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Online psychotherapy in times of COVID-19: professional's experience

A. Jambrosic Sakoman^{1*}, T. Jendricko², I. Zegura^{1,2}, M. Skelin¹ and P. Brecic³

¹Department Of Psychotic Disorders, University Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče, Zagreb, Croatia; ²Department Of Psychotherapy S, University Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče, Zagreb, Croatia and ³Department For Affective Disorders, University Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče, Zagreb, Croatia

*Corresponding author.

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Introduction: The global pandemic of corona virus has brought on the imperative of swift organisational changes within mental health care institutions. Outpatient psychiatric care system with all its complex features was organized online. Patient's adjustment to different modality of treatment, and their benefit, was of our primary concern. Mental health professionals had many challenges in this process as well. Couple of months into providing this form of treatment, we were interested in therapist experience.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to highlight challenges faced by the various mental health professionals that were a part of interdisciplinary team at University Psychiatric Hospital Vrapče.

Methods: We used self-assessment scales to assess mental health professionals experience and to recognize some of the possible difficulties in this process. We have examined satisfaction with available technology, suitability of different psychotherapeutic background when providing online treatment, therapists competencies for this kind of treatment and levels of perceived stress. Mental health treatment comprised individual and group approach, and was provided by interdisciplinary teams of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, social pedagogues, psychiatric nurses, and work therapists.

Results: The results show differences between professional's psychotherapy background, educational level and previous experience in perceived efficiency and experienced stress in the process of providing online treatment.

Conclusions: The findings of this study have proven that professionals perceive technical, organisational standards, previous experience, and education to be important for their efficiency. This should be taken into account when developing standards in online treatment within mental health institutions.

Conflict of interest: No significant relationships.

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Diagnosis moderates the relationship between anxiety and digital communications in bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder: A naturalistic remote-monitoring study

G. Gillett*, N. McGowan, N. Palmius, A. Bilderbeck, G. Goodwin and K. Saunders

Department Of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author.

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Introduction: Differences in the relationship between mood and digital communication metrics have been shown to act as a diagnostic marker in Bipolar Disorder (BD) and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Anxiety has been associated with mobile-phone use in non-clinical populations, although a potential association between anxiety and digital communications in BD or BPD populations hasn't been studied.

Objectives: To explore the association between self-reported anxiety symptoms and objective, naturalistic digital communications metrics in BD and BPD participants.

Methods: BD (n= 17) and BPD (n=17) cohorts were provided with a smartphone application which monitored phone call and SMS frequency and duration, alongside weekly self-reported anxiety (Generalised Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale). Linear mixed-effects regression models assessed the association between digital communications, anxiety state and interaction effects between anxiety and diagnosis.

Results: Self-reported anxiety state was negatively associated with decreased total call frequency (B=-5.150, p=0.002), cumulative total call duration (seconds; B=-1456.779, p<0.001), cumulative outgoing call duration (seconds; B=-1108.23, p<0.001), total SMS frequency (B=-31.412, p<0.001), outgoing SMS frequency (B=-16.443, p<0.001), cumulative total SMS length (characters; B=-1664.78, p=0.001) and cumulative outgoing SMS length (characters; B=-857.770, p=0.005) for BD, but not BPD, participants. Associations remained significant after adjusting for mood.

Conclusions: These results further suggest that BPD individuals, compared to BD individuals, exhibit persistent social interaction during mental distress. Together with previous findings, this effect appears to be common, but independent, for both self-reported anxiety and depression. These findings inform our understanding of the psychopathology of the two conditions, and may contribute to the development of tools to aid their diagnostic differentiation.

Conflict of interest: Prof Goodwin is a NIHR Emeritus Senior Investigator, holds shares in P1vital and P1Vital products and has served as consultant, advisor or CME speaker in the last 3 years for Compass pathways, Evapharm, Janssen, Lundbeck, Medscape, P1Vital, Sage, Servier.

Keywords: Digital phenotyping; bipolar disorder; Borderline personality disorder; Anxiety

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Effectiveness of internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy for binge eating disorder

E. Jensen*, J. Linnet, T. Holmberg, K. Tarp and J. Nielsen

Research Unit For Telepsychiatry And Emental Health, Centre for Telepsychiatry, Odense C, Denmark

*Corresponding author.

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Introduction: Binge eating disorder (BED) is the most prevalent specific eating disorder. It is characterized by recurrent episodes of binge eating and is associated with feelings of shame and a lack of control. Internet-based treatments are gaining increasing attention as a way to reach more patients with evidence based treatments. In 2020 we conducted a preliminary analysis on the effectiveness of an internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy treatment project (Jensen ES, Linnet, J, Holmberg TT, Tarp K, Nielsen JH,