Combined imaginal exposure and cognitive restructuring therapy is more effective than supportive counselling for treating post-traumatic stress disorder


Q For people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), does cognitive restructuring with prolonged imaginal exposure lead to greater symptom relief than imaginal exposure alone?

METHODS

Design: Randomised controlled trial.

Allocation: Concealed.

Blinding: Assessors blinded to treatment.

Follow up period: Six months.

Setting: Hospital PTSD unit, Sydney, Australia.

Patients: 58 people referred to PTSD unit after non-sexual assault or traffic accident, displaying PTSD (DSM-IV criteria) >3 months. Exclusions: history of psychosis, substance dependence, childhood sexual abuse, current suicidal ideation, or aged <17 or >60 years.

Intervention: Imaginal exposure; imaginal exposure plus cognitive restructuring, or supportive counselling for 8 weekly 90 minute sessions with daily homework.

Outcomes: PTSD symptoms assessed using clinician administered PTSD scale.

Patient follow up: 78%.

MAIN RESULTS

Imaginal exposure with cognitive restructuring significantly reduced PTSD symptoms compared with supportive counselling (p<0.05 at post-treatment and 6 months follow up; see web extra table 1). Imaginal exposure did not significantly reduce PTSD symptoms compared with supportive counselling alone.

CONCLUSIONS

Imaginal exposure with cognitive restructuring was more effective than supportive counselling for the treatment of PTSD.

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