

## Gestalt Group Meditation Therapy Effect on Occupational Stress and Anxiety in Working Women

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research was to measure the effect of a gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program on occupational stress and anxiety in working women aged 30 to 49 in Korea. Scientific methods were employed to test a gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program as treatment for working women in 30-40s to reduce their level of occupational stress and anxiety. The study involved 18 volunteer subjects ages of 30 to 49 years, randomly divided into two groups: (1) gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program, and (2) no program. Both groups completed a pre-test and a post-test of occupational stress scale and trait anxiety inventory. The outcome data was analyzed as quantitative information using the SPSSPC+ computer program. Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze the result in order to verify the sameness between experienced group and controlled group of pre-test scores within the groups. Also U-test comparisons were used to analyze the treatment effects. The results of this investigation indicated that (1) occupational stress scores decrease after gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program on the treatment group, and (2) trait-anxiety scores decrease after gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program on the treatment group. In summary, the gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program for career women, aged 30 to 49, in Korea could reduce the subjects' occupational stress and anxiety.*

**Keywords:** *Mediation, Gestalt Therapy, Working Women, Occupational Stress, Anxiety.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

These days we have seen many social activities by women because the society is offering more opportunities in workplaces not only to men but to women as well, including that which only accepted men's traditional role of industry in the past, as a result of changing occupational segregation and perspective toward women. Hence, a number of women engaging in workplaces have been increasing gradually after marriage. This is mainly due to the meaning of committing to work as regard to financial support, and as well as self-attainment which is considered in today's modern society as a key factor in determining people's quality of life [1].

Although job itself can lead a person's emotional fulfillment, nonetheless, it does influence on the person's physical and emotional changes in varying degrees by the severity of work stress, respectively. Likewise, under the constant occupational stress, one hardly finds self aptitude and capability due to rather following rules within the job boundary than personal impotency. Therefore, controlling one self's emotions and behavior is imperative. Furthermore, development of negative feelings and perspectives in such a heavy workload, competitive and demanding work environment is obvious.

According to [2], anxieties can often be felt in conjunction with job insecurities by employment instability. Also, future uncertainty to working women in developing working environment under the social organization pressure, and possible job recession in particular, is evident. This anxiety can be treated as a general feeling in finding of stress, besides it is an important milestone in order to measure occupational stress. Of course, casual anxiety can disappear when solving a complicated event or problem. However, as a result of progressive experience of anxiety, it produces work joggling, negative impact on social relationship by nervous breakdown, physical disorder and many other relative matters [3].

Occupational stress and anxiety influence directly in increasing a subordinated culture, productivity and an originality of organization. Unbalanced relationship between an objective of organization, personal desire within the organization and personal matters can cause dissatisfaction, low quality performance, reduced devotion in the job and other resulting number of side effects. In this manner, the presence of anxiety results in frequent turnover intention, reduced productivity and others in the job, by occupational stress. These are finally producing a negative perspectives and emotion in reality [4].

According to the finding of research by JobKorea and HRpartners in 2006, 84% of the employees have experienced a high degree of occupational stress [1]. Thus, in order to develop a business, it is urgently required to bring more

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attention to the employee's stress, initiating the professional and systematic stress management tools in practices. It is especially essential to consider the social and cultural stimulus in association with the job's characteristic. For instance, the working women in Korea have more severe experience of occupational stress than men, due to the men focused ranking social organization. Therefore, several methods are used to resolve occupational stress and anxiety for the working women.

Among those, the meditation is recommended as one of the mutual methods for physical and emotional changes within the traditional psychology, and it has been implemented in almost every cultural area from the ancient to modern times. Since the development of high industrialization in 1950s, the stress suffering has been drastically increased, and thus, resulted in focusing an insight meditation or a mindful meditation as an applicable and important stress relief method to control self-management.

Also, the Gestalt therapy is treated as a psychological therapy which is similar to the mindful meditation emphasizing the perception of presence phenomenon. There is a common aspect between both therapies such as emphasizing perception. However, while the mindful meditation focuses on the progression of perceptions, the Gestalt therapy offers the equal value to both contents and processions [5].

The interests of the Gestalt therapy has increased in Korea so far, but more experienced studies are required in finding of effectiveness, especially on the working women. Also, most of occupational stress related studies for the working women addressed aspects such as the relationship between leisure and work [6], and the effect of using leisure program [1], [7]. Additionally professional program has not been put into practice to reduce occupational stress and anxiety. Thus, it is necessary to investigate the systematic and professional program related occupational stress and anxiety study for the working women.

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to measure the effectiveness of the Gestalt therapy by using meditation, in reducing occupational stress and anxiety, which is designed for the working women aged from 30 to 49 in Korea. Specifically, the purpose of this study is described in two specific aspects. The first of two aspects to this purpose is that the Gestalt group meditation therapy is to reduce occupational stress in the working woman, and the second is to examine the effectiveness of the Gestalt group meditation therapy by reducing anxiety among the working women.

### 1.3 Research Hypotheses

Specifically the following research hypotheses will guide the inquiry as it pertained to the effect of gestalt group meditation therapy on occupational stress and trait-anxiety for career women aged 30 to 49 in Korea. It was hypothesized that the occupational stress scores and the trait-anxiety scores of the experienced group are significantly lower than the controlled group by using the Gestalt meditation program.

### 1.4 Limitations

This study advances the research of the Gestalt group

meditation therapy on occupational stress and anxiety for the working women aged 30 to 49 at the S area of Gyeonggi, Korea. It was challenged for this research to examine the effects of occupational stress and trait-anxiety in working women. Several limitations must be considered in the interpretation of this study:

1. This research was conducted with a limited number of subjects (18 working women aged 30 to 49) due to time and cost factors. As a result, caution must be exercised in generalizing beyond a similar population.

2. The study subjects were limited to the S area of Gyeonggi, Korea; therefore it eliminates any research from other countries or cultures.

3. The duration of meditation program varied somewhat according to day, participants and sessions. This may have had an impact on the influence of participants during the non-program time.

4. Considering this study performed under non-blind method to the experimental group in terms of the Gestalt group meditation therapy, it could be influencing the post-study questionnaire for evaluating this study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Gestalt Group Meditation Therapy

The purpose of the Gestalt therapy that the client is clearly embossed foreground removed an obstacle between foreground and background of client, based on existential meeting of human is to help to make an united self that the client is responsible for oneself. Also, the concept of meditation indicated that the techniques of intuition and wisdom of human are used rather than analytical and rational knowledge. This technique changes a mind that is changing from an aspect of activity, external and edged mind to an aspect of accepted and tranquil mind, and the focus of awareness is changing from outside to inside. The Gestalt group meditation therapy used in this study is the Gestalt therapy applying meditation program developed by H.-J. Kim (2007) [8]. She published that the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) scores were significantly reduced in the experienced group after the program, and that the effectiveness continued until a later treatment examination. According to her study, the post-treatment state anxiety scores in the experienced group were significantly reduced compared to the pre-treatment scores. Her study also showed that the trait anxiety scores in the experienced group were also reduced, but the degree of reduction was not statistically significant.

### 2.2 Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is stress about the performance of one's duties so concrete and limiting approach rather than stress of general concept. Contributing factors of that stress are stimulation, reaction, environment quality, individual character, interaction between individual and environment, and so on. Beehr and Newman (1978) [9] said that job stress is a condition to change the worker's mind and body circumstances by interactions between workers and the various influencing factors described above. Handrix, Oval and Troxer (1985) [10]

said that job stress is an outcome of interacting between individual character or incongruity of circumstance and role of worker and potential stress source of a working environment. In summary, the occupational stress is a condition that organization member feel the imbalance and incongruity about his or her work.

A research applying a program to reduce occupational stress has appeared since 2000s in Korea. The prior studies about the working women are as follow. K.-S. Lee (2001) [7] studied the effect of participation of sports for all by production female employee on job stress, burnout and physical symptoms, and reported that there was a significant difference between participants and non-participants in terms of occupational stress. He also argued that the participants received less stress from overload factors. D.-J. Song (2008) [1] studied the effect of participation of dance sports of working women on occupational stress, job satisfaction and life satisfaction, and addressed that participation of dance sports among working women influenced positively on occupational stress.

The prior studies about others program for employee are as follow. J.-H. Lee (2005) [11] investigated the effect of dance/movement therapy on the Job stress. She reported that the dance/movement therapy program is an effective method to reduce the level of stress from the interpersonal relationships, to increase self-esteem, and even to alleviate the negative relationship with other people. H.-Y. Seong (2006) [4] studied the effect of musical activities on the reduction of work-related stress and state-anxiety of young military officers, and addressed that musical activities can be very effectual for reducing the level of work-related stress and state-anxiety of young military officers. B.-Y. Ryu (2008) [12] researched that the effect of drama-therapy on employee's job stress and their stress management manner, and she announced that a drama-therapy mitigates the level of job stress and provides positive influences on the participant's stress management manner. I.-S. Lee (2008) [13] worked on the effects of a stress management program on job stress of culinary staff in a hotel. According to her study result 12 weeks of the stress management program can be very operative to lessen the job stress and especially to release the interpersonal conflict among the lower factors of job stress. H.-K. Jung (2009) [14] researched the influence of self-understanding program on hospital employees and reported that self-understanding program helps the adjustment of a hospital employees' psychological emotion and relieve the occupational stress. A prior study applying Gestalt program in order to reduce occupational stress has not been done yet.

### 2.3 Anxiety

Anxiety is an elementary factor that displays the individual's emotional state to concept attached great importance to regarding problems of human existence since philosophy and religion began. Spielberger (1972) [15] divided anxiety into both trait-anxiety and state-anxiety by more concrete anxiety theory that can support contents of anxiety. Conceptual difference of trait-anxiety and state-anxiety was proved in the 1950s, but it was definitely divided into state-trait anxiety by Spielberger in 1966. He described state-trait anxiety theory in his book 'Anxiety and Behavior'. As a result of using Spielberger's STAI, D'Augelli (1974) [16] addressed that small

group participants' trait anxiety remained stable, but their state anxiety reduced significantly as time goes by. According to Spielberger and Guerrero (1976) [17] a person suffering from trait-anxiety is more vulnerable due to tension and is likely to experience more server and more frequent status-anxiety than a person with low trait anxiety. Crews and Melnick (1976) [18] argued that situational anxiety can be defined as a form of status-anxiety while social anxiety can be seen as a form of trait-anxiety. They also reported that a person with high social anxiety tends to have a higher situational anxiety than a person with low social anxiety. Greenberg and Webster (1982) [19] announced that a gestalt group therapy is effective in resolving conflicts and decreasing anxiety.

As for domestic research on effectiveness of Gestalt program on anxiety, S.-I. Lee (1997) [20] reported a great deal of status-anxiety and trait anxiety became relieved after conducting Gestalt group therapy on general public. H.-Y. Han (2001) [21] studied the effects of gestalt group counseling on the mitigation of anxiety and aggression, and published that Gestalt group counseling for the middle school students is effective on the reduction of anxiety and aggression. M.-J. Kim (2003) [22] investigated the Gestalt group psychotherapy effect for self-concept, depression, anxiety of runaway juveniles, and addressed that the Gestalt group therapy tends to influence positively on enhancement of emotional stability and on the reduction of the anxiety level and self-abuse, especially right after the therapy, although the effectiveness could fade depending on the personal situation as time goes by.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1 Subjects

For this study, 18 working women aged 30 to 49 volunteered to participate as subjects. The subjects were randomly divided into two groups: (1) the Gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program, and (2) no program. The subjects of this research were in the S area of Gyeonggi, Korea. The Gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program applied for 90 minutes of a section was executed to the experienced group from April 15, 2009 to June 3 for 8 weeks, every Wednesday. Controlled group did not receive the therapy for the duration of that period.

### 3.2 Research Design

The research design of this study involves with a pre-test on both experienced group and controlled group, and the program is conducted with experienced group only. A post-test are conducted with both groups, thus the effectiveness of the program can be verified by comparing the difference within groups.

### 3.3 Scales

#### 3.3.1 Occupational stress scale

Korean occupational stress scale (KOSS) is a standard tool that was developed by The Korean Society of Occupational Stress for 2 years [24]. A subordinate measure is consisted of occupational demand, occupational self-regulation, relation discord, occupational insecurity, organization system, requital

inappropriateness, and company culture. The contents of subordinate measure are shown in table 1. The Cronbach alpha was .80.

Table 1. The meaning of the subordinate measure

Subordinate measure	Definition
Occupational demand	It is meaning the degree of burden on task duty. Increment of task amount, timely pressure, and excessive task burden fall on this category.
Occupational self-regulation	It is meaning the degree of decision making right and availability of authority with regard of given task.
Relation discord	It is meaning an evaluation of interpersonal relationships with other people in the company. Support from colleagues and bosses, lack of support, and general support within the company fall on this category.
Occupational insecurity	It is meaning the degree of job security. Security of job and task, and insecurity in job fall are included in this category.
Organization system	It evaluates factors causing occupational stress such as organizational operating system, support within organization, lack of proper communication, and so on.
Requital Inappropriateness	It is measuring the degree of proper remuneration with regard to the related task. Respect, expected compensation, and opportunity for self development are included in this category.
Company culture	This factor evaluates how attributes of organization culture cause stress. Korean traditional group-oriented culture, inappropriate communication channel, and informal organizational culture can be included in this category.

### 3.3.2 Trait-Anxiety Inventory

State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) that Spielberger devised in 1972 and J.-T. Kim translated is used [25]. STAI is divided into state-anxiety(Form X-I) and trait-anxiety(Form X-II). State-anxiety is more temporarily emotional state of excitement and the degree varies over time while trait-anxiety sustain the status that is stable and consistent in frequency and severity about future anxiety. Therefore, trait-anxiety showing consistent anxiety of working women was used rather than state-anxiety representing temporary anxiety in this research. There is no subordinate measure of trait anxiety. Trait Anxiety Inventory of STAI is made up of 20 questions. The Cronbach alpha of this study was .87.

### 3.4 Data Analyses

The statistical program used to perform the data analyses was SPSSPC+. Pearson Chi-Square test was used to analyze the demographic and sociologic traits in order to verify the sameness between the experienced group and the controlled group. Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze the result in

order to verify the sameness between the experienced group and the controlled group on occupational stress and trait-anxiety, and the difference of post-test scores within the groups due to the small number of samples.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Verification of sameness between experienced group and controlled group

#### 4.1.1 Verification of sameness in demographic and sociologic traits

Table 2 shows demographic and sociologic traits in terms of age, level of education, marital status, and occupation.

Table 2. The demographic and sociologic traits

(unit = people)				
Class	Category	Experienced (n=9)	Controlled (n=9)	p
Age	30s	2	4	.599
	40s	7	5	
Level of education	High school graduates	1	2	.445
	College graduates	8	6	
	Postgraduates	0	1	
Marital status	unmarried	1	3	.354
	married	7	6	
	divorced	1	0	
Occupation	sales persons	2	3	.842
	office workers	4	3	
	others	3	3	

As given in table 2 both experienced group and controlled group have more 40s than 30s in ages. Regarding education levels, college graduates take the most of the all samples. While every woman aged over 40 was all married, more of women in 30s were not married. As for occupation all participants were classified to office workers, sales persons and others. There were more office workers in the experienced group while the controlled group were evenly distributed in terms of kind in occupations. Also, there were no significant difference( $p < .05$ ) between two groups. Hence, the two groups can be defined as the same in demographic and sociologic characteristics.

#### 4.1.2 Verification of sameness of pre-test between experienced group and controlled group

The results on Mann-Whitney U test between experienced group and controlled group of the pre-test on occupational stress and trait-anxiety were conducted in order to confirm the sameness of controlled group and experienced group. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The result of U-test between experienced group and controlled group of pre-test on occupational stress and trait-anxiety

	Experienced (M±SD)	Controlled (M±SD)	p
Occupational demand	62.03±21.65	62.03±13.88	1.000
Occupational self-regulation	46.26±8.44	47.22±10.20	.931
Relation Discord	46.91±16.45	45.65±10.31	.605
Occupational insecurity	46.29±20.03	51.85±15.46	.387
Organization System	50.00±11.78	52.77±5.89	.730
Requital Inappropriateness	41.97±7.40	51.85±12.42	.077
Company Culture	45.37±15.08	47.22±11.02	.666
Occupational Stress	48.41±7.11	51.23±4.60	.297
trait-anxiety	47.22±4.86	47.55±6.19	1.000

Table 3 describes the results of U-test between experienced group and controlled group of pre-test on occupational stress and trait-anxiety. The U-tests on occupational stress and trait-anxiety have no significant result by  $p < .05$ . In the subordinate measure of occupational stress, occupational demand, occupational self-regulation, relation discord, occupational insecurity, organization system, requital inappropriateness, and company culture score have no significant result by  $p < .05$ . Hence, the two groups can be referred to the same.

Considering the results in the table 3 and table 4, the experienced group and the controlled group can be seen homogeneous by demographic and sociologic characteristics and the result of pre-tests.

#### 4.2 The result of U-test between the experienced group and the controlled group of post-test on occupational stress

With the purpose of finding out the effectiveness of Gestalt group mediation program on the stress of working women, the post-test of occupational stress was conducted. Mann-Whitney U test was followed to verify the difference of post-test scores between the experienced group and the controlled group. The result is shown in table 4.

Table 4. The result of U-test between experienced group and controlled group of post-test on occupational stress

	Experienced (M±SD)	Controlled (M±SD)	p

Occupational Demand	43.51±9.10	64.81±13.67	.002
Occupational self-regulation	33.33±13.17	44.44±8.33	.077
Relation Discord	27.16±16.76	43.20±11.71	.063
Occupational insecurity	33.33±22.04	53.70±13.88	.050
Organization System	38.88±5.89	50.92±10.57	.011
Requital Inappropriateness	29.62±9.62	53.08±13.35	.001
Company Culture	32.40±14.69	50.92±11.36	.006
Occupational Stress	34.03±4.80	51.58±5.58	.000

As the table shows, the U-test between experienced group and controlled group of post-test on occupational stress has a significant result by  $p < .001$ . In the subordinate measure of occupational stress, occupational demand, requital inappropriateness, and company culture score have a significant result by  $p < .01$ , and organization system score has a significant result by  $p < .05$ . However, occupational self-regulation, relation discord, and occupational insecurity score have no significant result by  $p < .05$ . Namely, it means that Gestalt group mediation program is effective on mitigating occupational stress of working women.

#### 4.3 The result of U-test between the experienced group and the controlled group of post-test on trait-anxiety

Trait-anxiety measuring test was taken so as to investigate the effectiveness of Gestalt group mediation program on working female's anxiety. Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to confirm the difference of post-test scores between experienced group and controlled group. The results are shown in table 5.

Table 5. The result of U-test between experienced group and controlled group of post-test on trait-anxiety

	Experienced (M±SD)	Controlled (M±SD)	p
trait-anxiety	40.22±2.16	46.88±4.01	.001

As given in the table, the U-test between experienced group and controlled group of post-test on occupational stress has a significant result by  $p < .01$ . This shows that Gestalt group mediation program is effective on reducing the anxiety of working women.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to measure the effectiveness of the Gestalt group meditation therapy in occupational stress and trait-anxiety in the working women. 18 working females were classified into experienced group and controlled group in order to accomplish the above-mentioned purpose, and Gestalt group mediation program was conducted to the experienced group. As a result, Gestalt group mediation program was proven to be effective on reducing occupational stress and anxiety of working women. Further discussion based on the result is as follows.

Firstly, the result of this study share a similarity with the previous studies including H.-K. Jung (2009) [14] who implemented self-understanding program, I.-S. Lee (2008) [13] of stress management program, B.-Y. Ryu (2008) [12] of drama therapy, and H.-Y. Seong (2006) [4] of musical activities. The similarity is also found in the research of D.-J. Song (2008) [1] who studied the relationship between dance sport activities and reduction of occupational stress of working female, and of K.-S. Lee [7] who reported participation of sports for all of production female employee was effective on mitigation of occupational stress. However, while the prior studies mainly focused on the influence of leisure activities of working women on their occupational stress, this study differentiates from other studies by focusing on reduction of occupational stress by solving women's depressed emotion.

The work-related stress of working female can be physiologically different from the ones of working male's. According to the study result of M. Frankenhaeuser (1988) [23], women were observed to react more sensitively under the stressful situation than men were. Moreover, D.-J. Song (2008) [1] mentioned that women experience more physical and mental disorder than men though they experience fewer accidents in the workplace than men. This implies a peculiarity of women, and the result of this study shows that Gestalt group mediation program can be very effective on reduction of occupational stress of working women because the program affected on depressed emotional dissolution of women.

Secondly, the result of conducting Gestalt group mediation program on working women shows that it was proven to be effective in alleviating the anxiety. The result of this study is similar with the research result of S.-I. Lee (1997) [20] that reported reduced state-anxiety and trait-anxiety after applying Gestalt group meditation program to general public, of H.-Y. Han (2001) [21], and of M.-J. Kim (2003) [22]. Anxiety refers to the fearful emotion that involves with insecurity of safety against potential danger. Working women are demanded to perform well in very competitive work environment, and also have to live with the fear of potential job-loss and organizational restructuring. It is inevitable for working women to suffer from anxiety that tends to get worsened. The result of this research reveals that Gestalt group mediation program can influence positively on working women to have emotional stability by offering meditation and Gestalt counseling.

Gestalt group mediation program could be effective on working women with occupational stress and anxiety by providing with emotional purification and stability.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to measure the effectiveness of the Gestalt group meditation therapy in occupational stress and trait-anxiety in the working women aged 30 to 49 in Korea. As for this, following hypothesis was used.

Occupational stress scores and the anxiety scores of the experienced group are significantly lower than the controlled group by using the Gestalt meditation program.

The U-test between post-test of experienced group and post-test of controlled group on occupational stress has a significant result by  $p < .001$ . In the subordinate measurement of occupational stress, occupational demand, requital inappropriateness, and company culture score have a significant result by  $p < .01$  and organization system score has a significant result by  $p < .05$ . The U-test between post-test of experienced group and post-test of controlled group on trait-anxiety has a significant result by  $p < .01$ . Therefore, the results of this investigation indicated that (1) occupational stress scores decrease after Gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program on experienced group, and (2) trait-anxiety scores decrease after the Gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program on experienced group.

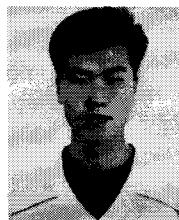
In summary, the Gestalt group meditation therapy intervention program for the working women aged 30 to 49 in Korea significantly reduced the working women's occupational stress and trait-anxiety. There is necessity to utilize this actively to decrease occupational stress and anxiety in working women in enterprise.

Finally, the evidence presented in this article suggests that the future study is considered to be profound of its result, The Gestalt group meditation therapy requires verification that is in regard to the specially designated industries of the working women and to the different location of the working women. Therefore, further research related to the Gestalt group meditation therapy for the working women in Korea is recommended. However, if those suggestions can be put into practices, and it is necessary to further investigate, further professional programs by using a Gestalt medication programs are expected in the future to develop in this field.

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