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A systematic review of the effectiveness of Occupational Therapy interventions for improving functioning and mental health for individuals with anxiety and stress-related disorders

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Background

- Anxiety disorders are highly persistent over the lifetime (Kessler et al., 2009) and are associated with poor functioning in many activities of daily life (Iancu et al., 2014).
- Occupational therapists have a long history of practice with individuals with anxiety disorders (Creek & Lougher, 2012), but their interventions are individualised and vary widely across clinical settings.
- Very few manualised or standardised occupational therapy interventions exist for individuals with anxiety disorders, leading to a weak evidence base and a lack of rigorous research.
- The effectiveness of occupational-therapy led interventions for improving functioning and mental health is under-researched and systematic reviews are urgently required.

Objective

To determine the effectiveness of interventions designed/led by occupational therapists to improve functioning and mental health outcomes for individuals with anxiety and stress-related disorders.

Results

Records identified through database searching (n = 4231)

- Records after duplicates removed (n = 2584)
- Records published after 1994 (n = 2065)
- Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 226)
- Records included in narrative synthesis (n = 24)

Titles and abstracts excluded with reasons (n = 1839)

- Qualitative studies 124
- Cross-sectional studies and reviews 234
- Population under-18 Surgical/pharmacological treatment 155
- Diagnostic accounts 94
- Healthcare services 337
- Academia 87
- Records with no OT intervention or anxiety diagnosis 278
- Assessment tool development 54
- Theory papers 183

Randomised Controlled Trials (5)

- Lambert et al. (2007) showed significant improvements in panic symptoms in an individually delivered lifestyle intervention.
- Garvey et al. (2015) showed significant improvements in daily functioning from a 6 week group self-management intervention.
- Kitchener et al. (2009) showed no difference between an OT group, a stress management intervention and CAU.
- Heterogeneous theoretical approaches mean results cannot be combined.

Controlled Trials (3)

- Eklund & Erlandsson (2011) showed improved return-to-work rates for the Redesigning Daily Occupations programme compared to usual work rehabilitation.
- Prior (1998) showed a statistically significant improvement in anxiety symptoms following a 6 week group using mixed approaches.
- Lack of randomisation increases risk of bias, but is common in clinical-based research.

Uncontrolled trials (6)

- A surfing intervention (Rogers et al) and a life skills intervention showed potential for improving PTSD trauma symptoms.
- Driving rehabilitation demonstrated improvement in driving skills (Classen).
- Lack of a control group increases risk of bias.

Single-case designs (5)

- n = 1 designs using widely differing interventions.
- The best quality study showed some emerging potential for a driving rehabilitation programme for veterans with PTSD.

Implications

- Occupational therapy interventions that focus on changing how individuals perform daily activities have the potential to improve individual functioning and mental health symptoms.
- Emerging evidence for replicable programmes such as OPTIMAL, ReDO and LAMP, as well as life skills and driving rehabilitation for specific populations.
- Occupational therapy interventions for anxiety are heterogeneous and high quality RCTs are urgently required.