



Hybrid Cognitive Processing Therapy – Compensatory Cognitive Training

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Abstract:

Cognitive processing therapy (CPT) focuses on traumatic memories and distress reduction using written exposures and cognitive restructuring with emphasis to themes of power/control, safety, intimacy, trust, and self-control. Compensatory cognitive training (CCT) on the other hand targets cognitive impairments in learning/memory, attention, and executive functioning using compensatory intervention strategies. A hybrid method of the two therapeutic approaches is used to address both the cognitive and emotional complaints of people with PTSD as well as the objective cognitive deficits. This article review techniques used in CPT and CCT and how the two are combined into a hybrid therapeutic approach.

Keywords: Cognitive behavioral therapy, Compensatory cognitive training, Cognitive processing therapy, Hybrid therapy, PTSD, Trauma-related disorders

1. Introduction

Cognitive processing therapy (CPT) is a type of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) technique used in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related disorders that helps to teach people skills to manage distressing thoughts and emotions so that they can gain control of their lives (Tran et al., 2016). It usually comprises of 12 sessions each lasting about 60 to 90 minutes, whether in individual or group setting, or as a combination of both. According to Asmundson et al. (2019), CPT focuses on traumatic memories and distress reduction using written exposures and cognitive restructuring with emphasis to themes of power/control, safety, intimacy, trust, and self-control. It helps patients re-conceptualize trauma and therefore change their maladaptive appraisal of the traumatic event.

Compensatory cognitive training (CCT) on the other hand targets cognitive impairments in learning/memory, attention, and executive functioning using compensatory intervention strategies such as self-talk, use of calendar, taking notes, and takes a 6-step problem-solving approach (Twamley et al., 2012). It usually takes 12 weeks and helps in improving cognitive performance, functioning skills, and quality of life, and in reducing negative symptoms. It is useful for people with cognitive impairments due to severe mental illnesses like schizophrenia (Twamley et al., 2019). It is also useful for other disorders like psychosis, PTSD, and mild to moderate traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

Cognitive training helps to improve cognitive abilities and functioning either through restorative or compensatory approaches (Dorociak et al., 2022). Restorative approaches involve using drills or practicing ways of improving cognitive functioning while compensatory approaches involves using strategies that help a person to work around the cognitive defects they have. CCT is applicable in individual, group, and community settings.

A hybrid method of the two therapeutic approaches is used to address both the cognitive and emotional complaints of people with PTSD as well as the objective cognitive deficits. Combining CPT and CCT helps to reduce PTSD related and neurobehavioral symptoms, and improve the cognitive functioning (Jak et al., 2019).

One form of CCT is the Cognitive Symptom Management and Rehabilitation Therapy (Cog SMART). CogSMART CCT helps to improve compensatory strategies and learning in several cognitive domains, and has been shown to reduce symptoms after TBI, and reduce the severity of PTSD and depressive symptoms (Dorociak et al., 2022). The strategy has been shown to improve attainment of competitive work, prospective memory and the quality of life. When combined with a psychotherapy method that addresses emotional symptoms like CPT, CogSMART has been shown

to have benefits in improving cognitive functions like working memory/attention, problem solving, and memory/learning (Dorociak et al., 2022).

SMART-CPT is a hybrid technique that combines CogSMART and CPT. According to Crocker et al. (2018), SMART-CPT is a modified form of CPT that includes compensatory cognitive strategies of rehabilitation used in CCT. This technique is reported to be especially useful among Veterans with TBI and comorbid PTSD.

2. Techniques Used in CPT

Psychoeducation and Impact Statement

Psychoeducation helps the client understand how their thoughts and feeling are connected to the traumatic experience they had. According to Phoenix (2007), psychoeducation helps trauma survivors to understand their stress response and imparts them with knowledge of healthy coping strategies so that they can gain a sense of control over how they respond when triggered. Psychoeducation helps gain greater understanding of how thoughts, feelings and emotions are connected and it helps to reduce symptoms related to fear, increases self-awareness, and helps the client to gain insight.

An impact statement on the other hand involves the client writing a detailed account of the traumatic event and the associated thoughts, feelings, and emotions. An impact statement helps in the recovery process by giving the victim acknowledgement and recognition of what they went through, helps them develop insight into the effects of trauma and the available resources they can use, helps them to grieve and achieve growth from the negative event, and helps to reduce shame (McGovern, 2013). The client is given this task as homework where they write their trauma narrative.

Cognitive Therapy

This technique helps the client to learn about their faulty thinking patterns and challenge single belief at a time with the aim of achieving cognitive restructuring. It involves the use of Challenging Beliefs Worksheet usually given as homework to be completed between the sessions. This helps the client identify and challenge discrepant beliefs and thoughts that developed during and after the trauma and focuses on beliefs related to trust, safety, esteem, power and control, and intimacy (Chard et al., 1997).

The Challenging Beliefs Worksheets help the client to identify the triggering situation, write the automatic thoughts that come up and the associated emotions, use challenging questions to challenge the distorted automatic thoughts, identify problematic thinking patterns, and come up with alternate healthy thoughts and emotions.

3. Techniques Used in CCT

Prospective Memory Tasks

Prospective memory refers to the ability to remember to do things or perform actions in future (Smith & Bayen, 2004). Techniques used in CCT to improve prospective memory involves the use of calendars, lists, and linking tasks. A calendar is useful for writing down daily and weekly plans, appointments, event reminders, and other to do lists. Creating a to-do list helps keep track of all activities one intends to do. Linking tasks involves linking an automatic activity such as brushing teeth with another activity such as taking medication. (Center For Deployment Psychology, 2022). Other types of reminders include having a selected place to keep things like keys and writing short reminders on the hand.

Conversational and Task Attention Skills

Conversational skills include active listening skills like eye contact and open posture, eliminating distractions like phones or television, asking questions to get clarification about something, and paraphrasing (Center For Deployment Psychology, 2022). Task attention on the hand involves ability to pay attention to the task one is performing. This can involve first understanding the task and then engaging in self-talk to help one remain attentive/focused.

Verbal Learning and Memory Skills

Techniques that can enhance encoding, storage, and retrieval of information include writing down or note taking, paraphrasing, association by linking new information to what one already knows, use of acronyms, use of rhymes, overlearning for example by use of flashcards and mnemonics, use of imagery, and having strategies for remembering names for example by using the physical characteristics of the person (Center For Deployment Psychology, 2022).

Techniques for improving memory include self-care activities like getting enough sleep and exercising, and use of habits or routines to get organized.

Executive Functioning and Cognitive Flexibility Skills

This helps the client increase the ability to think flexibly and come up with ideas to help solve a particular problem using a 6-step problem-solving approach. The 6 steps include defining the problem, brainstorming and coming up with many ideas, evaluating the alternatives, selecting the best ideas, trying them out, and then evaluating them again (Center For Deployment Psychology, 2022). There is also the use of strategy verbalization like using self-talk to help focus and solve a problem, and self-monitoring strategies like evaluating one's progress on a task and looking for evidence whether the problem is solved or not.

4. Conclusion

Hybrid CPT-CCT is a therapeutic method that uses the standard CPT approaches like using worksheets to challenge distorted beliefs and writing impact statements, while incorporating CCT strategies to help address and improve cognitive impairment in people with PTSD and other mental disorders. CPT helps to decrease the severity and intensity of symptoms by helping clients process the traumatic event in a safe therapeutic environment, identify and change distorted cognition, and help them learn coping skills so that they can function better. In addition, CPT helps clients challenge distorted beliefs about safety, helps them learn to trust others, regain a sense of power and control over their lives, increase their self-esteem, and help them learn to create intimate connections with others.

The technique incorporates CCT compensatory strategies to help clients improve their organization, attention, memory, and planning with the aim of improving overall cognition. This helps the clients get things done, use conversational skills to improve their relationships, increase ability to learn new information, and help them learn to plan, prioritize, have flexible thinking and problem-solve, which helps to increase functioning and their quality of life.

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