

Patients' expectations and satisfaction towards an Internet-based treatment for flying phobia: preliminary data

Daniel CAMPOS^a, Soledad QUERO^{a,b1}, Juana BRETÓN-LÓPEZ^{a,b}, Carla SOLER^a, Sonia MOR^a & Cristina BOTELLA^{a,b}

^aUniversitat Jaume I (Castellón, Spain).

^bCIBER de Fisiopatología de la Obesidad y Nutrición (CIBEROBN)

Abstract. The treatment of choice for specific phobias is *in vivo exposure*. Despite the proven efficacy of this technique, it is linked to a number of limitations in its acceptance. Information and Communication Technologies (i.e., computer-assisted exposure programs and Internet) could help to overcome these issues. However, to our knowledge, no other studies investigate the acceptability of an Internet-based treatment for Flying Phobia. The aim of this work is to offer data about the patients' expectations and satisfaction towards *NO-FEAR Airlines* in a pilot study. The sample was composed by four participants residents in Spain (N=3) and Colombia (N=1). Participants completed the Treatment Expectation-Satisfaction Questionnaire, reporting high expectations (M=8.7; SD=.85) and satisfaction (M=9.4; SD=.44) about the treatment. In conclusion, *NO-FEAR Airlines* was a well accepted Internet-based Treatment for FP.

Keywords. Specific phobia, Flying Phobia, Acceptability, Computer-Assisted Exposure, Internet based therapy

1. Introduction

Flying Phobia (FP) is a common and disabling disorder, resulting in a profound impact on professional, social and family life [1]. The treatment of choice for specific phobias is *in vivo exposure* showing its efficacy in several studies [2]. Despite the proven efficacy of this technique, it is not used extensively among therapists. Some authors have raised ethical concerns about the safety, tolerability, and indeed humaneness of exposure therapy [3]. Moreover, approximately 20-25% of patients reject *in vivo exposure* because they consider it too aversive [4]. Thus, *in vivo exposure* is linked to a number of limitations in its acceptance among therapists and patients.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) could help to overcome these issues. Specifically, the use of computer-assisted exposure programs is an effective and highly recommended alternative for FP [5]. Furthermore, the Internet is a useful tool for providing these effective psychological treatments in a wide range of psychological disorders and psychiatric conditions [6].

¹ Corresponding author, squero@psb.uji.es

¹ Corresponding author, squero@psb.uji.es

However, to our knowledge, no other studies investigate the acceptability of an Internet-based treatment for FP. The aim of this work is to offer data about the patients' expectations and satisfaction towards an Internet-based treatment for Flying Phobia called *NO-FEAR Airlines* in a pilot study.

2.Method

2.1. Participants

The sample was composed by four participants (3 women and 1 man) with a mean age of 34.5 (SD=11.1) residents in Spain (N=3) and Colombia (N=1). All participants fulfilled the Diagnostic and Statistical manual for Mental Health Disorders-Version 5 (DSM-5) criteria for specific phobia (FP).

2.2.Measures

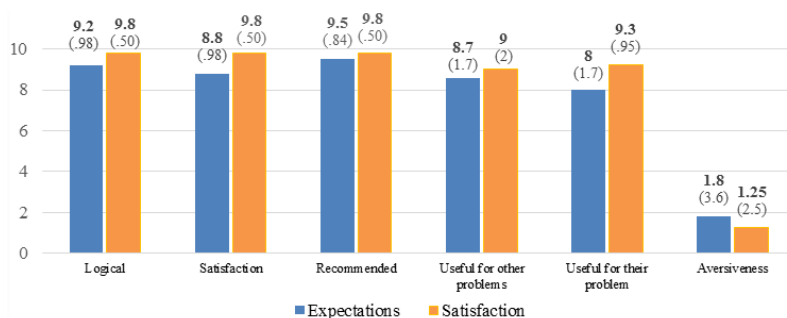
Treatment Expectation-Satisfaction Questionnaire [7] measures the participants' expectations about the treatment they will receive and their satisfaction at the end. It includes a 6-item scale ranging from 0 ("not at all") to 10 ("very much") about: 1) how logical the treatment seemed, 2) to what extent it could satisfy the patient, 3) whether the patient would recommend the treatment to others, 4) whether it would be useful in treating other problems, 5) the treatment usefulness for the patient's problem and, 6) to what extent it could be aversive. The participants answered these questions before the treatment and after receiving a brief explanation about the treatment rationale and the exposure component. After the treatment, they filled in the same questions.

2.3. NO-FEAR Airlines

NO-FEAR Airlines is a self-applied program via the Internet that allows people with FP to be exposed to images and sounds related to their phobic fears [8].

The treatment protocol comprises 3 therapeutic components: 1) *Psychoeducation* related to FP; 2) *Exposure* to 6 scenarios composed by real sounds and images (travel preparations, airport, boarding and taking off, central part of the flight, landing, plane crashes news) and; 3) *Overlearning*, the same exposure scenarios with greater difficulty (i.e., turbulences effect).

2.4. Procedure



All participants completed the screening and pre-treatment assessment via telephone. Then, all of them completed the *NO-FEAR Airlines* self-applied treatment via the Internet. The duration of the treatment varied according to the rate of each participant with a maximum of six weeks. Post-treatment assessment was applied through the Internet and telephone, including the satisfaction measure.

Results

All participants reported high expectations ($M=8.7$; $SD=.85$) and satisfaction ($M=9.4$; $SD=.44$) about the treatment (Figure 1). Regarding *aversiveness*, results showed low mean scores.

Figure 1. Means and standard deviations of participants' expectations and satisfaction towards *NO-FEAR Airlines*

3. Discussion

NO-FEAR Airlines was a well-accepted Internet-based Treatment for FP. The data obtained suggests that *NO-FEAR Airlines* can be a less aversive and more accepted exposure treatment alternative that could help us to reduce the limitations of the traditional *in vivo* exposure therapy, such as the low acceptance on the part of the patients. More studies are needed to confirm these preliminary and promising results in order to promote the dissemination of evidence-based treatments.

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