


TEO: An Online Emotional Therapy System to Apply Homework Assignments in the Treatment of Adjustment Disorders

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Abstract

Adjustment Disorders (AD) are a very important public health problem. Regarding its treatment, only a series of general guidelines are available. Our research team has developed a cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT) supported by Virtual Reality (VR) that has shown its utility in the treatment of AD. A CBT approach gives a crucial role to homework assignments. So far, studies that use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for psychological treatments have been centered on how to use the technologies to deliver treatment within the therapeutic context. No study is available in the literature that uses ICT to apply homework assignments. Therefore, in the present work we pretend to go one step beyond and join the use of the VR EMMA system within the therapy sessions, with the use of other ICT to apply homework assignments between sessions in the treatment of AD. TEO is a completely open Online Emotional Therapy system based on Web technology that allows, in a simple and effective way, to create personalized therapeutic material to present to the patient over the Internet. The aim of the present work is to describe the TEO system and the study that is being conducted to test its efficacy and efficiency.

Keywords: Cognitive-behavioral Treatment, Online Therapy, Internet, Homework Assignments, Adjustment Disorder

Introduction

The diagnosis of Adjustment Disorders (AD) is very popular among clinicians [1] and is an important public health problem [2]. However, regarding its treatment, only a series of general guidelines are available [3]. Our research team has developed a cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT) which is supported by Virtual Reality (VR) and also includes positive psychology strategies [4]. Preliminary data about its utility is already available [5].

A CBT approach gives a crucial role to homework assignments from the very beginning. However, studies so far that use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for psychological treatments have been centered on how to use the technologies to deliver treatment within the therapeutic context. This is the case for EMMA, the VR system used in the aforementioned studies. EMMA is a VR adaptive display that adapts its presentation to the patient’s therapeutic needs, with the main objective of reflecting and evoking emotional responses in them to allow emotional processing to occur.

As far as we know, there is no study that uses ICT to apply homework assignments. Therefore, in the present work we pretend to go one step beyond, and combine the use of the VR EMMA system within the therapy sessions in the consulting room (which has already showed its utility), with the use of other ICT to apply homework assignments in the treatment of AD. It implies the transfer of ICT to the patient’s home – the homework the patient has to do between
sessions is also important. TEO is a completely open Online Emotional Therapy system base on Web technology that allows, in a simple and effective way, to create personalized therapeutic material to present to the patient over the Internet (http://www.psicologiaytecnologia.es /teo). The aim of the present work is to describe the TEO system and the study that is being conducted to test its efficacy.

**Method**

In order to compare the differential efficacy and efficiency of two different ways of applying homework assignments in the treatment of AD, a between group study with two experimental conductions will be use: 1) Homework assignments using the TEO system and; 2) Homework assignments in the traditional way (material reading and writing tasks). Participants will be randomly assigned to each of the experimental conditions. The assessment protocol will include different efficacy outcome measures (therapeutic goals, AD specific questionnaires, interference measures) and satisfaction with the treatment measures.

**Results**

Work in progress.

**Conclusion**

This is the first time that a homework assignments component that can be completely self-administered over the Internet has been developed. TEO will permit the creation and administration of assessment and treatment protocols to be completely personalized; each session will be adapted to the patient’s needs. Furthermore, because it is based on the Web it will increase the possibilities for therapy – it can be used in blended mode (complementing the therapy), or in tele-assistance mode (being the own self-administered therapy).

**References**


