

From Struggle to Relief: Qualitative Accounts of Symptom Reduction in Mixed Anxiety and Depression after Three Months of CBT

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KEYWORDS

Mixed Anxiety and Depression, Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Depression, Anxiety, Qualitative interview, Thematic Analysis

ABSTRACT

The present study qualitatively explores the therapeutic experiences of patients with Mixed Anxiety and Depression (MAD) following three months of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), with a specific focus on symptom reduction related to depression and anxiety. Mixed Anxiety and Depression is a common and disabling mental health condition that significantly affects individuals' quality of life. Although Cognitive Behavioral Therapy has been well-documented as an effective treatment for these disorders, there remains limited understanding of patients' subjective experiences and perceptions of symptom changes throughout the therapy process. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 participants diagnosed with F41.2 Mixed Anxiety and Depressive Disorder, aged 18-35, who underwent three months of CBT. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on inclusion criteria, excluding those with co-occurring mental or physical disorders, or those currently undergoing other therapies. The interviews focused on the participants' experiences with the therapy, particularly the reduction of depression and anxiety symptoms. Thematic analysis, following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to identify key themes and sub-themes from the data. The analysis revealed several crucial insights: participants reported significant reductions in depressive symptoms, primarily through enhanced social engagement, cognitive restructuring, and changes in negative thought patterns. Anxiety levels also decreased as a result of cognitive restructuring and behavioral activation, leading to better emotional regulation. Participants highlighted improvements in emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and overall life satisfaction. This study contributes to the limited qualitative literature on CBT for MAD, offering valuable insights into the mechanisms of symptom reduction. It has important implications for clinical practice, suggesting that CBT can be an effective treatment for MAD, and that understanding the subjective experiences of patients can help clinicians tailor interventions for optimal outcomes.

1. Background

The present study aims to qualitatively explore the therapeutic experiences of patients with Mixed Anxiety and Depression (MAD) after three months of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), with a particular focus on symptom reduction related to depression and anxiety. Mixed Anxiety and Depression is a prevalent and debilitating condition that significantly impairs individuals' quality of life. Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of CBT in treating these disorders, less is known about the nuanced, subjective experiences of individuals undergoing therapy. This study uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews to capture these experiences, providing rich, contextualized insights into how patients perceive and experience changes in their symptoms over the course of treatment. The goal is to understand how CBT helps in alleviating anxiety and depression, as well as to identify the mechanisms through which these changes occur. This research not only adds to the limited qualitative literature on CBT for MAD but also offers implications for clinical practice. By identifying key themes in symptom reduction, the study could inform future therapeutic approaches and improve patient care strategies. Furthermore, the findings could assist clinicians in tailoring CBT interventions to enhance effectiveness for individuals with MAD, ultimately improving treatment outcomes and patient well-being.

The objective of the present study:

To qualitatively explore the overall therapeutic experience of patients with mixed anxiety and depression, focusing on reductions in Depression and Anxiety Symptoms.

2. Methods

Participants:

Patients with diagnosis of Mixed anxiety and depression were recruited via purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria for the study required participants to have a primary diagnosis of F41.2 Mixed Anxiety and Depressive Disorder, as defined by the ICD-10, and be within the age range of 18 to 35 (mean age = 25.5 years, 73% female). The exclusion criteria were as follows: individuals with any other co-occurring mental or physical disorders, those who were regularly taking medications, and individuals currently undergoing any other psychotherapy were excluded from the study. This point of data saturation was reached after conducting 25 interviews, consistent with the saturation points of previous comparable studies (Moon, Moss-Morris, Hunter, & Hughes, 2017; Taylor, O'Neill, Hughes, & Moss-Morris, 2018).

Procedure:

The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews from July to October 2023 to explore the therapeutic experiences of patients with Mixed Anxiety and Depression, specifically focusing on symptom reduction related to depression and anxiety after three months of Cognitive behavior therapy. By employing qualitative methods, the researcher aimed to gain a rich, contextualized understanding of the individual illness experiences, allowing for a deeper exploration of how patients perceive and experience their treatment outcomes.

At first consent was taken from each participant. After 3 months of CBT, Therapeutic Experience Schedule was developed to have an exit interview with the participants to tap the experiences and changes after going through the therapy process. It includes questions related to the subjective experience related to primary outcome variables (Reduction in Depression and Anxiety). The data was generated by using a semi-structured interview method consisting of 5 items (open ended questions). The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis, which allowed the research to find out themes, and sub-themes under the research variables. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher identified several themes, which were then thoroughly elaborated upon and discussed. Open coding was employed to categorize the data, allowing for a clear presentation of research objectives, themes, and sub-themes in a tabular format. Following data collection, the researcher engaged in active reading and critical analysis, coding the data to highlight significant differences and similarities in responses relevant to the research. This unbiased assembly of codes enabled a direct engagement with the data, yielding new insights. The next step involved meticulously reading and re-reading the data to extract relevant themes and rectify any errors. Ultimately, all research objectives, themes and sub-themes were compiled in a table for better clarity. The final presentation of the themes included data extracts from participants, which were analyzed and succinctly summarized to align with the context of each theme.

3. Result

Table1: Contains the Research Objectives, themes, and sub-themes on the therapeutic experience

Research objectives	Themes	Sub- themes
1. Reduction in Depression	1. Improvements in symptoms related to cognitive distortions	1. Decreased negative Self-Talk 2. Reduced Catastrophic Thinking 3. Realistic Perfectionism
	2. Improvement in symptoms related to Social Withdrawal	1. Interest in Social Activities 2. Spending more time with others 3. Reduced Interpersonal Conflict

Research objectives	Themes	Sub- themes
	3. Improvement in Emotional Dysregulation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced mood swings 2. Improvements in Emotional Numbness 3. Reduced Sensitivity.
2. Reduction in Anxiety	1. Better Cognitive Ability (Restructuring)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced Catastrophic Thinking 2. Decreased Rumination 3. Increased Cognitive Flexibility
	2. Better Behavioral Changes (Behavioral Activation)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased Engagement in Pleasant Activities 2. Improved Problem-Solving Skills 3. Enhanced Behavioral Coping Strategies
	3. Better Emotional Regulation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decreased Emotional Reactivity 2. Increased Emotional Awareness 3. Improved Emotion Regulation Strategies

4. Discussion

denotes the Research Objectives, themes, and sub-themes on the therapeutic experience. Through the implementation of Thematic Analysis, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the research subject, enabling them to draw insightful conclusions that can be applied in relevant fields, while understanding the distinctive experience of each participant.

Research objective 1: Reduction in level of depression

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) has demonstrated significant efficacy in reducing depression levels among patients with mixed anxiety and depression. Through structured sessions that target cognitive distortions and maladaptive behaviors, CBT equips individuals with coping strategies to manage their symptoms effectively. By challenging negative thought patterns and facilitating behavioral changes, CBT fosters a sense of empowerment and control over one's emotions, leading to a reduction in depressive symptoms. Moreover, CBT's focus on practical skills acquisition and problem-solving enhances patients' resilience, enabling them to navigate stressors more effectively and prevent relapse. A 23-year-old female nursing student: *"Before CBT, I used to think everything was my fault, and I couldn't see things in any other way. I'd get stuck in these negative thought cycles, believing that I wasn't good enough and that I'd never succeed. CBT really helped me challenge those thoughts. My therapist showed me how to spot them and reframe them in a more realistic way. I feel like I'm finally able to see things more clearly and not automatically jump to the worst-case scenario. As for social withdrawal, I used to avoid social situations because I felt like everyone was judging me, but now I feel more comfortable interacting with people. It's like I've got the confidence to re-engage. Emotionally, I'm much better at handling things now. Before, I'd get overwhelmed by my emotions and cry over little things, but now I can take a step back and regulate how I'm feeling. I feel like I have more control."* A 35-year-old male truck driver: *"I didn't realize how much my negative thoughts were dragging me down. I'd constantly think that I wasn't good enough, or that I was a failure, and it just made everything worse. CBT helped me see those thoughts for what they were—distorted and unrealistic. Now, I can catch myself when I'm thinking that way and remind myself it's not true. I've also been able to break out of my shell socially. I used to isolate myself a lot, especially after a tough*

day, because I felt like I wasn't worth talking to. But through therapy, I've learned to push myself to connect with others, even if it's just small talk. It's made a big difference. Emotionally, I used to be all over the place, snapping at people or getting upset for no reason, but now I can manage my emotions better. If I start feeling upset, I know how to pause and calm myself down before reacting. It's been a huge relief." Overall, the evidence supports CBT as a valuable therapeutic intervention in ameliorating depression within the context of mixed anxiety and depression.

Under research objective of Reduction in level of depression three main themes has been emerged from the interview of the patients. 1. Improvements in symptoms related to cognitive distortions, 2. Improvement in symptoms related to Social Withdrawal and 3. Improvement in Emotional Dysregulation.

Theme 1.1: Improvements in symptoms related to cognitive distortions

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has shown significant efficacy in alleviating symptoms related to cognitive distortions in patients with mixed anxiety and depression. Cognitive distortions are patterns of thinking that are irrational, biased, or inaccurate, often exacerbating feelings of anxiety and depression. Through CBT, individuals learn to identify and challenge these distorted thoughts, replacing them with more realistic and adaptive ones. One key aspect of CBT is cognitive restructuring, where patients work with therapists to recognize and reframe their negative thought patterns. For instance, individuals prone to catastrophizing may learn to evaluate situations more objectively, understanding that not all negative outcomes are as dire as they initially perceive. Similarly, those with a tendency towards black-and-white thinking can develop a more nuanced perspective, acknowledging shades of gray in their experiences. Furthermore, CBT equips patients with coping strategies to manage anxiety and depression symptoms as they arise. These may include relaxation techniques, problem-solving skills, and behavioral experiments to test the validity of their beliefs. Over time, individuals become better equipped to navigate challenging situations and cope with distressing thoughts, leading to a reduction in overall symptom severity. Research studies have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of CBT in improving cognitive distortions and related symptoms in mixed anxiety and depression patients. By targeting maladaptive thought processes and teaching adaptive coping strategies, CBT offers a promising avenue for enhancing psychological well-being and quality of life in this population.

Under the theme of improvement in symptoms related to cognitive distortion, three sub-themes came out from the interviews 1. decreased negative Self-Talk, 2. reduced catastrophic Thinking and 3.realistic perfectionism.

1.1.1 Decreased Negative Self-Talk

Negative self-talk involves the pervasive and self-deprecating inner dialogue common in depression. Individuals may engage in constant self-criticism, focusing on their perceived flaws and failures while disregarding their strengths and accomplishments. This negative self-talk reinforces feelings of worthlessness and contributes to low self-esteem, perpetuating the cycle of depression. After completing a course of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), patients commonly report a notable decrease in negative self-talk. This shift is a result of the cognitive restructuring techniques taught in CBT sessions, which help individuals recognize and challenge their self-defeating thoughts. Through guided exercises and interventions, patients learn to identify the underlying beliefs fueling their negative self-talk and replace them with more balanced and affirming perspectives. As a result, they develop greater self-awareness and self-compassion, leading to a reduction in self-criticism and a more positive internal dialogue. This decrease in negative self-talk contributes significantly to improvements in mood and overall psychological well-being following CBT intervention.

1.1.2 Reduced Catastrophic Thinking

Catastrophic thinking refers to the tendency to anticipate the worst possible outcomes in any given situation. Individuals experiencing depression may exaggerate the potential consequences of their actions or circumstances, leading to feelings of overwhelming anxiety and hopelessness. This cognitive distortion can paralyze individuals, preventing them from taking proactive steps to address their challenges and exacerbating their depressive symptoms. After completing three months of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) sessions, several patients reported a noticeable reduction in catastrophic thinking. This positive outcome is a testament to the effectiveness of CBT techniques in addressing maladaptive thought patterns commonly associated with anxiety and depression. Through targeted interventions such as cognitive restructuring and behavioral experiments, individuals learn to challenge catastrophic thoughts and replace them with more realistic and adaptive interpretations of events. As a result, they experience decreased levels of anxiety and distress, allowing them to approach challenges with greater resilience and confidence. This reduction in catastrophic thinking represents a significant step towards improved mental well-being and a more positive outlook on life for these patients.

1.1.3 Realistic Perfectionism

Perfectionism involves setting unrealistic standards for oneself and experiencing distress when unable to meet them. Individuals with depression may internalize a belief that their worth is contingent upon their achievements or external validation, leading to relentless self-imposed pressure to excel in all areas of life. This perfectionistic mindset fosters a fear of failure and can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, exacerbating depressive symptoms. After completing cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) sessions, patients often share experiences of developing a more realistic approach to perfectionism. Through the process of cognitive restructuring and behavioral interventions in CBT, individuals learn to challenge rigid and unrealistic standards they may have held for themselves. Instead of striving for unattainable perfection, they begin to embrace more realistic goals and expectations. This shift allows them to appreciate their efforts and accomplishments without succumbing to self-criticism or excessive pressure. By fostering a healthier relationship with perfectionism, patients can reduce feelings of anxiety and inadequacy while maintaining a sense of motivation and achievement. This newfound perspective on perfectionism reflects a key aspect of their progress in therapy and contributes to their overall well-being and satisfaction with life.

Theme 1.2: Improvement in symptoms related to Social Withdrawal

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been shown to effectively address symptoms related to social withdrawal in mixed anxiety depression patients. Through structured interventions targeting cognitive distortions and avoidance behaviors, CBT encourages patients to gradually confront and engage in social situations they may have previously avoided due to anxiety or depression. By challenging negative beliefs about social interactions and providing coping strategies to manage discomfort, CBT helps individuals relearn social skills and rebuild confidence in interpersonal interactions. Additionally, CBT often incorporates behavioral activation techniques that encourage patients to participate in enjoyable and fulfilling activities, including social engagements, which can alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness. As a result, CBT facilitates a gradual but significant improvement in symptoms related to social withdrawal, ultimately fostering greater social connectedness and enhancing overall well-being in individuals with mixed anxiety and depression.

Under the theme of improvement in symptoms related to Social Withdrawal three sub-themes came out from the interviews 1. Interest in Social Activities 2. Spending more time with others 3. Reduced Interpersonal Conflict.

Subtheme 1.2.1 Interest in Social Activities

This theme encapsulates the profound disengagement from previously enjoyed social interactions. Individuals experiencing depression may gradually lose interest in activities they once found pleasurable, such as spending time with friends or participating in hobbies. This withdrawal often stems from a sense of apathy or emotional numbness, making it challenging to derive joy or satisfaction from social engagements. Patients' interviews often reveal a notable increase in interest in social activities following Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions. Through structured interventions aimed at challenging negative thought patterns and avoidance behaviors, individuals with mixed anxiety and depression report a newfound willingness to engage in social interactions. Many express feelings more confident and equipped to navigate social situations that previously caused distress or avoidance. Patients often highlight a shift in perspective, recognizing the importance of social connection in their overall well-being and actively seeking out opportunities for social engagement. Additionally, they describe experiencing greater enjoyment and fulfillment from participating in activities with others, which contributes to a sense of belonging and connectedness. These insights from patient interviews underscore the effectiveness of CBT in promoting a positive change in social behavior and highlight the significance of addressing social withdrawal as part of the therapeutic process for individuals with mixed anxiety and depression.

Subtheme 1.2.2. Spending more time with others

Isolation involves the physical and emotional distancing from others. Individuals may retreat from social interactions and spend increasing amounts of time alone. This withdrawal can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and exacerbate depressive symptoms. Isolation may serve as a coping mechanism, providing a sense of control or protection from perceived social stressors, but it often perpetuates feelings of alienation and exacerbates depressive symptoms. In patient interviews conducted post-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions, a common theme emerges: individuals express a significant increase in the amount of time spent with others. Through the structured interventions and support provided in CBT, patients report feeling more motivated and capable of actively seeking out social interactions. Many describe a shift from withdrawing or avoiding social situations to actively pursuing opportunities to spend time with friends, family, or peers. Patients often attribute this change to newfound confidence in their ability to manage social anxiety and overcome obstacles that previously hindered their social engagement. Furthermore, they emphasize the positive impact of increased social interaction on their mood and overall well-being, noting improvements in feelings of loneliness and isolation. By fostering a sense of connection and support, CBT equips individuals with the skills and mindset necessary to cultivate meaningful relationships and enrich their social lives, ultimately contributing to their recovery from mixed anxiety and depression.

Subtheme 1.2.3. Reduced interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict reflects the strained relationships that can accompany depression. Individuals may experience difficulties in communicating their emotions effectively, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts with loved ones. These conflicts may arise from a sense of frustration or resentment towards perceived lack of understanding or support from others. Interpersonal conflict can further isolate individuals, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and worsening depressive symptoms. Patient interviews conducted post-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions consistently highlight a reduction in interpersonal conflict as a significant outcome of the treatment. Through targeted interventions addressing maladaptive communication patterns and conflict resolution skills, individuals with mixed anxiety and depression report a newfound ability to navigate challenging interpersonal dynamics more effectively. Patients often describe feeling more assertive in expressing their needs and boundaries while also demonstrating increased empathy and understanding towards others. This shift in communication style fosters healthier relationships and diminishes the frequency and intensity of conflicts within their social circles. Moreover, patients attribute this improvement to

the insights gained during CBT sessions, which helped them identify and challenge unhelpful thought patterns and behaviors contributing to interpersonal strife. As a result, they experience greater harmony and mutual respect in their interactions, leading to a reduction in stress and an overall improvement in their mental well-being. These findings underscore the importance of addressing interpersonal issues within the context of CBT for individuals with mixed anxiety and depression, ultimately fostering more fulfilling and supportive social relationships.

Theme 1.3: Improvement in Emotional Dysregulation

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has demonstrated efficacy in improving depression symptoms by targeting emotional dysregulation. Emotional dysregulation refers to difficulties in managing and expressing emotions appropriately, which are often prominent in individuals experiencing depression. Through CBT, patients learn various skills and techniques to enhance emotional regulation. This may involve identifying and challenging negative thought patterns that contribute to emotional distress, as well as learning effective coping strategies to manage overwhelming emotions. By gaining insight into the interplay between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, patients develop greater emotional awareness and resilience. As a result, they become better equipped to navigate life's challenges without becoming overwhelmed by negative emotions, leading to a reduction in depressive symptoms and an improvement in overall emotional well-being. The comprehensive approach of CBT in addressing emotional dysregulation underscores its effectiveness as a treatment for depression.

Under the theme of Improvement in Emotional Dysregulation following three subthemes emerges; 1. Reduced mood swings, 2. Improvements in Emotional Numbness and 3. Reduced Heightened Sensitivity.

Subtheme: 1.3.1. Reduced Mood Swings

Mood swings involve abrupt and intense fluctuations in emotional states, ranging from profound sadness to fleeting moments of euphoria. Individuals experiencing depression may feel as though they are on an emotional rollercoaster, struggling to maintain stability amidst turbulent feelings. These mood swings can be triggered by internal or external factors, further destabilizing individuals and exacerbating their depressive symptoms. Patients experienced reduced mood swings after undergoing three months of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT is known to be effective in helping individuals manage and cope with a variety of mental health issues, including mood swings associated with conditions Mixed Anxiety and Depression. This positive outcome suggests that the therapy may have provided patients with effective tools and strategies to better regulate their emotions and maintain stability in their mood. It highlights the importance of evidence-based treatments like CBT in improving the well-being and quality of life for individuals struggling with mood-related difficulties.

Subtheme: 1.3.2. Improvements in emotional Numbness

Emotional numbness refers to a pervasive sense of detachment from one's emotions. Individuals with depression may feel as though they are operating on autopilot, experiencing a profound sense of emptiness or flatness in their emotional landscape. This emotional numbness can be distressing, as individuals may struggle to connect with others or derive pleasure from previously enjoyable activities, exacerbating feelings of isolation and despair. During qualitative interviews exploring their therapeutic journey, patients conveyed notable improvements in their experience of emotional numbness following a three-month course of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). This observation underscores the efficacy of CBT in addressing not only mood swings but also deeper emotional states. Emotional numbness can be a distressing symptom, often associated with conditions like depression or trauma. The fact that patients reported enhancements in this aspect suggests that CBT may have facilitated a reconnection with their emotions, fostering a greater sense of vitality and engagement with life. This outcome underscores the holistic impact of CBT, extending beyond mood regulation to encompass a broader spectrum of emotional well-being.

Subtheme: 1.3.3. Reduced Sensitivity

Heightened sensitivity involves an increased reactivity to emotional stimuli, resulting in exaggerated responses to minor stressors or triggers. Individuals with depression may find themselves overwhelmed by seemingly innocuous events, experiencing intense emotional reactions that feel disproportionate to the situation. This heightened sensitivity can be exhausting and destabilizing, contributing to feelings of emotional dysregulation and exacerbating depressive symptoms. During qualitative interviews delving into their therapeutic journey, patients articulated a discernible reduction in their sensitivity levels following a three-month regimen of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Sensitivity, often intertwined with emotional reactivity, can significantly impact one's ability to navigate daily life and relationships. The reported decrease in sensitivity suggests that CBT may have equipped patients with tools to manage their emotional responses more effectively, fostering a sense of resilience and stability. By targeting cognitive distortions and maladaptive thought patterns, CBT likely facilitated a shift towards a more balanced and grounded emotional state. This outcome underscores the transformative potential of CBT in empowering individuals to regain control over their emotional experiences, enhancing their overall well-being and interpersonal functioning.

Research objective 2: Reduction in the level of Anxiety

The reduction in the level of anxiety among patients was a notable finding during qualitative interviews exploring their therapeutic journey post three months of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Anxiety can profoundly impact daily functioning and quality of life, often manifesting in various forms of distress and avoidance behaviors. The reported decrease in anxiety levels suggests that CBT interventions effectively targeted the underlying cognitive and behavioral patterns contributing to anxiety symptoms. By addressing irrational thoughts and implementing coping strategies, CBT likely empowered patients to confront and manage their anxieties more constructively. A 28-year-old female marketing professional: *"Before CBT, I felt trapped in a cycle of overthinking. I'd constantly worry about work and how I was perceived, and my mind would just race. But CBT really helped me restructure those thoughts. I learned to catch the irrational ones, like assuming the worst would happen, and replace them with more realistic, balanced thoughts. It's like I gained a new cognitive ability to see things clearly. Behaviorally, I've started taking more initiative at work—like tackling projects that I would have avoided before because of anxiety. I used to procrastinate, but now I break tasks down and just start them. Emotionally, I feel more in control. I'm not as quick to get overwhelmed or anxious when things don't go perfectly. I can manage my feelings better and stay calm in situations that used to trigger me."* A 26-year-old male graphic designer: *"CBT helped me see how much my anxious thoughts were controlling me. I would overthink everything, especially with deadlines or client feedback. The cognitive restructuring techniques really helped me challenge those automatic negative thoughts. Now, when I start thinking that something is going to go wrong, I can pause and ask myself if it's actually true, or if I'm just making it worse in my head. In terms of behavior, I've become more proactive. I stopped avoiding certain tasks and now I face them head-on, even if I feel nervous. It's been empowering to realize I can still act despite the anxiety. Emotionally, I'm more stable. I no longer let my anxiety dictate my mood, and I've learned ways to self-soothe when I feel overwhelmed. I'm much better at managing my emotional responses now."* This outcome highlights the significant role of CBT in providing practical tools and support for individuals grappling with anxiety, ultimately fostering a sense of empowerment and resilience in navigating life's challenges.

Under research objective of reduction in the level of Anxiety symptoms there are three themes 1. Better Cognitive Ability (Restructuring), 2. Better Behavioral Changes (Behavioral Activation) and 3. Better Emotional Regulation.

Theme 2.1: Better Cognitive Ability (Restructuring):

The observed improvement in cognitive ability, particularly through cognitive restructuring techniques, emerged as a noteworthy outcome during qualitative interviews conducted post three

months of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Cognitive restructuring is a core component of CBT, aimed at identifying and challenging distorted or negative thought patterns that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviors. The reported enhancement in cognitive ability suggests that CBT interventions effectively equipped patients with skills to identify and reframe unhelpful thoughts, leading to more adaptive and realistic interpretations of situations. By fostering a greater sense of cognitive flexibility and resilience, CBT likely enabled patients to approach challenges with a clearer and more rational mindset. This cognitive enhancement can have far-reaching benefits beyond the therapeutic setting, impacting various aspects of daily life, such as problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions. The observed improvement in cognitive ability underscores the transformative potential of CBT in not only alleviating symptoms but also equipping individuals with lifelong skills to navigate and thrive in the face of adversity.

Under Better Cognitive Ability (Restructuring) there are three subthemes noted down: 1. Reduced Catastrophic Thinking, 2. Decreased Rumination and 3. Increased Cognitive Flexibility.

Subtheme 2.1.1 Reduced Catastrophic Thinking

Catastrophic thinking involves magnifying the severity of potential outcomes in a given situation, often leading to heightened anxiety and distress. Through cognitive restructuring in CBT, individuals learn to challenge and reframe these catastrophic thoughts. They may be taught to examine evidence for and against their catastrophic beliefs, identify cognitive distortions, and develop more balanced and realistic perspectives. As a result, they experience a reduction in anticipatory anxiety and a greater sense of control over their thoughts and emotions. The study observed a notable reduction in catastrophic thinking and subsequent anxiety symptoms following a three-month course of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). This finding underscores the efficacy of CBT in addressing maladaptive thought patterns and associated emotional distress. The participants demonstrated significant improvements in their ability to identify and challenge negative thoughts, suggesting a positive impact on their overall mental well-being. These results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of CBT as a primary intervention for anxiety-related disorders, highlighting its potential to bring about meaningful and lasting change in individuals' cognitive and emotional functioning.

Subtheme 2.1.2 Decreased Rumination

Rumination refers to the repetitive and intrusive focus on negative thoughts and feelings, which can exacerbate anxiety symptoms. CBT helps individuals interrupt the cycle of rumination by teaching them to recognize and challenge unproductive thought patterns. Techniques such as mindfulness, thought monitoring, and cognitive restructuring are used to shift attention away from rumination and towards more constructive activities and thoughts. By breaking free from rumination, individuals experience decreased anxiety and improved emotional well-being. The research findings indicate a substantial decrease in rumination and consequent reduction in anxiety symptoms following a three-month intervention of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). This outcome underscores the efficacy of CBT in targeting and mitigating maladaptive cognitive processes associated with anxiety. Participants exhibited significant improvements in their ability to redirect their thoughts away from repetitive and distressing patterns, indicative of enhanced cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation. These results contribute to the existing literature on the therapeutic benefits of CBT for anxiety disorders, emphasizing its role in fostering adaptive cognitive responses and alleviating psychological distress over a relatively short-term intervention period.

Subtheme 2.1.3 Increased Cognitive Flexibility

Cognitive flexibility involves the ability to adapt one's thinking patterns and perspectives in response to changing circumstances. In CBT, individuals learn to cultivate cognitive flexibility through various exercises and strategies. This may include challenging black-and-white thinking, practicing

perspective-taking, and exploring alternative interpretations of situations. By fostering cognitive flexibility, individuals become less rigid in their thinking, allowing them to approach challenges with greater adaptability and resilience, ultimately reducing anxiety levels. The investigation yielded noteworthy evidence of increased cognitive flexibility correlating with reduced anxiety symptoms following a three-month Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) intervention. This outcome underscores the therapeutic efficacy of CBT in enhancing adaptive cognitive processes crucial for anxiety management. Participants demonstrated significant improvements in their capacity to entertain alternative perspectives and generate adaptive responses to anxiety-provoking stimuli. Such findings suggest that CBT fosters the development of flexible cognitive strategies, enabling individuals to effectively navigate and regulate their emotional experiences. These results contribute substantively to the empirical understanding of CBT's mechanisms of action in anxiety treatment, underscoring its potential to promote enduring shifts in cognitive functioning conducive to improved psychological well-being.

Theme 2.2: Behavioral Activation

The study reveals a notable reduction in anxiety symptoms consequent to Behavioral Activation within the framework of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions. This finding underscores the therapeutic effectiveness of integrating Behavioral Activation techniques into CBT interventions for anxiety disorders. Participants demonstrated significant improvements in mood regulation and engagement in rewarding activities, indicative of enhanced behavioral activation and subsequent reduction in anxiety-related distress. These results contribute substantively to the growing body of literature supporting the utility of Behavioral Activation as an integral component of CBT for anxiety, highlighting its role in facilitating behavioral change and symptom amelioration. Such findings underscore the importance of addressing both cognitive and behavioral components in anxiety treatment paradigms, emphasizing the holistic nature of effective therapeutic interventions within the CBT framework.

Subtheme 2.2. 1: Increased Engagement in Pleasant Activities

Behavioral activation aims to increase individuals' participation in rewarding and enjoyable activities as a means of combating anxiety and depression. Through CBT, individuals learn to identify and schedule pleasurable activities that align with their values and interests. By engaging in these activities, individuals experience a sense of accomplishment, pleasure, and mastery, which counteracts feelings of anxiety and low mood. Over time, increased engagement in pleasant activities helps individuals build a more fulfilling and balanced lifestyle, contributing to reduced anxiety levels. The research findings elucidate a significant reduction in anxiety symptoms following increased engagement in pleasant activities within the context of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions. This outcome underscores the therapeutic value of promoting positive reinforcement and behavioral activation in anxiety treatment. Participants exhibited marked improvements in mood regulation and enjoyment of rewarding activities, indicative of enhanced engagement in pleasurable experiences and subsequent reduction in anxiety-related distress. These results contribute substantively to the empirical understanding of CBT's mechanisms of action, emphasizing the importance of addressing behavioral components in anxiety management. By fostering increased participation in pleasant activities, CBT interventions facilitate adaptive coping strategies and symptom alleviation, underscoring the holistic nature of effective anxiety treatment within the CBT framework.

Subtheme 2. 2.2 Improved Problem-Solving Skills

Problem-solving skills are crucial for effectively managing stressors and reducing anxiety. In CBT, individuals learn structured problem-solving techniques to identify, evaluate, and implement solutions to specific challenges or stressors in their lives. This may involve breaking down problems into manageable steps, generating alternative solutions, and evaluating the effectiveness of different approaches. By enhancing their problem-solving skills, individuals feel more confident and competent

in addressing anxiety-provoking situations, leading to reduced anxiety and increased self-efficacy. The study presents compelling evidence of improved problem-solving skills among patients experiencing mixed anxiety and depression following Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions. This finding underscores the therapeutic efficacy of CBT in addressing cognitive distortions and enhancing adaptive coping mechanisms. Participants demonstrated significant enhancements in their ability to identify and resolve challenges, indicative of improved problem-solving efficacy and subsequent reduction in symptoms of both anxiety and depression. These results contribute substantively to the understanding of CBT's multifaceted approach to treating comorbid anxiety and depression, highlighting its capacity to target underlying cognitive processes and promote adaptive behavioral responses. By fostering the development of effective problem-solving skills, CBT interventions equip individuals with the tools necessary to navigate and overcome the complexities of concurrent anxiety and depression, thereby facilitating meaningful improvements in overall mental health and well-being.

Subtheme 2. 2. 3. Enhanced Behavioral Coping Strategies

Behavioral coping strategies refer to the techniques individuals use to manage and alleviate anxiety symptoms in their daily lives. In CBT, individuals learn a range of coping strategies, including relaxation exercises, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery. These techniques help individuals reduce physiological arousal, promote a sense of calmness, and increase their ability to cope with stressful situations. By incorporating these coping strategies into their daily routines, individuals experience decreased anxiety and improved overall well-being. The study provides compelling evidence of enhanced behavioral coping strategies among individuals experiencing mixed anxiety and depression following Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions. This finding underscores the therapeutic effectiveness of CBT in addressing maladaptive coping patterns and fostering adaptive responses to stressors. Participants demonstrated significant improvements in their utilization of constructive coping mechanisms, indicative of enhanced behavioral flexibility and subsequent reduction in symptoms of both anxiety and depression. These results contribute substantively to the understanding of CBT's comprehensive approach to treating comorbid anxiety and depression, emphasizing its role in promoting adaptive behavioral adjustments crucial for symptom alleviation. By equipping individuals with a diverse repertoire of coping strategies, CBT interventions empower them to effectively manage the challenges associated with concurrent anxiety and depression, facilitating tangible improvements in overall mental health and functioning.

Theme 2.3: Better Emotional Regulation

The research findings highlight a significant reduction in anxiety symptoms among individuals experiencing mixed anxiety and depression following Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions, attributable to enhanced emotional regulation skills. This outcome underscores the therapeutic efficacy of CBT in addressing dysregulated emotions and fostering adaptive emotional responses. Participants demonstrated marked improvements in their ability to identify, tolerate, and modulate distressing emotions, indicative of enhanced emotional flexibility and subsequent alleviation of both anxiety and depressive symptoms. These results contribute substantively to the understanding of CBT's integrative approach to treating comorbid anxiety and depression, emphasizing its role in promoting adaptive emotional regulation mechanisms crucial for overall symptom improvement. By equipping individuals with the skills necessary to effectively manage their emotions, CBT interventions facilitate tangible and enduring enhancements in emotional well-being and mental health functioning.

Under this theme researcher has pointed out three subthemes; namely, 1. Decreased emotional reactivity, 2. Increased emotional awareness and 3. Improved emotional regulation strategies.

Subtheme 2.3.1 Decreased Emotional Reactivity

Emotional reactivity refers to the intensity and volatility of emotional responses to internal and external stimuli. Through CBT, individuals learn skills to regulate their emotions more effectively, reducing emotional reactivity. This may involve identifying triggers for emotional distress, practicing emotion regulation techniques such as cognitive reappraisal and mindfulness, and developing coping strategies to manage strong emotions. By learning to modulate their emotional responses, individuals experience decreased anxiety and greater emotional stability. The study reveals reduction in anxiety symptoms among individuals with mixed anxiety and depression following Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions, attributed to decreased emotional reactivity and subsequent improvement in emotional regulation skills. This outcome underscores the therapeutic efficacy of CBT in modulating emotional responses and fostering adaptive regulation strategies. Participants exhibited notable reductions in emotional reactivity to stressors, accompanied by enhancements in their ability to identify, understand, and manage their emotions effectively. Such improvements in emotional regulation were associated with a parallel reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression. These findings contribute substantively to the understanding of CBT's comprehensive approach to treating comorbid anxiety and depression, emphasizing its role in targeting underlying emotional dysregulation mechanisms. By facilitating a decrease in emotional reactivity and promoting better emotional regulation, CBT interventions equip individuals with the tools necessary to navigate and mitigate the complexities of concurrent anxiety and

Subtheme 2.3.2: Increased Emotional Awareness

Emotional awareness involves recognizing, understanding, and accepting one's own emotions. In CBT, individuals develop greater emotional awareness through psychoeducation, mindfulness practices, and emotion-focused exercises. They learn to identify and label their emotions accurately, discerning between different emotional states and understanding their underlying causes. By cultivating emotional awareness, individuals become more attuned to their emotional experiences, facilitating effective emotion regulation and reducing anxiety levels. The research findings illuminate a substantial reduction in anxiety symptoms among individuals with mixed anxiety and depression following Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions, facilitated by increased emotional awareness and subsequent improvement in emotional regulation skills. This outcome underscores the therapeutic efficacy of CBT in cultivating mindful attention to emotional experiences and fostering adaptive regulation strategies. Participants demonstrated significant enhancements in their ability to recognize, label, and understand their emotions, leading to more effective regulation and management of distressing feelings. Such improvements in emotional regulation were associated with a concurrent reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression. These findings contribute significantly to the understanding of CBT's holistic approach to treating comorbid anxiety and depression, highlighting its role in targeting fundamental aspects of emotional functioning. By enhancing emotional awareness and promoting better emotional regulation, CBT interventions empower individuals to navigate the challenges of concurrent anxiety and depression, ultimately fostering substantial improvements in overall mental health and well-being.

Subtheme 2.3.3: Improved Emotion Regulation Strategies

Emotion regulation strategies are techniques individuals use to manage and modulate their emotional experiences. In CBT, individuals learn a range of emotion regulation strategies tailored to their specific needs and preferences. This may include relaxation techniques, mindfulness practices, emotional expression, and cognitive reappraisal. By practicing these strategies regularly, individuals develop greater emotional resilience and flexibility, allowing them to cope more effectively with anxiety-provoking situations and reducing the impact of anxiety on their daily functioning. The study demonstrates a notable reduction in anxiety symptoms among individuals with mixed anxiety and depression following Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) sessions, attributed to improved emotion

regulation strategies and subsequent enhancement in emotional regulation skills. This finding underscores the therapeutic efficacy of CBT in equipping individuals with adaptive tools to manage their emotions effectively. Participants exhibited significant improvements in their ability to identify, tolerate, and modulate distressing emotions, indicative of enhanced emotional regulation. Such improvements in emotional regulation were associated with a concurrent reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression. These findings contribute substantially to the understanding of CBT's integrative approach to treating comorbid anxiety and depression, emphasizing its role in targeting core mechanisms underlying emotional dysregulation. By fostering the development of effective emotion regulation strategies, CBT interventions empower individuals to navigate and mitigate the complexities of concurrent anxiety and depression, facilitating tangible improvements in overall mental health and well-being.

5. Conclusion

Qualitative analysis (Thematic analysis) concludes the research objectives encompass a multifaceted approach aimed at addressing various dimensions of mental health challenges. Through cognitive-behavioral therapy, the research objectives were to reduce depression and anxiety. Participants reported that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) decreased their depressive symptoms by enhancing social engagement and transforming negative thought patterns. They also found that CBT effectively reduced anxiety by promoting cognitive restructuring and encouraging behavioral activation, leading to improved emotional regulation. The findings of this research have important implications for clinical practice, suggesting that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can be an effective approach for treating Mixed Anxiety and Depression. Clinicians can leverage the insights on cognitive restructuring and behavioral activation to tailor interventions that address both depressive and anxiety symptoms, improving overall emotional regulation. Moreover, understanding the role of social engagement and thought pattern transformation can guide therapists in enhancing therapeutic strategies to foster long-term mental well-being and resilience in patients.

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