

Original Article

The effectiveness of mindfulness on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, defectiveness/shame and stubborn criteria in betrayed women

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Abstract

In recent years, infidelity and its effects on the family system have become the focus of psychological research more than ever. The current research was conducted with the aim of investigating the effectiveness of mindfulness on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in the betrayed women in Karaj in 2021. The method of this study was quasi-experimental with pre-test and post-test design. The total number of women was 122 who had referred to Mehr Aria Psychology Clinic in Karaj. The pre-test, post-test, and follow-up were conducted on all participants, who were randomly placed in two groups: the experimental and control groups, each consisting of 30 people. We provided eight mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) sessions for only the experimental group. Then, MANCOVA was conducted and the results showed that there was a significant difference between the mean of Early Maladaptive Schemas of Abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in pre-test and post-test ($p < 0.05$). Also, there was a significant difference between the mean of Early Maladaptive Schemas of Abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in follow-up and pre-test ($p < 0.05$).

Keywords

Mindfulness
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Stubborn criteria
mistrust and defectiveness
Betrayed women

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Introduction

One of the main reasons for divorce and family disintegration is marital infidelity, which takes place in the form of extramarital relationships (Kiel, 2015). Donovan and Imers (2012) Sumer define treason as follows: 1) The couples have violated the framework of their relationship because of their relationship with the other person, 2) And this violation of the framework of the relationship and crossing the boundaries of the two-person relationship has caused competition and jealousy. This violation can encompass emotional, sexual communication and spending attention, time and financial expenses to another person other than the spouse. In fact, infidelity is the passing of a person from the borders of a two-person marital relationship and the establishment of sexual and emotional intimacy with another person outside the relationship (Thimm, 2010). In another definition, infidelity means that one of the couples believes that he has a loyal life with his wife, while his wife has secretly had sex with a third person or an intimate emotional relationship. In another definition,

infidelity means that one of the couples believes that he has a loyal life with his wife, while his wife secretly had sex with a third person or intimate emotional relationship and broke the treaty (Kiel & Kalomiris, 2015). Considering that infidelity is one of the main reasons for conflict, collapse and divorce of couples, but unfortunately there is no accurate, credible information about which person, woman or man is most involved in infidelity. Some statistics have shown that 70-33% of men and 70-26% of married women attempt to cheat during their marriage (Potek, 2012). Or another study found that almost 11% of women and 21% of men committed infidelity during their duet life (Stephenson, 2013). However, although several studies have mentioned the statistics of infidelity in Iran, no exact statistics have yet been published about the prevalence of infidelity among Iranian couples (Haseliet al., 2019). While the numerous increase in treason indicates the need for further investigations and measures in this regard, in our country, Iran has been confirmed based on the few studies that have been conducted (Naderi & Momeni 2014). Dukan, Morgan and Dukan (2007), who studied

Internet infidelity of couples, showed that women consider their spouse's infidelity as harassment more than men. It seems that nothing awakens as much as infidelity, worthlessness and distrust in the existence of a person who has been exposed to extramarital relationships. Research in this area shows that women who have been betrayed experience feelings such as low self-esteem, depression, strict criteria, hesitation, anger, helplessness and abandonment (Ozer & Akgun, 2016; Staats, 2018). According to some studies, the reason for the couple's infidelity can be the experience of intimacy, acceptedness and sex, something they no longer find in their common life (Batabyal 2018; Apostolou, 2019). Also, research shows that infidelity can originate from different reasons such as sexual function (Haseli, 2019), boring life (Khorramabadi et al., 2019). And one of the main components can be the initial incompatible schema (Koolae et al., 2014). Young's maladaptive schemas (1999) are life traps which are effective in most issues of human life especially emotional relations, which can be also very damaging (Altschuler et al., 2012).

These early maladaptive schemas are created during childhood and under the effect of inheritance (genetic factors that are inherited by father, mother and ancestors), family education methods, culture as well as society in which the child has grown (Marici, 2016). Early maladaptive schemas are classified into five categories: Disconnection and Rejection, Impaired Autonomy and Performance, Impaired Limits, Other Directedness, Overvigilance/Inhibition (Gong & Chan, 2018). Activation of early maladaptive schemas can lead to emotional distress, inappropriate interpersonal interactions and maladaptive coping mechanisms (Lorzangeneh & Esazadegan, 2022). These defective and maladaptive schemas formed from childhood can become destructive, inefficient and self-destructive patterns that last into adulthood and restart in critical and stressful situations, creating and repeating an experience involving thoughts, feelings, memories, and schema compulsions (Lev, 2018). Yang (1999) believes that schemas come in three modes: 1) How to respond to the child's emotional needs, 2) Mood, personality and experiences of the child, and 3) child genetics (Yang, translated by Sahami and Hamidpour 2005).

Schema therapy approach based on mindfulness intervention is one of the new and applied relationship interventions in the areas of family and psychological injuries. Mindfulness means special and purposeful attention in the present moment, without prejudice and judgment (Kabat-Zinn, quoted by Segal et al., 2004). In mindfulness, people at any given moment become aware of their two mental ways: doing and being and they learn to move the mind in a different way requiring training of special behavioural, cognitive and metacognitive strategies to centralize the attention process (Du et al., 2015). Since mindfulness based cognitive therapy considers both physical and mental dimensions, is highly effective in treating clinical disorders and physical diseases (Gehart, 2012). Also, mindfulness techniques and exercises help a person to avoid negative emotions

and based their attention and awareness on their daily activities (Schäfer et al., 2017).

Many researches have indicated the effectiveness of mindfulness on schemas and mood changes (Khalili, 2021) investigated the effectiveness of cognitive therapy on the mindfulness of defectiveness/shame, mind rumination and social isolation of perfectionist women. They concluded that mindfulness based cognitive therapy adjusted the defectiveness/shame schema, reduced mind rumination and social isolation of experimental group in the post-test. Also mindfulness-based therapy focuses on the attention process, which in turn leads to the prevention of factors that cause negative moods, negative thinking, and the tendency to worry. It also causes the growth and formation of a new perspective such as increasing pleasant thoughts and feelings (Shokri, 2021). Conducting necessary researches in order to investigate and provide solutions and prevent such problems can certainly be important. Therefore, in this article, considering the issues raised, it was found that mindfulness-based therapy that simultaneously pays attention to both the body and the mind can help betrayed women in critical circumstances to react more rationally when their maladaptive schemas are activated. However, although many existing and studied studies overlap with the research hypothesis of this article, it was found that none of them have comprehensively and specifically examined the research variables in previous research, consequently, considering the importance of schema and treatment strategies, the present study has sought to answer these questions. Is the mindfulness approach effective on the early maladaptive schemas, abandonment and mistrust, defectiveness and stubborn criteria of betrayed women?

Method

Participants

The method of this study is quasi-experimental which was performed with pre-test and follow-up with control group. The population of the research was all women aged 20 to 40 who were betrayed and referred to counselling centres in Karaj. Among them were 40 people who were willing to cooperate with the researcher were selected. Then these 40 people were randomly assigned to two groups (experimental and control groups). In the next step, the experimental group received mindfulness therapy during 8 sessions of 90 minutes and the control group did not receive any special treatment during this period. After the end of treatment sessions, Yang's maladaptive schema questionnaire was administered among both groups. Then, after 32 days to evaluate the effect of persistence of treatment, Young's maladaptive schema questionnaire was administered to both groups as follow (follow-up period). Then, repeated measures analysis was used by SPSS software to analyse the research hypotheses.

Instrument

Young's maladaptive schema questionnaire:

This questionnaire is consisted of 75 items to test early maladaptive schemas, which evaluates 15 maladaptive schemas (emotional deprivation, abandonment, mistrust, social isolation, disturbing social, vulnerability to the disease, entangled, obedience, sacrifice, dependence/incompetence, stubborn criteria, merit and emotional inhibition). The subjects identify the amount of correctness and incorrectness of each item about oneself according to the six-point scale beginning from 1. The internal conformity of the questionnaire was obtained from 0.83 to 0.96 through Cronbach Alpha for the score of the entire questionnaire and using control/self-discipline coefficient in nonclinical population, it was 0.50 to 0.82 (Abbasi & Khadamlou, 2018). In the current study, 20 questions related to the early maladaptive schemas, abandonment, mistrust and defectiveness and stubborn criteria have been used and the reliability coefficients of these four subscales were 0.82, 0.79, 0.84 and 0.79, respectively.

Procedure

In the implementation phase, first, women between the ages of 20 and 40 who had referred to Mehr Aryan Psychology Clinic in Karaj during the past six months (May 5th to November 6th, 2020) due to marital

infidelity of their spouses. It was explained that after completing the research period for the control group, the same services given to the experimental group will be provided free of charge, which finally 48 people definitely announced to participate in the research and Young's initial maladaptive schema questionnaire was administered as a pre-test between them. Then, these 48 individuals were randomly assigned to two groups of 24 and then one group was considered as experimental group and one group was considered as control group and the experimental group received mindfulness-based therapy during 8 sessions of 90 minutes and the control group did not receive any training or treatment during this period (It should be noted that 4 members of the experimental group withdrew from the treatment process and therefore the final sample for each group is 20 people). After completing the training course, the mentioned questionnaire was administered to both groups again (post-test). In order to measure the persistence of the effect of treatment after 32 days, the research questionnaire was administered again among each round of the group and after the completion of the research process, according to the researcher's commitment to the control group for free treatment of the mentioned period, the study was performed in 8 sessions for the control group.

The intervention therapy was prepared based on the Mindfulness Protocol of Bayer version (2006) in Table 1 summarizing 8 sessions of mindfulness-based psychotherapy performed on the experimental group.

Table 1. Summary of the mindfulness based therapeutic sessions` contents

Number of session	Aims of the session	Contents of the session	Expected behaviour change	Homework practice
1	Identifying the members and the determining aims	Doing mindfulness exercise- Physical investigation exercise	Noticing every moment	Doing respiration three times a day
2	Focusing more on the body and controlling daily events more	Physical investigation meditation- though and emotions` exercise- recording pleasant events	Facing obstacles	Recording daily reports regarding pleasant experiences
3	Respiration and tension exercise and tension exercise	Walking with the presence of mind providing a list of unpleasant events	The presence of mind on respiration	Identify and recording unpleasant experiences- repeating phase 1
4	Learning respiration	Sitting meditation- three minute respiration space	Staying in the time	Doing sitting meditation
5	Acceptance and allowing to be present	Sitting meditation- emphasizing on thought, emotions and physical senses` concentration	Reacting to the emotions and thoughts	Sitting meditation and repeating phase 1
6	One`s noticing his own respiration and body	Practicing tempers, thoughts, embedment views- identifying serious signs	The effect of respiration on the body	Repeating phase 5
7	Taking care of possible oneself in the best form	Recognizing the relationship between activity and temper- providing daily list of emotions and thoughts- identifying serious signs and the way to face them	To treat and accept the temper	Repeating phase 6- and approach toward preventing being serious
8	Regularly exercising mindfulness and protecting balance in life	Exercising body investigation- reviewing entire program-sitting meditation	Mindfulness and preventing seriousness	Repeating phase 7

Participants were aware of the research process and allowed to leave the sessions whenever they wished. The researcher was committed to preserving the anonymity of the participants. Research results were provided to participants upon request. Participants in the control and experimental groups did not participate in any course of treatment and psychological intervention during the intervention simultaneously. A positive psychotherapy workshop was provided to control group members after the completion of the research process. The conditions for entering the research were: The betrayed women referred to Aria Mehr psychotherapy clinic in Karaj. Participants were menstrual women

between 20 and 40 years old. The clients were willing to cooperate with the researcher and give written consent. Physical and mental ability of the subjects was considered to participate in the training courses. During the two-month research period, the testers were not treated for any other treatment. The conditions for getting out of research were: Absenteeism of participants over two sessions in psychotherapy process. Unwillingness of the participants to continue receiving psychotherapy.

Results

Table 2. Descriptive Pre-test/post-test mean and standard deviation of Research variables among groups under study

		Pretest		Post-test		Follow-up	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
abandonment	Control	16	4	14.95	4.20	15.25	4.01
	experiment	15.05	4.21	11.40	4.25	12	4.35
stubborn criteria	Control	12.90	4.31	12.55	4.21	12.60	4.16
	experiment	13.65	4.04	11.25	3.99	11.65	3.81
mistrust	Control	15.90	3.26	14.60	2.68	14.90	2.63
	experiment	16.15	3.01	12.10	2.63	12.85	2.50
defectiveness	Control	13.20	4.07	12.60	3.95	12.85	3.98
	experiment	13.10	3.82	9.85	3.47	10.45	3.66

Data obtained from Table 2 showed that the average score and standard deviation on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in the betrayed women in pre-test, post-test and follow-up stages in experimental and control groups. According to the results, the average score of schemas in the two groups in the pre-test was almost the same and in the experimental group the average score of the schemas in the post-test was higher than the post-test and there is a significant difference between the average score of the studied schemas in the control and experimental groups and there is no significant

difference in the follow-up period compared to the post-test period.

In order to perform the analysis of variance with repeated measurement of assumptions related to this statistical method, it is necessary. In addition, basic assumptions of normality such as skewness coefficient, elongation coefficient, Colmo graph Smirnov test, Machelli spherical test about homogeneity of variance matrix - quaris and Levine test have been observed to investigate the same variance error about dependent variables.

Table 3. Multivariate Tests

	Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power	
abandonment	time	Wilks' Lambda	.073	236.27	2	37	.000	.927	1.000
	time * group	Wilks' Lambda	.199	74.37	2	37	.000	.801	1.000
stubborn criteria	time	Wilks' Lambda	.611	11.757	2	37	.000	.389	.991
	time * group	Wilks' Lambda	.744	6.370	2	37	.004	.256	.876
mistrust	time	Wilks' Lambda	.432	24.313	2	37	.000	.568	1.000

In Table 3, the results of analysis of variance are presented with repeated measurements. As can be seen, multivariate test results of Wilkes lambda index have been reported for each of the intragroup and intergroup effects. The results of Table 3 show that 1) the effect of group on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in the betrayed women was significant ($P < 0.05$). In other words, there is a significant difference between the average score early maladaptive schemas of

abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in pre-test, post-test and follow-up. The effect of interaction between groups and measurement time early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness was significant ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, it can be said that the early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness times have a significant difference according to the levels of variables.

Table 4. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
abandonment	Intercept	23885.40	1	23885.40	461.34	.000	.924	1.000
	group	220.20	1	220.20	4.25	.037	.232	.483
	Error	1967.38	38	51.77				
stubborn criteria	Intercept	18550.53	1	18550.53	386.75	.000	.911	1.000
	group	175.50	1	175.50	4.11	.041	.224	.467
	Error	1622.63	38	42.70				
mistrust	Intercept	24940.83	1	24940.83	1250.00	.000	.970	1.000
	group	91.63	1	91.63	4.57	.023	.245	.503
	Error	768.20	38	20.02				
defectiveness	Intercept	17104.00	1	17104.00	418.12	.000	.913	1.000
	group	191.87	1	191.87	4.69	.021	.253	.594
	Error	1554.45	38	40.90				

The results of Table 4 show that there is a significant difference between the average score and standard deviation on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in the experimental and control groups in the post-test ($P < 0.05$).

This indicates the effectiveness of mindfulness on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, strict criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in betrayed women. Based on ITA coefficient, it can be said that the effect of mindfulness on abandonment schema was 0.232, strict criteria was 0.224, mistrust was 0.245 and defectiveness was 0.253.

Table 5. Tests of Within-Subjects Effects

	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power	
abandonment	time	Greenhouse-Geisser	124.467	1.872	66.49	277.13	.000	.87	1.000
	time * group	Greenhouse-Geisser	40.467	1.872	21.61	90.102	.000	.70	1.000
	Error	Greenhouse-Geisser	17.067	71.12	.240				
Stubborn criteria	time	Greenhouse-Geisser	43.517	1.128	38.57	18.841	.000	.33	.993
	time * group	Greenhouse-Geisser	24.050	1.128	21.31	10.413	.002	.21	.908
	Error	Greenhouse-Geisser	87.767	42.87	2.047				
mistrust	time	Greenhouse-Geisser	160.717	1.203	133.64	45.205	.000	.54	1.000
	time * group	Greenhouse-Geisser	43.517	1.203	36.18	12.240	.001	.24	.956
	Error	Greenhouse-Geisser	135.100	45.69	2.95				
defectiveness	time	Greenhouse-Geisser	81.817	1.879	43.54	160.25	.000	.80	1.000
	time * group	Greenhouse-Geisser	41.450	1.879	22.05	81.191	.000	.68	1.000
	Error	Greenhouse-Geisser	19.400	71.40	.272				

The results of Table 5 show that 1) the effect of time on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness is significant ($P < 0.05$). 2) The effect of interaction of time and groups on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness is

significant ($P < 0.05$). In other words, the difference between the average score of early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in pre-test, post-test and follow-up times varies according to the variable levels of groups (experimental and control groups).

Table 6. Pairwise Comparisons

	Time I	Time J	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
abandonment	pretest	Post-test	2.350	.107	.000	2.081	2.619
		Follow-up	1.900	.117	.000	1.608	2.192
	Post-test	Follow-up	-.450	.092	.072	-.682	.218
stubborn criteria	pretest	Post-test	1.375	.320	.000	.574	2.176
		Follow-up	1.150	.238	.000	.554	1.746
	Post-test	Follow-up	-.225	.120	.203	-.525	.075
mistrust	pretest	Post-test	2.675	.383	.000	1.715	3.635
		Follow-up	2.150	.312	.000	1.368	2.932
	Post-test	Follow-up	-.525	.149	.053	-.899	.151
defectiveness	pretest	Post-test	1.925	.122	.000	1.620	2.230
		Follow-up	1.500	.118	.000	1.205	1.795
	Post-test	Follow-up	-.425	.098	.074	-.670	.180

According to Table 6, according to the results of Toki's follow-up test, there was a significant difference between the average score of early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in pre-test with post-test ($P < 0.05$). Also, there was a significant difference between the average score of early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in pre-test with follow-up period ($P < 0.05$). However, there was no significant difference between the average score of early maladaptive schemas, strict criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in post-test with follow-up period ($P > 0.05$). This indicates the persistence of the effect of treatment after the treatment period.

Discussion

The present study was conducted with the effectiveness of mindfulness in the face early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness in betrayed women. As the findings of this study showed, mindfulness therapy affects the face of adjustment of early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, mistrust and defectiveness and shame of betrayed women in Karaj city. The results of this study are in line with the results of [Abdi et al., \(2022\)](#), [Khalili \(2021\)](#), [Mafi and Hosni \(2017\)](#), [Nasim \(2019\)](#), [Faustino et al., \(2020\)](#), [Manicavasgar et al., \(2011\)](#), [Kabat Zayn, \(2003\)](#), [Gehart, \(2012\)](#), [Germer et al., \(2005\)](#). In explaining the results, it can be said that early maladaptive schemas are particularly associated with high neuroticism, extroversion and low agreement. Therefore, one can cite the belief of [Calvete's idea \(2013\)](#) and say that neurotic mood or negative affectability is a factor of overall vulnerability or vulnerable mood. This can lead to the formation early maladaptive schemas, especially behavioural mistrust and abandonment. Mindfulness training teaches people how to pay attention to neutral goals by strategies to satisfy emotional needs and to direct information processing resources toward neutral goals and like breathing or instantaneous sensation, prepare the conditions for improving schemas. Therefore, re-applying attention to this method prevents the increase or continuity of feelings of shame and makes defective processing cycles less access available. From this point of view, the chances of expansion or continuation of the schema of shame decrease. On the other hand, since during mindfulness training, attention is drawn from uninvited thoughts to optional focus, the individual becomes able to avoid secondary processing of thoughts, emotions and body senses that are provoked during the schemas and the schemas of behavioural mistrust and abandonment are adjusted. Also, the purpose of mindfulness techniques is to work on physical, emotional, memories and mental images. Clients struggle with maladaptive schemas with the help of mindfulness techniques at the emotional level and express their shame and guilt over childhood events using mental imagery. In explaining this finding, it can be stated that early maladaptive schemas, because they

arise in early childhood, can affect one's behaviours, thinking and actions throughout one's life. In explaining the results of the third variable of this research, the primary incompatible schema is stubborn criteria. Participants in mindfulness therapy are encouraged to Mindfulness therapy states that you accept what is beyond your control and commit to an action that enriches your life. This helps the person to create a rich, complete and meaningful life. In this treatment each action is compared and analysed with its function in the mind. This approach includes both acceptance strategies and behavioural commitment to change. According to the fact that inhibiting unwanted thoughts increases the frequency of these thoughts, mindfulness therapy reduces avoidance and strict criteria by encouraging acceptance and reduction of verbal language and direct reference to the consequences of excessive avoidance. Thus, it can be argued that thoughts and feelings that were reinforced by avoidance inhibition, and strict criteria will be less pronounced once they are accepted.

Conclusion

In general, it can be said that MBCT can be considered appropriate intervention to reduce on early maladaptive schemas of abandonment, stubborn criteria, defectiveness/ shame. The findings of this research increase the theoretical knowledge about infidelity as a serious and threatening social damage for the family in today's conditions. The results of this research at the scientific level have confirmed the important role of mindfulness intervention on the incompatible schemas of women who have seen betrayal.

According to the results of this study, counselling centres should reduce this damage among couples by developing mindfulness-based programs based on modulating schemas and establishing training courses for couples both before and after marriage. However, we acknowledge that our study had several limitations, including small sample size, not providing any treatment to the control group during the study. Furthermore, participants of the study were recruited from one of the Iranian cities, which was not representative of cultural differences within Iran. Conducting similar research on men could be also beneficial for comparison. Finally, we suggest future investigations of mindfulness's effectiveness on remaining essential variables, the early maladaptive schema such as dedication, verification, and failure schema, etc.

Disclosure Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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