Effectiveness of a Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy for children with anxiety disorders

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INTRODUCTION

Anxiety disorders are prevalent and recurrent among children and adolescents. Coping Cat is a cognitive-behavioral well-supported treatment for children from 7 to 13 years old with anxiety disorders. It was designed by Philip Kendall and colleagues.

OBJECTIVE

To assess the effectiveness of Coping Cat program in group format in a sample of patients with anxiety disorders in an outpatient clinic mental health for child and adolescents.

METHOD

21 patients (mean age 9,14 y.o.) with a primary diagnosis of anxiety disorder who received 16 treatment sessions over 16 weeks lasting for 60 minutes: 14 children group sessions and 2 parent sessions.
Measurements to evaluate the program's effectiveness were made at the beginning and at the end of the intervention of:
● Severity of symptoms (through the RCADS scales)
● Evaluation of personal, social, school and family adaptation and of the educating attitudes of parents (through the TAMAI scale)
The differences between these measurements were analyzed through Student's t means comparison test. The data was recorded using the statistical package SPSS v19.

RESULTS

After the cognitive-behavioral intervention, there was a significant decrease in the separation anxiety symptoms ($p = 0.04$) and depressive symptoms ($p = 0.03$).
There was no significant decrease in social phobia, panic disorder or generalized anxiety disorder symptoms, neither in the adaptation levels of the individuals.

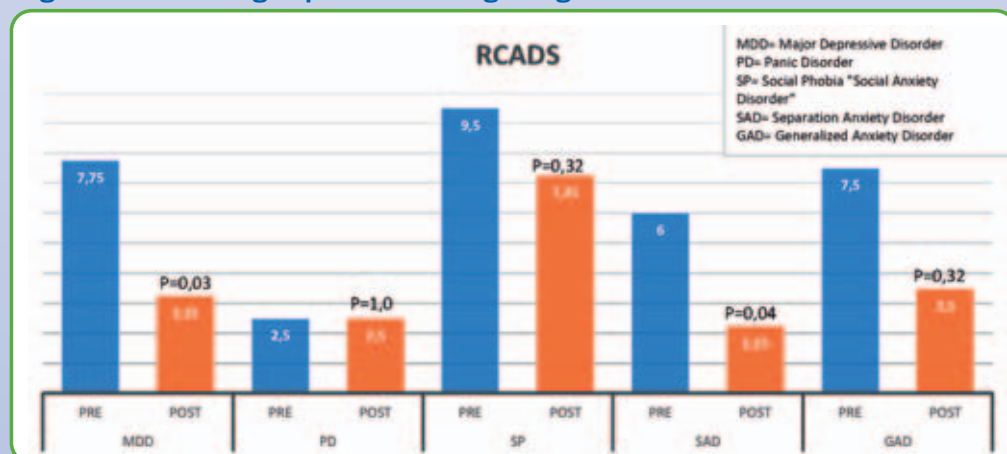**Figure 1. Results of group CBT at the beginning and end of treatment**

Table 1. Demographic and clinical characteristics of the sample

Sample characteristics	N (%)
Gender	
Boys	15 (71.4)
Girls	6 (28.6)
Marital Status of parents	
Married	18 (85.7)
Divorced	3 (14.3)
Siblings	
Only child	7 (33.3)
Two	14 (66.7)
Comorbidity	
Yes	10 (47.6)
No	11 (52.4)
Medication	
Yes	5 (23.8)
No	16 (76.2)
Mental Health History	
Yes	8 (38.1)
No	13 (61.9)
First diagnosis (ICD-10)	
F93.0 Separation anxiety disorder	5 (23.8)
F 40.1 Social Phobias	1 (4.8)
F40.2 Specific phobias	2 (9.6)
F41.1 Generalized anxiety disorder	5 (23.8)
F41.9 Anxiety disorder, unspecified	8 (38.1)

CONCLUSION

CBT applied in group format to patients with anxiety disorders was effective reducing depressive bend anxiety separation symptoms. Previous studies have found greater effectiveness in reducing the symptomatology of anxiety disorders or associated disability. When dealing with a disorder that involves making significant changes in one's lifestyle, it would make sense to assess the size of the effect after a time of treatment completion. More studies are needed with larger samples, control groups and long-term follow-ups.