

EFFECTIVENESS OF COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING AND GRADED EXPOSURE COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES IN MANAGING AVOIDANT PERSONALITY DISORDER AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring and graded exposure counselling techniques in managing avoidant personality disorder among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State, Nigeria. Avoidant personality disorder is associated with low global functioning, high interpersonal problems, and reduced quality of life, it is one of the personality disorder manifested on students in schools. Four research hypotheses were formulated in the study. Quasi experimental design, the target population of the study was SS II students in 125 public Senior Secondary Schools in the State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select two mixed schools (boys and girls) 267 samples in the State who exhibited the symptoms of avoidant personality disorder. Multistage sampling technique was also used to select samples of students with high avoidant personality disorder based on the pre-test scores who met the criteria for DSM-IV-TR. The sample arrived at 44 highest scorers among the students. Participants were assigned into experimental and control groups and were exposed to intervention sessions for a period of eight weeks. Avoidant Personality Disorders Test (APDT) by Lawal, instrument with construct validity and a reliability index of 0.90. The data collected from the study were analyzed using t-test. The findings of the study showed significant effectiveness of cognitive restructuring and graded exposure in managing avoidant personality disorder among Senior Secondary School in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The study further found out that although the two counselling techniques were used on different groups but analysis of data received proved that they had similar effectiveness in managing avoidant personality disorder among the Students and was recommended among others that cognitive restructuring and graded exposure should be used in managing avoidant personality disorder.

Keywords: Cognitive Restructuring, Graded Exposure and Avoidant Personality Disorder

Introduction

The school is a type of service organization vested with the primary function of educating the child, but with an increasing incidence of maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in Nigeria as it is in other countries. These maladaptive behaviours prevent these students from fulfilling their developmental tasks thereby making them not to achieve the stated academic objectives. Personality disorders play a major role in today's psychiatric clinical practice. They are defined as enduring patterns of inner experience and behaviour causing distress and leading to maladaptive functioning in the areas of emotion, cognition, interpersonal relationships and impulse control (ICD, 10) WHO, 1992). According to Gelford, Jenson and Drew in Ekemia, Otta and Ogbuokiri

(2013), untreated problems sometimes gradually grow into more serious and chronic disorders as the child passes with the problem into adulthood through adolescence or they manifest themselves later as different disorders.

Avoidant personality disorder among students has been an issue of concern in our schools and societies for many years, it is in cluster 'C' types of personality disorder in which individuals demonstrate behaviours described as fearful or anxious, where the person appears painfully shy, socially inhibited, feels inadequate and is extremely sensitive to rejection (APA, 2013). They may have intense anger and rage due to fear of abandonment or rejection (Bienenfeld, 2013; Hoermann, Zupanick & Dombeck, 2015c). The term avoidant personality disorder has been used in Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM), while anxious personality disorder is used in International classification of mental and behavioural disorders (ICD-10). Persons with avoidant personality disorder tend to avoid all academic activities that require group work or express their views in public. They tend towards poor academic performance and achievement, and are socially isolated. They also manifest low self-esteem, low global functioning, high interpersonal problems, and reduced quality of life. Avoidant personality disorder is associated with other personality disorders, including mood and anxiety disorders, dependent, borderline, paranoid, schizoid or schizotypal personality disorder (APA, 2013; Bienenfeld, 2013). Intuitively, this would lead to the concern that such behaviour would result in academic failure, thereby severely limiting a student's chances of future success in life. This is a pertinent course of study, because Avoidant personality disorder is one of the main personality disorders manifested by students in schools. It is also associated with an increased risk of having psychiatric disorder, It occurs about equally between males and females. Skodal in Hageman, Francis, Field and Carr, (2015) found that as many as 35.2% of individuals with APD were also diagnosed with major depressive disorder. With respect to anxiety disorders, in particular, generalized social phobia (GSP), reported comorbidity ranges widely between 25% to nearly 100% (Rettew, 2000). Further evidence suggests that current anxiety and/or depression may influence recall of childhood experiences (Lewinsohn & Rosenbaum in Hageman, Francis, Field & Carr, 2015), which is relatively widespread and is currently on the rise in Sokoto State, Nigeria (Musa, 2021).

The helping relationship can be defined as a systematic and intentional attempt, using a specified cluster of inter personal skills, to assist another person to make self- determined improvements in behaviour, feelings or thought. The therapeutic relationship helps the client work through feelings of isolation, a condition that the existentialists such as (Kaiser, & Yalom in Musa, 2013) consider the "universal symptom" of humanity. The only cure is communication with someone who is sensitive, receptive, neutral, interested and psychologically healthy. Avoidant personality disorder can be treated using different counselling approaches such as cognitive restructuring and graded exposure techniques, which encourage patients to identify the fears of rejection and criticism that underlie APD and then modify these distorted thought processes, have proven particularly helpful in the treatment of APD.

Cognitive restructuring technique is cognitive behavioural technique that focuses on changing a person's perceptions and irrational assumptions of self and world. . Cognitive restructuring gives people new ways of thinking and talking to themselves about their problems. This technique believes that man's maladaptive behaviour is hinged on irrational thoughts, beliefs, self-talks or verbalizations. According to Nwamuo (2005),

cognitive learning theory assumes that individuals are not passive observers in their environment, rather they are active, goal oriented and capable of taking responsibility for their decisions, actions and consequently exercise control over their behaviours.

Graded Exposure Technique (GET) is a psychological treatment that was developed, to help people confront their fears. Graded exposure therapy rests on the idea that graduated exposure to the fear provoking situation (in this case, social interaction) will help the individual overcome their fear and bring about behavioural change. Exposure therapy has been scientifically demonstrated to be a helpful treatment for a range of problems, including: Personality disorder, Phobias, Panic Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Tolin, & Carbonel in Shina, 2016). It is against this background that this study is set to assess the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring and graded exposure counselling techniques in managing APD among Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State, Nigeria.

The theoretical Framework that guided this research work was Attachment theory which was developed by John Bowlby as an attempt to link human social and psychological behaviour. Attachment theory provides an ethnological, biological, and psychoanalytic framework for revealing how human infant attachment to their caregivers correlates to attachment styles in relationships as an adult. The theory proposes that non-existent or under-developed bonds between an infant and a parent provide attachment patterns for future relationships through adolescence into adulthood. These attachment patterns or styles are likely to be similar between generations due to transmission from parent to child (Hines & Saudino, 2002). Bowlby developed a model that includes self, important others, and their shared relationships. Bowlby (1979) posited an important part of healthy development was having a close and caring relationship with parents and other caregivers. Proximity to attachment figures helps infants to have increased chances of protection and survival from an evolutionary standpoint. In addition to the biological necessity of attachment, it is also satisfying for both the parents and the infant (Bretherton in Mcvay, 2012). As the bonds strengthen between infant and parents, the infant begins to grow an inner representation of the parent, which develops “internal working models” of self, others, and self-other relationships (Bowlby, 1973). The higher parental sensitivity and responsiveness are to the infant’s needs, the more secure and healthy the attachment that develops. Infants begin to feel they are deserving of their parents’ care-giving and that they have a secure base on which to rely in the future. Parental insensitivity and unresponsiveness contribute to insecure attachment by the infant, leading the infant to internalize these experiences and find the world to be unsafe and rejecting, which makes forming relationships difficult and dangerous. Ainsworth in Mcvay, (2012) developed a method for assessing infant attachment known as the “strange situation.” This experiment first separated infants from their parents, then exposed them to the presence of a stranger, and finally reunited them with their parents. The infant expressed proximity seeking behaviour, a displayed desire or lack of desire for closeness, and the responses and behaviours were classified into patterns. Two dimensions were used to determine the infant’s attachment behaviour classifications, anxiety and avoidance. The degree of anxiety experienced from abandonment and the avoidance of closeness to the stranger contributed to the classification.

In the course of this study related empirical studies were reviewed such as Ngwoke, Davidson, Micheal and Ngoke (2013) this study investigated the effect of cognitive

restructuring on achievement orientation of low-achieving students. A quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group, pretest /s posttest, involving one treatment group and control group. The sample of 135 low-achieving senior secondary class two students purposively drawn from four public senior secondary schools, two from each educational zone of Yenagoa and Okolobiri in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Findings showed that cognitive restructuring significantly enhanced achievement orientation of low-achieving students. Three randomized controlled studies have compared the efficacy of graded exposure with verbal coping skills (Sheslow, Bondy & Nelson in Shina, 2016), vicarious exposure (Menzies & Clarke in Shina 2016) or computer aided vicarious exposure (Dewis, Kirkby, Martin, Daniel, Gilroy & Menzies, 2001) in children with school phobias or assessed as having severe fears, 32 children in private day care aged 4-5 years were recruited via a parental survey report on children's fear of the dark. Finding revealed those children in the two treatment conditions that included direct exposure to the dark demonstrated significant increase in ability to tolerate the dark. Adeusi (2013) Examine the efficacy of Cognitive Restructuring and Behavioural Rehearsal on Conduct Disorder in Adolescents in Special Correctional Centres in Lagos State. Finding reveals a decrease in the participants conduct disorder when the pre-test and post test results were compared.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this research, at 0.05 level of significance.

- Ho₁ There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State.
- Ho₂ There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State.
- Ho₃ There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female Students in Sokoto State.
- Ho₄ There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female Students in Sokoto State.

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental design involving pre-test post-test experimental design. The population of this study consisted of all 27,307 senior secondary school students in 125 public senior secondary schools in the State. Deliberate sample selection was used to select 2 mixed schools (boys and girls) in the state. The subjects were identified after the scoring of the pre-test which was administered on the SS II students of the purposefully selected schools. Therefore 267 students who exhibited the symptoms of avoidant personality disorder were identified. The sample was typically heterogeneous as the students were of different ethno-cultural backgrounds. This was owing to the nature of the general population as cosmopolitan Schools. The deliberate selection of the subject is what Fox in Musa, (2013) referring to purposive sampling as deliberate selection which is often sensible and simple to justify. According to him, if within a population there are some elements which a research believes are particularly

crucial to his study, then the only way to ensure this is to deliberately select them. The rationale for using a separate school was for the following reasons:

- i. To get members of the experimental group from the same environment with the control group;
- ii. To pick the experimental group members who have the same characteristics with the control group. It could have been difficult to justify male students in experimental group but females in a different school being the control group or vice versa;
- iii. To ease closer watch of the three groups by the researcher;
- iv. To prevent some extraneous variables caused by difference in location from influencing behaviour changes in the groups;
- v. To justify claims that changes observed in experimental groups were purely results of the treatment.

Also a multistage sampling selected was used to select samples of students with high avoidant personality disorder. The sample was therefore forty four (44) highest scorers among the students who met the required points to qualify as highest level of avoidant personality disorder as stated in the manual of diagnostic criteria for Avoidant Personality Disorders that was published in (DSM-IV-TR, 2000) that is any score from 28 to 44. Among the 44 samples 11 were assigned to each (Cognitive Restructuring and graded exposure counselling techniques) in the two schools. Fourteen subjects in each group were considered ideal for group counselling according to William and Trochim (2006). Group counselling members could vary as between 3 to 14 persons. They further stressed that better results are achieved in smaller groups and that there will be effective concentration and understanding of the treatment procedures by the group. Therefore, the sample size was based on respondents who have the highest scores in the levels of symptom of APD.

Table 1: Students with Avoidant Personality Disorder

Schools	CR	GE	Total
A	11	11	22
B	11	11	22
Total	22	22	44

Key words:

CR= Cognitive Restructuring

GE= Graded Exposure

The adopted version of Avoidant Personality disorders Test (APDT) by Lawal (2016) was used as the pre-test to ascertain those who benefitted from the treatment. It was also used as a posttest to test the effectiveness of the counselling techniques. To obtain the validity of the instrument, Lawal (2016) exposed the instrument to test and measurement experts/reviewers in the field of psychology and guidance and counselling unit Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Based on their assessment the test items were adjudged to possessed strong construct validity. The researcher adopted the instrument for use in this study. To obtain the reliability of the instrument, Lawal (2016), subjected the instrument to test re-test at the interval of four weeks between the first and the second administration. After the second administration, the two set of scores were subjected to Pearson product moment correlation coefficient 'r' and a reliability index of 0.90 was obtained. This was

considered reliable enough for use and the researcher adopted the instrument for use in this study.

Results

Data collected from the study were analyzed using t-test statistical methods at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State.

This hypothesis was tested by subjecting the pretest and posttest scores of the students to a t-test analysis and result was presented in table 2

Table 2: Difference in the effectiveness between pre-test and post-test scores of cognitive restructuring in managing Avoidant Personality Disorder

Variables	N	Mean	Std	Df	t-Cal	t-Value	Decision
Pre-Test	22	41.22	1.621				
Post-Test	22	17.50	.651	42	32.125	.033	H ₀ Rejected

From the result of table 2, effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in managing students' avoidant personality disorder was positively significant, $t(21) = 32.125$, $p = .033$. This indicates significant effect of using cognitive restructuring in managing avoidant personality disorder because the p -value is less than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, H₀₁ which states that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in managing avoidant personality disorder among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State was rejected.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State.

This hypothesis was tested by subjecting the pretest and posttest scores of the students to a t-test analysis and result was presented in table 3.

Table 3: Difference in the effectiveness between pre-test and post-test scores of graded exposure in managing Avoidant Personality Disorder

Variables	N	Mean	Std	Df	t-Cal	t-Value	Decision
Pre-Test	22	38.50	1.241				
Post-Test	22	17.20	1.452	42	19.952	.000	H ₀ Rejected

From the result in table 3, effectiveness of graded exposure in managing students' avoidant personality disorder was positively significant, $t(21) = 19.952$, $p = .000$. This indicates significant effect of using graded exposure in managing avoidant personality disorder because the p -value is less than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, H₀₂ which states that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure

in managing avoidant personality disorder among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State was rejected.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State.

This hypothesis was tested by subjecting it to t-test analysis and result was presented in table 4.

Table 4: Difference between male and female Exposed to cognitive restructuring in managing Avoidant Personality Disorder

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	t-Cal	Df	t-Crit.value	Decision
Male	13	26.10	9.634	.063	20	.938	H ₀ Retained
Female	9	25.90	6.172				

From the result in table 4, difference in the effectiveness of Cognitive Restructuring in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female students was positive but not significant, $t(20) = .063$, $p = .938$. This indicates no significant difference in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female students because the t -value is greater than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, H₀₃ which states that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State was retained.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State.

This was tested by subjecting the hypothesis to t-test analysis and result was presented in table 5.

Table 5: Difference between male and female Students exposed to graded exposure in managing Avoidant Personality Disorder

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	t-Cal	Df	t-crit.Value	Decision
Male	13	25.90	6.172	.060	20	.518	H ₀ Retained
Female	9	27.50	9.058				

From the result in table 5, difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female students was positive but not significant, $t(20) = .060$, $p = .518$. This indicates no significant difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female students because the t -value is greater than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, H₀₄ which states that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State was retained.

Discussion

Findings from hypothesis one which sought to determine the significant difference in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among senior secondary school students in Sokoto State is rejected because the realized p -value.033 is less than 0.05 level of significance. This finding confirmed the study of Ngwoke, Davidson, Michael, and Ngwoke, (2013) which investigated the effect of cognitive restructuring on achievement orientation of low-achieving students. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The design of the study was a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group, pre / post test, involving one treatment group and control group. The sample of this study consisted of 135 low-achieving senior secondary class two students purposively drawn from four public senior secondary schools, two from each educational zone of Yenagoa and Okolobiri in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. These schools were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. One instrument, Achievement Orientation Questionnaire and Cognitive Restructuring Intervention Package were developed, validated and used for the study. The treatment group was exposed to the cognitive restructuring intervention package while the control group received placebo programmed on examination malpractice and prevention. The data obtained were analyzed using means and standard deviation for research objectives and ancova for the hypotheses. Results showed that cognitive restructuring significantly enhanced achievement orientation of low-achieving students.

The result of hypothesis two showed its acceptance in that a statistically significant effect exist among students with avoidant personality disorder that were exposed to graded exposure is rejected because the realized p -value .000 is less than 0.05 level of significance. This findings supports the finding of Sheslow, Bondy & Nelson in Shina, (2016), Menzies & Clarke in Shina (2016) and Dewis, et.al (2001) on three randomized controlled studies have compared the efficacy of graded exposure with verbal coping skills, vicarious exposure or computer-aided vicarious exposure in children with fear of the dark or assessed as having severe fears. The finding was that children in the two treatment conditions that included direct exposure to the dark demonstrated significant increase in ability to tolerate the dark.

Findings from hypothesis three showed no difference that exists in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among male and female Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State Nigeria. Null hypothesis is retained because table 4 hypothesis three above, $t(20) = .063$, $p = .938$. The realized t -value is greater than the 0.05 level of significance this shows that male and female students do not differ significantly in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in managing avoidant personality disorder. This hypothesis is retained. This finding agrees with the result of Adeusi, (2013) who maintains that the difference in conduct disorder of male and female participants that were exposed to cognitive restructuring revealed that there was no significant difference in the conduct disorder of the participants that were exposed to the cognitive restructuring treatment. However, the mean indicated that the female participants displayed more conduct disorder compared to the male participants.

The fourth hypothesis aimed at determining the difference in the effectiveness of graded exposure counselling technique in managing avoidant personality disorder among male

and female Senior Secondary School Students in Sokoto State, Nigeria. This null hypothesis was retained. Result of finding from table 5 hypothesis four above, $t(20) = .060$, $p = .518$. In which the t-value .518 is greater than 0.05 level of significant, indicated that male and female students do not differ significantly in the effectiveness of graded exposure in managing avoidant personality disorder. This confirmed that counselling technique such as graded exposure is effective in managing avoidant personality disorder which is in line with the findings of Shina, (2016) confirms that male and female student exposed to graded exposure on phobias had reduced the phobias in the post-test significantly.

Conclusion

The study concluded that, the use of cognitive restructuring technique and graded exposure in helping students to reduce their avoidant personality disorder has been very successful, considering the significant drop in the mean scores of the students 'avoidant personality disorder after the treatments. It is also concluded that the two counselling techniques were very effective in reducing avoidant personality disorder among students in Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made;

1. Since cognitive restructuring technique positively managed students' avoidant personality disorder, it is recommended that it should be used to manage APD.
2. Students' avoidant personality disorder can be adequately managed by graded exposure technique it is recommended to be use in managing APD.
3. Male and female students do not differ significantly in the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in managing avoidant personality disorder, so the technique can be use for male and female management.
4. Male and female students do not differ significantly in the effectiveness of graded exposure in managing avoidant personality disorder so it is recommended that graded exposure counselling should be use for both male and female.

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