

The role of traditional relaxation techniques in healthcare in Sri Lanka and Cambodia

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Abstract

Objectives - To assess the feasibility of using of traditional relaxation techniques for somatization and other minor mental health disorders in healthcare. **Design** - Descriptive study of the use of traditional relaxation techniques. **Settings** - University Mental Health Clinic, General Teaching Hospital, Jaffna, Northern Sri Lanka and Mental Health Clinics at Oudong, Sangke, and Ek Phnom District Hospitals and Batatmbang Provincial Hospital, Cambodia. **Materials and Methods** - Out of a total of 174 first visits and 4783 follow-up visits from May to August 1998, 127 were taught relaxation exercises. In Cambodia, out of a total of 839 patients treated in the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) Mental Health clinics during 1996-97, 287 (34%) were taught Buddhist relaxation exercises. **Results** - Relaxation exercises were prescribed mainly for people diagnosed as having Somatization (25% in Jaffna, 7% in Cambodia), Anxiety (15% in Jaffna, 51% in Cambodia), and mild Depression 44% in Jaffna, 36% in Cambodia). Relaxation exercises were often used in combination with other forms of treatment. In Cambodia, 70% of the patients improved while there was an 18% drop out rate. In Jaffna, 35% of the patients improved, while 50% dropped out. There were no adverse effects. On follow-up, many of the drop outs had improved and some were continuing to practice the relaxation techniques. **Conclusions** - Therapy with traditional relaxation methods is useful in somatisation and other minor mental health disorders. They are cheap, non-pharmacological, safe, non-toxic with minimal adverse effects and more culturally acceptable. The holistic approach of these methods allows them to work at the physical, psychological, social and spiritual levels at the same time. They can be used individually and in the community, to promote and maintain well being as well as prevent and cure a variety of physical and psychosocial disorders.

Author keywords

Minor mental health disorders; Relaxation techniques; Somatisation; Stress; Traditional methods

Indexed keywords

EMTREE medical terms: adolescent; adult; aged; anxiety disorder; article; breathing exercise; Cambodia; depression; disease severity; female; follow up; human; major clinical study; male; massage; meditation; mental disease; mental health care; muscle relaxation; patient counseling; psychological aspect; relaxation training; school child; social aspect; somatization; Sri Lanka; wellbeing