

Protocol for Online Group ACT and EPR Therapy for OCD in the Brazilian Context

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Background

Previous research suggests that a combined approach of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) effectively treats obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). However, there's a scarcity of studies on ACT for OCD within Latin American populations. Due to the substantial influence of socio-cultural factors on OCD symptomatology, it's crucial to customize and assess ACT within diverse cultural settings. In a pioneering study, our group adapted and evaluated an in-person individual ACT protocol combined with ERP for OCD within the Brazilian context. The results were promising, demonstrating reductions in symptom severity and beneficial effects on depressive symptoms, quality of life, and psychological flexibility. Nevertheless, in-person psychotherapy poses several barriers such as geographic distance and travel expenses. Consequently, online therapy emerges as a viable alternative. Moreover, improving treatment accessibility for a wider population is a pivotal public health strategy. Therefore, our aim was to develop an online group protocol of ACT combined with ERP, based on Twohig et al. (2018), tailored for Brazilian adults with OCD.

Protocol Development

This protocol was developed as a psychological flexibility skills training based on the hexaflex model, with a particular focus on the processes of acceptance and defusion, as these are most closely associated with OCD symptoms. To provide opportunities for practicing these skills, exposure exercises were included. These exposures aim to evoke difficult internal experiences and are conducted both in-session and as homework in the form of behavioral commitments.

In addition, we culturally adapted the therapeutic language and ACT concepts to enhance accessibility for Brazilian patients. For instance, we used the image of creating or opening space instead of "acceptance" and emphasized "what is important to you" rather than "values". Additionally, specific ACT metaphors were modified to align with the Brazilian context and to better fit the local preferences, we scheduled only one therapy session per week.

Protocol Structure



Duration: 16 weekly 2-hour sessions



Setting: online groups (4 - 5 participants)

Session 1

- Introduction of participants and symptoms information
- OCD and treatment models presentations
- Guidelines: Commitment and group rules
- Homework

Session 2

- Mindfulness practice and sharing of experiences (SoE)
- Review of the previous session and the OCD symptom list
- "Man in the Hole" metaphor and creative hopelessness
- Homework

Session 3

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and self-monitoring forms (SMF)
- Bull's Eye diagram
- Control as the problem
- Homework

Session 4

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and SMF
- List of situations exposures
- Willingness and exposure
- Homework

Session 5

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and SMF
- "Yellow Fusca" exercise
- Preparing the first exposure and the "Moving Through a Swamp" metaphor
- Behavioral commitment form (BCF) and homework

Session 6

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and homework exposures (HE)
- Explanation of defusion and "Passengers on the Bus" metaphor
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 7

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- "Milk, milk, milk" metaphor
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 8

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- Explanation of "description" versus "evaluation"
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 9

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- Exercises: "Exploring how our mind creates random relationships" and "Reasons as causes"
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 10

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- Exercise: "Word games"
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 11

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- "Working with Self-Conceptualizations"
- "The Cake Mold" metaphor and introduction of the Self as Context concept
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 12

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- "The Sky and the Weather" metaphor
- Exercise: "Rewriting Your Own Story"
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 13

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- The "Chessboard" metaphor
- Exercise: "Flexibilizing the Self" - Part 1
- Exposure practice
- Exercise: "Flexibilizing the Self" - Part 2
- BCF and homework

Session 14

- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and homework on flexible self and exposures
- Exercise: "85th Birthday"
- Repeating the "Bull's Eye" exercise
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 15

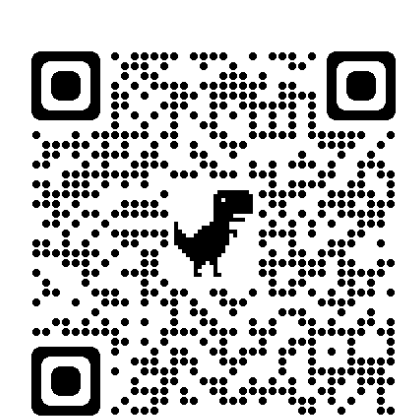
- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- The "Movie of Life" metaphor
- Exercise: "Chart for a More Meaningful Life"
- Exposure practice
- BCF and homework

Session 16

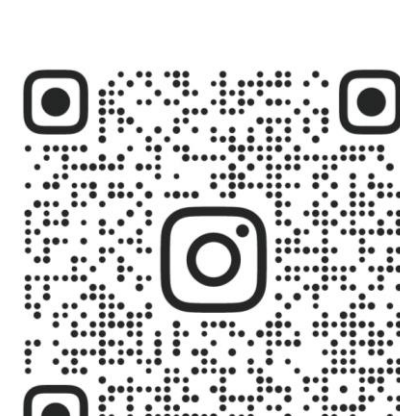
- Mindfulness practice and SoE
- Review of the previous session and HE
- The "Expansion vs. Limitation of Choices" metaphor
- Discussion on slips and relapses
- Developing a "Map"

Applicability

This protocol is currently being tested in a study involving patients from the state of Rio de Janeiro. We aim to soon expand this research to include participants from other regions of Brazil to evaluate the protocol's efficacy across diverse populations. This expansion will help determine the generalizability and overall effectiveness of the intervention within different cultural and geographical contexts throughout the country.



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