

EFFECTIVENESS AND MEANING OF 'LOW INTENSITY' COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS FOR THE LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN LONDON

Rationale of the study

To find out whether Latin American immigrants in the UK benefit from low intensity therapies (guided self-help interventions) offered across Primary Care in the NHS. The data gathered from this study will be used as a basis for a doctoral thesis focused on the use of these therapies with this community. It is hoped that these results will be fed back to local/national mental health services so that they consider it when developing services which are effective for this community.

Organised by

This study is part of the research project with the same name, proposed by Jose López, current student of the Doctorate programme of Clinical Psychology at the University of East London. The study counts on the full backing and of the School of Psychology and has received approval from its Ethics Committee.

Methodology

Facilitation of a group-based guided self-help intervention with up to 20 participants (two groups of 10 participants each) who find it difficult to deal with anxiety/worry. The programme consisted of up to four 1.5hr -long weekly sessions covering the principles of guided self-help work on anxiety, such as *psychoeducation about anxiety/worry, relaxation, graded exposure, cognitive restructuring and anxiety management techniques*.

In line with Primary Care practices, participants were asked to monitor their progress by completing brief questionnaires every session they attended.

At the end of the programme, participants were invited to attend a further session, where a conversation took place about their experience of attending the group, the aspects that they found useful and the ones they did not, and aspects that they would change to make it more acceptable/useful to people from their same background. This conversation was transcribed verbatim and analysed, trying to identify the topics that people talk about.

Project schedule

Recruitment started to take place during May'11, where people attending different activities at IRMO and those who showed interest in the project were approached and offered a face-to-face session to discuss the details of the study/intervention.

The group took place during the month of July and first week of August.

Outcomes

a. Attendance

Out of 22 people originally approached, 14 people attended the first session, of which 10 people went on to complete the intervention. This reflects the engagement rates observed with across other groups who are offered these interventions in the NHS.

b. Impact on mood

Overall, a reduction on self-reported distress (anxiety and depression) was observed among the participants during the length of the programme.

c. Participants' statements

Participants also stated that they had learnt a number of facts, techniques and strategies to better manage excessive levels of anxiety and worry that they were experiencing. The group also gave them the opportunity of talking freely in their mother tongue about concerns they found difficult to discuss in mainstream services with their limited command of English. A group setting also gave them the experience of feeling part of a community with difficulties, rather than seeing themselves as “different from the rest of mankind”.

Some participants felt this intervention, whilst really helpful, seemed too limited and requested it to be continued with further interventions covering more topics and facilitated on a regular basis.

Involvement of IRMO

Since the conception of the study, IRMO showed its enthusiasm with the idea and its willingness to help in any way possible. This support materialised in:

- Lending of premises to facilitate the groups (offering great flexibility as to slots when groups could be facilitated so that they did not clash with other ongoing activities).
- Lending of audiovisual and stationery material necessary to facilitate the groups.
- Acceptance of participants recruited from other organisations.
- Offering crèche/activities for children of mothers attending the sessions.
- Help with recruitment process (e.g. by allowing me access to in-house English classes and mothers’ group, putting up posters or advertising the group on IRMO’s facebook page).

Due to the success of the groups (and need for further participants for the research project), IRMO stated their commitment to assisting further in the facilitation of further similar projects/interventions for the community. They also expressed their concern about how to engage with certain members of the community they work with (e.g. children and men) and asked about the possibility of arranging further attention to these collectives.

I would like to emphasise that IRMO’s response has been in stark contrast to that of other organisations catering for the Latin American community in London, which have been extremely apprehensive to get involved or lend their facilities to collaborate with a project aimed at improving the well-being of the community.

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