

Binge-Eating Disorder Treatment Goes Online – Feasibility, Usability and Preliminary Evaluation of Treatment Outcome

(project no. 52-15)

Applicants/Authors

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Objective

Binge-eating disorder (BED) is characterized by recurrent episodes of loss of control over eating and is related to increased prevalence of further mental disorders and somatic consequences associated with overweight and obesity. In community-based samples, 2-4% of women and 1-3% men are diagnosed with BED. Psychotherapeutic interventions focusing on maintenance factors of disturbed eating behavior have proven to be effective. However, treatment access is limited for a considerable number of patients with BED. A lack of specialized institutions and treatment resources but also long distances to treatment facilities for people living in remote or rural areas are causes of insufficient care. Internet-based guided self-help (GSH) programs have the potential to fill this gap.

Method

This project aims at developing and evaluating an internet-based treatment for BED derived from an evidence-based manualized cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). The primary goal is to test feasibility and suitability of the internet-based program and to evaluate the treatment outcome in comparison to a pure and a placebo-inspired wait-list control group (i.e. reduction of binge-eating episodes and eating disorder pathology as primary outcome variables). Altogether 67 women and men between 18 and 70 years with a BED diagnosis will be recruited. The internet-based GSH treatment comprises 8-sessions followed by 3 booster sessions. The placebo-inspired waitlist control group receives weekly messages containing information increasing positive expectations regarding the treatment effects during the 4-weeks waiting period. The pure waitlist control group receives weekly messages simply asking patients to fill in a short questionnaire.

Results

Up to now, altogether 34 patients completed the active treatment phase, while 16 patients (20.2%) prematurely terminated the treatment. Overall, patients were positive with respect to the therapeutic relationship, compliance and treatment satisfaction measured by the working alliance inventory (WAI; Wilmers et al., 2008).

Preliminary short-term treatment outcomes are promising. Abstainer rate strongly increased from 0% at pre-treatment to 20.6% at the end of the active treatment phase. First analyses showed a significant reduction of binge-eating episodes as well as eating disorder pathology, while BMI remained stable.

Discussion

The access to evidence-based treatments for BED might be successfully increased by an internet-based GSH approach. The present study protocol presents a randomised control trial. Besides suitability and efficacy of the internet-based GSH treatment, the effect of positive expectations (placebo) regarding a therapeutic intervention on core symptoms will be preliminarily investigated.

A manuscript describing the study protocol is currently under evaluation: Munsch, S., Wyssen, A., Vanhulst, P., Lalanne, D., Steinemann, S. T. & Tuch, A. (submitted). Study protocol: Binge-Eating Disorder Treatment Goes Online – A Randomized Controlled Trial with a Waitlist and a Placebo Control Group to Evaluate Feasibility, Usability and Treatment Outcome of an Internet-Based Treatment for Binge-Eating Disorder. Submitted to the Journal BMC Trials.

Trial registration: German Clinical Trials Register: DRKS00012355. Date of registration: 14.09.2017

The project was funded by the Swiss Anorexia Nervosa Foundation.