

## Research & Psychotherapy

Psych 454 - Clinical Psychology  
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## Big Questions in Psychotherapy

- Does psychotherapy work?
- Does the length of time spent in therapy matter?
- How do we keep the patients we want to keep (and...)?
- Is one type of therapy better than another?
- Do the effects of psychotherapy last?
- How do we make sure that positive outcomes occur?
- Why is change so hard to produce?
- Must you be a professional to be a therapist?
- Does psychotherapy reduce medical costs?
- Can psychotherapy be harmful?

## Does Psychotherapy Work?

- In a word, Yes.
- But ... how can we even hope to study this?
  - Meta-analyses
  - Spontaneous remission rates
    - Eysenck: 72%
    - Bergen: 30%
  - “Cure” rates
    - Smith & Glass: 75% of patients do better in therapy
    - Andrews & Harvey: 77% do better in therapy

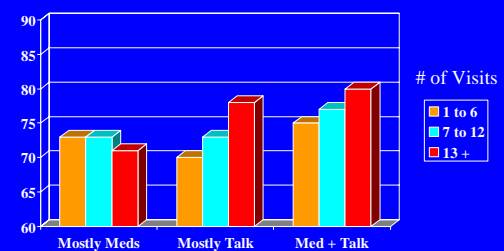
## Does Psychotherapy Work?

- Another strategy: ask the consumer
  - 1995 Consumer Reports survey
    - People who participated in therapy found the experience effective.
    - Long-term treatment superior to short-term treatment.
    - Therapy + Medication was not superior to Therapy alone.
    - BUT, low/no cost therapies were also highly satisfactory.
  - Cognitive dissonance? Overjustification?

## Does Psychotherapy Work?

- Ask the consumer (again) 2004 Consumer Reports Survey
  - Looked at patients with anxiety and depression
  - With or without drugs, most people who sought therapy gained relief
  - Combination of therapy + medications worked *best*
  - Mostly “talk therapy” was almost as effective if it lasted for 13+ visits

## Intervention Outcomes CR2004

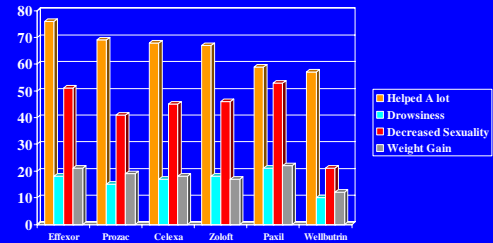


N = 2125

## Does Psychotherapy Work?

- Ask the consumer (again) 2004 Consumer Reports Survey
  - Medications had a quicker impact *but*
    - Trial and error was prevalent in finding appropriate medication
    - MUCH higher rate of side effects

## Antidepressant Ratings CR2004



## Does Psychotherapy Work?

- Extensive reviews generally conclude that psychotherapy does, in fact, work.
- More interesting questions:
  - How does it work?
  - What types of treatments work best for what types of patients?
    - Aptitude-Treatment Interactions (ATT's)
  - Can treatments be “manualized” or put into “best practices?”
    - Criticism applied to Professional Schools
    - Psychotherapy is a relationship that is too complicated to formalize.

## Length of Treatment?

- Brief approaches preferred by HMO's, PPO's and insurance companies.
  - Health Plan restrictions kept some patients from getting optimal treatment (Consumer Reports, 2004)
- Long-term treatment preferred by patients (Consumer Reports, 1995).
- Long-term treatment produces better results for talk only & talk + meds; not so for meds alone! (Consumer Reports 2004).

## Length of Treatment?

- What's the research?
  - 50% improve in 8 sessions.
  - 75% improve in 26 sessions.
  - Many improve somewhat with a single session.
  - Jury is still out....

## My Therapy Is Better Than Your Therapy

- We have dozens (if not hundreds) of therapeutic approaches.
- Each time one is promulgated, proponents say “It's the Best!”
- How can we study this?
  - Manualized treatments - high internal validity, low external validity
  - Freeform treatments - what, exactly, is being done out there?

## My Therapy Is Better Than Your Therapy

- “Everyone has won and all must have prizes.” - The Dodo, Alice in Wonderland.
  - Subtitle of Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975.
  - Since the 1970s, most research studies have failed to find that one type of psychotherapy is consistently superior to any other type of psychotherapy.
  - Dodo bird verdict.

## Why the dodo bird verdict?

- Different psychotherapies produce specific effects that aren't measured correctly.
- Dodo bird verdict is wrong ... cognitive behavioral approaches tend to work better than more verbal approaches.
  - Factor of how outcomes are measured?
  - “Hot field” factor?

## Update on Dodo Bird Verdict

- Luborsky, et. al. (2002)
  - Meta-analysis of 17 recent studies with each other (rather than with a control group)
  - Found an effect size (Cohen's *d*) of .20; corresponding to a correlation of about .10
  - Effect sizes *decreased* when researchers accounted for “allegiances” in therapeutic fields.

## Why is Change SO HARD?

- People enter therapy highly resistant to change!
- Change is:
  - threatening, unfamiliar, uncomfortable
- Individual change impacts other systems.
  - Family, social