

# Expressive Arts intervention for Low Self-esteem Management – A Case Study

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**Abstract**—The aim of the present study was to determine effects of expressive arts techniques intervention using ABA for low self-esteem management. Patient was a 28 years male; who is a pilot and undergoing conversion training from smaller aircraft to bigger one - recently divorced. Study was quantitative in nature, wherein; self-esteem level of client was assessed using Self-Esteem Scale (SES) by Rifai (1999) and stress; by applying Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS, 1995) – Urdu Version; pre and post intervention of Expressive Arts techniques. A positive shift in mental health was observed with respect to presenting problems and behavioral management through these effective interventions. Post intervention results confirm significant improvement in self-esteem and stress management. The results imply that low self-esteem and stress as a result of low self-esteem were considerably improved as a result of expressive arts techniques intervention. Therefore, maintaining and facilitating in maintaining appropriate self-esteem by using appropriate expressive arts techniques intervention significantly alters low self-esteem and reduces stress as a result of low self-esteem.

**Index Terms**—ABA, Expressive Arts, Interventions, Self-esteem, Stress, Case Study

## 1 INTRODUCTION

ARTS therapy is a blend of both, self-expression and creative process as well as mirror image which makes it distinct for its therapeutic role in facilitating individuals in solving issues concerning with stress, physical illness, and interventions besides number of other things. Now a days; use of art as an expressive therapy is gaining popularity in the fields of medicine. Utilizing the expressive arts to guide emotional healing, support individual creativity, self-exploration as well as solve inner conflict is spreading at a rapid pace throughout the world. It is becoming widely used, now in therapy with children, adolescents and even adults in medical environments led by art therapists, social workers, psychologists, counselors, nurses and other professionals [3].

Expressive therapies are interventions that bring together action to psychotherapy and that “action within therapy and life is rarely limited to a specific mode of expression” [11]. In contrast to customary art expression; in expressive arts techniques intervention course of creation is stressed as opposed to final product. Expressive therapy is grounded on the conjecture that people can heal themselves by using imagination and the different methods of creative expression. The expressive interventions are defined but not limited to the use of dance/movement, play, sand-tray, art, music, drama, and poetry/creative writing within the ambit of counseling/ psychotherapy, and rehabilitation/ health care [9].

Role expressive therapies play - in enhancing work with clients in ways that verbal therapies alone cannot do - is being accepted by a large number of professionals dealing with mental health. In addition, there is a growing movement in mental health division to use “creative methods” in therapy and medicine. Expressive therapies bring along with them a distinctive dimension to counseling/ psychotherapy since they have number of specific features which are not solely found in verbal therapies, inclusive of, but not limited to: (1) self-expression, (2) active participation, (3) imagination, and (4) mind-body connections [9].

There seems to be some occurrence which bounds individuals to react in a particular way to the events happening around. In view of the relevancy to the present study, self-esteem has shown to be a significant personality variable in determining human behavior. “To understand a man psychologically, one must understand the nature and degree of one’s self-esteem, and the standards that one judges oneself. One experiences one’s desire for self-esteem as an urgent, imperative and a basic need. One feels so intensely the need of a positive view of oneself.” [1]. “Feelings about ourselves is self-esteem, and these feelings are clearly reflected by our behavior” [19].

The way in which an individual feels about himself, his self-esteem, has its impact on level of happiness, and also facilitates in making his life less stressful for him. For instance, if one trust his/her capacity to handle what comes, that individual will be more likely to see difficult situations as a challenge instead of as a threat; conversely, where the individual finds it difficult to trust his/her own ability to handle things, he/she is more apt to see new situations as threatening and stress-

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provoking [14]. Matthieu and Ivanoff [11] are of the view that stress has become a common denominator in our fast-paced, complex society.

Human beings live in a world of uncertainty - a world which is evolving and changing continually and turning out to be more and more trying. This change is apt to bring in distressing circumstances, which becomes a basis of stress. The word stress has been one of the most deliberated and pondered term in the field of Psychology; having a hefty quantity of definitions. "There seem to be as many definitions of stress as there are stress researchers. Adding to the difficulty in finding an adequate definition for stress is the fact that the term is used in association with so many different constructs" [16]. In psychology stress is a feeling of strain and pressure [15]. McGrath [12], according to Staal [16]; conceptualized stress as the interaction between three elements: perceived demand, perceived ability to cope, and the perception of the importance of being able to cope with the demand.

Excessive stress is harmful for any person, as it results in mental and physical disequilibrium and subsequently leads to physical and mental disturbance [18]. Person's thinking is normally rational, logical, and flexible, during periods of non-stress. However, during periods of stress, thinking is often subjugated by worries about the consequences of our actions and by negative self-evaluations [2]. It is very unpleasant state which brings lot of tension frustration and irritation which effects on work, relationships and daily life style.

### 2.1 Research Objective

- To determine relationship between expressive arts techniques intervention and self-esteem and stress

### 2.2 Research Questions

- What is the relationship of expressive arts techniques with self-esteem?
- What is the relationship of Ezpressive Arts Techniques with stress as a result of low self-esteem?

### 2.3 Hypotheses

H1

- There would be a significant change in low self-esteem, post expressive arts techniques intervention.

H2

- There would be a significant change in stress, post expressive arts techniques intervention.

## 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

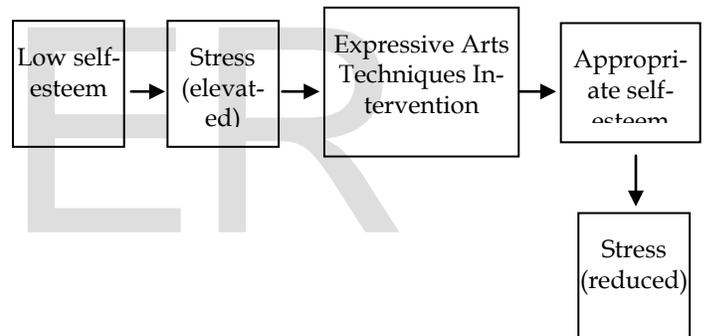
The constantly changing and evolving world in which human beings live has led to uncertainty due to its becoming more and more demanding. This inclines to bring in distressing circumstances, which becomes a source of stress. Stress permeates individual's life in all forms and upsets his compartment, routine and attitudes. Which in turn leads onto affect his behavior and conduct. Kyriacou [5], defines stress as "an unpleasant emotional state fraught with tension, frustra-

tion, anxiety and emotional exhaustion".

Krohne [4]; puts forward the notion that there are number of theories postulated to define genesis of stress. This contains Selye's theory of General Adaption Syndrome (GAS), Lazarus's theory of *relational* concept, i.e., stress is not defined as a specific kind of external stimulation nor a specific pattern of physiological, behavioral, or subjective reactions. Instead, stress is viewed as a relationship ('transaction') between individuals and their environment. Likewise, resource theories of stress; which are not primarily concerned with factors that create stress, but with resources that preserve well-being in the face of stressful encounters.

In the opinion of Tripathi and Dilawari [17]; one of the most fascinating measures taken for stress relief can be art therapy, as it has been found to be of great success in helping people suffering from a collection of conditions that are both physical and mental. According to Zarezadeh Kheibari S, et al. [20], expressive arts therapy is arts based approach to addressing clinical issues with various populations.

Table 1: Effects of Expressive Arts Techniques intervention



Expressive Arts Therapy acts as a conduit for clients to step in and step out from the muddled problems and revitalize their imagination utilizing art making process for new possibilities, once they revisit the problems, for a growing and optimistic future. By integrating the arts processes and allowing one to flow into another, we gain access to our inner resources for creativity, illumination, clarity and healing [6].

## 4 CASE STUDY

**Client with low self-esteem and stress issues** due to low self-esteem was administered expressive arts techniques to overcome the cause of concern. In this context different techniques were employed.

**4.1 Count your Blessings (Gratitude Journaling).** The client was asked to count his blessings and record it as a method of exploring gratitude within his life. Client was encouraged to identify positive outcomes in his life. In this regard his religious inclination was also used as an impetus and he was suggested to be thankful for his achievements as mentioned in the Holy Quran in 'Surah Rehman' - 'AUR TUM APNAY RAB

KI KON KONSU NAIMATON KO JHUTLAO GAY'. For e.g. If a situation at work is causing anxiety, the gratitude journaling would focus on things to be grateful about in his employment outside of the stressful situation that exists, i.e. helpful colleagues, good pay, interesting work etc. During the initial phase; client was reluctant in determining/ acknowledging healthy life achievements.

**4.2 Angry Bull's eye and Positive Clay.** Client was required to draw a bull's eye on paper and label it with angry thoughts, feelings, emotions and anything that is creating a "negative energy" in his life at the present time. After the bull's eye was completed, he was asked to create something positive out of his clay. (example: what is something that creates "positive energy" in your life? Sports, home, music?) When done sculpting "positive clay" he was asked to lay the bull's eye on the ground and throw the clay at the bull's eye. The goal was to cover the negative energy with positive energy. The goals to this activity are to enable client to enhance coping skills, and work successfully, while releasing anger in a positive manner. It also enables to guide the client to recognize what makes him angry and have a positive outlook on situations like this.

**4.3 Hiku.** Expression of repressed ideas brings about a cathartic feeling which, in turn not only reduces feeling of worthlessness but also elevates the self-esteem as well as reduces stress. This activity was given as homework to the client. After free flow writing, creating Hiku helped the client to develop insight to understand his situation and feelings of low self-worth as well as to mitigate stress.

**4.4 Be the D.J.** Music plays a significant role in art therapy. Inviting the clients to come prepared to a session with a soundtrack of songs that is important to him is likely to yield positive vibes. It depends on him that what's more important to him, the lyrics or the sounds? If music is helpful, then he'll be tasked to create a theme for each week, such as stress-reducing songs or music to meditate to, and asking him to share playlists. The goal was to reduce stress of client by enabling him to realize that he can learn to relax and enjoy from the soothing music and that he is in control of his actions.

## 5 DESIRED OUTCOME

The gradual insight into blessings (gratitude) and feeling of being in control resulted in elated self-esteem and increased sense of self-worth as well as changed cognitions and client was able to overcome stress. Due to positive effects of relaxation techniques; client was able to maintain mood relatively stable and started to take interest in job at work. Efforts were made to minimize resistance effect by empathetic listening and with genuineness as well as by taking into account transference and counter transference effects.

## 6 MEASURES

### 6.1 Demographic Information & Consent Form

This form was utilized for collection of demographic information and consent.

### 6.2 Self-esteem Scale (SES) (Rifai, 1999)

This form was utilized for collection of demographic information and consent. The SES consists of 29 items, phrased in self-reported statements with a five-point scale (score range 0-4). These selected 29 items were positively correlated with a total score with an average correlation of 0.42. The SES was found to be initially consistent and reliable as indicated by the alpha coefficient value 0.83. The split half reliability was found to be 0.72 with Spearman Brown correction.

### 6.3 Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (1995)

This form was utilized for collection of demographic information and consent. Depression, anxiety and stress scale was developed by Lovibond and Lovibond in 1995. This scale has 21 articles. There are 4 responses for each item such as 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (applied to me very much). The intensity of any of the three conditions is determined by the sum scores of responses to its 7-item subscale. Items 1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, and 18 evaluate stress. The stress subscale assesses symptoms of difficulty in relaxing, nervous arousal, easily upset or agitated, irritable or over-reactive and impatient. For the ease and convenience of respondents; an Urdu version of DASS 21 by Naeem Aslam from the National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad - Pakistan, was used.

### 6.4 Participant

It was a single client case study. Prior history, if any, of psychological /psychiatric problem was used as exclusion criteria.

## 7. PROCEDURE

Participant was required to endorse a consent form prior filling in the questionnaires. After the signing of consent form and giving a brief introduction into the nature of study; client was presented with Demographic Information Form, followed by Self-Esteem Scale (SES) by Rifai (1999), DASS<sub>21</sub> (Urdu version - Aslam) pre and post expressive arts techniques intervention. Results obtained were compared to ascertain change in low self-esteem and stress due to low self-esteem.

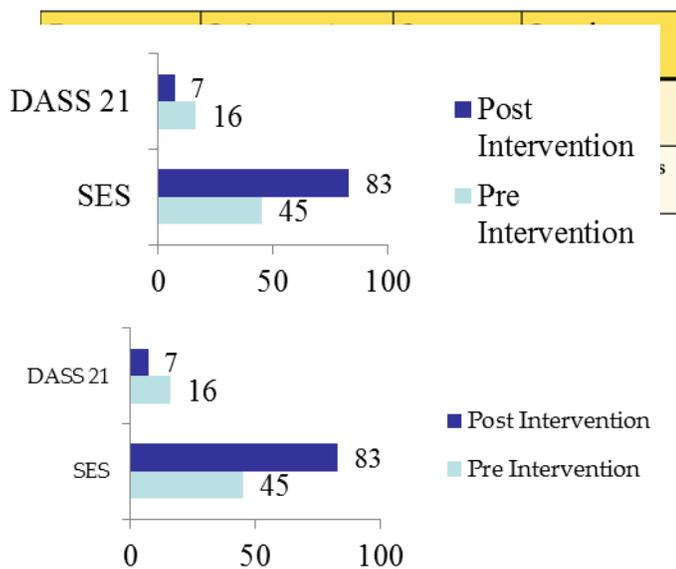
## 8. Therapeutic Goals

Following were the therapeutic goals:

- Work on feelings of inadequacies and worthlessness
- Increase Positive Self Image and elevate self-esteem
- Reduce Judgmental (Negative) Thought Processes
- Work on anger issues
- Increase Social Interactions

## 9. Psychological Assessment (Pre & Post Intervention)

Table 2: Psychological Assessment (Pre & Post Intervention)



Graph 1 : Psychological Assessment (Pre & Post Intervention)

## 10. CONCLUSION

A positive shift in mental health of client was observed with respect to presenting problems and behavioral management through effective arts techniques interventions. Post intervention results confirmed significant improvement in self-esteem and effective stress management. The results imply that low self-esteem and stress as a result of low self-esteem were considerably improved as a result of expressive arts techniques intervention. Therefore, maintaining and facilitating in maintaining appropriate self-esteem by using appropriate expressive arts techniques intervention significantly alters low self-esteem and reduces stress as a result of low self-esteem.

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