



Experiences of Participants practicing Anapan sati (Progressive Relaxation via Breathing Technique) prior to Counselling session

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Abstract

The fabric of mental health in India is susceptible to several difficulties and obstacles. In the middle class and lower middle class, particularly among the Indian people, there are still many negative stereotypes about psychotherapy and counseling. Ironically, this group is also the one that experiences the most mental health problems. To comprehend the type, severity, and typology of barriers to counseling, extensive research has been done on poor mental health literacy and the stigma associated with counseling. This study attempts to comprehend the variance in counseling experiences and the impact of Anapan sati (often used in Vipassana meditation using Anapan's progressive breathing technique) before counseling sessions. The sample is split into two groups for the investigation. Age (18–30 years), socioeconomic level (lower middle class), and medical history are used to match the groups. Prior to the counseling session, members of Group 1 (N=10) participated in the breathing exercise, but members of Group 2 (N=10) did not. To comprehend the experiences of counseling and the anguish it causes, semi-structured interviews were done. Cathartic, relaxing, and investigative were the typical themes that surfaced, but the themes from people who did not use breathing techniques were similar but intense. Future research should concentrate on examining the counseling experiences of people with a history of psychopathology. There were limitations and suggestions offered.

Keywords: Breathing Exercise, Counseling, Mental Health, Qualitative

Introduction & Literature review

Directing is a powerful cycle consisting of interrelated and fundamental substances of client factors, instructor factors and what's going on between them (Henkelman and Paulson, 2006). According to this, client experience is significant in understanding how the directing system adds to change (Elliott, 2008). As Grafanaki (2010) proposes, many examinations on the encounters of advocate learners depend vigorously on quantitative information, as well as frequently barring the viewpoint of students from outside viewpoints. Stefano, Mann-Feder and Gazzola (2010) directed a subjective investigation of composed accounts by clients who took part in a guiding relationship. It showed that the clients saw the relational characteristics and abilities of the instructor as significant commitments to

their encounters (Stefano et al., 2010). Since every client has their own perspective on the advising experience, it is prescribed to address the's comprehension client might interpret the interaction and how they got a handle on their guiding.

They concentrate on showing that the client is a supporter of the course of progress (Bohart, 2000; Duncan and Mill operator, 2000). Another review demonstrated that the client was not an uninvolved beneficiary but rather a functioning supporter of genuine results (Rennie, 2000). Since every member has their own perspective on the guiding relationship and cycle, every viewpoint is essential to comprehend what's going on during these encounters. We can more readily figure out the cycle assuming we hear straightforwardly from clients about their encounters in advising and we can more

readily plan powerful advisors (Elliott and James, 1989). Moreover, clients are definitive, self-propelled, talented and dynamic members during the time spent settling their challenges (Manthei, 2007). As per Manthei (2007), clients didn't appear to expect, or need, flawlessness or a total goal of their concerns; they were practical and even minded in their decisions of the cycle, the guide, and their prosperity.

Numerous works, especially according to an Indian viewpoint, emphasis on the impacts of guiding help on clients. As per Othman Mohamed (2005), a singular looks for guiding administrations since the individual regrets oneself and needs support in assisting them with rolling out an improvement, especially in mental, profound and conduct improvements. Proficient directing administrations can make a positive change in the present moment and long haul and they add to the improvement of a positive self (Zuria Mahmud, Noriah Mohd Ishak and Amla Salleh, 2005; Zainuddin Abu, Zuria Mahmud and Salleh Amat, 2008). The study's findings suggested that clients increase their certainty, learn about familial connections, and get support, as well as create more successful behaviors. According to Zuria Mahmud et.al (2005), the viability of the advising system can be determined by the client's behavior, thoughts, and feelings throughout the discussion. The author also stated that clients understood the root causes of their problems and gained confidence that they might change as a result of the therapy session. Another study showed that respondents who have been through a counseling experience have more positive attitudes than those who have never had a counseling experience (Rusnani Abdul Kadir, Loh Poh Fang & Asmah Ismail, 2008). A previous study also indicated that counselors were able to win trust among clients despite their guidance programme at moderate levels (Azizi Yahaya, Anuar Rahman, Rahim Hamdan & Yusuf Boon, 2001). The study also revealed that counselor's role was to lessen their client's feelings of tension. The counselors were also seen as sincere (Aziziet al, 2001). In relation to this, Rogers (1951) states that relationships with others help individuals understand themselves, which contributes to positive self-esteem. Every person requires positive attention and to be loved, liked, respected, admired, and accepted by others, especially family

members. In reality, people do not always receive the helpful attention they require. Additionally, they are subjected to unfavorable attention, which could lead to stress. Individuals frequently receive both negative and positive attention. As a result, they are able to handle tension and stress despite the unfavorable attention they receive. Positive attention aids in the building of self-concept. Humans have an inherent desire for love and acceptance. If these are not met, the individual's self-concept will be distorted. Relationships with others, including family members and members of the community, are very important in developing a sense of love and affection (Rogers, 1951).

In addition, Rogers (1961) suggests that humans have an internal power and the potential to make themselves successful and useful to society. According to Rogers, an individual who experienced unconditional acceptance or unconditional positive regard is likely to be more open to understanding his or her experiences. Furthermore, potential and openness will grow in a supportive atmosphere, which will contribute to a high sense of self-worth and can be reached in phases. Rogers (1961) also suggests that humans are naturally good, rational, responsible and strive for self-actualisation.

People, on the other hand, tend to be frustrated and unhappy when they are unable to strive for self-actualisation due to lack of love and security. Disequilibrium happens when there is an inconsistency between one's self-perception and one's actual self. Individuals are confused and tense as a result of this. Human behavior can also be explained with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977).

According to this view, human conduct is the outcome of interaction with environmental challenges and forces. Bandura (1977) also states that individuals will behave based on the experience of seeing others who are considered role models. In relation to this, rewards can avoid delinquent behavior and produce good behavior (Bandura, 1977). Individuals, on the other hand, do not exist in a vacuum when it comes to environmental demands. They have the ability to choose their behaviors when they are participating in the environment (Ruhani Mat Min, 2009). This suggests that people are subjected to pressure from sources other than the environment. Individual

experiences are the result of interaction between the components of self and the environment (Ruhani Mat Min, 2009). Counselor trainees perform their internships at various counseling centers. They must complete a four-year counseling training program, which includes an internship at a counseling center at the conclusion. During the internship, responsibilities such as counseling sessions, developmental activities, and administrative work must be accomplished, as well as a set number of needed hours of counseling sessions with clients. In other words, the trainee counselors have fulfilled all the training requirements prior to the internship. The counselor trainees will have an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they have learnt with clients in a real environment (Ruhani Mat Min, 2009). Baird (2016) points out that the counseling practicum provides an opportunity for the trainees to synthesize information, knowledge and skills learned during their training at the university, as well as to review what has been learned. Previously, Folkes-Skinner, Elliot, & Wheeler (2010) have indicated that training to be a counselor is stressful and inevitably involves significant shifts in identity, self-knowledge and confidence. The majority of these adjustments were related to beginning work with clients.

Despite the significant shifts, counselor trainees develop self-confidence about becoming effective helpers, and the anxiety level decreases as they go through their supervised training (Al-Darmaki, 2004). In relation to this, Grafanaki (2010) suggests that the development of counselor trainees is also important for clients and society at large because professional development contributes to their performance as a counselor. Corey (2013) discusses personal characteristics of effective counselors during counseling sessions and argues that these characteristics may foster client growth. Despite this, Folkes-Skinner et al. (2010) found that easier clients provide counselors with positive initial client experiences, thus giving counselor trainees time to develop confidence and a positive professional identity, which can help them later when clients become more challenging.

Breathing retraining, for example, is increasingly being used in psychotherapy to enhance heart rate variability and reduce stress, but little research on its usefulness

has been conducted too yet. To be specific, no research has directly compared utilizing a breathing acer at 6 breaths per minute with compassion centered calming rhythm breathing to date. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of clients who attended therapy sessions with the counselor after doing a brief breathing method (Anapan Sati).

Problem/Objectives

The problem addressed by the research study “Experiences of participants practicing Anapan Sati (Progressive Relaxation via Breathing Technique) prior to counselling sessions” attempts to address is the stigma associated with counselling and psychotherapy in India. The study attempts to comprehend the variance in counselling experience and the impact of Anapan Sati (often used in Vipashana meditation with Anapan’s progressive relaxation breathing technique) before counselling sessions.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Recognize what individuals who engaged in Anapan Sati prior to therapy experienced.
2. Contrast the experiences of those who engaged in Anapan Sati with those of those who did not.
3. Consider how Anapana Sati might affect the therapy process.

Methodology

This qualitative study aims to explore the experiential differences in the participants during the counseling session. Sample for the group was selected using non-random purposive convenience sampling. Regular participants of the counseling sessions were debriefed and asked to participate in the study. Informed consent was taken from the participant. Sample was purposefully selected with the same socio-economic background i.e. Middle Class Household, age range (18 - 30 years old) and with fair medical history. There were two groups in the study N=10 each. Group 1 practiced Anapan Sati, the breathing technique prior to the start of the counseling session, while Group 2 did not practice any relaxation intervention prior to the counseling session. The Anapan Sati activity was conducted with the client in the sitting upright position and guided to perform the breathing activity for a duration of 5 minutes. The semi-structured interviews were conducted post the counseling session by a counseling trainee.

The mean age of participants N=20 was found to be 25.76 years of age and the sample consisted of 14 Males and 6 Females. One on one interviews were conducted to understand the experiences of participants in the counseling sessions. The data was assessed by coding and eventually forming themes from the narrative of the interviews collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data analysis began as soon as each research participant's interview session concluded. The initial stage in this investigation was to transcribe the interview. The interview transcripts were read several times to get a sense of the client's entire experience. Then, a crucial statement relating to the client's experience was underlined. This method of establishing an overall picture of the client's experience and extracting a key statement was carried out with each of the research participants' transcripts. This analysis was conducted based on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data.

Results and Discussion

Two main themes emerged from the data analysis which directed towards an insight into overall participant interview in the counseling session. It also highlighted the difference among the participants who practiced the breathing technique.

Theme 1 Venting out - "Feeling cathartic"

Cathartic was the most common term used by the participants while describing their counseling experiences. They viewed the experiences as being very relaxed and having the space to talk about their emotional experiences without any disturbance. The trust building process and the experience of unconditional positive regards were also experienced by the participants especially who were exposed to the brief breathing exercise prior to the counseling session.

Below is a statement example from the participant

" We were able to express our true self. Counseling is one of the most relaxing experiences that I normally get to experience in my busy life. The session for today was incredibly helpful. I was able to discuss my routine, my issues and also things which were bothering me for a while. I talked to the therapist about my issues related to anxiety, self-blame, low self-esteem and body image.

Today's session was like a good old catharsis which I could remember I used to have long back when I was with my best friends and used to share everything with them"

Theme 2 Bodily Relaxation and Mental Calmness

Relaxation is an integral part of counseling and mental health care. The experience of the participant also shaped their perception towards mental health as a health alternative. Relaxing themes emerged from the majority of the participants with or without breathing exercise.

Here is sample text from the participants interview

"Generally, I was able to discuss some of my personal issues with the therapist. I have been dealing with very depressive thoughts with a lot of overthinking and sometimes I am just not able to relax at my home, office or in the activities that I love to do. More than talking, I was able to feel calm, relaxed and slow. I would say mellow. It was a good experience and I would surely look forward to the next session.

Theme 3 Intensive and Overwhelming

Counseling and psychotherapy are emotionally intimate experiences and should be practiced under a supervisor or licensed therapist. Although a lot of care is taken for the session to be relaxed and anxiety free, the whole process of opening up and speaking about personal experiences could lead to feelings of overwhelm. Here is the sample text from the interview.

" I feel that the counseling session was very exercise. Where I had to dig deeper into my experiences and recall bad incidents and memories. The counselor was supportive and understanding but there were times when I felt that it's too much. It was an overwhelming experiences for me and I felt like it was quite intensive"

Theme 4 Recreational activity

Counseling sessions offer a range of benefits to the clients and it was common among the participants also that they perceived the counseling session to be like a recreational activity. Here is a sample text from them

"I always love my counseling sessions as I am able to just wonder with my feelings. Nobody talks about how one feels, right? Mostly people talk about what happened and why it happened etc. But the counseling session is one place where I talk about how Am I feeling. It's like any other fun activity for me

like playing games, walking around, listening to music etc. I get the same feeling in the counseling session as I get when I am cooking

at my home or engaging in any activity which I love”

Table 1 - Summary of themes (In tabulated form) Group wise based on the frequency they appeared

Group 1 (With Breathing exercise)	Group 2 (Without Breathing exercise)
Relaxed (Very frequent)	Vention Out- Cathartic (Very frequent)
Recreational Activity (Moderately Frequent)	Intensive (Moderately frequent)
Venting out- Cathartic (Less frequent)	Relaxe (Less Frequent)

Conclusion

The qualitative study conducted on N=20 participants revealed the differences in the experiences of the participants. Addition of the Anapan Sati activity resulted in the more relaxed experiences of the participants in the counseling session. The major themes which emerged from the data collection part of the study were rated on their frequency of appearance and it was observed that the group 2 (with no breathing exercise) experienced more intensive perception of the counseling session. Though there is less evidence of using breathing exercise just prior to counseling, studies like these are just the starting point of further detailed investigations with protocol-based experimentations. Mental health counseling or any other mental health care input can be perceived as stressful, mentally taxing, exhaustive etc. and such breathing exercises bridge the gap of reduced relaxation from such perception.

Recommendation

1. Increase the sample size. The sample size of the study was small, so it's possible that the results can't be applied to the broader population. The validity of the results would be improved by a larger sample size.
2. Conduct the study in multiple settings. The study was conducted in a single setting, so it is unclear whether the results would hold true in other situations because the study was only done in one. The study's generalizability could be improved by carrying it out in various environments.
3. Conduct a longitudinal study. A longitudinal study would follow the individuals over time to observe changes in their counselling experiences. This would make it easier to comprehend how

Anapan sati will affect therapy in the long run.

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