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Title: Efficacy of Brief CBT as an Intervention for Test Anxiety, Academic Performance, and General Health among School Students

Abstract

School and exams are important integral events of children's lives in the modern world leading to academic stress and test anxiety. It has been estimated that between 10% and 40% of all students suffer from various levels of test anxiety. Students with high levels of test anxiety perform lower on tests and have the lower overall academic achievement as measured by grade point averages. Attempt made hitherto in the majority of the Indian schools has been aimed at helping students to raise their marks in the public exams held in Grades XII. This academic year in Indian scenario is crucial for students as the marks in XII board examination determine the future path of education. The concern for high marks, as we know, has engulfed all the stakeholders' i.e., schools, parents, students, policy makers, etc.; it has a detrimental impact on their development and happiness. It leads to student adopting negative measures, and according to Srivastava (2011), 6 suicides out of the 19 committed by students every day in India are caused by fear of failure in examinations. In the west, there have been active efforts for developing the interventions that reduce not only the test anxiety but also results in improvement in performance. In India, studies have focused on testing the effectiveness/efficacy of particular techniques, which demonstrate the potential of reducing the test anxiety, but studies showing an improvement in academic performance are scarce. As discussed earlier, test anxiety has a negative spillover effect on health and performance in schools. The anxiety related to low performance can adequately be tackled only by appropriate therapeutic techniques. There seems to be a dearth of studies that explored the effect of a CBT intervention for test anxiety, academic achievement, and general health including the mental health of students. In the light of development in the field of CBT and current understanding of test anxiety, there is a pressing need was felt to use a comprehensive intervention program for the treatment of test anxiety and improving the academic standard and general health by treating test anxiety of students so as to prevent the wastage in education and to make the life of students happier. The present study aimed at finding the efficacy of brief CBT for test anxiety, academic performance, and general health for school students in India. **Method:** Permission was sought from English medium private schools in Delhi and NCR conduct the study. Out of these schools, two schools for the intervention group and two schools for the control group were selected, randomly. In these schools, the consent of students of XII standard to participate in the study was obtained from the students and parents. In this way, a total of 674 gave consent to participate in the study. Those who gave consent Westside test anxiety scale was administered on them. On the basis of scores on the test, the students were kept into two groups: high and normal test anxiety groups. According to the recommendations of Driscoll (2004) a cutoff point of 3.0 was used. Those obtaining scores below 3.0 were kept in normal test anxiety group and those obtaining scores of 3.0 and above were kept in high test anxiety group. In the schools selected for intervention, 40 students each were randomly selected for high test anxiety intervention group and normal test anxiety intervention group. In the schools selected

for the control condition, 40 students each were randomly selected for high test anxiety control group and normal test anxiety control group. High test anxiety control group was treated as wait-list control. To assess the effect of intervention on test anxiety and general health randomized group pretest posttest design and to assess the effect of intervention on test anxiety, academic performance/achievement and general health randomized group posttest design was used. Following measures were used in the present investigation- Westside Test Anxiety Scale developed by Driscoll (2004), Test Anxiety Inventory developed by Spielberger and colleagues (1980), Academic Performance- Percentage of marks obtained in Class XII CBSE Board examinations and General Health Questionnaire-28 developed by Goldberg and Hillier (1979). Brief CBT intervention based on eclectic approach was used in the present study. **Results:** Mean, Standard Deviation, independent sample and matched *t*-test and Cohen's *d* were used to analyze the data. The findings of the study indicate that the intervention has resulted in significant changes in desired direction in test anxiety and its two components, i.e., worry and emotionality for students with high test anxiety as well as for students with normal test anxiety. There was improvement in academic performance for high as well as normal test anxiety intervention groups. There was significant improvement in general health of high test anxiety as well as normal test anxiety intervention groups as a result of intervention. There was significant reduction in somatic complaints of high test anxiety intervention group as a result of intervention, but the same was not significant for normal test anxiety intervention group. There was significant reduction in anxiety and insomnia of high test anxiety as well as normal test anxiety intervention groups as a result of intervention. There was no significant reduction in social dysfunction of high test anxiety as well as normal test anxiety intervention groups as a result of the intervention. There was a significant reduction in depressive symptoms of high test anxiety intervention group as a result of the intervention, but the same was not significant for normal test anxiety intervention group.

Keywords: Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Test Anxiety, Academic Performance, General Health, School Students