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Honours Research Abstract

Promoting breast awareness in a female university sample: An application of the theory of planned behaviour with an implementation intentions intervention

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Aim of this Research

This project had a number of aims. The first was to evaluate the usefulness of the Theory of Planned Behaviour in predicting intention to engage in breast awareness (BA) and later BA behaviour of females under 40. Second, this project evaluated the efficacy of an implementation intentions intervention aiming to increase BA behaviour in the younger population. Finally, the study also aimed to compare BA intention and behaviour of undergraduate psychology and nursing students.

'Breast awareness' describes a process of becoming familiar with one's own breasts, knowing normal breast changes and promptly reporting any abnormal changes detected to a physician. It is recommended by the medical community that this be performed in women under 40 to assist in the early detection of breast cancer. (Cancer Council of Australia, 2004). The theory of planned behaviour was applied to the examination of breast awareness behaviour (BA) in university students under the age of 40, and its usefulness in predicting intention and actual breast awareness behaviour was evaluated. The TPB was extended with self-efficacy and controllability proposed to comprise separate factors in the PBC construct. Belief-based measures for the TPB were obtained in pilot testing. A two-wave 2x3 independent groups design was utilized, with a follow-up measure completed by participants a month after completing the first questionnaire. Participants included psychology and nursing students who were randomly assigned to either a control group who received a pamphlet on BA, an implementation intentions group who received the pamphlet and planned when, where and how they would engage in breast awareness, or an implementation intentions group with a reminder who received the pamphlet, planned their behaviour, and received an email reminding them of the importance of BA. At T1, the target behaviour assessed was intention to engage in BA in the next month, and at

T2 the target behaviour was BA undertaken in the previous month. Ninety-nine participants responded to both questionnaires (52 psychology students and 47 nursing students; mean age = 23.41 years).

Self-efficacy formed a stable and robust factor. Only two items measuring controllability, however, loaded onto a separate factor which was not considered stable or robust, and was excluded from further analyses. Self-efficacy, subjective norm, past behaviour and degree significantly predicted intention at T1. Past behaviour was found to mediate the relationship between intention and behaviour at T2, an unanticipated finding. Contrary to predictions, no difference in behaviour was observed between the control and implementation intention groups. Nursing students had a significantly higher intention to engage in BA, however, converse to predictions, no differences in behaviour at T2 or breast cancer knowledge were observed. The results emphasized the importance of self-efficacy in BA, provided evidence for the inclusion of past behaviour as an additional construct in the TPB, and suggested that in future research it may be of use to include an information session on BA before interventions are undertaken. Other avenues for future research and limitations of the current study were also identified.