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THE ROLE OF GROUP TREATMENT FOR OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER

C. Zampetaki, C. Delimpalta, E. Varouchaki, A. Zampogiannis

Medical School, National and Capodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

Introduction: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is characterized by recurrent intrusive thoughts and/or repetitive behaviors carried out in a ritualistic fashion. Both obsessions and compulsions are ego-alien and produce anxiety if resisted. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) based on exposure and response prevention (ERP) and pharmacotherapy are currently the most popular choices of treatment.

Objective: Individual CBT/ERP with or without psychopharmacological treatment has been established as the treatment of choice for OCD, but group CBT/ERP has received little attention although it has been proposed as a cost-effective alternative. The aim of this paper is to explore its pros and cons.

Method: Review of the current literature.

Results: Group CBT/ERP appears to be equally effective as individual, although the latter has been associated with a more rapid rate of improvement. Both achieve similar reductions in anxiety and depressive symptoms and have similar dropout rates. Group therapy is also acceptable to most patients and saves time and money to both patients and doctors. It is not documented whether it achieves change of the same magnitude as the individual format of the respective treatment. Patients with more severe global symptoms are less likely to respond to the group format, therefore an attempt to reduce these symptoms prior to the treatment of OCD may be necessary.

Conclusion: Group treatment is an effective treatment for OCD in the long term, but more research needs to be done to compare the effectiveness of group and individual treatment formats.