ABSTRACT

The empirical base of this study was the recognition of the diverse, multidimensional psycho-somatic nature of human personality. It was anticipated that any effective treatment programme attempting to alleviate the composite of mental-physical disturbances which characterise personality disorder, must necessarily contain a combination of intellectual-emotional features. Hence, it was considered efficacious to utilise the Bioenergetic mode of psychotherapy which consisted of an integration of cognitive, physical and experiential techniques and methods of understanding, aimed at relieving all the different aspects of personality dysfunction, including physiological, affective, inter-personal, cognitive and intra-psychic functioning.

The primary aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a six month Bioenergetic treatment course on the holistic (mind-body) functioning of a group of forty-four clients, diagnosed as suffering from nine different types of personality disorders based on the diagnostic criteria laid down in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, IV th edition (1994). At the same time, this sample of clients was also classified along five bioenergetic personality groups as per guidelines laid down by Lowen (1979). Each of the clients was administered a series of measures attempting to assess the holistic (psycho-somatic) nature of his personality disturbances. The same measures were re-administered at the termination of the therapeutic process and the relative pre and post-treatment scores were compared and analysed by inferential and descriptive statistics, namely, t-test, ANOVA, Scheffe's Multiple Range Test, Correlation co-efficient analysis and Multivariate Discriminant Analysis.

The results indicated that the majority of clients responded positively to the Bioenergetic treatment on all four parameters of personality
dysfunction, namely, psychiatric status, psycho-physical health status, self-esteem level and bioenergetic condition.

It was observed that the different types of personality disorders and bioenergetic groups responded differentially to the therapeutic programme. For instance, the maximum level of decrease in psychiatric symptoms was experienced by clients with Rigid personality pattern i.e. obsessive-compulsive and histrionic personality disorders (mean of differences between pre and post-treatment scores on psychiatric dysfunction scale 28.17); clients with Masochistic disturbances i.e dependent personality disorder showed the next highest level of response to the therapeutic treatment (m: 25.62); moderate changes in psychiatric status were noticed in clients who suffered from Psychopathic problems i.e anti-social and narcissistic personality disorders (m: 23.11); followed by clients who exhibited Oral problems (i.e.borderline and avoidant personality disorders (m: 21.37); whereas clients who demonstrated Schizoid personality patterns i.e. paranoid and schizoid personality disorders showed the lowest level of change in psychiatric condition (m: 17.43), as a consequence of the Bioenergetic treatment.

The factors which influenced therapeutic outcome were also studied and it was found that socio-demographic variables like the client’s occupation (F-ratio: 12.46; p: 0.001), education (F-ratio: 25.51; p: 0.001), and family support level (F-ratio: 25.50; p: 0.001) and other variables like motivation level (F-ratio: 28.84; p: 0.001), empathy level (F-ratio: 24.68; p: 0.001), illness chronicity (F-ratio: 27.48; p: 0.001), and medication level (F-ratio: 9.59; p: 0.003) significantly impacted the rate of therapeutic success achieved. Hence, clients who experienced maximum relief from psychiatric symptoms were well-educated; engaged in high status jobs; with supportive and understanding families; highly motivated to change; had established an
empathic therapeutic relationship; with illness of relatively short duration and were not consuming psychotropic drugs.

In order to delineate the key variables which impacted the five main personality groups, the research data was further tested on Discriminant Functional Analysis and the two variables which most significantly differentiated between the groups were psychiatric status and psychophysical health status. The holistic nature of personality disorders and the different aspects of bioenergetic assessment and treatment namely, energetic, physical and psychological processes were highlighted with the presentation of a detailed diagnostic case-study.

It was concluded that a mental disorder like personality dysfunction was an essential combination of somatic as well as mental features and that effective psychotherapy must necessarily include an understanding of bodily as well as psychological processes.