Relationship of Self-efficacy with Mindfulness and Empathy in Red Crescent Society Volunteers in Saveh, Iran

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Original Article

Abstract

INTRODUCTION: It is an indisputable fact that people who live in societies will always need each other. In this regard, the members of a society should try to decrease the problems and difficulties of the community by participating in voluntary services. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship of self-efficacy with mindfulness and empathy in volunteers of the Red Crescent society in Saveh, Iran.

METHODS: This practical study was conducted based on a descriptive-survey method. The population included 100 experts and key members of the Sistan and Baluchistan Crisis Management Coordination Council. In total 80 cases were selected using Cochran's formula and purposive (snowball) sampling method. The data were collected through a 46-item researcher-made questionnaire. The face and content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts, and the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated at 0.94 using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which indicated acceptable reliability of this scale. The data were analyzed in SPSS software (version 22) through multiple regression to evaluate the research hypotheses.

FINDINGS: Based on the results, mindfulness ($P<0.05$, $r=0.468$) and expressive empathy ($P<0.01$, $r=0.207$) had a positive and significant relationship with self-efficacy; however, empathy did not have a relationship with other variables. Moreover, out of the subscales of empathy, empathy for others ($P<0.05$, $r=-0.138$) and control ($P<0.01$, $r=-0.210$) had a negative relationship with self-efficacy. The mindfulness variable was significant in the prediction of self-efficacy ($F=25.353$) which explains about 21.8% of the variance of the criterion variable. Moreover, the component of emotional stability was significant in the prediction of self-efficacy ($F=16.379$) which explains about 5% of the variance of the criterion variable. Therefore, with a coefficient of determination of 51.7% the changes in self-efficacy are explained by mindfulness and the component of emotional stability.

CONCLUSION: According to the findings, the variables of mindfulness and the component of emotional stability can significantly predict self-efficacy. Furthermore, mindfulness with a beta of 0.467 had the greatest effect on self-efficacy.

Keywords: Empathy; Mindfulness; Red Crescent Society Volunteers; Self-efficacy.

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Introduction

In the Red Crescent Society, voluntary service is a means used by an individual or group to realize one of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society, namely "voluntary service". In fact, voluntary service is a voluntary and benevolent act that expresses one's desire to be in solidarity with other human beings. These services make the receivers know that they are not alone and will always belong to a group or

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community (1). Therefore, the people who offer such services must have a set of traits and behaviors, the most important of which are mindfulness, empathy, and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one of the main components of social cognitive theories and refers to the individual's beliefs and judgments about his/her abilities to perform duties and responsibilities (2).

The structure of self-efficacy is of special importance in educational environments since according to Bandura; such environments are suitable for growth and formation of self-efficacy (3). Fulfillment of duties, high-level performance commensurate with one's capability, problem-solving skills, proper use of analytical thinking, acceptance of failure, selection of challenging tasks, commitment and perseverance in fulfilling it, and self-mastery when the withdrawal is necessary are among the characteristics of a person with self-efficacy (4).

According to Bandura, self-efficacy regulates human actions through cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decision-making processes (5). People who believe they can control potential threats and pressures, do not allow disturbing cognitions to influence them and make them lose control. On the other hand, lack of self-efficacy in the face of potential threats and stressful situations leads to stress and anxiety arousal (6).

Social, educational, emotional, and creative self-efficacy are among the aspects of self-efficacy that have attracted the attention of researchers in recent years. Educational self-efficacy, which refers to one's sense of empowerment in learning (9) affects educational outcomes by increasing motivation and facilitating the efficient use of achieved knowledge and skills (7). Social self-efficacy is one's assessment of his/her own ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships and face social challenges, which includes social courage, desirable social relations, exchange of friendly feedback, group participation, or social activity (8, 9).

Emotional self-efficacy refers to one's belief in their ability to control and manage emotions. Creative self-efficacy refers to one's belief that s/he has the ability to produce creative outcomes. It is a form of self-assessment that influences decisions about the amount of effort and the level of commitment when faced with creative challenges (9). Mindfulness is an unintentional contemplation of current events. It is defined as a receptive, judgment-free consciousness of what is happening at the moment (10).

Mindfulness is derived from cognitive-behavioral therapies and is one of the important elements of the third wave of psychological therapy models. It is a kind of focused awareness that is conscious and directed and can raise the level of awareness regarding all mental events or present states (11). Mindfulness refers to conscious, diligent, and controlled processing which stands in opposition to negligence (12). People with mindfulness perceive internal and external realities freely and without distortion and also have a great ability to face a wide range of thoughts, emotions, and experiences (both pleasant and unpleasant) (10).

According to Byron (2006), useful guides for adaptation to mindfulness in order to create and maintain awareness include lack of judgment and evaluation, patience, initiative mind, lack of engagement, acceptance, and liberation. Mindfulness is the decisive attention to the matters of the present time that we have perceived differently until now (13). Gellman (2005) defines mindfulness as awareness of the present experiences, acceptance, awareness, and consciousness of reality, confrontation with the nature of experiences, and observation of things as if they are seen for the first time (14).

Empathy is considered as the ability to understand and convey an understanding of the thoughts and feelings of others. Empathy enables people to perceive others' experiences as if they have experienced them (15). It is one of the most important emotional abilities and starts manifesting itself from early childhood (16). Empathy is one of the components of social cognition that guides interaction in the right direction. It is defined as the ability to understand others, experience their feelings, and respond appropriately to the situation (17). Empathy consists of two main components, namely the cognitive and emotional components. Cognitive empathy is the ability to understand the emotions of others and the emotional component of the individual's emotional response to an emotional stimulus (15).

It should be noted that self-efficacy can positively affect the performance of tasks that are related to helping and assisting people in times of crisis and problem-solving. This issue has been confirmed by the results of many studies in various

fields. For instance, Wampold and Watson (2001) found that one of the essential skills for the successful achievement of self-efficacy in counseling is the ability to focus on the present and empathize with the clients. Moreover, based on the results of the above-mentioned study, one of the characteristics of self-efficacy in the counseling session is the consultant's ability to pay effective attention and guide his/her cognition (18).

Sanmartín and Carbonell (2011) in their research found that there is a positive relationship between empathy, self-efficacy, responsibility, socialization, and prosocial behaviors (19). Furthermore, based on the results of the study performed by Goroshit and Hen (2016), self-efficacy has an important effect on teachers' empathy (20). RazmiSoha and RazmiSoha (2015) in their study showed that the level of empathy and self-efficacy among Red Crescent staff is higher than ordinary people (21). Besides, regarding the relationship between mindfulness and self-efficacy, Riahi et al. (2016) found that teaching mindfulness to mothers increases self-efficacy in their children (22).

Mehdizadeh Azdin et al. (2017) in their study confirmed the effectiveness of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy on increasing social self-efficacy (23). Moreover, the findings of the research performed by Mirdrikund et al. (2015) showed that the implementation of an intervention with the aim of teaching metacognitive techniques has been effective in increasing self-efficacy (24). In addition, Luberto et al. (2014) found that coping self-efficacy indicates a person's confidence in his/her ability to cope effectively with difficult and threatening events, as a mediator in the relationship between mindfulness and emotional regulation (25).

Furthermore, Shah Moradi Tabatabai and Ansari Shahidi (2017) showed that mindfulness increases general self-efficacy (26). Greason and Cashwell (2009) also supported the hypothesis that mindfulness is a significant predictor of the variables of counseling self-efficiency and attention for empathy (27). In this regard, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship of self-efficacy with mindfulness and empathy in the Red Crescent society volunteers in Saveh, Iran.

Methods

The present research used the correlational method, which is the most common type of descriptive (non-experimental) research. Moreover, the statistical population of this study was all the volunteers of the Red Crescent Society of Saveh. The subjects were selected from among the volunteers participating in the first aid and introductory search and rescue courses in January 2019. In total, 93 samples were selected using the convenience sampling method. The inclusion criteria consisted of volunteer participation in the above-mentioned courses and willingness to cooperate.

Research tools

A) Sherer General Self-efficacy Scale

This scale has 17 items that are scored based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items 1, 3, 8, 9, 13, and 15 are scored from right to left and the rest of the items are scored in reverse (i.e., from left to right). Therefore, the maximum and minimum scores that can be obtained from this scale were 85 and 17, respectively.

The reliability coefficient of this scale was calculated at 0.76 and 0.79 by Guttman split-half reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, respectively (28). Moreover, Vaghari (2000) in his study obtained the reliability of self-efficacy at 0.85 by Cronbach's alpha. Furthermore, Najafi (2001) randomly selected 30 subjects from the participants of his study and performed the self-efficacy test on them. He estimated the reliability at 0.83 by both Cronbach's alpha and the Spearman-Brown formula. In another study carried out by Ganji and Farahani (2009), the reliability of this scale was calculated at 0.81 by Cronbach's alpha (29). In the present study, the obtained reliability was 0.7 by Cronbach's alpha.

B) Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory-Short form

This questionnaire has 17 items that are scored based on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (rarely) to 4 (almost always). It should be noted that item number 13 was scored in reverse. The minimum and maximum scores that could be achieved in this questionnaire were 14 and 56, respectively. The short form of the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory has acceptable and sufficient reliability and the obtained coefficients for Cronbach's alpha coefficient and ordinal theta were 0.92 and 0.93, respectively. Furthermore, the test-retest-reliability coefficient was 0.83 for a four-week interval (30). In the present study, the reliability

was obtained at 0.75.

C) The Mehrabian and Epstein Empathy Scale

This scale was developed by Mehrabian and Epstein (1972) and has 33 items, 17 of which are positive and the other 16 are reverse. Each item has 5 options, namely strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree, that are scored from 5 to 1, respectively. This questionnaire includes subscales of relational empathy, expressive empathy, cooperative empathy, to be moved by others' emotional experiences, emotional stability, empathy with others, and control. Based on a study that used this scale on 101 men and 101 women, its reliability coefficient was reported to be 0.84 (31). In a study performed by Zarshaghaei et al. (2010), the reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated at 0.559 (P<0.001) (32). Moreover, in the present study, the obtained reliability coefficient was 0.5.

Findings

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to investigate the relationship between the variables and the required data are summarized in Table 1. As can be seen, self-efficacy was the predictable variable, while mindfulness and empathy with its components were the predictive variables. As can be seen in Table 1, the mean value of the self-efficacy of the subjects was 57.61±9.6. Moreover, the mean value of mindfulness of the subjects was 17.37±67.4. Among the empathy subscales of the subjects, the relational empathy and control subscales obtained the highest (96.21) and lowest (6.6) mean values, respectively. Moreover, the mean value of the total empathy of the subjects was 98.107±81.7.

Table 1 also shows that mindfulness (P<0.05, r=0.467) had a positive and significant relationship with self-efficacy; accordingly, the increase of mindfulness, leads to an increase in self-efficacy. Furthermore, control (P<0.01, r=-0.210) had a negative and significant relationship with self-efficacy; accordingly, the increase of self-efficacy led to a decrease in the level of control (P <0.01, r = 0.207).

Mindfulness had a positive and significant relationship with expressive empathy (P<0.01, r=0.207) and a negative and significant relationship with empathy for others (P<0.05, r=-0.317). Self-efficacy and mindfulness had no significant relationship with empathy. Stepwise regression and regression coefficients were used to determine which of the variables was predictive and which one was the most important variable in prediction. The results of the regression analysis are summarized in Table 2.

In Table 2 of Model 1, the mindfulness variable is significant in the prediction of self-

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients of mindfulness, empathy, and self-efficacy

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Subjects 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Self-efficacy	57.61	9.6	1									
Mindfulness	17.37	67.4	0.468**	1								
Empathy	98.107	81.7	-0.156	-0.044	1							
Relational empathy	96.21	92.2	-0.112	-0.151	0.489**	1						
Expressive empathy	05.15	36.2	0.152	0.207*	0.370**	-0.221*	1					
Cooperative empathy	06.20	54.2	0.135	0.113	0.456**	0.017	0.304**	1				
Moved by others' emotional experience	55.18	98.2	-0.175	0.052	0.604**	0.204	0.068	0.291**	1			
Emotional stability	19.12	97.1	-0.191	0.063	0.448**	0.136	-0.076	0.051	0.287**	1		
Empathy with others	12.14	34.2	-0.134	-0.318**	0.449**	0.212*	0.075	-0.047	-0.075	0.088	1	
Control	6.6	45.1	-0.220*	-0.109	0.401**	0.222*	-0.025	-0.102	0.232*	0.106	0.204	1

(n=93)

Table 2. Analysis of variance of the regression model of predictors of mindfulness and empathy (emotional stability component) and the criterion variable of self-efficacy

Source of changes	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	P	R	R^2
Regression	956.848	1	956.848	25.353	0.000	0.467	0.218
Remainder	3434.399	91	37.741				
Total	4391.248	92					
Regression	1171.788	2	585.849	16.379	0.000	0.517	0.267
Remainder	3219.460	90	35.772				
Total	4391.248	92					

Table 3. Regression coefficients

Regression model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t-value	P
	Regression coefficient B	Standard error	β		
y-intercept	35.937	5.131		7.003	0.000
Mindfulness	0.690	0.137	0.467	5.035	0.000
y-intercept	44.602	6.120		7.288	0.000
Mindfulness	0.710	0.134	0.481	5.316	0.000
Emotional stability	-0.774	0.316	-0.222	-2.451	0.000

efficacy (F=25.353), which explains about 21.8% of the variance of the criterion variable. Moreover, the emotional stability component is also significant in the prediction of self-efficacy (F=16.379) and explains about 5% of the variance of the criterion variable. Therefore, based on the coefficient of determination, it can be stated that 51.7% of the changes in self-efficacy are due to mindfulness and the component of emotional stability.

According to Table 3, the results of the stepwise regression analysis regarding the research hypothesis indicated that the variable of mindfulness and the component of emotional stability can significantly predict mental well-being. Therefore, if the mindfulness predictor variable increases by one standard deviation, self-efficacy will increase by 0.48 standard deviation. Moreover, the contribution of the emotional stability component to the prediction of self-efficacy was negative which means that if emotional stability decreases by one standard deviation, self-efficacy will increase by 0.22 standard deviation. Furthermore, it was found that mindfulness with a beta of 0.467 had the most significant effect on the self-efficacy variable, while other components of empathy did not have a significant effect on self-efficacy.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results of the correlation test, mindfulness had a positive and significant relationship with self-efficacy; however, empathy did not have a relationship with self-efficacy. Among the components of empathy, control had a negative and significant relationship with self-efficacy, while expressive empathy had a positive and significant relationship with it. Moreover, empathy with others had a negative and significant relationship with mindfulness. Furthermore, the results of stepwise regression also indicated that mindfulness predicts self-efficacy positively; accordingly, with the increase of self-awareness, self-efficacy also increases. However, the component of emotional stability predicts self-efficacy negatively.

Consistent with the results of the present study, those of research conducted by Riahi et al. (22), Mehdizadeh Azdin et al. (23), Shah Moradi Tabatabai, and Ansari Shahidi (26) indicated the effect of mindfulness training on self-efficacy. Moreover, Mirdrikvand et al. (2015) found that an intervention based on teaching metacognitive techniques can increase self-efficacy (24).

As previously discussed, the results of the studies carried out by Luberto et al. (25) and Greason and Cashwell (27) indicated the same relationship and confirm the results of the present study. Therefore, as it was found in the present study and several other studies, there is a significant relationship between mindfulness and self-efficacy.

According to the research performed by Ranjbar Noshahri, Hashemi, Asadi Majareh and Mohaddesi (2013), and Teymouri, Khakpour, and Momeni Mahmouyeh (2015) quoted in

Mahdipour and Kurd (6), people with self-efficacy do not allow disturbing cognitions to affect them and do not lose their control. On the other hand, lack of self-efficacy in the face of potential threats and stressful situations leads to the experience of stress and anxiety arousal.

Behrad and Abdollahzadeh Jedi (33) in their study concluded that mindfulness training reduces self-efficacy in education by reducing psychological distress. Therefore, mindfulness is one of the effective predictors of self-efficacy and should be considered in any position. However, not much research has been performed on the second variable of empathy and the results of the few existing studies are inconsistent with those of the present study.

The studies carried out by Cortis, Scarti, and Pascal (19), Goroschit and Hen (20), Razmisoha and Razmisoha (21), and Greason and Cashwell (27) have indicated a positive relationship between empathy and self-efficacy, while only the component of emotional stability had a negative prediction. This is inconsistent with the results of the present study; therefore, it seems necessary to perform more extensive research on the variables of empathy and self-efficacy in order to find the relationship between these two variables.

The present research can help the Red Crescent Society to become aware of the performance of the volunteers and develop plans to strengthen self-efficacy and mindfulness of the volunteers who participate in their training courses. Empathy is also an important feature in times of crisis and more research should be performed on this variable as well. Since there is a need for trained and capable people to meet the needs of the society in times of trouble and volunteers play a significant role in such situations, more attention should be paid to these behavioral characteristics and traits in them.

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Conflict of Interests

There is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the study.

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