Positive Effects of a Brief Online Program for Social Anxiety in a Real-World Setting

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Introduction

• More than 1 in 10 suffer from symptoms of social anxiety each year [1].
• Less than 1 in 4 get help for their symptoms [2].
• Barriers to getting help may include stigmatization, limited access to health care resources, and the cost of care [3].
• We developed a free-for-all brief online program to help the socially anxious.

Methods

• The web-based program consisted of 5 sessions including 10 interactive exercises based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy [4].
• 213 community users rated their mood before and after each session using a 9-point scale, and 41 users rated their social anxiety before and at the end of the program with MINI-SPIN [5].
• Sessions longer than 30 minutes were excluded as outliers, leaving 95% of the original data.

Results

Mood (1-9) was more positive after sessions than before them, t(203)=6.16, p<.001, and symptoms of social anxiety were reduced after the program, t(40)=5.78, p<.001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Mood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>psychoeducation, mindfulness</td>
<td>8 min 32 s ± 23 s</td>
<td>+0.5 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>thinking, cognitive defusion</td>
<td>10 min 44 s ± 38 s</td>
<td>+0.2 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>social interaction, contact w/ present</td>
<td>10 min 46 s ± 52 s</td>
<td>+0.2 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>self-esteem, acceptance</td>
<td>8 min 54 s ± 46 s</td>
<td>+0.3 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>values, committed action</td>
<td>10 min 14 s ± 59 s</td>
<td>+0.3 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean ± S.E.M. for length of each session and change in mood rating.

Discussion

• Symptoms of social anxiety were reduced after five ACT-based, 10-minute sessions.
• Users gave positive feedback about the ACT-based approach, the clarity of the exercises, and the appropriate amount of content per session.
• Users said that they would like to get peer support and more content. We are extending our service with new exercises and ways to share experiences.
• We aim to uncover the reasons for attrition and non-adherence, and increase user engagement.

References


Acknowledgements

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We thank all our users for their usage data and feedback, which allow us to learn and improve our digital services.

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