Benzodiazepines and their Effects on Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

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Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a severe anxiety disorder that may form in individuals after exposure to trauma. It can have debilitating effects, including flashbacks or nightmares, avoidance of associated stimuli, hyperarousal, or sleep disturbances (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994). Approximately 70% of individuals with PTSD suffer from sleep impairment (Ohayon & Shapiro, 2000). Such sleep impairment includes increases in sleep onset latency, lower sleep efficiency, and decreased total sleep time (Babson & Feldner, 2010; Yerkin, Aydin, & Orzen, 2010). These can severely affect daytime functioning. Most individuals are prescribed benzodiazepines to alleviate symptoms.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

- **Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT).** Individuals undergoing CPT (Resick & Schnicke, 1993) learn to identify the relationships among the events, thoughts, and emotions associated with the trauma(s), and then their beliefs of the trauma are challenged with questions regarding their perceptions.

- **Prolonged Exposure (PE).** Individuals who undergo PE (Foa, Hearst, Danu, Hembree, & Jaycox, 1994) are educated about PTSD. They also engage in behavioral exposure to reduce avoidance and negative emotional responses.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that benzodiazepines inversely affect the outcomes of cognitive-processing therapy and prolonged exposure.

Method

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups that included cognitive-processing therapy (CPT), prolonged exposure (PE), and a minimal attention (MA) condition (Resick et al., 2002). Treatments continued for six weeks, and then those in MA were randomly assigned to either CPT or PE. Treatments were conducted twice each week for a total of 13 hours of treatment. A follow-up was completed for each participant after 3 months.

Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using correlations to determine if there are any statistically significant associations between the type and/or amount of benzodiazepines used and the individuals’ respective PTSD scores.

References


