

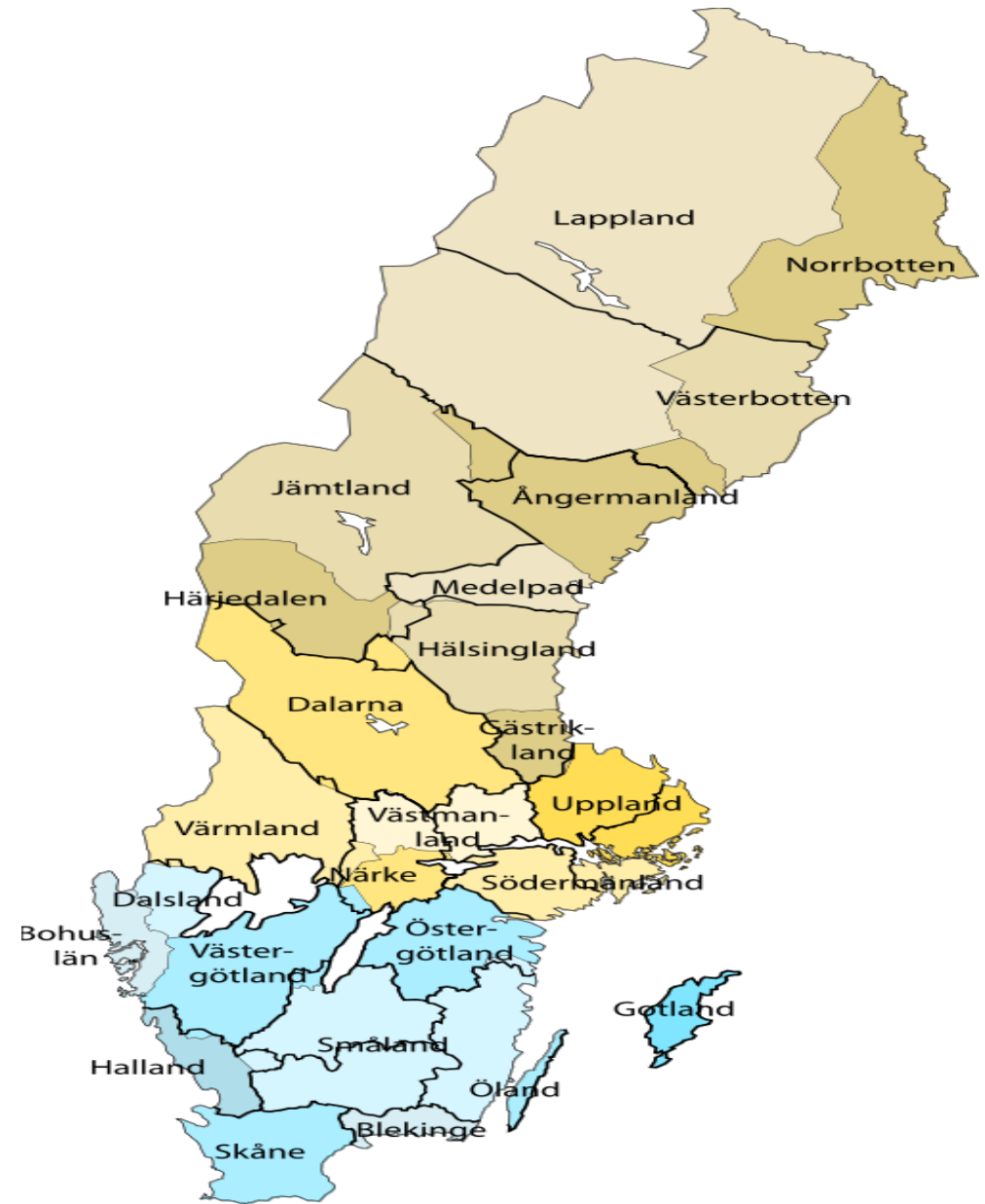
Internet-based cognitive behaviour therapy for covid-related worry

Region Skåne, Sweden

Region Skåne

Region Skåne is the southernmost region of Sweden

Region Skåne is a politically governed organisation that is responsible for the health care of 1.3 million inhabitants



Background

- For some people unhelpful worry about COVID-19 dominates their lives in a way that will have an impact on their psychological well-being.
- Unhelpful worry can in some cases develop into anxiety, insomnia, concentration difficulties, low mood or excessive use of alcohol and drugs.
- A group of researchers (Tove Wahlund et al.) at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm/Sweden developed an on-line cognitive behavioural (CBT) self-help programme with the aim to reduce the participants' unhelpful worry about the pandemic.
- Wahlund et al. and Region Stockholm kindly shared their programme with Region Skåne and other regions in Sweden.

Administration of the programme

- The digital self-help intervention “Managing COVID-19 worry” takes 3 weeks to complete without any contact with a therapist.
- The programme is available through the Swedish national e-health digital platform and is activated free of charge by citizens regardless of being a primary care patient or not.
- This self-guided online intervention is a scalable and easily accessible solution that does not add additional pressure on the healthcare services.
- In theory the number of self-help participants is unlimited.

Content – classic CBT interventions for worry & anxiety

- Distinguish between helpful worry and unhelpful worry.
- Problem solving: “When you get a worrisome thought that is solvable, please schedule a time slot the same or the following day to work on this thought”.
- Identify unhelpful checking or reassurance-seeking behaviours such as taking one’s temperature several times a day without having any symptoms of fever, or repeatedly checking news for COVID-19 death rates – and refrain from these behaviours.
- Detaching oneself from unhelpful worrisome thoughts – not respond to worrisome thoughts but just leave them as “cognitive noise” without further action or attention.
- Engage in competing focus-shifting behaviours – allowing less room for worrying (e.g., cooking, engaging in hobbies, exercising which is compatible with current restrictions, asking for help from others, and helping others).

Evaluation

- Researchers (Tove Wahlund, David Mataix-Cols, Klara Olofsdotter Lauri, Elles de Schipper, Brjánn Ljótsson, Kristina Aspvall, & Erik Andersson) at the Karolinska Institute Stockholm evaluated the program by randomly assigning 670 participants to two groups: One that started the CBT programme immediately and one that had to wait for three weeks.
- The program reduced the participants' unhelpful worry by about 40 percent according to a self-rated questionnaire completed at the end of the three-week programme. During this time, the control group's self-rated worry decreased by 17 percent, a statistically significant difference.
- The participants who underwent the therapy also showed a significant improvement in their ability to function at work and at home, and had fewer sleep problems and a lower degree of depressive symptoms.

Internet-based CBT for covid-related worry Region Skåne (December 2020 – October 2021)

