

Group therapy for Generalised Anxiety Disorder: A viable alternative

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Generalised anxiety disorder is no joke for its many sufferers who find their enjoyment of everyday life inhibited by excessive and uncontrollable worry and whose treatment presents a significant cost to the healthcare system.

Generalised Anxiety Disorder or GAD, says Dr Emma Burt-Hill from QUT's School of Psychology and Counselling, is very common in the general community and also occurs with a number of other conditions such as mood, substance use and personality disorders, and [anxiety disorders](#) like [panic disorder](#) with agoraphobia, and social and simple [phobias](#).

"GAD is a chronic and fluctuating condition that affects many people's daily living," Dr Burt-Hill said.

"It can be costly for the health system as it is difficult to treat."

To find viable and cost-effective alternatives to one-on-one therapy, Dr Burt-Hill, studied the efficacy and durability of three different forms of [psychotherapy](#) for treating GAD delivered in groups rather than individually.

"I carried out two studies of group therapy for nine weeks and 14 weeks duration with a follow-up six months after the end of therapy to gauge the lasting effects of the therapy," Ms Dr Burt-Hill said.

"The first study compared the results of nearly 30 individuals from three groups who undertook nine weeks of either [Cognitive Behaviour Therapy](#) (CBT), Supportive-Expressive Psychodynamic Therapy (SE PDT) or Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT).

"A second study had two groups undertake 14 weeks of either CBT or SE PDT."

"The results show that group therapy for all methods over nine or 14-weeks reduced worry, trait anxiety, and [depressive symptoms](#). And the good news is, after six months we found that participants had maintained those gains.

"This suggests that therapy for GAD can be conducted in groups thereby enabling more people to receive help and cutting healthcare costs."

Dr Burt-Hill said the length of therapy was an important factor.

"The 14-week course of CBT was more effective at producing long-lasting beneficial outcomes than the nine-week CBT," she said.

"A significant finding at the six-month follow-up was that those who had taken part in the 14 weeks of CBT had a 15 per cent higher benefit for recovery than 14 weeks of supportive-expressive psychodynamic therapy."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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