Reviewer's report

Title: Standard and advanced CBT techniques in a randomized controlled psychotherapy trial of PTSD in motor vehicle accident survivors (ISRCTN66456536)

Version: 2 Date: 8 May 2006

Reviewer: Jonathan Evans

Reviewer's report:

General
The study presented in this paper sought to test the effectiveness of a CBT intervention for PTSD associated with moving vehicle accidents (MVA's). The design of the study is straightforward, clearly described and appropriately analysed. The large effect sizes demonstrated indicate that the package of CBT interventions was more considerably effective than a wait list control condition.

The study clearly adds to the body of evidence that CBT is an effective psychological treatment for PTSD following MVA's. The major limitation of the study is, as the authors acknowledge, that the experimental design does not allow for any evaluation of the specific effects of this package of interventions. Several interventions not previously included in research evaluation studies with MVA survivors were utilised. These were described as 'writing assignments, social sharing and facilitation of posttraumatic growth'. The comparison with a wait list control group does not enable the added benefit of these treatment elements to be determined. Indeed the wait list control design does not even allow for a control against the possibility that treatment benefits are related to more general aspects of the intervention. It is appreciated of course that if 'advanced CBT' were compared with 'standard CBT', then effect sizes would be more likely to be more modest and as a result very much larger sample sizes would be required in order to achieve sufficient statistical power. Nevertheless, this approach will be required if we are to move evaluation of efficacy on significantly.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

There is reference to 2 participants with noticeable cognitive impairment being excluded. However there was no reference to whether there was any systematic evaluation of whether participants had suffered a head injury with any loss of consciousness or period of post-traumatic amnesia. It would be helpful to make clear whether this was assessed.

There is reference to the fact that 'self-perceived posttraumatic growth' and 'psychophysical assessment' were conducted, but it is noted that details of these will be reported elsewhere. I think it would be useful to at least give a very brief outline of these issues and particularly the way in which the 'facilitation of posttraumatic growth' was achieved as this was reported as a key component of the CBT package. BioMed reviewing guidelines stress the importance of minimising duplication of reporting of data. It would perhaps be helpful for the authors to provide (in a cover letter response) some further clarification/justification for not including details of these elements of the study in this paper.

For completeness and given that this is a registered trial, I think it would be useful to briefly describe the method used to randomly assign the dyads to conditions and to therapists (P8)

On P9, first paragraph reference is made to patients reading aloud at home their description of the MVA and it is noted that this was 'tapered to once per dayâ€¦...' I think it would be helpful to refer initially to how often this was done before it was tapered to once per day.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

P2, abstract, Conclusion section, 'indicate' should be 'indicated'
P3 para 3, 'survivors natural disasters' should be 'survivors of natural disasters'
manual on€’

P6 Therapists section, need to report a p value for the kappa = 0.63 statistic
P7, P14 and P19 Need to be consistent with how the Rabe et al reference is cited. Is it submitted, in press or published?
P9 write SUDS in full first time the abbreviation is used.
P10 para 1, ‘save’ should be ‘safe’.
P12 Three-month follow up outcome section, ‘available do to logistic’ should be ‘available due to logistic’
P13, para 3, use semi-colons instead of full-stops between numbered items.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

i declare that I have no competing interests