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Research title

Reporting of unwanted events in evaluations of psychological and psychosocial interventions with forensic patients: A systematic review of current practice,

Research Authors

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Research Objectives

This research aimed to review current practices in reporting unwanted events with results of controlled evaluations of psychological or psychosocial interventions with forensic mental health inpatients.

Research Outline (250 words)

Psychological treatment cannot be simultaneously helpful and harmless. Moreover, negative treatment effects, from brief and mild side effects to lasting harm, do occur during interventions which are considered beneficial overall. According to previous reviews, only a minority published trials of psychological interventions report monitoring unwanted events during the study. This practice systematically biases the evidence-base to identify positive over negative treatment effects. The exploration in research on aetiology, prevention and management of unwanted events during psychological treatment in offender populations is still in its infancy. This study was the first to systematically review current practice in reporting of the measurement and occurrence of unwanted events from evaluations of psychological and psychosocial interventions in forensic patients. Thirty-two controlled studies were included. Using pre-specified criteria for unwanted events informed by prior research, reports from only 3 studies (9%) indicated that potential unwanted events were monitored during the study. While it was rare for studies to acknowledge and measure potential unwanted events, undesirable outcomes were noted to occur with greater frequency, including group-level deterioration on study outcome measures, treatment dropout due to deterioration in mental state, and patient reported negative experiences of treatment. Reliable information on the benefits as well as risks of psychological treatment must be available to facilitate evidence-based decision-making and patient informed consent. The present findings indicate that important information about potential negative effects of treatment is not being systematically measured or reported in this research field. Implications are discussed and recommendations for research and practice offered.