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MODERN CHALLENGES TO PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR ANXIETY DISORDERS

Mykola Nesterenko¹

1. Visiting Researcher of Innovative Technologies
of Development and Mental Health Research Center
Ukrainian Academy of Social, Humanities and Health Sciences, UKRAINE
ORCID ID: 0009-0003-6370-7679

Mental disorders associated with high anxiety are among the most common disorders that negatively affect an individual's mental well-being. A consistently high level of anxiety is one of the key symptoms of a wide range of various mental disorders belonging to different classification categories of impairments from phobic anxiety disorders to specific personality disorders.

The most effective strategy for treating anxiety disorders is a combination of pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, and in some cases, such as with avoidant personality disorder, psychotherapy isn't only the first-choice option, but also the only possible treatment option. While the issue of pharmacotherapy has been actively researched for many years, the psychotherapy of disorders associated with high anxiety is still represented by selective studies, the results of which don't provide a basis for forming a holistic and systemic understanding of effective psychotherapy approaches, methods, and technologies.

In Ukraine, the issue of psychological treatment for clients with anxiety disorders has become an issue only in the last few years. Just a year ago, a law was adopted, which hasn't yet entered into force, trying to regulate, among other things, the provision of psychotherapy services. However, for now, the issue of psychotherapy is regulated only by the Order of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine dated December 13, 2023, No. 2118, and Clinical Guideline No. 00729.

Order No. 2118 defines a list of psychotherapy methods with proven effectiveness that are recommended for use in working with various mental disorders, including anxiety disorders. Clinical Guideline No. 00729 is specifically dedicated to approaches for treating anxiety disorders. Common to both regulatory acts are that, in the case of psychotherapy for anxiety disorders, methods of the cognitive-behavioral approach are recommended for use. This isn't



surprising, as this approach has long been considered one of the most effective methods in the therapy of anxiety disorders. It has been considered effective for so long, in fact, that it is perceived as an axiom.

Although the belief in the high effectiveness of the cognitive-behavioral approach isn't always scientifically substantiated.

First, the very design of scientific studies is questionable, as they use only one method of psychotherapy, and the clients' results are compared with the anxiety indicators of clients from a waiting-list or using pharmacotherapy only. Under these conditions, it isn't possible to assess which method of psychotherapy is more effective. At this case one can only determine how successful a certain psychotherapy method is compared to standard treatment, rather than to other psychotherapy methods.

A separate caveat arises if, in the argumentation of a better method for psychotherapy of anxiety disorders, we focus on the results of comparative studies. For instance, there is a whole series of comparative studies on the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy and psychodynamic therapy, which were conducted back in the 1980s-90s. The conclusions of those studies demonstrated the higher effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy over the psychodynamic [3]. It should be emphasized here that both the psychodynamic approach and the cognitive-behavioral approach are constantly evolving, and in fact there isn't one clearly regulated protocol of psychological therapy that all specialists adhere to. Both approaches are essentially an umbrella of different methods whose representatives agree with each other on some aspects of the conceptual vision of what forms the basis for the emergence of anxiety disorders and what the therapy for such disorders should be aimed at. In this context, comparative studies of the effectiveness of different psychotherapy methods within a single conceptual approach are of significant interest.

Furthermore, it is worth considering that the list of disorders that researchers classify as anxiety disorders varies significantly, depending on which classification they use. For example, in the ICD-10, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder don't belong to the group of anxiety disorders, unlike in the DSM-5. These disorders have been included in the group of anxiety disorders since the 1980s at DSM-III. Accordingly, all studies on the effectiveness of using the cognitive-behavioral approach for the therapy of anxiety disorders that were based on the DSM include work with those disorders that, according to ICD, don't belong to anxiety disorders. For example, the study, which aimed to determine the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy for anxiety disorders, was based on research involving such categories of clients who have acute stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-

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traumatic stress disorder, and social anxiety disorder [1]. Half of these disorders, according to the ICD, don't belong to the group of anxiety disorders. And according to the results of the study, cognitive-behavioral exposure therapy has different effectiveness for different disorders. Thus, generalizing the results of studies conducted using different classifications of disorders and extrapolating one method of psychotherapy to the entire group of anxiety disorders isn't relevant.

At the same time, as evidenced by a meta-analysis, the success rate of cognitive-behavioral therapy for anxiety disorders is about 49.5% [4]. Despite these arguments, the cognitive-behavioral approach is considered today to be the 'gold standard' for the psychological treatment of anxiety disorders.

Alongside this, other conceptual approaches offer equally successful methods for the psychotherapy of anxiety disorders. For example, short-term psychodynamic therapy is used for the treatment of generalized anxiety disorder and demonstrates effectiveness no lower than exposure therapy.

In recent years, researchers have paid significant attention to attempts to find an integrated approach to the psychotherapy of anxiety disorders that would combine the benefits of different approaches and have higher effectiveness than the use of separate methods. For example, research results suggest that integrated psychotherapy, which combines techniques from exposure cognitive-behavioral therapy and short-term psychodynamic therapy for generalized anxiety disorder, demonstrates higher effectiveness than using a purely cognitive-behavioral approach.

Conclusions. The theoretical analysis indicates that the issue of psychological therapy for anxiety disorders requires a systemic vision that would take into account the current state of development of psychotherapy methods, the specifics of the classification of anxiety disorders, and would focus not on the competition of methods, but on their integration to find more effective solutions in terms of speed of results, duration of effect, and availability of human resources.

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