Do Words Matter? Exploring the Effect of Safety Behaviour Beliefs on Exposure Credibility, Expectancy, and Acceptability

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Introduction

Treatment Expectancy
- Predictor of treatment success = client expectations of efficacy
- CBT psychoeducation: the words clinicians use may influence client expectations about treatment success

Safety behaviours (SBs)
- It is unclear whether judicious SB use is helpful or harmful to exposure outcomes
- Clinician opinions on judicious SB use → client expectations of treatment
- Beliefs about SBs may impact clients’ beliefs about therapy
- Past research: impact of SBs vs. no SBs without considering the way SBs are presented

Current Study
- Question: Do beliefs about the efficacy of SBs during a speech exposure task influence beliefs about exposure success?
- Hypotheses: Participants told that SBs are helpful in reducing anxiety would report increased: 1) exposure credibility, 2) expected success, and 3) willingness to engage in future exposures

Method

Participants
- Undergraduate students (N = 140) from the University of Ottawa (89.1% women)
- Recruited based on high speech anxiety (4 or 5): “On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely), how much do you fear public speaking?”

Procedure

Psychoeducation
- On how CBT & exposure work to reduce anxiety

Manipulation
- Conditions: SBs are helpful, SBs are unhelpful, control

Credibility Expectancy Questionnaire
- Measure of exposure credibility & expectancy

Speech Task
- All participants use SBs (e.g. sit down, bottle of water)

One-week Follow-up Questionnaire
- Assess willingness to engage in future exposures

Results

Differences Between Conditions on Ratings of Exposure Credibility, Expectancy, and Willingness to Deliver Another Speech

Expectancy
- Helpful vs. Unhelpful: f(92) = 1.96, p = .05, d = .41
- Helpful vs. Control: f(86) = 2.29, p = .03, d = .49

Discussion

Summary
- Helpful condition had greater expectations of exposure success compared to unhelpful and control conditions
- No differences for credibility or future exposure willingness

Implications
- First study to assess the impact of beliefs about SBs on exposure
- Beliefs about SBs → different success expectancy, but no impact on post-exposure outcomes
- If clinicians describe SBs as being initially helpful (to ↓ attrition) or unhelpful (to ↓ reliance on SBs), this may impact on how clients view exposure therapy
- May directly impact how clinicians describe SBs and exposure to their clients during psychoeducation

References

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