



A Trauma-Focused Intensive Outpatient Program Integrating Acceptance and Commitment Therapy with Elements of Exposure Therapy



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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of exposure therapy for the treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is well-established. Despite its efficacy, exposure therapy has been associated with high drop-out rates ostensibly restricting successful outcomes. A Performance Improvement (PI) project was conducted within the Brooke Army Medical Center Trauma-Focused Intensive Outpatient Program to determine if integrating Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) with elements of exposure therapy would decrease the drop-out rate while maintaining high-quality PTSD treatment. Patients included 311 active duty service members who completed a 6-week, closed-cohort IOP consisting of both group (24-sessions) and individual (10-12 sessions) therapy. Reductions in PTSD symptoms as measured by the Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale-5 (PDS-5) and PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5) at pre- and post-measure reached statistical significance. Moreover, the drop-out rate was well below the average observed for exposure therapy alone; differences in effectiveness were not observed. The results suggest integrating ACT with elements of exposure therapy in an IOP format may effectively treat PTSD while decreasing the drop-out rate.

RESULTS

Student's <i>t</i> -test Results							
Measure	Pre-treatment Mean (SD)	Post-treatment Mean (SD)	Mean Score Change (SD)	df	t	Cohen's d	p
PDS-5	60.57 (11.49)	41.58 (18.70)	-18.97 (16.45)	302	20.08	1.22	<0.001
PCL-5	59.67 (11.53)	42.93 (18.03)	-16.75 (15.50)	309	19.03	1.11	<0.001
AAQ-II	39.92 (6.96)	33.65 (9.76)	-6.29 (10.13)	249	9.82	0.74	<0.001
CFQ	40.55 (6.21)	34.44 (9.62)	-6.14 (9.76)	249	9.95	0.75	<0.001
VLQ-Imp	68.61 (17.67)	72.53 (14.64)	3.87 (16.29)	221	-3.54	0.24	<0.001
VLQ-Do	42.84 (18.94)	50.41 (17.85)	7.46 (19.08)	221	-5.83	0.41	<0.001

METHOD

All 311 patients were included in the PI project. Demographic data was collected on the following variables: age, gender, race and ethnicity, marital status, education level, rank, service branch, number of deployments, and total deployment length. The majority (68%) were men. Mean age was 38. patients were ethnically diverse. Most (69.1%) were married. Average education level was high school. The Army was the mostly widely represented branch at 80.7%. The mean time in service was 15 years with 86.2% having been deployed at least once. Traumatic events experienced include combat, military sexual assault, childhood abuse, and other. Of note, 97% percent experienced more than one trauma.

All patients completed the PDS-5, AAQ-II (Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II), VLQ (Valued Living Questionnaire) and CFQ (Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire) on the first and last day of the program while the PCL-5 was completed weekly.

DISCUSSION

This IOP experienced a drop-out rate of only 9.3%. Overall, PDS-5 scores decreased by 18.97 points and PCL-5 scores decreased by 16.75 points. Program developers attribute favorable outcomes to the addition of ACT.

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