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The Effectiveness of Psychological Empowerment on Emotional Cognitive Regulation and Parenting Self-Efficacy in Female-Headed Households

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this research is to examine the impact of psychological empowerment on emotional cognitive regulation and parenting self-efficacy among female-headed households.

Methods: This quasi-experimental study utilized a pretest-posttest design with a control group and quarterly follow-up. Thirty women heading families in Isfahan were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups (15 individuals in each group). The experimental group underwent 10 sessions of psychological empowerment therapy, whereas the control group did not undergo any intervention. Participants completed the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies and Parenting Self-efficacy Questionnaire during pre-test and post-test stages to gather data, which was subsequently analyzed using covariance.

Results: The findings indicated that approximately 78% of the variability in emotional regulation scores and 25% of the variability in parental self-efficacy scores were influenced by psychological empowerment.

Conclusions: The outcomes of this study lay the groundwork for understanding the impact of psychological empowerment on emotional cognitive regulation and parenting self-efficacy within female-headed families.

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Introduction

Female heads of households represent a substantial and escalating portion of total households in Iran in the present time. Previously, the primary cause for the emergence of female-headed households was predominantly the demise of husbands; however, in recent decades, a surge in the percentage of households where women, either through divorce or remaining unmarried, actively assume household responsibilities has been observed due to shifts in values, norms, as well as economic and cultural advancements (Motamedi et al., 2019). The abrupt transition of family life responsibilities from the husband to the wife presents numerous challenges for the female head of the household and contributes to feelings of insecurity, including issues such as loss of income, child-rearing, and adopting the role of a father figure for the child, leading to a multitude of difficulties and dilemmas for the female head of the household (Motamedi et al., 2020).

In Islamic sources, there are many narrations about helping widows, orphans, and abusive women, as well as recommendations on how the head of the household (father and husband) should deal with dependent women. Due to the fact that women who are the head of the household mostly have many challenges and problems in the field of raising their children, and it is important that which of the parents plays a more important role in the child's development, there is a difference of opinion, but more researchers agree that both parents and their correct roles are necessary for the social and personality development of children. The father has a special role in preventing the occurrence of behavioral, social and psychological problems.

Children imitate and replicate their parents, and in the meantime, the father's presence plays an effective role in organizing the family situation. The presence of a healthy and powerful father with the children helps to increase their adaptability and reduce aggression in them and also plays an important role in the proper sexual orientation of girls and boys (Frascarolo et al., 2016; Klockars, 2018). Research confirms that the presence of each parent is effective in the mental health of children, and deprivation from parents and the family environment has many psychological and social factors. Stress and anxiety are more in the members of these families and they have fewer financial resources and social support. Children from these families show more behavioral problems than children who live in two-parent families, and in adolescence and adulthood, they are more exposed to negative consequences than other children, such as behavioral problems, lack of self-esteem, dropping out of school, depression and are considered criminals

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(Bryan et al., 2001). Regulation of emotions in female heads of the household is a very important issue and it is obvious that depressed and low-tempered mothers raise unhappy and sick children with lower mental health. As a result, it can be acknowledged that humans use different methods to regulate their emotions and one of the most common methods is the use of cognitive strategies (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Cognitive emotion regulation includes a range of conscious or unconscious cognitive and behavioral strategies to reduce or increase an emotion (Gross, 2001). Cognitive emotion regulation strategies are cognitive processes that people use to manage exciting and arousing information and emphasize the cognitive aspect of coping. Therefore, thoughts and cognitions play a very important role in the ability to manage, regulate and control feelings and emotions after experiencing a stressful event (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006). Garnefski et al. (2009) believe that people have different behaviors in stressful situations and some people turn to rumination and blame themselves and others and catastrophize an event, and others notice positive refocusing and developing a perspective. and positive evaluation and acceptance and planning, which causes the management of the created emotion and increases the person's ability to deal with that event.

Studies show that women who have emotion regulation skills experience more happiness and perform better in emotional situations (Extremera & Rey, 2015). Teaching emotion regulation skills increases mental health, increases the use of positive emotion regulation strategies and decreases the use of negative emotion regulation strategies in female heads of households (Berking et al., 2012).

Self-efficacy is an important component that has been studied in connection with emotion regulation as an influential factor in parenting. Parenting self-efficacy refers to the caregiver's assessment of his/her abilities in the role of caregiver and refers to a parent's beliefs or judgments about his/her abilities to organize and perform a series of parenting tasks with a child (Fang et al., 2021). Also, in addition to the effect it has on the mother-child interaction, the mother's disciplinary methods, the mother's belief about her own parenting methods even predict her responsiveness (Fang et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2018). Given the rise in concerns and dilemmas faced by female household heads, the escalating difficulties encountered in nurturing lone parents, and the dearth of comprehensive research on the assessment of cognitive-emotional control and self-

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efficacy in single parenting, the primary aim of this study is to explore the impact of psychological empowerment on the cognitive-emotional regulation and self-efficacy of parenting among female family leaders.

Materials and Methods

The research method was semi-experimental with a pre-test-post-test design. The statistical population included guardian mothers covered by the welfare organization of Isfahan city. After obtaining the necessary permits to introduce the welfare that women heads of families refer to in the city of Isfahan, the sample group was selected. Sampling was done in an accessible manner from among the applicants to participate in the research who announced their readiness to participate in the announcement. After selecting 30 people from the statistical population based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the number of members of the experimental group (cognitive empowerment training group) and the control group were determined to be 15 people each. The inclusion criteria included willingness to participate in the research, at least a diploma education, age range of 30 to 50 years, acceptance and commitment to group principles and rules of education, having at least one child, being the head of the family and living alone without a spouse. The mother's history of drug addiction and the mother's remarriage and the child's living with other family members such as the grandfather and grandmother were the criteria for exclusion from the research. The experimental group underwent 10 sessions of psychological empowerment training and the control group did not receive any training.

Instruments

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies Questionnaire (CERQ): The cognitive emotion regulation strategies questionnaire was compiled by Garnefski et al. (2001) in the Netherlands and has two English and Dutch versions. The cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire is a multidimensional questionnaire that is used to identify cognitive coping strategies of people after experiencing negative events or situations. Unlike other coping questionnaires that do not clearly distinguish between a person's thoughts and his actual actions, this questionnaire evaluates a person's thoughts after facing a negative experience or traumatic events. Garnefski et al. (2001) reported the internal consistency of the whole scale with the Cronbach's alpha method of 0.92 and the alpha for the subscales was in the range of 0.77 to 0.87. The retest coefficient of the whole

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scale after 3 to 4 weeks was 0.77, which indicated the appropriate reliability of the test. To determine the validity of this scale, exploratory factor analysis was used, and the results showed that, just like the original version, nine factors were obtained from the Persian translation of the cognitive emotion regulation scale, which explained 74% of the total variance, and all the coefficients The path was higher than 0.40, which indicates the appropriate construct validity of the test.

Parenting self-efficacy questionnaire. This questionnaire was created by Kendall and Bloomfield (2005) to evaluate the general levels of parenting self-efficacy and contains ten questions. High scores in this questionnaire indicate high self-efficacy and low scores indicate low self-efficacy. This questionnaire contains five positive statements and five negative statements that measure parents' general sense of confidence in the role of a parent. Questions are scored on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = rarely to 7 = always). Kendall and Bloomfield (2005) reported the internal consistency of this questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70.

Results

The mean and standard deviation of the age of the experimental group were 34.53 and 04.03, and the mean and standard deviation of the control group were 36.67 and 2.76. Regarding the level of education, 8 people had a under diploma degree, 15 people had a diploma, 5 people had a post-graduate diploma, and 2 people had a bachelor's degree. According to the chi-square test, there was no significant difference between the number of children and academic groups in the two groups ($p<0.05$). Also, based on the one-way analysis of variance test, there was no significant difference between the mother's age in the two groups ($p<0.05$).

Table 1. Descriptive indices of research variables in two experimental and control groups

Variable	Group	Pretest		Posttest		Follow up	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Negative strategies of cognitive emotion regulation	Experimental	33.13	5.55	33.33	4.56	26.2	4.18
	Control	35	4.58	35.33	4.16	36.47	4.22
Positive strategies of cognitive emotion regulation	Experimental	20.55	3.95	30.27	3.95	29.06	4.06
	Control	21.47	5.02	22.27	5.12	22.53	4.61
Parenting self-efficacy	Experimental	33.94	5.02	46.53	6.82	45.20	5.80
	Control	33.06	6.19	33.23	5.37	33.15	5.20

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The scores of the research variables are presented separately in the experimental and control groups in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, the average of the negative cognitive emotion regulation strategies in the experimental groups has a greater decrease in the post-test and follow-up stages than in the pre-test. While the average scores of positive emotion regulation strategies and parenting self-efficacy have increased. Shapiro-Wilks test was used to check the assumption of normality of the distribution of scores. The results showed that the null hypothesis based on the normality of the distribution of the scores of the research variables including negative and positive emotion regulation strategies and parenting self-efficacy was confirmed in the pre-test, post-test and follow-up stages.

Table 2. Levene's test to evaluate the assumption of equality of the variances of the scores of the research variables

Variable	Pretest		Posttest		Follow up	
	F	P	F	P	F	P
Negative strategies of cognitive emotion regulation	0.64	0.53	0.24	0.78	0.51	0.60
Positive strategies of cognitive emotion regulation	0.13	0.87	0.74	0.48	1.54	0.23
Parenting self-efficacy	2.36	0.11	3.02	0.05	1.7	0.19

Levene's test was used to check the assumption of equality of variances. The results of Table 2 show that equality of variances assumption in the groups in all research variables, including negative and positive emotion regulation strategies and parenting self-efficacy in all three stages of pre-test, post-test and follow-up was not rejected. Therefore, this assumption is confirmed (all significance levels are greater than 0.05).

Table 3. The results of covariance analysis comparing cognitive-emotional regulation scores in two groups

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	P	Effect size	Power
Pretest	38.95	1	38.95	17.49	0.001	0.392	0.98
Group membership	223.19	1	223.19	100.24	0.001	0.788	1
Error	60.11	27	2.22				

The results of covariance analysis of the effect of psychological empowerment training on emotional cognitive regulation are shown in Table 3. The results showed that the pre-test scores of emotional cognitive regulations have a significant relationship with the post-test and its follow-up. By controlling this relationship, the difference between the adjusted averages of cognitive emotional regulation scores in the post-test and follow-up phase (after controlling the pre-test scores) in the two experimental and control groups is significant ($p < 0.001$), so the first hypothesis

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of the research is confirmed. In other words, it has improved in the post-test stage. The effect of this training on the improvement of this variable in the post-test stage was 0.788. That is, about 78.8% of the variance of emotional regulation scores is related to group membership or the effect of training. The statistical power of 100% shows that the statistical accuracy of this test is excellent.

Table 4. The results of covariance analysis of parenting self-efficacy scores according to group membership

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	P	Effect size	Power
Pretest	35.26	1	35.26	36.33	0.001	0.574	1
Group membership	8.84	1	8.84	9.11	0.005	0.252	0.89
Error	26.20	27	0.97				

As can be seen in Table 4, the pre-test scores of parenting self-efficacy have a significant relationship with the post-test. By controlling this relationship, the difference between the adjusted averages of parental self-efficacy scores in the post-test and follow-up stages (after controlling the pre-test scores) in the two experimental and control groups is significant ($p < 0.005$), so the second sub-hypothesis of the research is confirmed. In other words, psychological empowerment training has improved parental self-efficacy in the post-test and follow-up phase. The effect of this training on the improvement of this variable in the post-test stage was 0.252. That is, about 2.25% of the variance of parenting self-efficacy scores is related to group membership or the effect of training. The statistical power of 89.9% shows that the statistical accuracy of this test is suitable.

Discussion

The aim of the research was to investigate the effectiveness of psychological empowerment on cognitive-emotional regulation and parenting self-efficacy in women heads of families. The results showed that the psychological empowerment training program is effective on the positive and negative cognitive regulation of emotions and self-efficacy in mothers who head the family. These results are in line with the studies of Navabi Nezhad (2019), Amini et al. (2020), and Motamedi et al. (2019). The result of empowerment is the promotion of self-belief, self-worth, self-reliance, identification and feeling of power, which makes a person gain the strength to face adversity and deal with them. Numerous evidences also show that psychological empowerment is related to outcomes such as improving the quality of life, facilitating decision-making, self-care, effective management of problems and appropriate decision-making (Sundaram et al., 2014). There are

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various skills such as confidence and self-esteem, effective communication with others, emotion regulation, intellectual independence, etc., that training and practicing skills can play a role in increasing the emotional control and self-efficacy of women heads of households.

The rationale behind this phenomenon can be attributed to the enhancement of psychological dimensions, which in turn elevate the quality of life and psychological well-being. For instance, self-awareness serves as a foundation for individuals to recognize their capabilities and accept themselves along with their circumstances. Studies indicate that education and awareness play a significant role in enhancing the quality of life for such individuals. It appears that heightening awareness levels and acquiring diverse skills boost the inclination to engage in social activities and join social groups among these women. Furthermore, it can be inferred from a different perspective that enhanced knowledge and skills augment the employment opportunities for these individuals, subsequently improving their physical and mental well-being while enhancing emotional regulation and self-efficacy.

Psychological empowerment, a crucial aspect influencing social empowerment, encompasses factors like resource accessibility, level of autonomy, information availability, as well as social and political backing within the collaborative work environment. Psychological empowerment represents a set of competencies that enhance cognitive and social capabilities for leading an effective and purposeful life, enabling individuals to confront life's challenges. Hence, when conducive conditions for a productive life are established through the cultivation of these skills, individuals are likely to adeptly navigate the inevitable emotional complexities of life and foster conditions conducive to peace and productivity, benefiting themselves and others. Recognizing the impact of psychological empowerment on emotional regulation and self-efficacy among female heads of households, institutions and organizations supporting this demographic are advised to incorporate psychological empowerment training programs tailored for female heads of households.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. The author contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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