

Effects of implementation intentions on binge eating

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Appendix 1

Impact Addendum

Introduction

This impact addendum highlights the significance and potential impact of the present thesis. We explored an innovative approach to addressing the challenges individuals with binge eating disorder (BED) or bulimia nervosa (BN) face in their daily lives. The purpose of this addendum is to highlight the potential contributions of our research to clinical practice, patient empowerment, public health initiatives, and the advancement of scientific knowledge in the field of eating disorders.

Research

The main purpose of our research was to investigate the effects of a brief implementation intention intervention in reducing binge eating and thereby promoting healthier eating behaviors among individuals with BED or BN. The studies consisted of scientific experiments and included participants with subthreshold binge eating and participants diagnosed with BED or BN. In the control conditions, participants kept a food diary and learned to set specific goals for reducing binge eating in three sessions (e.g., “Starting today, I will eat healthy and have no more binges”). In the experimental conditions of also three sessions, participants also learned to set implementation intentions, if-then plans, in relation to the set goals (e.g., “If I feel lonely or sad, then I will call or text a friend to talk about my feeling”). The main results of the studies showed that the implementation intention intervention significantly reduced the frequency of binge eating, both in the short and long term. Therefore, we concluded that the implementation intention intervention holds promise as an effective adjunctive treatment for individuals with BED or BN, providing a cost-effective and accessible intervention strategy.

Relevance

Many people worldwide are seriously hampered in their daily functioning by binge eating. Both BED and BN are associated with significant physical and mental health risks. There are proven effective treatments for BED and BN. Unfortunately, these treatments are usually offered by centers of expertise with long waiting lists, and not everyone benefits equally from these treatments. Additional interventions, preferably low-threshold and easy to apply, are therefore more than welcome. Building on previous research on goal achievement and behavior change through the formation of implementation intentions, the primary aim of this thesis was to investigate whether such an easy to apply intervention can also be used in the treatment of relatively complex problems such as binge eating. Second, we investigated the ability of several possible moderators to optimize the implementation intention effects. In that regard, however, our findings were less optimistic: We were not able to show that the implementation intention effects could be enhanced by several possible moderators.

The results of our studies contribute to the scientific understanding of effective treatment methods for individuals with BED or BN. The implementation intention intervention provides eating disorder treatment centers and clinicians with an evidence-based complementary strategy to address binge eating that is also cost-effective, easy to implement, and patient-friendly. Therewith this research may lead to improved treatment outcomes and a reduction in the severity and frequency of binge eating in individuals with BED or BN. The intervention's clarity and ease of implementation make it a feasible option to integrate into clinical protocols, potentially enhancing the efficacy of treatment programs. In addition, the findings of our studies may have broader implications for the treatment of other psychological or physical problems associated with unwanted behaviors, such as addiction or obesity.

Target Groups

The research findings are relevant and interesting to multiple target groups. Firstly, clinicians and mental health professionals specializing in eating disorders can benefit from the results, as the implementation intention intervention offers a cost-effective and practical tool to enhance treatment outcomes. Our findings provide evidence-based support for integrating this intervention into existing treatment protocols, ultimately improving the effectiveness of clinical practices. Second, individuals diagnosed with BED or BN and their families form another important target group. Our research findings offer hope by providing evidence of a successful and accessible intervention that can help individuals regain control over their eating behaviors, reduce binge eating, and improve their overall well-being. With the reality of waiting lists and inaccessibility of professional treatments, e-health and self-help trainings find a clear use. Implementation intentions fit perfectly within such forms of treatment. Goal setting combined with implementation intentions also helps empower people and get them to work on their problems themselves. Finally, policymakers, public health organizations, and researchers in the field of eating disorders can use our research findings for prevention efforts, the development of more targeted interventions, and to advocate for improved support and resources for individuals with BED or BN.

Activity

To ensure our research findings are effectively utilized by the target groups, it is crucial to involve and inform them about the results. Several activities can facilitate the dissemination and application of knowledge gained from this research in the future:

1) Academic Conferences and Publications

Presenting the research findings at relevant academic conferences and publishing them in peer-reviewed journals will allow researchers and clinicians in the field to learn about the effectiveness of the implementation intention intervention.

This dissemination strategy ensures the integration of the research into the scientific community, fostering further advancements in the treatment of BED and BN, collaborations, and discussions.

2) Professional Trainings and Workshops

Organizing workshops and training sessions for clinicians, healthcare providers, and mental health professionals can promote the dissemination and implementation of the research findings in clinical practice. These events can offer a platform to educate professionals about the intervention technique, its application, and its potential benefits. Sharing guidelines and practical tools can help professionals effectively incorporate the intervention into their treatment approaches. Especially in this regard, there is still much to be gained because self-regulatory interventions, such as implementation intentions, are not yet widely known among mental health professionals.

3) Patient Education and Support Groups

Engaging with patient organizations and support groups dedicated to eating disorders allows for direct dissemination of the research findings to individuals affected by BED or BN and their families. Presenting the intervention technique and its positive outcomes in an accessible and relatable manner can empower individuals, increase awareness, and promote self-help strategies for managing binge eating.