

Introduction & Background

Today's world is full of uncertainty, changes, and seemingly endless chaos. How does the human body and mind respond to such uncertainty? In the United States and around the world, people are facing more uncertainty than perhaps ever before. Due to the Corona Virus pandemic of 2020, political upheaval and unrest, racial and ethnic disparities faced by those in minority groups, and day-to-day struggles to maintain societal expectations in all domains of life, there is an alarmingly high rate of individuals who suffer from a mental health disorder. Of the most common mental health disorders diagnosed is social anxiety disorder (SAD), also commonly referred to as social phobia. This presentation is a brief introduction to the treatment options explored.

According to the DSM-5...

The DSM-5 defines social anxiety disorder as a "marked or intense fear of social situations in which the individual may be scrutinized by others" (APA 2013). There are nine additional diagnostic criteria that must be considered when potentially diagnosing social anxiety disorder, including the following: the individual fears their anxiety symptoms will be negatively evaluated by others; social situations almost always provoke intense fear or anxiety for the individual; the social situations are avoided or endured with intense fear or anxiety; the fear of the situation is out of proportion with the actual threat that is being posed by the situation; and the fear or anxiety is persistent. Usually lasting more than six months, the fear or anxiety causes significant impairment on important areas of functioning and must not be attributable to the physiological effects of substance use. Additionally, the fear or anxiety cannot be better explained by another mental disorder; and if another medical condition is present, the fear or anxiety is unrelated or is excessive (APA 2013). The severity of these physical and emotional symptoms will vary depending on severity of the individual's diagnosis.

Treatments Reviewed

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

- The cognitive behavioral treatment view and approach examines how an individual's thinking and feeling directly influences one's behavior. Cognitive theorists hold that anxiety in social situations is caused by continuous overestimation of negative evaluation by others and/or overestimation of threats in a situation (Beck et al. 1985).
- Techniques used within CBT include Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy, psychoeducation, exposure, cognitive restructuring, and social skills teaching
- Symptom severity varies between individuals. This means that time spent in treatment is not the same for everyone; where some individuals may only seek treatment for a set number of sessions, while other individuals may require lifelong support.
- After decades of research and practice, CBT is the most commonly used treatment approach for social anxiety disorder.

Psychopharmacological Therapy

- The psychopharmacological treatment approach to social anxiety disorder aims to regulate the fear response that an individual elicits during an anxiety-inducing event using prescribed medications which impact neurotransmitter (serotonin and norepinephrine) production (Isper et al. 2008).
- There are different classes of medications that have been explored to treat the symptom severity of SAD. These classes include selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MOAs), and benzodiazepines (Isper et al. 2008).
- As with any medication, there is the possibility of mild, but still undesirable, side effects. This is a potential drawback of this treatment approach.
- Growing research contributes to the psychopharmacological treatment of social anxiety, especially when paired with CBT.

Key: The analysis included a review of numerous literature sources discussing both CBT and PT regarding the treatment of SAD. This analysis was required in order to discover the advantages and drawbacks of both treatment approaches.

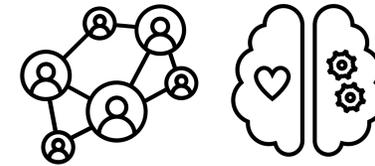
SAD: Social Anxiety Disorder

CBT: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

PT: Psychopharmacological Therapy

References

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- Ipser, J., Kariuki, C., and Stein, D. (2008). Pharmacotherapy for social anxiety disorder: A systematic review. *Expert Review of Neurotherapeutics*, 8(2), 235-257, doi: 10.1586/14737175.8.2.235



Conclusion

Changes in one's cognition, affect, and behavior can all occur through proactive and continued treatment, regardless of the treatment approach chosen. To varying degrees and depending on the individual, both treatment approaches show to be effective at reducing the severity of symptoms for individuals who suffer from social anxiety disorder. Research shows common interest in treating children and adolescents using CBT and PT, but both treatment approaches are utilized to also treat adults with social anxiety disorder.

Future directions

Regardless of its prevalence, treatment for social anxiety is still not sought at appropriate levels. There exists societal and logical barriers inhibiting individuals from seeking treatment. In order to reduce some of these barriers to treatment, there needs to be a broader everyday discussion in educational, occupational, and recreational settings to decrease the associated stigma and increase awareness of mental health issues. Further education regarding where to seek treatment is another key component of reducing this barrier.

Additionally, further research needs conducted on the effectiveness of combining the two treatment approaches in treatment of social anxiety disorder.

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- Today's world is full of uncertainty, changes, and seemingly endless chaos. How does the human body and mind respond to such uncertainty? In the United States and around the world, people are facing more uncertainty than perhaps ever before. Due to the Corona Virus pandemic of 2020, political upheaval and unrest, racial and ethnic disparities faced by those in minority groups, and day-to-day struggles to maintain societal expectations in all domains of life, there is an alarmingly high rate of individuals who suffer from a mental health disorder. Of the most common mental health disorders diagnosed is social anxiety disorder (SAD), also commonly referred to as social phobia.
- The DSM-5 reports that approximately 7% of adults in the United States within a 12-month span will be diagnosed with social anxiety disorder (APA 2013). Prevalence rates are similar for children and adolescents. Around the world, similar prevalence rates are observed, and these rates typically tend to decrease with age. It is more common for adolescents and young adults to suffer from social anxiety disorder than it is for middle aged and older adults (APA 2013).

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Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

- CBT is typically the first treatment option that is explored for individuals with social anxiety disorder
- The cognitive behavioral treatment view and approach examines how an individual's thinking and feeling directly influences one's behavior, then aims to correct the individual's maladaptive thinking processes during time spent in treatment.
- Cognitive theorists hold that anxiety in social situations is caused by continuous overestimation of negative evaluation by others and/or overestimation of threats in a situation (Beck et al. 1985).
- Techniques used within CBT include Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy, psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, exposure, and social skills training.

Psychopharmacological Therapy

- The psychopharmacological treatment approach to social anxiety disorder aims to regulate the fear response that an individual elicits during an anxiety-inducing event through the use of prescribed medications which impact neurotransmitter (serotonin and norepinephrine) production (Isper et al. 2008).
- There are different classes of medications that have been explored to treat the symptom severity of SAD. These classes include selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MOAs), and benzodiazepines (Isper et al. 2008).
- As with any medication, there is the possibility of mild, but still undesirable side effects. This is a potential drawback of this treatment approach.
- Growing research contributes to the psychopharmacological treatment of social anxiety, especially when paired with CBT.

Conclusion

- Without therapeutic intervention, the symptoms of social anxiety disorder are likely to remain a disrupting factor in an individual's life.
- Changes in one's cognition, affect, and behavior can all occur through proactive and continued treatment, regardless of the treatment approach chosen.
- To varying degrees and depending on the individual's original severity, time in treatment, etc., both treatment approaches show to be effective at reducing the severity of symptoms for individuals who suffer from social anxiety disorder.
- Research shows CBT is most often used to treat the symptoms of social anxiety disorder, and is paired with psychopharmacological treatment to further the benefits of therapy.

Future Directions

- Regardless of its prevalence, treatment for social anxiety is still not sought at appropriate levels. There exists societal and logical barriers inhibiting individuals from seeking treatment. In order to reduce some of these barriers to treatment, there needs to be a broader everyday discussion in educational, occupational, and recreational settings to decrease the associated stigma and increase awareness of mental health issues.
- Further education regarding where to seek treatment is another key component of reducing this barrier.
- Additionally, further research needs to be conducted on the long-term effectiveness of combining the two treatment approaches in the treatment of social anxiety disorder.

References

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- Beck, A. T. (1985). Anxiety disorders and phobias: A cognitive perspective. New York: Basic Books.
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