

**Effect of Psychodynamic Therapy on Generalised Anxiety
experienced by mother of a child with Autism.**

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of psychodynamic psychotherapy, on generalised anxiety experienced by mother of a child with Autism. The mother had chronic anxiety issues after her child started showing deviations behaviour and was diagnosed to be on the spectrum of Autism. His deviant social conduct, repetitive behaviour and lack of empathy had started affecting the mother deeply and resulted in chronic anxiety. Her mental health had started deteriorating due to constant anxiety over a large range of phenomena and distress. She was given structured psychodynamic therapy that helped in her evolution as a woman, with her ability to manage her anxiety, making her way through the struggle and of her holding emotions. Therapy sessions were given initially thrice a week, then, tapered down over a few months to fortnightly follow ups, for a period of 8 months. Pre-test score of 12 on GAD-7 screener (Generalised anxiety Disorder -7) indicated moderate anxiety. After 8 months of intervention, the relatively lower score of 7 was obtained on the scale, indicating mild anxiety. It indicated improvement in her condition. The results indicate effectiveness of psychodynamic therapy in alleviating symptoms of anxiety experienced by a mother while involved in bringing up her child with Autism. She is presently 40 years of age, a member of the Autism help group, an aware, and stronger individual. She shares a beautiful relationship with her son, who is now an adolescent.

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Introduction:

Psychodynamic therapy is a means to explore the deeper conflicts and emotions that are repressed. It works on the premise that developing awareness of the past events can help an individual to resolve the present concerns and deal with the challenges put up by everyday life. Mental health refers to “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2004). To attain a sound mental health, and positive coping, selfexploration and introspection has proven to be efficacious.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder, that impacts social interaction of the child, shows speech difficulties and is demonstrative of repetitive behaviour and there are deficits in reciprocating the social emotional behaviours (DSM-V, 2013). Echolalia is also seen in ASD cases. The severity of symptoms are manifested differently in each person. Empathy, which refers to the ability to relate with other, to feel the way others are feeling, is an attribute that is not well developed in children with ASD.

Generalised anxiety is a psychological condition that is characterised by constant worry of different events, activities, topics, more often than usual and this condition persists for fairly long time, six months or more (DSM V, 2013). The anxious person feels there is no control on the situation. Excessive worrying in persons with GAD experience disposes them to health issues and frequent psychosomatic symptoms. This may be accompanied by seeking reassurance from other significant members in their environment. There is restlessness, lack of concentration, disturbed sleep, irritability and insecure relationships.

The premise of the presented paper extends along the above three constructs, that is ascertaining the effectiveness of psychodynamic therapy, in alleviating the generalised anxiety experienced by mother of a child with autism.

Background:

The present case was referred to the researcher by a mental health practitioner. She was 39 years old, had chronic generalised anxiety. She was married and had a son who was Autistic. The son had been going to a special school, close to her residence. She had tried putting him in an inclusive school but due to unavailability of the resources to meet the needs of an autistic child, schools were hesitant to taking him. She was also working as a teacher and tried keeping him in the same school but to her disappointment, accommodations made in the pedagogy for the child's learning couldn't help the child. Eventually, she had to quit her job so that she could give him attention herself. This had started building up constant pressure, and anxiety in her. Pandemic and lockdown conditions had further restricted their social movement. There were family issues, financial strain and constant stress. She had started feeling irritated, tired and helpless. Lack of empathy in her son, absence of reciprocity of emotional behaviour had bothered her for years. She would often be forcing him to reciprocate the warmth that she would show him, learn social behaviour, stop hitting himself and her and call her 'mummy' lovingly. Such episodes would eventually make her feel sad and guilty. The bottled up stress had now started spilling out on practically all aspects of her life. This is when she decided to seek help.

Method:

After a rapport, intake and mental status examination was done. A mutual agreement through the informed consent was signed. A pre-test on GAD-7 was administered to screen anxiety. Scores on the screener indicated high anxiety. After developing a therapeutic alliance, psychodynamic therapy was given over a span of 8 months. It was given thrice a week for 2 months, twice a week for 2 months, and once a week for 2 months. There were fortnightly follow up sessions for another 2 months that focused on building coping skills, self-awareness and empathy. There were positive

changes in her outlook, copingabilities, as shared by the client. After a period of 1month of the therapy, GAD-7 tool was re-administered to note if there was any change.

Tool: Generalised anxiety Disorder -7 (GAD-7) screener was used to obtain prepost scores on the scale. This is a seven item questionnaire, based on DSM-V Criteria of generalised anxiety disorder. It was developed by Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B.W. Williams, Kurt Kroenke and their colleagues, with an educational grant from Pfizer. The scores of 5, 10 and 15 are cut points for mild, moderate and sever anxiety respectively. While screening anxiety disorders, it is recommended to seek clinical consultation for score of 10 or above.

Procedure: The therapeutic setting was quiet, ventilated room with minimum paraphernalia. All sessions started with deep breathing to calm down the thoughts and be fully present in the session.It was followed by gradual introspective exploration using free associations, subtle probing and projective visualisations. The uninterrupted flow of feelings and thoughts helped in venting out the held up emotionsleading to catharsis. The sessions would end by a reflection of the session. Gradual progression helped to loosen up the tightly held beliefs, judgements, limiting notions about self and others. With deeper explorations of the unconscious, newer insights and awareness, she felt stronger, confident and focused. Gradually over eight months of therapy, she had revealed a new person in herself. During follow up sessions, productive and positive behaviour was reinforced. She was provided with necessary information about autism including myths and facts. She also got connected with autism help groups, applied for a new job and moved on stronger.

Results:Pre-test score of GAD-7 was 12 which indicated moderate anxiety and post test score was 7 that indicated mild anxiety. Relatively lower score on GAD-7 indicates a reduction in anxiety symptoms. This further also suggests the effectiveness of psychodynamic therapy in alleviating symptoms of generalised anxiety.

Discussion:

The findings of the present research are in agreement with the previous researches claiming the effectiveness of psychodynamic therapy on anxiety experienced by individuals (Black, 2020). Psychodynamic therapy has its roots in Freudian theory highlighting the role of unconscious and repressed desires. The exploration of unconscious helps clients develop insights and awareness of deep seated emotions.

The resolution of the repressed conflicts helps them feel better and stronger. It is effective in treating patients with anxiety (Wiltink, 2017). Further, equipping oneself with dependable information and resources also adds to the feeling of wellness and empowerment.

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