Abstract

Internet-based self-help intervention with or without therapist support has shown efficacy in improving depression and anxiety. However, the differences in efficacy in symptoms reduction, dropout rates, and adherence between the presence and absence of therapist support in the intervention remain debatable. This three-arm pilot RCT compared the efficacy of a seven-week guided online self-help intervention ("Guided SH Condition") with an unguided online self-help intervention ("Unguided SH Condition") and a wait-list control condition ("WLC Condition"). A total of 94 individuals, who met the screening criteria and completed the baseline assessments, were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. The primary outcomes were the change in depressive and anxiety symptoms. The secondary outcomes were changes in quality of life, insomnia severity, and perceived stress. At immediate post-treatment (Week 8), only Guided SH Condition demonstrated effective outcome, as compared to WLC Condition, in treating depression (Guided SH Condition v.s. WLC Condition: $p = 0.042$) with a medium effect size ($d = -0.742$), not anxiety. At immediate post-treatment, Guided SH Condition and Unguided SH Condition did not differ significantly in all primary and secondary measures. Both guided and unguided demonstrated effective outcome in relieving perceived stress, as compared to WLC Condition (Guided SH Condition v.s. WLC Condition: $p = 0.001$, Unguided SH Condition v.s. WLC Condition: $p = 0.005$) and two conditions did not differ significantly ($p = 0.993$).