

Exploring Salient Shifts and Transdiagnostic Factors in Eating Disordered Women

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Abstract : Carbohydrate addiction is said to be the sustained dependence on hyperpalatable foods rich in carbohydrates and sugar. This addiction manifests in increased consumption of carbohydrates through bingeing: a behaviour typically associated with eating disorders. There is a lack of consensus amongst relevant experts as to whether carbohydrates are physiologically or psychologically addictive. With an increased focus on carbohydrate addiction, an outpatient treatment programme, HELP, has been established in Cape Town, South Africa, to specifically address this issue. This research aimed to explore, pre-and post-intervention, the possible presence of, and subsequent shifts in, the maintaining mechanisms identified in the transdiagnostic model for eating disorders. However, the potential for the emergence of other perpetuating factors was not discounted and the nature of the analysis allowed for this possibility. Eight women between the ages of twenty-two and fifty, who had completed the outpatient treatment programme in the last six months, were interviewed. They were asked to speak retrospectively about their personal difficulties, eating and food, and their experience of the treatment. Thematic analysis was employed to identify themes arising from the data. Five themes congruent with the transdiagnostic model's factors emerged: over-evaluation of weight and shape, core low self-esteem, interpersonal difficulties, clinical perfectionism and mood intolerance. A variety of sub-themes, elaborating upon the various ways in which the disordered eating was maintained, also emerged from the data. Shifts in these maintaining mechanisms were identified. Although not necessarily indicative of recovery, the results suggest that the outpatient HELP programme had a positive overall influence on the participants; and that the transdiagnostic model may be useful in understanding and guiding the treatment of clients who engage in this type of treatment programme.

Keywords : eating disorders, binge eating disorder, carbohydrate addiction, transdiagnostic model, maintaining mechanisms, thematic analysis, outpatient treatment

Conference Title : ICAPBS 2014 : International Conference on Applied Psychology and Behavioral Sciences

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : May 26-27, 2014