

## A Case Study of Hypnoplasty for Migraine Headache

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### ABSTRACT

Migraine headache is a type of headache, which may have both organic and psychological causes. Even if it does not have a psychological origin, psychological factors like stress, anxiety and frustration have a tendency to aggravate the condition many a times. Thus the psychologists and the medical practitioners both have a role to play in the management and the treatment of the migraine headaches.

This paper is a case study of hypnotherapy, more specifically hypnoplasty with an adolescent girl who came with a problem of migraine headaches. She was given two sessions of hypnoplasty and one of age-regression with therapeutic –interview and one of positive suggestions. After these four sessions, two follow-up sessions, first after a time-period of fourteen days (two weeks) and second after a fifteen days gap were also conducted, during which she reported a remarkable decrease in the frequency and intensity of the migraine headaches. Her primary expectation of getting a drug-free treatment for her migraine problem was fulfilled to a great extent as she stopped taking medicine, when she got 60% decrease in the intensity of the pain after the session of age-regression with therapeutic-interview. According to her verbatim report, she was able to perform better academically as due to the decrement in the intensity and the frequency of the headache, now she is better able to concentrate during studies and also finds studies more interesting.

**Keywords:** *Hypnotherapy, Hypnoplasty, Miagrain Headache, Drug-Free Treatment*

Interest in hypnotic treatment for pain conditions appears to be on the rise. This may be due to recent evidence that hypnotic analgesia interventions result in substantial cost savings following medical procedures (Lang et al., 2000) as well as an increasing demand for non-pharmacologic therapies that do not carry the same troublesome side effects that many medical procedures do (Blumstein & Gorevic, 2005).

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Hypnosis is well documented as a useful treatment for headache (Drummond, 1981). Crasilneck and Hall (1985), stress the need to know the psychodynamics of the patient in order to address any underlying conflict, as well as seeking to reduce symptoms of pain. Crasilneck and Hall also state that “at times the roots lie in childhood, perhaps from identification with a parent or other significant adult who also suffered from head pain.” They emphasize the need to check with the unconscious mind whether the symptom is continuing to serve a purpose (such as punishment) or whether it has become an empty but habitual response and can be “let go” by the unconscious. The causes of headaches may be many, but the two main groups consist of migraine and tension type headaches. Some medical Practitioners would suggest that this division is rather artificial, and that in fact there is more of a continuum, with a large group of headaches falling into an intermediate category, possessing features of both types of headache. It is also possible to get tension headache on background of migraine headache. Migraine headache is considered to be associated with changes in blood flow, with initial vasoconstriction causing aura symptoms, followed by vasodilatation associated with pain, whereas tension headache is thought to be related to muscle tightening in the region of the scalp. Various techniques of symptom control have been used to manage headache based on these two theories, from relaxation alone to visualization of blood vessel calibre changes, hand warming techniques (Bowers, 1976), and transfer of muscle tension to other parts of the body (Damsbo, 1979).

The most recent American Psychological Association’s Division 30 (Society of Psychological Hypnosis) definition of hypnosis states that it “. . . typically involves an introduction to the procedure during which the subject is told that suggestions for imaginative experiences will be presented” and that following this introduction “. . . one person (the subject) is guided by another (the hypnotist) to respond to suggestions for changes in subjective experience, alterations in perception, sensation, emotion, thought, or behavior” (Green et al., 2005). While there is some controversy concerning what else an intervention should include so that it could be called “hypnosis” (e.g., whether or not term “hypnosis” needs to be used when performing hypnotic procedures, cf., Green et al., 2005; Nash, 2005), a hypnosis treatment usually begins with an “induction” consisting of one or more initial suggestions for changes in behavior or perception (e.g., for focused attention and/or relaxation).

Hypnoplasty is a technique, which involves the Imaginative Transformation or Conversion of pain or the Remodeling of the pain sensations to more tolerable sensations such as warmth or tingling and cold or heat. It may also involve transfer of pain to a more tolerable part of the body, usually a finger or toe, permits more control (Hypnosis Motivation Institute, 2009).

## CASE: MIGRAINE-MANAGEMENT

### Patient Information and Presenting Problem

Ms. R is a 20 years old girl, who requested Hypnotherapy for the treatment of migraine headaches. She was under medication from last three years. She reported the occurrence around four times a week.

Ms. R's suitability for Hypnotherapy

1. **Interest**-she was found to be highly interested in hypnosis as a therapy for her.
2. **Preference for non-drug treatment**- she was highly motivated for non-drug management of migraine headache.
3. **High Suggestibility** -The handclasp test was carried out as an assessment of suggestibility. Ms. R was asked to clasp her hands together tightly and to place them above her head with the palms facing outwards. He was then asked to close her eyes and to squeeze the fingers tightly together until her hands were locked so tightly together that she would find it very hard to separate them. The fact that Ms. R found it hard to pull her hands apart indicated a relatively high degree of suggestibility.
4. **Good Visualization**- Her ability to visualize was also tested. She was asked to close her eyes and imagine a scene. He was then asked to give details of the scene and was able to do so with great vividness. This suggested good visualization ability, which would be useful in hypnosis.
5. **No Contraindications** -like such a high intensity pain that the therapist feels disturbed, a paranoid illness and psychotic tendencies were not found.

### Treatment Plan

It was decided that each session would consists of four parts

1. At the commencement of each session we would review the present status and the progress since the last session.
2. After it hypnotic induction would be done. For induction Catalepsy and Hand-magnetism would be used preferably. Deepening techniques like Principle of Association and Bubbles technique would be used to make her to experience a deeper level of trance to facilitate emotional venting.
3. After Ms. R would come out of the trance state in every session, she would be given freedom for a more cognitive exploration of the images and symbols, arising out of hypnotic session.
4. She would be taught self-hypnosis for making the improvement speedy and more and more permanent with time.

### Treatment Goals

The following treatment goals were negotiated by Therapist and Client

1. To decrease the frequency and severity of the headaches.
2. To give Ms.R a “drug free” method of relieving his headaches.
3. To improve Ms. R's academic performance.

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Ms. R was also asked to keep a headache diary during therapy, noting the severity of his headaches, when they occurred, and her activities, feelings and thought sat the time. This was intended both to allow Ms.R to become aware of how stress affected him and which particular situations exacerbated the headaches, and to serve as a record in order to determine how effective different approaches we reprovig.

### **SESSION 1**

After clarifying her goals and expectations and counteracting the unrealistic goals She was encouraged to tell her story. She was the single child who lost her father when she was only 11 years old. Her father was a businessman, after his death, mother took a job of teaching in a Government Intercollege. She had no idea that when actually she had the migraine headache for the very first time, it is just she is having this problem from a long time and she is under medication from last three years. The focus of the therapist was not only on the symptoms reduction only, but finding the underlying cause and the unconscious purpose this migraine problem is serving for the client. But as the client was having an exam after two days, it was decided that preference should be given to symptom-reduction in this session, because working on the underlying cause, may create some discomfort, because of bringing unconscious issues to the surface, which may have an impact on her performance during exam. So first session of Hypnoplasty was given to her.

For inducing trance catalepsy technique was used. She was made to experience light trance. During Hypnoplasty, imaginative transformation or conversion of pain was done, in which remodeling of pain sensation to a more comfortable sensation was done. For hypnoplasty script of California-Hypnosis Institute U.S.A. was used. After coming out of the session, she reported 9% relief in the pain.Next appointment was given after one week.

### **SESSION 2**

First of all progress after the previous session was discussed. She reported a 20 % decrease in the intensity of pain but not in the frequency. Moreover she seemed lost, when asked about it, she reported that she is having a repeated dream of her late father every night, since the day she had a session of Hypnoplasty, so now-a-days missing him a lot. She wanted to meet her father during his last time, but could not reach hospital timely; she was even too small that could not understand what happened exactly. She always have a sad feeling that she lost his father in such manner and so early in her life that she even does not have many memories of him. So it was thought that it might have been helpful to question the unconscious mind about the purpose played by the headaches and perhaps to explore their meaning to the patient by using an approach such as age-regression. It is possible that there are unresolved and unspoken issues around the father's demise, even though on the surface this appeared unimportant. In retrospect, it might have been better to begin by exploring the meaning of the headaches to Ms. R under

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hypnosis, rather than starting with symptoms control, in order to bring any unconscious issues to the surface.

Thus this time an age regression session was conducted for her with her consent. Hand-magnetism was used for trance-induction and Principle of Association for deepening of the trance. In the session she went back in time at the age of 11 years. She narrated an incidence of having severe headache, due to which her mother cancelled her meeting and sitting with her and taking care of her. She reported that she is feeling bad because her mother seemed concerned for her but also reported a positive feeling of spending time with her mother as she always busy with her job. This session was ended with the metaphor, giving it a form of therapeutic interview with exaggerating, emoting and giving a form of metaphor to the positive feeling of spending time with mother. After it she was taken out of the trance.

She reported a feeling of relaxation and satisfaction, after coming out of the session and conscious unawareness of the so many details of the event she reached during the trance state. Next appointment was given after fifteen days.

### SESSION 3

When progress was discussed, she reported 60% relief in the intensity and 50% decrement in the frequency of the migraine headache (having around twice a week). This time, again a session of Hypnoplasty was given to her.

Hand-magnetism was used for trance induction. During the hypnoplasty, technique of transfer of pain to a more tolerable of the body was utilized. After coming out the trance state, she was also taught and recommended for self-hypnosis. Next appointment was given after three weeks.

### SESSION 4

This time she reported that during twenty one days period, she had the headache, just only once, moreover around 20% more relief in the intensity of the pain, it means if compared to a state before taking hypnotherapy, a total 80% relief in the intensity of the pain. In this session, she was given some positive suggestions (after getting her consent) to make the improvement more and more permanent. The positive suggestion given to her was

*“The positives I got from the previous sessions are increasing and becoming more and more permanent day by day”.*

Catalepsy was used to induce trance and bubble-technique was utilized as a deepening technique. After this session, she was again called with a gap of two-weeks for follow-up.

### Follow-up sessions-

Two follow-up sessions were conducted first after two weeks and second after fifteen days. During the sessions, she reported that the relief is permanent till now, as she is not having the

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headache with such a severity, as she was having before the hypnotherapy and she experience it once in a fifteen days period with much less severity. She was also reported an improvement in her academic performance, as due to the decrement in the intensity and the frequency of the headache, now she is better able to concentrate during studies and also finds studies more interesting.

### REFLECTIONS

It is interesting to speculate about the reasons and the purpose the headache problem serving for her. It seemed to be a case of secondary gain, as because of the demise of the father, at such a young age, busy schedule of the mother, due to all the responsibilities of the home and outside work like job and being a single child, she was not having a fellow with her, which gave rise to attention-seeking behaviour. During childhood, whenever she had headache, her mother used to give her proper-attention and even takes a leave from job to take care of her, in this way, this used to become an opportunity for her to spend time with her mother. Later in life also, she gets attention from room-mates, friends and teachers, whenever she has migraine, so it became a reinforcing situation all together. That why a reported a remarkable decrease in the intensity and frequency of the headache both (60% decrease in the intensity and 50% decrease in the frequency) after a session of the Age-regression and Therapeutic-interview. A 60% decrease in the intensity in the pain, made it tolerable for her without taking the medicine. So the primary goal of the management of the pain without pain-killers has been achieved to an extent. It is not confirmed whether the improvement will continue in the future or not, but the results so have far been very encouraging.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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