Clinical Trial Protocol
Iranian Registry of Clinical Trials

07 Nov 2026

Effectiveness and Mechanisms of Action of Meta-Inner Humor Therapy (MIHT) in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: Evidence from Ecological Momentary Assessment and Multilevel Network Modeling

Protocol summary

Study aim

To determine the effectiveness of Meta-Inner Humor Therapy (MIHT) in reducing the momentary intensity of clinical components in the obsessive-compulsive cycle and restructuring the network organization of these components in patients' daily lives, based on Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) data at pre- and post-treatment stages

Design

The present study is a single-group, pre-post intervention clinical trial, conducted using a systematic approach based on established standards for clinical study design. It aims to investigate the impact of Meta-Inner Humor Therapy (MIHT) on the momentary dynamics of the obsessive-compulsive cycle within the daily lives of individuals with OCD. The design is based on a three-phase structure: a 14-day baseline period of Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA), a five-week program consisting of 10 sessions of MIHT, and a corresponding 14-day EMA period post-treatment. This design enables a detailed analysis of changes at the intra-individual and momentary levels

Settings and conduct

Participants will be recruited between June 20, 2026, and July 21, 2026 using a multi-stage referral and announcement strategy to enhance sample representativeness and reduce self-selection bias, and will receive the intervention at university counseling centers and outpatient clinics in Tehran

Participants/Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Participants will include using the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 Disorders, Clinical Version, administered by trained therapists under the supervision of licensed clinical psychologists.

Intervention groups

Meta-Inner Humor Therapy will be delivered individually in 10 sessions over a 5-week period, implemented according to the standard Meta-Inner Humor protocol.

Main outcome variables

Severity of obsessive-compulsive disorder symptoms

General information

Reason for update

Acronym

IRCT registration information

IRCT registration number: **IRCT20130904014564N4**
Registration date: **2026-05-31, 1405/03/10**
Registration timing: **prospective**

Last update: **2026-05-31, 1405/03/10**
Update count: **0**

Registration date

2026-05-31, 1405/03/10

Registrant information

Name
Mehdi Akbari
Name of organization / entity
Kharazmi University
Country
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Phone
+98 21 6602 1735
Email address
akbari.psy@gmail.com

Recruitment status

Recruitment complete

Funding source

Expected recruitment start date

2026-06-20, 1405/03/30

Expected recruitment end date

2026-07-21, 1405/04/30

Actual recruitment start date

empty

Actual recruitment end date

empty

Trial completion date

empty

Scientific title

Effectiveness and Mechanisms of Action of Meta-Inner Humor Therapy (MIHT) in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: Evidence from Ecological Momentary Assessment and Multilevel Network Modeling

Public title

Effectiveness Meta-Inner Humor Therapy (MIHT) in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Purpose

Treatment

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria:

A primary diagnosis of OCD based on DSM-5 Age between 18 and 70 years Full proficiency in the Persian language The ability and willingness to complete smartphone-based EMA prompts multiple times daily throughout the study period Participants receiving psychiatric medication are eligible provided that their medication regimen has remained stable for at least four weeks prior to the baseline assessment

Exclusion criteria:

Receiving concurrent psychological treatment Any past or present Bipolar or Schizophrenia disorders Acute suicidal ideation or recent attempts Substance use disorder within the past three months Cluster A or B personality disorders Physical conditions that could interfere with participation in MIHT exercises (e.g., uncontrolled neurological or cardiovascular diseases)

Age

From **18 years** old to **70 years** old

Gender

Both

Phase

3

Groups that have been masked

No information

Sample size

Target sample size: **80**

Randomization (investigator's opinion)

N/A

Randomization description

Blinding (investigator's opinion)

Not blinded

Blinding description

Placebo

Not used

Assignment

Single

Other design features

Secondary Ids

empty

Ethics committees

1

Ethics committee

Name of ethics committee

Ethics committee of Kharazmi University

Street address

No.43, South Mofateh St, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

City

Tehran

Province

Tehran

Postal code

15719-14911

Approval date

2026-05-13, 1405/02/23

Ethics committee reference number

IR.KHU.REC.1405.024

Health conditions studied

1

Description of health condition studied

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

ICD-10 code

F42

ICD-10 code description

Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Primary outcomes

1

Description

Obsessive compulsive symptoms

Timepoint

Pre-treatment (baseline) and post-treatment (end of week9)

Method of measurement

Yale Brown Obsessive-Compulsive Scale (Y-BOCS)

Secondary outcomes

1

Description

Momentary severity of the participant’s current obsession, assessed daily via an Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) protocol.

Timepoint

Four times daily, for 14 days prior to the intervention (baseline) and 14 days following the intervention (follow-up).

Method of measurement

This variable is assessed using a single-item 0–10 numeric rating scale. The item is: “How intense is this obsession right now?” with 0 indicating “not at all” and 10 indicating “very much.”

2

Description

Momentary believability or perceived realism of the current obsession, assessed daily via an Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) protocol.

Timepoint

Four times daily, for 14 days prior to the intervention and 14 days following the intervention.

Method of measurement

This variable is measured using a single-item 0–10 numeric rating scale. The item is: “How real or believable does this obsession feel right now?” Higher scores indicate greater believability of the obsession.

3

Description

Momentary urge to perform a compulsion related to the current obsession.

Timepoint

Four times daily, for 14 days prior to the intervention (baseline) and 14 days following the intervention (follow-up).

Method of measurement

This variable is assessed using a single-item 0–10 numeric rating scale. The item is: “Because of this obsession, how strongly do you feel the need to perform a compulsion right now?” Higher scores indicate a stronger compulsive urge.

4

Description

Expected distress when resisting responding to the current obsession.

Timepoint

Four times daily, for 14 days prior to the intervention (baseline) and 14 days following the intervention (follow-up).

Method of measurement

This variable is measured using a single-item 0–10 numeric rating scale. The item is: “If you tried not to respond to this obsession right now, how distressed would you feel?” Higher scores indicate greater distress during resistance.

5

Description

Momentary change in the participant’s urge or perspective toward the obsession following the delivery of a humorous defusion-based audiovisual educational content.

Timepoint

Four times daily, for 14 days prior to the intervention (baseline) and 14 days following the intervention (follow-up).

Method of measurement

How much did this humorous defusion-based audiovisual educational content change your urge or perspective toward this obsession right now on a 0 to 10 numeric scale?” Higher scores indicate a greater change in the individual’s cognitive-emotional experience in relation to the obsession.

Intervention groups

1

Description

Intervention group: Meta-Inner Humor Therapy (MIHT): This treatment is a structured ten-session intervention based on active mindfulness that uses humor as a metacognitive tool to revise the individual’s relationship with thoughts and emotions (Akbari et al., 2026). MIHT unfolds across three therapeutic phases, as described below. Phase 1: awareness and pattern recognition (sessions 1–3): This phase embodies self-criticism, RNT, and cognitive rigidity and begins by framing negative thoughts as a universal human experience. Participants learn to notice typical tone, triggers, and repetitive narratives of negative thoughts without judgment. To make the negative internal voice, or Inner Fool, more recognizable, a simple, gloomy character—such as a Glum-like figure or other culturally familiar example like Eeyore—is used as a metaphor. For example, instead of automatically accepting a thought like “I’m incompetent” or “If I speak, everyone will notice my anxiety,” participants visualize The Inner Fool saying it aloud, exaggerating the certainty and gloom of the thought. By externalizing it in this way, the thought can be clearly recognized as a thought, not an objective fact. This allows clients to give distinct persona to their negative thinking and helps them conceptualize thoughts as mental events rather than objective reality, reducing emotional intensity and fostering cognitive distancing. The exercise turns RNT into something observable, approachable, and open to compassionate engagement. Phase 2: playful reframing (sessions 4–7): In this phase, clients develop an Inner Humorous character—often a familiar, playful figure such as a cartoon or culturally known character—to counter the rigid, gloomy tone of the Inner Fool. Importantly, playful reframing in MIHT does not involve replacing a negative thought with a more rational statement, as in traditional cognitive restructuring. Instead, the intervention invites clients to relate to the thought with humor and lightness, often by exaggerating, personifying, or gently parodying the thought pattern. This approach aims to reduce cognitive fusion and rigidity while maintaining awareness of the emotional experience. The goal is not to argue with negative thoughts but to mock the entire persona of the Inner Fool in a light, non-hostile way. By using humor rather than logic, clients gain cognitive distance from RNT and cultivate a flexible, resilient stance toward distressing thoughts. Instead of responding rationally to statements like “You’re incompetent,” the Inner Humorous playfully exaggerates and teases the Inner Fool, turning its certainty into something predictable and harmless. Playful reframing helps clients observe RNT with curiosity and levity, reducing its power and laying the groundwork for a wiser, more compassionate inner dialogue. For example, if the Inner Fool says, “You’re incompetent,” the Inner Humorous does not respond

logically (“No, I am competent because I did X task well”). Phase 3: integration and application (Sessions 8–10): In this phase, clients learn to cultivate two complementary inner capacities, The Inner Nurturer and the Inner Humorous, which together form the balanced voice of the Inner Wise, or the integration of humor and compassion. While the Inner Humorous playfully disrupts RNT, the Inner Nurturer responds to difficult emotions—fear, sadness, or frustration—with warmth, validation, and gentle reassurance. Clients imagine the Inner Nurturer as a caring friend, parent, or compassionate figure who helps regulate emotional distress. Through guided examples, clients practice shifting between these inner voices depending on what the moment requires. Over time, clients learn to alternate or integrate these voices fluidly, enabling them to neutralize negative thoughts, calm emotional intensity, and restore psychological balance. This phase emphasizes flexibility. Sometimes humor is enough, sometimes compassion is needed, and sometimes the integrated Inner Wise leads both. Here is a brief example of the conversion between different mindsets when the client comes up with a thought that begins with the Inner Fool.

Category
Behavior

Recruitment centers

1

Recruitment center

Name of recruitment center
Academic counseling centers, psychiatric outpatient clinics, and private clinics in Tehran

Full name of responsible person
Dr. Mehdi Solimani

Street address
South Kargar Street, Below the Lashgar, Roozbeh Psychiatric Hospital, Tehran, Iran

City
Tehran

Province
Tehran

Postal code
1333715914

Phone
+98 21 5541 9151

Email
m.akbari@khu.ac.ir

Sponsors / Funding sources

1

Sponsor

Name of organization / entity
Vice-chancellor for Research and Technology, Kharazmi University

Full name of responsible person
Dr. Alireza Harifi

Street address
No.43, South Mofateh St, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

City
Tehran

Province
Tehran

Postal code
15719-14911

Phone
+98 21 8832 9220

Email
m.akbari@khu.ac.ir

Grant name

Grant code / Reference number

Is the source of funding the same sponsor organization/entity?
Yes

Title of funding source
Vice-chancellor for Research and Technology, Kharazmi University

Proportion provided by this source
100

Public or private sector
Public

Domestic or foreign origin
Domestic

Category of foreign source of funding
empty

Country of origin

Type of organization providing the funding
Academic

Person responsible for general inquiries

Contact

Name of organization / entity
Kharazmi University

Full name of responsible person
Mehdi Akbari

Position
Professor

Latest degree
Ph.D.

Other areas of specialty/work
Psychology

Street address
No.43, South Mofateh St, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

City
Tehran

Province
Tehran

Postal code
15719-14911

Phone
+98 21 8832 9220

Email
m.akbari@khu.ac.ir

Person responsible for scientific

inquiries

Contact

Name of organization / entity
Kharazmi University

Full name of responsible person
Mehdi Akbari

Position
Professor

Latest degree
Ph.D.

Other areas of specialty/work
Psychology

Street address
No.43, South Mofateh St, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

City
Tehran

Province
Tehran

Postal code
15719-14911

Phone
+98 21 6655 2336

Email
m.akbari@khu.ac.ir

Person responsible for updating data

Contact

Name of organization / entity
Kharazmi University

Full name of responsible person
Mehdi Akbari

Position
Professor

Latest degree
Ph.D.

Other areas of specialty/work
Psychology

Street address
No.43, South Mofateh St, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

City
Tehran

Province
Tehran

Postal code
15719-14911

Phone
+98 21 6655 2336

Email
m.akbari@khu.ac.ir

Sharing plan

Deidentified Individual Participant Data Set (IPD)
Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Study Protocol
Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Statistical Analysis Plan
Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Informed Consent Form
Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Clinical Study Report
Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Analytic Code
Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Data Dictionary
Yes - There is a plan to make this available

Title and more details about the data/document
Information on the main outcome of the research will be shared.

When the data will become available and for how long
Access begins 6 months after results are published.

To whom data/document is available
Data and other scientific documentation can be made available to any person who requests it.

Under which criteria data/document could be used
There are no specific restrictions.

From where data/document is obtainable
To access the data, you can send a message to Dr.Mehdi Akbari's email address: Akbari.psy@gmail.com or m.akbari@khu.ac.ir

What processes are involved for a request to access data/document
One month after the requester sends a message to one of the two emails mentioned in the previous section, individuals can receive the requested information.

Comments