Does Timing Matter? Examining the Impact of Session Timing on Outcome

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Objective: First-line treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are often implemented twice per week in efficacy trials. However, there is considerable variability in the frequency of treatment sessions (e.g., once per week or twice per week) in clinical practice. Moreover, clients often cancel or reschedule treatment sessions, leading to even greater variability in treatment session timing. The goal of the current study is to investigate the impact of PTSD treatment session frequency on treatment outcome. Method: One hundred thirty-six women (M\text{age} = 32.16 \text{[SD} = 9.90]) with PTSD were randomized to receive cognitive processing therapy or prolonged exposure. PTSD symptom outcome was measured using the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale, and session frequency and consistency were measured using dates of treatment session attendance. Session frequency was operationalized using average days between sessions, and consistency was defined by the standard deviation of the number of days between treatment sessions. Results: Piecewise growth curve modeling revealed that higher average days between sessions was associated with significantly smaller PTSD symptom reduction, with more frequent sessions yielding greater PTSD symptom reduction (p < .001, d = .82). Higher consistency was also associated with significantly greater PTSD symptom reduction (p < .01, d = .48). The substantially larger effect size for frequency suggests that average days between treatment sessions impacts treatment outcome more than consistency. Follow-up analyses revealed a longer time interval between Sessions 4 and 5 was associated with smaller reductions in PTSD treatment outcome. Conclusions: More frequent scheduling of sessions may maximize PTSD treatment outcomes.

What is the public health significance of this article?
This study suggests that more frequent spaced sessions of psychotherapy for PTSD results in greater reductions in symptoms during the course of treatment.

Keywords: treatment outcome, session timing, posttraumatic stress disorder, cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure

Given the relatively high rate of dropout in trauma-focused psychotherapy (Imel, Laska, Jakupcak, & Simpson, 2013), there has been increased attention to identifying moderators of treatment outcome and predictors of treatment dropout, with most of this work focusing on demographic variables (e.g., educational level, age, time since trauma event). Unfortunately, findings from these studies have been mixed. (e.g., Cloitre, Stovall-McClough, Miranda, & Chemtob, 2004; Foa, Riggs, Massie, & Yarczower, 1995; Iverson, Resick, Suvak, Walling, & Taft, 2011; Rizvi, Vogt, & Resick, 2009; van Minnen, Arntz, & Keijsers, 2002). Accordingly, there remain more questions than answers with respect to understanding moderators of treatment outcome.

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This work was supported by National Institute of Mental Health Grant NIH-1 R01-MH51509 and National Institute of Mental Health Grant NIH-2 R01-MH51509 awarded to Patricia A. Resick while at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Dr. Gutner was supported by a National Institute of Mental Health grant (1K23MH103396-01A1). Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Cassidy A. Gutner, 150 S. Huntington Avenue (116B-3), Boston, MA 02130. E-mail: cassidy.gutner@va.gov
One factor that may serve as an important indicator of treatment outcome is the time between treatment sessions. Manualized evidence-based treatments for anxiety and traumatic stress disorders make recommendations about session timing (e.g., Foa, Hembree, & Rothbaum, 2007; Foa, Yadin, & Lichner, 2012; Resick, Nishith, Weaver, Astin, & Feuer, 2002), with some trauma-focused protocols recommending twice-weekly sessions. Furthermore, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) efficacy trials for both prolonged exposure (PE; Foa, Rothbaum, Riggs, & Murdock, 1991) and cognitive processing therapy (CPT; Resick & Schnicke, 1992) have often used a twice-per-week session format (e.g., Foa et al., 1991; Monson et al., 2006; Resick et al., 2002, 2008, 2015), whereas some PTSD treatment studies followed a weekly format (e.g., Bryant et al., 2008; Foa et al., 2005; Galovski, Blain, Mott, Elwood, & Houle, 2012; Schnurr et al., 2007). Despite the clear protocols used in these randomized controlled trials, participants reschedule and cancel appointments, impacting the frequency of session attendance. This pattern of rescheduling and canceling appointments has led to efficacy protocols having guidelines about the maximum amount of time that is permitted to complete treatment. For instance, Resick and colleagues (2008) aimed to have participants attend twice-weekly sessions for 6 weeks; however, they required completion of treatment in 12 weeks, given the expectation that some participants would not attend sessions as indicated in the protocol or that there might be competing appointments or illness.

Further complicating this issue is that the twice-per-week protocol used in randomized controlled trials for trauma-focused treatment are rarely followed in clinical practice settings (Spoont, Murdoch, Hodges, & Nugent, 2010). In clinical practice settings, treatment sessions are more often scheduled once per week or less frequently depending on the demands and available resources in a particular clinic. Indeed, the clinical demands (e.g., too many clinical hours, significant administrative responsibilities, clinics being understaffed) of mental health care clinics may not permit more frequent scheduling of treatment sessions (Finley et al., 2015). Importantly, the efficacy data obtained in randomized controlled trials may not translate to clinical practice settings, given the differences in frequency of treatment sessions. Although speculative, it is possible that inconsistent treatment session attendance may be a proxy variable for treatment engagement. To date, session timing has been examined in depression, and broadly across psychopathology in naturalistic data (e.g., Cuijpers, Hubers, Ebert, Koole, & Andersson, 2013; Erekson, Lambert, & Eggett, 2015). Findings demonstrate an association between concentrating sessions over a shorter duration and greater symptom change. Other research has examined the impact of 18 hr of cognitive–behavioral therapy for PTSD over 5 to 7 workdays compared with weekly treatment (Ehlers et al., 2010, 2014). Results indicate comparable findings to weekly treatment delivered over 3 months. Taken together, it is important to investigate whether frequency of treatment sessions affects PTSD treatment outcome with gold-standard PTSD treatments, including PE and CPT.

The primary goal of the current study is to examine whether session frequency (i.e., mean number of days between sessions) and consistency (standard deviation of number of days between session) predicts PTSD treatment outcome at both posttreatment assessment and at the follow-up assessments (3 months, 9 months, 5 years). Given the recommended twice-weekly sessions, we hypothesize that both frequency and consistency of sessions will be significantly related to PTSD treatment outcome. The second goal of the study is exploratory. Specifically, given anecdotal evidence of treatment dropout around certain treatment-related assignments (e.g., in vivo exposures, imaginal exposures, writing a trauma account) for both PE and CPT (Sessions 2–3, 3–4, 4–5) and evidence of early dropout (i.e., Session 3; Kehle-Forbes, Meis, Spoont, & Polusny, 2015), exploratory analyses will examine whether length of time between these particular sessions impacts outcome.

Method

Participants

Data were drawn from women who met eligibility criteria for a randomized controlled trial comparing CPT and PE (Resick et al., 2002). The intent-to-treat (ITT) sample of the trial consisted of 171 participants. Because the current study focused on timing between sessions, we included data from 136 participants (79.5% of the ITT) who attended at least the first two treatment sessions. Participants were included in the study if they were 18 years of age or older, female, and met criteria for Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) diagnosis of PTSD related to interpersonal violence. Participants were excluded for current psychosis, current suicidality, current diagnosis of substance dependence, illiteracy, or currently engaged in an abusive relationship or a dangerous situation such as being stalked. Participants were recruited from the greater metropolitan St. Louis, Missouri, area. The sample included in the current study had a mean age of 32.16 years (SD = 9.90), a mean of 14.59 (SD = 2.31) years of education, a mean of 103.75 (SD = 100.55) months since their primary trauma, and were self-identified as 75.7% White, 19.9% Black, and 4.4% other.

Measures

Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale-DSM–IV (CAPS; Blake et al., 1995). The CAPS is a 17-item clinician-administered measure for PTSD diagnostic criteria outlined in the DSM–IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The measure yields both a diagnostic measure and a total severity score that includes both symptom frequency and intensity scores, which are each rated separately. The CAPS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties (Blake et al., 1995; Weathers, Keane, & Davidson, 2001). The CAPS was the primary treatment outcome measure, which was assessed as the total PTSD symptom severity score taken at baseline, posttreatment, and at follow-up assessments (3 months, 9 months, 5 years).

Session timing. Session and assessment dates were recorded at each visit and used to calculate both session frequency and consistency. Session frequency was computed as a mean number of days between session, and session consistency was the standard deviation of the number of days between sessions.

Procedure

The study was conducted in accordance with approved procedures from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University...
of St. Louis, Missouri, with the new analyses approved by the IRB of VA Boston Health Care System. As previously reported (e.g., Resick et al., 2002), participants completed a brief telephone screen prior to their initial assessment, at which time written informed consent was obtained prior to the baseline assessment. All eligible participants were then randomized to one of the treatment conditions prior to the start of treatment. Some of these participants dropped out prior to attending the first session (see Gutner, Gallagher, Baker, Sloan, & Resick, 2016).

All women were randomly assigned to receive PE, CPT, or minimal attention waitlist (MA; Resick et al., 2002). PE and CPT were scheduled with the intention of having twice-weekly sessions over the course of 6 weeks. PE (Foa, Hearst, Dancu, Hembree, & Jaycox, 1994) and CPT (Resick & Schnicke, 1993) are gold-standard PTSD treatments that utilize different mechanisms of change for symptom reduction (Gallagher & Resick, 2012). PE is designed to facilitate recovery of PTSD through extinction learning during imaginal and in vivo exposures. Alternatively, CPT is founded in cognitive theory and relies on modification of distorted beliefs and cognitive processing of emotional information for symptom reduction. Both conditions had a total of 13 hr in treatment. The PE condition involved a total of nine sessions, the first of which was 60 min, with the remainder lasting for 90 min per session. With respect to CPT, there were twelve 60-min sessions, with the exception of Sessions 4 and 5, which were 90 min in duration in order to match the number of therapy hours of PE. For the MA condition, participants were informed that they would be eligible for treatment after a 6-week waiting period (and had been prerandomized after initial assessment despite both the staff and participant initially remaining blind to randomized condition), with check-in phone calls from clinicians every 2 weeks to ensure there were no emergencies requiring immediate attention. At the conclusion of the 6-week period (which served as a no-treatment control condition), individuals in the MA condition began the therapy they had been randomized to and are included in this study.

Data Analytic Plan

Analyses were all retrospective and conducted with archival data previously collected by Resick and colleagues (2002). Piecewise multilevel growth curve modeling was used to examine change over time in PTSD symptoms with the software package Hierarchical Linear and Non-Linear Modeling (HLM 6.34: Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2005) using full maximum likelihood estimation. Multilevel growth curve modeling is particularly well-suited for the current data because there was a considerable amount of variation in the timing of the assessments, particularly for the long-term follow-up assessment. To account for this variability, we modeled time as number of days since baseline assessment. Piecewise modeling of the outcomes over time was used to estimate different slopes from pre- to posttreatment (Epoch 1) and posttreatment to long-term follow-up (Epoch 2) using procedures described by Singer and Willett (2003, Chapter 6). Trajectories of both epochs were tested simultaneously by including two time variables: (a) the number of days since baseline assessment, with the baseline assessment coded as zero; and (b) the number of days since the posttreatment assessment, with all time points prior to posttreatment coded as zero. The coefficient for the first time variable represents change over time from pre- to posttreatment (Epoch 1), whereas the coefficient for the second time variable represent the difference in rate of change between Epoch 1 and Epoch 2 (the follow-up period). To estimate change during Epoch 2, the time variables were recoded such that the variable representing number of days since baseline assessment was centered at the posttreatment assessment, and the second time variable represented the number of days since baseline assessment with posttreatment assessments coded as zero. This reparameterization sets up the identical overall model as the first; however, the time coefficients provide slightly different information, with the first being change during the follow-up period, and the second, as with the original parameterization, represents the difference in rate of change between the two epochs.

All time coefficients described in the data analytic plan section were modeled as random effects, which specifies variation in the time coefficients across participants. Predictor variables (average number of days between sessions, standard deviation of days between sessions, a dummy-coded treatment variable, and interactions terms) and one covariate (percent of sessions attended) were included as Level 2 predictors for each of the time coefficients described above to evaluate how they influenced change in PTSD symptoms (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Continuous predictor variables and covariates were grand mean centered, treatment condition was modeled using a dummy coded variable, and product terms were used to analyze interactions. Cohen’s $d$ (.25 = small, .50 = medium, .80 = large; Cohen, 1988) was calculated as an estimate of effect size using the formula $d = \frac{\text{effect size}}{\text{standard deviation of the measure}}$. Another advantage of multilevel growth curve modeling is that it allowed us to conduct the data on the largest sample size possible because it is robust to missing data at Level 1 (i.e., measures assessed over time).

Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for all of the time and predictor variables as well as the covariate, percent sessions attended. None of these variables differed significantly as a function of treatment condition. The range of timing between sessions across the sample was as follows: average days between sessions ranged from 2 to 32; Session 2 to 3 ranged from 2 to 19 days; Session 3 to 4 ranged from 2 to 71 days; and Session 5 ranged from 1 to 22 days. Mean number of days between treatment sessions ($r = -.09, p = .287$) and consistency ($r = .034, p = .701$) were not significantly related to pretreatment CAPS scores. Percent of treatment sessions attended exhibited significant negative associations with average frequency ($r = -.24, p = .006$) and average consistency ($r = -.19, p = .031$), speaking to the need to include this variable as a covariate. Of note, percent of treatment sessions attended did not include those who completed only one session, as these individuals were not included in analyses. We examined associations between mean number of days between treatment sessions, consistency, and several demographic variables, including age, years of education, minority status, income level, and years since index rape. The only significant associations to emerge were between minority status and mean number of days between sessions ($r = .29, p = .001$) and minority status and consistency ($r = .22, p = .015$), indicating that compared with participants
identifying as Caucasian, participants identifying as belonging to a
minority ethnic group tended to have more time elapsed between
sessions and to attend sessions in a less consistent manner.1

Table 2 provides the coefficients for the Predictor \( \times \) Time
(analyses labeled “a”) and Predictor \( \times \) Time interactions (analyses
labeled “b”).2 Analysis 1a indicated that the percent of treatment
sessions attended significantly impacted change from both pre-
to posttreatment and posttreatment through the long-term follow-up
period. Figure 1 illustrates that participants who attended more
sessions (labeled high in Figure 1) showed larger decreases pre-
to posttreatment relative to those who attended fewer sessions
(labeled “b”). Analysis 1a indicated that the percent of treatment
sessions attended significantly impacted change from both pre-
to posttreatment and posttreatment through the long-term follow-up
period. Figure 1 illustrates that participants who attended more
sessions (labeled high in Figure 1) showed larger decreases pre-
to posttreatment relative to those who attended fewer sessions
(labeled “b”). However, this effect reversed from posttreatment
through the long-term follow-up period, as percentage of ses-
tions attended was significantly and positively associated with
change during the follow-up period, with those showing high
levels of percent attended exhibiting slight increases during this
period and those exhibiting low levels of percent attended
exhibiting slight decreases in PTSD symptoms. Percentage of
sessions attended was included as a covariate in all subsequent
analyses. Because this covariate was grand mean centered, all
subsequent analyses can be interpreted as the effect when holding
percent sessions attended constant at its mean.

Analysis 2a indicated that the mean number of days between
treatment sessions significantly predicted change in PTSD symp-
toms during treatment, but not during the follow-up period. Par-
ticipants with shorter average time between sessions showed larger
decreases in PTSD symptoms pre- to posttreatment compared with
participants with longer average time between sessions when con-
trolling for percent sessions attended,3 with no difference in
change during the follow-up period as a function of average time
between sessions. Analysis 2b indicated that the impact of average
time between sessions did not significantly vary as a function of
treatment condition. In other words, the more frequently sessions
were attended, the better the outcome was for both CPT and PE.

Consistency, as indexed by the within-subjects standard devia-
tion of days between treatment sessions, was related to the change
in PTSD in a manner similar to average time between sessions (see
Analysis 3a). However, the effect size for average time between
sessions (\( d = .82 \), indicating a large effect) was substantially larger
than the effect size for consistency (\( d = .48 \), indicating a medium
effect), suggesting that average days between treatment sessions
impacts treatment outcome more than consistency. We did not
evaluate a model with both of these variables predicting the
outcome variable because the mean is used to calculate standard
deviation; thus, they should not be evaluated simultaneously in a
regression analysis. Analysis 3b indicated that the impact of con-
sistency did not significantly vary across treatment conditions.

Analyses 4 to 6 were exploratory and were conducted to identify
the interval between sessions that most impacted treatment out-
come. The coefficients in Table 2 indicated that the time between
Sessions 4 and 5 was the only interval that significantly impacted
change in PTSD symptoms, with longer time intervals associated
with smaller decreases in PTSD symptom severity during treat-
ment (see Analysis 6a). This effect did not significantly differ
across treatment conditions (see Analysis 6b). The intervals be-
tween Sessions 2 and 3 and between Sessions 3 and 4 were not
significantly associated with change in PTSD symptoms from pre-
to posttreatment or posttreatment through the follow-up period.

Discussion

The current study provides initial evidence that timing of ses-
sions plays an important role in PTSD treatment outcome. More
specifically, we found that when controlling for amount of sessions
attended, the more frequently sessions are attended (i.e., fewer
average days between sessions), the greater symptom improve-
ment over the course of treatment (i.e., in the short term). These
findings speak to the potential utility of more frequent sessions

1 We conducted follow-up analyses including minority status as a cova-
riate. This did not change the pattern of results and had minimal impact on
the estimated coefficients.

2 All main effects (i.e., predictor and time) as well as the covariate
percent sessions attended were included in the models. However, to facil-
itate interpretation, only the coefficients for the Predictor \( \times \) Time and
Condition \( \times \) Predictor \( \times \) Time interactions are presented. A table with the
coefficients for the intercept terms and main effects can be obtained from
the first author.

3 Because percent sessions attended was included in all analyses, the
phrase “when controlling for percent sessions attended” applies through-
out; however, we will no longer add it to increase the readability of the
Results section.
improving outcomes in the context of brief evidence-based psychotherapy for PTSD. Although consistency of session timing was also examined, the substantially larger effect size for frequency suggests that frequency impacts treatment outcome more than consistency does. Furthermore, the analyses examining the 5-year follow-up data demonstrated that the effects were maintained at follow-up, with no significant change in either direction.

Importantly, these results demonstrate that even in the context of a controlled efficacy trial with high rates of treatment fidelity (see Resick et al., 2002), there remain relevant malleable factors that impact treatment outcome—namely, the timing of sessions. Although our data are not able to speak to the ideal timing of days in treatment sessions for CPT and PE. This is consistent with the respective efficacy trials (e.g., Foa et al., 1991; Resick et al., 2002).

Although both CPT and PE treatment manuals encourage twice-weekly sessions for 6 weeks, the implications for improved outcome are likely not fully understood and require further examination. The current study did not directly examine treatment occurring once a week versus twice a week. Gaining greater knowledge regarding the difference in efficacy when sessions occur once per week versus twice per week would be important, given that these treatments are typically implemented once per week in clinical practice. Although scheduling of sessions is important, it is equally important to acknowledge that even when sessions are scheduled to occur once or twice per week, clients tend to reschedule or cancel treatment sessions, which further impacts frequency of sessions. In these circumstances, it is critical to understand why individuals are rescheduling and/or canceling treatment sessions and the frequency with which they do so.

Although some data support the generalizability of efficacious treatments in routine care (e.g., Stirman, 2008; Zappert & Westrup, 2008), the timing with which treatment is delivered in these settings may play a crucial role, and this deserves greater research attention. Results from the current study suggest that one way to potentially increase treatment response rates outside of these randomized controlled trials (RCTs) may be to administer more fre-

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### Table 2

**Coefficients for the Predictor × Time and Predictor × Time Interactions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Model level</th>
<th>Change during treatment</th>
<th>Change during follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$t$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Percent sessions attended</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>-.86</td>
<td>-4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Frequency (M)</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Frequency (M)</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Consistency (SD)</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>Consistency (SD)</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a</td>
<td>Days btw S2 and S3</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b</td>
<td>Days btw S2 and S3</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group × Time</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Days btw S3 and S4</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>Days btw S3 and S4</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group × Time</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Days btw S4 and S5</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>Days btw S4 and S5</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group × Time</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CPT = cognitive processing therapy; PE = prolonged exposure; SD = standard deviation; M = mean; btw = between; S2 = session 2; S3 = session 3; S4 = session 4; S5 = session 5. Bold text indicates statistically significant results. Bold text indicates $p < 0.05$. 
The exploratory analyses demonstrated the potential benefit on symptom outcome of having fewer days between Sessions 4 and 5 for PTSD treatment, regardless of the type of treatment (e.g., CPT or PE). Given that both CPT and PE contain assignments in Session 4 that require patients to directly confront the content of their trauma (e.g., trauma account is assigned in Session 3, and the first imaginal exposure occurs in Session 3), we added an exploratory aim to examine the potential impact of session timing between these sessions on treatment outcome. Results revealed that the longer time in between these sessions, after which exposure assignments are first introduced, was related to smaller symptom reduction, regardless of treatment type. Although these exploratory results could be spurious, these sessions involve the more in-depth discussion of trauma details. Although they do not align with the first introduction of the trauma account across both treatments, it is important to further explore the potential importance of these sessions and to replicate these findings. Notably, these findings counter the common clinical perception that exposure-based techniques are not well tolerated. Furthermore, the data may suggest that clinicians should pay attention to session timing around the period after which the trauma accounts are introduced, as increased avoidance may manifest in a delay in attendance at the subsequent sessions and may impact symptom reduction.

Although these analyses were exploratory, it is interesting to highlight the potential role of timing around potentially more difficult assignments in treatment. Although we were not able to directly measure avoidance, it is possible that the longer time between sessions may be a proxy for avoidance related to confronting the details of the index trauma. Furthermore, the current study is not powered to examine whether session timing is a mechanism of change or a correlate of other variables not directly examined. Future research should examine whether or not there is an ideal threshold for session timing. The pattern in the current data set may not reflect routine care that may have higher averages of days between session because of factors such as clinical availability and cancellations. Additionally, we suggest that session attendance may be a proxy for treatment engagement; however, we do not include a measure of engagement in the current study and are unable to address to this issue more specifically. Finally, it is important to recognize that the current study did not collect data on the reason for the frequency of session scheduling. For example, it is possible that factors such as vacation, illness, or avoidance could have been playing a role in session timing.

The current study has a number of clinical implications. First, it highlights the importance of discussing the impact of frequent session attendance with patients. The current study provides empirical support for the importance of regular session attendance by demonstrating that the more frequently the sessions are attended, the better the expected treatment outcome, above and beyond the number of sessions attended. This is consistent with prior research in depression and naturalistic treatment (e.g., Cuijpers et al., 2013; Erikson et al., 2015). Furthermore, carefully monitoring when patients cancel sessions and directly addressing the reason for cancelation may be beneficial. A pattern of frequent canceling and rescheduling should be discussed with the patient to convey the potential impact of frequency of attendance on outcome. Future research should continue to investigate the importance of session timing on treatment outcome.

Figure 1. Symptoms change over time by session attendance. Session attended was analyzed using a continuous percentage of sessions attended variable. Only to depict the nature of this effect, we show the trajectory for participants who fell one standard deviation above the mean of percentage of sessions attended (labeled “Low”) and for participants who fell one standard deviation below the mean of percentage of sessions attended (labeled “High”). As Table 2 indicates, percentage of sessions attended was negatively associated with PTSD symptom change (i.e., higher percentage attended corresponded to larger decreases in PTSD symptoms), and the effect reversed during the follow-up period (i.e., higher percentage attended corresponded to smaller decreases or slight increases in PTSD symptoms during the follow-up period in comparison with lower percentage attended). CAPS = ClinicianAdministered PTSD Scale; Pre = pretreatment; Post = posttreatment; 3MFU = 3-month follow-up; 9MFU = 9-month follow-up; LTFU = longterm follow-up. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

References


Received December 8, 2015
Revision received April 6, 2016
Accepted April 9, 2016

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