

Transcendental Meditation: An Intervention for Improving the Interpersonal Relationships of Adolescents' Abused During Childhood

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Abstract

Adolescents with childhood histories of abuse have been found to have difficulties in the domain of interpersonal functioning, including how they relate with their parents, peers and teachers, and how they perceive the social world and in return how are they perceived by the others from social world. This investigation was an attempt to study the effectiveness of Transcendental Meditation (TM) in improving the interpersonal relationships of adolescents abused during childhood. Therefore, it was hypothesized that TM will be effective in improving the interpersonal relations with parents, peers and teachers, of adolescents abused during childhood. 600 adolescent boys and girls (aged 15–18 years) were screened for possible abuse during childhood (using Childhood Trauma Questionnaire). 25 adolescents with histories of childhood abuse were administered Clinical Assessment of Interpersonal Relationships (CAIR). During the later stages of study, the subjects learned and practiced the technique of TM for about a period of 3 months. After this phase the post-intervention scores on CAIR were obtained from subjects and were compared with the pre-intervention scores. The results obtained supported the hypothesis, suggesting that TM could be effective intervention for improving the interpersonal relationships of adolescents abused during childhood.

Keywords: *Transcendental Meditation, Interpersonal Relationships, Childhood abuse, Adolescents*

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Introduction

Long time back in 1956 Erikson postulated that every stage of development builds upon the successful completion of the previous stages. The challenges of stages not met successfully may be expected to re-appear as problems in the future. Since inappropriate development at one stage tends to have ripple effect on the development at subsequent stages (Cicchetti, 1989). According to organizational developmental perspective successful resolution of stage-salient issues at one stage of development increases the probability of competent functioning at the next

developmental stage. Hence developmental maladaptation due to childhood abuse is probably related to maladaptations in the subsequent developmental periods (Egeland, 2009).

World Health Organization (1999) defines child abuse as “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power” (p. 15). She has given four categories of child abuse. These are –

Physical abuse: which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, that is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust; *Sexual abuse*: is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society; *Emotional abuse*: includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, including the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies commensurate with her or his personal potentials and in the context of the society in which the child dwells; and *Neglect*: is the failure to provide for the development of the child in all spheres (health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter, and safe living conditions), in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers and causes or has a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development (WHO, 1999, p. 15).

Adolescence (10-18 years), the second decade of life, is an age when human beings pack so much of development in a short period, gaining about 50% of their adult body weight, becoming capable of reproduction, and experience an astonishing transformation in their brains (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2011). It's an age of opportunity, where the adolescents should be helped to navigate the path of fulfilling their potentials (UNICEF, 2011). But childhood abuse jeopardizes the potentialities of adolescents. Adolescents with childhood histories of abuse have been found to have difficulties in the

domain of interpersonal functioning, including how they relate with their parents, peers and teachers, and how they perceive the social world and in return how are they perceived by the others from social world (Chin, 2014). Childhood abuse tends to have powerful impact on how the victims construct their lives and relationships later in their lives (Riggs, 2010). The experiences of childhood abuse often irrevocably shape the way the victims define their world and themselves, and thus affect their later lives interpersonal relationships (Paradis & Boucher, 2010).

Traumatized children have often experienced what Pynoos (1994) has called – a fracture of the protective shield. These children have experienced a reduced confidence in their parents' ability to protect them from danger. Hence, they have suffered a change in core assumptions about the world and the people in it, that the world is not a safe place and the other people are not good at all (Janoff-Bulman, as cited in Dittmann & Jensen, 2014). Adolescents with abuse histories often exhibit social cognition biases in how they perceive their social worlds (Pollak & Sinha, 2002). In a study, peer, parent, and teacher ratings of behaviours of 106 school students with histories of physical abuse were examined. The results obtained revealed that as compared to non-abused peers the abused ones were rated as exhibiting more fights, meanness, and less cooperation and leadership (Feldman et al., 1995). Similarly sexually abused adolescents have also been found to be less socially competent, more aggressive, and more socially withdrawn than the non-abused ones (Gil & Johnson, 1993). Childhood emotional abuse was found to be associated with later life interpersonal problems in a group of adolescent students (Rich, Gidycz, Warkentin, Loh, & Weiland, 2005). In one similar study by Shaffer, Yates and Egeland (2009), childhood emotional abuse and neglect

was found to be associated increased aggression, social withdrawal and consequent interpersonal problems during adolescence.

Hence childhood abuse leads to difficulties in interpersonal judgment and also to externally imposed disruptions in relationships with others, and create problematic lifelong relational trajectories (D'Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2012).

Transcendental Meditation

Originated in India, by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the simple technique of Transcendental Meditation has come long way in various prevention-oriented programmes to reduce stress and ailments, and improving an overall quality of life for its pursuers. The Transcendental Meditation technique is a simple, natural, and effortless mental procedure, practiced using a mantra, for about 15-20 minutes, twice a day, while sitting comfortably with closed eyes (Roth, 1994). According to Roth (2011) following points elaborate further Transcendental Meditation: (1) It is easy to learn and enjoyable to practice. (2) The scientific research has shown that the benefits of TM can be seen immediately and accumulate over time. (3) It is simple to understand. Studies have shown that Transcendental Meditation programmes tend to reduce stress, increase energy, increase happiness, increase self-esteem, increase inner calm, reduce anxiety and depression, and improve relationships (Roth, 2011). The Transcendental Meditation programme was found to increase the mindfulness (i.e. low levels of neuroticism,

anxiety and depressive symptoms; and high levels of self-esteem and satisfaction with life) amongst adolescents (Tanner et al., 2009). In another study (Rosaen & Benn, 2006), Transcendental Meditation helped adolescents gain higher levels of relaxation and energy. At the same time it helped them to increase self-control, especially with regard to anger. Hence, in the studies comprising adolescents, the Transcendental Meditation has been found to be really effective.

Objective of Study: To study the effectiveness of Transcendental Meditation in improving the interpersonal relationships with parents, peers and teachers, of adolescents abused during childhood.

Hypothesis: Transcendental Meditation will be effective in improving the interpersonal relationships with parents, peers and teachers, of adolescents abused during childhood.

Methodology

Sample: In the present investigation, around 600 adolescents boys and girls between the age group of 15 – 18 years, from various schools of Rupnagar and Patiala districts (of Punjab, India), were screened for possible abuse during childhood. Mean age of the sample was 16.73 years (and S.D. = 0.64). After this long process of screening, 25 adolescents (12 boys, 13 girls) with confirmed histories of abuse and who were willing and self-motivated to participate till the completion of study, were enrolled for this study. These subjects were matched on age, middle socio-economic status and two-parent nuclear families.

Table 1: Showing the composition of sample for this study

	No of Males	No. of Females
Physical abuse (N = 7)	5	2
Sexual abuse (N = 4)	1	3
Emotional abuse (N = 10)	4	6
Neglect (N = 4)	2	2
Total	12	13

Psychological Measures

1. Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ, by Bernstein & Fink, 1998): 'Childhood Trauma Questionnaire - A Retrospective Self-Report', is a 28-item self-report inventory that provides brief, reliable, and valid screening for histories of abuse. CTQ is appropriate for adolescents aged 12 and over. Internal consistency reliability coefficients for the CTQ scales were computed with Cronbach's alpha for all of the validation samples (such as Adult Substance Abusers, Adolescent Psychiatric Impatiens, College Undergraduates, etc.). Reliability coefficients ranged from satisfactory to excellent, with the highest for the Sexual Abuse Scale (median = .92) and the lowest for the Physical Neglect Scale (median = .66). Further, for construct validity CTQ was validated with data from over 2,000 respondents, including both clinical and non-referred groups and satisfactory results were obtained (Bernstein & Fink, 1998).

2. Clinical Assessment Of Interpersonal Relationships (CAIR, by Bracken, 2006): CAIR documents the difficulties that students (ages 9 to 19 years) have in relationships with their mother, father, male peers, female peers, and teachers, through its five scales and Total Relationship Index (TRI). This instrument demonstrates exceptional technical adequacy as a tool, with reliabilities well above .90 for each of the five scales and for TRI (Bracken, 2006). Further, statistically significant correlations have been found between CAIR Scales and – Multidimensional Self Concept Scale (Bracken, 2006), Clinical Assessments of Attention Deficit-Child (Bracken & Boatwright, 2005), Clinical Assessment of Behaviour (Bracken & Keith, 2004), and so on (Bracken, 2006).

Procedure

The present investigation started first with taking permission to carry out the research work from the authorities concerned, and then with the screening of around 600 adolescents through CTQ for possible histories of abuse. After this long process of screening, 25 adolescents were administered CAIR. The scores obtained were the pre-intervention scores. All these adolescents then were taught the technique of Transcendental Meditation. This technique was taught to subjects in a series of seven standardized steps:

1. A 90-minute introductory lecture to offer a review of previous scientific research on the Transcendental Meditation programme and vision of possible gains through regular practice.
2. A 90-minute preparatory lecture to offer a review of the mechanics and origin of this technique. The preparatory lecture was delivered 2-days after the first lecture. Both the first two steps were conducted in group setting.
3. Immediately following the preparatory lecture phase, the phase of one-on-one personal interview got started. In this 10-minutes interview the instructor gathered basic information from the subjects to aid with the personalization of instructions.
4. After 3 days of personal interviews, the next phase was of one-on-one personal instruction meeting. In this 90-minute meeting the learning of Transcendental Meditation technique took place. This phase too started 3 days after the previous one.
- 5-7. The phase of personal instruction was followed by three 90-minute "checking sessions" held on consecutive days, beginning in our study the day just after personal instruction phase. On the first

day of checking, verification of the correctness of Transcendental Meditation practice took place. On the second day of checking, understanding of the mechanics of Transcendental Meditation technique from personal experiences took place. Finally on the third day of checking the understanding of the mechanics of development of higher states of well-being through Transcendental Meditation programme took place.

Once the subjects mastered the simple technique of Transcendental Meditation they were required to engage in 15-20 minute sessions twice a day. During week days, one session was fitted into school schedule without taking time from the academic schedule. This session for every subject was conducted in groups. The second session was done by each subject at his/her home. During weekends both the sessions were conducted at home. Each subject was provided 'routine participation card'. To confirm subject's regular practice of Transcendental Meditation, daily signatures of teacher (if Transcendental Meditation done at school) and any one parent (when

again administered CAIR to obtain their post-intervention scores. The pre- and post-intervention scores of adolescents were compared using suitable statistical analysis.

Results

Table 2 shows that the mean and S.D. of entire sample on CAIR before and after intervention is 385.52 and 90.54, and 531.24 and 97.19 respectively. The t-ratio calculated between the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores of adolescents with childhood histories of abuse on CAIR is 11.5 ($p < 0.01$) and it also comes out to be significant. The obtained value of t exceeds the critical value, indicating that a significant difference exists between pre-intervention and post-intervention scores of the group on the index of interpersonal relationships. Further, the mean of scores also suggest a raise in interpersonal relationships of this group after intervention. Hence, Transcendental Meditation comes out to be effective in improving the interpersonal relationships of adolescents abused during childhood.

Table 2: t-ratio of pre- and post-intervention scores of abused adolescents on CAIR

	Pre-intervention scores	Post-intervention scores
Mean	385.52	531.24
SD	90.54	97.19
t		11.58

Transcendental Meditation done at home) were required on routine participation card. The absence of signatures on this card showed the session missed by the subject.

Although the benefits of Transcendental Meditation can be seen immediately, but for this present study benefits accumulated over time were studied. Hence, this entire phase of intervention took place for about a period of 3 months. After this period the subjects were once

df(24) at 0.05 level = 2.06
at 0.01 level = 2.79

The results obtained from pre- and post-intervention scores of the abused adolescents were further subjected to inferential statistics. To know for each participant the extent of change brought by the intervention, incremental changes before and after intervention was studied. The incremental change for any participant on the index of interpersonal

relationships is the difference between post- and pre-intervention scores of that participant on that measure (i.e. **Incremental change for any subject on CAIR = post-intervention score minus pre-intervention score on CAIR**). In the following Line chart 1 the total number of participants (i.e. 25) is shown on the horizontal axis and the scores on CAIR on the vertical axis. It can be observed that for all 25 abused participants the pre-intervention scores on CAIR i.e. the interpersonal relationships measure were lower than the post-intervention scores. There has been an incremental raise for every participant over this measure. This suggests that the intervention has been effective in improving the interpersonal relationships scores for every abused adolescent.

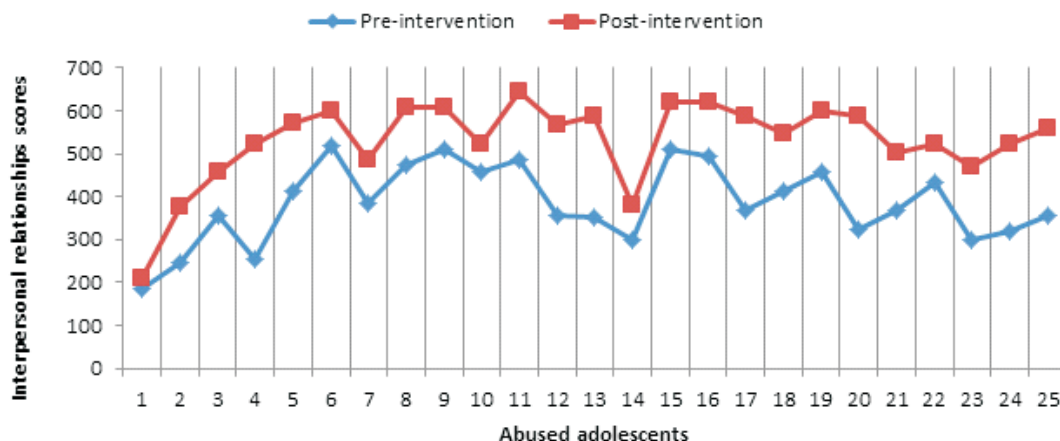
For every participant there has been an increase in the scores on CAIR. Average incremental raise for each participant comes out to be 145.72 points on the interpersonal relationships score. On an average, therefore, each participant's post-intervention scores come out to be 145.72 points higher than his/her pre-intervention scores on CAIR.

Line chart 1: Showing incremental changes in pre- and post- intervention scores on interpersonal relationships measure for abused adolescents

Hence, the above mentioned incremental changes clearly favor the effectiveness of intervention, i.e. Transcendental Meditation, in improving interpersonal relationships for every abused adolescent.

Discussion

The aim of this investigation was to study the effectiveness of Transcendental Meditation in improving the interpersonal relationships with parents, peers and teachers, of adolescents abused during childhood. Childhood abuse results in difficulties in interpersonal domain of the victims during adolescence (Briere & Runtz, 2002; Cook et al., 2005). Since childhood abuse occurred at the time when assumptions, beliefs, and expectations about interpersonal relationships are first to be formed, and when the positive and negative states are to be conditioned to relational stimuli (Pearlman & Courtois, 2005), making the survivors of abuse sensitive to rejection, abandonment, encountering problems in trusting others, unstable relationships, and ambivalence regarding intimacy (Dietrich, 2007). The victims of childhood abuse often display the errors in judgment for interpersonal reasoning situations that lead to inappropriate or odd social behaviour and social rejection



(DePrince, Chu, & Combs, 2008). Such victims of abuse generally have more difficulties with social perspective-taking, that leads to a defensive interpersonal style and generate conflicted relationships (Burack et al., 2006). Hence childhood abuse tends to cripples the interpersonal relations of victims, especially during adolescence.

Adolescence is already the stage of challenges and problems, and when it gets compounded with the dreadful experiences of past, the stage is likely to become the toughest period for an individual. Schools in many countries are finding Transcendental Meditation programme of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to be an effective solution for dealing with various problems of adolescents. More than five million people from various cultures, religions, and educational backgrounds throughout the world have learned Transcendental Meditation over past 50 years (Roth, 2011). Transcendental Meditation is the key component of Consciousness-Based Education programmes that can be added to the normal academic curriculum of any school in order to remove the stresses of past and to unfold the full potential of brain functioning for any student. The technique intends to take mind from active levels of thinking to a state of least mental activity. Such an experience of psychophysiological 'restful alertness', i.e. full self-awareness devoid of customary mental content, has been called as *transcendental consciousness* (Maharishi, 1969). So during Transcendental Meditation the mind settles down to silence, yet fully awakened and expanded, and simultaneously at the same time the body gains a unique and profound state of rest and relaxation. Further, the technique has its origins in the ancient Vedic approach towards health (Yogi, 1995) and does not need any changes in personal beliefs, philosophy, lifestyle, or diet (Nader, 1994). Moreover, no mental effort is required to alter intentionally the

physiological processes (such as respiration rate, muscle relaxation, etc.); there are no manipulations and suggestions (such as in hypnosis); requires no ability to concentrate or control the mind; requires no physical exercises, special postures, or procedures; and can be practiced anywhere. Hence the technique can be easily incorporated into the daily schedules of troubled adolescents.

In the present investigation when adolescents started to practice Transcendental Meditation, they started to move away from the memories and experiences of past. They realized and accepted their victimization yet they got ready to give their lives a new start, where they started to acknowledge that all people are not bad. These adolescents reported that the inner calm that they received from this practice inculcated in them the qualities of alertness, intelligence, creative thinking, confidence, motivation, integrity, and happiness. These qualities developed naturally in them through regular practice of Transcendental Meditation. As they started to experience the inner field of their own total potential, they started to live it more and more in their daily lives. A sexually abused subject, who earlier used to stay away from people, after the Transcendental Meditation intervention programme reported that,

"I want to experience life again and that too with the significant persons in my life."

Female, 15 years

Another subject, who was a victim of childhood physical abuse, reported that,

"My life need not be dependent on few people. There are many more who are worth my attention and affection."

Male, 16 years

The regular practice of Transcendental Meditation has been found to be really effective for adolescents. Just like Mr. Derek Cassells, the Head Teacher of the award-winning Maharishi

School, in UK in 2014 said, “Through Transcendental Meditation the students of our school experience a unique quality of deep rest, twice every day. Stresses and tensions are released and the nervous system is brought into balance.” **Benn (2003) conducted a research at the University of Michigan Medical School and found that pupils practicing Transcendental Meditation had significantly higher scores on three scales: positive affectivity, self-esteem, and emotional competence.** In another study (Rosaen & Benn, 2006), seventh grade students who practiced transcendental meditation each day for one year reported that the meditation helped them to gain higher levels of concentration, relaxation, and energy. At the same time it helped them to increase self-control, especially with regard to anger. According to Deans (2012), the government of Brazil sent a fact-finding delegation to Maharishi School in UK, and as a consequence the ministry of education has requested that the programme be offered in 38,000 schools in Brazil. In Melbourne, Australia, and in Victoria, Canada, consciousness-based schools receive half of their funding from their respective governments. To date such programmes have been introduced to almost half a million students in over hundreds of schools amongst 53 countries.

Hence, growing body of research indicates that Transcendental Meditation is being accepted as a form of intervention for dealing with the problems of adolescence. This study has also suggested the application of Transcendental Meditation for improving the interpersonal relationships of adolescents with childhood histories of abuse. The results have shown that each single participant was benefitted from the regular practice of this technique. The intervention actually brought positive outcomes measured in terms of improved interpersonal relationships of abused

adolescents with the significant persons, but “how” it was successful in bringing those outcomes is still a mystery. How come a relaxed mind helps in building healthy interpersonal relationships is not yet clear. Even previous research has found improvements in the interpersonal relationships of adolescents after the regular practice of technique (Roth, 2011). But what chemical change the technique actually brings in the brains of its pursuers is not yet fully clear. The need is to do more and more research in this direction. Adolescence can be a stage of turmoil, and impaired interpersonal relationships due to childhood abuse can further aggravate the stress of this stage. There is need to design interventions which can be beneficial for this sensitive age group. Transcendental Meditation seems to be an easy and exceptional intervention which has worked well for this population. The technique is highly simple and therefore can be made a part of abused as well as normal adolescents' lives. Yet not much research has been done in eliciting the benefits of Transcendental Meditation for this age group. Unveiling the benefits from the hidden areas of research can bring fruitful results for many, and for this serious endeavours are required in the field of Contemplative Psychology.

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