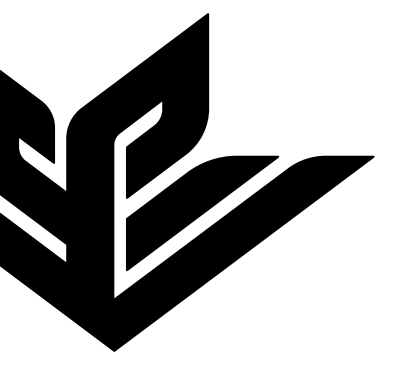




Effectiveness of couples-based Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) therapy vs. individual ERP treatment for OCD symptom reduction and overall couple satisfaction



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ABSTRACT

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a debilitating, chronic condition characterized by recurrent intrusive thoughts followed by persistent behavioral urges and time-consuming rituals that attempt to neutralize the anxiety and distress caused by those unwanted obsessive thoughts according to the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This research study aims to explore the effectiveness of Couples-Based ERP in decreasing individual symptoms of OCD and evaluating the impact of treatment on a couple's overall relationship satisfaction. Using the Yale-Brown Obsessive Compulsive Scale (Y-BOCS) and the Dyadic-Adjustment Scale (DAS) to measure our constructs, we hypothesize that Couples-Based ERP will be effective in not only decreasing OCD symptoms, but also increasing overall relationship satisfaction after 10-weeks of treatment.

INTRODUCTION

- Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are faced with an increasing number of couple clients diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), which often leads to heightened levels of couple dissatisfaction and an increase in divorce rates.
- While previous research demonstrates that Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) is the most effective psychotherapy for individuals diagnosed with OCD (McKay et al., 2015; Abramowitz, et al., 2013), there is limited research examining the effectiveness of ERP using a systems-based treatment approach.
- OCD often negatively affects interpersonal relationships through accommodations by romantic partners, resulting in poorer relationship functioning (Boeding, et al., 2013).

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

Research Questions:

- Is couples-based ERP more effective than individual ERP treatment in reducing symptoms of OCD?
- What is the effect of couples-based ERP on relationship satisfaction?

Hypotheses:

- Couple ERP will be more effective in decreasing OCD symptoms.
- Couple ERP will increase relationship satisfaction.

METHODS

Participants

- Participants consist of couples (N=40) recruited by group private practices and community mental health facilities in King County WA where one partner meets DSM-5 criteria for OCD and who are in a heterosexual or same-sex couple relationship.
- To be eligible, each partner must report living with their partner for a minimum of 6 months and all participants must be at least 21 years of age.
- Exclusion criteria were current suicidal ideation or other psychotic symptoms, current substance abuse and couples were screened for intimate partner violence. Participants using psychotropic medications were included if mood was stable for the last 6 months.
- Participants will be randomly assigned to 10-weeks of treatment.

Procedures

- Eligible participants will be sent an email to complete an online survey via Qualtrics that includes self-reported assessments for OCD and Couple Satisfaction.
- Data will be collected within one week prior to the initial therapy session (T1) and within one week following the last ERP therapy session (T2).

Main Components of Couples-Based ERP

- Psychoeducation about OCD and ERP
- Collaborative development of exposure hierarchy
- ERP practice and coping skills
- Reduction of partner accommodations
- Assignment of ERP homework

MEASURES

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

- The Yale-Brown Obsessive Compulsive Scale (Y-BOCS) will assess the severity of OCD according to the time spent occupied by obsessions and compulsions, the degree of interference or distress and the internal resistance or degree of control experienced by the participant.
- Y-BOCS is the most widely used scale for measuring OCD severity due to its strong reliability and validity

Relationship Satisfaction

- The Dyadic-Adjustment Scale (DAS) is a 32-item self-report inventory that will measure the individual's perception of his/her/their relationship quality with an intimate partner.
- The DAS is a commonly used measure of overall relationship satisfaction for both research and clinical purposes and has been found to have excellent reliability and validity.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *Is couples-based ERP more effective than individual ERP treatment in reducing symptoms of OCD?*

- A t-test will be used to compare the reduction of OCD symptom severity using the data from the Y-BOCS (T1 and T2) between those randomly assigned to the couples-based ERP treatment group and the individual ERP control group.

Research Question 2: *What is the effect of couples-based ERP on relationship satisfaction?*

- A t-test analysis will be used to examine the effects of couples-based ERP on relationship satisfaction using scores from the DAS (T1 vs. T2).

DISCUSSION

Social Implications

- OCD is often an isolating disorder where the gold standard treatment (ERP) is based on the individual treatment plan, yet in an interpersonal context, the partner is often pulled into the OCD compulsions (for example the couple may avoid certain situations, engage in rituals together or respond when the partner with OCD is seeking reassurance) resulting in couple dissatisfaction and increased OCD symptomology.
- This study explores the effects of couples-based ERP therapy compared to individual ERP therapy based on OCD symptomology and couple satisfaction.

Clinical Implications

- We expect this research to have clinical benefits with couples who are experiencing OCD by expanding ERP to the couple system to create deeper understanding of the disorder and a collaboration of treatment progress.
- Based on previous research we expect that couple's-based ERP will be equally effective for OCD symptomology, yet we expect the system's approach to be effective for clinical goals of increased couple satisfaction.

Future Research

- Future research in this area should focus specifically on partner or family accommodations to decrease the impact OCD has on the couple or family system.
- Due to the lack of research around polyamorous systems, future research should also explore how ERP could impact larger systems.