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# Comparing the effectiveness of therapeutic intervention based on healthy human theory with positive psychotherapy on self-compassion and cognitive fusion of mothers with autistic children

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## Abstract

**Aim:** This research aims to compare the effectiveness of therapeutic intervention based on the healthy human theory with positive psychotherapy on self-compassion and cognitive fusion of mothers with children on the autism spectrum. **Method:** The research method was quasi-experimental (three groups-three stages) and the statistical population included all mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders who referred to autism centers in Isfahan city in July 2022, and 20 people were placed in each group in a targeted manner. The data in all three stages were collected by Neff's self-compassion questionnaire (2003) and Gillanders et al.'s (2014) cognitive fusion scale. Also, the positive psychotherapy package of Rashid and Seligman (2013) was implemented during 8 sessions of 90 minutes on the first experimental group and the therapeutic intervention package based on the healthy human theory was implemented as 9 sessions of 90 minutes on the second experimental group. **Results:** The results of variance analysis with repeated measurement showed that both therapeutic intervention packages based on healthy human theory and positive psychotherapy reduced cognitive fusion and increased self-compassion of mothers with children on the autism spectrum ( $p \geq 0.05$ ) and this effectiveness in follow-up phase has also been stable. Also, the results of Bonferroni's post hoc test showed that there is no significant difference between the effectiveness of the two therapeutic intervention packages in any of the research variables. **Conclusion:** Based on the results of this research, psychologists can use both interventions to increase the awareness of mothers with children on the autism spectrum regarding the meaning and positive emotions in order to reduce cognitive fusion and increase self-compassion.

**Keywords:** therapeutic intervention package based on healthy human theory, self-compassion, positive psychotherapy, cognitive fusion, mothers with children on the autism spectrum.

## Introduction

Parenting can be a source of stress and burnout, especially when a child begins to exhibit emotional problems and behavioral challenges (Roskam, Reiss, & Mikolajczak, 2017). As research shows, there is a strong bidirectional correlation between children's psychopathology and psychological distress in their parents beyond what can be accounted for by shared genetic and environmental effects (Stone et al., 2016; York et al., 2018). Parents of children with disabilities report higher levels of stress, and parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) report the highest levels compared to parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities or other disabilities (Singh et al., 2021). Also, studies have reported that parents (especially mothers) with autism spectrum disorders are at an increased risk of developing psychological problems, including parental stress, depression, suicide, anxiety and other emotional disorders can be very serious (Jahan et al., 2020). Mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder experience severe stress, social, communication and emotional competence problems along with cognitive dysfunctional development and maladjustment due to restraint (Khoshakhlaq, Mareshian, & Jairond, a2022).

In this regard, one of the treatment models that seems to be effective in reducing the social, mood and cognitive problems of mothers with children with autism spectrum disorder is positive psychotherapy approach (PPT). The first version of this program was compiled by Seligman, Rashid and Parks (2006). Nevertheless, attention to educations that are culture-based and integrated and comprehensive by nature is felt for parents with children on the autism spectrum (Ramachandran, 2020). For this reason, the researcher in the current research has developed a therapeutic intervention package based on the healthy human theory. These two interventions have a special emphasis on the meaning component. Since having an autism disorder causes stress and neuropsychological pressures and adverse effects on the body and mind of their parents, and the range of their problems ranges from depression, anxiety, incompatibility to emotional disorders and fear. Such symptoms have harmful effects such as reducing the quality of life, negatively impacting the patient's capacity to accept physical treatments, reducing resilience and life expectancy, reducing survival and ultimately meaninglessness of life. This sense of meaninglessness in life leads to emptiness and emptiness, so that a person stops trying to create a purposeful life and nothing matters to him anymore (Saeidi et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important and necessary to investigate the effectiveness of these two therapeutic interventions. On the other hand, counselors and psychotherapists are looking for the most cost-effective interventions in terms of time and economy, with which they can overcome the clients' problems in a short period of time; Therefore, the effectiveness of the therapeutic intervention package developed based on the healthy human theory was compared with positive psychotherapy. The present study was conducted in order to answer this research question: Is the effect of the therapeutic intervention package based on the healthy human theory and positive psychotherapy on self-compassion and cognitive fusion of mothers with children on the autism spectrum different?

## Method

The research method was quasi-experimental (three groups-three stages) and the statistical population included all mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders who referred to autism centers in Isfahan city in July 2022, and 20 people were placed in each group in a targeted manner. The data in all three stages were collected by Neff's self-compassion questionnaire (2003) and Gillanders et al.'s (2014) cognitive fusion scale. Also, the positive psychotherapy package of Rashid and Seligman (2013) was implemented during 8 sessions of 90 minutes on the first experimental group and the therapeutic intervention package based on the healthy human theory was implemented as 9 sessions of 90 minutes on the second experimental group.

## Results

The results of variance analysis with repeated measurement showed that both therapeutic intervention packages based on healthy human theory and positive psychotherapy reduced cognitive fusion and increased self-compassion of mothers with children on the autism spectrum ( $p \geq 0.05$ ) and this effectiveness in follow-up phase has also been stable. Also, the results of Bonferroni's post hoc test showed that there is no significant difference between the effectiveness of the two therapeutic intervention packages in any of the research variables.

## Conclusion

In order to achieve the above results, the researcher has faced some limitations, such as the community being limited to mothers with children on the autism spectrum. It is suggested that the current research be conducted on mothers with children with Down syndrome disorders, mental-motor disabilities, and autism levels (mild, moderate, and severe) and its results be compared with the current research. In this research, a questionnaire was used to collect data and information, which has a self-reporting aspect, and mothers may have noticed that the results of the research have been affected due to their motherly sense in answering honestly. Therefore, it is suggested to use other collection methods such as interview and observation in future researches. In general, according to the results of the research, it is suggested that positive psychotherapy interventions and treatment based on the healthy human theory be taught to related counselors and therapists. It is also suggested that welfare centers, in order to improve the psychological health of parents with autistic children, especially by reducing cognitive fusion, prepare appropriate educational booklets for these parents based on the findings of the current research and provide them to counselors of the welfare center and parents with autistic children.

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