Special Article

Anxiety Management In Asian Culture*

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Anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling, the sources of which are often non-specific or unknown to individual. Several studies indicate that anxiety is the most frequent emotion found in general population. However, stimulating environment may increase the severity of anxiety. People in industrialized country, such as Japan, are introduced to read this paper. Generally, everyone can deal with anxiety, and two strategies used in dealing with are coping mechanism and relaxation techniques. The first strategy is coping mechanism, which has two types: defense mechanism and adaptive coping mechanism. Everyone automatically uses defense mechanism to release tension and increase self-confidence each day, for examples, compensation, projection, rationalization, displacement etc, whereas someone uses adaptive coping mechanism to reduce anxiety. Two types of adaptive coping mechanism are introduced in this paper. The first one is an affective coping method--a natural method, such as cry, laugh loudly, feel angry and aggress to someone. The other one is problem-solving method--a scientific way to find out

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problems, choose the best way to solve, implement and evaluate problems causing anxiety. The second strategy, Asian people are familiar with and mostly used, is relaxation techniques. Simple relaxation techniques in reducing anxiety through physical exercises, are deep breathing exercise and muscle relaxations. For some Asian people, they use a complicated relaxation technique, like meditation.

Normal or mild anxiety has some advantages, but severe anxiety is a dangerous emotion. For example, normal or mild anxiety can stimulate anxious person to prepare such a good work and to manage something carefully. Severe anxiety is a pathological anxiety and whoever being under this type of anxiety are vulnerable and prone to neurosis or psychosis. Therefore, it is important for everyone to evaluate oneself in order to prevent severe anxiety that may cause mental health problems later.

Introduction

Anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling, the sources of which are often non-specific or unknown to individual. However, stimulating environment may increase the severity of anxiety. People in industrialized country, such as Japan, are introduced to read this brief paper. Knowingly, Japan was faced with a severe economic problem after the World War II. As a result of its war and subsequent loss of the war, Japan has improved the quality of its products. The country was recovered and become a leader in world market in accordance with the tremendous change to an industrialized country. Gradually, Japanese people have grown up in a competitive way as the country has absolutely become a major economic power. This results in increasing the levels of stress and anxiety of the people. In fact, several studies indicate that anxiety is the most frequent emotion found in general population (Bourne, 1995; Cattell & Scheier, 1961; Townsend, 1941; Yarcheski, Proctor, & Oriscello, 1998). The levels of this emotion are divided by degree of severity. These levels vary from normal to severe degree. Although each level contributes feeling of insecurity and helplessness, everyone can deal with it, especially, normal or mild anxiety. In contrast, an intensely anxious emotion, severe anxiety, everyone is unable to comprehend and manage anything because it is a dangerous emotion known as pathological anxiety. In each culture, among people's interaction, people always deal with normal anxiety automatically and naturally but

sometimes they do not know how to deal with it effectively. That's why anxiety management is an interesting thing to come to know.

Strategy & Method

The first strategy everyone can deal with anxiety is to use coping mechanism. According to Townsend (1941), coping mechanism consists of defense mechanism that is a self- protective pattern, and adaptive coping mechanism that is affective coping and problem solving abilities of a person in meeting life's demands. For this reason, defense mechanism is falsely positive evaluation based on self-protective pattern that defends against underlying perceived threats. For example, although we do not succeed in studying, we are good at sport or music instead. It means we use compensation. An example of projection is to blame someone or something to make us secured in facing with threatening situation, that is, when we fail in doing something because we do not work hard, we blame others, such as people or things. When we use rationalization, it means we give rational reasons to protect ourselves, for example, we come late in meeting, we always tell others that the traffic jams. For displacement, it is used when we feel uncomfortable or angry with the other and cannot react to him/her because he/she has more power than us. We may react to things or animals, such as dog or cat instead. All of these examples are known as defense mechanisms and everyone always uses automatically to release tension. It is a natural way to protect oneself

from threats. However, the other way of coping mechanism is to use adaptive coping mechanism to reduce anxiety. There are two ways of using adaptive coping mechanism (Beck, Rawlins, and Williams, 1984). One way, is to use an affective coping method. This is also a natural method, such as cry, laugh loudly, feel angry and aggress to others etc. Another way, is to use problem solving method that is a scientific method. It means to find out problems by assessing data, and then to choose the best way to solve problems. After making alternatives, implementing and evaluating problems causing anxiety are utilized.

The second strategy, already known by Asian people and mostly used, is relaxation techniques through physical exercises such as deep breathing exercise and muscle relaxations. Deep breathing exercise is a simple technique, for example, during practicing long inspiration and expiration exercises, we make imagination simultaneous. It means we think about something feeling comfortable, such as forest, mountain, sea etc. Moreover, it is necessary to expire so long in order to make the muscle of stomach deflated during expiration. Because of this simple technique, a basic step leading to meditation, we will feel more comfortable and relaxed. Progressive muscle relaxation,tense-relax, is also one of the most frequently used technique for Asian people. The following is to learn how to practice tense-relax (Danskin & Crow, 1981; Lehrer, & Woolfolk, 1993; Sebenick, 2000; Tarlar-Benlolo, 1978).

To begin the tense-relax exercise, find a comfortable position. Very gently close your eyes. Take a deep breath, hold it for the count of four, and then exhale slowly, letting all tension fade away as your body begins to relax. Breathe normally with your eyes still closed. Scan your body for any signs of tension. Notice any tightness, pressure, or pain anywhere in your body. At first, this may take a minute or two, but with practice you will become aware of your tension level in just a few seconds.

Begin by closing your eyes tightly. Hold for five seconds. Then, let go and be aware of the feeling as the muscles relax more and more. With your eyes closed, roll your eyes in a large circle. *Be careful;* these muscles can be strained, so make the circles just large enough so you can feel the wave of tension go round and round. Then relax.

Using the same process of tensing and relaxing, go through the following: clench your jaws; move your tongue up and down, left, right; tense your neck muscles by first tensing the muscles that move your head back, and while holding these tense, tensing those that move your head forward, to the right, and then to the left; try to touch your shoulders in front of you; try to touch your shoulder blades together. Tighten your forehead muscles as much as you can. Hold for five seconds, noting how it feels. Notice where the central focus of tension is and the adjacent muscles that are affected just by tightening the forehead. Now, release that tension and pay close attention to how the muscles feel at the various levels as they drift toward relaxation. After having been tight, the

muscles let go by stages. It is these stages that you will learn to recognize and become familiar with.

Then clenching your fists. Hold them clenched for about five seconds, while letting the other muscles in your body remain relaxed. Now, be aware of how the muscles feel as they let go and relax more and more. This letting-go feeling is what you are most interested in—it is what's associated with relaxation and what you can learn to do more and more.

Now, pull your forearms up against your upper arms and feel the tension in your biceps. Hold that for five seconds or so. Then let go all at once and "tune in" those feelings of relaxation. Once you can identify the various degrees of muscle tension-relaxation, you can duplicate any level you desire. Most people can duplicate the tense levels at will; it is the relaxed levels that are more difficult and that are learned through this exercise. Continue through the rest of your body—abdomen, thighs, calves, feet. Each time, tense and then let go and be aware of the muscles as they relax more and more.

Once you have completed tensing and relaxing all muscles in the body, again take a deep breath, hold it for the count of four and release it slowly. At this point notice once again how your entire body feels. See if any tension that you may have noticed prior to the exercise is still present. When you decide to end the exercise, stretch fully and then continue with your daily activity. By practicing this exercise, you can learn

to recognize tension when it first begins to build, and at that time reduce it to a comfortable level.

To learn effective differential control of muscle relaxations takes up to a year, and its purpose is to help us learn awareness and control of very small changes in muscle tension levels. It can be noticed that each of our body systems affects how well we experience relaxations. If our muscles are relaxed and our skin temperature is warm, we have some indicators that we may be relaxed (Davis, Eshelman, & Mckay, 1995). These signs do not completely mean we are anxiety free, however, we can say that anxiety and tension can be reduced safely and beneficially through physical exercises.

Another technique for some Asian people is a complicated technique, such as meditation. Meditation may involve religious contemplation. It is difficult to use this technique because everyone cannot meditate. It is special for someone who plan in mind and continue contemplation, for example, whoever intending to meditate always plan their mind calmly, and then engage in thought controlled by several methods, such as counting number 1-2-3-4, not thinking about everything, determining breathing like deep breathing exercise, feeling relaxed, and focusing on mind as long as possible.

Conclusion

Although anxiety is a dangerous emotion, especially severe anxiety, normal or mild anxiety has some advantages. Whoever using

normal or mild anxiety in their lives can get benefit from this anxiety because it can stimulate anxious person to prepare good work, such as examination, presentation etc. In fact, because of fear of failure, whoever using normal or mild anxiety always manage something carefully. Thus, people knowing how to use strategies and control this feeling effectively always succeed in their careers. On the other hand, severe anxiety is a pathological anxiety and it is a dangerous emotion. Whoever being under severe anxiety are vulnerable and prone to neurosis or psychosis (Bourne, 1995). This emotion always relates symptoms including the following: restlessness, excessive worry, obsessive thought, nausea, abdominal distress, chest pain, and feelings of unreality. The last symptom is significant and susceptible to neurosis and psychosis, and that means it involves grandiose idea, hallucination, and illusion.

All of above, anxiety is not an exactly dangerous emotion. If we can control this emotion and always evaluate ourselves, we can get benefit from it. There are many tools, like questionnaires, to evaluate ourselves, which they are easily used. Self-evaluation is one way to prevent severe anxiety that may cause mental health problems later. But, we are not aware and enthusiastic in self-evaluation. We ignore and use ineffective strategies leading to mental disorders and that mental health problem rate increases every day in every competitive society.

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