

Cognitive therapy compared with CBT for social anxiety disorder in adolescents: a feasibility study

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Declared competing interests of authors: David M Clark reports personal fees from the NHS outside the submitted work; he is also one of the authors of the cognitive model of social anxiety that CT-SAD-A (Cognitive Therapy for Social Anxiety Disorder in Adolescents) is based on, and he has also played a central role in developing the treatment.

Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published March 2021

DOI: 10.3310/hta25200

Plain English summary

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Health Technology Assessment 2021; Vol. 25: No. 20

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Why did we do this study?

People with social anxiety disorder (SAD) are scared of social situations because they fear embarrassment or humiliation. SAD usually starts at around 13 years of age, typically does not go away without treatment, and leads to personal and social difficulties. Clark and Wells' cognitive therapy for SAD in adults (CT-SAD) is a talking therapy that produces excellent outcomes. CT-SAD has not previously been adapted for or tested with adolescents.

What did we do?

We adapted CT-SAD so that it was suitable for adolescents (CT-SAD-A). We intended to compare this with current practice in child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). However, we were not able to complete the trial owing to a high staff turnover and a lack of young people with SAD coming into CAMHS. Instead, we examined outcomes for young people who received CT-SAD-A during the therapist training phase and explored the views of young people, their parents, the therapists and CAMHS managers about CT-SAD-A and the study.

What did we find?

Young people's outcomes were very promising; for example, 10 out of 12 participants reported a reliable improvement in social anxiety. The young people and their parents were generally positive about the treatment. Therapists were also positive about the treatment, but they and their managers found it difficult to implement the treatment within their CAMHS teams. The cost to the NHS to treat young people with SAD within this study compared favourably with the cost of treating adults.

What does this mean?

We need to be careful about drawing conclusions from a small sample size, but we suggest that further work is needed to ensure that CT-SAD-A can be delivered and tested in CAMHS. Alternatively, CT-SAD-A should be delivered and tested in community or school settings that can treat young people whose lives are held back by SAD.

Health Technology Assessment

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)

ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)

Impact factor: 3.370

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, the Cochrane Library and Clarivate Analytics Science Citation Index.

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 14/170/01. The contractual start date was in March 2016. The draft report began editorial review in November 2018 and was accepted for publication in April 2019. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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