



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

AN INTERVENTION BASED STUDY ON PERCEIVED STRESS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Stress refers to the physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses to events that are appraised as threatening/challenging. It is said that, a person's inability to cope up stress may lead to a crisis situation, as that person may feel obstruction. UPSC-civil services aspirants during their journey of the prestigious exam preparation may experience stress. Brief psychological interventions may be helpful in dealing with it.

Aim/Objective: the study was aimed to explore and compare the effectiveness of psychotherapy on perceived stress in UPSC civil services aspirants.

Methodology: The study was a pre-post design. The study will be carried out in different coaching institutions that were providing coaching for Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)-Civil services examinations and libraries in Chandigarh, Mohali, Panchkula and Zirakpur. 120 UPSC-civil services aspirants were included for the study which were divided into two groups randomly viz., experimental and control. Tools/measures used were perceived stress scale and visual analogue scale. The test findings were analyzed statistically and discussed.

Results: perceived stress was less after the intervention in the experimental group after the intervention and no such change was observed in the control group.

Keywords: perceived stress, psychotherapy

Introduction:

In a May 2022 poll done in India, 50% of participants in the 24 to 34 age group reported feeling more stressed or nervous over the previous 12 months. In the same study, 28% of respondents in the 16 to 24 age range said their stress and anxiety levels were the same as before. Stress Psychological stress is "a particular relationship between the person and the environment," according to **Lazarus & Folkman,1984**. This term has made important contributions to the field of psychology (**Meyer & Ciccarelli, 2008**). The physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural reactions to situations that are perceived as threatening or demanding are sometimes referred to as stress. Extremely stressful circumstances frequently result in bodily difficulties such as unusual exhaustion, nausea, sleep disruptions, and an increase or reduction in appetite, while emotionally stressed persons may experience sorrow of mood, fear, irritation, anxiety, frustration, and wrath. Cognitively, there has been a noticeable reduction in attention and concentration, memory performance, and good decision-making abilities. Individuals exhibit less social interaction, become less productive, lose their temper, and have a higher absence rate at work (**Fink,2016; Braun et.al.,2016**).

Candidates are known to experience significant stress during the Civil Services Examination (CSE), and this stress may even lower their likelihood of passing each part of the exam. The strategy's major focus is on the time and stress issues that arise during CSE preparation, even though some of the concepts and strategies can be used more widely. In order to effectively manage stress and time, an aspirant must first recognise the numerous sources of stress and the various reasons for time management errors.

A renowned clinical psychologist claimed in an article in a local newspaper that students are affected physically and emotionally by competitive exams like the Union Public Service Commission and are unable to find time for eating well, exercising, or having fun. Students continue to feel stress due to growing competition, societal pressure, and familial pressure. Living alone, handling finances, putting in long hours of study, fees, and health-related worries are a few stressors. The current study's goal is to examine the psychosocial factors connected to aspirants for the U.P.S.C. civil services who sense stress. It critical to start psychotherapy as soon as possible to address stress so that it doesn't worsen serious mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and reactive psychosis.

Psychotherapy will help in identifying and creating the protective factors in addition to treating the stress-related presenting condition. The research has shown substantial evidence for the efficacy of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), a widely used and practised psychotherapy treatment, in treating psychological diseases and challenges like anxiety, depression, addictive behaviour, and stress-related concerns. The stress and coping theory of Lazarus et al., which contends that there are two types of cognitive responses to stress, forms the foundation of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) methods to stress management. They are primary and secondary appraisal. Effective Therapy tools for stress management include self-observation techniques, cognitive restructuring, relaxation techniques, time management strategies, and problem-solving procedures (**Greenberg, 1995**).

Aim /objective of study: To study the effectiveness of therapy on perceived stress in UPSC civil services aspirants.

Hypothesis:

1. It was expected that there will be change on scores on in the post assessment phase in experimental group.
2. It was expected that there will be no change on scores the post assessment phase in the control group.

Procedure:

A survey was carried out in coaching centres offering coaching for Union public service examination (UPSC)-civil services in Chandigarh, Mohalli, Panchkula and Zirakpur. The purpose of the survey was to identify who those aspirants who reported stress related to their Union Public Service Commission(UPSC)-civil services aspirants preparation, coaching and examination. Those aspirants who scored atleast 14 or above score on Perceived stress scale (PSS),Cohen were inducted for the study. A total of 120 participants were inducted in the study.A pre-assessment will be carried out on those inducted participants on visual analogue scale and perceived stress scale. Randomization will be done and the participants will further be divided into two groups that is, the experimental and the control group.

TOOLS USED:

1. **Visual analogue scale:** The subjects were asked to rate their degrees of stress on a scale of 0 to 10 subjectively, one was not at all and 10 as extremely high.
2. **Perceived stress scale-PSS (Cohen,1983) :** The tool is designed by Sheldon Cohen in 1994. It is a self reported 10 item questionnaire. Response is taken on a five point Likert scale ranging from never, almost never, sometimes, fairly often to very often. It is a measure of the degree to which situation's of one's life is appraised as stressful. It has 3 versions- a 14 item, a 10 item and a 4 item. Its psychometric properties were investigated by confirmatory factor analysis(construct validity), chronbach's alpha(reliability) and by investigating relations with DASS-21 scores. A satisfactory Chronbach's alpha values(0.82) for Perceived stress scale(PSS)-14 and Perceived stress scale(PSS)-10 and a marginal satisfactory values of Perceived stress scale(PSS)-4(0.69) has been found.

Inclusion criteria:

- Those participants who scored at least 14 or above score on Perceived stress scale(PSS),Cohen,1986
- Both male and female participants and who were between age of 20-32 years.
- Participants who were able to speak both Hindi/English.
- Participants who were willing to give consent for participation in the study.
- Participants who were enrolled in coaching for at least 6 months and more.

Exclusion criteria:

- Participants who didn't gave consent for participation in the study.
- Who had major psychiatric illness and are on treatment for it.
- Those who were or have been on formal psychotherapy in the past 1 year

Intervention : The intervention comprised of a pre session phonic contact, a face to face session and a telephonic review/follow up session.

Results:

Mean comparisons of the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores of the intervention Group on Visual analogue scale and perceived stress scale and the corresponding 't' values with their level of significance

Table 1

Variables	PRE-ASSESSMENT (N=60)		POST-ASSESSMENT (N=60)		t-value
	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	
STRESS ON VISUAL ANALOGUE SCALE	6.93	1.30	3.45	1.26	19.498**
STRESS ON PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE	28.03	6.39	13.48	3.78	21.569**

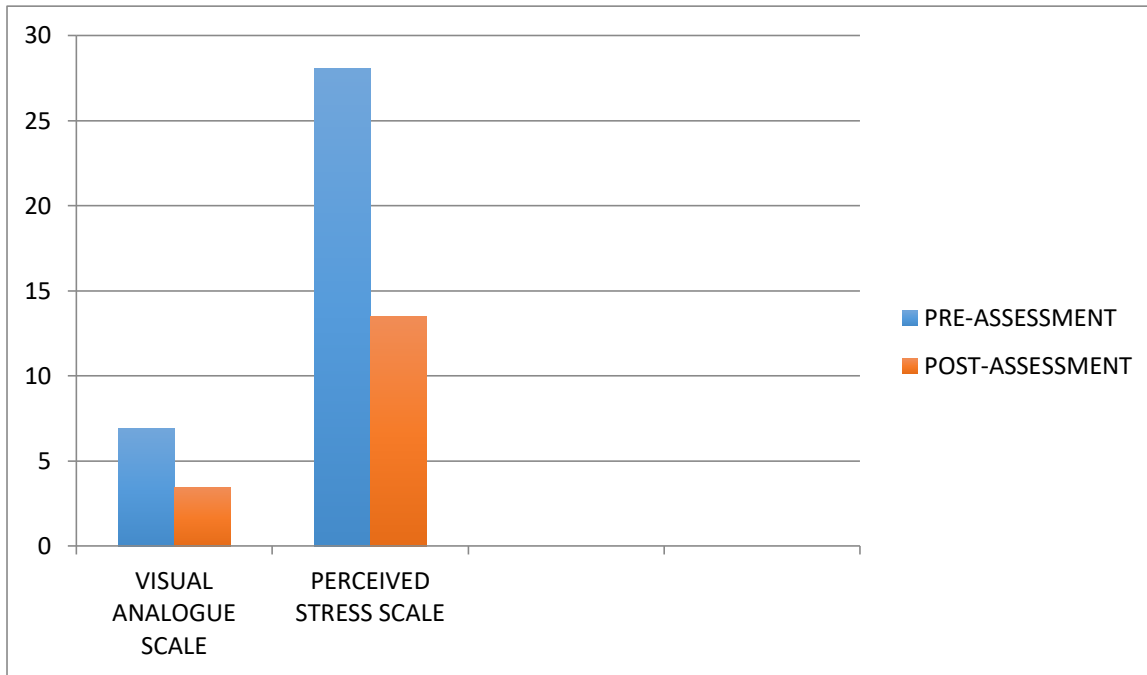
* $p \leq 05$

** $p \leq 01$

N.S.: Non-Significant

Figure 1

Showing the comparison of the mean scores on the visual analogue scale and perceived stress scale before (pre-assessment) and after (post-assessment) in experimental group.



Comparison of mean scores on pre and post assessment scores on visual analogue scale and perceived stress scale in the experimental group

Table 2

The pre and post mean scores ,standard deviation, t-value and p-value of no intervention on visual analogue scale and perceived stress scale.

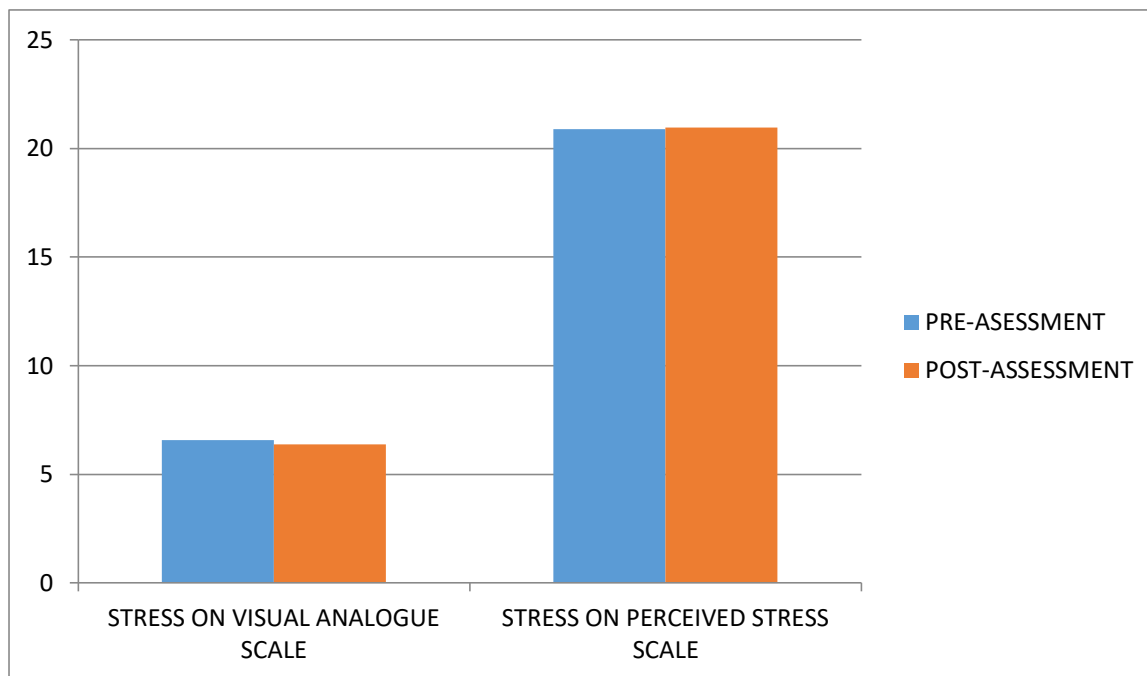
VARIABLES	PRE-ASSESSMENT (N=60)		POST-ASSESSMENT (N=60)		t-value	
	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD		
STRESS ON VISUAL ANALOGUE SCALE	6.58	1.32	6.37	1.34	2.034	(N.S.)
STRESS OF PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE	20.88	4.89	20.95	4.95	-1.070	(N.S.)

* $p \leq 05$

** $p \leq 01$

N.S.: Non-Significant

Figure 2



Showing the comparison of the mean scores on the visual analogue scale and perceived stress scale of control group

Comparison of mean scores on pre and post assessment scores on visual analogue scale and perceived stress scale in the control group

DISCUSSION:

The present study aimed to study the effectiveness of psychotherapy in reducing perceived stress in UPSC civil services aspirants. A pre-post designed study was planned and purposive sampling was used to recruit the sample. A total of 120 participants were recruited and randomly divided in two groups that is, experimental (group that received intervention) and control (group that did not receive any intervention). Pre and post assessment scores were compared in both the groups and it was observed that in the experimental group (Table 1), prior to the intervention, the mean score on the visual analogue scale was 6.93 (SD=1.30), and it was 3.45 (SD=1.26) following the intervention. The mean score on the felt stress scale was 28.03 (SD=6.39) at baseline and 13.48 (SD=3.78) at follow-up; on both measures, perceived stress was significantly lower ($p < .01$). The fact that intervention was successful as an intervention in lowering perceived stress among U.P.S.C. civil services aspirants may be inferred from the results findings. In the control group (Table 2), the average visual analogue scale scores in the pre-assessment phase were 6.58 (SD=1.32) and at the post-assessment phase were 6.37 (SD=1.34). The p-value was determined to be non-significant (N.S.), indicating that the control group's scores had not changed significantly following any form of intervention. The mean scores on the Cohen (1983) perceived stress scale were 20.88 (SD=4.89) at the pre-assessment and 20.95 (SD=4.95) at the post-assessment. The t value was determined to be non-significant (N.S.), meaning that no significant change in scores was discovered. Intervention given in the experimental group was effective in reducing perceived stress in UPSC civil services aspirants (Objective 1 and hypothesis 1). The test results

support a prior study by Sarid et al. (2010) that indicated cognitive behavioural treatment (CBT) to be successful in lowering perceived stress. The findings are also consistent with a study by Chaudhary in 2022, which found that following CBT sessions, students who were taking competitive exams scored significantly lower on the perceived stress measure developed by Cohen in 1984. Additionally, it is in line with a research study by Golshani et al. from 2021, which came to the conclusion that CBT-based counselling was successful in lowering perceived stress.

Conclusion:

Intervention/psychotherapy delivered to the UPSC aspirants had a positive effect in reducing perceived stress.

Future implications:

The majority of the research on psychotherapy focuses on clinical diseases like depression, anxiety disorders, etc. The index study investigated the impact of psychotherapy on non-clinical populations, can be implicated on other population which is vulnerable to stress.

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