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**The use of cognitive behaviour therapy for the reduction of test anxiety in year five scholarship students in the Western Province**

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The adverse effects of test anxiety have been clearly demonstrated in previous studies. These include detrimental effects on academic performance and emotional wellbeing. High stake examinations are a central aspect of schooling in Sri Lanka. Hence evaluating the effectiveness of psychological interventions targeting test anxiety is of great importance. Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) has been proven to be effective in treating test anxiety, and group-based CBT (GCBT) has demonstrated favorable results in developed nations. As a preliminary study, a sample of 64 year five students due to take part in the year five scholarship examination was chosen from the Western Province to ascertain the effectiveness of GCBT in the reduction of test anxiety. 32 participants comprised the treatment group and 32 participants comprised the control group. Both groups consisted of equal numbers of males and females (16 males and 16 females in each group). Schools were chosen randomly from the Western Province, and children were chosen and allocated into treatment and control groups *via* random sampling.

A brief ten-item questionnaire, “The Westside Test Anxiety Scale” was used to determine the samples’ pre-intervention test anxiety level. These results showed high levels of test anxiety, with 40.6% of the sample showing moderately high levels of test anxiety, 34% showing high levels of test anxiety and 4.6% showing extremely high levels of test anxiety.

A treatment series of eight sessions of weekly GCBT has been currently commenced on the treatment group. The eight sessions consist of the core components of cognitive behaviour therapy techniques for test anxiety reduction such as cognitive reconstruction, *in vivo* exposure and study and memory skills training. This treatment program is evidence based, on treatment done with similar populations in developed nations. However, it has also been modified to suit the Sri Lankan cultural context. Upon completion of therapy, the questionnaire will be re-administered to evaluate levels of test anxiety, and treatment and control groups will be compared to determine the effectiveness of therapy.

Should the results prove to be effective, the proposed program could be integrated as a part of the year-five syllabus to enhance psychological wellbeing and academic performance of Sri Lankan students. The investigators are also hopeful that early internalization of these skills will reduce the students’ negative bias towards future examinations.