Experiential avoidance and emotional dysregulation as therapeutic dimensions in Alcohol Use Disorder treatment: findings based on 3-months Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Training

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Abstract

Statement of the Problem: It was showed how Experiential Avoidance (EA) plays a role in several psychopathological disorders, such as Substance Use Disorders. Additionally, EA seems to be related to Emotional Dysregulation (ED), which is implicated in alcohol and substances use. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Skills Training (ST) showed promising results in treating several clinical conditions characterized by problematic behaviors related to ED, including Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). Consistent with the empirical research, this study aims to evaluate the improvement of EA and alcohol-related dimensions of ED (ARD-ED) during 3-month DBT-ST program. Further, we tested the mediating role of EA between ED and treatment outcomes. Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: We proposed an observational study including 110 AUD patients consecutively admitted to the treatment. We administered AAQ-II (EA measure), DERS (ED measure) and SPQ alcohol subscale (alcohol addiction severity [AAS] measure) at the beginning and at the end of treatment. Abstinence maintenance (consecutive days of abstinence [CDA]) was assessed by random weekly urinal toxicological screening. Data analysis was based on dependent *t*-test with a covariate (baseline level for each dimension), linear regression and mediational analysis based on computation of Sobel test for indirect effect (using bootstrap procedures). Findings: 86 patients concluded the program. EA, ARD-ED and AAS significantly improved during the program, independently of baseline levels. We demonstrated significant associations between EA, ARD-ED and AAS at the beginning and at the end of treatment. The improvement in EA partially mediated the relationship existing between pre-post change in DERS strategies/impulse levels and improvement of AAS during the treatment. Baseline levels of EA predicted the number of CDA at the end of treatment Significance: This is the first study which shows how DBT-ST might be effective in reducing EA levels in AUD patients. EA and ED might be considered relevant therapeutic dimensions in AUD treatment.

Recent Publications

1. Chawla N, Ostafin B (2007). Experiential avoidance as a functional dimensional approach to psychopathology: An empirical review. Journal of clinical psychology 63(9): 871-890.

2. Berking M, Margraf M, Ebert D, Wupperman P, Hofmann S G, Junghanns K (2011). Deficits in emotion-regulation skills predict alcohol use during and after cognitive–behavioral therapy for alcohol dependence. Journal of consulting and clinical psychology 79(3): 307-318

3. Fox H C, Hong K A, Sinha R (2008). Difficulties in emotion regulation and impulse control in recently abstinent alcoholics compared with social drinkers. Addictive behaviors 33(2): 388-394

4. Corbin W R, Farmer N M, Nolen-Hoekesma S (2013). Relations among stress, coping strategies, coping motives, alcohol consumption and related problems: A mediated moderation model. Addictive Behaviors 38(4): 1912-1919.

5. Chapman A L, Dixon-Gordon K L, Walters K N (2011). Experiential avoidance and emotion regulation in borderline personality disorder. Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy 29(1): 35-52.

6. Gross J J (1998). Antecedent-and response-focused emotion regulation: divergent consequences for experience, expression, and physiology. Journal of personality and social psychology 74(1): 224-237.

7. Valentine S E, Bankoff S M, Poulin R M, Reidler E B, Pantalone D W (2015). The use of dialectical behavior therapy skills training as stand-alone treatment: A systematic review of the treatment outcome literature. Journal of clinical psychology 71(1): 1-20.

8.Maffei C, Cavicchioli M, Movalli M, Cavallaro C, Fossati A (20/12/2016). Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Training in Alcohol Dependence Treatment: Findings Based on an Open Trial. Submitted to Cognitive and Behavioral Practice

Biography

Marco Cavicchioli has his expertise in study and evaluation of psychotherapeutic processes. Particularly, his interests are related to the explanation of underlying processes implicated in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) efficacy. In this context, he is studying the role of some dimensions strictly associated with DBT model, such as emotional dysregulation and mindfulness, as well as other aspects not primary implicated in DBT, such as experiential avoidance, motivation for change and group dynamics. Eventually, these fields of study are leading him in evaluating the efficacy of DBT in other clinical setting, especially in Substance Use Disorders treatment.