

Case Report on Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Gad)

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Abstract

This in-depth case study delves into the complex experiences of Maria, a 19-year-old college student grappling with debilitating anxiety. Through a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) lens, Maria's anxiety symptoms, coping mechanisms, and intricate relationship dynamics are meticulously examined. The study reveals Maria's pervasive and excessive worry, fear of losing loved ones, and anxiety related physical symptoms, which significantly impair her daily life and relationships.

Employing a CBT approach, this case study explores the underlying causes of Maria's anxiety, including her negative thought patterns, beliefs, and values. The therapeutic process and CBT techniques, such as relaxation, mindfulness, and problem-solving, are thoroughly discussed. Additionally, the case study highlights the crucial role of addressing relationship issues and developing healthier coping mechanism in managing anxiety.

This comprehensive case study provides valuable insights into the complexities of anxiety in young adults, and the importance of a holistic approach to mental health treatment. Maria's journey towards managing her anxiety symptoms, improving her relationships, and enhancing her overall well-being is thoroughly explored, offering a rich and nuanced understanding of anxiety experience.

Keywords: General Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Introduction

This case study examines Maria, a 19-year-old college student diagnosed with General Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Maria's condition illustrates the emotional challenges common to young adulthood, especially related to personal relationships, and managing anxiety. GAD is defined by persistent, excessive worry that interferes with various areas of life and leads to significant,

mental, emotional, and physical strain. Through Maria's experiences, we gain insights into the complex ways anxiety affects young adults and the importance of supportive interventions

Background And Demographics

Maria is a college student from a middle-class family, known to her loved ones as a kind, empathetic person. She prioritizes her studies and maintains close relationships with family, friends, and a partner. However, her deep attachment to loved ones makes her particularly sensitive to conflict or perceived rejection, heightening her anxiety in situations where her relationships feel threatened.

Presenting Problem:

Maria's anxiety manifests through both physical and psychological symptoms.

Physically, she experiences hand tremors, fluctuating blood pressure, and a racing heartbeat during anxious excessive worry, overthinking, and intrusive thoughts about losing loved ones, causing her to feel overwhelmed. However, she finds relief from these symptoms through talking with her best friend, other close friends, and family members; these interactions provide a sense of reassurance and distraction from her stress.

Symptomatology And Clinical Features:

Maria's symptoms align closely with the DSM-5 criteria for GAD.

They include:

1. Physical Symptoms

- Tremors: Her hands begin to shake, and she often feels a tremor throughout her body, especially when she's under tension or stressed about something, or during arguments with her partner, as she fears potential conflict. These symptoms are often accompanied by a throbbing headache, a loss of appetite, and waves of nausea that makes it difficult for her to eat. This physical reaction not only heightens her anxiety but also leaves her feeling exhausted, trapped in a cycle of emotional and physical discomfort.
- Blood Pressure Fluctuation: She experiences fluctuations in her blood pressure, with levels shifting between high and low during episodes of intense stress or anxiety. When she is particularly anxious or stressed, her blood pressure often spikes, leading to symptoms such as a racing heart, dizziness, and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Conversely, during periods of emotional exhaustion

following high-stress episodes, her blood pressure may drop, leaving her feeling lightheaded, weak, or fatigued. These fluctuations contribute to her stress by making her physically uncomfortable, which in turn exacerbates her anxiety and creates a challenging cycle of physical and emotional strain.

- Heart palpitation: She experiences heart palpitations during anxious moments, where her heart rate increases rapidly, making her feel out of control. This racing heartbeat intensifies her anxiety adding to her sense of panic and discomfort.

2. Psychological Symptoms

- Fear of Rejection or Abandonment: Maria's anxiety stems from a fear that she might unintentionally do something wrong, leading her loved ones, especially her partner, to distance themselves from her. She worries that even unintentional actions on her part could push people away, which amplifies her anxiety and makes her feel insecure in her relationships.
- Excessive Worry and Overthinking: She experiences persistent worry and tends to overthink aspects of her relationships. She often finds herself fixated on hypothetical scenarios or minor incidents, which her mind amplifies into larger issues. This overthinking leads to a sense of dread, where she constantly fears that something could go wrong in her relationships. Her anxiety manifests as a possessive need to ensure that her relationships are secure, which, in turn, fuels her worry further. This cycle of excessive concern and possessiveness leaves her feelings emotionally drained, as she struggles to find peace and reassurance in her connections with others.

3. Coping Mechanisms

- Seeking Social Support: Maria's primary coping strategy is seeking social support through interactions with her friends, family, and especially her best friend. Her best friend is very supportive and understanding; when she talks to him, she stops overthinking as he always reminds her that she is enough for herself. He reassured her not to feel stressed because of anyone or anything and emphasizes that she is perfect as she is. These social connections provide her with reassurance, temporarily alleviating her anxiety symptoms.

Impact on Daily Life and Functioning:

Maria's anxiety has significant effects on her academics, social, and personal life. Academically, she struggles with concentration and finds herself procrastinating, which heightens her anxiety. In her relationships, the fear of conflicts and rejection leads her to avoid confrontations, creating tensions. Her physical symptoms, especially her fluctuating blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, and shivering of hands, also interfere with her daily activities and create further health concerns. She is very lean and not able to gain weight just because daily stress she gets due to her relationship. While social interactions provide temporary relief, her dependence on reassurance often intensifies her worry when she cannot immediately access this support.

Diagnosis:

To assess Maria's anxiety, a Generalized Anxiety Disorder, 7-item (GAD-7) test was administered, a standardized tool from the National HIV Curriculum designed to gauge the severity of anxiety symptoms. Maria's responses indicated a score within the "severe anxiety" range, confirming the intensity of her conditions. This finding aligns with her pervasive symptoms frequent episodes of excessive worry, physical manifestations (such as hand tremors, blood pressure fluctuations, and palpitation), and psychological distress related to her relationships and academic pressures.

The GAD-7 results, alongside her presenting symptoms and self-reported challenges, reinforce a diagnosis of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). The severity of her symptoms highlights the need for immediate and comprehensive intervention to help Maria manage her anxiety and improve her quality of life.

Treatment Plan:

1. **Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** CBT has been suggested as a first-line treatment for Maria, with a focus on restricting her thought patterns around abandonment, conflict, and academic performances. CBT would help Maria identify and challenge irrational thoughts and develop healthier coping strategies for managing stress.

2. **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**: To address her physical symptoms of anxiety, including heart palpitations and tremors, MBSR would provide Maria with tools to calm her nervous system through breathing exercises and relaxation techniques.
3. **Lifestyle Changes**: Maria has been encouraged to incorporate exercise, journaling, and a balanced diet into her routine. Regular physical activity can improve her mood and regulates blood pressure, while journaling provides a healthy outlet for her concerns and emotions.
4. **Social Support and Counseling**: Maria's support system, including her family and close friends, plays a crucial role in her recovery. Family counselling and psychoeducation about GAD will equip her loved ones to better support her in challenging times.

Conclusion

Maria's case highlights the significant impact of Generalized Anxiety Disorder on young adults, especially in areas of relationships, academic performance, and self-confidence. Her GAD symptoms, including physical manifestation like tremors, blood pressure changes, and racing heart, combined with persistent fears of conflicts and rejection, show how anxiety can deeply affect daily life. Her GAD-7 assessment classified her anxiety as severe, underscoring the need for immediate intervention to prevent further disruption in her personal and academic life.

The treatment plan for Maria is holistic, combining Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Mindfulness techniques, family support, and potential medication. CBT will help her challenge irrational fears and build healthier thought patterns, while mindfulness and relaxation practices aim to address her physical symptoms. Social support from friends and family is also essential, though treatment will encourage her to develop resilience and reduce dependency on reassurance.

In the long term, Maria's prognosis is positive, as therapy and coping strategies are expected to empower her to manage anxiety independently, enhancing her academics focus and strengthening her relationship. This case study emphasizes the importance of early intervention and comprehensive care for GAD, showing that with consistent support and effective coping skills, individuals like Maria can lead fulfilling, balanced lives despite anxiety challenges.

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