

# EXISTENTIAL THERAPIES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS IN ADULTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND META-ANALYSIS (EXIST REVIEW)

PROTOCOL -- 10<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2011

## Aim

The aim of this project is to undertake a comprehensive, systematic review of the evidence on the effectiveness of existential therapeutic interventions with adults.

## 1 Eligibility criteria

Studies will be eligible for inclusion in the systematic review if they meet the following criteria.

### 1.1 Study characteristics

#### 1.1.1 Participants

Adults (18+)

#### 1.1.2 Interventions

Therapeutic practices that:

- A. Explicitly uses the term 'existential' to describe *either* the therapeutic intervention *or* the focus of the therapeutic work.

And

- B. Are based, primarily or wholly, on one or more of the following assumptions associated with the existential school of thought:
  - a. that human beings are orientated to, and have a need for, meaning and purpose;
  - b. that human beings have a capacity for freedom and choice, and function most effectively when they actualise this potential and take responsibility for their choices;
  - c. that human beings will inevitably face limitations and challenges in their lives, and function most effectively when they face up to -- rather than avoid or deny -- them;
  - d. that the subjective, phenomenological flow of experiencing is a key aspect of human being, and therefore a central focus for psychotherapeutic work;
  - e. that human experiencing is fundamentally embedded in relationships with others and with its world.

#### 1.1.2.1 Included therapies

Based on these definitions, the research team will decide on the inclusion or exclusion of specific therapeutic approaches/schools. It has been agreed that the following forms of existential therapy will be included in review:

- logotherapy

- Existential-humanistic therapy
- Existential analysis/British school existential therapy/Existential-phenomenological
- Daseinsanalysis  
MC
- Meaning-centred group psychotherapy (Breitbart); Individual Meaning-Centred Psychotherapy (Popitto); Meaning-Centered Intervention (Vachon)
- Meaning-Making intervention (MMi) (Henry, 2010; Lee 2006) (but not explicitly defined as existential)
- Lantz's Existential Psychotherapy
- Experiential-existential group psychotherapy (van der Pompe)
- Existential analytical psychotherapy (Gortz, Längle)
- Supportive-expressive (need to see manual, see Kissane 2004): Bordeleau, Classen 2001, Classen 2008, Giese-Davis 2002, Goodwin 2001 ("group psychosocial support")
- Cognitive-existential

#### 1.1.2.2 Excluded therapies:

- Contextual therapy
- person-centred therapy
- gestalt therapy  
MC:
- Tapestry (Angen et al.)
- Re-Creating your life (Cole et al.)
- Motivational counselling
- Client-centred/nondirective therapy
- EFT/process-experiential therapy
- Focusing
- Encounter
- Psychodrama
- Self-awareness therapy
- 12-step programme (Brown, H)
- Interactional group therapy (Brown and Yalom, Matano and Yalom)
- Cancer support group (Sivesind, 1997)
- Dignity Therapy: Chochinov 2005; McClement, 2007
- Holistic existential therapy (Ventegodt et al.)
- Soteria: Bola and Loren, Calton et al.
- TUBA therapeutic intervention (generic, Mackrill)

#### 1.1.3 Comparators

Studies with any, or no, comparator conditions will be eligible for inclusion.

#### 1.1.4 Outcomes

At least one quantitative, or qualitative, indicator of psychological distress.

#### 1.1.5 Study design

All empirical studies of a systematic nature will be eligible for inclusion in the review. This will include:

- Randomised controlled trials (RCTs)
- Pre-post contrasts (observational/longitudinal studies)
- Case studies (using a named, systematic method) (e.g., HSCED)
- Systematic qualitative research (in which at least one outcome of existential therapy is identified, e.g., a greater sense of wellbeing)

## 1.2 Report characteristics

### 1.2.1 Language of publication

Reports from all languages will be eligible, but the abstract has to be in English and to include enough information for the reviewers to be able to assess it for inclusion in the Review.

### 1.2.2 Publication status

No restrictions. We will review both published and unpublished studies that are found through the information sources below, including:

- refereed journal
- non-refereed journals
- dissertations
- books
- book chapters
- reports

### 1.2.3 Year of publication

Data should have been published from 1970 onwards.

## 2 Information sources

### 2.1 Computerized bibliographic databases

- ISI Web of knowledge
- Medline
- APA PsycNet
- Current contents
- google scholar
- dissertation abstracts (covered by APA PsychNet)
- pubmed

### 2.2. Reference lists in the following review articles

- Calton, T., Ferriter, M., Huband, N., & Spandler, H. (2008). A Systematic Review of the Soteria Paradigm for the Treatment of People Diagnosed With Schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, *34*(1), 181-192.
- Ernst, E., Schmidt, K., & Baum, M. (2006). Complementary/alternative therapies for the treatment of breast cancer. A systematic review of randomized clinical trials and a critique of current terminology. *Breast Journal*, *12*(6), 526-530.
- Gottlieb, B. H., & Wachala, E. D. (2007). Cancer support groups: a critical review of empirical studies. *Psycho-Oncology*, *16*(5), 379-400.
- Henoch, I., & Danielson, E. (2009). Existential concerns among patients with cancer and interventions to meet them: an integrative literature review. *Psycho-Oncology*, *18*(3), 225-236.
- Keshen, A. (2006). A new look at existential psychotherapy. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, *60*(3), 285-298.
- Lantz, J. (2004). Research and Evaluation Issues in Existential Psychotherapy. [doi:10.1007/s10879-004-2527-5]. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, *34*(4), 331-340.
- Lemay, K., & Wilson, K. G. (2008). Treatment of existential distress in life threatening illness: A review of manualized interventions. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *28*(3), 472-493.

- Norcross, J. C. (1987). A rational and empirical analysis of existential psychotherapy. [doi:10.1177/0022167887271005]. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 27(1), 41-68.
- Schulenberg, S. E., Hutzell, R. R., Nassif, C., & Rogina, J. M. (2008). Logotherapy for clinical practice. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 45(4), 447-463.
- Wong, P. T. P. (2010). Meaning Therapy: An Integrative and Positive Existential Psychotherapy. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 40, 85-93.

### 2.3 Reference lists in the following key books and book chapters

- Cohn, H. W. (1997). *Existential Thought and Therapeutic Practice: An Introduction to Existential Psychotherapy*. London: Sage.
- Cooper, M. (2003). *Existential Therapies*. London: Sage.
- Cooper, M. (2008). Existential psychotherapy. In J. LeBow (Ed.), *Twenty-First Century Psychotherapies: Contemporary Approaches to Theory and Practice* (pp. 237-276). London: Wiley.
- Du Plock, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Case studies in existential psychotherapy and counselling*. Hoboken, NJ, US: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Elliott, R., Greenberg, L. S., & Lietaer, G. (2004). Research on experiential therapies. In M. J. Lambert (Ed.), *Bergin and Garfield's Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change* (5th ed., pp. 493-539). Chicago: John Wiley and Sons.
- Fabry, J. B., Bulka, R., P., & Sahakian, W. S. (Eds.). (1979). *Logotherapy in Action*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Gibson, C., Tomarken, A., & Breitbart, W. (2006). Meaning-Centered Group Psychotherapy for Cancer Patients *A time for listening and caring: Spirituality and the care of the chronically ill and dying*. (pp. 269-282): New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.
- Lantz, J and Walsh, J. Lantz, J., & Walsh, J. (2007). *Short-term existential intervention in clinical practice*. Chicago, Ill: Lyceum Books.
- Loewenthal, D. (2011). *Post-existentialism and the psychological therapies: Towards a therapy without foundations*. London: Karnac.
- May, R., & Yalom, I. (2005). Existential psychotherapy *Current psychotherapies (7th ed., instr. ed.)*. (pp. 269-298): Belmont, CA, US: Thomson Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.
- Schneider, K. J. (Ed.). (2008). *Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy: Guideposts to the Core of Practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Schneider, K. J., & Krug, O. T. (2010). *Existential-humanistic therapy*. Washington, DC: APA.
- Spinelli, E. (1994). *Demystifying Therapy*. London: Constable.
- Spinelli, E. (2005). *The Interpreted World: An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Spinelli, E. (2007). *Practising Existential Psychotherapy: The Relational World*. London: Sage.
- Spira, J. L. (2000). Existential psychotherapy in palliative care *Handbook of psychiatry in palliative medicine*. (pp. 197-214): New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.
- van Deurzen, E. (2002). *Existential Counselling and Psychotherapy in Practice* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- van Deurzen, E., & Baker, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Existential Perspectives on Human Issues: A Handbook for Therapeutic Practice*. London: Palgrave.
- Walsh, R., A., & McElwain, B. (2002). Existential Psychotherapies. In D. J. Cain & J. Seeman (Eds.), *Humanistic Psychotherapies: Handbook of Research and Practice* (pp. 253-278). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- Wong, P. T. (2011). *The Human Quest for Meaning: A Handbook of Psychological Research and Clinical Applications* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Yalom, I. (1980). *Existential Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

## 2.4 Handsearched journals

- Existential Analysis

## 2.5 Personal contacts

Known experts in the fields of existential therapy and humanistic psychotherapy research will be sent a personal email inviting them to identify appropriate studies:

- [deleted for reasons of confidentiality]

## 2.6 Newsletter adverts:

Adverts inviting submission of data will be sent to all known existential therapy newsletters, websites and online discussion groups:

- Existential Therapy Research
- Society of Existential Analysis/Hermeneutic Circular
- Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry
- AHP Perspective
- APA Division 32 Newsletter

## 2.7 References in studies

References in all eligible studies will be scrutinized.

## 2.8 Contact authors

Authors of all eligible studies will be contacted to identify further potentially eligible studies.

## 2.9 Websites

<http://www.meaning.ca/>

# 3 Search

Search terms meeting all following criteria:

- *Orientation or theoretical founders*: existential or existentialism or logotherapy\* or phenomen\* or Daseinsanal\* or Laing or meaning\* or existence or Buber or Camus or Heidegger or Jaspers or Kierkegaard or Nietzsche or Sartre
- *Intervention type*: therapy or psychotherapy or counselling or counseling or treatment or coach\* or intervention
- *Research*: research or study or studies or trial\* or eval\* or experiment or outcome or result\* or effect\* or change\*

# 4 Study selection

The researcher team will use the following study selection procedures:

1. The researcher, in collaboration with the Principal and Co-Investigator, to follow search procedure and identify studies for review (based on title, keyword, and abstracts) (enter to Endnote database).
2. Independent review by Principal and Co-Investigator of all abstracts.
3. Compare selections, and resolve disagreements through consensus (agreed selection for full text review).
4. Independent assessment of full-text articles by Research Team for eligibility.

5. Compare selections, and resolve disagreements through consensus (agreed selection for inclusion in review) (enter to Comprehensive Meta-analysis database).
6. Researcher to contact all authorities in the field (see 2.5 and 2.8) to check for any additional studies.

## 5 Data Collection process

An electronic data extraction sheet will be developed using SPSS, and piloted on the first three selected studies. Where full information is not available, individual authors will be contacted.

## 6 Data items

Data will be extracted by the Researcher from each study on the following characteristics:

- Participant characteristics:
  - number of participants
  - mean age: 18 - 100
  - gender: % male, % female
  - diagnosis/form of psychological distress: e.g., depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, physical health problems
- Country/location
- Study design:
  - Randomised controlled trial
    - Control condition: e.g., waiting list, no treatment, active intervention
  - Pre-post contrast
  - Systematic case studies
    - Type of case study
  - Systematic qualitative research
    - Method of data collection
    - Method of analysis
- Type of intervention:
  - form of existential therapy: meaning therapy, Laing, etc.
  - group versus individual intervention
  - length/number of sessions
  -
- Type of outcome measure(s)
  - type of measure (e.g., BDI, CORE)
  - Form of psychological distress measures (e.g., depression, anxiety)
  - self-/therapist-/observer-rated
  - endpoint/follow up
- Outcomes:
  - Standardised mean differences between experimental and comparator condition
  - Standardised mean gain (pre-post research)
  - Evaluation of efficacy (systematic case study)
  - Outcome effects (systematic qualitative data)

## 7 Risk of bias in individual studies

Where appropriate, we will use The Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing risk of bias (<http://www.ohg.cochrane.org/forms/Risk%20of%20bias%20assessment%20tool.pdf>):

- appropriate generation of random allocation sequence

- concealment of allocation sequence
- blinding of participants, etc.
- proportion of participants lost to follow-up
- selective outcome reporting
- other sources of bias

## **8 Summary measures**

We will summarise experimental studies using standardised mean differences between experimental and control groups.

## **9 Planned method of analysis**

If sufficient RCT and pre-post data is available, we will use Comprehensive Meta-analysis to conduct:

- an overall meta-analysis
- a meta-analysis by different client populations/form of psychological distress
- a meta-analysis by different forms of existential therapy.

Where data is insufficient, a narrative account will be given of all eligible findings.

Data from case studies and systematic qualitative research will be presented in narrative format.

## **10 Risk of bias across studies**

Due to the heterogeneity of data, we will not assess risk of bias across studies in any systematic way.

## **11 Additional analyses**

None planned.