

A critical consideration of a self-help coping psychosocial intervention, designed to reduce distress when awaiting cancer genetic risk information.

The transactional theory of stress and coping (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). Stress is created by "transactions" between the individual and their environment. With this theory in mind the researchers were able to identify the *environmental demands (Awaiting Genetic Testing Results)* and look to provide an adequate *resources for coping (Intervention – distractions)* > Providing additional resources can allow for the reappraisal of a situation and allow coping with *environmental demands*. The intervention provided individuals with short term distraction based *copng* techniques; internal (counting to 50) and external (physical exercise).

Background

Genetic testing is used to estimate an individual's chances of developing cancer within their life-time. This can include inherited cancers such as breast and bowel cancer which are currently the most common inheritable cancer in the UK. Genetic testing has proven to be cost effective and has shown consistent growth across many different demographics (Wedderburn & McVeigh, 2021). As of 2006 it is known that while literature shows that some people experience distress due to genetic testing there has been very little done to intervene and aid coping (Phelps et al., 2006).

Development

2001-2002 (Phelps et al., 2006).

Phase I- Preliminary study for intervention as information on genetic testing interventions was limited.

- If there is a need for the intervention.
- What are the needs of the target group (coping, reassurances etc.)
- Appropriate format (leaflet) vs support group.
- Coping tools (distractions) would personally be useful and/or beneficial to others.

Phase II - Investigates the psychological impact of the intervention.
 Final leaflet – administered to public.
 2003 (Bennet et al., 2007).

Results!

Women with high levels of distress saw lower levels upon follow up.
 Otherwise, no significance different between two groups > low self reported distress.

Phase III

2007-08 (Phelps et al., 2013)

- Included a 3rd stage- IES after the result of genetic testing.
- Men and women participants. 86.9% Female.
- Intervention reduced intrusive thoughts (moderate) and lower distress (low to moderate) intrusive worries.
- Did not reduce intrusive thought in those with high levels of distress. Intervention showed no negative effect after 1 month.
- follow ups linked to high Avoidance and could lead to future avoidance of genetic testing referrals.

Self-help coping leaflet

Methodology

Phase I- (Phelps et al., 2006).

Focus groups (Qualitative data).
 Participants – 15 women from CGSW
 First focus group – Current feelings, needs and coping responses (Deficits also).
 Leaflet produced and given to participants.
 Second focus group – Discussion about the effectiveness of the leaflet and the suggested coping skills.

Results

Positively received by participants. Suggestions were taken into consideration for final leaflet.

Theory Into Practice

Methodology

Phase II (Bennet et al., 2007).

Postal survey (quantitative) RCT
 Participants – 162 women from CGSW for risk of breast and/or ovarian cancer.
 Intervention group - IES (baseline) > Intervention (4-6 weeks) > IES (follow up).
 Control Group – IES > No interventions (4-6 weeks) > IES
 99 participants info included in follow up.
Critique:

- Postage process - Drop out rate – avoidance.
- Both target's women again... Breast and ovarian.
- Ovarian cancer worries unique? More specialized care is needed due to psychological impact (Howell et al., 2003).

Impact of Event Scale (Horowitz et al. 1979).

>95% read leaflet at least once?

Impact

2001-2021

The research

- Those with high distress levels are less likely to follow through with study participation.
- These trials reported that higher distress is less common (¼) Which supports more recent literature....
- Those who are more vulnerable to distressed are those with contributing factors such as; prior cancer diagnosis and prior affective issues (Di Mattei et al., 2018), a lack of genetic knowledge or low socioeconomic status (Lumish, 2017).

Conclusion.... Did it work.... Could it work?

- ✓ Distraction > Reduced intrusive thoughts > Reduce distress
- ✓ Could potentially have helped more than just those who used the intervention by adding to literature on distressed cause by genetic testing.
- ✓ Identified high risk individuals with high avoidance tactics.
- ✓ Helps some and harms no one.
- Low cost and easily distributed?
- Health information seeking has moved online and does help with anxiety (Brown et al., 2020). Webpage? App? PDF? Email?
- 2021 adaptation to be more specialised (stand out) For women? For men?