



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Meseron Therapy in the Management of Thanatophobia among Patients with Chronic Diabetes

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Abstract

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic health condition that affects millions of people worldwide and is often associated with psychological challenges, including fear of death or thanatophobia. This study investigated the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Meseron Therapy in reducing thanatophobia among diabetic patients attending the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu State. A between-subjects experimental design was adopted. Forty diabetic patients, comprising 19 females and 21 males aged between 39 and 63 years, participated in the study. The Templer Death Anxiety Scale was used for data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-test and repeated measures ANOVA. Findings showed that CBT significantly reduced death anxiety among diabetic patients, $t(19) = 12.03$, $p < .001$. Meseron Therapy also significantly reduced death anxiety, $t(19) = 10.34$, $p < .001$. The mean score of the CBT group decreased from 20.35 at pre-test to 8.35 at post-test, while the Meseron Therapy group decreased from 15.35 to 5.55. Repeated measures ANOVA further revealed that both therapies independently and jointly produced significant reductions in thanatophobia, $F = 508.26$, $p < .001$. The study concluded that CBT and Meseron Therapy are effective interventions for reducing death anxiety among diabetic patients.

Keywords:

Thanatophobia, Death Anxiety, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Meseron Therapy, Diabetes Mellitus, Psychological Intervention.

Introduction

Diabetes mellitus remains one of the most common chronic illnesses globally. According to the World Health Organisation, about 830 million people were living with diabetes in 2022, compared with 200 million in 1990. The disease is associated with serious complications such as kidney failure, blindness, cardiovascular diseases, stroke and lower limb amputation. In 2021, diabetes and diabetes-related kidney disease accounted for more than two million deaths globally (World Health Organisation, 2024).

Apart from its physical effects, diabetes often creates psychological challenges. Many patients experience anxiety, depression, uncertainty about the future and fear of death. One of the most

common psychological reactions among individuals living with chronic illnesses is thanatophobia, also known as death anxiety. Thanatophobia refers to an excessive and persistent fear of death or the dying process. Patients with chronic illnesses may constantly worry about disease progression, complications and possible mortality.

Research has shown that psychological interventions can help individuals cope better with chronic illnesses and associated emotional distress. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is one of the most widely used evidence-based psychotherapies for anxiety and depression. Recent systematic reviews have shown that CBT remains effective in reducing anxiety and psychological distress among individuals with chronic diseases (Scott et al., 2023; Tao et al., 2023). However, indigenous therapeutic approaches such as Meseron Therapy have received limited empirical attention despite their relevance within the Nigerian cultural setting.

This study therefore examined the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Meseron Therapy in reducing thanatophobia among diabetic patients receiving treatment at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu State.

The study was anchored on terror management theory developed by Greenberg et al. (1986). The theory proposes that awareness of mortality creates fear and anxiety in human beings. To manage this fear, individuals develop psychological mechanisms that provide meaning, purpose and self-worth.

The theory is relevant to the present study because diabetic patients often become conscious of their vulnerability to illness-related complications and mortality. Such awareness may trigger death anxiety. CBT and Meseron Therapy help individuals challenge negative beliefs, develop healthier thinking patterns and strengthen coping mechanisms, thereby reducing fears associated with death and dying.

Method

A between-subjects experimental research design was adopted. Participants consisted of 40 diabetic patients drawn from the Renal Unit of the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu State. The sample comprised 19 females and 21 males aged between 39 and 63 years.

Participants were selected through simple random sampling and randomly assigned into two treatment groups: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Meseron Therapy.

The Templer Death Anxiety Scale (TDAS) developed by Templer (1970) was used to measure thanatophobia. The instrument consists of 15 items scored on a true-false format. Higher scores indicate higher levels of death anxiety.

The intervention lasted eight weeks. Pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted before and after treatment. Data were analysed using means, standard deviations, paired sample t-tests and repeated measures ANOVA.

Results

The findings revealed substantial reductions in death anxiety among participants who received the therapeutic interventions.

For the CBT group, the pre-test mean score of 20.35 (SD = 1.57) decreased to 8.35 (SD = 3.41) at post-test. Paired sample t-test showed that the reduction was statistically significant, $t(19) = 12.03$, $p < .001$.

Similarly, participants in the Meseron Therapy group recorded a decrease from a pre-test mean score of 15.35 (SD = 2.83) to a post-test mean score of 5.55 (SD = 3.68). The difference was also statistically significant, $t(19) = 10.34$, $p < .001$.

Repeated measures ANOVA showed significant treatment effects for CBT, $F = 508.26$, $p < .001$, and Meseron Therapy, $F = 198.21$, $p < .001$. The interaction effect between CBT and Meseron Therapy was equally significant, $F = 32.54$, $p < .001$.

These results indicate that both therapeutic approaches effectively reduced thanatophobia among diabetic patients.

Discussion

The study found that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy significantly reduced death anxiety among diabetic patients. This finding agrees with previous studies showing that CBT is effective in managing anxiety and emotional distress among individuals with chronic illnesses. CBT assists patients in identifying irrational thoughts about illness, disability and death and replacing them with healthier and more realistic beliefs.

The study also found that Meseron Therapy significantly reduced thanatophobia. This outcome supports the view that culturally relevant therapeutic approaches can effectively address psychological challenges among Nigerian patients. Meseron Therapy emphasises positive thinking, positive speaking and positive action, which may help patients develop resilience and hope despite living with a chronic illness.

The findings further revealed that both therapies jointly contributed to significant reductions in death anxiety. This suggests that psychological interventions should be integrated into diabetes management programmes to improve both emotional and physical well-being.

Implications of the Findings

The findings have theoretical, empirical and practical implications.

Theoretically, the findings support Terror Management Theory by demonstrating that psychological interventions can help individuals manage fears associated with mortality.

Empirically, the study contributes to the growing literature on psychological management of chronic illnesses, particularly diabetes.

Practically, healthcare providers should incorporate psychotherapy into routine diabetes care. Clinical psychologists and counsellors should work alongside physicians to address the emotional needs of diabetic patients.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by the relatively small sample size of 40 participants, which may affect the generalisation of the findings.

The study was also conducted in a single hospital, limiting the extent to which the findings can be applied to diabetic patients in other healthcare settings.

Furthermore, the study focused only on diabetic patients and did not include individuals with other chronic illnesses.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies should use larger samples drawn from multiple hospitals across different regions of Nigeria.

Researchers should also investigate the effectiveness of CBT and Meseron Therapy among patients living with other chronic conditions such as hypertension, cancer and kidney disease.

Longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine whether treatment gains are maintained over longer periods.

Summary and Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Meseron Therapy in reducing thanatophobia among diabetic patients. The findings showed that both interventions significantly reduced death anxiety among participants. CBT and Meseron Therapy independently and jointly demonstrated strong therapeutic effects. The study concludes that psychological interventions are valuable components of comprehensive diabetes care and should be integrated into hospital treatment programmes to improve patients' quality of life and psychological well-being.

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