

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

EFFECTIVENESS OF TAPPING THERAPY FOR TREATMENT OF ANXIETY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Background: Anxiety is one of the most recurrent mental illnesses with 10–44% prevalence in developing nations and is the 4th supreme cause of morbidity. Studies have shown that rate of anxiety are 29 to 66% higher in females as compared to their male counterparts. The important step is to treat anxiety by using therapeutic techniques. Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), called tapping, is a developing psychological treatment based on tapping therapy that has been utilized to treat an assortment of conditions, including anxiety. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of emotional freedom technique as a tapping therapy for treatment of anxiety among female university students. **Method:** Quasi experimental design was used. The study was conducted at International Islamic University, from Oct to Dec 2018. Following convenience sampling, a sample of 70 female university students (n=70) with age range 18–25 years, was selected. Following a one group pre-test and post-test design, State-Trait Anxiety Inventory was administered before and after implementation of emotional freedom technique in order to determine the anxiety, i.e., State-Anxiety and Trait-Anxiety. For data analysis, paired sample *t*-test was used in SPSS-23. **Results:** Paired sample *t*-test indicated significant pre- and post-test differences in the state and trait anxiety levels in female university students ($p<0.000$). **Conclusion:** Using the emotional freedom technique as a tapping therapy, one can decrease the incidence of state and trait anxieties among university students.

Keywords: Emotional Freedom Technique, Anxiety, Students

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INTRODUCTION

A phenomenon that affects a person's feelings and behaviour sometimes causes a condition of discomfort, fear, and tension which is referred to as anxiety.¹ State and Trait anxiety are two types of anxiety. A person's instant emotional condition characterized by apprehension, stress, and fright which, in turn, is followed by somatic arousal, refers to state anxiety. Trait anxiety is tendency of a person to recognize certain stimuli in the environment as threatening. People with trait anxiety mostly recognize situations as mentally and physically threatening in contrast to person with state anxiety.² In Pakistan, prevalence of anxiety is 10–44% with a low range in men (10–33%) and a high range in women (29–66%).³ Female university students experience elevated amounts of anxiety because of reasons, for example, academic pressure, family issues, social unsettling influences or disruptions.⁴ This anxiety can negatively affect their lives and mental well-being. It has turned out to be important to diminish the levels of anxiety among students of the university to enable them to enhance their scholastic execution.⁵

The most recent 5 years have observed a stream of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) considering emotional freedom technique (EFT) as a therapy for psychological issues. Emotional Freedom technique is a combination of psychological and somatic mediation⁶ that integrates components of exposure and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (conventional psychotherapeutic approaches), and physical stimulation

utilizing pressure points on the body. On account of this acupressure point, EFT is frequently called as 'tapping' and it is similar to acupuncture, a popular Chinese healing method. As a popularized type of thought field therapy, Craig and Fowlie in 1995 published a basic protocol of Emotional Freedom Technique.⁷ Since 1995, studies have found the efficacy of EFT in the reduction of phobias⁸, post-traumatic stress⁹, depression, anxiety and pain¹⁰. In addition to Craig and Fowlie (1995) basic EFT protocol, Church in 2013 published a fundamental EFT protocol called the 'Essential/Basic Recipe'.¹¹ Even so, 'basic recipe' is expressed in both of the above mentioned extensive treatment manuals.^{7,11} In EFT, subjects are first requested to choose a troubling memory or incident (as in exposure therapy that involves exposing the target client to the root or source of anxiety) which is then verbally acknowledged by the subject in the therapeutic session. After that, it is combined with a reframing self-acknowledgment proclamation/statement (recommended to contribute to cognitive restructuring as in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy). A simplified or rationalized example of this pairing is: Despite the fact that I have (expressed issue), I deeply and completely accept, respect and love myself. The proclamation keeps the subject's awareness on the presenting issue and is repeated while tapping on acupressure points (2 of the acupressure points are on torso, 5 are on the head and 5 are on the hand). The acupressure points are 1: Top of the head, 2: Beginning of the eye brow, 3: Side of the eye, 4: Under the Eye, 5:

Under the Nose, 6: Chin, 7: Collar bone, 8: Under arm, 9: Thumb, 10: Index Finger, 11: Middle Finger, 12: Baby Finger, 13: Karate Chop.¹¹ The self-acceptance statement along with shorter 'reminder terms/phrase' helps the subjects focus his/her attention on the presenting issue. This is then rehearsed when tapping gently on pressure points with the fingertips 5 to 7 times on the 12 pressure points.¹¹ Moreover, emotional freedom technique, also known as the Chinese acupuncture method, is based on the view that tapping on certain points alleviates stress.¹²

Empirically supported psychological intervention, i.e., Emotional Freedom Technique can be effortlessly implemented by the clinician and also self-administered for the treatment of many psychological issues like depression, anxiety, fear, phobias and so on. Mainly Emotional Freedom technique can be mastered in a solitary session¹³, and several of meta-analysis researches disclose significant outcomes utilizing just one guided session.¹⁴ Despite the fact that the outcome is likely exceptionally individualized because it depends upon the intensity of psychological illness and therapeutic measures varies from person to person², a pilot research proposed that Emotional Freedom Technique usually accomplished viable outcomes in a median or average of two sittings/sessions, though Cognitive Behaviour Therapy required a normal of five psychotherapeutic sessions in university students for the treatment of anxiety.¹⁵

Limbic System is mediated by a stress hormone, known as cortisol. A randomized controlled trial that measured cortisol level before and after intervention with either Emotional Freedom Technique, psychotherapy, or relaxation on a sample of 83 individuals reported that emotional freedom technique significantly reduces cortisol level when compared with other two treatments. Additionally, decrease in cortisol were significantly negatively associated with anxiety.¹⁶ US National Co-morbidity Survey Replication found that the lifetime danger of an anxiety issue is as high as 37.3% in females and 25.6% in males.¹⁷ Although Emotional Freedom Technique can likewise be utilized to address other mental issues, for example, melancholy and addiction, it is also suitable for the management of anxiety, perhaps because of the exposure part of the therapy, i.e., it exposes clients to the source of anxiety.¹⁸

Effectiveness and clarity are two noteworthy features of the Emotional Freedom Technique. Subjects could rapidly be educated about therapy technique. There is no requirement for the persistent therapist intercession or the expense related with it. Considerably more vital therapeutic impacts have been found to occur rapidly, maybe even immediately subsequent to exercising the technique.² There is limited published research that has addressed the effectiveness of tapping (EFT) in reducing anxiety among University students.

This study aimed to address this gap in literature by investigating effectiveness of this technique. The present study investigated state-trait anxiety among university students to provide evidence-based therapy for reduction of anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

It was a Quasi-experimental design and a pre-test and post-test measure. Statisticians reported that such studies are organized with 30–40 participants as sample size but it is better to consider larger sample size.¹⁹ Sample was selected from International Islamic University, Female Campus, based on convenience sampling method. Data was collected from October to December 2018 after obtaining ethical approval from Ethics Review Committee of International Islamic University, Islamabad. The final sample size was 70 female students studying in BS (Hons) and MSc with age range of 18–25 years. Participants with no psychiatric history, i.e., with no prior history of anxiety disorder and willingness to participate voluntarily were recruited for the present study.

Study participants were first informed about the nature, importance and aim behind the present study. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants. Emotional Freedom Technique was used as an intervention method. State-Trait anxiety inventory developed by Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg, and Jacobs²⁰ was used to collect data before and after intervention. The instrument assesses both state and trait anxiety and is comprised of 40 items based on four-point Likert type scale with 20–80 score range. Scores higher on the scale are indicator of higher anxiety. Items measuring non-appearance of anxiety are coded backward. For the recruitment of participants, initially reported cut-off score were utilized. No to low anxiety was indicated by scores ≤ 30 , whereas scores > 30 represented moderate to high anxiety.²¹ To obtain final subscale scores of anxiety, items were summed on each subscale. The psychometric properties of the subscales, i.e., test retest reliability ranges from 0.5 to 0.8.^{20,21} For a pre-test measure, state and trait anxiety inventory was administered on study participants ($n=70$). After that, for a period of three weeks participants were called for implementation of EFT by a trained therapist. At first week, a group session of emotional freedom technique was organized and emotional freedom technique was conducted to find out its effectiveness on anxiety. Steps of the technique were also taught to the participants. Participants were encouraged to apply emotional freedom technique to themselves by gently tapping on the acupressure points at least one to three times a day for a period of two weeks and they were provided with therapeutic log to monitor progress. The reason behind providing the therapeutic log was to ensure the therapeutic outcome by both the therapist and client.

They were called again for the group session of emotional freedom technique during second week. Before the start of the session, through therapeutic log the participants were individually asked about whether they feel relax or not. At the end of the third week, State-Trait anxiety inventory was administered again as a post-test measure. SPSS-23 was used for the data analysis. Paired sample *t*-test was used to find out mean differences in anxiety before and after intervention, and $p \leq 0.05$ was taken as statistically significant.

RESULTS

There were 70 participants with mean age 22.16±1.19. Pre-test Cronbach’s alpha reliability of state and trait anxiety tool were 0.79 (54.00±7.02) and 0.66 (53.98±7.86) respectively. Cronbach’s alpha for the post-test measure of state and trait anxiety were 0.65 (32.40±2.32) and 0.67 (32.02±2.37) respectively. Table-1 shows comparison in symptoms of state anxiety and trait anxiety. The results disclose significant pre-test and post-test differences in state anxiety before (54.00±7.02) and after (32.40±2.32) emotional freedom technique intervention ($t(69)=22.31, p<0.001$). There were also significant pre-test and post-test differences in trait anxiety both before (53.98±7.86) and after (50.51±1.27) emotional freedom technique intervention among female students ($t(69)=3.51, p<0.001$).

Table-1: Comparison between pre-test and post-test values of state and trait anxiety (Mean±SD)

	Pre-test	Post-test	<i>t</i> (69)	<i>p</i>
State Anxiety	54.00±7.02	32.40±2.32	22.31	<0.001
Trait Anxiety	53.98±7.86	50.51±1.27	3.51	<0.001

DISCUSSION

During education, anxiety has been recognized as a notable problem encountered by university students. Many researchers identified anxiety as an important concerning area for research in university students and there is an overabundance of information regarding the prevalence of anxiety but little is known about the strategies used to overcome anxiety especially in university students.⁴ Existing literature on anxiety suggests that it has unfavourable consequence for all persons. Prospects of university routine, economic, sometimes genetic, and individual stressors put students, especially females at higher risk.³

Quantitative statistical analysis supported the hypothesis that there will be a significant decrease from pre-test to post-test measures of anxiety using emotional freedom technique on female university students measured by state-trait anxiety inventory. Emotional Freedom Technique is a reasonably modern therapeutic procedure but literature based on peer review is inadequate. Anxiety as experienced by the students is documented well in the prior studies; in fact most of the studies reveal that female students encounter more

anxiety based upon their classroom roles and life experiences.^{3,4,17} Meridian or vitality comprised therapy, EFT, has been revealed to considerably lessen anxiety. Under diverse situations and population such as veterans, athletes, students, fearful persons, and persons having fibromyalgia, EFT significantly reduces anxiety.^{2,13} Consistent with the prior studies, EFT is an efficacious intervention in decreasing anxiety. In contrast to other related therapeutic strategies, it has positive effects. When compared with psychotherapy and relaxation, EFT significantly reduced anxiety.¹⁶ When compared with the baselines, both EFT and CBT participants showed significant reduction in anxiety levels. But CBT participants did not differ significantly from the EFT participants.²²

The significant difference in scores of anxiety between baseline and post-test assessment supports the effectiveness of EFT.²³ Likewise, research using the subjects’ repeated measure design showed a significant and strong decrease in anxiety following 3 days of emotional freedom technique with subsequent follow-ups at one month and half year.²⁴

Management of anxiety could play an important role in the enhancement of psychological well-being of students. An enhanced feeling of prosperity/well-being and self-adequacy promotes mental health. The mentally strong individuals are better able to adapt and persevere through the specific stressors of academics/scholastics and later, the official environment. Students must have a resiliency power to succeed further in life. Emotional Freedom Technique improves mental as well as physical health and can be used both on a self-help basis and as a primary evidence-based treatment.^{2,9,22}

Quantitatively, the outcome of this research maintains that EFT reduced anxiety encountered by female students as well as suggested for them a way to cope and offered them a few control measures over presented anxiety. Ahead of effectiveness, the immediacy and effortlessness of EFT for persons are two of its best attractions. The method can be learnt swiftly and then accomplished by the person exclusive of hindrance. Significantly, effects of the therapy have been documented to happen rapidly, possibly even immediately subsequent to performing the procedure. The recent studies have unlocked doors for additional investigations. Extensive research is needed to be done with tapping therapies and their efficacy on psychological or emotional issues in children, adolescents, and younger adults regardless of their age.

CONCLUSION

Emotional freedom technique is effective for managing university students’ anxiety and it might be utilized and tested with other populaces and individuals with different mental health issues.

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