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Test Anxiety amongst Students of Paramedical Courses: A Hypnotherapeutic Intervention Study

Ms. Dipal Patel and Dr. Anjuli Verma

Abstract

Academic pressure and test anxiety are among the major sources of stress genic, behavioral, and other problems among students in India. Academic pressure and test anxiety has been on the rise due to the cut-throat competition and the students are unable to cope with the extremely demanding nature of academic programs. Besides the added pressure from their parents and teachers to perform well further aggravate the pressure. The present study was intended to test the effectiveness of the Hypnotherapeutic intervention program on academic pressure and test anxiety amongst the students. A sample of sixty students from paramedical courses like, physiotherapy, pharmacy, and nursing were selected for the study out of the seven hundred students from the first phase of the study. These were selected on the basis of their scores on test anxiety. Seventy participants scoring very high on test anxiety were selected. These were equally divided into two groups i.e. one which was given hypnotherapeutic intervention and the other was taken as control. Ten sessions of a specially designed module of hypnotherapy was given as intervention. The test anxiety was measured both before and after the intervention. In the case of the control group, no intervention was given and they were just given free time. The data were analyzed using a t-test besides descriptive statistics. The results of the study revealed that hypnotherapeutic intervention was effective in reducing the test anxiety among the students of paramedical courses. Findings are discussed in light of their implications.

Keywords: Test anxiety, Academic pressure, Hypnotherapy, Intervention strategy

Approximately half of India's 1.2 billion people are under the age of 26, and by 2020 India is predicted to be the [youngest country in the world](#), with a median age of 29 years. With this tremendous forecast, it becomes imperative to ensure an environment that promotes positive well-being. Unfortunately, India has the highest suicide rate in the world among the youth standing at 35.5 per 100,000. The reason for such high numbers can be attributed to a lack of economic, social, and emotional resources. Besides these, academic pressure, workplace stress, social pressures, modernization of urban centers, relationship concerns, and the breakdown of support systems have been the major cause of concern (Foundation, 2017).

Test anxiety

Test anxiety, also known as evaluation anxiety, is a condition characterized by apprehension and distress in the context of a test or other evaluation. Although test anxiety is most commonly discussed concerning school testing situations, the same principles can apply to athletic performance or any other occasion where a person feels threatened or pressured by the need to do well on a task. Test anxiety is distinct from trait anxiety because it only occurs in particular circumstances. However, like trait anxiety, test anxiety is usually considered to have two components, one mental and one physical. The mental component, sometimes called worry, includes difficulty in reasoning and in recalling information, while the physical component includes aspects of the fight-or-flight response, such as increased heart rate and blood pressure,

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which may interfere with cognitive processing. Some theorists also include a third component, social humiliation, meaning the fear of being negatively evaluated by others. Many studies of anxiety and performance have found that some anxiety may be necessary to perform one's best, but too much anxiety may interfere with performance (Boslaugh, 2013).

Test Anxiety and Self Harming behaviors

The rapidly expanding regime of tests has generated too much stress and anxiety among the students. Test stress is a universal phenomenon and has been widely reported among school-levels in Britain and Japan. In an article that appeared in *The Guardian*, in March 2018, Anthea Lipsett presents the finding of a survey published by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) in the United Kingdom. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the 804 teachers and lecturers who participated in the survey believe children are under more pressure now than 10 years ago, with testing and tests, and family break-up causing the most distress. The ATL survey also found that while most children release the pressure by crying or becoming withdrawn, 46% of teachers reported that pupils self-harm. Most teachers (89%) who participated in the survey think stress comes from testing and tests, with family break-ups (68%) and peer and family pressure to do well (51%) also the main causes of problems. (Lipsett, 2018).

In India too, students are found to be under excessive stress due to tests. The whole test system in India is very stressful for students. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India, Youth (18 and above- below 30 years) is one of the most vulnerable groups resorting to suicides. This age group accounted for 32.8% of suicides. 'Family Problems' (307), 'Illness' (163) 'Failure in Testination' (162) were the main causes of suicides among children below 14 years of age (National Crime Records Beurau of India, 2015). To a student, the prospect of sitting for a test can be identified as a stressor and the resulting physiological, emotional and cognitive state can be described as test stress.

Hypnotherapy

Hypnosis is a state of consciousness that is experienced by one and all in their lives from time to time(Vyas, 2014). Typical instances would be when someone is reading a book and is so much into it that he doesn't hear when he is called. Or while watching a film a person becomes so emotional that she starts to cry despite being fully aware that she is only watching actors perform and what he is seeing on screen is not real. This heightened state of concentration is the state of hypnosis. Erickson (Erickson, 1958) defines hypnosis as "a state of intensified attention and receptiveness and an increased responsiveness to an idea or a set of ideas."

Hypnosis is induced by using various induction methods like Breath watching, Progressive Muscular Relaxation, Eye-fixation with verbal suggestion, Eye-fixation with Progressive Muscular Relaxation, Eye-fixation with distraction, Direct eye-gaze method, Erickson's hand-levitation method, Erickson's confusional technique, Chiasson's method, etc. Whichever method be used, all trance induction methods aim at a gradual restriction of consciousness, by limiting sensory impressions (Heartland, 1971). This sensory restriction is reinforced by a rhythmic, monotonous repetition of suggestions.

Hypnotherapy is known to work for all kinds of anxiety problems(Hammond, 2014) and test anxiety is no different. Various researchers have used hypnotherapy at different times to find its effect on test anxiety. Ainsworth (2010)concluded that those who received hypnotherapy reported that they found it helpful and useful. Similarly, Boutin(2011)demonstrated the effectiveness of Rational Stage Directed Hypnotherapy in the treatment of test anxiety. Palan&Chandwani (Palan, 2011)found that the hypnosis group improved significantly in coping with examination stress as compared to the other groups.

Considering the increasing incidence of test anxiety and the consequent self-harming behavior of the adolescents and the effectiveness of hypnotherapy in coping with these, the current study

was planned to examine the effectiveness of hypnotherapeutic intervention in reducing test anxiety.

Method

Sample: The sample of the present study was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Initially, seven hundred students of paramedical courses from five institutes located in Gujarat were tested for test anxiety. The students were pursuing courses like physiotherapy, pharmacy, and nursing. The age range was 17-25 years. Out of these, the students scoring extremely high and categorized in the severe category and having high or moderate scores on suggestibility were selected for the second phase of the study. A total of 70 such students were taken up. Thirty-five were taken in the intervention group and thirty-five in the control group.

Tools

Test Anxiety

Test anxiety was assessed by using a tool developed by Verma(2006). The Reliability of the tool was calculated and the Cronbach's Alpha for part 1 was 0.79 and Alpha for part 2 was 0.81. The Alpha coefficient of the full scale was high 0.87. The validity by the Guilford method was found to be 0.93.

Procedure

Test anxiety was assessed using test anxiety inventory (Verma, 2006). It was administered to 700 paramedical students. Then the data was collected and analyzed to select the students who scored above average and high in the test anxiety. The subjects were then categorized based on total score into severe, moderate, and mild categories. Those who scored high and fall in the severe category of test anxiety were taken up for the second phase. Seventy such participants were selected and they were randomly assigned to two groups (with 35 participants each). The intervention group was given hypnotherapeutic intervention and no intervention was given to the control group. Ten hypnotherapeutic sessions were given to the participants of the intervention group. Test anxiety scores both pre and post-intervention were taken and both the groups were compared for reduction in post hypnotherapeutic intervention score on test anxiety.

Results and Discussion

The obtained data was analyzed using paired t-test and independent sample t-test. The pre-post comparison in both the groups was done by paired sample t-test whereas the intervention and control group anxiety scores were compared using independent sample t-test. The Means, Standard Deviations, and t-values are given in Tables and are described below:

Table 1: Descriptive analysis and Paired t-test of Hypnotherapy and Control Groups.

Groups	N	Pre		Post		Difference (Pre-Post)		t-value	P-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Control	35	201.7	4.7	217.2	18.7	- 15.5	18.0	- 5.1	<0.01
Hypnotherapy	35	238.3	11.9	107.4	10.5	130.9	13.8	56.2	<0.01

From the results(Table 1), it can be seen that there is a decrease in the post-intervention score compared to the pre-intervention score in the hypnotherapy group while there is an increase in the same for the control group. The 35 students (100%) who participated in the hypnotherapy intervention program benefited by reduced test anxiety, while only six (17%) of the 35 students in the control group experienced reduced test anxiety.

A paired-t-test was carried out in the Hypnotherapy group and Control group for Pre and Post scores. Both groups had P-value <0.01 and so we can conclude that the difference in the scores from Pre to Post was highly significant at a 5% level of significance. While in the Hypnotherapy group, there was a reduction in the Post scores compared to the Pre scores; in the Control group, an increase was recorded.

Table 2: Independent t-test of Hypnotherapy and Control Groups.

Groups	N	t-value	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	P-value
Difference of Post from Pre	70	38.3	146.4	3.8	<0.01

The results from the Independent t-test suggests that the difference in scores of Post from Pre in both the Hypnotherapy and Control groups had a highly significant difference at a 5% level of significance.

Effectiveness of Hypnotherapy as an intervention strategy.

Despite the differences of scholarly opinions about the nature and sources of test anxiety, the immense pressure of it leads many students to suicide and self-harming behaviors. A lot of students who face this pressure are not able to find help. There are different and diverse measures suggested to alleviate test anxiety and enhance academic performance. In this study, hypnotherapy has been tested as an intervention strategy for test anxiety over against a controlled group of students who did not receive any help. Hypnotherapy was found to be effective in reducing test anxiety of all the members (100%) of the experimental group and enhancing their performance. Whereas among the control group only a few (17%) of the participants experienced a slight reduction in test anxiety. This could be due to any random chances.

There are many reasons why hypnotherapy works very well in cases with test anxiety. The first and foremost reason is that in hypnotherapy the client is made to relax both physically and mentally. The main difficulty faced by therapists who use methods other than hypnotherapy to treat test anxiety is that the client is too anxious to grasp what the therapist has to offer. In Hypnotherapy, the first step is to relax the client to a level where he or she becomes calm and more receptive as he or she is relaxed. The second most important reason is that hypnotherapy opens the road to the unconscious mind which other therapies do not have access to. In hypnotherapy bypassing the conscious mind, suggestions are put directly to the unconscious mind and they are accepted without critical analysis. Compared to the conscious mind, the unconscious mind work is more permanent and long term. And so, the suggestions that go deep

down to the unconscious mind become the more permanent entity of the psychic system of the client.

Conclusion

This study was a designed experiment to determine the effect of hypnotherapy in alleviating test anxiety. After the intervention program, hypnotherapy appears to be a far more effective intervention strategy than no intervention. This finding has far-reaching implications in addressing the problem of suicide and self-harming behaviors due to academic pressure among students and youth.

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