

The impact of hypnotherapy on the student experience



At a time of ever tightening pressure coupled with increased demand, **Susan Lory** reports on how the use of hypnotherapy helped ease the pressure on a counselling service at key times and kept more students on course

The Counselling Service at Southampton Solent University introduced hypnotherapy support to students in September 2007, as a response to the increased number of occasions when students presented with a need for an instant response to the difficulties they were experiencing eg anxieties about a presentation that week or an exam they had the next day¹. The hypnotherapy support was developed to work primarily with anxiety that affected academic obligations and included: presentation anxiety, public speaking, exam stress, panic attacks, relaxation, some phobias and an inability to sleep. Since this time the service has experienced popularity, demand and success in the form of:

- The number of counselling hours directly saved by providing hypnotherapy instead of counselling;
- The number of students who would not previously have considered counselling but would now access this as a support (reaching a new counselling client group)
- The number of exclusive hypnotherapy clients, revealing that broadening the support available to students has broadened our client group, reaching students we could not support in any other way

The positive impact hypnotherapy support has had on resources led to further funds being provided to the hypnotherapy team in the academic year 2009-2010, to undertake research into the impact hypnotherapy

support had on students' experience. The student experience was defined, for our purposes, as including: academic performance, retention and student wellbeing, enabling us to reflect and contribute to three of the university-wide concerns actively being addressed within Southampton Solent University.

Research Design

Qualitative methods of data collection were selected to provide the team with as much relevant data as possible for analysis, and were collected in two parts:

Part 1: Pre and post hypnotherapy treatment questionnaire - anxiety focused

A questionnaire was developed which consisted of eight questions focusing on anxiety related issues: feeling anxious, difficulties with presentations, difficulties with public speaking, feeling stressed, difficulties relaxing, exam stress, panic attacks and phobias.

Each question asked students to rate from 0 to 4 how affected they felt by each of these individual items; 0 = 'not being affected at all' ranging up to 4 = being affected 'most/all of the time'. The highest total score (most negatively affected) possible for the whole of the questionnaire was 32, and the lowest (not being affected by the issue at all) being 0. The pre treatment questionnaire was completed at the hypnotherapy assessment

appointment and the post treatment questionnaire completed either after two hypnotherapy treatment sessions or after the identified assignment/presentation/exam date the student had indicated they were seeking hypnotherapy for, and was administered online.

These scores were then calculated by the hypnotherapy team and used to compare increases and decreases in score post hypnotherapy treatment. A reduction or decrease in the score post therapy represents a positive change (or a reduction in the intensity of the problem experienced).

Part 2: Post therapy questionnaire - academic and wellbeing

The second part of the data was collected by the use of five questions focusing on the impact hypnotherapy had on academic performance and general wellbeing. These were only answered by students after completing hypnotherapy treatment. They were asked to rate whether any of the following areas had 'improved', 'remained the same' or 'got worse': ability to study; attendance; commitment to remain at university; ability to cope, and general mood. These questions, for ease, were added to the post therapy questionnaire used in part 1.

Participants

There were 34 potential participants for this study. Seventeen students were excluded on the grounds that we did not receive any part of the qualitative data we were collecting. This resulted in 17 actual participants.

Limitations

The number of participants involved in this study limits the ability to generalise these findings. Indeed, the fact that this research was conducted in a university context limits the participant population to being students within HE. The bio-data of the participants reveals further limitations in relation to: ethnicity (94 per cent identifying as 'white'), international status (82 per cent identifying as being 'UK home' status students), mode of study (88 per cent being full-time students), and gender (76 per cent being female).

Due to the timescale of this study, only qualitative methodologies were used. If the study was to be conducted over a longer period of time (eg extending the research over a two or three-year period) quantitative methodologies could be included to enable

'like for like' assignment type grades to be compared year on year.

Data analysis - results

Part 1: Pre and post therapy questionnaire - anxiety related

Fourteen of the 17 participants are included for part one of the qualitative data analysis (the remaining three were excluded as they did not complete the follow-up questions on the post treatment form).

Table 1 below shows the pre and post hypnotherapy (HT) scores participants rated themselves. The final column in Table 1 shows the difference between pre and post HT scores. The lowest possible score for each item is 0, 4 being the highest. 0 score indicates the item not affecting the participant at all, whilst a score of 4 recorded reflects the participant being affected most or all of the time. A decrease in the total score shows a positive reduction in overall anxiety for the participant.

Analysis of the data presented in Table 1 reveals:

- All participants (100 per cent) show at least one area of anxiety having improved.

- Thirteen (93 per cent) show a decrease in their total score (showing an overall reduction in their anxiety).
- One participant indicated a reduction in their overall score by 14 (from 14 to 0).

Part 2: Post therapy questionnaire - academic and wellbeing

Seventeen participants are included for this analysis.

Table 2 shows how participants had rated the impact (if any) they felt hypnotherapy had on: ability to study; attendance; commitment to remain on course; ability to cope; and general mood. It also includes the total number of these areas that were 'improved' for each participant and the total difference in their pre and post HT scores, transferred from Table 1.

Analysis of the data contained in Table 2 reveals:

- Thirteen of 17 participants (76 per cent) indicated at least one area had improved
- Six (35 per cent) indicated their ability to study had improved
- Three (18 per cent) indicated since receiving hypnotherapy their commitment to remain

Table 1: Pre and post HT form totals

C. no	Felt anxious		Difficulties presentations		Difficulties with public speaking		Feeling stressed		Difficulties with relaxation		Difficulties with exam stress		Have panic attacks		Have phobias		Total for student		Difference in pre & post score
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
1	3	3	1	2	1	1	4	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	3	15	15	0
2	3	2	2	2	1	2	3	1	3	1	3	2	0	0	4	3	19	13	-6
3	2	3	1	0	1	1	3	3	3	3	4	3	0	0	0	0	14	13	-1
4	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	1	15	14	-1
5	3	1	1	0	1	0	2	3	1	2	3	4	1	0	3	1	15	11	-4
6	3	3	1	1	2	1	4	3	3	-	2	2	1	1	0	0	16	11	-5
7	4	2	0	0	0	0	4	2	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	16	5	-9
8	4	3	2	-	3	2	4	2	2	1	1	0	2	1	2	0	20	9	-11
9	3	1	0	0	1	0	3	1	2	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	12	3	-9
10	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	14	0	-14
11	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	4	3	2	2	3	1	3	3	23	17	-6
12	4	2	0	0	0	0	4	2	3	2	1	0	1	0	4	3	17	9	-8
13	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	3	1	0	-	0	0	0	0	7	1	-6
14	1	1	1	0	1	0	3	2	2	2	4	2	2	0	2	1	16	8	-8

on the course had improved, with the remaining 14 (82 per cent) stating this had remained the same

- Ten (59 per cent) indicated their ability to cope had improved, with the remaining seven (41 per cent) stating it had remained the same
- Nine (53 per cent) indicated their general mood had improved
- One (6 per cent) indicated their attendance had improved whilst the remaining 16 (94 per cent) stated it had remained the same.

Discussion

Hypnotherapy could be considered to have contributed to improvement of anxiety related issues, as 100 per cent of participants indicated at least one area of anxiety had improved/got better for them, with 93 per cent of the participants showing a total decrease across the anxiety-related areas (indicating improvement).

The majority of participants reported that their student experience improved, in terms of feeling able to cope with academic studies and with their general mood after

hypnotherapy, with 10 (59 per cent) and nine (53 per cent) respectively.

We can also consider there to be indicators that a person may be more likely to report experiencing improvements in ability to study, attendance, commitment to course, ability to cope and general mood if they have felt an improvement in their anxiety symptoms/issues (Table 2). The bigger the improvement in their anxiety the more likely they are to experience improvement in more than one of these areas, based on the findings that four students who recorded only one area of improvement had scored a reduction in anxiety score of six or less, whilst five of the nine who experienced an improvement in more than one area recorded a reduction in their anxiety score of more than six points (Table 2). However, it is important to note that the student whose anxiety score reduced by the most significant amount (a decrease of 14 down to 0) did not experience any improvement in their academic performance or in their mood or general wellbeing (Table 2).

From these findings we can suggest that hypnotherapy support contributes and can improve students' experience, as it has been

shown to contribute to reducing anxiety for all participants and to improving the ability to cope and general mood for the majority of students. It is also indicated that the more reduction in anxiety a participant experiences, the more areas they will experience as improving in terms of academic and general wellbeing.

It would be interesting to conduct further research to develop the findings in this study to include quantitative data comparing grades/marks for assignments, to consider if the positive student experience is translated and has any impact on assignment and grade achievement.

This research was undertaken by the hypnotherapists within the Counselling Service at Southampton Solent University. At that time this was **Susan Lory** and **Clare Clifford**, both qualified counsellors and hypnotherapists.

Reference:

3,2,1, you're back in the (class) room...
AUCC journal, March 2010, pgs 24-27

Table 2: Participants' ratings of impact of hypnotherapy:

C. no	Ability to study			Attendance			Commitment to remain on course			Ability to cope			General mood			Number of areas improved	Difference in pre & post hypno scores
	Improved	Remained the same	Got worse	Improved	Remained the same	Got worse	Improved	Remained the same	Got worse	Improved	Remained the same	Got worse	Improved	Remained the same	Got worse		
1	x				x		x				x			x		2	0
2		x			x			x		x			x			2	-6
3		x			x			x			x			x		Same	-1
4	x				x			x			x			x		1	-1
5		x			x			x		x				x		1	-4
6		x			x			x			x			x		1	-5
7	x				x			x		x				x		2	-9
8	x			x			x			x				x		5	-11
9		x			x			x		x				x		2	-9
10		x			x			x			x			x		Same	-14
11		x			x			x		x				x		1	-6
12		x			x			x		x				x		2	-8
13		x			x			x			x				x	0	-6
14	x				x			x		x				x		3	-8
15	x				x			x		x				x		4	N/A
16		x			x			x			x			x		Same	N/A
17		x			x			x		x				x		2	N/A
	6	11	-	1	16	-	3	14	-	10	7	-	9	7	1	13 show improvement in 1 (or more) areas	13 show reduction