

Effectiveness of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy in Adults Aged 55 Years and Older: Preliminary Findings from a Systematic Review

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Introduction

Older adults are underrepresented in psychotherapy research, and the evidence base for psychodynamic psychotherapy in this age group remains limited and has not been comprehensively evaluated. This systematic review aimed to examine the effectiveness of psychodynamic psychotherapy in older adults and to identify the range, quality, and nature of the available evidence.

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Takeaway box

Psychodynamic psychotherapy shows promising but under-researched benefits in older adults. Existing evidence suggests effectiveness for late-life depression and psychological functioning, but the evidence base remains small, heterogeneous, and largely derived from studies conducted before 2000.

Methods

Databases Searched

MEDLINE	Scopus
Embase	Web of Science
PsychINFO	Science Citation Index
Social Science Citation Index	

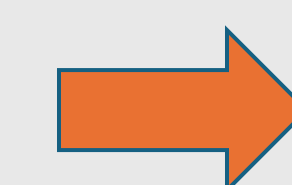
Inclusion Criteria

- Adults aged ≥ 55 years
- Psychodynamic or brief psychodynamic psychotherapy
- Randomised controlled trials
- Non-randomised comparative studies
- Observational outcome studies

Exclusion Criteria

- Case reports
- Narrative reviews
- Theoretical papers
- Studies without outcome data

34,550 articles screened



8 studies identified

Randomised controlled trials (n = 3)

Non-randomised controlled trials (n = 2) Observational studies (n = 3)

Preliminary Findings

Most identified studies were published more than 30 years ago, highlighting the scarcity of contemporary evidence for psychodynamic psychotherapy in older adults.

Evidence Suggests Benefit For

- ✓ Depressive symptoms
- ✓ Psychological functioning
- ✓ Long term maintenance of treatment gains

Important Limitations

- Small sample sizes
- Predominantly older studies
- Limited contemporary RCT evidence
- Heterogeneous outcome measures

Conclusions

This systematic review identified a limited evidence base for psychodynamic psychotherapy in adults aged 55 years and older. More rigorous contemporary trials are needed to establish its effectiveness and benefits in this age group.

Declaration of Interests

BRU is vice chair of the Faculty of Old Age Psychiatry at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He is the R&D director at his trust, Cambridge NIHR BRC theme lead for mental health and RDN lead for dementia and neurodegeneration for the east of England. He has served on paid advisory boards for Lilly and TauRx. He is a co-investigator for the READ-OUT project of blood biomarkers in dementia.