

Efficacy of three treatment protocols for adolescents with social anxiety disorder: A 5-year follow-up assessment

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Abstract

Few studies have reported long-term follow-up data in adults and even fewer in adolescents. The purpose of this work is to report on the longest follow-up assessment in the literature on treatments for adolescents with social phobia. A 5-year follow-up assessment was conducted with subjects who originally received either Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy for Adolescents (CBGT-A), Social Effectiveness Therapy for Adolescents—Spanish version (SET-Asv), or Intervención en Adolescentes con Fobia Social—Treatment for Adolescents with Social Phobia (IAFS) in a controlled clinical trial. Twenty-three subjects completing the treatment conditions were available for the 5-year follow-up. Results demonstrate that subjects treated either with CBGT-A, SET-Asv and IAFS continued to maintain their gains after treatments were terminated. Either the CBGT-A, SET-Asv and IAFS can provide lasting effects to the majority of adolescents with social anxiety. Issues that may contribute to future research and clinical implications are discussed.

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Social phobia, also known as social anxiety disorder, is “a marked and persistent fear of one or more social or performance situations in which the person is exposed to unfamiliar people or to possible scrutiny by others” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Epidemiology studies have revealed that social anxiety disorder is one of the three most common mental disorders and the most common anxiety disorder in adolescence, while data in clinical settings indicate that it is also the anxiety disorder most commonly diagnosed in this developmental stage (Albano & Detweiler, 2001). Social phobia usually begins in mid-adolescence, has a chronic course and interferes in academic, social, family and personal functioning (Beidel, Ferrell, Alfano, & Yeganeh, 2001). Youth with social anxiety in general have poor social networks, underachieve at school, are less likely to complete school, have poorer adjustment outcomes, fail to meet social expectations for full adult status, as well as, are at a high risk for developing major depression due to social isolation (Masia-Warner, Storch, Fisher, & Klein, 2003). In addition, social phobia precedes onset of internalizing and externalizing disorders, including substance abuse and tends to follow a chronic course (Beidel & Turner, 1998; Essau, Conradt, & Petermann, 2002).

Recent publications report positive treatment effects either by North American researchers (Albano, Marten, Holt, Heimberg, & Barlow, 1995; Hayward et al., 2000; Masia-Warner, Klein, Storch, & Corda, 2001; Masia-Warner et al., in press), European teams (Olivares & García-López, 2001) or multicultural research teams (García-López et al., 2002; Olivares et al., 2002). To date, the only available treatments are the Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy for Adolescents (CBGT-A; Albano, Marten, & Holt, 1991), Intervención en Adolescentes con Fobia Social—Treatment for Adolescents with Social Phobia (IAFS; Olivares & García-López, 1998), Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS; Masia-Warner et al., 2001) and the Social Effectiveness Therapy for Adolescents—Spanish version (SET-Asv; Olivares, García-López, Beidel, & Turner, 1998).

Despite the favorable outcome reported in most treatment studies, number of published works including 1-year follow-up assessment is limited to four intervention protocols: (i) the CBGT-A (García-López et al., 2002; Hayward et al., 2000; Olivares et al., 2002), (ii) the SASS (Masia-Warner et al., in press), (iii) the SET-Asv (García-López et al., 2002; Olivares et al., 2002) and (iv) the IAFS (García-López et al., 2002; Olivares et al., 2002). However, to our knowledge, no follow-up study longer than 12 months has been published. The purpose of this work is to examine long-term outcome course for adolescents with generalized social anxiety who received either CBGT-A, SET-Asv and IAFS as reported in the Olivares et al. (2002) and García-López et al. (2002) studies. That is, this work addresses the question of whether psychological treatments for youth with social phobia are effective in the longer term. It was hypothesized that subjects would continue evidencing improvements 5 years following the termination of interventions that were delivered in a school setting. Long-term outcomes were assessed in terms of effect size, clinical, and statistical significance. Our 12-month follow-up results were described in Olivares et al.

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