Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Ethnic Minority Groups:

A Review of Outcome Research

Letter of Intent

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This letter of intent titled “Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Ethnic Minority Groups: A Review of Outcome Research” proposes a literature review to examine the extent to which cognitive-behavioral therapy has received both quantitative and qualitative support in the therapeutic treatment of members of ethnic minority groups as well as to determine whether some ethnic minority gain greater benefits from the treatment than others. The implications of this literature review are to inform and improve the application of cognitive-behavioral therapy for the treatment of members of ethnic minorities.

Overview

Problem Statement

A review of recent and relevant literature conducted by the author, as provided below, displays that there is little empirical evidence illustrating the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) in the treatment of individuals from ethnic minority groups. Therefore, a more comprehensive review including quantitative research and qualitative research is necessary to determine the extent to which CBT has received support for its application with diverse populations.

Rationale

As Western society is becoming increasingly diverse, the challenge of meeting psychological health needs requires increased attention. Many research studies have provided empirical support for the efficacy of CBT in the general population for the treatment of depression, phobic disorders, anxiety, and more recently post traumatic stress disorder (Blanchard et al., 2004; Cohen, Mannarino, & Knudsen, 2005; Corsini & Wedding, 2000). However, many of these studies included only white, middle-class participants. Very little CBT research has been conducted with diverse populations, thereby causing little to be known about
the efficacy of CBT with members of ethnic minority groups. In fact, as recently as 1988, Casas (1988) conducted a literature review of psychological abstracts that included studies that were conducted within the prior 20 years, searching for studies that focused on cognitive-behavioral treatments of anxiety in people of racial or ethnic minority groups. Casas found only three empirically based outcome studies that included ethnic minority participants, and two of these studies included only two ethnic minority persons in each of their samples. Therefore, a more recent and comprehensive literature review is needed to determine whether recent research has included and/or has had a sole focus on members of minority populations to determine the efficacy of CBT with members from these diverse populations.

Many counselling theories that are utilized today have originated from a Eurocentric view with individualistic and agentic values underlying the approaches (Hays, 1995). Human agency refers to the capacity for humans to make choices and to impose those choices on the world, which occurs in contrast to natural forces and the will of God (Wikipedia, 2005). These Western beliefs and/or freedoms are not an understood or accepted human value for all cultures. Thereby, illustrating that the underlying values infused in Western counselling interventions may not meet the needs of our changing population and may in fact lead to more harm than good.

Over the last decade immigration numbers have been on the rise. In fact, Ibrahim (1991) claimed that “a century from now, the population of the United States will be closer to the world balance: 57% Asian, 26% White, 7% Black, and 10% people of Hispanic origin” (p. 13); and “the total population of Canada’s visible minority population is expected to reach 20% of the adult population and 25% of children by the year 2016” (McDougall & Arthur, 2001, p. 123). Increasing immigration and the growth of ethnic minority groups are producing changes in the acceptability of Eurocentric counselling practices. Many cultures do not support, understand, or
recognize European/American counselling methods because of conflicting covert and/or overt cultural values represented by the intervention and/or the ethnic minority client. Therefore, this change in the overall structure of the population suggests the need to increase our awareness to diversity and alter the structure and application of therapeutic interventions utilized with members of ethnic minority groups.

Although “ethnic minorities make up nearly 25% of the United States population, the percentage of ethnic minority psychologists in practice is estimated at 5.1% or less” (Hammond & Yung, 1993, p. 4). Hays (1995) stated as well that “although the representation of people of color in cognitive-behavioral practice has yet to be assessed, a look at the literature suggests that cognitive-behavioral therapy as a field is similarly dominated by Euro-American perspectives” (p. 311). Therefore, the underlying philosophies that guide cognitive-behavioral therapy may not have been thoroughly examined and consequentially, may not be appropriate or beneficial for certain diverse populations.

Literature that has focused on diversity and the effects of psychotherapy suggested that therapeutic treatments may be affected by many cultural factors, such as ethnic match for some groups (Kim, Ng, & Ahn, 2005), client expectations (Fischer, Jome, & Atkinson, 1998), shared worldview (Frank & Frank, 1991; Torrey, 1986), communication styles (Sue & Sue, 1999), culturally responsive forms of treatment (Hays, 1995), degree of acculturation (Atkinson, Kim, & Caldwell, 1998; Sue & Sue, 2003), and the training of therapists to work with ethnic minority groups (Sue & Sue, 2003). Therefore, controversy over the need for supported treatments for ethnic minorities is looming as there is increasing recognition that diverse clientele may achieve greater gains from culturally sensitive psychotherapy services. If such culturally sensitive therapies are not developed and implemented into the counselling practice, members of ethnic
minority groups may not seek counselling services, may have high attrition rates, and/or may even be harmed by these Western value-laden interventions.

Reference to Literature

The author conducted a literature review to determine whether there was any current and available research that would help to determine the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral treatment approaches for members of ethnic groups and uncovered 19 outcome studies that included members of ethnic minorities. The outcome studies included participants from various ethnic minority groups including Chinese, Asian American, Puerto-Rican, Hispanic/Latino, Iranian, African American, Cambodian refugees, and Armenian children (Arroya, Miller, & Tonigan, 2003; Carter, Sbrocco, Gore, Watt Marin, & Lewis, 2003; Chan et al., 2005; Dai et al., 1999; Fu Keung Wong, Yu Kit Sun, Tse, & Wong, 2002; Gil, Wagner, & Tubman, 2004; Goenjian et al., 1997; Jaberghaderi et al., 2004; Kataoka et al., 2003; Kubany et al., 2004; Markowitz, Spielman, Sullivan, & Fishman, 2000; Miranda et al., 2003a; Miranda, Azocar, Organista, Dwyer, & Arcane, 2003b; Organista, Munoz, & Gonzalez, 1994; Otto et al., 2003; Rosello, & Bernal, 1999; Schneiderman et al., 2004; Silverman et al., 1999a, b; as cited in Pina, Silverman, Fuentes, Kurtines, & Weems, 2003; Zlotnick, Najavits, Rohsenow, & Johnson, 2003).

The author will conduct a critical analysis of these studies, with reference to the evaluation guidelines outlined in Mertens (1998) for analyzing experimental and quasi-experimental research, to determine the level of empiricism applied throughout the research. The research studies will then be categorized into well-controlled, medium-controlled, and low controlled groups and will include both quantitative and qualitative studies. The findings from these 19 studies, along with any newly surfacing studies, will be analyzed and synthesized to determine the efficacy of CBT with members from the said minority groups and highlight which
ethnic minority groups are more likely to benefit from cognitive-behavioral therapy as a treatment intervention and which may benefit more from different therapeutic interventions. 

Method of Procedures

This literature review will be conducted on the basis of the following descriptive research question: To what extent has CBT received quantitative and qualitative support with members of ethnic minority groups? A brief description of CBT will be included, followed by an overview of recent literature regarding the relationship of CBT to client diversity. A review of how the evaluation of counselling and counselling interventions is conducted as well as literature regarding efficacy research conducted with diverse clientele will be included. Research will include a review of secondary sources to obtain a comprehensive overview of what is known about CBT and ethnic minority groups. An extensive literature search, utilizing and consulting databases such as PsychInfo, EBSCOhost, and OVID, augmented by findings from the World Wide Web, bibliographies of secondary sources, and personal networks, including peers and colleagues who are currently working in the field of CBT or who have completed related work, will be performed to select primary research studies conducted within the last ten years that apply the terms “cognitive behavioral therapy” in conjunction with “ethnic”, “culture”, “multicultural” “minority” and “diverse” to determine the extent to which CBT has received qualitative and/or quantitative support regarding the effectiveness of this approach with individuals from ethnic minority groups. The primary research articles will then be evaluated and analyzed with reference to Mertens’ (1998) guidelines for evaluating qualitative and quantitative research, and the results will be synthesized to provide a conclusion to the research question guiding the literature review. This synthesis will also help to illustrate and guide the development of future research.
Implications

The increased diversity in North America and the recent rise in the acceptability and application of CBT make the information elicited from this literature review invaluable. The conclusions of this review could serve many purposes. First, the findings will help to highlight the need for more culturally sensitive research into the applicability of other therapeutic techniques for the treatment of members of ethnic minority groups. Second, the findings may emphasize the importance of implementing specific educational curriculum into counselling programs that focuses on teaching culturally sensitive interventions. Third, these conclusions will help to educate students and counsellors on the extent to which CBT has received support in the treatment of members of ethnic minority groups. This information will help to guide counsellors through their decision making processes when choosing techniques and interventions that will be in the best interest of a client of particular ethnic minority group. Fourth, the conclusions of this research will increase the competency of the counselling field and will help to ensure that individuals of ethnic minority groups receive culturally sensitive interventions and thus, obtain greater gains from therapy. And finally, this information could pave the way towards the integration of a more emic approach to counselling, which described by Scorzelli and Reinke-Scorzelli (2001) “suggests that counselling strategies unique to the client’s culture are needed to effectively meet the needs of the particular client group” (p. 85).
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