EFFECTIVENESS OF COGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH OF TEACHERS OF SECONDARY CLASSES – AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT:
The present study is experimental nature following Pre-test Post-test experimental control group design. Male and female teachers numbering 30 each formed the sample of the study. As they belong to same age group with similar length of experience, teaching similar disciplines it is considered as equivalent group. The interventional process involved theoretical cum practical exposure to cognitive strategies to take stress by adopting Avoidance, Acceptance, Altering and Adapting coping strategies. At the beginning and end of experimentation Mental Health Inventory was administered to both control and experimental group. The study revealed the positive influence of cognitive strategies in promoting Mental Health of teachers.

INTRODUCTION:
Mental health is a sense of wellbeing incorporating confidence and self-esteem. A good mental health enables the individual to fully enjoy and appreciate day to day life and the life of others. Moreover, it is the basis for: 1. forming positive relationships, 2. using ones’ abilities to reach potential, and 3. dealing with life challenges. When mental health is affected the individual gets affected in thinking, feeling and behaviour. However, a person of ordinary mental health problem can distance himself from a person of mental illness which is also referred as mental disorder, mental impairment or psychiatric disability.

Mental health is affected by factors such as self-esteem, feeling loved, confidence, family breakup or loss, poor physical health, abuse, etc., When some of these factors happen to affect the individual in the negative way, his / her mental health may lose its strength and fall into a level that will make the individual look different from a person of good mental health. Generally individuals affected in
mental health may exhibit to visible changes in the behaviour. When a mentally unhealthy individual approaches a conflict he will find difficult to resolve and as such his responsibility would be confused. This sort of hesitating or unsystematic reaction will make him emotionally upset and lose his self-image or self-confidence. Again, if the same condition prevails for longer times that will become a stressful experience for the individual making him manifest stress related behaviour. He will start losing concentration in his work, always look pre-occupied, started complaining or falling into silence, getting into overeating or poor self-care and suffer from isolation, mental and physical tiredness and incapable of releasing emotions. So from this it may be concluded that mental health is a feature incorporating the effects of emotion and emotion related behaviour; and stress and stress related behaviours. Therefore to set right a person of this category, it is always advisable to release the individual from the hold of emotion and the spirit of dejection. For this, the cognitive strategies seem to bear fruit and also stay longer in keeping the individual a mentally healthy person. Therefore, the researcher would like to word the problem as follows:

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

EFFECTIVENESS OF COGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH OF TEACHERS OF SECONDARY CLASSES – AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS:

COGNITIVE STRATEGIES: By this the researcher means the 4As of coping with stress put forth by Melinda Smith and Robert Segal (2011) and the seven steps for eliminating emotions presented by Chopra (2009).

MENTAL HEALTH: By this the researcher means the score obtained on Mental Health Inventory designed by Jagdish and Srivastava (1996).

TEACHERS OF SECONDARY CLASSES: It refers to teachers teaching classes to eight to tenth in the schools in Trichy Educational District.

OBJECTIVES:

- To find the effectiveness of the chosen cognitive strategies on the mental health of the target population.
- To find the effectiveness of the chosen cognitive strategies on the mental health of male and female teachers.
HYPOTHESES:

- There is no significant improvement in the mental health of the target population due to the intervention of cognitive strategies.
- There is no significant improvement in the mental health of the male and female teachers due to the intervention of cognitive strategies.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE:

All the teachers of secondary classes working in the schools in Trichy educational district form the population of the study.

30 male teachers and the 30 female teachers would be selected by random to form the sample of the study.

Equal number of male and female teachers would be taken by random to form the experimental and control group of the study.

RESEARCH TOOLS:

- Mental Health Inventory prepared and validated by Jagdish and Srivatsava (1996).

METHOD:

Pretest-posttest experimental – control group design was adopted.

PROCESS OF EXPERIMENTATION:

- Equal control and experimental groups were formed by random selection of sample.
- Both the groups are pretested by administering the ‘Mental Health Inventory’.
- The following seven steps were used for providing a inputs to strengthen the participants cognitively in terms of their emotional wellbeing.
  - Identify and locate the emotion physically
  - Witness the experience
  - Take responsibility
  - Express the emotion
  - Release the emotion
  - Share the outcome
  - Celebrate the process

The researchers provided the input by explanation with life examples and concretize the information by group discussions and role-play. The first part of the experiment lasted for fifteen minutes, two hours per day after the class hours.

- In the second part of the experimentation, the researcher introduced the cognitive coping strategies – the 4As.
Of the four coping strategies beginning with a letter ‘A’, two of them are meant for changing the stressful situation as such. They are “Avoid the stressor” and “Alter the stressor”. The other two strategies are useful for changing the individual’s reaction to stress causing situation. They are “Adapt to the stressor” and “Accept the stressor”.

**Stress Coping Strategy 1: Avoid Unnecessary Stress**

The following are the guidelines for practicing avoidance.

- Learn how to say “No”
- Avoid people who stress you out
- Take control of your environment
- Avoid hot – button topics
- Pare down your to – do list

**Stress Coping Strategy 2: Alter the Situation**

Often, this involves changing the way one can communicate and operate.

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up
- Be willing to compromise
- Be more assertive
- Manage your time better

**Stress Coping Strategy 3: Adapt to the Stressor**

One can adapt to stressful situations without losing his or her sense of control by practicing the following

- Reframe problems
- Look at the big picture
- Adjust your standards
- Focus on the positive

**Stress Coping Strategy 4: Accept the things you can’t change**

This is the best way to cope with stress. It is difficult to make use of acceptance. However the following are the ways to get changed to accept the stressful situations.

- Don’t try to control the uncontrollable
- Look for the upside
- Share your feelings
- Learn to forgive (Melinda Smith and Robert Segal, 2011)

✓ The second part of experimentation lasted for fifteen days.
Then as post-test the mental health inventory was administered again to both experiential group and control group.

The responses of the samples were decoded and scored accordingly suitable for tabulation.

The tabulated data were subjected to statistical analysis such as ‘t’ test.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA:**

**Hypothesis 1:**
There is no significant improvement in the mental health of the target population due to the intervention of cognitive strategies.

**Table 1: Improvement in the mental health of the target population due to the intervention of cognitive strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>‘t’ value</th>
<th>‘p’ value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Pretest</td>
<td>48.72</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>50.99</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Posttest</td>
<td>146.25</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**significant at 1% level**

**Hypothesis 2:**
There is no significant improvement in the mental health of the male and female teachers due to the intervention of cognitive strategies.

**Table 2: Improvement in the mental health of the male and female teachers due to the intervention of cognitive strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>‘t’ value</th>
<th>‘p’ value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Male Pretest</td>
<td>44.65</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>38.22</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health Male Posttest</td>
<td>141.26</td>
<td>8.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health Female Pretest</td>
<td>52.34</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>34.37</td>
<td>0.00**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health Female Posttest</td>
<td>149.67</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**significant at 1% level**

**FINDINGS:**

* There was significant improvement in the mental health of teachers due to the intervention of the experimental variable cognitive variable.
* There was significant improvement in the mental health of male and female teachers due to the intervention of the experimental variable cognitive variable.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

From the findings of the study it may be deduced that after the introduction of seven steps for enriching the knowledge and competence to understand themselves and the environment around them so as to keep the emotion well-balanced and a happy one. It happened because of improvement in the subjects in aspects such as positive self-evaluation, perception of reality, environmental competence, integration of personality, enhanced autonomy and group oriented attitude due to the experimental variable adoption of seven steps.

In addition to this, the adoption of 4As coping strategies to cope with the stress and stressful situations, it seems, they have well identified the problem causing stressors and the factors that cause such stressors and the ways and means of tackling those stressors in not causing any stress to them. Therefore, certainly there cognitive strategies would have built in them a competence to deal with their mental and emotional life by preventing all those interfering factors causing stress and emotionally unstable conditions. In short, an understanding of oneself and the environment around the individual they have learnt the skill of combating with the evil effects of the environment and the unwanted thinking and impulses arising from oneself. This may be reason for the experimental variable effecting such a positive change in terms of mental health of the target population.
REFERENCE:


<http://www.canwetalk.ca/about-mental-illness/factors-affecting-mental-health>