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INCREASING HOMEWORK COMPLIANCE
BY USING THE GUIDING MODEL FOR
PRACTICE:
AN ANALOGUE STUDY

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Abstract

Homework assignments are considered a fundamental component of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and are believed to be significant in assisting to produce and maintain treatment gains. However, gaining clients compliance to homework tasks remains a significant challenge. An analogue study of a single session relaxation intervention was conducted to test the guiding model for practice (Kazantzis, MacEwan & Dattilio, 2005); designed to provide therapists with a step-by-step guide of how to systematically administer homework in therapy. Forty four participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. The systematic condition ($n = 21$) was designed to administer homework following the guiding model, while the non-systematic condition ($n = 23$) followed standard therapy practice. Hypotheses posited that participants in the systematic group would display greater levels of engagement in homework; would have more positive beliefs in completing the homework; that greater adherence to the homework would correlate positively with reductions in anxiety; and that the systematic group would show a greater reduction in anxiety. In relation to engagement in homework the results found a statistically significant difference in the mean ranks of homework compliance between the two groups. The Mann-Whitney U result was 182 ($z = -1.48$) with an associated probability of .14, showing that participants in the systematic group did have higher levels of homework compliance. A MANOVA calculation was used to assess the systematic group for more positive beliefs in completing homework. The results found significant differences in two of the four Homework Rating Scale II (HRS) subscales; behaviour: $F(1, 42) = 1.83, p = .184$, partial eta squared = .042; and consequences/synthesis: $F(1, 42) = 2.93, p = .094$, partial eta squared = .065. The other two subscales of the HRS; beliefs and situation, were not administered differently between groups, providing further support for the difference of homework administration. Partial support was found for correlations between homework practice and anxiety. While three of the four correlations were significant, it was found that state anxiety actually increased as practice increased, however, trait anxiety was found to reduce as homework levels increased. No significant group differences were found in anxiety reduction. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview of chapters

The present study aims to assess a newly designed ‘guiding model for practice’ developed to assist therapists with increasing their clients’ uptake of homework. Thus, this introductory chapter aims to provide an overview of homework and its utility within Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), together with the issues faced in gaining clients’ compliance with homework tasks.

Chapter 2 provides a summary of the behavioural and cognitive theoretical determinants of homework compliance. It presents an overview of classical and operant conditioning, as well as the generalisation and maintenance of homework. The chapter concludes with an overview of cognitive theories including discussion of social learning and social cognition models.

Chapter 3 outlines the empirical support for the use of homework within Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. It highlights the utility of homework assignments and argues that sufficient evidence exists to suggest that the outcome of treatment is significantly enhanced when clients complete their homework. Treatment outcomes of therapy, with and without the use of homework, is presented, as is empirical research around homework compliance and therapist and client factors.

Models and heuristics designed to increase the uptake of homework are presented in Chapter 4. A brief review and critique of key models and their recommendations for practice is discussed, before the new guiding model for practice is outlined.

The aims of the present study are presented in Chapter 5. It summarises the importance of homework in therapy and outlines the research objectives of the study. The four hypotheses of the study are considered and discussed. The necessity of standardising the homework is outlined and an overview provided on relaxation — the homework intervention utilised in the study. The rationale is presented for using an analogue design, before briefly outlining the sample required for the study. Due to the possibility that many of the participants may have high levels of anxiety or stress in their lives, the chapter concludes with a short overview of anxiety.

Chapter 6 examines the challenges of how to accurately measure homework compliance. There are a number of issues that occur when using a single item measure and these are discussed before introducing the Homework Rating Scale II. This newly designed measure enables the client to provide a self-report on both the quality and quantity of the homework. Its utility and design are discussed.

The method used in this study is outlined in Chapter 7. Included within this section is a comprehensive description of the systematic and non-systematic protocols utilised in this study in teaching relaxation. An outline of the procedure and measures is also provided.

Chapter 8 offers an overview of the statistical analysis procedures conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.0. Included within this chapter is a consideration of the importance and use of statistical power.

The results for the study can be found in Chapter 9. These are separated and presented in four sections, each relating to one hypothesis. In addition, the results of the analysis of the inter-rater agreement and researcher adherence to the protocols are presented.

Finally, Chapter 10 presents an overall discussion of the results, again separated into the hypotheses, the inter-rater agreement and researcher adherence sections. The chapter also examines possible clinical implications of the guiding model for practice. An analysis of the study's limitations is provided, as are the implications for future research. Chapter 10 concludes with a summary of the results of the study and their potential application.

1.2 Homework definition

Homework is the generic term used for a wide range of activities that are completed by clients in between therapy sessions. More specifically, it refers to therapeutic tasks that assist the client to maintain, as well as generalise, in-session learning to their everyday situations in which their problems exist (Kazantzis & L'Abate, 2005). Homework is an important component of many therapies. Surveys of therapist opinions and attitudes support the importance of homework assignments when treating various problems independent of theoretical orientation (Kazantzis, Lampropoulos & Deane, 2003; Kazantzis & Deane, 1998; Kazantzis & Deane, 1999), including experiential therapies (Greenberg, Watson & Goldman, 1988), systematic forms of therapy (e.g., Boscolo,

Cecchin, Hoffman & Penn, 1987), behavioural therapy (Shelton & Levy, 1981b), solution-focused therapies (e.g., DeJong & Berg, 2002), dynamic therapies (Badgio, Halperin & Barber, 1999) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1979).

Homework assignments are viewed as a key component of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Kazantzis & L'Abate, 2005). Compliance with homework enhances a client's ability to develop their coping skills and aims over time to enable the client to become independent of the therapist. Research has found that clients who comply with homework recommendations, within the cognitive therapy paradigm, benefit more than clients who do not (Bryant, Simons & Thase, 1999). Furthermore, it is theorised that if therapists gain compliance for homework tasks, they may also achieve higher levels of motivation, involvement and commitment from clients, ultimately introducing a tangible and understandable change process into the clients' coping style (Scheel, Hanson & Razzhavaikina, 2004).

There is a wide range of tasks that constitute homework. However, a broad definition of homework is assignments that are generally planned therapeutic activities, where the specific activities are selected predominantly from the empirically supported Cognitive Behavioural Therapy model for that client's particular presenting problem (i.e., depression) (Kazantzis, MacEwan & Dattilio, 2005). The task is then tailored to meet the client's specific needs based on their individual conceptualisation. The aim is for the homework assignments to be tailored and designed collaboratively with a focus on the client's goals for therapy (Kazantzis, MacEwan & Dattilio, 2005). Specifically within Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, however — as also within various other therapies — homework denotes the main process in which clients experience change both behaviourally and cognitively. Through the use of homework, clients are able to learn new skills,

practice them within their own environment, and experiment with new behaviours and thought patterns. For example, a client may present to therapy with social anxiety. If it was established that the anxiety was mediated by a deficit of social skills, then the homework may revolve around some social skills practice (Friedberg & McClure, 2003).

1.3 Homework compliance

Homework is considered important in therapy as it engages the client in working towards their goals between therapy sessions (Kazantzis & Lampropoulos, 2002). This can enable a client to become self-sufficient and integrate a number of healthy strategies more quickly into their everyday lives (Kazantzis & L'Abate, 2005). Several studies suggest that homework compliance is related to better outcomes (see further Chapter 3), thus supporting the importance for clients to comply with the homework tasks set them. However, engaging clients in homework represents a significant challenge, with client non-completion of homework identified as a frequent occurrence (Leahy, 2002; Gilbertson, 2001).

Within CBT, while homework is considered a vital component of the therapy, existing data do not explain *how* homework produces effects on CBT outcomes. A clear theoretical and empirical understanding of the mechanisms by which homework produces its effects is required. Such an understanding would form the foundation for evidence-based guidelines to improve the process psychologists use to integrate homework into CBT, thus supporting an increase in levels of homework compliance and more positive outcomes for clients.

There are a number of theoretical determinants that relate to homework compliance. Chapter 2 reviews the behavioural theories of respondent (classical)

conditioning, operant conditioning, and the cognitive theories. Its aim is to outline the theoretical basis of the factors that can impact on an individual's compliance with homework tasks.