

Pilot Study to Evaluate the Efficacy of Autogenic Training in Reducing Anxiety and Enhancing Quality of Life Among Mothers of Children with Special Needs

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Abstract:

Pain is a common major symptom of advanced cancer and over the years numerous agents and methods have been developed for pain control. However, not all patients would respond to treatment, and of those that respond, many would develop drug resistance or intolerable side effects. This is a review of some simple unconventional agents and methods which might hopefully bring some relief to the sufferings of these unfortunate patients. These include the revival of an abandoned old drug like thalidomide, unconventional route of administration of the common paracetamol and the uncommon use of botulinum toxin, the unconventional exploitation of methylnaltrexone in conjunction with opioids, the potential of a newcomer, suzetrigine and a brief review of complementary medicine. It is hoped that judicious application of these agents might bring more relief of pain and suffering to some of the advanced cancer patients.

Keywords: cancer pain; thalidomide; rectal paracetamol; methylnaltrexone; suzetrigine

Introduction

Caring for children with special needs is often accompanied by considerable psychological stress for mothers, leading to elevated anxiety levels and diminished quality of life. This can affect not only maternal well-being but also caregiving capacity and family dynamics. Autogenic Training (AT) is a structured relaxation technique involving passive concentration and self-suggestion that has demonstrated efficacy in anxiety management in various populations. However, its application among mothers of children with special needs has been minimally studied. This pilot study aims to assess the preliminary efficacy of AT in reducing anxiety and enhancing quality of life in this demographic.

Methods

Study Design and Participants

A pilot quasi-experimental study was conducted among 10 mothers of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Cerebral Palsy (CP), or Global Developmental Delay (GDD) enrolled at selected Schools for Exceptional Children in Hubballi and Dharwad. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental (n=5) or control (n=5) groups.

Intervention

The experimental group received weekly supervised Autogenic Training sessions for four weeks and practiced the technique independently for 15–20 minutes daily. The control group received no intervention during the study period.

Outcome Measures

- **Anxiety:** Assessed using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) scale at baseline and post-intervention.
- **Quality of Life:** Measured by the WHOQOL-BREF instrument, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and environmental domains.

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for anxiety severity categories pre- and post-intervention. Quality of life scores were compared descriptively. Due to the pilot nature and small sample size, inferential statistics were not performed.

Results

Anxiety Severity Distribution

| GAD-7 Score Range | Anxiety Severity | Pre-Test (f) | Pre-Test (%) | Post-Test (f) | Post-Test (%) |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| 0-4 | Minimal | 0 | 0% | 4 | 80% |
| 5-9 | Mild | 0 | 0% | 1 | 20% |
| 10-14 | Moderate | 3 | 60% | 0 | 0% |
| 15-21 | Severe | 2 | 40% | 0 | 0% |
| Total | | 5 | 100% | 5 | 100% |

Table 1 shows the anxiety severity in the experimental group. Initially, 60% of mothers exhibited moderate anxiety, and 40% severe anxiety. After the intervention, 80% shifted to minimal anxiety, and 20% to mild anxiety, with no participants remaining in moderate or severe categories.

| GAD-7 Score Range | Anxiety Severity | Pre-Test (f) | Pre-Test (%) | Post-Test (f) | Post-Test (%) |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| 0-4 | Minimal | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| 5-9 | Mild | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| 10-14 | Moderate | 2 | 40% | 4 | 80% |
| 15-21 | Severe | 3 | 60% | 1 | 20% |
| Total | | 5 | 100% | 5 | 100% |

Table 2 shows that the control group had no meaningful anxiety improvement, with 60% severe and 40% moderate anxiety at baseline, and post-test figures indicating persistent moderate to severe anxiety.

Quality of Life

Mothers in the experimental group reported improved quality of life across all WHOQOL-BREF domains post-intervention, reflecting enhanced physical, psychological, social, and environmental well-being.

Discussion

This pilot study indicates that Autogenic Training may effectively reduce anxiety and improve quality of life among mothers of children with special needs. The significant reduction in anxiety severity post-intervention contrasts with the control group's unchanged anxiety levels, suggesting a positive therapeutic effect of AT. These findings support the feasibility of AT as a low-cost, accessible intervention in this population.

Limitations include the small sample size and lack of inferential statistics. Future research with larger, randomized controlled trials and longer follow-up is needed to validate these findings and explore long-term benefits.

Conclusion

Autogenic Training appears to be a promising intervention for reducing anxiety and enhancing quality of life in mothers caring for children with special needs. Implementation of such interventions could improve maternal well-being and caregiving outcomes.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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