

Abstract

Common mental disorders (CMD) have high worldwide prevalence and have caused global burden. To fulfil the rising demand for psychotherapy, low-intensity cognitive behavioural therapy (LICBT) was introduced to treat people with mild-to-moderate CMD. Despite its promising short-term effectiveness, there is little evidence for the long-term maintenance of the LICBT effects. The aim of the current study is to investigate both the short-term effectiveness of LICBT and the maintenance of its benefits in Hong Kong. One thousand two hundred twenty participants who have received LICBT services from a local community centre were invited to join this study. Their pre-, post-, and follow-up symptom severity were assessed by Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) and Generalised Anxiety Disorder Scale-7 (GAD-7). Based on their dates of treatment termination, participants were divided into six follow-up groups, with follow-up time period up to about four and a half year. Results indicated that PHQ-9 and GAD-7 significantly decreased after LICBT with large effect sizes ($d = 0.83 - 0.93$). For follow-up assessments, follow-up PHQ-9 and GAD-7 were significantly lower than post-treatment PHQ-9 and GAD-7 scores ($d = 0.09 - 0.15$), and lower than pre-treatment PHQ-9 and GAD-7 scores ($d = 1.08 - 1.09$). Results also indicated no significant differences in follow-up PHQ-9 and GAD-7 across different follow-up time periods. These findings support both the short-term LICBT effectiveness and long-term maintenance of LICBT benefits in Hong Kong. More resources could be devoted to LICBT's development.

Keywords: low-intensity cognitive-behavioural therapy (LICBT), common mental disorders, effectiveness, maintenance.