

The negative schemata in patients' written life stories

or

Maladaptive thought patterns in patients attending therapy – the first steps towards recognition?



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MUNCH: "The Dance of Life"

Our Family Practice

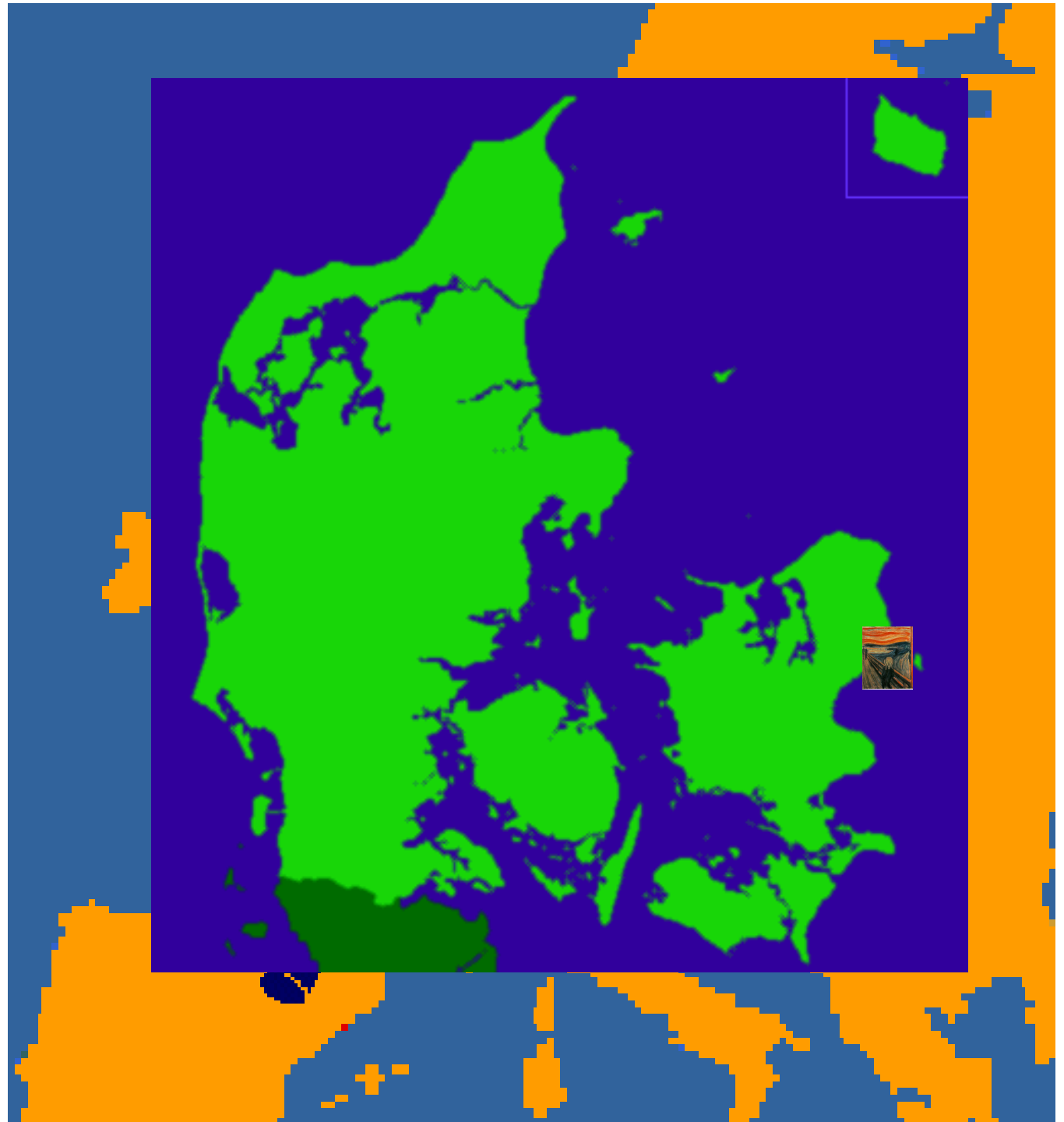
Copenhagen

Denmark

2.200 patients (studied)

2 GPs (plus a pre-registered nurse)

Therapy is offered



Background

- 20-30% of patients suffer from a psychiatric condition
- Referral to a psychologist is a very limited option
- Therapy is an option in General Practice in Denmark

Supervision based on:

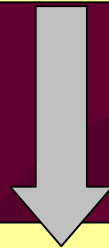
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy**
- **Written homework assignments**
- **Life stories (Patients' personal history)**

Background

Beck's Model:

Early unpleasant experiences

(criticism, rejection, loss..)

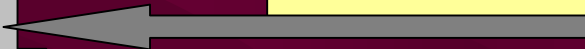


Maladaptive ways of thinking

(negative views of self, world, and future)



Activation of maladaptive thinking,
when matching events in the environment.
(divorce, unemployment..)



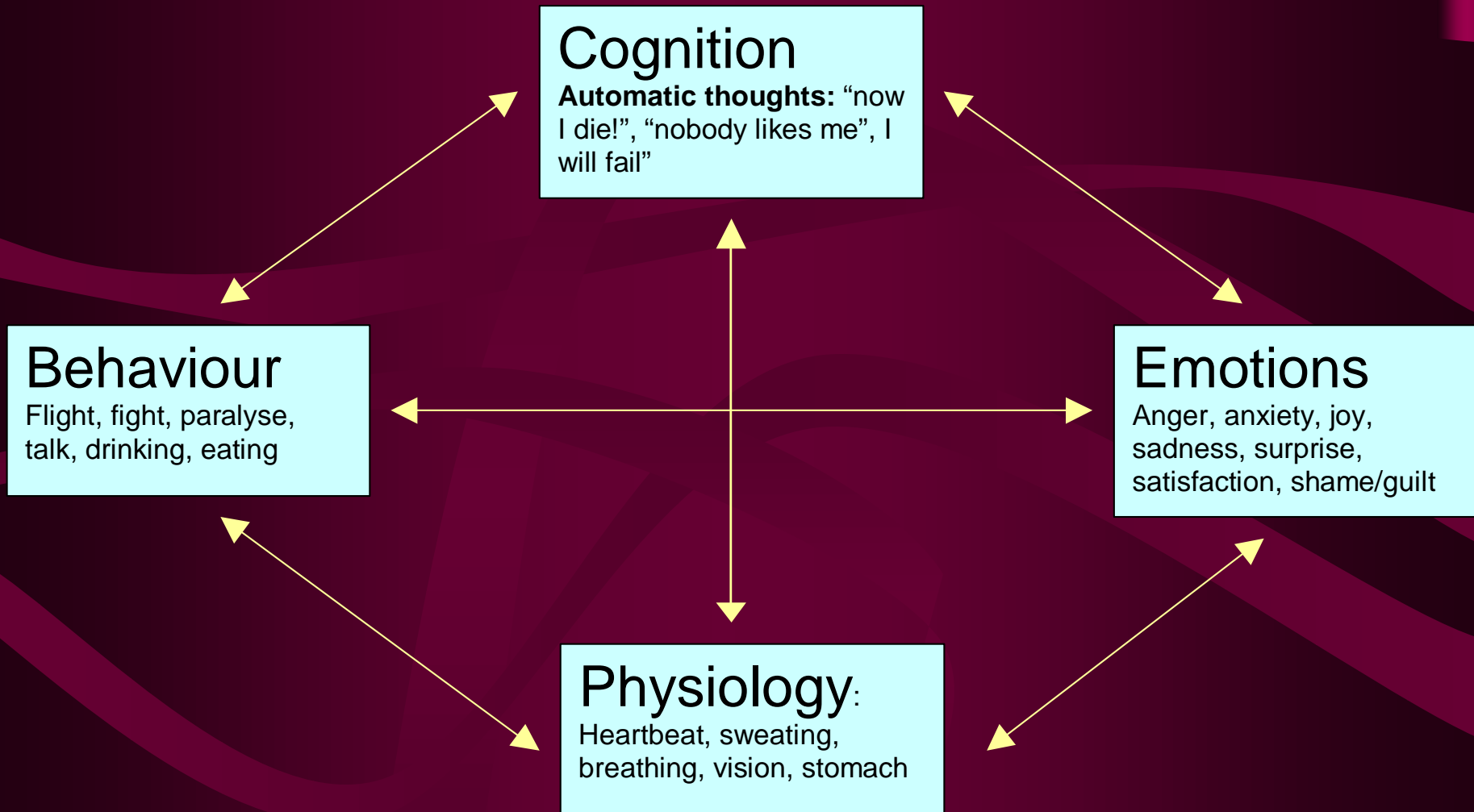
Automatic negative thoughts

(I will fail, nobody likes me..)



Depression, Anxiety

The Cognitive Model:



Background

Cognitive therapy:

Find the **thought**

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graph TD; A[Find the thought] --> B[Analyse it]; B --> C[Replace it with a more realistic and less harmful thought];
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Analyse it

**Replace it with a more realistic
and less harmful thought**

Objective

....to explore how the maladaptive thought patterns are presented when the patient is asked to write her life story

Material

- The story of their life *focusing on people, emotions and events of importance*
- 22 consecutive life stories from patients of both sexes aged 23 to 49

Method

- Finding statements founded on negative and maladaptive thought patterns
- Retrospective document analysis based on the principles of Giorgi, modified by Malterud

Results

- 3 categories of maladaptive thought patterns could be identified:
 - The world is evil
 - Only the perfect (is of value)
 - Emotions are dangerous

The world is evil

- Life is unpredictable and dangerous
- You cannot expect anything good
- Fear of being abandoned or rejected

The world is evil

“ I believe I attended day-care during my parents divorce. I remember being the last child to be fetched and thought my father had forgotten me ”

31 year old woman, day-care worker, with anxiety

The world is evil

“ I was only a child and it was not right of him to touch me like that... I couldn't reject him at the time - I don't think any child would be able to. Has it happened to others? - Creepy ! ”

28 years old woman with unexplained bodily symptoms

Only the perfect

- You are worthless as a person – have to be perfect to be loved
- Fear of showing your inner self
- ‘All or none thinking’

Only the perfect

“They gave me and the other kids the impression that men were all male-chauvinistic pigs... men where thoughtless and without feelings ... I think they forgot that we five boys in the female-community were growing up to be men some day.”

28 years old male fitter with unexplained bodily symptoms

Only the perfect

A 49 year old nurse with unexplained bodily symptoms states:

- *“In 1996 I met Brian, I thought he **was** the man of my life!”*
- She didn't write:
*“... I thought he could **turn out to be** the man of my life”*

Emotions are dangerous

- Negative emotions are combined with great malaise
- Rage is suppressed
- You are responsible for the well-being of others

Emotions are dangerous

“I only saw mother cry once. Of course she did cry a lot more, but if I didn't see it, it didn't exist. I only knew that I didn't want to experience my mother cry ever again.”

28 years old woman with unexplained bodily symptoms

Emotions are dangerous

*“After two weeks I felt locked up.
The thought of getting that close to
another person that might suddenly
disappear, didn’t appeal to me at
all.”*

27 year old man, student, with anxiety

Conclusion

- The life stories reveal maladaptive thoughts
- We believe early identification of the maladaptive thoughts is beneficial
- The results can be transferred to other (therapeutical) settings
- We hope other GP's can use these results



Munch "The Dance of Life"

References