

A Critical Evaluation of Distraction-Based Coping as a Psychosocial Intervention for Individuals Living with Cancer

NAME OF STUDENT | BSc in Psychology | Centre for Psychology and Counselling

Background

- A distraction-based coping intervention via a leaflet for women waiting for genetic risk assessment results (Phelps et al., 2006)
- The waiting period is reported to be a distressing period however research is lacking in this area (Fry et al., 2003)
- No trials of testing the effectiveness of “self-help” written distraction technique were reported during the time (Phelps et al., 2006)
- Investigates women’s reaction to their referral for cancer genetic risk
- Study 1: Focus group study with 15 females (31-62 years old) (Phelps et al., 2006)
- Study 2: Randomised control trial including 162 referrals in Cardiff area for genetic risk of breast and/or ovarian cancer (Bennett et al., 2007)

Methodological Critique

Study 1

- **Strengths**
 - Focus groups were suitable due to minimal research in this area which allowed rich descriptive information on the topic
 - Uncovers new ideas or findings
 - Allows researcher to observe more than verbal responses
- **Limitations**
 - Findings may not be generalised to a wider population
 - Participants may not have expressed honest opinions
 - Responses were subjective therefore hard to determine before and after effects

Study 2

- **Strengths**
 - Used a control group which provided clear distinction on the impact of the leaflet making causal inferences
 - Minimal bias due to randomisation
 - Randomised controlled trials provide reliable evidence on the effectiveness of interventions
- **Limitations**
 - Difficult to assess how much the leaflet alleviated their distress due to confounding variables
 - Does not outline the effectiveness of the study in the long-term impact
 - Sample minimises generalisability

Count to 50 and picture the numbers

Distraction strategies may differ for individuals throughout the day

Theory-based Intervention

Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping
(Folkman & Lazarus, 1988)

Coping: A phenomenon which involves cognitive and behavioural responses that individuals use to manage internal or external stressors perceived to exceed their personal resources

Leaflet: Distraction-based coping leaflet was developed specifically for the waiting period. Leaflet provided a wide range of suggestions for distraction activities

Purpose: To involve active distraction from unwanted intrusive thoughts which is known to significantly reduce physical and psychological distress (Diette et al., 2003)

Development & Evaluation of Intervention

Study 1

- Focus groups which met twice
- The first discussed participants experiences of referral. The second focused on their reactions to the coping leaflet
- Thematically analysed
- **Findings:** Findings: Most women used distraction techniques and found it helpful to control their worries. Some found certain strategies to be time specific. The leaflet was reassuring. However some wondered if they should be worrying more upon reading

Study 2

- Quantitative study using questionnaires
- Participants carried out postal questionnaire (Impact of Event Scale) upon referral (baseline) and after referral
- **Findings:** Results showed no significant reduction in distress in all women. A significant reduction of distress seen for those with high levels of baseline stress. No gains were shown in control group The findings suggest that the intervention is appropriate for individuals experiencing distress
- No rebound anxiety effect from avoidance thinking

Different activities work differently for everyone

Impact

Strengths of Intervention

- The findings have proven the intervention to be effective for individuals experiencing high levels of distress during the waiting period.
- Low-cost self-help effective coping intervention which hold minimal risks

Limitation of Intervention

- Could trigger an anxiety distress that may not have been priorly experienced
- Distraction may lead to lack of absorption of important information
- May be misunderstood as ignoring important information if not understood properly

Proof of effectiveness (Phelps et al., 2013)

- Individuals with moderate baseline levels of intrusion showed reduced levels of intrusion ($p=0.03$)
- Low and moderate intrusive baselines reduced levels of intrusion compared to control group ($p=0.04$, $p=0.03$)
- Participants with high baseline were more likely to remain in the study

Future recommendations

- Incorporating Interactive Software Programmes which contain distraction strategies suggested by the leaflet (Crafoord et al., 2020)