

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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EFFICACY OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING THERAPY (COGNITIVE BASED) IN MANAGING DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the efficacy of EXPRESSIVE WRITING THERAPY (cognitive based) in managing Depression and Anxiety. After getting informed consent 4 patients were selected from Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute Hospital, Pondicherry, they were already diagnosed as having the symptoms of Depression and Anxiety, referred by Psychiatrist, were under antidepressants and anxiolytics medication. ICD-10 criteria was used as a diagnostic tool, structured proforma was used to record the demographic profile and Hamilton Depression & Anxiety Rating Scales were used to quantify the symptoms. The data was collected over 2 weeks. Pretest of HDRS & HARS were recorded and after 2 weeks of psycho education and EXPRESSIVE WRITING THERAPY post-test of HDRS & HARS were recorded. The result of the study shown that there is significant differences in pre-test and post-test of Hamilton Rating Scales, Hence EXPRESSIVE WRITING THERAPY can be used to managing the depression & Anxiety. (Pennebaker, J. W., & Chung, C. K. (in press). Expressive writing and its links to mental and physical health. Friedman (Ed.), Oxford handbook of

health psychology. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.)

KEYWORDS: Writing , Depression, Anxiety, Hamilton, Pennebaker.

INTRODUCTION: Depression

- Depression is defined as pervasive feeling of sadness that may begin after some loss or stressful life events.
- Depression is one of the most common complications of chronic illness. It is estimated that up to one third of individuals with a serious medical condition experience symptoms of depression.
- Depression can aggravate the illness

by intensifying symptoms resulting in sluggishness that can worsen the loss of energy and tends to make people withdraw into social isolation.

Anxiety

- Anxiety is defined as feeling of apprehension from the anticipation of danger, which may have internal or external manifestations.
- Thus Anxiety prevents damage by alerting the person to carry out certain acts that forestall the danger. The experience of anxiety has two components, 1) the awareness of the physiological sensations (e.g) palpitation and sweating and 2) the awareness of being nervous / frightened, a feeling of shame may increase anxiety.
- In addition motor and



visceral effects include diarrhea, dizziness, light headedness, hyper-reflexia, hyper tension, papillary mydriasis, restlessness, syncope, tachycardia, tremors, butterfly in the stomach, hesitancy, urgency.

What is EXPRESSIVE WRITING THERAPY?

Writing therapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses the act of writing and processing the written word as therapy. Writing therapy posits that writing one's feelings gradually eases feelings of emotional trauma.

The field of writing therapy includes many practitioners in a variety of settings. The therapy is usually administered by a therapist or counselor. Writing group leaders also work in hospitals with patients dealing with mental and physical illnesses.

As with most forms of therapy, writing therapy is adapted and used to work with a wide range of illnesses, including bereavement, desertion and abuse. Many of these interventions take the form of classes where clients write on specific themes chosen by their therapist or counselor.

Typical writing instructions include:

I would like you to write your very deepest thoughts and feelings about the most traumatic experience of your entire life or an extremely important emotional issue that has affected you and your life.

In your writing, I'd like you to really let go and explore your deepest emotions and thoughts. You might tie your topic to your relationships with others, including parents, lovers, friends or relatives; to your past, your present or your future; or to who you have been, who you would like to be or who you are now. You may write about the same general issues or experiences on all days of writing or about different topics each day. All of your writing will be completely confidential.

Don't worry about spelling, grammar or sentence structure. The only rule is that once you begin writing, you continue until the time is up.

How does it work?

- Emotional catharsis; Unlikely
- Confronting previous inhibited emotions; may reduce psychological stress resulting from inhibition, but unlikely to be the only explanation
- Cognitive processing; it is that the development of a coherent narrative helps to reorganize and structure traumatic memories, resulting in more adaptive internal schemas.
- Repeated exposure; May involve extinction of emotional responses to traumatic memories, but some equivocal findings.

How to use Expressive writing as a Therapeutic Tool;

- Expressive Writing tasks can be set as a Home work, or can be carried out before, during or after a session.
- Writing should be carried out in a private personalized place, free from distractions.
- Write on constructive days or weeks
- Let the patient select the traumatic/stressful experience; do not specify the trauma or specific event.
- Allow the patient to structure the writing rather than imposing structure
- If possible give patient the option to write by hand or on a computer
- Explain the patient that their writing is private, for themselves not for you and that confidentiality and anonymity are assured
- Do not give feedback
- Writing should be kept by the patient or separate from the clinical file.

What are the benefits?

- Fewer stress related visits to the doctor
- Improved Immune system functioning
- Reduced blood pressure

- Improved lung function
- Improved liver function
- Improved mood/affect
- Feeling of greater psychological well being
- Reduced depressive symptoms
- Fewer post traumatic and avoidance symptoms

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDIES

- To study the efficacy of Expressive Writing Therapy (cognitive based) in managing depression and anxiety.
- To study the Expressive Writing Therapy as a valid potential method for patients with depression and anxiety.
- To study the importance of Expressive Writing Therapy as an adjunct treatment in managing depression and anxiety.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Pennebaker, J. W., & Chung, C. K. (in press). Expressive writing and its links to mental and physical health.
- Friedman (Ed.), Oxford handbook of health psychology. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Long term benefits of expressive writing for emotional health outcomes;

- Including mood/affect (pennebaker, et al, 1988, paez et al, 1999)
- Psychological well being (Park & Blumberg, 2002)
- Depressive symptoms (Lepore, 1997)
- Post-traumatic intrusion and avoidance symptoms (Klein & Boals, 2001)

METHODOLOGY

- The samples were collected from Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and research Institute Hospital, Pondicherry.
- After getting informed consent, forty patients of Depression and Anxiety were studied using Hamilton depression and Anxiety rating scales.
- Patients attending regular follow up, who consented to participate in study served as cases and accompanied by family members.
- Patients with symptoms of insomnia, decreased appetite, hypertension were included.
- The patients belonged to the following category
 - + GROUP-I: 2 patients (who are getting Expressive Writing Therapy) were diagnosed cases for more than 3 months with depression and anxiety
 - + GROUP-II: 2 patients (who are not getting Expressive Writing Therapy) were diagnosed cases for more than 3 months with depression and anxiety.

- STUDY DESIGN- Descriptive study
- STUDY PERIOD- Data collection over a period of Two weeks.

MATERIALS

1. Structured proforma for record the demographic data of the patients
2. Hamilton depression rating scale to quantify the symptoms
3. Hamilton anxiety rating scale to quantify the symptoms
4. ICD-10 criteria was used as a diagnostic tool

RESULT OF THE STUDY

- Depression and Anxiety will be decreased, from the level of high severity to the level of mild severity.
- Patients who are getting expressive writing Therapy will gain more mental control and hope.
- Obsessive worries and fears will decrease.
- Insomnia, Feeling of guilt, general somatic symptoms like heaviness in head, muscle aches etc, will decrease in Depression patients.
- Feelings of tension, feeling of restlessness, inability to relax, palpitations and tension headache will decrease in Anxiety patients.

Table I shows that total no of patients in Depression and anxiety

Total No of Patients with Depression and Anxiety	GROUP I Patients who are getting Expressive Writing Therapy	GROUP II Patients who are not getting Expressive Writing Therapy
4	2	2

Table II shows that Pre-test level and Post-test level in Depression

Depression Patients	No of Patients	Pre Test	Level	Post Test	Level
Male	1	24	Severe Depression	8	Mild Depression
Female	1	27	Severe Depression	9	Mild Depression

Table III shows that Pre-test level and Post-test level in Anxiety

Anxiety Patients	No of Patients	Pre Test	Level	Post Test	Level
Male	1	38	Severe Anxiety	21	Mild Anxiety
Female	1	42	Severe Anxiety	19	Mild Anxiety

Chart I shows that Pre-test level and Post-test level in Depression

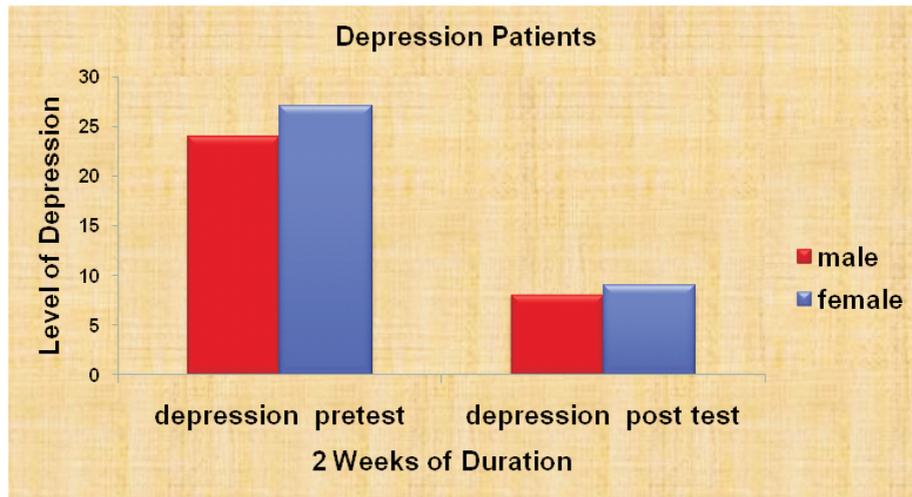
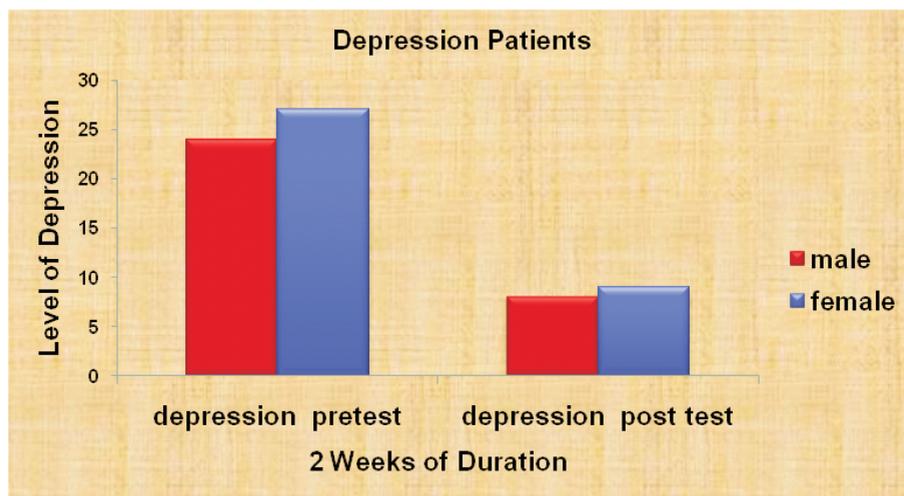


Chart II shows that Pre-test level and Post-test level in Anxiety



DISCUSSION

- This study was conducted to find out the efficacy of Expressive Writing Therapy in managing depression and anxiety.
- Pre Test of Hamilton Depression and Anxiety Rating scales of 2 patients(Group I)
- The post test of Hamilton Depression and Anxiety Rating scale of the same 2 patients.(group I)
- The Pre Test and Post test of Hamilton Depression and Anxiety of another 2 patients(GroupII) who are not getting expressive writing therapy.

CONCLUSIONS

- Expressive Writing Therapy is an effective treatment method in managing Depression and Anxiety.
- If Expressive Writing Therapy is an adjunct therapy along with Anti-Anxiety Drugs and Anti-Depressants, it accelerates the improvement.

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