

Visualization as a Psychotherapeutic Mind-Body Intervention through Reducing Stress and Depression among Breast Cancer Patients in Kolkata

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Abstract : Background: Visualization (guided imagery) is a set of techniques which induce relaxation and help people create positive mental images in order to reduce stress. It is relatively inexpensive and can even be practised by bed bound people. Studies have shown visualization to be an effective tool to improve cancer patients' anxiety, depression and quality of life. The common images used with cancer patients in the developed world are those involving the individual's body and its strengths. Since breast cancer patients in India are more family oriented and often their main concerns are the stigma of having cancer and subsequent isolation of their families, including their children, we figured that positive images involving acceptance and integration within family and society would be more effective for them. Method: Data was collected from 119 breast cancer patients on chemotherapy willing to undergo psychotherapy, with no history of past psychiatric illness. Their baseline stress, anxiety, depression and quality of life were assessed using validated tools. The participants were then randomly divided into three groups: a) those who received visualization therapy with standard imageries involving the body and its strengths (sVT), b) those who received visualization therapy using indigenous family oriented imageries (mVT) and c) a control group who received supportive therapy. There were six sessions spread over two months for each group. The psychological outcome variables were measured post intervention. Appropriate statistical analyses were done. Results: Both forms of visualization therapy were more effective than supportive therapy alone in reducing patients' depression, anxiety and quality of life. Modified VT proved to be significantly more effective in improving patients' anxiety and quality of life. Conclusion: Visualization is a valuable therapeutic option for reduction of psychological distress and improving quality of life of breast cancer patients. In order to be more effective, the images used need to be modified according to the sociocultural background and individual needs of the patients.

Keywords : breast cancer, visualization therapy, quality of life, anxiety, depression

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