



Analysis Of The Effectiveness Of Hypnotherapy In Addressing Childhood Trauma- Three Case Studies

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Abstract: This research examines hypnotherapy as a therapeutic intervention for addressing childhood trauma in adults, focusing on its effectiveness in fostering resilience and emotional stability. Childhood trauma, including abuse and neglect, significantly affects adult psychological well-being, often leading to disorders such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Hypnotherapy, rooted in positive psychology, is explored here as a technique to reprocess traumatic memories and integrate them into a healthier self-concept. The study presents three case studies of adults with histories of childhood trauma, each receiving hypnotherapy for symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, and social withdrawal. Over multiple sessions, each participant achieved a notable improvement in resilience, reduced anxiety, and greater social confidence. Hypnotic techniques, including visualization, relaxation, and age regression, were tailored to each individual, facilitating emotional release and fostering positive cognitive restructuring. Findings suggest that hypnotherapy, through its ability to access the subconscious mind, is a promising intervention for those suffering from the lingering effects of childhood trauma. Despite the study's limited sample size, results indicate hypnotherapy's potential as a meaningful approach to trauma healing, warranting further research with a larger, more diverse population.

Index Terms - Hypnotherapy, Childhood trauma, Positive psychology, PTSD, Relaxation, Age regression, Cognitive restructuring

I. INTRODUCTION

Adulthood is that life stage when a person attains full physiological and psychological development. It is the stage in which a person learns how to make choices and lead an autonomous existence and they understand how their action or choice can have a profound effect on both their own lives and society as a whole. Generally, adulthood can be divided into 3 stages- young adulthood roughly from 20 to 35 years, middle adulthood from 36 to 64 years and later adulthood from 65 and beyond(APA,2023)

Trauma is defined as an extremely upsetting or stressful experience or occurrence that exceeds a person's capacity for coping and often leads to feelings of extreme fear, helplessness, or anxiety. Many events, such as physical or sexual abuse, violence or assault, accidents or injuries, natural catastrophes, witnessing violence or death, war or combat experiences, psychological or emotional abuse, death of a loved one, serious sickness or medical treatments, abandonment or neglect can cause trauma. An individual's mental, emotional, and physical health can be adversely affected by traumatic events in a significant and long-lasting way. Trauma symptoms can vary greatly and include nightmares, anxiety, depression, dissociation, impatience, difficulties concentrating, flashbacks, and emotional numbness. Trauma can also affect daily functioning, employment, and relationships.. According to APA, "Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships, and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea." According to a recent survey, childhood trauma carries a substantially higher risk of causing PTSD compared to adult trauma.

Hypnotherapy is a type of therapy that utilizes hypnosis to induce a state of focused attention and heightened suggestibility in individuals. During hypnotherapy sessions, the therapist guides the individual into a relaxed state and uses techniques such as verbal repetition, imagery, and suggestions to help address various issues or concerns.

In the context of this research topic, positive psychology can provide a framework for understanding how hypnotherapy can contribute to the positive outcomes associated with resilience and well-being. For example, hypnotherapy may help individuals develop coping strategies, enhance self-esteem, and foster a sense of empowerment, all of which are key components of positive psychology interventions.

Additionally, hypnosis as a therapeutic tool can be seen to facilitate the process of meaning-making and post-traumatic growth, which are central concepts in positive psychology. By accessing subconscious processes through hypnosis, individuals can reframe their traumatic experiences, find new meanings, and integrate them into their identity in a way that promotes growth and resilience.

Hypnosis has had an uneven trajectory. Its methods have been connected to hysteria and witchcraft, and stage hypnotists have damaged its legitimacy and image. Before, hypnosis was referred to as mesmerism, after the Austrian physician Franz Mesmer (1734–1815). When it was believed that magnets led people into states of trance and for this reason mesmerism was rebranded as animal magnetism (1766). After this was debunked, Braid created the term hypnosis in 1843 (as stated in Lynn & Kirsch, 2006), which is still in use today.

Over the past fifty years, hypnosis has emerged as an evidence-based therapy; nonetheless, it is distressing to realize that the use and promotion of hypnosis may have been unduly delayed due to the sensational history of hypnosis and the absence of evidence-based research. But, in the past ten to twenty years, hypnosis's application in anxiety and pain management has been extensively researched.

Thirty-two target illnesses for which hypnosis is either a feasible or successful treatment were identified by Wark (2008) after looking at eighteen meta-analyses of hypnosis treatments

II. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In a review of the mentioned literatures, it has been found noted that hypnosis was not given nearly as much weight in the literature as it should have as a psycho-spiritual and transpersonal healing technique for a happier more contented existence.

In response to the currently lengthy psychodynamic approaches, a protocol for an experiential, whole-person approach that will potentiate a healing response in short term care is needed.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How effective the Hypnotherapy treatment is while addressing childhood trauma among adults?
2. Can hypnotherapy as a tool of positive psychology can bring resilience and positive approach towards life situations specially among those adults who faced abuse or any other kind of childhood trauma?

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The primary objectives of the study on the effectiveness of hypnotherapy in addressing childhood trauma could include:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of hypnotherapy, as a therapeutic technique for releasing emotions related to childhood trauma.
2. To assess the impact of hypnotherapy on bringing equilibrium and resilience in adults who have experienced childhood trauma.

V. BACKGROUND OF THE CASES:

Table 1:

Sr. No.	Name initials	Gender	Age (when it happened)	Background of trauma when initiated	Abuser
1	DJ	F	7	Caressing of breast and genital area, forced to watch porn videos	Cousin sister
2	BN	M	13	Fondling of breast, making fun poster of his breast, secretly clicking photo	Friends, Uncle
3	GK	F	36	Pushing her during fights, use of abusive words	Fights between parents, Father

Table 2:

Sr. No.	Name initials	Age	Type of trauma	Trauma symptoms	Timespan
1	DJ	22	Childhood sexual abuse	Panic attacks, Lower back pain, Migraine, Insomnia, Distrust	5-6 times
2	BN	26	Childhood sexual abuse	Low self esteem, Social anxiety, Headache, Spondylitis, Eczema	Multiple times in 5 years
3	GK	33	Domestic violence	Social anxiety, Sleep paralysis, Vitiligo	Multiple times in more than 10 years

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on 3 sample case studies getting hypnotherapy for their treatment. The participants are selected based on the assessment made on the basis of Childhood Trauma Screening Questionnaire CTSQ) by Justin A. Kenardy, S. H. Spence, A. C. Macleod. (Kenardy, Spence, & Macleod, 2006). Participants had completed a self report assessment based on emotional expressiveness, positive mind frame, ego strengthening, social confidence .

Tools of the study: For the assessment of trauma symptoms-Childhood Trauma Screening Questionnaire (CTSQ) by Justin A. Kenardy, S. H. Spence, A. C. Macleod. (Kenardy, Spence, & Macleod, 2006)

To assess hypnotic susceptibility- Standford Hypnotic susceptibility scale by Weitzenhoffer & Hilgard, 1963

Statistical method: Qualitative

Inclusion criteria: Single case analysis

Exclusion criteria:

- Adults not qualifying trauma screening tests.
- Individuals suffering from major psychological illness(depression, schizophrenia and mania etc.)

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sr. No.	Name initials	Age	Intervention technique	Total no. of sessions	Resilience factor after intervention
1	DJ	22	Hypnosis	16	Reduced anxiety, more focused, emotional stability
2	BN	26	Hypnosis	11	Reduced social anxiety, Confidence in self
3	GK	33	Hypnosis	13	Feeling confident while meeting new people, the Spread of vitiligo stopped completely.

Case details:

Case 1

DJ, 22 year female , a resident of Bangalore has been undergoing psychological treatment from last 7 years. When she was 7 years old, her cousin sister sexually abused her multiple times at her father's hometown. DJ grown up supressing her emotions. When DJ was at the age of 15 , the same cousin sister visited her Bangalore house. The resulted the onset of panic attacks, frequent mood swings and suicidal ideation in DJ. Gradually, she developed bipolar symptoms and has been taking treatment for it. The psychological treatments helped her to recover from suicidal thoughts and balanced the bipolar symptoms but she couldn't get back the trust and frequently complained about back pain, insomnia and severe migraine. Any other females touch make her uncomfortable and she felt dirty. She was on sleeping medicines and mood stabilisers for last 6 years.

Following the first round of history taking, DJ stated she could not recall any of her early experiences. It's only when she reads or watches stories about similar situations that she becomes so furious that she considers killing her cousin. DJ found it difficult to acknowledge that there was a connection at all between her panic episodes and her childhood trauma.

The first four sessions were focused mainly on breathing exercises and relaxation. Coached breathing techniques were taught to the subject. Followed by that progressive muscle relaxation techniques were used to ease her joints and muscles. Despite her resistance during the first session, she eventually participated nicely and went into a deep sleep at the end of fourth session.

Hypnotic suggestibility test was conducted in the following session and DJ scored high score on that. As DJ felt strong connection with beaches and ocean, she created a beach scene in her mind as a safest place so that she could come back to the place whenever she felt anxious. Couple of sessions were required to train her mind to use the visualisation technique.

In the following sessions age regression techniques been used. Started with recalling a happy memory of last year, she felt joyful and accepted the suggestions of going back to retrieve more happy memories. The following sessions were focused on trauma re exposure along with relaxation techniques. Towards the end, DJ showed tremendous improvement on back pain and insomnia problem. She could sleep without taking sleeping medicines after 6 years. During the de-sensitization process, positive suggestions of love, trust and forgiveness was incorporated so that it can replace her negative emotions. At the last phase of integration, DJ started to accept if any other female touch or hug her. She even started going out with other females for shopping. She has been suggested to practice yoga along with meditation to balance her thoughts even in later life.

Case 2

BN, a 26 year old from Orissa, has complained about recently developed Eczema which leads to headache when gets severe and now started developing spondylitis pain. Born and brought up in a remote village of Orissa, during childhood, he had been bullied for Gynecomastia by his friends. At the age of 13, he was molested by one of his maternal uncles. From that time onwards, he had developed a fear of being present in public place be it market or family event. It affected both his professional and personal life. He was not able speak to females and attend professional meetings. Gradually, he started having itching like sensation and redness all over body whenever he was supposed to attend any public event or official meeting. Later, he was diagnosed with Eczema. Except dermatological treatment, he didn't take any psychological assistance till now.

First few sessions were focused mainly on mindfulness practice and breathing exercise. During initial sessions, his eczema got aggravated so the therapist had to give deep relaxation therapies to calm it down. Hypnosis was used when he felt better and ready to dive down deeper.

BN has generated a calm forest as his safest place in the visualisation practice. He found a sense of security and comfort in that location. Couple of sessions were required to train his mind to return to his safest place whenever he feels anxious during the session. After these sessions, BN agreed to revisit the traumatic memories of his past.

Due to repeated suffering, BN lacked self confidence and developed shame of his own body. Through hypnosis ego strengthening suggestions were imparted and self-sabotaging thought patterns were replaced with self love and acceptance. He had gone through catharsis towards the end which released all blocked emotions in his body. BN later reported that he felt lighter after the sessions.

In the last phase, BN could able to integrate the relation of his trapped emotions associated with traumatic memories and his physical issues. Towards the end, BN reported Eczema and spondylitis issues reduced drastically and gradually getting confidence to attend public events. In his own words "I feel like a different person now. Earlier I used to make excuses to avoid get together, personal and professional events. I had to change multiple jobs because of my embarrassment to stand in public. After these session, a sense of confidence is coming from inside, I can now mingle up with other people easily without thinking how am I looking, what if they laugh at me? Even if these kinds of thoughts occur, I can easily shed away and confidently participate in any talks. Headache is completely gone. And I am sure Eczema and spondylitis will also go as I can see how drastically these problems reduced. Feeling wonderful all the time nowadays".

Case 3

GK, a 33 year old women from Bangalore, married, mother of a 5 year old reported uneasiness while being in public or meeting new people. She has been also diagnosed with vitiligo which is spreading rapidly in her body. She has developed sleep paralysis after her marriage. Her father had extra marital affair and this caused intense fights among her parents. Her complete childhood went looking at those fights. When she was in her adolescence, her mother diagnosed with schizophrenia, died in the year 2012. After that her father married to the other woman. She couldn't accept her step mother and always consider her as guilty for her mother's death.

GK's most of the childhood days went without getting parental love and care as her parents were dealing with their own issues. In her words "Most of the time during childhood I used to close my room door and put the headphones on with high volume music so that I couldn't hear the loud, harsh, slang words used by my parents. I was never appreciated or loved by anyone including my mom as she was schizophrenic and my father had extra marital affairs. No one cared about my feelings and I was hated by my grandparents. I was always depressed."

2 years back she was diagnosed with vitiligo which is causing anxiety and stress as it was spreading over her body. When she was 21, she got married to her long time boyfriend. After marriage she has developed sleep paralysis which created a feeling of guilt and shame in her.

Started with deep breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation practices, GK cooperated well in all the sessions. The tightness in her muscles specially shoulder, neck and thighs were gradually loosen. After couple of sessions, her ideomotor response showed complete and deep relaxation. As visual is not a dominant sense for GK, it took couple of sessions to practice visualisation as a induction method. Being a hill/mountain lover, GK has framed the image of a beautiful hill with flowers and a water falls nearby as her safest place in her mind. She has been instructed to come back to that hill whenever she feels anxious.

With age regression techniques, she immediately went back to the moment when her mother died. Her mind was holding the grief and guilt of not loving her mom as well as not protecting her from an abusive husband.

With the hypnotic suggestions, she could release these negative emotions and got an understanding that it was beyond her control and so humble acceptance is the only possible solution.

In the following sessions, she revisited the traumatic memories of her childhood when her parents used to fight a lot over that another lady with whom her father had an affair. It made her so anxious that multiple time she had come back to her safest place to relax. Sensitizations and de sensitization techniques were used during hypnosis to replace negative thoughts with positive frame of mind.

She had been given a self-hypnosis audio to listen to at home for 1 week. By the end of the 13 sessions, she reported that for almost one week she didn't experience sleep paralysis, she felt confident and She made several new acquaintances who were also the parents of her son's friends. When enquired after a month, she further stated that the vitiligo had completely stopped growing on her body.

Conclusion:

The three case studies showed excellent improvement on their physical and mental health caused by childhood trauma after using hypnosis as an intervention tool. Hypnosis had been used in different phases in all three cases. Self report questionnaire had been used to collect the result of hypnotherapy. Subjects were given adequate time to understand about hypnosis and it was used as a intervention tool only after clearing their all doubts and questions. These activities had build a confidence in the minds of subjects and later on that resulted in effective implementation of positive thoughts replacing the negative ones.

Summary

The study examines hypnotherapy's efficacy in treating adults with childhood trauma, particularly through the lenses of positive psychology and trauma resilience. It starts by framing adulthood as a developmental stage significantly shaped by past traumas, detailing how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can impede personal growth, decision-making, and emotional health. The work is structured around case studies of three participants who suffered from childhood abuse or neglect, manifesting in various psychological and physical issues such as panic attacks, insomnia, social anxiety, and physical symptoms like back pain and eczema.

The research methodology centers on single-case analysis, using hypnotherapy as the primary intervention. The Childhood Trauma Screening Questionnaire (CTSQ) and the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale (SHSS) were utilized to screen participants and assess their susceptibility to hypnosis. Each participant underwent a series of hypnotherapy sessions focused on inducing deep relaxation, visualization, age regression, and memory reprocessing. Techniques such as breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and ego-strengthening suggestions were employed to address trauma-related issues embedded in the subconscious mind. The results indicate significant improvements, including reduced anxiety, physical symptom relief, and enhanced social confidence.

Hypnotherapy's integration with positive psychology is a key aspect of this study. Positive suggestions targeting resilience, forgiveness, and self-compassion were embedded in hypnotherapy sessions, aiding participants in reframing traumatic memories as growth opportunities. This therapeutic process facilitated emotional resilience and cognitive restructuring, promoting personal empowerment. Hypnotherapy's advantages over traditional therapies are highlighted, especially its ability to access and reframe subconscious memories without retraumatization, making it a potent approach for individuals with deep-seated trauma.

The study's limitations are noted, such as the small sample size, which restricts generalizability, and the limited emphasis on empirical evidence. The study concludes that hypnotherapy, when aligned with positive psychology, holds promise in addressing childhood trauma. However, further large-scale research is recommended to validate hypnotherapy's efficacy across diverse populations and trauma types. This research contributes to the understanding of hypnotherapy as a feasible, potentially transformative modality for trauma recovery.

Limitations:

As the results are based on only three case studies, effectiveness of hypnotherapy in treating all type of childhood trauma cannot be established. Further research with large sample size can throw more light on efficacy of hypnosis.

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