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Orginal Article

Effectiveness of Contextual Schema Therapy for Fear of Negative Evaluation and Fear of Positive Evaluation in Individuals with Social Anxiety Disorder: Single Subject Design

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Abstract

Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) is a common type of anxiety disorder. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR), SAD is characterized by an intense fear or anxiety about social situations where individuals may be evaluated or scrutinized by others. People with SAD often avoid social interactions or endure them with significant distress. The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of contextual schema therapy in addressing fear of negative evaluation and fear of positive evaluation in individuals with social anxiety disorder. This study utilized a single-subject A-B design and focused on individuals with SAD in Mashhad city during 2021. A total of 12 individuals were selected through convenience sampling for the study. Participants received contextual schema therapy over 16 weekly sessions, each lasting one hour. The instruments used in the study included the revised Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNES-II) (Carleton et al., 2006) and the Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPES) (Weeks et al., 2008). Participants completed these scales during the baseline phase, as well as after sessions 4, 8, 12, and 16, and again during a 3-month follow-up phase.Data analysis involved several methods, including the improvement percentage index, non-overlapping effect size (percentage of non-overlapping data), reliable change index (RCI), and visual analysis. The reliable change index (greater than 1.96), improvement percentage (greater than 25%), and percentage of non-overlapping data (greater than 75%) indicated a significant effect of contextual schema therapy in reducing both fear of negative evaluation and fear

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of positive evaluation in all participants. Furthermore, the improvement percentage during the 3-month follow-up phase confirmed the ongoing effectiveness of the therapyBased on the findings, it can be concluded that contextual schema therapy, which incorporates elements of schema therapy and third-wave cognitive-behavioral therapies, significantly improves fear of negative evaluation and fear of positive evaluation in individuals with social anxiety disorder. Therefore, clinicians are encouraged to consider using contextual schema therapy to address the cognitive aspects of social anxiety disorder, particularly fears related to negative and positive evaluations.

Keywords: Contextual schema therapy, Fear of negative evaluation, Fear of positive evaluation, Social anxiety disorder.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Anxiety disorders include a group of disorders characterized by intense anxiety, worry, or fear and related functional disturbances. These disorders include separation anxiety disorder, selective mutism, specific phobia, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety disorder (SAD), and agoraphobia. Among these, social anxiety disorder is recognized as the third most common psychiatric disorder. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR), social anxiety disorder is characterized by intense anxiety or fear of one or more social situations in which a person may be evaluated by other people. Some of these situations include being observed, social relationships, and performing in the presence of other people. People with this disorder worry about receiving negative and positive evaluations from others and avoid situations where they may be evaluated. Social anxiety disorder is related to lower quality of life and more interpersonal, occupational, and academic problems. A high percentage of people with this disorder also report comorbid disorders such as other anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder, and some personality disorders. Despite the high prevalence and important consequences of social anxiety disorder, studies show that one-third of people with this disorder receive treatment. Social anxiety disorder, if not treated, can turn into a chronic disorder that leads to problems, destruction, and comorbid or subsequent disorders such as anxiety disorders and depression. Contextual schema therapy is a therapeutic approach introduced by Roediger et al. (2018) that addresses personality, emotion regulation, and interpersonal problems. Contextual schema therapy integrates third-wave cognitive behavioral therapies with schema therapy to

expand on Young's approach. In other words, this model integrates important concepts such as mentalization, mindfulness, acceptance, metacognition, and clarification of human values and commitment to them, which are well-framed within third-wave cognitive behavioral approaches, into the traditional schema therapy model. The goal of contextual schema therapy is to correct coping, inner critic, and child modes and strengthen the healthy adult mode. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of contextual schema therapy on the fear of negative evaluation and the fear of positive evaluation in people with social anxiety disorder.

Method

The present study was performed in the frame of a single-subject A-B design. The statistical population consisted of all the people with social anxiety disorder in Mashhad city in 2021, out of which 12 people were selected by the convenience sampling method. In the study, the structured clinical interview for DSM-5 (SCID-5) (First et al., 2016) was used to diagnose social anxiety disorder. The subjects received contextual schema therapy for 16 weekly sessions of 1 hour. The tools used in the study included the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale-II (BFNE-II) (Carleton et al. 2006) and the Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale (FPES) (Weeks et al. 2008). The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale-II contains 12 self-report items, with a possible total score ranging from 12 to 60. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (entirely characteristic of me). The Fear of Positive Evaluation Scale contains 10 self-report items, rated on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all true) to 9 (very true). The total score of this scale ranges from 0 to 72. Items 5 and 10, which are reverse-scored, are excluded from the total score calculation. In the present study, Subjects answered the scales in the baseline phase, at sessions 4, 8, 12, and 16, and at the 3-month follow-up phase. The data were analyzed using improvement percentage, reliable change index (RCI), non-overlapping effect size (percentage of non-overlapping data), and visual analysis.

Results

The reliable change index (1.96 <), the improvement percentage (25% <) and the percentage of non-overlapping data (75% <) showed the significant effect of contextual schema therapy in reducing the fear of negative evaluation and the fear of positive evaluation of all subjects. The improvement percentage at the 3-month follow-up phase indicated that contextual schema therapy was effective in reducing the fear of negative evaluation and the fear of positive evaluation in the subjects.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the present study, contextual schema therapy using cognitive, behavioral, and emotional techniques of schema therapy and Third-wave cognitive behavioral therapies such as acceptance and commitment-based therapy (ACT) reduced the fear of negative evaluation and fear of positive evaluation in people with social anxiety disorder. Therefore, contextual schema therapy can be suggested to clinical psychologists as an effective treatment for the cognitive components of social anxiety disorder, including fear of negative evaluation and fear of positive evaluation.

Author Contributions: In the present study, the first author was responsible for preparing and conducting the research plan, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the findings, and writing the content of the article. The second author (corresponding author) and the supervisor of the doctoral thesis, supervised the research process and revised and finalized the corrections of the article. The third author and advisor professor, has been responsible for providing guidance and pointing out the necessary tips on the research steps and editing the article.

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