



A Narrative Literature Review on The Effectiveness of Psychotherapy

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Abstract

The field of psychotherapy is continuously evolving, with new therapeutic approaches being developed and existing ones refined to address a wide array of psychological issues. Therefore one systematic and comprehensive overview is needed. This narrative literature review systematically compiles and comprehensively overviews various psychotherapies, including psychoanalysis, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), humanistic-existential therapy, art therapy, music therapy, story-drama therapy, and Rabindrik psychotherapy. Conducted through a comprehensive search of databases like Science Direct, APA Psyc Net, Pub Med, Google Scholar, and other sources, as well as relevant conferences, the review focused on English-language peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2024. Excluding non-English articles and those published before 2014, data extraction involved a systematic review of study characteristics and outcomes, with thematic analysis synthesizing common patterns and findings across selected studies. Findings indicate psychoanalysis and psychodynamic psychotherapy sustain efficacy in treating mood and anxiety disorders, despite challenges such as small sample sizes and methodological constraints. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) shows broad efficacy, though questions persist regarding the long-term impact and technological barriers. Culturally specific modalities like Rabindra Sangeet and Rabindrik values enhance emotional self-awareness, yet generalizability remains limited. Further research on existential, humanistic, art, drama, and music therapies is crucial to refine applications and validate efficacy across diverse clinical settings. The review underscores varied therapeutic efficacy across contexts, with promising results from psychoanalysis and CBT but ongoing challenges in maintaining long-term effectiveness and methodological rigor. Culturally specific therapies and modalities like group art, drama, narrative, and music therapy demonstrate beneficial outcomes, necessitating standardized methodologies and larger-scale investigations to validate effectiveness across clinical settings. The project is funded by Rabindrik Psychotherapy Research Institute Trust, Kolkata

INTRODUCTION

A narrative literature review summarizes existing research on a topic, highlighting key themes, trends, and gaps. It provides an overview without a strict methodology, organized thematically or chronologically. This type of review

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is interpretative, offering insights and identifying areas for future research, making it valuable for contextual understanding. Current research focuses on a narrative literature review of critical evaluation of different psychotherapies.

Psychotherapy is a collaborative process between a therapist and client, addressing emotional distress, mental health challenges, and behavioral issues. It fosters personal insight, growth, and positive change within a safe environment by exploring thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The effectiveness of psychotherapy is evaluated through symptom reduction, improved functioning, client satisfaction, long-term maintenance of gains, reduced relapse rates, quality of life improvement, cultural competence, therapeutic alliance, objective measures, and cost-effectiveness. By addressing diverse needs, enhancing daily coping mechanisms, and fostering strong therapist-client relationships, psychotherapy leads to sustained mental health improvements and personal growth. Success is measured through positive feedback, quantifiable progress, and overall life satisfaction. Techniques such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Psychodynamic Therapy, Humanistic-existential Therapy, Art Therapy, Drama-Story Therapy, Music Therapy, and Rabindrik Psychotherapy help individuals understand their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, fostering self-awareness and coping strategies to promote mental well-being.

METHOD

This narrative literature review was conducted to compile and comprehensively overview various psychotherapies. The review focused on psychoanalysis, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), humanistic-existential therapy, art therapy, music therapy, and drama-story therapy, Rabindrik psychotherapy. A comprehensive search of relevant databases, including ScienceDirect, APA PsycNet, PubMed, and Google Scholar, as well as relevant conferences, was conducted to identify English-language peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2024. Articles not in English and those published before 2014 were excluded from the review.

The data extraction process involved systematically reviewing the characteristics and outcomes of each study. Key variables of interest included thera-

peutic efficacy, methodological quality, sample sizes, and specific outcomes for various mental health conditions. A thematic analysis was employed to synthesize common patterns and findings across the selected studies, allowing for the identification of overarching themes and insights into the effectiveness of different psychotherapeutic approaches.

Psychoanalysis

Pioneered by Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis revolutionized our understanding of the mind by delving into the unconscious to bring repressed thoughts to consciousness. Techniques like free association, dream analysis, and transference are central, aiming to alleviate psychological distress and promote growth. Despite criticism, psychoanalysis remains influential, exploring unconscious conflicts to aid self-understanding and emotional healing. Its impact extends across psychotherapy and other fields, highlighting its value in mental health and personal development.

Prior studies

Several studies have assessed the effectiveness of psychodynamic and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Knekt, P., Heinonen, E., & Lindfors, O. (2018) followed 326 outpatients with mood or anxiety disorders over five years, finding that all treatments reduced symptoms, with psychoanalysis proving more effective long-term. Briggs et al. (2019) reviewed 3,290 individuals and found that psychoanalytic therapies reduced suicidal behavior and improved psychosocial functioning in the short term. Lindfors et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis comparing psychoanalysis and long-term psychodynamic psychotherapy (LPP) in 326 patients over 10 years, finding initial greater and end-period improvement with psychoanalysis. Weitkamp et al. (2014) found significant symptom reduction in 35 children and adolescents with severe depression using psychoanalytic therapy. Shepherd and Beail (2017) highlighted potential benefits for adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, though more research is needed.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), developed by Dr. Aaron Beck, is a psychotherapeutic treatment

that helps individuals identify and change negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It's based on the concept that these three are interconnected, and altering negative patterns can improve emotional well-being. Cognitive Behavior Therapy involves identifying and challenging negative thoughts, replacing them with realistic ones, and engaging in behavior-modifying activities. Key aspects include setting measurable goals, practicing skills through homework, and fostering a collaborative therapist-client relationship. Effective for depression, anxiety, Obsession compulsive disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and phobias, Cognitive Behavior Therapies' evidence-based techniques empower individuals to manage their mental health, enhancing self-awareness and coping skills for long-term well-being.

Prior studies

Shayganfard et al. (2024) found that cognitive-behavioral group play therapy significantly reduced anxiety-based school refusal and behavioral issues in elementary school boys. Rodriguez-Muñoz et al. (2023) reported that third-wave CBT effectively decreased peripartum depression symptoms across six studies. Wang et al. (2024) observed that subjective support-focused CBT (SS-CBT) reduced depressive symptoms and enhanced subjective support in 100 (pre)frail older adults. Aguilera et al. (2024) increased access to digital CBT (dCBT) for 213 LEP Latinx patients, improving depression and anxiety. Sweetman et al. (2020) showed that CBT for Insomnia (CBTi) improved sleep irrespective of comorbid depression, anxiety, or stress in 455 patients. Matsumoto, K., Hamatani, S., & Shimizu, E. (2024) demonstrated sustained symptom reduction and cost-effectiveness of guided internet-based CBT for OCD. Rezazadeh Yazd et al. (2023) found significant decreases in depression and anxiety in Parkinson's patients through group CBT.

Humanistic-Existential Therapy

Humanistic-existential therapy integrates humanistic principles like self-actualization and empathy with existential themes such as freedom and meaning. It fosters personal growth by prioritizing the client's perspective, encouraging self-aware-

ness, and addressing existential concerns, helping individuals navigate life's challenges and realize their full potential authentically.

Prior studies

Sharp et al. (2022) found that over half of 434 Canadian men experienced clinical-level distress during the COVID-19 pandemic, with loneliness mediating between existential isolation and distress. Feizi, M., Kamali, Z., Gholami, M., Abadi, G. A. H., & Moeini, S. (2021) demonstrated significant improvements in self-flourishing and attitude to life among 68 educated homemakers in Iran after ten sessions of existential psychotherapy. Vos, J., Craig, M., & Cooper, M. (2023) synthesized research on existential therapies, highlighting their focus on meaningful living and competencies like phenomenological skills, with meta-analyses indicating positive effects on well-being. Other studies have shown the potential of existential therapies in addressing adolescent suicidality (Lybbert, R., Ryland, S., & Bean, R. 2019), existential distress in terminally ill patients (Schimmers et al., 2022), and depression among residents in moral rehabilitation schools (Rosli, M. R., Rafae, N. M., & Alim, A. A. A. 2022).

Pearce et al. (2016) conducted a pilot randomized controlled trial on school-based humanistic counseling for ethnically diverse youth aged 11–18. Among 64 participants (78.1% non-white), they found short-term reductions in psychological distress and improvements in self-esteem, but no long-term effects, indicating a need for continued support post-therapy. Daei Jafari, Aghaei, and Rashidi Rad (2020) explored Existential-Humanistic Therapy's impact on Iranian couples' meaning of life and love attitudes shows significant improvements in both domains were observed post-therapy, highlighting existential therapy's potential to enhance meaning and love attitudes in couples, despite limitations like self-report bias and cultural specificity.

Art Therapy

Art therapy, blending art creation with psychotherapy, enhances physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Coined by Adrian Hill in the 1940s, it was shaped by key figures like Margaret Naumburg, who emphasized spontaneous art in psychother-

apy. Influenced by Freud, Jung, and later humanistic and Gestalt approaches, it evolved to focus on self-expression and present-moment awareness. Techniques include painting, drawing, sculpting, collage, digital art, photography, mandalas, sand play, mask-making, textile arts, body mapping, art journaling, group projects, and mindfulness-based practices. Anna Freud's work in child psychoanalysis and ego psychology provided foundational insights for art therapy's development.

Prior studies

Vezmar et al. (2024) conducted a randomized controlled trial, revealing that group art therapy improved group cohesion, self-esteem, and emotional regulation compared to standard treatments. Griffin, C., Fenner, P., Landorf, K. B., & Cotchett, M. (2021) systematically reviewed art therapy for eating disorders, noting enhanced self-expression and mental health despite some methodological limitations. Lee (2021) found that group art therapy significantly reduced parenting stress, perceived stress, and depression in Korean mothers of children with disabilities. Newland and Other studies found that women with breast cancer (Jalambadani and Borji, 2019), adults with learning disabilities (Power, N., Harrison, T. L., Hackett, S., & Carr, C. 2023), Abbing et al. (2019) found that anthroposophic art therapy effectively reduced anxiety and improved the quality of life in women with anxiety disorders.

Drama-Story Therapy

Drama-story therapy combines drama and narrative techniques to promote personal growth and mental health. Through role-playing, storytelling, and improvisation, clients explore and resolve psychological issues, express emotions, and reframe negative narratives. Techniques like role reversal and playback theatre foster empathy and understanding. This creative, embodied therapy enhances problem-solving skills, builds confidence, and provides a transformative alternative to traditional talk therapy, especially beneficial for those who find conventional methods challenging.

Prior studies

Drama therapy utilizes theatrical techniques to improve emotional expression, coping skills, and

social abilities. It has proven effective for individuals with Cluster C personality disorders (Doomen, 2018), young children with intellectual disabilities (Wu, J., Chen, K., Ma, Y., & Vomočilová, J. 2020), and pediatric cancer patients (Şenol & Şenol, 2024). It also enhances playfulness and emotional understanding in those with personality disorders (De Gruijter, E., Wouters, H., & Haeyen, S. 2024).

Studies have shown that story therapy improves neuropsychiatric symptoms in dementia care (Sadhu & Sarangi, 2024), empathy and personal development (Gonzalez et al., 2022), social-emotional skills in children (Beaudoin, M. N., Moersch, M., & Evare, B. S. 2016), and emotion regulation in autistic children (Mirzajani, H., Nekoi, F., & Nekoi, H. 2023).

Music therapy

Music therapy uses music to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs, conducted by trained therapists. Receptive music therapy involves listening and appreciation for relaxation and emotional expression. Active music therapy includes improvisation, composition, singing, and playing instruments to enhance self-expression and motor skills. Music and movement combine music with dance for physical coordination and emotional release. Music-assisted relaxation employs guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation with music to reduce stress. Neurologic music therapy aids motor and speech rehabilitation. Community music therapy involves group music-making to strengthen social bonds and cultural identity, tailored to individual needs.

Prior studies

Sharkiya (2024) conducted a systematic review of randomized controlled trials from 2010 to 2023, finding moderate evidence for music therapy's ability to reduce preoperative anxiety. However, the results for postoperative pain were inconclusive due to inconsistent findings and high risks of bias.

Bakhtarikia, S., Tavanai, E., Rouhbakhsh, N., Sayadi, A. J., & Sabet, V. K. (2024) found significant improvements in tinnitus with music therapy and binaural beats, while Zhong, K., An, X., & Kong, Y. (2024) reported that five-element music therapy reduces post-stroke depression, enhances daily living abili-

ties, and increases serum 5-HT levels. Huang and Gu (2024) demonstrated that music therapy enhances empathy and emotion recognition in adolescents with mild intellectual disabilities. Chan et al. (2023) discovered that mindfulness-based music therapy improves emotional regulation in blind older women more effectively than mindfulness intervention alone. Daengruan et al. (2021) found no significant benefits of music therapy with binaural beats for major depressive disorder. Yang et al. (2019) reported significant reductions in postpartum depression symptoms, Raglio et al. (2020) used machine learning to identify factors predicting music therapy's relaxation effects, highlighting the importance of individual differences

Rabindrik Psychotherapy

Rabindrik Psychotherapy, originating in India, integrates Rabindra Sangeet into Health Psychology practices. This innovative approach utilizes Tagore's literary works to enhance mental wellness through real-time interaction, object-oriented metaphors, and auto-suggestion, consciousness unfolds, images metamorphose, shifting from Murta's structural foundations to Raga's emotionally tinged landscapes, and finally, Saraswat's harmonious realms. By employing culturally significant songs, the therapy promotes emotional resilience and well-being. Rabindrik psychotherapy is unstructured and free-floating, emphasizing understanding over labeling others' consciousness. The journey of consciousness moves from incomplete to complete, driven by the pursuit of newness and completeness in a cyclic process. The therapy involves customizing the environment to alter consciousness, ensuring no stigma is attached to the therapeutic process. The pioneering works of Rabindrik Psychotherapy were done by Dr. Debdullal Dutta Roy.

Prior studies

Dey and Dutta Roy (2019) explored anxiety reduction in 31 individuals categorized by Beck Anxiety Inventory scores into high and low anxiety groups, finding significant differences in flow experiences with Rabindra Sangeet, favoring the low anxiety group. Basu (2019) examined a single 27-year-old Bengali woman with depression, using Rabindra

Sangeet to enhance emotional self-awareness through a consciousness flow diagram, aiding her understanding and acceptance of her depression. Panigrahi and Dutta Roy (2019) conducted a case study on a 24-year-old woman with depression, anxiety, loneliness, relationship issues, and work-life stress, showing significant psychological improvements after three sessions of Rabindrik Psychotherapy involving Rabindra Sangeet and expressive drawing. Basu (2019) aimed to examine the test-retest reliability of flow experience in Rabindra Sangeet with 12 participants. They listened to "Bipulo Tarongo re" twice, a week apart, and plotted their flow experience. Six participants showed high-reliability coefficients, indicating stable flow experiences, which enhances understanding of playing Rabindra Sangeet. Datta and Dutta Roy (2019) examined Rabindrik value preferences in newly diagnosed HIV-positive patients, revealing prioritization of values like "fearless," "active," "cleanliness," "self-understanding," "peace," "inner harmony," and "self-empowerment." It tailored psychotherapeutic interventions based on patients' Rabindrik principles may enhance among those living with HIV. Shah and Roy (2014) investigated the hierarchical structure and cultural universality of Rabindrik human values, drawing from the work of Rabindranath Tagore, involving 519 adolescent students from diverse backgrounds in India. Utilizing principal component analysis, they identified four components of path-oriented values (accounting for 70% variance) and two components of goal-oriented values (accounting for 80% variance). In their study published in the Asian Journal of Management Research.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the reviewed research highlights the varied efficacy of different therapeutic approaches across diverse populations and conditions. Psychoanalysis and psychodynamic psychotherapy effectively reduce mood and anxiety disorder symptoms, with psychoanalysis showing long-term benefits, though small sample sizes and methodological rigor issues persist. CBT is broadly effective, yet long-term efficacy remains to be determined due to

small samples and technological barriers. Rabindra Sangeet and Rabindrik's values show promise in emotional self-awareness and symptom reduction for depression and anxiety, but cultural specificity limits generalizability. Existential psychotherapy mitigates psychological distress and enhances well-being, necessitating more RCTs and cross-cultural studies. Humanistic and existential therapies positively impact psychological and relational outcomes, requiring further research on long-term effects and mechanisms of improvement. Group art therapy reduces negative emotions and enhances emotional regulation, yet standardizing methodologies and addressing attrition rates are needed. Drama therapy supports emotional expression and social skills, requiring larger samples and control groups. Narrative approaches benefit symptom severity and social competencies, requiring enhanced story diversity and exploration of long-term impacts. Music therapy is effective for anxiety, depression, and empathy, though inconsistent results and methodological limitations call for more robust research. Overall, each therapy shows unique strengths and requires further study to refine its application and validate its efficacy across diverse clinical settings.

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