

MINDFULNESS IN PATIENTS WITH BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

*Ripan Sippy

**Dr Preeti Dixit

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Corresponding Author: Ripan Sippy; doi:10.46360/cosmos.ahe.520222016

Abstract

Background: People with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) often experience intense and rapidly shifting emotions, have difficulty regulating their emotions, and struggle with impulsivity. This disorder can significantly impact their daily functioning and relationships. Mindfulness seems to encompass incompatible mental phenomena. However, there is a dearth of Indian literature on the same. This study was taken up to examine the mindfulness in BPD population.

Material and Methods: Present study is a cross-sectional study in which hundred patients with BPD and hundred normals were selected by purposive sampling. Assessment was done using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). The statistical analysis was carried out using the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) Windows 16.0 software package. The analysis of the obtained data was done using various descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results: Significant differences were seen in mindfulness scores between both the groups. The normal group scored significantly high on Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale in comparison with patients with BPD group.

Conclusion: Our study suggests an association among low mindfulness scores and BPD or vice versa. Present findings are generating and passing out relevant knowledge, which would be helpful and beneficial in developing new strategies to help BPD population via improving the mindfulness. Present findings support the use of Mindfulness based interventions in the treatment of BPD.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Borderline Personality Disorder.

Introduction

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a mental health disorder characterized by a pattern of unstable relationships, self-image, and emotions. People with BPD often experience intense and rapidly shifting emotions, have difficulty regulating their emotions, and struggle with impulsivity (Garland & Miller, 2020). This disorder can significantly impact their daily functioning and relationships. Here are some common features and symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder-Intense and Unstable Relationships: Individuals with BPD may have a history of unstable and tumultuous relationships (Kulacaoglu & Kose, 2018). They may go from idealizing someone to devaluing them quickly, leading to conflicts and frequent changes in their social circle.

Distorted Self-Image: People with BPD often have a poor sense of self and may have difficulty establishing a stable and positive self-identity (Beeney, Hallquist, Ellison, & Levy, 2016). They may feel empty, unsure of who they are, and have a tendency to adopt the traits and values of those around them.

Impulsivity: Impulsive behaviors, such as reckless

driving, substance abuse, binge eating, or self-harm, are common in individuals with BPD (Selby, Bulik, Thornton, et al., 2010). These actions often occur in response to emotional distress.

Mood Instability: Frequent and intense mood swings are a hallmark of BPD. Individuals may experience episodes of anger, anxiety, or depression that can last for just a few hours to several days. **Fear of Abandonment:** People with BPD often have an intense fear of being abandoned or rejected (Palihawadana, Broadbear & Rao, 2019). This fear can lead to clinginess or desperate efforts to avoid real or perceived abandonment.

Self-Harm and Suicidal Behavior: Some individuals with BPD engage in self-harming behaviors like cutting or burning themselves, and they may have recurrent thoughts of suicide or engage in suicidal actions (Paris, 2019).

Chronic Feelings of Emptiness: A pervasive sense of emptiness or boredom is common among those with BPD (Masland, Shah, & Choi-Kain, 2020). They may struggle to find a sense of purpose or fulfillment in life.

*Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India.

**Supervisor & Professor, Department of Psychology, Kalinga University, Naya Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India.

Dissociation: In times of extreme stress, some individuals with BPD may experience episodes of dissociation, during which they feel disconnected from their thoughts, feelings, or surroundings (Zanarini, & Jager-Hyman, 2009).

It's important to note that Borderline Personality Disorder can vary in severity from person to person, and not all individuals with BPD will exhibit all of these symptoms. The exact cause of BPD is not well understood, but a combination of genetic, environmental, and neurobiological factors is believed to contribute to its development. Research has shown that mindfulness-based interventions can be effective in reducing symptoms of BPD and improving overall well-being (Schmidt Gómez, Soler Ribaudi, Carmona Farrés, et al., 2021).

Concept of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a mental practice and a state of awareness characterized by paying purposeful and non-judgmental attention to the present moment. It involves observing your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment without attempting to change or judge them (Purser, 2015). The concept of mindfulness is rooted in ancient Eastern philosophies, particularly Buddhism, but it has gained widespread popularity and application in modern psychology and wellness practices (Nehra, Sharma, Kumar, & Nehra, 2013). Key concepts and principles of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) include: Present-Moment Awareness: Mindfulness encourages individuals to focus their attention on the here and now, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. It involves fully engaging with whatever is happening in the present moment. Non-Judgment: A crucial aspect of mindfulness is approaching experiences with an attitude of non-judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Instead of labeling thoughts or emotions as good or bad, right or wrong, mindfulness invites individuals to simply observe these experiences without evaluating them. Acceptance: Mindfulness encourages acceptance of the present moment, including one's thoughts and emotions, even if they are uncomfortable or distressing. This does not mean resignation but rather acknowledging reality as it is. Awareness of Breath: One of the most common mindfulness practices involves paying attention to the breath. Observing the breath can serve as an anchor to the present moment, helping to refocus attention when it wanders. Benefits of practicing mindfulness regularly may include reduced stress, improved emotional regulation, enhanced self-awareness, increased focus and concentration, better management of chronic pain, and greater overall well-being. Researcher found that mindfulness-based DBT skills training reduced

BPD symptoms by increasing decentering ability, which in turn reduced emotion dysregulation (Schmidt Gómez, Soler Ribaudi, Carmona Farrés, et al., 2021).

To understand this phenomenon, the present study has been taken up to find out the association between mindfulness and BPD.

Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of 200 male participants who were selected at random from North India. Out of these 100 were patients with a diagnosis of BPD and the remaining 100 were healthy controls. BPD cases were no more than 55 years of age. The study group was matched to the control group by age, sex, and place of living.

Tools

1. Case history Performa: This was developed to obtain information on demographic, clinical, personal and family details.
2. General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28): GHQ-28 is a self-administered tool that contains 28 items (Goldberg & Williams, 1998). As a measure of general health, it has four subscales- somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression. The test-retest reliability some eight months apart was found to be as high as +0.90. The studies show that the values for specificity of the GHQ-28 range from 74 percent to 93 percent.
3. The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003): It is a self-report measure designed to assess an individual's level of mindful attention and awareness in daily life. It consists of 15 items that measure the extent to which individuals are able to maintain attention and awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and surroundings in the present moment, without judgment or distraction. The MAAS has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of mindfulness, and has been used in a wide range of research studies examining the effects of mindfulness interventions on psychological well-being. It is scored on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never). The scores for each item are summed to create a total score, which can range from 15 to 90. Higher scores indicate greater levels of mindfulness and attentional awareness. Research has shown that individuals with higher MAAS scores

have better mental health outcomes, including lower levels of anxiety and depression, and better overall well-being.

Procedure

Fifty patients with diagnoses of BPD as per DSM-V criteria and fulfilling the inclusion and exclusion criteria were taken for the study. After establishing rapport, a clinical interview was held and informed consent was taken. The personal data sheet and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale were administered. Similarly, GHQ-28 and the above-mentioned scale were administered on the control group who fulfil the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS (version 17.0.) statistical program. Student’s t test was used to obtain the p value and level of significance was taken as .05. To find out the relationship between the two variables Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation was calculated.

Result

The analysis of the data and the results are presented below in the form of tables.

Table 1-A: Mean and Standard Deviation of Mindfulness Between BPD and Healthy Controls

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
MASS	Healthy controls	100	64.6500	5.75313
	BPD	100	57.8700	9.49498

Table 1-B: Summary of the t-test for BPD and Healthy Controls on Mindfulness

	Z	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
MASS	-6.107	198	.000	-6.78000	-8.96932	-4.59068

Discussion

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a complex mental health condition characterized by intense and unstable emotions, impulsive behaviors, and a distorted sense of self. Mindfulness-based interventions for BPD often involve practices such as mindfulness meditation, body scan, and breathing exercises. These practices aim to increase awareness of present-moment experiences, reduce reactivity to emotional triggers, and develop non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts and feelings. One study found that participants with BPD who received mindfulness-based therapy showed significant improvements in emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, and overall quality of life. Another study found that mindfulness-based interventions were effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety in individuals with BPD. Research on personality disorders particularly BPD has recently taken great interest. While the world literature seems to have found a relationship between early diagnosis and better treatment outcome, this seems less true within Indian context where research is lacking. Hence, the present study was taken up to fill these lacunae. In the present study, control group was found to be high on mindfulness scores as compare to the BPD group. Overall, mindfulness-based interventions can be a

valuable tool in the treatment of BPD. However, it is important to note that these interventions should be used in conjunction with other evidence-based treatments, such as dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and should be tailored to the individual needs of the patient and few techniques of the mindfulness based interventions should be incorporated in the treatment of BPD patients. Mindfulness-based interventions, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), have been developed and widely used in clinical settings to help individuals manage various mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2018). Body Scan: Mindfulness often involves a body scan, which is a systematic exploration of bodily sensations from head to toe. This practice can increase awareness of physical tension or discomfort. Mindful Meditation: Formal mindfulness meditation involves setting aside dedicated time to engage in mindfulness practices. This can include sitting meditation, walking meditation, or loving-kindness meditation, among others. Mindful Eating: This practice involves eating with full awareness, savoring each bite, and paying attention to the sensory experiences of food. Mindfulness in Daily Life: Mindfulness

isn't limited to formal meditation sessions (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). It can be integrated into everyday activities, such as driving, working, or even doing household chores, by being fully present and attentive, in patient population (Gratz, Tull, & Wagner, 2005).

Possible Role of Mindfulness in BPD

Mindfulness can play a significant role in the treatment and management of BPD. BPD is characterized by emotional dysregulation, impulsivity, unstable relationships, and a poor sense of self, and mindfulness practices can help individuals with BPD develop greater emotional stability, self-awareness, and improved coping mechanisms. Here are several ways in which mindfulness can be beneficial (Baer, 2015), for individuals with BPD- Emotion Regulation: Mindfulness practices can help individuals with BPD become more aware of their emotions as they arise, allowing them to observe and accept these emotions without immediate reactivity or judgment. Over time, this increased awareness can lead to better emotional regulation. Reduced Impulsivity: BPD often includes impulsive behaviors such as self-harm, substance abuse, or reckless actions. Mindfulness can help individuals pause and reflect before acting on impulses, giving them more control over their behaviors. Enhanced Self-Awareness: Mindfulness encourages self-reflection and self-observation without judgment. This can help individuals with BPD gain insight into their thought patterns, triggers, and emotional responses, leading to a better understanding of themselves. Interpersonal Effectiveness: Mindfulness practices can improve interpersonal skills by helping individuals become more attentive listeners and less reactive in relationships. This can contribute to more stable and healthier relationships. Distress Tolerance: Mindfulness techniques, such as mindful breathing or grounding exercises, can be used to manage moments of distress and prevent impulsive or self-destructive behaviors during emotional crises (Zeifman, Boritz, Barnhart, Labrish, & McMain, 2020). Reduction of Self-Harming Behaviors: Mindfulness can provide individuals with alternative ways to cope with emotional pain, reducing the reliance on self-harm as a coping mechanism. Improved Self-Identity: People with BPD often struggle with a fragmented or unstable self-identity. Mindfulness practices can contribute to a more stable and coherent sense of self over time. Treatment Complement: Mindfulness-based interventions, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), often incorporate mindfulness techniques as a core component. DBT is specifically designed to address BPD and has been found to be effective in reducing self-destructive behaviors and improving emotional regulation. It's essential to note that while

mindfulness can be a valuable tool in managing BPD, it should be integrated into a comprehensive treatment plan. BPD typically requires a multifaceted approach that may include therapy, medication (for co-occurring conditions like depression or anxiety), and support from mental health professionals and loved ones (John Lothes, Mochrie, Wilson, & Hakan, 2021). Individuals with BPD may find it beneficial to work with a therapist or mental health provider who has experience in both BPD and mindfulness-based approaches to ensure that mindfulness practices are tailored to their specific needs and integrated effectively into their treatment.

Conclusion

Lack of mindfulness skills in the BPD group in present study indicates that mindfulness-based DBT can be an effective treatment option for individuals with BPD who struggle with emotional dysregulation and impulsive behaviors. By developing mindfulness skills, individuals can learn to regulate their emotions, reduce impulsive behaviors, and improve their overall quality of life. Mindfulness-based DBT is a variation of DBT that incorporates mindfulness practices to help individuals with BPD regulate their emotions and cope with distress. It focuses on developing mindfulness skills, which involve paying attention to the present moment without judgment. This can help individuals with BPD become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, which can help them identify triggers for emotional dysregulation and develop strategies to manage these triggers. One of the core components of mindfulness-based DBT is mindfulness meditation, which involves sitting quietly and focusing on the breath or other sensations in the body. This can help individuals with BPD learn to tolerate distressing emotions and reduce impulsive behaviors. Based on the present findings we strongly recommend mindfulness-based DBT for patients with BPD.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no significant competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

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