanbari M, Tizdast T, Khalatbari J, Rahmani M.A . The Effectiveness of Schema Therapy on Flexibility and Perfectionism of Physical Appearance in Body Deformity Disorder: A Pilot Study. *Salāmat-i ijtīmāi (Community Health)*. 2022; 9(2): 37-48. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22037/ch.v9i2.31444>.

Abstract

Background and Objective: Body deformity disorder (BDD) is one of the disorders of the obsessive-compulsive spectrum and includes intense and disturbing mental occupation with minor or visual defects in appearance. The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of schema therapy on flexibility and perfectionism of physical appearance in body dysmorphic disorder.

Materials and Methods: In a quasi-experimental study of pre-test-post-test-follow-up design with a control group, 30 female students with BDD studying at the Islamic Azad University of Tehran University of Medical Sciences from November to January 2017 were selected via convenience sampling method. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The experimental group (n=15) underwent schematic therapy for eight weekly 90-minute sessions. The flexibility questionnaire and the Physical Appearance Perfectionism Scale (PAPS) were collected in three baseline stages after quarterly intervention and follow-up. Data were entered in SPSS statistical software version 21 and analyzed using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance.

Results: In the experimental group, the mean (SD) of cognitive flexibility increased from 26.3 (7.4) in the pre-test to 43.5 (10.2) in the post-test ($P<0.001$) and 45.8 (11.7) in the follow-up phase, ($P<0.001$). Also, in the experimental group, the mean (SD) perfectionism score decreased from 74.5 (5.4) in the pre-test to 34.3 (6.1) in the post-test ($P<0.001$) and 49.5 (5.5) in the follow-up phase, ($P<0.001$). In the control group, the scores of both variables in the pre-test, post-test and follow-up were not different.

Conclusion: The study showed that schema therapy improved flexibility and decreased physical appearance perfectionism in students with body dysmorphic disorder.

Keywords: Flexibility, Body Deformity Disorder, Schema Therapy, Physical Appearance Perfectionism.

Introduction

Physical deformity disorder (BDD) is one of the disorders of the obsessive-compulsive spectrum and includes intense and disturbing mental occupation with minor or visual defects in appearance (1). One of the areas in which many people tend to perfectionism is

their physical appearance (2). Schematic therapy is one of the effective treatments for people with body dysmorphic disorder (3). Eating Disorder Schema Theory emphasizes the role of core beliefs and schemas in the development and persistence of eating disorders (4). According to this model,

schemas are developed in childhood and are used as templates for processing subsequent experiences. Reflecting inconsistent schemas often creates unconditional beliefs about oneself (5). In schema therapy, the main focus is on establishing a relationship between eating behaviors and schemas; to the extent that patients can become more aware of the origins and coping behaviors associated with the eating disorder pattern in themselves (6). Therefore, due to the growing body dysmorphic disorder, especially among adolescents and young people and the vulnerability of this period of development, as well as the need for psychological therapies to reduce this disorder and the lack of research in the country that directly affects the effectiveness. The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of schema therapy on flexibility and perfectionism of physical appearance in body dysmorphic disorder.

Materials and methods

In a quasi-experimental study of pre-test-post-test-follow-up design with a control group, 30 female students with BDD studying at the Islamic Azad University of Tehran University of Medical Sciences from November to January 2017 were selected via convenience sampling method. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The experimental group ($n=15$) underwent schematic therapy for eight weekly 90-minute sessions. The flexibility questionnaire (7) and the Physical Appearance Perfectionism Scale (PAPS) (8) were collected in three baseline stages after quarterly intervention and follow-up. Data were entered in SPSS statistical software version 21 and analyzed using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance.

Results

In the experimental group, the mean (SD) of cognitive flexibility increased from 26.3 (7.4) in the pre-test to 43.5 (10.2) in the post-test ($P<0.001$) and 45.8 (11.7) in the follow-up phase, ($P<0.001$). Also, in the experimental group, the mean (SD) perfectionism score decreased from 74.5 (5.4) in the pre-test to 34.3 (6.1) in the post-test ($P<0.001$) and 49.5 (5.5) in the follow-up phase, ($P<0.001$). In the control group, the scores of both variables in

the pre-test, post-test and follow-up were not different.

Discussion

The present study showed that schema therapy led to a reduction in physical perfectionism in body deformity disorder. This finding is consistent with the results of another study on the effectiveness of group schema therapy on body deformity symptoms and early maladaptation schemas in female students with overweight (9). Most of the dysfunctional beliefs observed in the experimental group were cultural beliefs such as physical deformity, inattention and rejection, and the like, whose emotional memories indicated that needs such as security, love, understanding, empathy, and self-expression were not met. These unmet needs lead to the formation of maladaptive schemas in childhood, and the activation of these schemas in the present life, still causes these needs not to be met. Schemas are considered structural and organizational components of cognition through which human beings can determine, interpret, classify and evaluate their experience. Schemas are consistent with beliefs such as lack, worthlessness, inadequacy, unfriendliness, and self-loathing, which are factors that cause the body to become deformed. Schema therapy led to increased cognitive flexibility in body dysmorphic disorder. The present study results are in line with the results of the study of neoplasms and individuals based on the effectiveness of schema therapy on body image, self-concept, and maladaptive schemas in patients with deformity (10). This therapeutic approach helps patients assess the correctness of their schemas. Individuals view schema as an external reality and can fight against it using objective evidence (11). Cognitive techniques help clients distance themselves from schemas. They also help to see the schema as an annoying creature rather than an indisputable fact about themselves. Therefore, reducing the activity of maladaptive schemas can play an essential role in reducing individuals' perfection of physical appearance. Experimental techniques also change the bitter images of childhood, mental images, physical feelings and emotional feelings, and

help to remember the bitter memories of the past and do not have a destructive effect on the person. Because the validation of experimental techniques is based on emotions, these techniques seem to help a person become aware of and accept their emotions and, by reorganizing emotions, examine themselves and learn new ones, regulate interpersonal emotion, and calm down. Provide the basis for improving schemas.

Conclusion

The study showed that schema therapy improved flexibility and decreased physical appearance perfectionism in students with body dysmorphic disorder.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank all participants of the study.

Conflict of Interest

None of the authors has any conflict of interest to disclose.

Ethical publication statement

We confirm that we have read the Journal's position on issues involved in ethical publication and affirm that this report is consistent with those guidelines.

Ethical code: IR.IAU.TON.REC.1399.07 .

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