

Language and communication assessment in Cognitive Stimulation Therapy studies: A review

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Introduction: Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) is an evidence-based intervention programme for people with dementia (Spector, 2003). It has been applied internationally in various clinical settings while its effectiveness on cognition, communication and social interaction, mood and anxiety, quality of life, behaviour and activities of daily living have been investigated and reviewed in the latest Cochrane Review (Woods et al., 2023). The review also revealed that among various outcomes, communication and social interaction benefited most, with a standard mean difference of 0.53, indicating a medium effect size. Despite a clinically meaningful treatment effect, specific tasks assessing language and communication were not included in most of the CST studies. The present study aims to take an in-depth investigation into the type and nature of the language/communication assessments taken in reported CST trials.

Methods: Randomized Clinical trials (RCTs) of CST were searched in PubMed and Google Scholar. The tests used for tapping language/communication, their nature (i.e., quantitative vs. qualitative) and the components of language/communication functions assessed was summarized.

Results: Ten RCTs were identified. Holden Communication Scale (Holden & Woods, 1995), a qualitative communication measure based on caregiver's observation, and quantitative analysis of content produced in a picture description task were the two major tasks used.

Conclusion: Language and communication were only evaluated in a few studies. To capture the effects of CSTs in everyday communication, it is suggested that tasks utilizing daily contexts (e.g., conversation) can be introduced in future studies.

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