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# EFFECT OF EMOTION FOCUSED THERAPY ON MODERATE DEPRESSION

Clinical Science

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Due to a frequent increase in its incidence, depression has consistently gained attention of psychologists, psychiatrist and other agencies around the globe. In 2015, 45 million of the Indian population was suffering from depressive disorder. This common flu of psychiatry is characterized by sadness, lowered energy and despair. These disturbed emotions interfere with daily life, even in the mildest of its form and emotional regulation becomes a necessity for such patients. Emotion focused therapy (EFT) is a treatment process that enables patients to regulate their emotions enhancing their adaptive behavior and thinking patterns with the help of different methods. EFT being a recently developed psychotherapy needs more evidences though the available literature suggests that it is found effective in the management of deregulated emotions. Theoretically, the EFT considers disturbed emotions to be at the core of depressive process and the individual can regain an emotional balance via emotional regulation by FET; thus, reducing the depression. So the following was the objective of the study.

**Objective:** To study the effect of emotion focused therapy on patients with moderate depression.

**Method:** A sample of 30 patients within the age range of 20 to 45 years was selected using ICD 10 criteria for moderate depression from different clinics of Haryana. The patients with moderate depression who were found to be suitable for emotional regulation were selected for an eight session EFT intervention. A pre and post-assessment was done using Beck's depression inventory (BDI). All patients were on low doses of antidepressants.

**Results and discussion:** The pre and post assessment scores on Beck's depression inventory were analyzed by using t test for paired samples and EFT was found to be significantly effective in reducing the level of depression ($t$= 19.182, $P$= .000).

## KEYWORDS

Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT), Moderate Depression, Effect, Therapy

## INTRODUCTION

Depression is a mental health condition where a person feels less energetic within oneself and perceives events, situations and people in a negative way. This often leads to depressive feelings. There is a constellation of symptoms in this state affecting physical, mental, and behavioral impairment of an individual.[1] Depression impacts every walk of life personal, familial & social; including career, individual sense of self-worth and purpose in life. According to Mathers and Loncar, depression was found to be the second leading factor of disease burden globally and the third leading cause of disease burden in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) by 2030.[2]

Globally there was increase its prevalence, 18.4% between years 2005 and 2015, in the number of people who have reported depression.[3] People over the age of 18 years have reported depression at some point of time in their life amounting to a total of over 45 million Indian people with depression in 2015.[4]

Comparatively, a recent report by WHO indicated that the universal prevalence of this disorder and episodes varied between 3.2 and 4.7%. A recent National Mental Health Survey, in India the lifetime prevalence was reported to be 5.25% and the current prevalence was found to be 2.68% (NMHS, India).[5] Depression is a common disease, and also known to be highly recurrent. It causes large economic losses to society as it markedly reduces the ability of people to work, and is associated with increased medical service use and with suicide.[6] The clinical, social and economic consequences of these disabilities have reinforced the need to promote effective interventions in the earliest phases of illness.[7,8,9]

Emotion focused therapy (EFT) is a treatment process that helps patients to understand and change their maladaptive emotions that lead to certain maladaptive behaviors and thinking style. The fundamental principle behind EFT is that the maladaptive learned emotional responses precede the negative or depressive cognition and that are interrelated with a person's mood, thoughts, physical reaction, and subsequent behavior. Therefore, changing maladaptive emotional responses will change their thought, behavior, and physical reaction.

Emotion Focused Therapy was developed by Greenberg and associates at York University, Toronto, in 1980s. It came out of extensive research into the process of therapeutic change, which demonstrated a significant correlation between positive outcomes and the following factors: empathy, therapeutic alliance, depth of experiencing, emotional arousal, making sense of aroused emotion, and productive emotional processing.[10]

EFT's treatment model combines a collaborative, empathic relationship with appropriate therapeutic processing of the client's emotions, and the integration of new meaning.[11,12] EFT is neo-humanistic and experiential approach. It holds that emotion is biologically adaptive, and assists humans to process information and choose appropriate actions. Emotion also co-ordinates and unifies experience, informs cognitive processing, and is crucial to meaning construction.[13]

With this already well-established background and earlier established effectiveness of EFT by the Greenberg and associates, the investigators developed an interest in exploring the efficacy and strength of the EFT in treating the depression in the current scenario. It seems relevant as EFT is relatively a recent therapy and no much studies exploring the effectiveness of EFT in treating depression were found to have been published during last decade. This reinforced the investigator to take the initiative to conduct such a piece of study in Indian context.

## AIM

To study the effect of emotion focused therapy on patients with moderate depression

## METHOD

### Design

A single group pre and post-design was used.

### Sample

30 patients, who fitted ICD- 10's moderate depression criteria for diagnosis and were suitable for the chosen therapy, were selected from the patients who came to attend the OPD while working in the various private psychiatric clinics of Haryana. Pre and post-assessments were conducted by using Beck Depression Inventory (BDI).

### Inclusion Criteria:

- Fulfilling the ICD-10 diagnostic criteria for the Moderate Depressive Disorder
- Age range 20-45 years
- Either gender with informed consent for the study
- Patients on low doses of antidepressant medications

### EXCLUSION CRITERIA:

- Presence of any other Psychiatric/ medical illness
- Presence of psychoactive substance abuse

**Tools**

- **Socio-demographic profile**

A semi-structured Performa was used to gather the basic information about Socio-Demographic data of the patients.

- **Diagnostic Criteria for depression**[14]

International Classification of Disease (ICD-10) diagnostic criteria were used to diagnose the moderate level of depression.

- **Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)**

The Beck Depression Inventory includes 21 items, self-report in nature, using a four-point scale which ranges from 0 (symptoms not present) to 3 (symptoms very intense). This inventory takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. It shows high construct validity with the medical symptoms of depression. A study reported an alpha coefficient rating of .92 for outpatients and .93 for college student samples. The BDI-II positively correlated with the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale, r = 0.71, had a one-week test-retest reliability of r = 0.93 and an internal consistency α=.91 (Beck et al., 1996).[15]

**Procedure**

The current research data was collected from private psychiatric centers in Haryana during the time period of July 2019 to November 2019, with due permission of the concerned head. After the approval and permission, 30 patients on first come first basis, who were diagnosed with the moderate depressive disorder as per the guidelines of ICD-10, fitted the other inclusion and exclusion criteria and seemed suitable for receiving EFT were chosen for the intervention. They were explained the objectives and written informed consent was taken from them. The socio-demographic details were recorded using an appropriate performa. After recording the socio-demographic data, Beck depression Inventory was administered for the pre-assessment of patients. Emotion focused therapy was applied in form of individualized sessions. It was an eight weekly session program; however, it took between six to ten sessions to complete the therapy. The basic steps of EFT included the identification of chief complaints and associated maladaptive emotional reactions to situation that cause behavioral disturbances; psycho-education regarding the maladaptive emotions and associated depressive features, with a focus was on converting the maladaptive emotions into adaptive ones by using different techniques and skills including awareness, evoking experiences, letting go, acceptance, two chair techniques, imagery, bodily sensation, gestalt techniques etc. as suggested by Greenberg and associates. The post BDI assessment criteria were completion of therapy that is having learnt skills of observation, understanding and generating new emotional responses in place of maladaptive processing of emotions. Statistically analyzed results have been discussed below.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As already mentioned, the objective of the study was to explore the effectiveness of EFT in the treatment of moderate level of depression. 30 subjects were given the intervention of a structured module of EFT. Before discussing the results, here is the brief of the socio-demographic profile of the selected sample.

**Table 1: Showing the Socio-demographic Profile of the patients**

| Variables | | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Age in years (Mean±SD) 32±11** | | | |
| **Gender** | Male | 11 | 36.66 |
| | Female | 19 | 63.33 |
| **Residence** | Urban | 20 | 66.66 |
| | Semi Urban | 03 | 10 |
| | Rural | 07 | 23.33 |
| **Family Type** | Joint | 05 | 16.66 |
| | Nuclear | 25 | 83.33 |
| **Marital Status** | Married | 18 | 60 |
| | Unmarried | 09 | 30 |
| | Divorced | 03 | 10 |
| **Occupation** | Agriculture | 05 | 16.66 |
| | Private Job | 11 | 33 |
| | Govt. Job | 05 | 16.66 |
| | Student | 04 | 13.33 |
| | Housewife | 05 | 16.66 |
| **Religion** | Hindu | 21 | 70 |
| | Sikh | 07 | 23.33 |
| | Muslim | 02 | 6.66 |
| **Education** | Matric | 05 | 16.66 |
| | Higher Secondary | 05 | 16.66 |
| | Graduate | 14 | 46.66 |
| | Postgraduate | 05 | 16.66 |
| | Above PG | 01 | 3.33 |
| **Socio-Economic Status** | Upper Middle | 10 | 33.33 |
| | Lower Middle | 16 | 53.33 |
| | Upper Lower | 04 | 13.33 |

Table 1: shows the distribution of age of selected patients indicating that most of them were in the productive age. The percentage of female patients was 63.3% and for males it was 36.6%. Most of the patients belonged to urban areas (66.6%) and most of them had a qualification of graduation (46.6%). The patients working in private setups were 33% and the ones managing household were 16.6%. 60% of them were married and 30% of them were unmarried. The Socioeconomic status of these patients was lower-middle (53.3%) and upper middle classes (33%) respectively. People from too high class and too low class status were not seen to have reported.

**Table 2: Showing the Pre and Post Mean scores on Beck Depression Inventory, Std. Deviation, t- value, and Level of significance**

| | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | t | *P* Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre BDI | 27.33 | 30 | .865 | | |
| Post BDI | 20.70 | 30 | 2.053 | 19.182 | **.000** |

Table 2: shows that the pre assessments mean scores on BDI were 27.73 which are much higher than the post-assessment mean on depression i.e. 20.70. This is indicative of an enormous sum of quantitative improvement in depression after the intervention of EFT. Looking at the norms of BDI, 27.733 falls in the range of moderate level of depression while 20.70 are also falls in the same range of depression but the mean of both assessments is differ significantly and this indicates that patients improved in their depressive features.

So paired sample t-test was employed by using SPSS 25.0 version. The obtained value of $t = 19.182$ is significant at .000 level. Thus, the results reveal that emotion focused therapy was found effective in the treatment of moderate depression amongst those on pharmacotherapy (low doses). Earlier studies tested the effects of emotion focused therapy by adding techniques that were used in present study and found it to be effective in reducing the level of depression[12] Similar findings have been reported in many other Western studies.[12,16,17]

Berking and associates examined 116 individuals and assessed the long-term effects of emotion regulation on symptoms of depression. They applied emotion regulation skills and assessed depression twice over a 5-year period. The findings suggested that deficits in emotion regulation may contribute to the development of depressive features and that interventions systematically enhancing adaptive emotion regulation skills may help prevent and treat depressive symptoms.[18]

Another study compared the client-centered therapy and adding emotion focused therapy to empathetic relationship and findings provided the evidence of effectiveness of EFT being superior to the client centered therapy.[12] In a similar study which was compared the effectiveness of emotion-focused therapy (EFT) with the help of an empty-chair technique was used to treat of emotionally traumatized individuals and results showed that EFT performed a significant effect all over the measures of forgiveness, letting go, depression, global symptoms, and key target complaints and it was sustaining over 3 months when followed up.[16]

In the present piece of study, the patients were trained on identification of their maladaptive emotions and observe the negative impact on their daily life. Mindful awareness of emotions helped the patients recognize such emotions that were changed easily by using the above-mentioned techniques. This helped the patients in developing more mature and balanced emotional reactions to the same events, situations and the people; thus, reducing their depression. In fact, training the young ones on let go and forgiveness is expected to play a protective role in falling for depression that can improve the global mental health. Finally, it is concluded that emotion focused therapy with low-dose antidepressant medications was found to be highly effective in the treatment of moderate depression. Emotion focused therapy can be considered as a good treatment approach for depressive disorder. EFT helps the client to generate a new and adaptive emotional response with its successful implication in form of adaptive behavior pattern. It

is recommended that irregular emotions being the potent source of maladaptive thoughts and behavior patterns, emotion focused therapy should be more frequently used and researched by the psychotherapists in the field of mental health. It is further recommended that the school counselors and parents focus on developing healthy emotional regulation amongst the young adolescents in order to reduce the global burden of depression in the nation and around the globe.

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