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The empirical status of cognitive-behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses

Andrew C. Butler^a ... Aaron T. Beck^a

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Abstract

This review summarizes the current meta-analysis literature on treatment outcomes of CBT for a wide range of psychiatric disorders. A search of the literature resulted in a total of 16 methodologically rigorous meta-analyses. Our review focuses on effect sizes that contrast outcomes for CBT with outcomes for various control groups for each disorder, which provides an overview of the effectiveness of cognitive therapy as quantified by meta-analysis. Large effect sizes were found for CBT for unipolar depression, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder with or without agoraphobia, social phobia, posttraumatic stress disorder, and childhood depressive and anxiety disorders. Effect sizes for CBT of marital distress, anger, childhood somatic disorders, and chronic pain were in the moderate range. CBT was somewhat superior to antidepressants in the treatment of adult depression. CBT was equally effective as behavior therapy in the treatment of adult depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Large uncontrolled

effect sizes were found for bulimia nervosa and schizophrenia. The 16 meta-analyses we reviewed support the efficacy of CBT for many disorders. While limitations of the meta-analytic approach need to be considered in interpreting the results of this review, our findings are consistent with other review methodologies that also provide support for the efficacy CBT.



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