Review: self-help interventions improve anxiety and mood disorders

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MAIN RESULTS

Fourteen RCTs (13 on bibliotherapy, one on a self-help group) met inclusion criteria. Studies were in people with mood disorders (nine RCTs), anxiety disorders (four RCTs), or both mood and anxiety disorders (one RCT). Self-help interventions had a greater effect on symptom measures than control at the end of treatment (16 comparisons, 490 people, treatment length 4–12 weeks; effect size difference 0.84, 95% CI 0.65 to 1.02; no significant heterogeneity). Self-help interventions also had a greater effect than control at the end of follow up, but there was significant heterogeneity among trials (five comparisons, 130 people, follow up at 8–37 weeks; effect size difference 0.76, 95% CI 0.09 to 1.42, heterogeneity reported as significant).

CONCLUSIONS

Self-help interventions (mainly bibliotherapy) are more effective than control treatments (placebo, waiting list, or usual treatment) for clinically significant emotional disorders (anxiety and mood disorders).

NOTES

The authors note that limitations of their study included the reliance on search of published meta-analyses to identify studies published before 1990. Most of the included RCTs were small, had poor or unclear allocation concealment methods, had short intervention periods, and did not blind assessors or conduct intention to treat analyses. Meta-analysis was not performed by type of self-help received or type of emotional disorder.