ASSESSMENT OF SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION COUNSELLING TEACHNIQUE ON SOCIAL PHOBIA AMONG NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research investigated the assessment of systematic desensitization counselling technique on social Phobia among Nigerian undergraduate students. Concept and dimension of social phobia (cognitive, behavioural and psychological dimension) were discussed, symptoms such as Feelings of shyness or discomfort in certain situations aren't necessarily signs of social phobia disorder, particularly among undergraduate and genetic, environmental, and parental, courses of social phobia were also addressed. Systematic desensitization counselling technique, procedure and process on how to improve the process were discussed. The researcher suggested that counsellors and teachers should be encouraged to use systematic desensitization counselling Technique in addressing social phobia behaviour among Nigerian undergraduate students and students should be given equal opportunity and exposure to the techniques in re-addressing social phobia in schools, this will help improve the active participation in class and enhance teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Systematic Desensitization, Social Phobia, Undergraduate students

Introduction

Social phobia is a fast growing phenomenon which is thought to disproportionately affect university undergraduate students. The global prevalence of Social phobia was found to be significantly higher with more than 10 million university undergraduates students in America. The symptoms of Social phobia did not differ between sexes but varied as a function of age, country, work status, level of education, and whether an individual lived in an urban or rural location and is also known for its association with depression and substance use disorder. While in case of Nigeria, university students are associated with social phobia especially at the beginning of their program. This social phobia lead to low performance and poor academic achievement among students, because social phobia is a normal situation which one should not be afraid to participate in. Many university undergraduate students usually feel uneasy, fearful and anxious some even go to the extent of illness as result of this social phobia. This situation has broad negative consequence which emanates stress in students' concentration and psychological worries. It should be noted that the poor academic performance should not be attributed to student's intellectual problems only, but the social phobia situation created in students serve as factor of poor academic achievement. Social phobia is something that almost everyone experiences to some extent in any stressful situation. For university students one of the most frequent stressful or anxiety provoking experiences is social phobia. The anxious feeling can occur while the students is about to enter the university and during

the university. Social phobia is an uneasiness or apprehension experienced before, during, and after the university. Almost every student experiences some phobia.

Social phobia is "the set of phenomenological, psychological, and behavioural responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences, (Chapell, Blanding, Takahashi, Silverstein, Newman, Gubi, & McCann, 2015). Crozier as cited in Sola, (2014) reported that there are three separate response systems that can be used to analyze emotional behavior: the cognitive verbal, the behavioral-expressive, and the bodily-expressive system. Thus, it might be fruitful to distinguish between cognitive, behavioural, and physiological aspects of social phobia.

The Concept of Social Phobia

The term Social phobia was first coined by Wolpe (1958), who described Social phobia is a term used to describe the excessive fear, nervousness and apprehension that , undergraduate students and other people experience in their social interactions. This can cause considerable discomfort and embarrassment and often affect the person's ability to act naturally or perform a task in front of people. Olamiji and Badru (2014), explained that Social phobia is a persistent fear of one or more situations in which others expose the person to possible scrutiny and fears that he or she may do something or act in a way that will be humiliating or embarrassing. Social phobia involves overwhelming phobia and excessive self-consciousness in everyday social situations. It is both a persistent and irrational fear of situations in which the person feels they may be closely watched and judged by others, as in public speaking, eating, or using public facilities. Feared activities may include most type of social interaction, especially small groups, parties, talking to strangers, restaurants.

Dimension of social phobia

Cognitive dimension of social phobia

Situations that can provoke anxiety include talking in groups, meeting people, going to school or work, going shopping, eating or drinking in public, or public performances such as public speaking. People with social phobia believe that social situations pose a danger. They fear negative evaluation, believing in particular that "(1) they are in danger of behaving in an inept and unacceptable fashion, and, (2) that such behavior will have disastrous consequences in terms of loss of status, loss of worth, and rejection" (Clark and Wells, 2019).

Behavioural dimension of social phobia

Behaviours are actions which are intended to reduce the risk of negative evaluation. They are problematic because they "prevent unambiguous disconfirmation of their unrealistic beliefs about feared behaviors or the consequences of these behaviors" (Adam & Ammar,2017). Non-occurrence of the feared catastrophe is attributed to the safety behavior, rather than the socially anxious person concluding that the situation is less dangerous than they had previously believed.

Physiological dimension of social phobia

Social phobia exhibit the same somatic symptoms during anxiogenic exposure as observed in other anxiety disorders (Vieira & Matos, 2015). Palpitations, sweating, hand tremor, hot flushes. These arousal symptoms stem from exaggerated activity in the sympathetic division of the autonomic nervous system, and are characteristic features of the "fight-or-flight" response (Garcia- Lopez 2016). However, facial blushing and somatic symptoms of embarrassment, which are common in social phobia, might not be simply mediated by increased sympathetic activity.

Types of Social Phobia

Wolpe (1958), as cited in Akinade (2015), stated the following as the major type of social phobia, among the undergraduate students which include the following:

1. **Generalized Social Phobia**: Generalized Social Phobia, It is normal to feel anxious from time to time, especially if one's life is stressful. However, excessive ongoing social phobia and worry that interfere with daily activities may be a sign of generalized social phobia. It is possible for university students to develop generalized social phobia. Mitchel (2019), pointed out, that the tendency of having difficulty in the learning and teaching process can aggravate nervousness, having difficulty organizing thoughts, restlessness, among others

   Those who suffer generalized social phobia have three areas of phobic behaviour:

   i. Social interaction such as meeting friends or going to parties
   ii. Performance such as giving a presentation in front of classmate or others
   iii. Observation such as being seen by others, even just walking down a street in public

2. **Specific Social Phobia**: Mental health professionals often distinguish between generalized social phobia and specific social phobia. Specific social phobia is the intense fear, anxiety, and avoidance of a specific object or situation (e.g., flying, heights, injections, animals). People with generalized social phobia have great distress in a wide range of social situations (Musa 2014). Those with specific social phobia may experience phobia only in a few situations. The term "specific social phobia" may also refer to specific forms of non-clinical social phobia. The most common specific social phobia are glossophobia (the fear of public speaking) and stage fright (the fear of performance). Others include fears of intimacy or sexual encounters, using public restrooms, attending social gatherings, and dealing with authority figures.

3. **Agoraphobia**; According to Anastasi (2015). Agoraphobia is a type of social phobia disorder in which you fear and avoid places or situations that might cause you to panic and make you feel computable, helpless. Agoraphobia is fear of an actual or anticipated situation, such as using public transportation, being in open or enclosed spaces, standing in line, or being in a crowd. This type of social phobia is caused by fear that there's no easy way to escape or get help if the social phobia intensifies.

Symptoms and Diagnosis of Social Phobia

It's normal to feel nervous in some social situations. Giving a presentation may cause social phobia. But social phobia disorder, everyday interactions cause significant phobia, self-consciousness and embarrassment because you fear being scrutinized or judged negatively by others (Kande, 2015).

Feelings of shyness or discomfort in certain situations aren't necessarily signs of social phobia disorder, particularly in undergraduate. Comfort levels in social situations vary, depending on personality traits and life experiences. Some people are naturally reserved and others are more outgoing. In contrast to everyday nervousness, social phobia disorder includes fear, anxiety and avoidance that interfere with relationships, daily routines, work, school or other activities. Social phobia disorder typically begins in the early to mid-teens, though it can sometimes start in younger children or in adults.

According to Kande (2015), the signs and symptoms of social phobia disorder can include constant:

i.   Fear of situations in which you may be judged negatively
ii.   Worry about embarrassing or humiliating yourself
iii.   Intense fear of interacting or talking with strangers
iv.   Fear that others will notice that you look anxious
v.   Fear of physical symptoms that may cause you embarrassment, such as blushing, sweating, trembling or having a shaky voice

Causes of Social Phobia Disorder

Researches into the causes of social phobia are wide-ranging, encompassing multiple perspectives from neuroscience to sociology. Scientists have yet to pinpoint the exact causes.

1.   **Genetic Causes**; Studies suggest that genetic can play a part in combination with environmental factors. According to Montesi Conner (2014), asserts that social phobia is not caused by other mental disorders or by substance abuse. Generally, social phobia begins at a specific point in an individual's life. This will develop over time as the person struggles to recover. Eventually, mild social awkwardness can develop into symptoms of social phobia.

2.   **Environmental Causes**; Social Phobia is genetically transmitted disorder but some time is course by some environmental factors. The environment in which a students is raised can contribute to the kind of behaviour such a students will put up. For instance, the influences of parents, extended family, care giver, poor school performance, difficult temperament, inflated self-esteem, impulsivity, low verbal intelligence. Peer and neighborhood risk factors may play a significant in the development of Social Phobia disorder and others and therefore, Healthy environment will produce healthy students while unhealthy environments will encourage or promote SPD and other behavioural disorder. (Aderka & Hofman, 2015).

3.   **Temperamental Causes**; Mussen, Conger, Kagan, and Huston, (as cited in Ahmed, 2019) defined temperament as an inborn biases towards certain moods and emotional reaction styles and they depicted two temperamental styles of

students called inhibited and uninhibited. Inhibited children are characterized by withdrawal and increased autonomic arousal in situations of uncertainty, in contrast to uninhibited students who tend to react with spontaneity and approach in these situations.

4.   **Parental Causes**; Hudson and Rapee (2019) in their study found out that there is a reciprocal relationship between parent and child behaviour. They then claim that anxious students are more likely to have anxious parents whose behaviour may maintain phobia and avoidance. Also Hadi and Maryam (2015), observed that a parent with social phobia disorder is more likely to have anxious offspring, and therefore believed that the risk for social phobia disorders in offspring of anxious parents was 3.5 times that of non-anxious students.

Challenges of Social Phobia Disorder

Social phobia disorder will not only hinder our social interactions and relationships, but also have some challenge on our physiological, Cognitive and behavioral as well. These are some physiological effects that may be experienced:

i.   Racing heart or tightness in chest due to nervousness
ii.   Difficulties in occupational functioning
iii.   Emotional detachment
iv.   Extreme feelings of fear inferiority
v.   Profuse sweating/shaking
vi.   Difficulty initiating or sustaining relationships

Method of Controlling Social Phobia

The treatment of SPD is typically involves the following three folded process of using cognitive behavioural principles and techniques as described in MacManus (2013):

Challenging and Changing Dysfunctional Thinking. Students with social phobia disorder tend to have a lot of limiting beliefs, plus an unrealistic view of social standards and of themselves. These need to be corrected by consciously changing the way they think.

Gradual Exposure: Students with social phobia disorder need to be gradually face those exact situations they are afraid of and they typically avoid. Systematic exposure, combined with combined with combating unrealistic thinking that will set their mind and emotions on the right path.

Systematic desensitization

Systematic desensitization was developed from classical conditioning theory by Wolpe (1958) using reciprocal inhibition as a fundamental intervention. its an effective therapy strategy designed on social phobia. The students is first equipped with relaxation skills and then is asked to come up with a hierarchy of increasingly phobia-provoking stimuli or situations. When using this technique, a students is placed in a deeply relaxed state and is presented with a series of gradually increasingly phobia-provoking situations using imaginal exposure. The therapist starts with the least phobia-provoking stimulus on the hierarchy and then slowly works up to more phobia-inducing stimuli.

Steps of systematic desensitization

Adeboga 2012, cited in Ibrahim (2018). The following as the major steps uses in systematic desensitization

1. Establish social phobia stimulus hierarchy. A therapist may begin by asking the students to identify a fear of hierarchy.
2. Learn relaxation or coping techniques; Relaxation training, such as meditation, is one type of best coping strategies.
3. Repeated for each level of the hierarchy, starting from the least fear-inducing situation.

Techniques used in systematic desensitization

The techniques used in systematic desensitization are delineated based on the form of real or imagined exposures implemented to achieve results. The techniques involved in systematic desensitization include in vivo, imagination, virtual reality, and interoceptive exposure. (Wolpe 1958).

In Vivo Exposure Technique: In vivo exposure, is a technique that incorporates the actual feared stimulus. So, if a students is afraid of spiders, there will be real spiders used during exposure.

1. **Imaginal Exposure Technique**; During imaginal exposure, the therapist will prompt the students to imagine being in a situation or setting with their trigger. Through the use of guided imagery techniques, the therapist can encourage a more realistic and vivid mental picture, which helps to better recreate the fearful situation.
2. **Virtual Reality Exposure Technique**; Technological advances are helping to bridge the gap between imaginal and in vivo exposure. Using virtual reality exposure technique, are able to reproduce the sights, sounds, and other sensations of the feared setting of course virtual reality exposures are not available for all triggers, but for students with a common fear, like flying, virtual reality exposure can reduce symptoms without the expense of buying a plane ticket.

How to Apply Systematic desensitization to university undergraduate students

Familiarize students with relaxation techniques. If students are already feeling tense and anxious, thinking about relaxing may be harder, so it's important to learn these techniques first.

List at least two items for each level of fear on hierarchy. This allows for more exposure to students social phobia.

Practice exposing students to fear each day. Even a few minutes every day can help.

Remember to stop and use a relaxation exercise when you feel anxious. The goal is to replace the anxious feeling with a relaxed state. You might have to try each step multiple times.

Try students to make the exposure exercise until they feel about half of the fear. This can be hard to gauge, but students will likely become better able to track it as you become more familiar with exposure

Types of Relaxation Exercises in Systematic Desensitization

According to Bunky (2013), cited in Sulaiman , (2016), The following are different relaxation exercises in systematic desensitization. These exercises could be used on their own or in combination with each other.

Diaphragmatic breathing. With this type, students will learn to regulate their breathing by breathing slowly and deeply through their nose, holding the breath for one to two seconds, then breathing out through your mouth.
Visualization. students will focus on a relaxing scene, picturing it in their mind and concentrating on sensory details, such as sights or smells. This includes guided imagery, which involves someone describing a scene to you.
Progressive muscle relaxation. students will learn to tense up and release muscles throughout their body. This types can reduce muscle tension and help students to recognize the difference between tense and relaxed muscles. That way, students will be able to better recognize when their muscles start tensing up in response to anxiety or fear.
Meditation and mindfulness type. Learning meditation may help students to become more aware of their thoughts and feelings as you face a fearful situation. Mindfulness helps students to notice what they are experiencing in the present moment, which can reduce anxious thoughts.

Conclusion

Many studies have revealed that Social phobia is a fast growing phenomenon which affect university undergraduate students. The global prevalence of Social phobia was found to be significantly higher with more than 10 million university undergraduates students in America. The symptoms of Social phobia did not differ between sexes but varied as a function of age, most of the problems stated above of social phobia are most likely to be manage by the systematic desensitization techniques. The resultant effects of the situation coupled with some recommendations on how to tackled social phobia among undergraduate education in Nigeria using systematic desensitization counselling technique

Recommendations

Based on the above explanation it can be recommended that,
i.   counsellors and teachers should be encouraged to use systematic desensitazation counselling Technique on re-addressing social phobia behaviour among Nigerian undergraduate students.
ii.   Students should be given equal opportunity and exposure to the techniques in addressing social phobia in schools, this will help improve the active participation in class participation and enhance teaching and learning process.

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