

Daily Avoidance as a mechanism of change

Can Changes in a Contextual Measure of Avoidance be Associated
with Changes in Mental Health Symptoms?



IMMERSE

01.

Background

Why is avoidance important?
Is it a viable mechanism of change?
How can it be better operationalised?

03.

Method

What will the participants in my sample need to complete?

02.

Objectives and Hypotheses

04.

Measures

What IMMERSE measures will I need to use?

Background

Avoidance as a transdiagnostic risk factor for mental health disorders

- **A large longitudinal study has implicated avoidance in the development and maintenance of multiple emotional disorders (Spinhoven et al. 2014).**
- **Avoidance has also been identified as a risk factor for treatment resistant mental health disorders (Spinhoven et al. 2014, Kumpula, Orcutt, Bardeen & Varkovitzky 2011).**
- **A recent comprehensive review found the magnitude of the relationship between EA and mental health symptomology to be between a medium and large effect size (Akbari et al. 2022).**

Avoidance as a potential mechanism of change throughout mental health treatment

- **Both CBT and ACT have been associated with significantly reducing avoidance as well as mental health symptoms (Gonzalez-Menendez, Fernandez, Rodriguez & Villagra, 2014; Juarascio et al. 2013; Lapalainen et al. 2015; Khoramnia et al. 2020).**
- **A brief systematic review revealed 14 out of 15 studies included found changes in avoidance to be associated with changes in mental health symptoms**
- **However, Lack of ability to understand the temporal effects of avoidance, underpowered, trait conceptualisation of avoidance**

Issues with the current operationalisation of avoidance



Avoidance is seemingly sensitive to context

Asner et al. (2021) found that whilst socially anxious individuals adapted during a conversation with a stranger, momentary avoidance scores decreased which was associated with decreased anxious symptoms



Conceptualisations of avoidance which view it as a process and not a trait

Relational Frame Theory conceptualisation of Experiential Avoidance suggests that the use of avoidance is contextually bound (Hayes et al. 2006).

Contextual perspective of emotion regulation suggests emotion regulation strategies fluctuate on a day-to-day basis (Brockman, Ciarrochi, Parker & Kashdan, 2017).

Objectives and Hypotheses

1

Objective one

To operationalise a 'contextual' measure of avoidance, and test the sensitivity, specificity and validity of such a measure.

2

Objective two

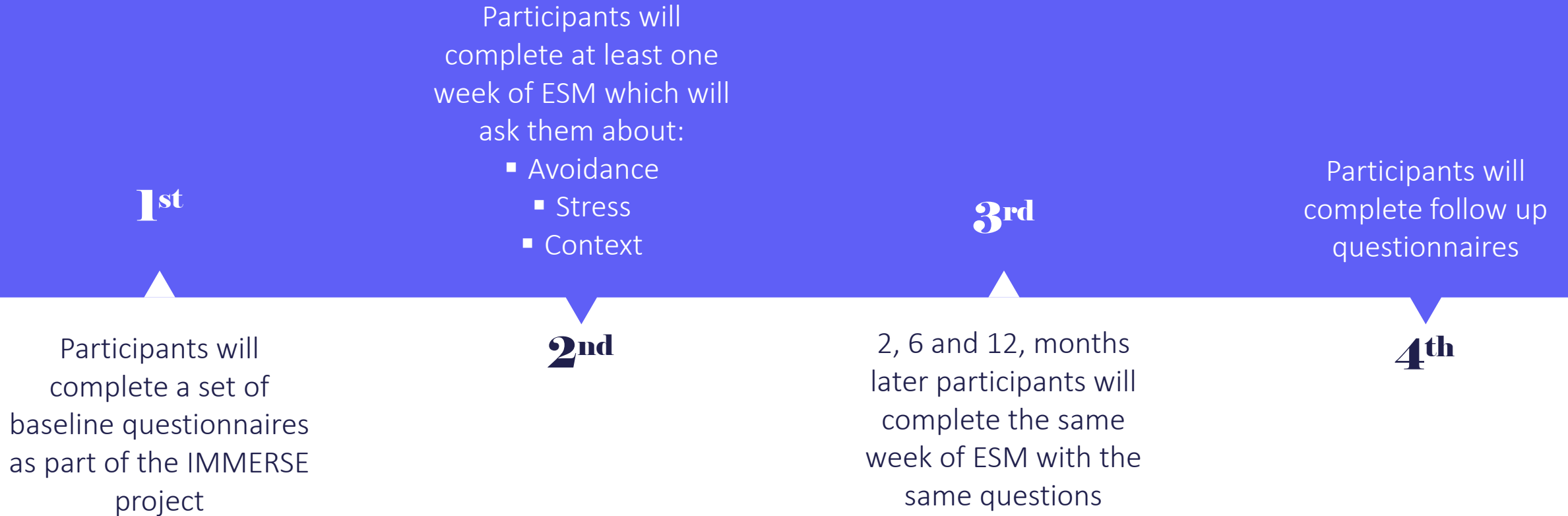
To assess daily avoidance as a mechanism of change in a clinical population undergoing treatment

3

Objective three

To determine whether potential changes in a contextual measure of daily avoidance are more strongly associated with changes in mental health outcomes than changes in a trait measure of avoidance.

- **Greater variability in the use of daily avoidance, when controlling for stressful daily events, will predict lower scores on measures of mental health disorder symptoms and higher scores on measures of mental wellbeing.**
- **Higher avoidance scores in the face of daily life stressors, when controlling for variability in the use of daily avoidance, will predict higher scores on measures of mental health disorder symptoms and lower scores on measures of mental health wellbeing.**
- **Active engagement in mental health treatment (versus poorer engagement or less intensive treatment) will predict decreases in daily avoidance usage from baseline to follow up two months later.**
- **Decreases in the use of daily experiential avoidance will predict improvements in mental health outcomes and mental wellbeing across the treatment period.**



**Measures to be
used from
IMMERSE**

ESM Data:

- Experiential Avoidance module/ items from emotion regulation module/ rumination
- Stress/ relaxed item
- Context items

Questionnaires:

- Demographics
- Significant Life events
- BEAQ
- Social functioning
- General health questionnaire
- Quality of life
- Loneliness
- Reflective functioning
- Service engagement Questionnaire

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