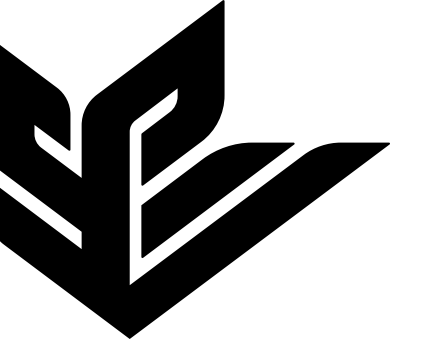


Examining the impact of Internal Family Systems (IFS) versus Emotionally Focused Individual Therapy (EFIT) on depression for college students: A comparative study



Laura Anne Bowlin & Hillary Bucher-Brown

ABSTRACT

In light of the prevalence of depression in modern society, researchers persist in the quest for effective treatment approaches. This research proposal aims to examine the impact of Internal Family Systems (IFS) Theory and Emotionally Focused Individual Therapy (EFIT) on depression among college students. The study will involve 20 college students recruited from local universities experiencing depression, as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). Each participant will undergo ten psychotherapy sessions, randomly assigned to a certified IFS or EFIT therapist. Subsequently, participants will complete a post-test using the BDI-II. Comparative analysis of the outcomes between the two groups will be conducted and results interpreted.

INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Major depressive disorder remains one of the most prevalent mental health disorders in the United States, with approximately 21 million adults experiencing at least one major depressive episode in their lifetime (NIMH, 2023).
- ❑ Depression is conventionally managed with a combination of psychotropic medications and evidence-based practices such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), behavioral activation (BA), interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT), and problem-solving therapy, focusing on individual treatment approaches (WHO, 2024).
- ❑ Preliminary findings suggest that Internal Family Systems (IFS) shows promise as an effective systemic treatment for depression among college females, potentially comparable to traditional "Gold Standard Treatments" like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) (Fitzgerald & Barton, 2021; Haddock et al., 2017; Hodgdon et al., 2022; Martin 2014).
- ❑ Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) has also shown to be an effective treatment for depression compared to other standard treatment models when at least one partner in a couple struggles with depression and relational satisfaction is low (Alder et al., 2018; Denton et al., 2012; Wittenborn et al., 2018).
- ❑ Initial research indicates that experiential models like IFS and EFT have potential in treating depression, necessitating further investigation to compare their effectiveness in reducing depressive symptoms among college students.
- ❑ Our upcoming study seeks to expand on prior research to determine whether IFS or EFIT offers a more effective systemic, experiential approach to managing depression in college student populations.

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

- ❑ Research Question: How does the impact of Internal Family Systems (IFS) compare to Emotionally Focused Individual Therapy (EFIT) in addressing depression among college students.
- ❑ Hypothesis: It is hypothesized that IFS will be equivalent to or more effective than EFIT in addressing depression among college students.

METHODS

Participants

Participants

- ❑ Undergraduate college students currently enrolled in Seattle-area universities seeking counseling services.

Recruitment

- ❑ Participants will be recruited from university counseling services based on a BDI-II score of 20 or more, indicating moderate or severe depression.

Exclusion Criteria

- ❑ Participants must not currently be taking psychotropic medication to treat depression (i.e., antidepressants). Additionally, individuals with a history of psychiatric hospitalization or severe mental health conditions will be excluded from the study.

Sample Size

- ❑ A total of 20 participants will be included in the study, randomly assigned to the two treatment groups, IFS individual treatment (n=10) or EFIT treatment (n=10).

Procedures

- ❑ The Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) will be administered to potential participants during the intake session to verify participation criteria and establish a pre-test baseline (T1) for both IFS and EFIT treatment groups.
- ❑ Participants will be randomly assigned to a certified IFS or EFIT therapist and receive 10 psychotherapy sessions.
- ❑ At the conclusion of the 10 sessions, participants will complete the BDI-II (T2).

MEASURES

Depressive Symptoms

- ❑ Depression symptoms will be assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) (Beck, A.T. et al., 1996).
- ❑ The BDI-II is a 21-item self-report questionnaire that measures depression symptoms and their severity. Respondents rate each of the 21 items on a 0-3 scale, with 0 indicating no symptom and 3 indicating extreme symptomatology. Scores are then added together, resulting in severity from no depression to severe depression (Beck, A.T. et al., 1996).

RESULTS

- ❑ The data collected from the BDI-II at T1 and T2 will be analyzed using an independent-samples t-test. The t-test will be conducted to examine differences between the depression symptoms of participants in the IFS and EFIT groups.
- ❑ The findings from these analyses will be compared to determine the efficacy of the IFS vs. EFIT treatments in reducing depression symptoms.

Discussion

Social Implications

- ❑ Depression remains prevalent in our society, often beginning in early adulthood and significantly impacting college students. It is crucial for individuals with depression to receive appropriate therapeutic help to reduce negative symptoms, such as suicidality, and to improve their quality of life.

Clinical Implications

- ❑ This study aims to advance research on the effectiveness of IFS and EFIT therapy models in treating depression among an important group: college students, many of whom are young adults. If the hypothesis is supported, this study could help establish IFS and EFIT as evidence-based treatments for depression. More evidence-supported therapeutic models offer additional options for those suffering from depression.

Research Implications

- ❑ The results of this study could contribute to the literature suggesting that IFS and EFIT are effective in treating depression across various populations, including college students.
- ❑ Additionally, this study could inform future research into the effectiveness of other systemic therapy models for treating depression in college students and young adults.