

EFFECT OF COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING TECHNIQUE ON AVOIDANT PERSONALITY DISORDER AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN DUTSINMA METROPOLIS, KATSINA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring technique on avoidant personality disorder among students in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state, Nigeria. The study aimed to find out the effect cognitive restructuring technique on social inhibition, feeling of inadequacy and hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsinma metropolis, Katsina state. These objectives were transformed into research questions and hypotheses, respectively. A quasi-experimental research design (pre-test, post-test without a control group) was adopted. The population of the study consisted of two hundred and twelve (212) students, among which 114 were males and 98 were females. Fifteen (15) students were purposively identified with the symptoms of avoidant personality disorder and were used as sample of the study using the teacher nomination inventory for the identification of students with avoidant personality disorder and avoidant personality disorder scale. The intervention involved a six-week cognitive restructuring technique program aimed at enhancing present-moment, awareness and emotional regulation. After the treatment, a post-test was administered to determine whether there is a significant reduction in students' social inhibition, feeling of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to criticism. The data collected was analyzed using inferential statistics of paired t-test for related sample using SPSS package. The findings revealed that, significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on social inhibition, feeling of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to criticism existed among senior secondary school 2 students in Dutsin-ma zonal education quality assurance, Kastina state ($t = 6.86, p = 0.05; t = 2.98, p = 0.05; t = 5.28, p = 0.05$, accordingly). The study concluded that, cognitive restructuring technique demonstrates significant effects in remediating avoidant personality disorder. The study recommended that among others, awareness and educational programs on the signs, causes, and coping mechanisms of avoidant personality disorder should be organized for students, teachers, and parents.

Key words: Cognitive Restructuring Technique, Avoidant Personality Disorder, Students.

Introduction

Avoidant Personality Disorder (AvPD) is one of the personality disorders manifested on students in schools which are characterized by feelings of extreme social inhibition, inadequacy and sensitivity to negative criticism and rejections. It causes significant problems to students with avoidant behaviors which lead to inability to interact with others and maintain relationships in academic and social life. It makes them to avoid work or school activities as a result of fear of rejection or low self-esteem. Avoidant personality disorder is cluster-C types of personality disorder where the person appears painfully shy, socially inhibited, feels inadequate and extremely sensitive to rejection. The person may want to be close to others, but lacks confidence to form a close relationship. This is why some time it is called “anxious personality disorder” it is afflicting to persons when they display a pervasive pattern of social inhibition, feeling of inadequacy, extreme sensitivity to negative evaluation, and avoidance of social interactions. People with APvD cannot stop thinking about their own shortcomings. They form relationships with other people only if they believe they will not be rejected otherwise they choose to be lonely rather than risk trying to connect with others (Blair, Smallwood, Groves & Rivas-Vazquez, 2018).

According to American Psychiatric Association (2013) People with avoidant personality disorder typically have difficulty forming relationships, both personal and professional, and may avoid social activities, job opportunities, and other situations where they feel they may be rejected or negatively evaluated. Unlike social anxiety disorder (SAD), which focuses more on situational fears, AvPD reflects a more pervasive pattern of avoidance across various domains of life. The key indices of avoidant personality disorder disorders as highlighted by Millon and Davis (2010), are:

Social inhibition: Individuals with avoidant personality features often display marked restraint in social contexts because they anticipate rejection or humiliation. This inhibition is not simply shyness but a pervasive pattern in which the person avoids new interpersonal contacts unless they are certain of being liked (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Such inhibition can hinder participation in work, academic, or group settings, even when the individual desires social connection.

Feelings of inadequacy: a persistent internal narrative of being “less than” or socially incompetent is common. People may view themselves as inferior, unattractive, or incapable, which becomes a core part of their identity (Millon et al., 2012). These feelings of inadequacy often distort how they interpret social cues, leading them to assume others see them in the same negative light. **Hypersensitivity: individual to criticism:** frequently scan their environment for signs of disapproval. Even mild feedback or ambiguous expressions can be interpreted as harsh criticism (Lampe & Malhi, 2018). This heightened sensitivity increases emotional distress and reinforces avoidance behaviors, as the person seeks to protect themselves from potential embarrassment or negative evaluation.

Avoidance of social interaction: our fear that others will judge them harshly, individuals may withdraw from interpersonal activities even those they previously enjoyed. This avoidance is not due to lack of interest but rather to fear-driven self-protection (American Psychiatric

Association, 2013). Over time, avoidance can worsen social impairment and reduce opportunities for positive social experiences.

Cognitive therapists make use of varieties of techniques to change and challenge beliefs that interfere with successful functioning. Among these techniques is the cognitive restructuring technique. Cognitive restructuring technique (CRT) is one of the cognitive behaviour therapies (CBT) which is used as an intervention technique to identify and dispute irrational or maladaptive thoughts that are commonly associated with many mental health disorders. It is being used to help individuals experiencing a variety of psychiatric conditions including depression, anxiety disorders, bulimia, social phobia, avoidant personality disorder, among others. It is a useful technique for understanding what lies behind negative moods. Faruq, (2024) stated that, cognitive restructuring technique is a useful tool for understanding and turning around negative thinking. He further stated that, it can help person to approach situations in a positive frame of mind.

Cognitive restructuring technique is a therapeutic strategy that aims to identify and challenge irrational or maladaptive thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. Cognitive restructuring strategy helps individuals to modify their thinking patterns to adopt more realistic and positive ways of interpreting events, which can lead to improved emotional regulation and behavior. Beck, (2011) stated that, the primary goal of cognitive restructuring technique is to help individuals understand the impact of their thoughts on their emotions and behaviors. By recognizing and altering distorted thinking, individuals can reduce psychological distress and improve their overall mental health. Cognitive restructuring technique (CRT) as one of the cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is an intervention strategy meant to identify and dispute irrational or maladaptive thoughts which are commonly associated with many mental health disorders. It is being used to help individuals experiencing a variety of psychiatric conditions including depression, anxiety disorders, bulimia, social phobia, avoidant personality disorder, among others. It is also a useful technique for understanding what lies behind negative moods (Faruq, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Peer interaction, class participation and overall academic achievement are the major problems faced by students with avoidant personality disorder (AvPD) because they tend to avoid any academic activities or social life that required group work or expressing their views in public as a result of excessive shyness or feeling of inadequacy. And as a result of their avoidant behavior they could not get peer support. The manifestation of this psychological disorder affects not only their academic performance but also hinders their social and emotional development, posing a significant challenge to the educational system. Researches has shown that, avoidant personality disorder (AvPD) is associated with decreased in academic achievement, increased anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (Kashdan & Ciarrochi, 2013; Miller & Campbell, 2010).

In the context of senior secondary schools in Dutsin-ma in particular and Katsina state as whole, the impact of avoidant personality disorder (AvPD) extends beyond individual students to the overall learning environment. In recent years, there have been reports of decline in

academic performance of students in schools in Katsina state and Dutsin-ma in particular. This decline in performance could be visibly observed from the West Africans examination council's report in the year 2022, which indicates that, Katsina state ranked 33rd position out of the 36 States of the federation and the FCT. Also The National Examination Council (NECO) has released the results of the 2024 senior school certificate examinations with 828,284 candidates, representing 60.55 percent, scoring five credits, including Mathematics and English Language. Katsina State ranked bottom on the table with 2.42 per cent pass rate. Similarly, Lawan (2023) observed that, lack of peer interaction, class participation and poor academic performance are the major problems faced by students with avoidant personality disorder (AvPD) because they tend to avoid any academic activities that required group work or expressing their views in public as a result of excessive shyness or feeling of inadequacy and as a result of their avoidant behaviours they could not get peer support. This is showing an alarm that extra efforts need to be in place in order ameliorate this psychological distress and at the same time boost the self-esteem and improve the emotional regulations of such students.

Going by this report it's pertinent to note, since students with avoidant personality disorder (AvPD) are exhibiting unexpected under achievements in schools and these disorder contribute to an unhealthy school climate, affecting not only the well-being of students but also the effectiveness of teaching and the overall quality of education provided, there is need to come up with a proactive and promising intervention techniques that will remediate the rate of avoidant personality disorder in our schools. However, it can be posits that, psychological treatments can reduce the symptoms of the AvPD but unfortunately, empirical studies shows that, these psychological treatments in remediating avoidant personality disorder has been neglected and receive less attention. In light of the above, this research aims to bridge this gap by investigating the effectiveness or other wise of cognitive restructuring techniques in remediating the social inhibition, feeling of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to criticism of students with avoidance personality disorder in government pilot secondary school Dutsin-ma, Katsina state.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.
2. To examine the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.
3. To evaluate the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state?
2. What is the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state?
3. What is the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁. There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.

H₀₂. There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.

H₀₃. There is no significant cognitive restructuring techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.

Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental research design, with a pre-test, post-test without control group design. The pre-test, post-test no control group design allows for the measurement of the dependent variable (Avoidance Personality Disorder) before and after the intervention. The Population of this study comprised a total of 212 students, among which 114 were males and 98 were females. For this study, 15 students were purposively identified with social anxiety and were selected as the sample using purposive sampling technique. Teacher nomination inventory for the identification of students with avoidant personality disorder and avoidant personality disorder scale were used as the instruments to collect data in this research. Lastly, the data collected was analyzed using inferential statistics paired t-tests for related sample using SPSS package.

Results

Research Questions One: What is the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state?

Table 1: Effect of Cognitive Restructuring Techniques on social inhibition

Groups	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Mean Difference
Pre-test	15	3.53	0.91	
Post-test	15	1.73	0.45	1.8

Table 1 reveals that, there is a notable decrease in social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder in Government pilot secondary school Dutsin-ma, Katsina state. The mean score dropped by 1.8 points, suggesting that the therapy was effective in reducing social avoidance among the students.

Research Questions Two: effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsinma metropolis, Katsina state?

Table 2: Effect of Cognitive Restructuring Techniques on feeling of inadequacy

Groups	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Mean Difference
Pre-test	15	2.47	0.85	
Post-test	15	1.73	0.45	0.74

Table 2 reveals that, feeling of inadequacy also decreased after the cognitive restructuring technique. The 0.74 point reduction shows a moderate improvement, indicating that cognitive restructuring technique helped students become less feeling of inadequacy, though the effect was smaller.

Research Questions Three: What is the effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsinma metropolis, Katsina state?

Table 3: Effect of Cognitive Restructuring Techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism

Groups	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Mean Difference
Pre-test	15	3.13	0.89	
Post-test	15	1.67	0.47	1.46

Table 3 indicates that, hypersensitivity to criticism significantly decreased following the cognitive restructuring technique, with a 1.46 point drop. This suggests that cognitive restructuring technique was quite effective in helping students feel less hypersensitivity to criticism during the social interaction situations.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsinma metropolis, Katsina state.

Table 4: Paired t-test of effect of Cognitive Restructuring Technique on social inhibition.

Groups	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Tcal.	Df	P
Pre-test	15	3.53	0.91			
				6.86	28	0.05
Post-test	15	1.73	0.45			

Table 4 reveals that, there is significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on social inhibition. The $t_{cal}=6.86$ at degree of freedom of 28 and $p\text{-value}=0.05$ is equal to 0.05 alpha value. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsinma metropolis, Katsina state is rejected. This implies that, there is a significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsinma metropolis, Katsina state.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsinma metropolis, Katsina state.

Table 5: Paired t-test of effect of Cognitive Restructuring Techniques on feeling of inadequacy.

Groups	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Tcal.	Df	P
Pre-test	15	2.47	0.85			
				2.98	28	0.05
Post-test	15	1.73	0.45			

Table 5 reveals that, there is significant effect of effect of cognitive restructuring technique on feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state. The $t_{cal}= 2.98$ at degree of freedom of 28 and $p\text{-value} = 0.05$ is equal to 0.05 alpha value. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsinma metropolis, Katsina state is

rejected. This implies that, there is a significant effect of effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.

Table 6: Paired t-test of effect of Cognitive Restructuring Techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism.

Groups	N	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Tcal.	Df	P
Pre-test	15	3.13	0.89			
				5.62	28	0.05
Post-test	15	1.67	0.47			

Table 6 reveals that, there is significant effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state. The t-cal= 5.62 at degree of freedom of 28 and p-value = 0.05 is equal to 0.05 alpha value. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state is rejected. This implies that, there is a significant effect of cognitive restructuring techniques on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis concerning the first finding revealed that, there is significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on social inhibition among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state. This finding is in line with the finding of Faruk, (2025) which revealed that cognitive restructuring technique improved students’ social inhibition and boost their self-esteem. The second finding of this study indicated that, there is significant effect of cognitive restructuring techniques n feeling of inadequacy among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state. This finding is in concurrence with the finding of Zimbardo (2021) which discovered that, cognitive restructuring technique was effective in

improving feeling of inadequacy of the sampled students. Moreover, the study finding number three which revealed that, there is significant effect of cognitive restructuring technique on hypersensitivity to criticism among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidance personality disorder among senior secondary school 2 students with avoidant personality disorder in Dutsin-ma metropolis, Katsina state. This finding agrees with the finding of Leary (2021) that, cognitive restructuring technique was found to be very effective in remediating students with hypersensitivity to criticism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that, cognitive restructuring technique increases awareness and acceptance of the present moment, helping individuals to address avoidance personality disorder. Students with avoidance personality disorder face serious threats in regulating their emotions and this hindered their emotional, social and educational success in schools. These individuals are mostly of normal and above normal intelligence but tend to underachieve in some specific areas of development and academic activities. Hence teachers as organizers of the classroom instructions and real implementers of the curriculum should become aware of the existence of such students and know how to handle them in the regular class room setting with a view to enable them develop their full potentialities. Both special education and regular teachers including the counsellors have the important job of presenting curriculum materials in many different modalities so that all students will be capable of learning as their peers. It would also assist them with the practical procedure to be prepared in meeting the diverse needs of all students with emotional and behavior problems.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on the findings and conclusion of the study:

- i. There should be increased awareness and education programmes for students, teachers, and parents on the signs, causes, and coping mechanisms for avoidance personality disorder. Early detection and support can significantly reduce long-term psychological impacts.
- ii. Schools and mental health practitioners should consider integrating counselling sessions, peer support groups, and social skills training to help students manage avoidance personality disorder more effectively.
- iii. Teachers should always use cognitive restructuring technique to reduce student's avoidance personality disorder in order to enable them participate actively in the lessons, interact with instructional materials and colleagues.

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