Effects of exposure treatment on locus of control attributions in agoraphobics

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Health attributions of 36 agoraphobics assessed using the Multidimensional Health Locus of control (MHLC) questionnaire, were compared to a general population control group (N=29). Internal health attributions of agoraphobics were comparable to controls, but external attributions to chance and powerful others were significantly higher. Agoraphobics were then offered behavioral-cognitive (exposure) treatment, which 24 completed while 12 discontinued or refused. Both groups of agoraphobic patients, were assessed on the MHLC and other behavioural and cognitive measures. Mean duration of active treatment was 4 months. Completers were reassessed after treatment and at 6 months follow up while drop-outs were reassessed one year after initial assessment. Both groups of agoraphobics showed significant decrease of attributions to chance at retest, while only successfully treated patients showed significant decrease in attributions to powerful others at follow up with improvement on all behavioral and cognitive psychopathology measures, including depressive cognitions. Attributions correlated with mood in both groups before treatment and attributional changes were not related to mood improvement.

Key words: locus of control attributions, agoraphobia, behavioural-cognitive psychotherapy.
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