

## **Countering Stage Fright**

**Prof. Smita Jha**

**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee**

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Hello students, I am here once again, Smita Jha to discuss countering stage fright and today's topic is, systematic desensitization as countering stage fright. Well, we have discussed the various aspects of countering stage fright to reduce, to minimize, to neutralize performance anxiety because different names, but the symptom is one, that is, the fear for the future. And in course of discussion, I've also defined the very meaning of stage fright, that how a person having performance anxiety is more conscious of the future performance, not the present and the moment, the future. And also self-obsessed that the image may not tarnish if he or she commits any mistakes. So, how to reduce this because this obsession, this anxiety may lead to completely, you know, fiasco or completely disturbance to ruin one's career. Because maximum, you give your presentation for your career, for your job and if anything happens, it does not give a very good signal or sign to be as a good leader or as a good employee.

So this is essential in my view in the present scenario to know the various facets of countering stage fright and this systematic desensitization as countering stage fright is very important because there are various systems through which you can very systematically desensitize this unnecessary fear. Being sensitive is fine, but when this fear becomes a kind of phobia, anxiety, unnecessary nervousness, then it is important to address. So, let us discuss this systematic desensitization. Well, what is this systematic desensitization as countering stage fright? Systematic desensitization- it is a kind of therapy, a treatment, a type of behavioral therapy used to treat anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, phobias, and a fear of things like snakes or a spider.

You know, this is a kind of phobia. I mean, if you have sometimes a dog bite or a spider bite or if you have faced the attack of a snake, this is the kind of phobia. So this is called the post-traumatic stress disorder. And this performance anxiety is more or less the same. And the aim of this therapy is to change the way you respond to objects, people or situations that trigger feelings of fear and anxiety.

And this is how you will learn coping tools to help you to stay relaxed and calm. Because what is most important in giving the presentation in front of, you know, your boss or audience, is to maintain calm, to be relaxed. So let us know background of the systematic desensitization. One should know about the history and background of this systematic desensitization. So systematic desensitization is an evidence-based therapy

approach that combines relaxation techniques with gradual exposure to help the person slowly, gradually, to overcome a phobia.

See, nothing can happen in one night. Miracle can't take place in one night. But if you follow a systematic path to understand the phobia, to understand the problem, slowly, gradually, you could be able to eradicate it. During systematic desensitization, which is also called graduated exposure therapy, you work your way up through levels of fear, starting with the least fearful exposure. And this approach also involves the use of relaxation techniques.

Now this concept- the concept of emotional processing has its origin in Lange's, that is in 1977, in Lange's analysis of fear- relevant imaginary in the context of behavior therapy and fear reducer, that is reducer or reduction. In studying the procedure of systematic desensitization, Lange and others in 1970, found 3 predictors of successful treatment. Greater initial heart rate reactivity during fear-relevant imagery, well these are the factors. So, first is, greater initial heart rate reactivity during fear-relevant imagery. Greater concordance between self-reported distress, and heart rate elevation during fear-relevant imagery and systematic decline, reduce in heart rate reactivity with repetition of the imagery.

So, Lange and his associates, they found three predictions of successful treatment. Means, what actually happened when a person is suffering from this stage fear, from this performance anxiety. And on the basis of these findings, the three major findings, Lange suggested that the psycho-physiological structure of imagined scenes may be a key to the emotional processing which the therapy is designed to accomplish. Lange's theory holds that a fear image is a cognitive structure containing stimulus, response, and meaning information that serves as a program to avoid or escape from danger. The fear structure is activated by environmental input that matches some of the information stored in the structure.

Well, these are the studies made by Lange and his associates. And this is a very successful therapy applied to the students, to the person suffering from such kind of fear. One thing very important, that there is no age bar in it. Even a senior person may have this kind of suffering and fear. So in the 1950s, a South African psychiatrist, Joseph Wolpe, developed a type of behavior therapy called systematic desensitization to help people to manage their phobias.

Phobias or performance anxiety or anxiety or anxiousness or unexplained fear. Desensitization is a type of behavior therapy that has its roots in classical conditioning. What are the classical conditionings? What do we mean by classical conditioning? We should know about it and let us discuss it. Systematic desensitization is a behavior therapy that works by removing the fear of a response to a phobia and replaces it with a relaxation response. Therapist use counter conditioning and gradual exposure to stimulus to help their clients to feel less fearful.

Means, to pull out a person from a specific situation of which the person is having fear,

due to the past experiences. That is why it is called counter conditioning. That one condition is where a person is full of fear, but the same countering condition that gives response and relaxation that very time, thus to reduce the fear, cause of fear that is there in the subconscious of the person. One of Wolpe's clients provides an example of the power of systematic desensitization. And in Wolpe's practice, he encountered a young adult that had a severe hand-washing compulsion.

The young man was intentionally fearful of contaminating others with his urine. This hand-washing compulsion is a kind of obsessive compulsion disorder. And see, the young man was intentionally fearful of contaminating others with his urine, a kind of obsessive compulsion disorder. In treating the young man, Wolpe put him in a state of relaxation and asked him to imagine scenes that would incite a low amount of anxiety, such as imagining someone touching a large container of water with one drop of urine in it.

See the treatment. Because he has this, that young person has this apprehension that he may contaminate others with his urine, with the touch. So Wolpe and his associates, they apply this kind of treatment to that boy. As his client was able to tolerate this image, Wolpe continued asking him to imagine scenes where the concentration of imaginary urine increased, because this is all hypothetical, imaginary, but then the fear is very much there and that is why it is a kind of disorder. In time, the young man was able to tolerate a real bottle of urine in front of him. Ultimately, the client was able to tolerate having a few drops of diluted urine being applied to the back of his hand without feeling any anxiety.

Wolpe followed up with the patient four years later to find that he was in complete remission from his compulsive behavior. So this was a successful experiment. Well, this is an extreme case, but people are suffering from such kind of obsessive compulsion disorders. There are others studies that have shown the effectiveness of systematic desensitization and how this form of therapy helps individuals move past their phobias through gradual exposure. That is why this is very important to know.

When we talk of stage fear or performance anxiety, such therapy can help immensely to make a person normal. See, in my discussion, repeatedly, I mentioned that being a bit nervous is not abnormal. It is a kind of normal activity, but then, too much anxiety level is not normal. If it is going to disturb your entire mental frame and physic then it should be addressed by the doctor. Joseph wolpe based systematic desensitization on the theory of reciprocal inhibition which involves the automatic antagonist alpha motor neuron inhibition evoked by agonist muscle contraction.

This biological process is suspected to play a major role in controlling voluntarily movement in the human body. So this is biological, this is related to medical also and then the hormone secretion in human body. Systematic desensitization has proven to be highly effective in treating anxiety disorders caused by a learned situation as well as specific phobias. It is important to note that this type of therapy is not effective for treating mental health disorders like depression or schizophrenia. This is just for, you know, performance anxiety and some kind of less important disorder.

Relaxation can be part of systematic desensitization, but the more significant component of it is simply repeated exposure to the feared object or situation. The premise behind systematic desensitization is that abnormal behavior is learned and is not innate. Actually, see, even you can imagine or you must have felt at your home that a child is not eating a particular vegetable- very innocent example, and that is healthy for him or her. And you say, "you taste it. Once you taste it and if you find it not healthy, not tasty, you can leave it.

" And if the child tastes it and finds it very, very tasty or to some extent tasty, he or she, you know, starts eating that, with the feeling that the kind of imagination about that vegetable they had is not true. So, to some extent this relaxation therapy of desensitization is more or less the same. In other words, nobody can experience anxiety, yet be relaxed at the same time. Wolpe developed his approach when working with veterans suffering from PTSD after the Second World War, post-traumatic disorder. Because war had a very bad impact.

You know, still in the history, the First World War and the Second World War. These two wars totally ruined the mankind or human society and people are still having this fear that if the third world war takes place the entire world will be collapsed. So the fear of war phobia of war- such kind of patients, they were also treated with this systematic desensitization. The stimulus may be a specific situation, such as meeting new people, in the case of social anxiety, or a specific thing like spiders, in the case of arachnophobia. It could also be places, sounds, sights, and events associated with a traumatic experience with PTSD.

So, systematic desensitization uses counter-conditioning to teach a client a new response to the stimulus using relaxation techniques during graded exposure to the stimulus. In this way, the original fight-or-flight response of the sympathetic nervous system is replaced by the relaxation response of the parasympathetic nervous system. He used Pavlov's research on classical conditioning to develop counter conditioning, during graded exposure to aversive stimuli that were preventing the veterans from reentering normal civilian life. And with PTSD, specific stimuli such as sounds, smells, words and places have become associated with traumatic experiences. See, how systematic and methodical desensitization is there, just to bring the concerned person from the fearful situation of which he or she is having this traumatic behavior.

And that is why this technique is called systematic desensitization, as the counter conditioning graded exposure proceeds systematically through various phases, mainly three phases. See, no one can be rectified any patient in one day. So, a gradual process needs to be evolved to develop the mental frame of the concerned person. The client learns relaxation techniques that will counter condition their response to the aversive stimulus. The therapist and client collaborate to produce a hierarchy of the client's intensity of response to the stimulus at different levels of exposure to the stimulus.

The client is desensitized to the stimulus through systematically graded exposure to the stimulus and practices relaxation techniques to counter their aversive fight-flight response

during the exposure. And these three phases are practiced, applied over several sessions with patient and homework may also be given to maintain the counter conditioning between the sessions. The easiest way to explain this approach is to use real life examples, which I'm going to present in next slide or the next lecture. Just now I told you that at home, someone is not eating a particular thing though that is healthy. So, how you desensitize that person towards that particular item.

While systematic desensitization is based on counter conditioning using reciprocal inhibitions, exposure therapy uses graded exposure to the stimulus while positively reinforcing tolerance of anxiety until the anxiety is gradually extinguished. Meanwhile, flooding exposes the client to the feared stimulus directly in one session so that anxiety floods the nervous system and then reduces until it becomes extinguished. The problem with graded exposure is that rising anxiety may be experienced as intolerable and the client may discontinue therapy. So, this therapy is being applied systematically to make the patient or the person comfortable. Also flooding may be experienced as traumatic, leading to further psychological harm and the termination of therapy.

That is why very carefully with patients, this has to be applied. Arachnophobia, this is the term, part of this performance anxiety is a relatively common phobia of spiders. And when treating this or any other phobia, the therapist and the client would produce a list of scenarios about the feared object or situation and the client would then rate their anxiety levels in each situation on a scale of 1 to 10. That is the heart palpitation that shows the fear, intensity of fear. And this is the first step in therapy, that is deep muscle relaxation techniques.

The first step in therapy, in this step, the therapist teaches the patient various breathing exercises and techniques to relax muscles. Relaxation techniques use the principles of reciprocal inhibition. Meaning, an individual cannot be relaxed and tensed at the same time. So, one can practice these relaxation techniques giving no space for tension when a phobia is triggered. So, there are basically, as I said earlier also, three steps or types or aspects of relaxation techniques.

The autogenic relaxation technique lets the patient constantly repeat words and phrases to relax the mind. During a progressive muscle relaxation technique, the patient tenses and relaxes each part of the body, starting from the toe and moving upward towards the head. The visualization technique works through imagination. The patient can imagine their favorite places, garden, pools, seashores to help the brain feel in a safe zone and thus relax.

So, there is a hierarchy in fear. So, we should know the fear hierarchy. In fact, in the second stage of therapy, the therapist can encourage the patient to list their fears on a scale of intensity from level 1 to 10. Level 10 is the most dreaded one and the level 1 causes the least amount of anxiety. And this way, the patient can analyze their fears.

So exposure to fears, that is very important. But here, I would like to wrap up this discussion and students, you must concentrate on the aspects I discuss under the heading

systematic desensitization of the fear or this kind of therapy to reduce your stage fear or the performance anxiety. Let us meet in the next discussion where I could be able to share with you some of the more points that define the fear hierarchy with exposure to fear. Till then bye, thank you.