



Verna Suarez, M.S., MFT
*President of Los Angeles
Association Of School
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Anxiety Study at Lancaster Violence Alternative Program LA County Probation Camp for Violent Youth Offenders

This study was conducted to evaluate the effects of the Prison Smart-Street Lights program. The Prison Smart-Street Lights program is a course in stress management, anger management, and rehabilitative training for incarcerated youth. The cornerstone of the course is the Sudarshan Kriya breathing practice, (SKY), which has been shown in prior studies to reduce anxiety and depression. The hypothesis for the current program is that as the young men felt less anxious, they would feel more centered and less likely to respond to provocation, or get angry. Youth who had participated in the first Street Lights course that was given at Lancaster Challenger Memorial (Camp Smith) in January of 2001, reported: they slept better; didn't react to provocation as rapidly; did not experience as much anger; felt less fear at bed time; and generally expressed that they were more calm. To test our hypothesis, the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Scale was administered before the commencement of the course and 8 weeks later to measure changes in level of anxiety that may be reflected in this decrease in anger, fear, and reactive behavior.

The Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Test (STAI) has been used since 1966 in thousands of research studies. Anxiety proneness is a relatively stable personality trait (trait) as differentiated from anxiety as a transitory emotional state (state). This test distinguishes between these two. We would not expect to see a change in the trait, only in the transient state. We consider this a valid measure, as revealed in the result of subjects tested before and after surgery in a hospital setting. The trait scores remained the same, and the state scores improved with recovery from surgery. The vocabulary used in this test is suitable for Jr. High and so it was appropriate for our age group tested. The questionnaire has 40 questions overall, 20 for the state and 20 for the trait. Responses as to agreement with each statement ranged from 1 to 4: not at all; somewhat; moderately so; very much so.

The design of the study was pre testing prior to being instructed in the program, state how long the program was 8 weeks of follow-up three times a week and post testing, using self-report on the Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Test. The self-report of the young men was supplemented by the facility director's report. There was no control group at this time, as all of the incoming violent detainees participated in this course. The subjects were ages 13- 18, and they were 707B offenders of violent crimes with deadly weapon, murder, rape, armed

robbery, and terrorist threats against others. Most of the youth were Black and Hispanic gang members, also some Asian, Samoan, and White youths from all over Los Angeles County. Most had prior incarcerations. Typically these young men appeared to be hyper-vigilant and restless. In the community these gang members live a dangerous life style committing more violent acts than their peers, and being victims of violence. In addition they witness violence and have violent acts perpetrated against friends and family members. Many do not expect to survive to the age of 20.

In this camp setting the members of different, antagonistic gangs are mixed together, with approximately 100 detainees on site at any time. The camp was run in a quasi military way, marching back and forth to school, responding "yes sir" when their name was called, with a very rigid structure overall. The goal of the camp program was to focus on rehabilitation and preparing the youth to return to productive lives in society. The Street Lights course was mandatory as was the pre and post testing. Certified Prison Smart-Street Lights Teachers taught the courses. Each course had two teachers and sometimes they would have an additional facilitator. Four teachers and several facilitators were involved in teaching the courses. Sometimes a camp staff member would be present to help maintain security, and when a staff member was not available other security measures were in place. The courses were small in number, usually 8 or 9 subjects per course. Eighty-six violent youths were instructed in the Prison Smart-Street Lights Program on 10 different courses.

The procedures used were that the pre and posttests were self-administered by those who could read well, and those who had difficulty had the test read to them. No more than 6 young men sat at each table to take the test. Each test was checked by whom? Important that guards or AOL teachers did not perform this task or see any of their responses and that the subjects knew this to see that every question had a response. Test protocols were numbered so that the young men's identity was protected. The youth were informed that the responses to the tests were being used not to evaluate them as individuals, but to evaluate the program, and that the results of the individual tests would not be shown to teachers, parents, or any camp authorities and they were asked to be as honest as possible. Post testing was done on 72 youths (16% drop off rate due to change of camps, court schedules, illness and 2 were in solitary confinement).

- The course was taught over a period of one week for about 20-25 hours. These courses took place between January and April of 2001 with post testing approximately 8 weeks after instruction. Follow-up consisted of one half hour of guided meditation, and breathing techniques taught on the course, conducted at bed-time 3 times a week. The results of this pilot study showed a significant decrease in anxiety in every course

except one that had four participants. Overall the numbers show that the decrease was statistically significant at the .004 level. This suggests that in our population the SKY and Streetlights program decreased anxiety that in turn may have led to the decrease in anger, fear and reactive behavior that was previously reported. Number of minors in incident reports decreased significantly within the four- month period that these courses were taught, and there were no night- time disturbances on the evenings that the follow-ups were conducted. These results were in spite of a change of director, a massive changeover in staffing, and significant deficits in staffing ratios during this time period. All of these are understood to increase the anxiety level of the detainees and affect the level of security.

Due to the success of the program, the directors from 5 other camps at Challenger Memorial Youth Center, where this program was being conducted have all requested that this program be put into their camps.

—Further studies on larger number of subjects are needed to confirm these findings.

Facility Director’s Report

Fights, Facility Incident Reports, and Disciplinary Removals
(all indicators of negative behavior)

Pre Prison Smart (June to October 2000)		Post Prison Smart (November 2000-March 2001)	Percent
Monthly averages		Monthly averages	
Fights 6.8		Fights 4.2	
	-38%		
Facility Incident Report 91.2		Facility Incident Report 71.8	
	-21%		
Temporary Disciplinary Removal 51			
Temporary Discipline Removal 39.2	-23%		

Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Scale

Pre testing Number	86
Post testing 8 weeks later Number	72
Statistically Significant Reduction in State Anxiety at the .004 level	

Healing Experience

I was a patient of Chronic Bronchial Asthma with acute exacerbation in change of seasons right from my childhood (hereditary from both parents), on continuous use of Bronchodilators and Steroids. After doing my 1st basic course in June 1999 till date I have used my inhalers just 3-4 times. Now I am free of all steroids, anti-allergy and bronchodilator medicines. It is amazing.

Jai Gurudev.
Dr. Ruchi Gupta (MBBS),
6A/153, New Vijay Nagar,
Jalandhar City, Punjab 144001.