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## Effectiveness of cognitive therapy group training based on mindfulness on reducing dysfunctional attitudes and automatic thoughts of women suffering from postpartum depression

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### Abstract

The present study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy group training in reducing dysfunctional attitudes and automatic thoughts in women suffering from postpartum depression. The current research method was quasi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The statistical population of this research is all women referred to Royin Tan Arash Hospital in the period from April to June 2021. Those who obtained a higher score (according to the clinical cut-off point) in this test were selected as a research sample in the size of 20 women and were replaced in two experimental and control groups where the number of each group was ten women. After the ineffective attitude and automatic thoughts questionnaires were administered to both the control and experimental groups, the experimental group members participated in mindfulness training sessions for eight sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. None of the control group members participated in the mindfulness training sessions. The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed through analysis of covariance using Spss-23 software. The research results showed that cognitive therapy training based on mindfulness reduced ineffective attitudes ( $F=30.30$ ,  $P=0.001$ ) and automatic thoughts ( $F=34.21$ ,  $P=0.001$ ) in the experimental group. In general, the findings of this research indicate that cognitive therapy based on mindfulness can be considered an effective intervention in reducing negative automatic thoughts and ineffective attitudes of women suffering from postpartum depression.

**Keywords:** *cognitive therapy, mindfulness, dysfunctional attitudes, automatic thoughts.*

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## Introduction

Depression is one of the common disorders and special problems during pregnancy and after. During pregnancy and childbirth, psychological changes occur in women, which make them very sensitive to psychological stimuli and sometimes cause problems in them (Verreault, Da Costa, Marchand, Ireland, Dritsa, and Khalifé, 2014).

Postpartum depression in women leads to the formation of assumptions or schemas about themselves and the world, and these assumptions or schemas are used in the organization of perception in controlling and evaluating behavior. The ability to predict individual experiences and give meaning to them is beneficial and in fact necessary for normal functioning, but some assumptions are inflexible, extreme and resistant to change and are therefore ineffective (Azergun and Kajbaf, 2010). When dysfunctional assumptions are activated, they trigger negative self-inflicted thoughts—we call these thoughts "negative" in this sense because they are associated with unpleasant emotions. In this sense, we call them automatic because they come to people's minds automatically and do not arise from any conscious reasoning process (Beck, 2008). These thoughts may be interpretations of current experiences or predictions about future events and recollections of things that have happened in the past. These thoughts in turn create other symptoms of depression. Such as behavioral symptoms (decrease in activity levels, withdrawal), motivational symptoms (apathy, lethargy), emotional symptoms (anxiety, guilt), cognitive symptoms (concentration problems, powerlessness in decision-making) and physical symptoms (anorexia and insomnia).

Mindfulness means paying special attention, purposefully in the present time and free from prejudice and judgment (Segal et al., 2002). In mindfulness, a person becomes aware of the mental pattern at every moment and learns the skills to identify more useful patterns. In mindfulness we learn to move the mind from one modality to another (Williams et al., 2013). Mindfulness requires special behavioral, cognitive and metacognitive strategies to focus the attention process. In turn, it leads to the prevention of the downward spiral of negative mood-negative thought- tendency to worrisome responses and the growth and new perspective and the emergence of pleasant thoughts and emotions (Ritvo, 2013). Cognitive therapy based on mindfulness is built on the stress reduction model based on the Kabat-Zinn mindfulness method and cognitive therapy principles have been added to it. This type of cognitive therapy includes various meditations, stretching yoga, preliminary education about depression, body review exercises, and several cognitive therapy exercises that show the connection between mood, thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of cognitive therapy based on mindfulness on reducing ineffective attitudes and negative thoughts in women suffering from postpartum depression.

## Method

The present research method was quasi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The statistical population of the current study included women with postpartum depression who were referred to the consultation center of Rooyin Tan Arash Hospital in Tehran in 2021. As a research sample, 20 women were

selected and assigned randomly to two groups of 10 people, experimental and control. After that, the interventional mindfulness method was implemented for the experiment group for eight sessions of 60 minutes, and no intervention was done for the control group.

## Materials

### 1. Dysfunctional Attitudes Assessment Scale (DAS):

This scale has two parallel forms A and B, each of which has 40 questions. which measures the underlying assumptions governing "depression". This scale is a self-assessment questionnaire that includes 40 items and each item has 7 ratings from "completely disagree" to "completely agree" that measures the degree of incompatible attitudes. Items that are scored as one of the two ends of the ranks (i.e. scores 6 and 7) indicate a completely inflexible attitude and can be discussed in detail.

### 2. Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ):

This questionnaire has four aspects of these automatic thoughts. "Personal Discord and Desire to Change" (PMDC) measures "Negative Self-Conception and Expectations" (NSNE), "Low Self-Esteem" (LSE), and "Despair."

## Findings

The average of the ineffective attitude and automatic thoughts of the experimental group had a significant decrease after the interventions in the post-test phase, while it did not show a significant decrease in the control group. The results of multivariate covariance analysis showed that after removing the pre-test effect, there is a significant difference between the two experimental and control groups in at least one of the compared variables ( $P = 0.001$  and Hotelling's  $T = 18.44$ ).

The results of univariate analysis of covariance showed that after removing the

effect of the pre-test, there was a significant difference between the two groups in the amount of ineffective attitude ( $F = 30.30$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ) and automatic thoughts ( $F = 34.21$ ,  $18 = 34.21$ ). This shows that the non-equality of the mean scores of dysfunctional attitude and automatic thoughts of the groups in the post-test is not accidental. The difference created is statistically significant. In other words, it seems that the intervention of mindfulness in the current sample group has significantly reduced ineffective attitudes and automatic thoughts; Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the negative hypothesis of the present study was confirmed.

## Discussion

In the present study, the researchers tried to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy group training on reducing dysfunctional attitudes and automatic thoughts in women suffering from postpartum depression. Therefore, the search of the researchers shows that the eight sessions of cognitive therapy based on mindfulness have been able to significantly reduce the amount of ineffective and automatic negative thoughts of the participants in the therapy period.

One of the advantages of the method used in this research is its "group holding". MBCT group treatment strategy is more cost-effective than individual treatments; Both in terms of material costs and in terms of effectiveness per unit of time. Considering the limitation of specialized psychological treatments in our society, this method of treatment can be a problem solver. Another advantage of the method used in this research is its applicability in the recovery period. Since the MBCT method, unlike cognitive behavioral therapy, does not emphasize the content change and specific meanings of

negative automatic thoughts, its training can be used in the recovery phase along with the use of daily life experiences. According to the positive results of this research, the direction of the next work can be towards clinical samples with the diagnosis of depression and anxiety.

### **Ethics**

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

### **Acknowledgement**

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### **Conflict of Interest**

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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