# The Effectiveness of Hope Therapy Based on Monotheistic Integrative Therapy on the Mental Health of Male High School Students in Yazd

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background**: Emotional and behavioral disorders and social problems can threaten the mental health of adolescents, who are particularly vulnerable to these difficulties. The present study aimed to examine the effectiveness of hope therapy based on monotheistic integrative therapy (MIT) on the mental health of male high school students.

**Methods:** In this quasi-experimental study with a pretest–posttest control group design**,** 40 male adolescent students were selected through convenience sampling from a high school in Yazd County during the 2021–2022 academic year and assigned to an experimental group (n = 20) and a control group (n = 20). The experimental group received 6 sessions of group counseling. Data were collected using the Child Symptom Inventory-4 (CSI-4), a screening measure for children and adolescents aged 6–14 years based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV). Data were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) in SPSS version 26.

**Result**: After controlling for pretest scores, the experimental and control groups differed significantly in the mental health dimensions of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) ($P < 0.001$). However, the intervention had no significant effect on the conduct disorder dimension ($P = 0.079$).

**Conclusion:** Hope therapy based on MIT, delivered as group counseling, appears to be an effective approach for improving the mental health of male high school students.

**Keywords:** Adolescent health, Hope therapy, Mental health, Monotheistic integrative therapy

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## Introduction

Mental health is of great importance today. The term mental health means physical and emotional well-being and the absence of mental disease, as well as the ability to continue an active life and flexibility against pressures of the life (1). According to the comprehensive definition presented by the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health equals the physical, mental, and social health accompanied with satisfaction and living a happy life (2). Some major factors such as emotional and behavioral disorders, as well as the social problems may affect peoples' mental health negatively (3). Adolescent students as the future makers of any society are one of the most vulnerable groups to these issues experiencing them in school and family environment (1). The students' emotional/behavioral disorders refer to conditions in which emotional and behavioral responses in school and family environment are different from cultural, age, and ethnic norms, as they negatively affect educational performance, self-care, social relations, individual adjustment, classroom behavior, and workplace adjustment (4).

The absence of mental health and behavioral problems among students make them to be rejected by their peers, leading to various educational problems. Consequently, these problems also end to depression, feeling of inferiority, and lack of accepting themselves (5). Hence, the students may have a negative attitude toward education and school. As a result, they are not willing to learn, do not try, and are of insufficient self-confidence (6).

The monotheistic integrated therapy (MIT) pattern is recently used to perceive and diagnose the phenomenon of positive psychology and mental health, use clinical diagnosis tools and methods, and implement therapeutic methods (7). Emphasizing the promotion of humanistic growth and development, this approach lets the individual develop a method for his or her life by searching for a transcendent meaning for life and striving to understand oneself, leading to accessing higher stages of growth and perfection (8). In addition to omission or reduction of the symptoms of behavioral disorder, the aim of this kind of therapy is to strengthen the position of reason, revitalize love, achieve the dimensions of attraction towards the source of unity, and access monotheism. Eliminating the barriers to the attraction and arousing awareness and commitment to virtuous behaviors constitute the main parts of the treatment plan (8).

Psychotherapists' disregard for the element of spirituality in the treatment process has caused instability of long-term behavioral variables and a high percentage of return to mental disorders. Psychologists and therapists have come to this fact that they should seriously take into account the integrated therapy methods in recent decades (6). Accordingly, the American Psychological Association (9), in the latest classification of mental disorders, suggests psychologists and psychiatrists to consider the spiritual factor clinically in the process of examining mental disorders. That is because the spiritual dimension is as important as biological, psychological, and social dimensions; besides, various group therapy methods are proposed in accordance with etiology of mental health problems (10).

Some studies have been conducted accordingly and indicate that belief in the existence of God and performing religious rites are effective on mental health and treatment of mental disorders (11 & 12). Trevino et al. (13) conducted a study and showed that religious attitude has a negative relationship with depression, anxiety, hostility, adjustment, and hypochondriasis. Bayati et al. (17) investigated the effectiveness of MIT approach on anxiety, patience, and hope in the depressed women and found a significant effect of this therapy on the intended individual variables. Other various studies have also indicated the effectiveness of therapeutic monotheistic integrated interventions on the reduction of mental stress (14), depression (15), drug use and related behaviors (16), and criminal behaviors (16). According to the above-mentioned theoretical and empirical literature, MIT approach can be effective on adolescent students' mental health. Therefore, the present study examined the effectiveness of hope therapy

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with MIT approach on mental health of male high school students in Yazd County.

## Methods

This quasi-experimental research used pre-test and post-test and consisted of a control group. The participants of the study were 40 male high school students who were selected based on convenience sampling procedure from a high school in Yazd in academic year of 2020-2021. The sample underwent pre-test of mental health questionnaire to ensure homogeneity of them in this respect before the intervention. After homogenizing, they were divided into two groups, i.e. an experimental group and a control group.

The treatment sessions was conducted in two high school classes in Yazd County. One of classes was devoted to the experimental group and the other one to the control group. In the treatment phase of the study, which lasted for 8 sessions, experimental group received group counseling course of hope therapy with MIT approach, based on Fallah, Shayeq, A'si, and Tahani's model (2018). Each session lasted for 45 minutes. The detailed description and content of the treatment (MIT intervention) sessions is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The session contents related to the MIT intervention among students

| Subject and purpose | Meeting sessions |
|---|---|
| Familiarity with group members and the rules of the MIT group | First |
| Relaxation training: learning to relax in meetings and critical situations; assessing members' motivation for change | Second |
| Evaluating members' problems and determining treatment priorities: diagnosing problems and learning to set priorities | Third |
| Identifying the causes of emotional problems and multiple strategies for preventing depression and anxiety; increasing self-efficacy | Fourth |
| Breaking denial, strengthening honesty and truthfulness, accepting mistakes and criticism, and increasing the tolerance threshold | Fifth |
| The role of the relationship with God and the sense of vitality and self-flourishing; deepening the spirit of worshipping God | Sixth |
| Forgiveness: forgiveness training, the benefits and consequences of forgiveness and mercy, the process of forgiveness, and the practical uses of forgiveness and mercy | Seventh |
| Conclusion: evaluation of group therapy results by group members | Eighth |

After group counseling course, the mental health post-test was given to both groups. Child Symptom Inventory-4 (CSI-4) for 6-to-14-year-old children and adolescents, based on Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSIM-IV), was used for data collection and assessment of the students' mental health. This questionnaire consisted of 41 items; items 1 to 18 were related to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), items 19 to 26 were related to oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and items 27 to 41 were related to conduct disorder. The questionnaire was scored based on the Likert scale of never = 0, sometimes = 0, often = 1, and most of the time = 1, except for Part C (items 32 to 41) in which sometimes = 1. Sperafkin, Loney, and Gadow have confirmed the validity of this questionnaire in 1984 and indicated a high correlation with child behavioral scales. In this study, Cronbach's alpha with 20 samples was 0.78. Covariance was used through SPSS 26 for data analysis. All ethical considerations and principles including confidentiality, oral consent, obtaining letter of introduction and official licenses, and the permission of the ethics committee were taken into account in this research.

## Results

To use analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), its parametric assumptions were examined using pretest

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scores: skewness and kurtosis values were used to assess the normality of score distributions, and Levene's test was used to assess the homogeneity of variances between the experimental and control groups. The results showed that skewness and kurtosis values were between −2 and +2 for all variables; therefore, the data were considered normally distributed (Table 2).

**Table 2.** The results of skewness and kurtosis tests for normal distribution of data

| Variable | Tests of skewness and kurtosis | |
|---|---|---|
| | Skewness | Kurtosis |
| Mental health | 0.194 | -0.157 |
| ADHD | 0.385 | -0.404 |
| ODD | -0.341 | 0.645 |
| Conduct disorder | -0.337 | -0.716 |

The results of Levene's test was not significant in all variables (P-value > 0.05). Hence, null hypothesis stating the homogeneity of variances was confirmed. It was concluded that another assumption of multivariate ANCOVA test, i.e. homogeneity of variances, was confirmed (Table 3).

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**Table 3.** The result of Levene's test for homogeneity of variances

| Variable | Levene's statistic | df 1 | df 2 | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mental health | 0.018 | 1 | 38 | 0.895 |
| ADHD | 0.275 | 1 | 38 | 0.602 |
| ODD | 2.311 | 1 | 38 | 0.137 |
| Conduct disorder | 1.593 | 1 | 38 | 0.214 |

Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine the effect of the intervention on students' mental health; the results are presented in Table 3. As shown in Table 4, the F values for mental health, ADHD, ODD, and conduct disorder were 27.53, 12.67, 14.26, and 3.27, respectively. All effects were significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level, except for conduct disorder. Accordingly, it can be concluded that, compared with the control group, hope therapy based on the MIT approach improved the mental health of participants in the experimental group by reducing ADHD and ODD symptoms.

**Table 4.** The results of ANCOVA related to the dependent variables of mental health in experimental and control groups

| Dependent variable | Sum of squares | df | Mean of squares | F | Sig. | Effect size |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mental health | 41.161 | 1 | 41.161 | 27.538 | 0.000 | 0.427 |
| ADHD | 8.278 | 1 | 8.278 | 12.679 | 0.001 | 0.255 |
| ODD) | 5.855 | 1 | 5.855 | 14.265 | 0.001 | 0.278 |
| Conduct disorder | 1.153 | 1 | 1.153 | 3.270 | 0.079 | 0.081 |

Table 4 shows that the effect size of the independent variable "the hope therapy pattern with MIT approach" on mental health affected mental health, ADHD, ODD, and conduct disorder by 42%, 25%, 27%, and 8%, respectively.

## Discussion

The results of the present study indicated that hope therapy based on the MIT approach (group counseling) was effective in improving the mental health of male high school students in Yazd County. More specifically, monotheistic hope therapy had a significant effect on mental health, ADHD, and ODD symptoms. On the other hand, this therapy was not significantly effective in reducing conduct disorder symptoms.

Adolescence is associated with physical, psychological, emotional, and social changes. Therefore, adolescents' lives are affected by hope and life expectancy in the areas of education, employment, daily life, recreation, society, and economy. Due to their age and exposure to various educational, occupational, economic, and social issues and the process of shaping their behavior, adolescents have a greater need for counseling and hope therapy. This is because their anxiety, stress, depression, and mental health problems may

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become more severe while coping with problems in various family and educational domains (6).

The results indicated that hope therapy based on the MIT approach (group counseling) was effective in improving students' mental health. The statistical analyses showed that group counseling based on hope therapy improved mental health. This means that students who underwent this therapy in the classroom setting showed a higher level of mental health than those who did not receive it.

The results of the present study are consistent with those of studies conducted by Sharifinia (18) and Sanaei (19). The effectiveness of MIT on the resilience component means that the treatment made participants more tolerant and resilient in the face of stress and life problems. It also made them more realistic when faced with problems and difficulties. As a result, MIT can provide a basis for improving and reforming students' behavior. Therapeutic interventions provide intimacy, care, and attention to the individual and help people understand themselves in general and their abilities in particular.

These interventions provide adolescent students with opportunities for participation and cooperation in school to practice and expand different life skills, which are considered a source of increased resilience. Furthermore, Mirnasab (20) found that trust in God is one of the most important factors in coping with depression. Islamic coping strategies such as trust in God, recitation of God's name, patience, prayer, repentance, and hope played leading roles in alleviating depression levels among prisoners. Therefore, special attention to the relationship with God should be incorporated into psychotherapy interventions to prevent depression (21).

Koenig (22) argues that "religion is a powerful coping behavior that enables people to make sense of suffering, provides control over the overwhelming forces of nature (both internal and external) and promotes social rules that facilitate communal living, cooperation, and mutual support" (p. 283). Koenig's review of studies on religion and mental health published before 2000 showed that the majority reported statistically significant positive associations (p. 285).

These results are in line with those of Bayati et al. (17), who found a significant effect of the MIT approach on anxiety, patience, and hope in depressed women. They are also in line with previous studies on hope therapy based on the MIT approach. Zeng, Danan, and George (14), Trevino et al. (11), Tayyebi and Qanbari Hashemabadi (12), and Soun and Khu (2010) found that a short-term anger management program can improve self-control, mental health, and a feeling of security among family members. Tajari et al. (2018) found that patience and tolerance training was effective for mental health.

Each of the above-mentioned studies has explored hope therapy from theological and psychological perspectives. According to the results of these studies, religion, religious affiliation, and spiritual beliefs are of specific importance in human life and can have a considerable effect on individuals' mental health. Spiritual therapy (based on the concept of hope) can be useful in reducing hopelessness (a negative feeling toward the future, loss of motivation, and diminished expectations) and mental disorders (such as depression and aggression). These studies have addressed the diagnostic aspect of hope therapy in religion, traditions, and psychology.

Some of the above-mentioned studies emphasize that lack of problem-solving skills, lack of purposefulness, lack of awareness of effective communication skills, and weak religious beliefs are among the important contributing factors to mental disorders (23). In other words, adolescents lack a clear purpose and motivation, and a unifying direction, in the face of problems in educational, family, social, economic, and recreational areas (14,24). Although this study found that hope therapy based on the MIT approach did not significantly affect adolescents' conduct disorder, this model was successful in making them aware of controlling their thoughts in terms of the mental dimension (25, 26).

A possible explanation for the effectiveness of hope therapy based on the MIT approach is that it introduces adolescents to a reliable source and

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destination and leads them to regulate all their activities based on this divine source and destination (27). Through the content of the treatment course (group counseling) in the present study, adolescents became aware of a reliable support (God), developed a positive attitude, and adjusted their performance based on this support, which may have contributed to the reduction of their ADHD and ODD symptoms.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of hope therapy based on the MIT approach on the mental health of male high school students in Yazd. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that participation in group counseling sessions based on monotheistic hope therapy had a considerable and significant effect on students' mental health. More generally, since human nature is grounded in goodness and virtue from the Islamic viewpoint, if the treatment process is designed so that a person approaches the divine nature and the inner core of their existence, they are likely to develop a desire for goodness and desirable behavior. Furthermore, according to Islamic teachings, remembrance of God is a source of peace of heart and obedience to God protects against depression and anxiety.

Regarding the MIT approach, when the client sincerely communicates with the origin of existence, this belief and relationship with God have a profound effect on their emotion, cognition, behavior, and performance; hence, their mental health is sustained (6). Hope therapy based on the MIT approach is regarded as integrative, drawing on real and genuine beliefs and values. These religious values can unify personality and eliminate distortions more effectively than other methods (16). As observed in the present study, unity meant the avoidance of adolescents' distractions, carelessness, and ignorance.

The present study had some limitations. One major limitation was that the participants were selected only from among high school adolescents in Yazd County, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other groups of adolescents. Another limitation is the use of self-report scales, which may elicit inaccurate or untruthful answers. Given these limitations, future studies could be conducted on adolescent students in both rural and urban areas of Iran. Furthermore, researchers could employ other data collection instruments such as interviews and observation to obtain more reliable and valid data.

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## Conflicts of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## Ethical considerations

This research is controlled by the internal committee of Yazd University, which is based on the Declaration of Helsinki. The informed consent was obtained from all subject's parents and/or their legal guardian(s).

## Code of ethics

The ethical confirmation for this study was obtained from the Ethical committee of Yazd University (IR.YAZD.REC.1401.054).

## Authors' contributions

H. ZM, developed the theoretical formalism; A. A, got interview and did analysis; A. H supervised the project; H. ZM, and A. A, contributed to the final version of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript and are responsible for questions related to the article.

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