



Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Addressing Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and Maladaptive Thinking in Black Individuals with the Disorder

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Abstract

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is a debilitating disorder that affects an estimated 2.7% of adult individuals in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). If left untreated GAD can lead to functional impairments in cognitive functions (i.e., attention and memory), as well as mindfulness and self-compassion (Hoge et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2015). The aim of this study was to test the hypothesis that cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is equal to or better than other treatment methods at improving maladaptive thinking and decreasing symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) in Black individuals who have experienced race-based oppression. To investigate the impacts of related GAD symptomatology as well as to determine the perceived effectiveness of CBT, a survey was distributed to 137 St. John's University undergraduate students. The goal of this capstone is to afford those at risk with the resources or opportunities to seek treatment, and an overwhelming majority of participants voted in favor of saying that CBT can positively impact those suffering from GAD because of their maladaptive thoughts, while also saying that resources should be made more readily available for therapy and mindfulness.

Research Question

Causing the Effectiveness of Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Addressing Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and Maladaptive Thinking in Individuals with the Disorder Within the Black Community

Introduction

CBT will address maladaptive thinking as well as GAD. CBT is a psychotherapeutic form of treatment that incorporates techniques from cognitive therapy and behavior therapy (American Psychological Association). This form of treatment is used under the assumption that cognitive, emotional, and behavioral variables are directly correlated or interrelated. Furthermore, treatment is purposed towards changing an individual's maladaptive thought processes and problematic behaviors through cognitive restructuring and behavioral techniques to achieve positive change (APA). CBT is a short-term form of treatment, occurring for 8 to 12 sessions, at a frequency of about once a week for 50-minute sessions. It is typically goal-oriented, where there is a collaborative relationship and effort between the client or patient and the therapist to work towards said goals (Shenfield, 2013). All in all, the findings from the literature review indicate and show a strong indication that Black individuals experiencing race-related stress are vulnerable or are at risk for GAD. Furthermore, that irrational thinking patterns is a mechanism that triggers or sustain the disorder. The proposed treatment study is supported by this empirically supported theoretical model, where maladaptive thoughts or negative thinking patterns are targets for treatment using CBT.

Background/Literature Review

Public Health Significance:

- According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is severe and ongoing anxiety and worry over an extended period and can be triggered by multiple different factors: including finances, school, or a traumatic event. GAD has a lifetime prevalence rate in adults ranging from 3.6 to 9.5% (Grant et al., 2005). In the past year, it was estimated that about 2.7% of US adults have GAD, although female prevalence is higher at 3.4% (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017).
- In a review by Revicki and colleagues (2012), it was determined that GAD is often not detected in primary care settings, meaning that many individuals who meet the criteria for GAD do not receive adequate care for their condition. If left untreated, GAD can result in a variety of consequences. GAD is known to affect health-related quality of life (Revicki et al., 2012). Life-threatening consequences (i.e., completed suicide) may also arise in GAD populations (Unick et al., 2009).
- Risk factors that may lead to the development of GAD include one's family environment and childhood maltreatment, domains of family history, childhood behavior, and adolescent self-esteem and personality traits (Moffitt et al., 2007). Black Americans who have experienced race-based systemic oppression are also at risk of developing GAD.

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GAD at School:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is one of the most common psychiatric disorders on college campuses and often goes unidentified and untreated (Kanuri et al., 2014). This study proposed a combined prevention and treatment model composed of evidence-based self-help and guided self-help interventions to address this issue. Data was collected from a population-based anxiety screening of college students. A primary model was developed to illustrate how increasing levels of symptomatology could be linked to prevention/treatment interventions. The study tested 2489 college students (mean age 19.1 years; 67% female); 8.0% (198/2489) met DSM-5 clinical criteria for GAD, in line with expected clinical rates for this population. Of the participants, 13.7% of students showed subthreshold anxiety symptoms, placing them at risk for potentially developing GAD (Kanuri et al., 2014).

Linking Race-Related Stress and GAD:

- A 2010 study done by Jose A. Soto and colleagues provides evidence in support of a vulnerability to develop GAD in Black individuals experiencing race-related stress. In this cross-sectional correlational study, the researchers examined the correlating factors between the experience of perceived racial discrimination and the lifetime prevalence of GAD in a sample of Black and White Individuals, who were categorized as African Americans, Afro Caribbeans, and non-Hispanic Whites (Soto et al., 2010).
- Ghafoori and her colleagues found that that in comparison to other racial groups, Black participants had significantly higher levels of trauma exposure. Although there were no significant discrepancies in symptom severity for GAD and PTSD found, significant differences were found between the Black and White groups in symptom severity resulting from Depression (Ghafoori et al., 2012).

The Link Between Maladaptive Thoughts and GAD

- Irrational thinking patterns are best described as a sort of maladaptive thought process where one tends to conceptualize things that perpetuate emotionally dysfunctional and behavioral consequences (i.e., demandingness, catastrophizing, low frustration tolerance, and self-downing) (Teran et al., 2020). Investigators have shown that irrational thinking patterns are linked to depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, and GAD and that it has had a positive correlation with procrastination, social isolation, self-harm, aggression, and violence (Szentagotai & Jones, 2010; Teran et al., 2020).

The Link Between Race-Related Stress and Maladaptive Thoughts

- In addition to the other connections, there is an established connection between race-related stress and irrational thinking patterns. A 2020 study by Vincenzo G. Teran and colleagues, shows exactly that. In this cross-sectional study, the investigators studied irrational thinking patterns across a racially and ethnically diverse United States university sample and its relationship with psychological distress (Teran et al., 2020). The investigators found that irrational thinking patterns were shown to have strong associations with psychological conditions, and that race also affects this interaction. Furthermore, they found that race was found to influence the relationship between socio-demographics with psychological distress. While finding that higher levels of irrational thinking were formed when concerning non-white individuals and the need for success, it is also to be noted that there was a direct relationship between darker skin with depression and social stress (Teran et al., 2020).

Methods:

- To investigate the impacts of related GAD symptomatology as well as to determine the perceived effectiveness of CBT a survey was distributed to 137 St. John's University undergraduate students.

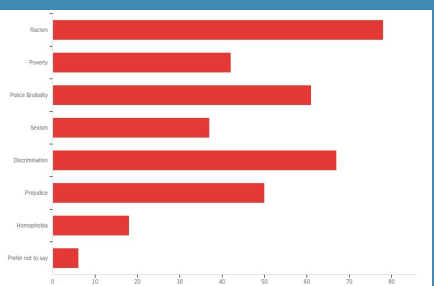
Results:

- Approximately two thirds of participants (67.7%), voted in favor of saying that CBT can positively impact those suffering from GAD because of their maladaptive thoughts, while an overwhelming majority of participants (83.4%) voted saying that resources should be made more readily available for therapy and mindfulness.

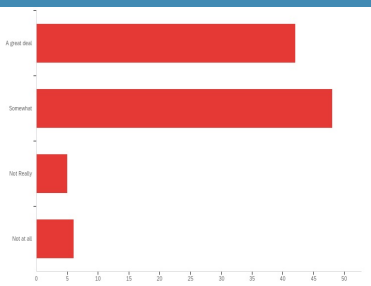
Discussion:

- The results of my study indicate that there should be workshops, and psycho educational discussion groups that can discussing the impacts of maladaptive thoughts on maintaining or triggering GAD.

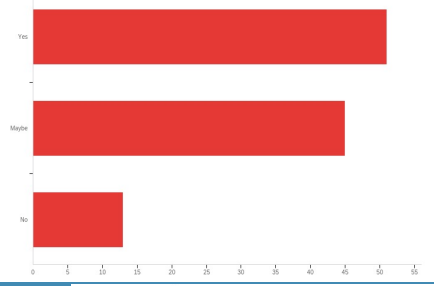
Would you say any of the following things throughout this past year have impacted your thought process in any facet? (select all that apply)



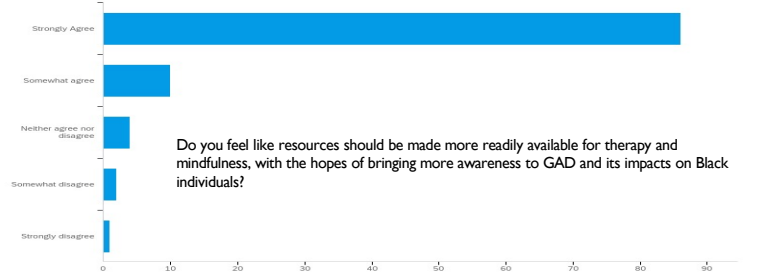
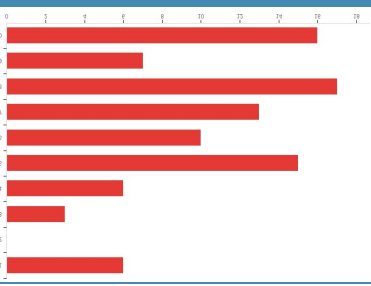
If you responded yes to the previous question, how much would you say it impacted you and your thought processes?



Would you argue that Maladaptive thought could potentially be increasing your anxiety levels?



After reading how CBT can positively impact GAD, would you say that it could positively impact those suffering from GAD because of their maladaptive thoughts? (1-10: 1 - Strongly Disagree, 10 - Strongly Agree, 5 – no



Do you feel like resources should be made more readily available for therapy and mindfulness, with the hopes of bringing more awareness to GAD and its impacts on Black individuals?