

The evidence-base for psychodynamic and psychoanalytic therapy with children and young people: a narrative review

Nick Midgley, Rose Mortimer, Antonella Cirasola,
Prisha Batra and Eilis Kennedy



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The evidence-base for psychoanalytic child psychotherapy: a challenge

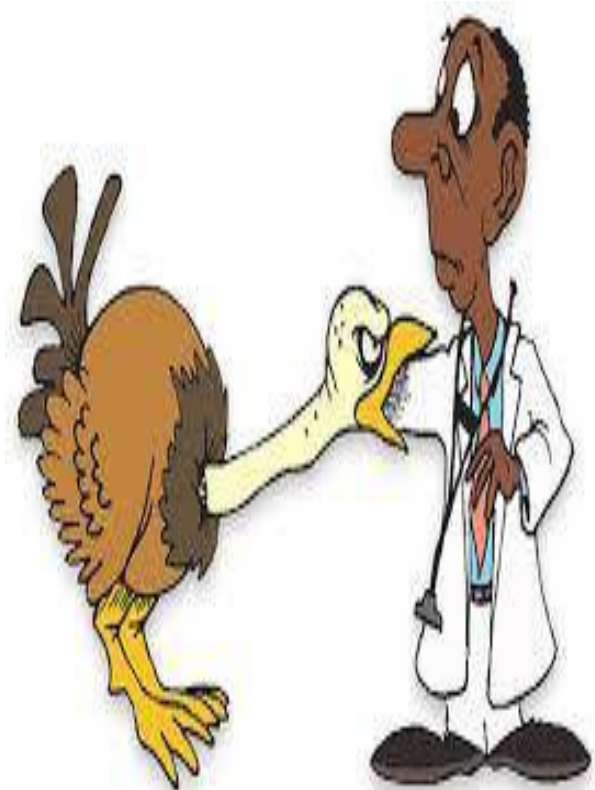
Drawing on the Evidence

Advice for mental health professionals working with children and adolescents

'There is insufficient evidence to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of psychodynamic child psychotherapy'

Miranda Wolpert
Peter Fuggle
David Cottrell
Peter Fonagy
Jeanette Phillips
Steve Pilling
Samuel Stein
Mary Target

The evidence-base for psychoanalytic child psychotherapy: the response



The evidence-base for psychoanalytic child psychotherapy: the response

Psychodynamic psychotherapy for children and adolescents: a critical review of the evidence base

Nick Midgley^{a*} and Eilis Kennedy^b

^aAnna Freud Centre/University College London, UK; ^bDepartment of Child and Family,
Tavistock Clinic, London, UK

For many years psychoanalytic and psychodynamic therapies have been considered to lack a credible evidence-base and have consistently failed to appear in lists of 'empirically supported treatments'. This study systematically reviews the research evaluating the efficacy and effectiveness of psychodynamic psychotherapy for children and young people. The researchers identified 34 separate studies that met criteria for inclusion, including nine randomised controlled trials. While many of the studies reported are limited by sample size and lack of control groups, the review indicates that there is increasing evidence to suggest the effectiveness of psychoanalytic psychotherapy for children and adolescents. The article aims to provide as complete a picture as possible of the existing evidence base, thereby enabling more refined questions to be asked regarding the nature of the current evidence and gaps requiring further exploration.

Keywords: child and adolescent psychotherapy; evidence-based practice; effectiveness; efficacy; outcome studies; psychodynamic psychotherapy

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Process and Outcome
Research in Child,
Adolescent and
Parent-Infant
Psychotherapy:
A Thematic Review

Edited by
Eilis Kennedy and Nick Midgley

Meta-analysis of short-term psychoanalytic psychotherapy with adolescents

Abbass A, Rabung S, Leichsenring F, Refseth J, Midgley N (2013).

Psychodynamic psychotherapy for children and adolescents: a meta-analysis of short-term psychodynamic models. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*

NEW RESEARCH

Psychodynamic Psychotherapy for Children and Adolescents: A Meta-Analysis of Short-Term Psychodynamic Models

Alien A. Abbass, MD, FRCPsych, Sven Rabung, MD, Folk Leichsenring, MD, Johannes S. Refseth, MD, PhD, Nick Midgley, MD, PhD

Objective: Psychodynamically based brief psychotherapy is frequently used in clinical practice for a range of common mental disorders in children and adolescents. To our knowledge, there have been no meta-analyses to evaluate the effectiveness of these therapies. **Method:** After a broad search, we meta-analyzed controlled outcome studies of short-term psychodynamic psychotherapies (STPP, 40 or fewer sessions). We also performed sensitivity analyses and evaluated the risk of bias in this body of studies. **Results:** We found 11 studies with a total of 655 patients covering a broad range of conditions including depression, anxiety disorders, anorexia nervosa, and borderline personality disorder. STPP did not separate from what were mostly robust treatment comparisons, but there were some subgroup differences. Robust ($g = 1.07$, 95% CI = 0.80–1.34) within group effect sizes were observed suggesting the treatment may be effective. These effects increased in follow up compared to post treatment (overall $g = 0.24$, 95% CI = 0.00–0.48), suggesting a tendency toward increased gains. Heterogeneity was high across most analyses, suggesting that these data need be interpreted with caution. **Conclusions:** This review suggests that STPP may be effective in children and adolescents across a range of common mental disorders. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2013;52(8):863–875. **Key Words:** anxiety, child, depression, psychodynamic, psychotherapy

Psychodynamic psychotherapy with children and adolescents has a long history, and has had a considerable impact on the provision of treatment within both the public and private sector in Europe and the United States. In the United Kingdom, for instance, a survey of mental health services carried out in 1995 suggested that 44% of public services providing community-based care for children and adolescents offered some form of psychodynamic interventions,¹ and in Germany data from the statutory health insurers suggest that 74% of psychotherapists working with children and adolescents are able to offer psychodynamic interventions.² Until recently, however, the empirical support for such treatments has been limited, with Target and Fonagy³ speaking of the way in which research in this field has been “doubly disadvantaged”: first, because psychodynamic treatment research has lagged behind cognitive, behavioral, and family therapies more generally; and second, because of “the general lag between child and adult psychotherapy research, across all forms of therapy” (p. 41).³

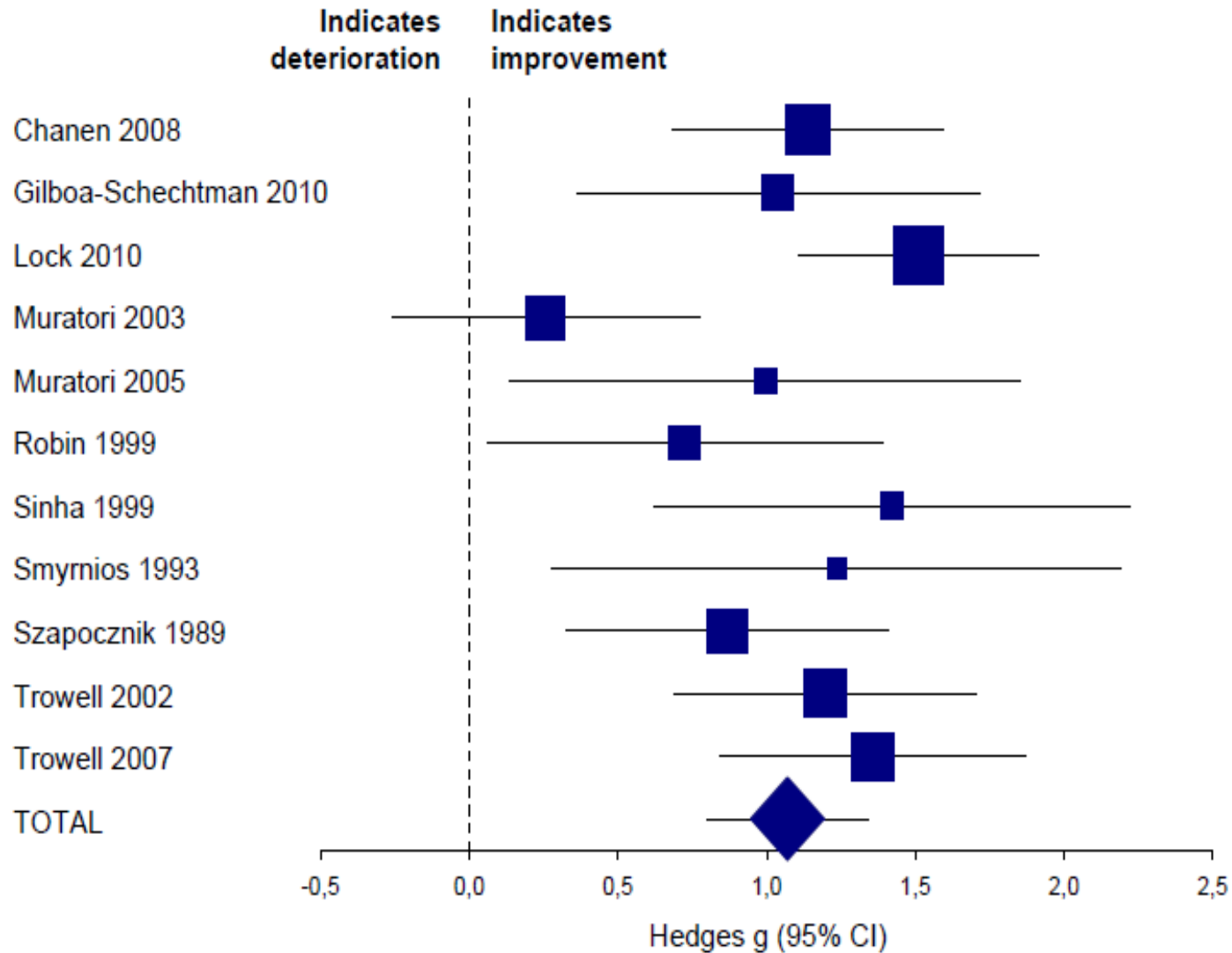
Over the last 20 years, each of these separate issues has been addressed to some degree. Psychodynamic therapy with adults now has a substantial evidence base, demonstrated in a series of reviews and meta-analyses^{4–11} culminating in the landmark publication of Jonathan Shedler’s paper “The efficacy of psychodynamic psychotherapy,” published in the *American Psychologist*.¹² In this article, Shedler described that Bugge and Hilsenrath¹³ had defined psychodynamic psychotherapy as focus on emotion, exploration of attempts to avoid distressing thoughts and feelings, identification of patterns, discussion of past experience, focus on interpersonal relationships, focus on the therapy relationship, and exploration of wishes and fantasies. Meanwhile, the

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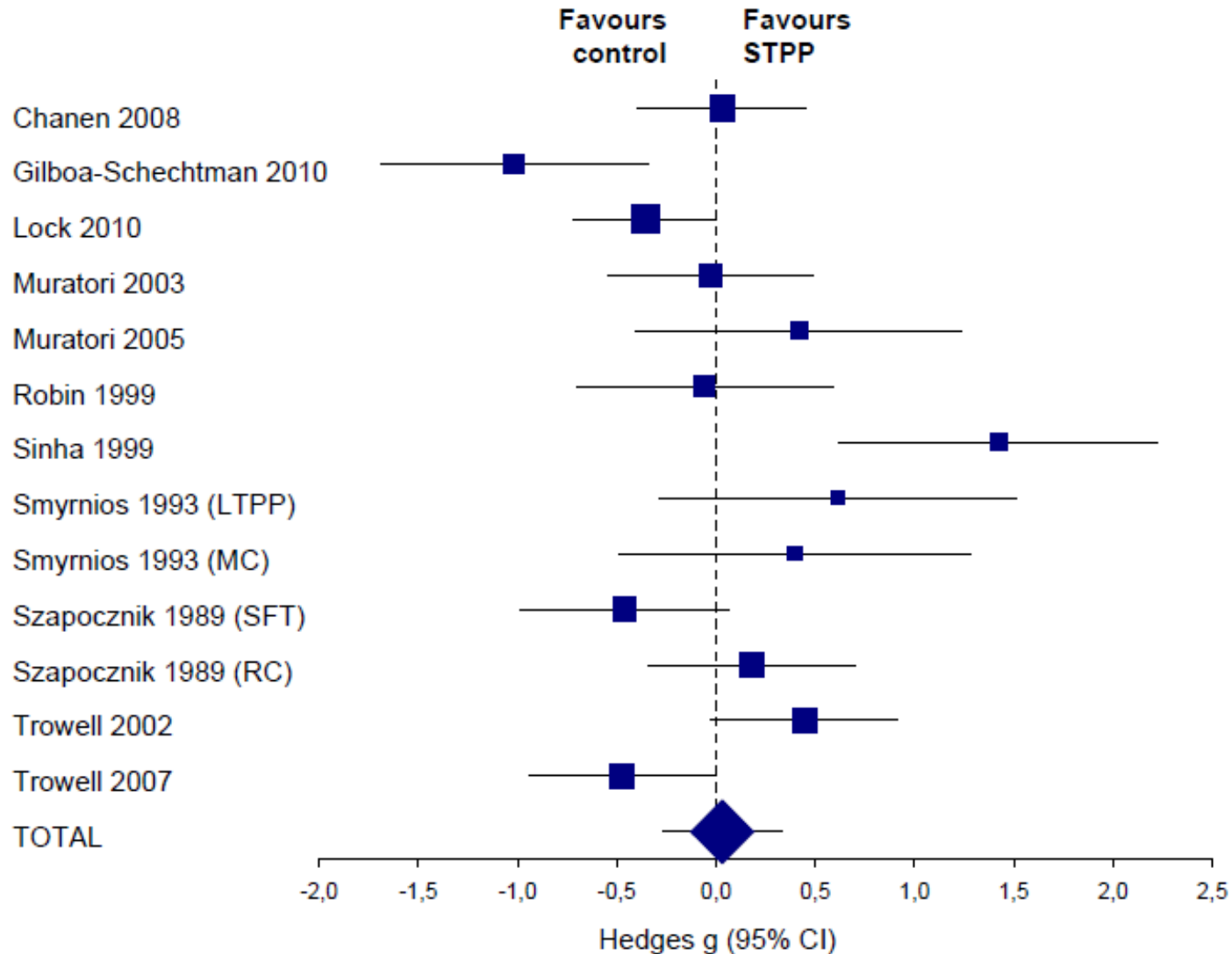
JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY
VOLUME 52 NUMBER 8 AUGUST 2013

www.jaacap.org 863

Overall pre-post effects within-group



Overall pre-post compared to control group



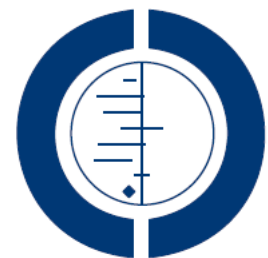
Meta-analysis of parent-infant psychoanalytic psychotherapy

Barlow, J., Bennett, C., Midgley, N., Larkin, S., Wei, Y. (2015).

Parent-infant psychotherapy for improving parental and infant mental health. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, Issue 1.

Parent-infant psychotherapy for improving parental and infant mental health (Review)

Barlow J, Bennett C, Midgley N, Larkin SK, Wei Y



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<http://www.thecochranelibrary.com>

WILEY

Parent-infant psychotherapy for improving parental and infant mental health (Review)
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The evidence for psychoanalytic work with young people – c. 2017

There was some evidence to support the effectiveness of psychoanalytic psychotherapy for children and young people

Superiority over other treatments not clearly established

Many studies were small-scale and had significant weaknesses in research design.

Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 2017
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0075417X.2017.1323945>



Psychodynamic psychotherapy for children and adolescents: an updated narrative review of the evidence base

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While the evidence base for psychodynamic therapy with adults is now quite substantial, there is still a lack of research evaluating the effectiveness of psychodynamic therapies with children and young people. Those studies that have been carried out are also not widely known in the field. To help address the second point, in 2011, we carried out a review of the evidence base for psychodynamic psychotherapy for children and adolescents, which identified 35 studies which together provided some preliminary evidence for this treatment for a range of childhood disorders. The present study is an updated review, focusing on research published between March 2011 and November 2016. During this period, 23 additional studies were published, of which 5 were reports on randomised controlled trials, 3 were quasi-experimental controlled studies and 15 were observational studies. Although most studies covered children with mixed diagnoses, there were a number of studies examining specific diagnostic groups, including children with depression, anxiety and disruptive disorders. whilst the quality of studies was mixed, some were well-designed and reported, and overall indicated promising findings. Nevertheless, further high-quality research is needed in order to better understand the effectiveness of psychodynamic psychotherapy across a range of different disorders, and to ensure that services can provide a range of evidence-based treatments for children and young people.

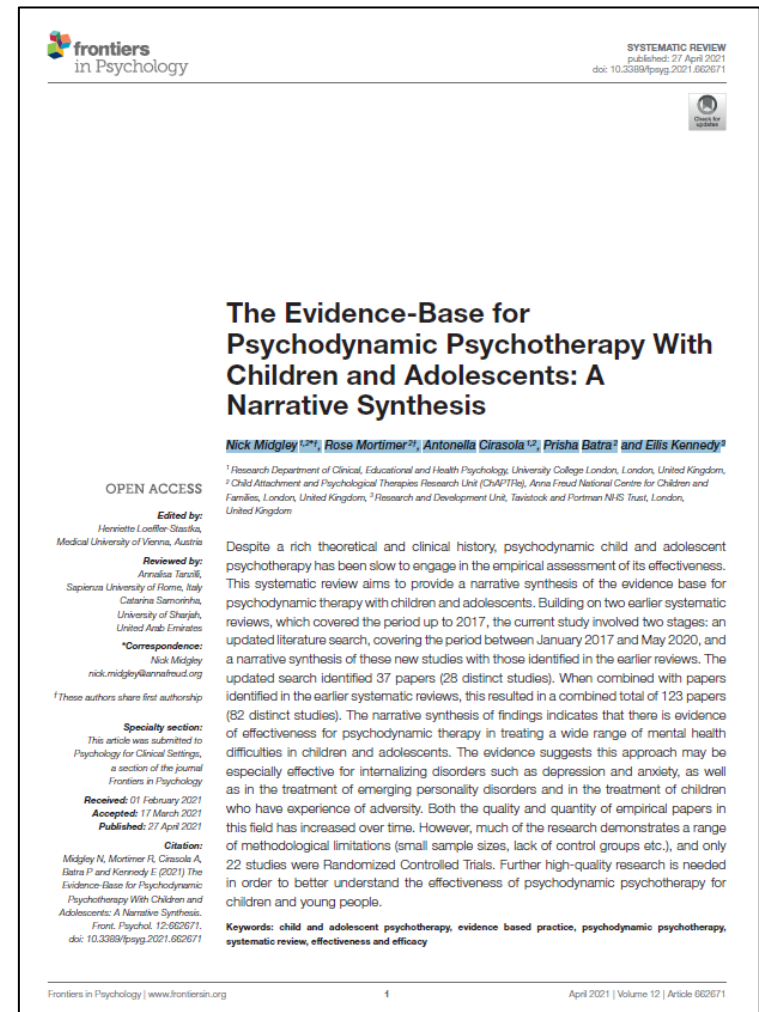
Keywords: child and adolescent psychotherapy; evidence-based practice; effectiveness; efficacy; outcome studies; psychodynamic psychotherapy

2021 – the updated review

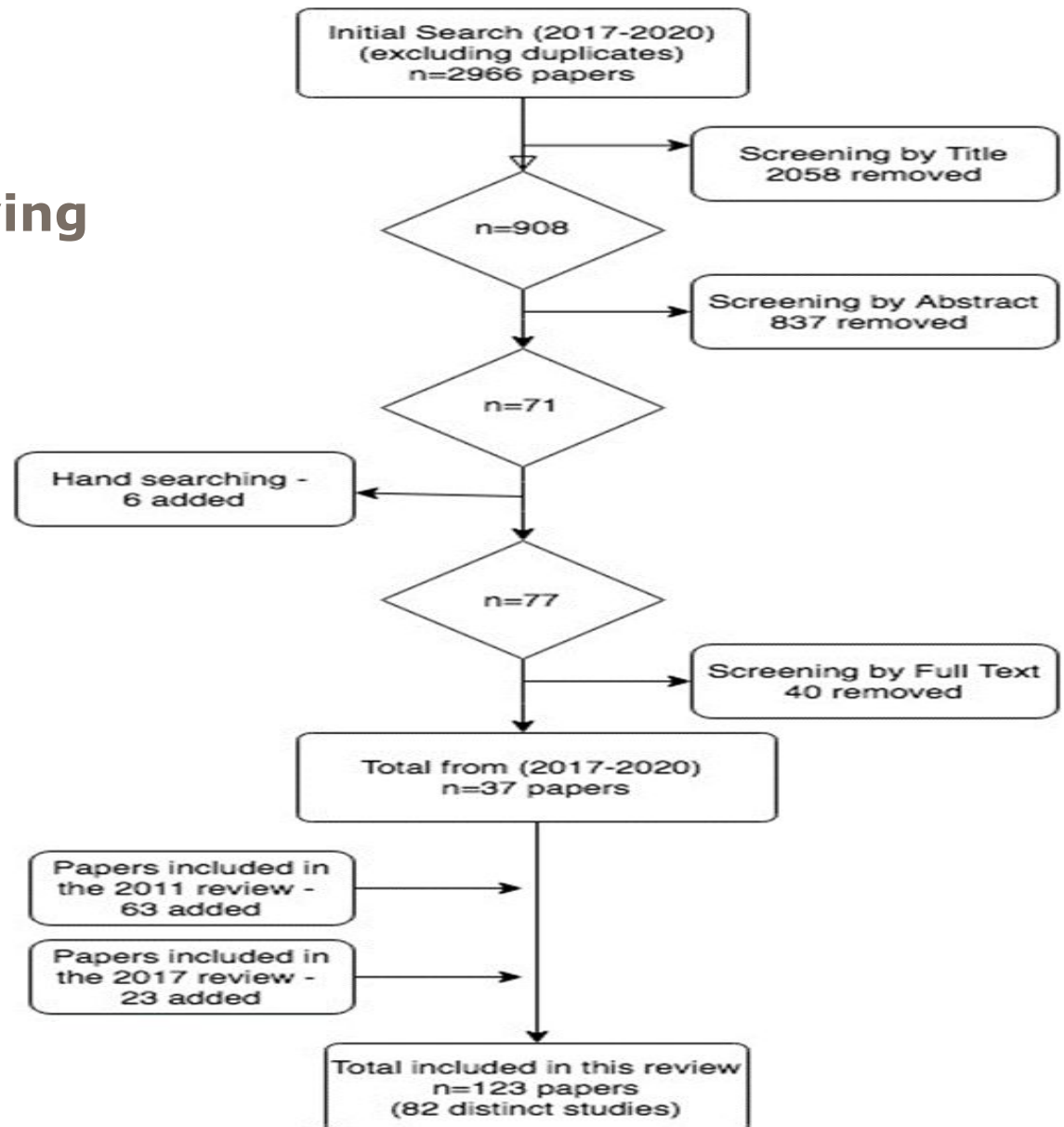


The aims of the 2021 review

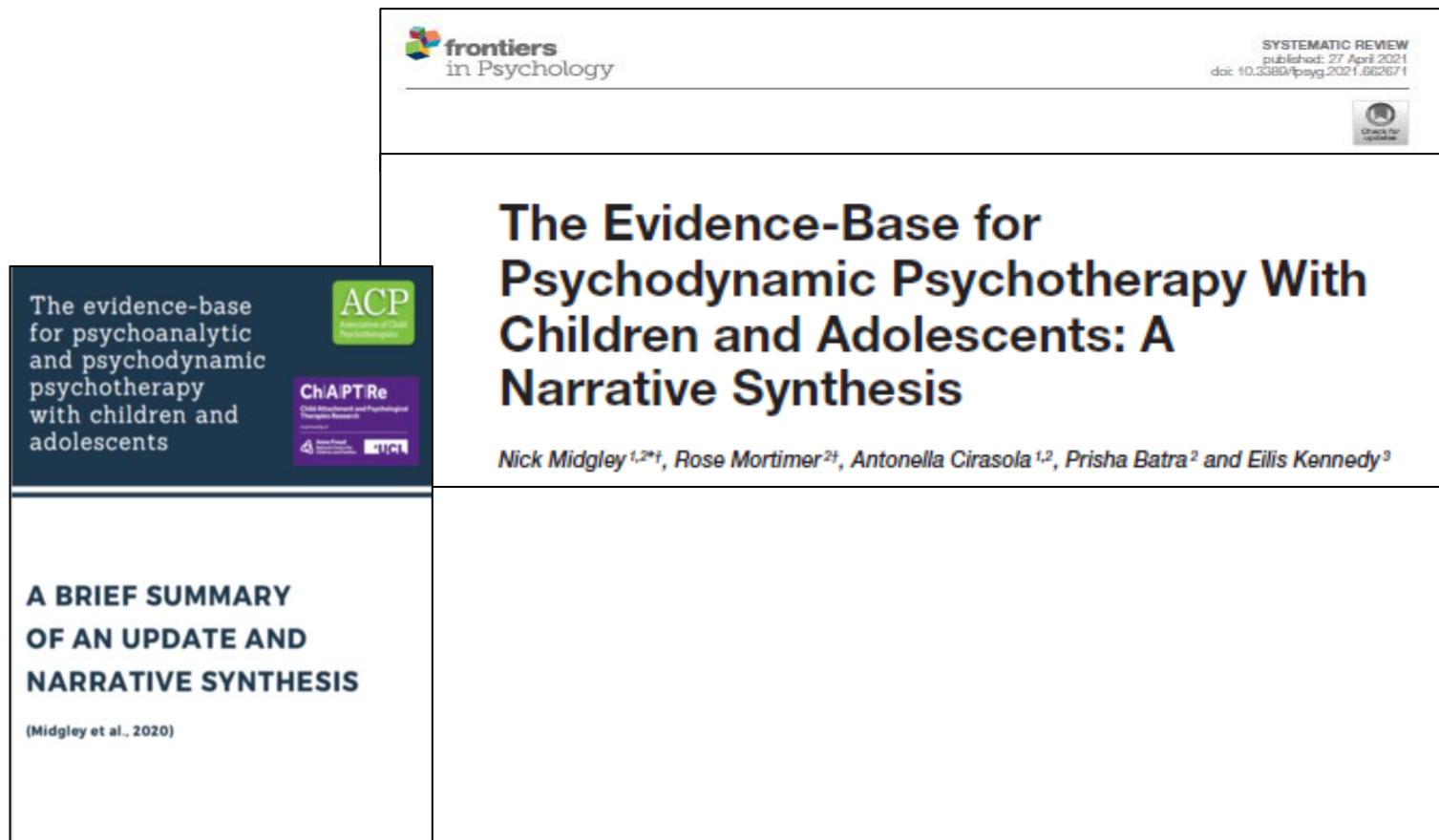
- To update studies published between 2017-2020
- To synthesise findings from this new review with those published in 2011 and 2017
- Key areas not covered:
 - early years (0-3, see Sleet et al., forthcoming)
 - process studies
 - qualitative research (watch this space!)



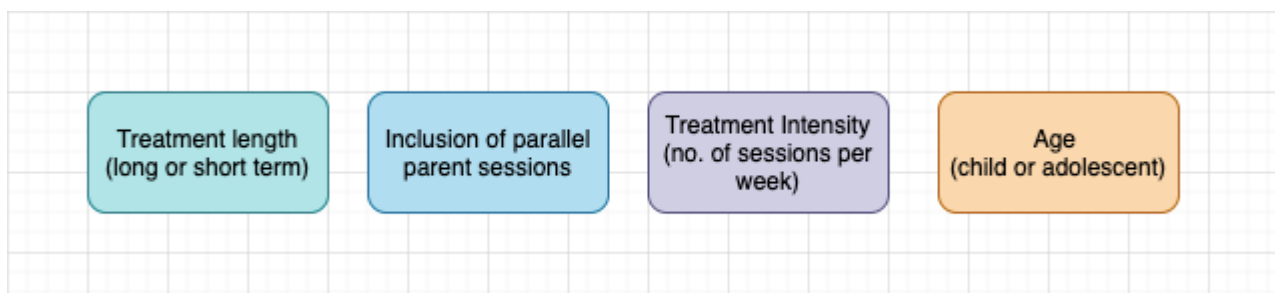
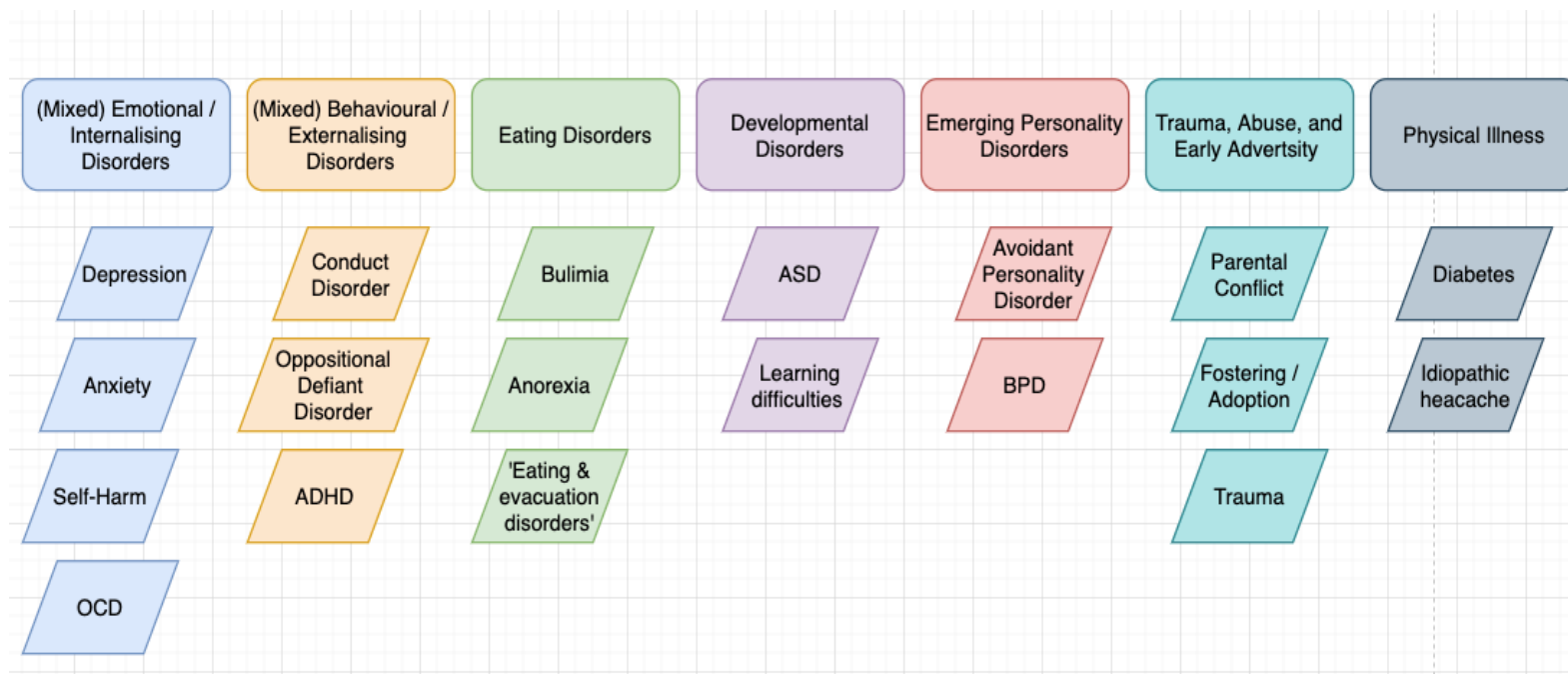
Process of identifying studies



Findings...



Organization of the narrative synthesis



Treatment of child and adolescent depression

Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry (2007)
16:157–167 DOI 10.1007/s00787-006-0584-x

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Judith Trowell
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Fredrik Almqvist
Mika Soininen
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Gerasimos Kolaiti
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Kate Grayson
Jacqueline Barnes
John Tsiantis

Childhood depression: a place for

Cognitive behavioural therapy and short-term
psychoanalytical psychotherapy versus a brief psychosocial
intervention in children with
disorder
randomi



Ulberg et al. *BMC Psychiatry* (2021) 21:106
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03055-y>

BMC Psychiatry

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Ian M Goodyer, Shirli
Chris Roberts, Rob S

The first experimental study of transference



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obs
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Randi Ul
Hanne-S

JOURNAL OF MEDICAL INTERNET RESEARCH

Lindqvist et al

Original Paper

Affect-Focused Psychodynamic Internet-Based Therapy for Adolescent Depression: Randomized Controlled Trial

Karin Lindqvist¹, MSc; Jakob Mechler¹, MSc; Per Carlbring¹, PhD; Peter Lillengren², PhD; Fredrik Falkenström³, PhD; Gerhard Andersson^{3,4}, PhD; Robert Johansson¹, PhD; Julian Edbrooke-Childs^{5,6}, PhD; Hanne-Sofie J Dahl^{7,8}, PhD; Katja Lindert Bergsten⁹, PhD; Nick Midgley^{6,10}, PhD; Rolf Sandell¹¹, PhD; Agneta Thorén¹², PhD; Naira Topooco^{3,13}, PhD; Randi Ulberg^{8,14}, PhD; Björn Philips¹, PhD

Treatment of social anxiety and bulimia in adolescents

Psychotherapy
and Psychosomatics

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Published

Cognitive-Behavioral and Psychodynamic Therapy in Adolescents with Social Anxiety Disorder: A Multicenter Randomized Controlled Trial

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Falk Leichenring^d Peter Henningsen^e Hamid Peseschkian^f Günter Reich^a
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Regina Steilⁱ

NEW RESEARCH

Cognitive-Behavioral and Psychodynamic Therapy in Female Adolescents With Bulimia Nervosa: A Randomized Controlled Trial



Annette Stefini, DSc, Simone Salzer, DSc, Günter Reich, PhD, Hildegard Horn, MA,
Klaus Winkelmann, MD, Hinrich Bents, PhD, Ursula Rutz, Dipl-Sozpäd, Ulrike Frost, Dipl-Psych,
Antje von Boetticher, Dipl-Psych, Uwe Ruhl, DSc, Nicole Specht, MSc, Klaus-Thomas Kronmüller, MD

And it keeps coming!

Development and Psychopathology (2023), 1–16
doi:[10.1017/S0954579422001341](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579422001341)



Regular Article

Effectiveness of psychodynamic treatment: Comparing trajectories of internalizing and externalizing psychopathology of adolescents in treatment, healthy and physically ill adolescents

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¹Department of Psychology, University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany and ²Department of Psychology, University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany

Abstract

Effectiveness of psychodynamic therapy for adolescents in reducing internalizing and externalizing psychopathology was determined by comparing treated adolescents (86 sessions) with the normative developmental progression in two groups without treatment: healthy and diabetic adolescents. In a three-wave longitudinal study, $n = 531$ adolescents ($n = 303$ patients, $n = 119$ healthy, $n = 109$ diabetics) and their mothers filled out psychopathology questionnaires (Youth Self-Report and Child Behavior Checklist). Latent growth curve modeling and multilevel modeling were used to analyze and compare within-person symptoms changes across groups. Analyses showed a significant reduction over the course of treatment for internalizing (Cohen's $d = .90-.92$) and externalizing ($d = .58-.72$) symptoms, *also* when the developmental progression of both control groups was accounted for ($d = .48-.76$). Mothers reported lower levels than their children in internalizing symptoms ($p \leq .01$) while this discrepancy increased over time for treated adolescents ($p = .02$). Results established the effectiveness of psychodynamic treatment for adolescents both with externalizing and internalizing symptoms in comparison with growth and change in nonclinical samples. Cross-informant differences and age-specific trajectories require attention in psychotherapy treatment and research.

Keywords: adolescent patients; adolescents with diabetes; healthy controls; internalizing and externalizing symptoms; psychodynamic therapy

So where are we now?

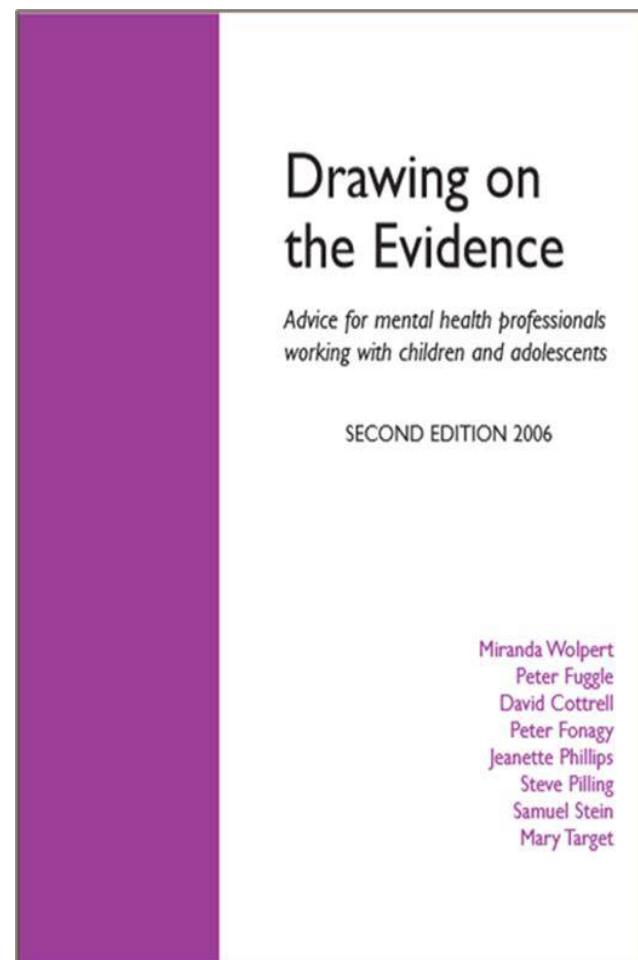
A very different place in 2002...

Some **key challenges:**

- a lack of funding for child mental health research
- a lack of career-pathways for child psychotherapy researchers

Some **opportunities:**

- the development of child psychotherapy doctorates
- a 'paradigm shift' in how we think about developing and evaluating treatments



Thank you!

**For more information
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