

Rating the Quality of Cognitive-Behavioural Case Formulations

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Aim

To develop a rating scale to establish the quality of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) case formulations.

Development

A scale was developed based on the quality scales in the Case Formulation Content Coding Method (CFCCM) developed by Eells, Kendjelic and Lucas (1998). The focus of this scale is on the quality of CBT case formulations. It was developed by Claire Fothergill and Willem Kuyken in an iterative process. Initial phases involved establishing what made up a “good enough” case formulation. This led to the scaling of the quality of case formulations from “good,” to “good enough,” to “poor” and to “very poor.” The final phase involved refining the scale through separately and then jointly reviewing multiple case formulations.

Properties

- The scale is a tool that reliably and comprehensively evaluates the quality of case formulations.
- Quality is defined as a parsimonious, coherent and meaningful account of a client’s presenting problems. “Best practice” in high quality cognitive therapy training programmes was used to operationalise the scale.
- The scale makes a distinction between “good enough” and “poor” formulations. The former are sufficiently well-focussed, coherent and meaningful to provide a fair description and explanation of the client’s presenting problems in CBT terms. The latter are considered significantly problematic that a therapist in training / under supervision would require significant formative feedback.

- The scale can be applied to CBT case formulations that share a focus on beliefs and behaviours.

Psychometric properties

The main criterion of interest is whether raters can agree in their differentiations of formulations of differing quality. Following the development of the scale, two raters (CDF & WK) independently coded a large sample of formulations (approximately 60). Discrepancies in scores were discussed and the scale was developed to increase its clarity. Ten formulations were then independently coded by the two raters and an acceptable rate of agreement was observed (kappa 0.85).

Quality Scale

Refers to the degree which the formulation integrates relevant information of the case so that the case formulation is a meaningful account of the presenting problems. The formulation should be neither overly brief nor verbose. The data should be accurate and should be written in the relevant section of the formulation. Relevant childhood data should be based on data whilst the core beliefs, conditional assumptions and compensatory strategies should be appropriate inferences derived from the data.

Checklist

1. Overall the data in the formulation should be well integrated and have links and connections between the different elements of the diagram. The data should flow in a meaningful way.
2. All the information in the formulation should be relevant
3. All the information should be accurate
4. The information must be in the correct section of the formulation
5. The relevant childhood data and the compensatory strategies should be based on the data whilst the core beliefs and conditionals assumptions should be inferences based on the data
6. The formulation should neither be too verbose nor too brief

Four point scale:

1. **Very Poor.** The case formulation shows minimal integration of the elements of the formulation. The formulation is a basic summary of the presenting problems and includes more irrelevant- than relevant information, which seems to distort the overall form. There may be a feeling that the participant has not understood the case or the formulation includes incoherent statements or statements are placed in the wrong part of the formulation. The majority of the information included is inaccurate. There may be inferential information in the relevant childhood data section, and factual information in the core belief and conditional assumptions and compensatory strategies sections. The formulation is either too brief or too verbose. Some information may be missing.

Checklist for Score 1

Most of the below criteria apply:

1. Minimal (approx. ½) integration of the elements
 2. More irrelevant than relevant
 3. Feeling the participant has either/both misunderstood the case or the instructions of how to formulate – statements in wrong section
 4. Inaccurate information included (more than three pieces in the overall formulation)
 5. The whole formulation is either too brief or too verbose
 6. Obvious information is missing
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2. **Poor.** There is a medium level of integrated elements, although the case formulation still consists of a great deal of irrelevant information and not all the relevant information is present. Again, there is a feeling that the case formulation has been used more as a summary than an integrated piece because irrelevant and relevant information seem to be equally important. Some of the information in the formulation is inaccurate. There still may be some doubt as to whether the participant has fully understood what information should be in each element of the formulation. There

may be some confusion between where the inferential and data information should be placed. Formulations may still be verging on being either too brief or too verbose in some, but NOT ALL sections.

Checklist for score 2

1. Medium (over ½)level of integrated elements
 2. Not all relevant information is included
 3. Balance between irrelevant and relevant information
 4. Less information is inaccurate (less than three)
 5. May be some doubt as to whether the participant has fully understood how to formulate or the case.
 6. Two pieces of information are placed in the wrong section
 7. Some of the sections are too brief
- 3. Good enough.** The elements are more clearly integrated (links and connections are apparent between sections) and more relevant-, than irrelevant-information is included. The case formulation is generally coherent and accurate. However, there may be some element of doubt as to whether the participant has fully understood the task. One or two of the elements of the formulation are either too brief or too verbose.

Checklist for score three

- More clearly integrated (good links and connections are apparent between sections)
 - Most of the information is relevant
 - Overall generally coherent and accurate but a couple of features to suggest that this is not the best formulation of the case
 - One of the sections may be too brief or too verbose
4. **Good.** The case formulation is seen as a coherent and integrated whole. There are strong links between the elements. It seems evident that the participant has included all the relevant and accurate information in the relevant sections. The participant has correctly used the data in the relevant childhood data, which has led them to make

accurate and appropriate inferences in the core belief, compensatory strategies and conditional assumption sections. The formulation is neither too verbose nor too brief.

Checklist for score 4

- Generally a coherent and integrated whole
- Strong links between the elements
- Majority of info is relevant and accurate
- Data is in the correct section
- Appropriate amount of statements overall and within each section

References

Eells, T. D., Kendjelic, E. M., & Lucas, C. P. (1998). What's in a case formulation? Development and use of a content coding manual. *Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research*, 7, 144-153.