AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY OF A COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOURAL AND A BEHAVIOURAL TREATMENT FOR CHILDHOOD ANXIETY DISORDERS

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Psychology
at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand.

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2004
ABSTRACT

Cognitive-behavioural treatment (CBT) approaches have been designed to provide strategies for children to reduce unwanted anxiety to more normal and manageable levels. A meta-analytic review of overseas outcome studies done as a precursor to the main studies of this thesis (Huzziff et al., 2004) indicates a CBT-based treatment programme (Kendall, Chansky, Kane, Kim, Kortlander, Ronan, Sessa, & Siqueland, 1992; Ronan & Deane, 1998) to be effective for children diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. The present study used a multiple baseline across participants design and addressed the need for increased knowledge of two primary CBT components (cognitive plus behavioural and behavioural alone). Two primary objectives of the study were: (1) to replicate previous research findings for this CBT programme within a New Zealand sample and (2) to investigate the effects of the behavioural components of the CBT programme. The final, and more exploratory aspect of the study was to compare the immediate and long-term treatment effects of the CBT programme with the behavioural treatment (BT) components alone. It was hypothesised that the CBT and the BT programmes would be effective for New Zealand children. Furthermore, it was hypothesised that children, regardless of treatment allocation, would benefit similarly from treatment. In this study, a manualised, 16-session CBT programme and a manualised, eight-session BT programme were used with six children each (total N = 12), aged 6 to 12 years, with anxiety disorders. A single-case research design was used. Children were randomly allocated to condition, using a yoked methodology to allow for selected group comparisons. Diagnoses, parent and teacher reports, and child self-reports were used to assess child treatment outcome. Additional measures assessed whether the programmes designed for children were capable of producing change in anxiety (and depression) for parents. Overall, the results replicated previous outcome findings for CBT studies. The results showed that the majority of participants, regardless of treatment allocation, (a) no longer met diagnostic criteria for an anxiety disorder, (b) had an increased ability to cope and decreased anxiety related problems, and (c) maintained treatment gains across 3-, 6-, and 12-month follow-up. Overall, the BT condition produced more initial changes in targeted areas of functioning than the first half of CBT and more than CBT as a whole. However, at 12-month follow-up, the CBT condition appeared to show greater effectiveness. Also, for parents with elevated distress scores at pre-treatment, positive change across condition was found. The
findings are discussed and considered with reference to the role of cognitive and behavioural treatment components, potential benefits for parent functioning, research limitations, and possible avenues for future research. The present study’s results have implications for informing future research regarding therapist choice of treatment modality and tailoring therapy to individual clients.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, and foremost I wish to thank Dr Kevin Ronan for his guidance and supervision. His patience, fostering spirit, and above all, confidence in me throughout this project motivated me to complete a job that at times felt impossible.

Thanks are due to my second supervisor, Dr Allan Winton, for comments on thesis drafts and behavioural expertise. For their statistical expertise I would like to thank Dr Ross Flett and Dr John Spicer. For her time and clinical expertise, Dr Rebecca Story.

I would like to thank the staff at the Massey University Psychology Clinic for their support and assistance during the treatment and assessment phase of my project. Special thanks go to Dr Sally Wills and Robyn Girling-Butcher, the other members of the research team. Special thanks also go to the children and parents who participated in the research.

I would like to thank those who supported me behind the scenes. Dr John Podd for his guidance in leading me away from my thesis alternative – a life on the high seas. Dr Melanie Martin for considering joining me in my thesis alternative. Dr Gillian Madison-Smith and Dr Cathie Collinson for all the ‘sanity’ checks. Tricia Stuart for her endless editing assistance, et cetera.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my family, Tom and Fay Huzziff, Robyn Vertongen and Jim Graham for their patience, understanding, and support. Finally, special thanks go to my daughter, Ana – a wee blessing, who helped motivate the completion of this thesis.
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