

Using traditional relaxation techniques in healthcare

Somasundaram, D.

Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna, Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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 **Materials and Methods:** In Northern Sri Lanka, out of a total of 174 first visits and 4783 follow-up visits from May to August, 1998 at the University Mental Health Clinic at General Hospital, Jaffna; 127 were taught relaxation exercises. In Cambodia, out of a total of 839 patients treated in the TPO Mental Health clinics during 1996-97, 287 (34%) were taught Buddhist relaxation exercises. **Results:** Relaxation exercises were prescribed mainly for persons 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 a 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 somatization 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; Somatization; Stress; Traditional methods

Indexed keywords

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