

Abstract

Background: Previous studies have shown that the introduction of psychoeducation with patient information booklet, in addition to their usual treatment, could produce more rapid improvement of symptoms in patients with panic disorder in the early phase of treatment.

Objective: To assess the efficacy of single-session psychoeducation combined with patient information booklet in the early relief of symptoms and suffering in panic disorder patients who have active symptoms and are concurrently on antidepressants.

Method: A randomised controlled study was conducted. A total of 120 new psychiatric out-patients with panic disorder (with or without agoraphobia) meeting the inclusion criteria were recruited and randomly allocated into three groups: (1) Intervention group with single-session psychoeducation and booklet about panic disorder and treatment with antidepressants (n = 40); (2) Placebo group with placebo psychoeducation and leaflet about mental well-being and treatment with antidepressants (n = 40); (3) Control group treated with antidepressants (n = 40). The primary outcome measures were the change of score in Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and Panic Disorder Severity Scale (PDSS) total score from baseline to the primary endpoint (week 3 of the study). The secondary outcome measures were the change of score in Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), World Health Organization Quality of Life Assessment-BREF (WHOQoL-BREF) and the seven symptom domains of PDSS from baseline to the primary endpoint. The pattern of change of scores over the period of the study (12 weeks) was also studied. Intention-to-treat analysis with last observation carried forward was employed for data analysis.

Results: Significant ($p < 0.05$) difference in the pattern of change was noted in BAI and “distress during panic attack” domain of PDSS at week 3 among the three groups. The intervention group was found to have significantly ($p < 0.05$) greater improvement in these two measures at week 3 after receiving psychoeducation and information booklet. No significant difference in improvement was noted in BDI, WHOQoL and PDSS total scores among the three groups. All outcome measures showed significant ($p < 0.01$) improvement with time but no significant difference in the score of outcome measures was noted at the end of study at week 12.

Conclusion: There was a significant reduction in symptomatic distress at week 3, as measured by BAI and “distress during panic attack” domain of PDSS, in the intervention group. The findings of the present study suggested that psychoeducation together with information booklet hold promise for the early relief of symptoms in patients with panic disorder. Further studies are needed to explore its potential applications and establish its role in clinical use.

Keywords: panic disorder, psychoeducation, randomised controlled study

Declaration of interest: none