

**COURSE: CLINICAL ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION  
CC-7 (PGDCP; SEM II); Unit III**

**By**

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## **EFFECTIVENESS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Psychotherapy is a general term used to describe the treatment of mental disorders by way of communicating with a counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist or therapist. Many times, psychotherapy is non-medicinal in its approach. However, sometimes psychotherapy alone is not enough to alleviate symptoms, in which case patients may undergo a combination of psychotherapy and medication.

A treatment is considered efficacious to the extent that the average person receiving the treatment in clinical trials is demonstrated to be significantly less dysfunctional than the average person not receiving any treatment.

*Efficacy studies* place a premium on internal validity by controlling the types of clients in the study, by standardizing the treatments, and by randomly assigning patients to treatment or no treatment groups. Efficacy studies often take place in a research lab or university clinic where a group of pre-screened clients can participate. Often the group of clients is homogeneous, and they may be paid to participate. Therapists in efficacy studies often are trained graduate students or mental health professionals who receive very close supervision. In contrast, *effectiveness studies* emphasize external validity and the representativeness of the treatment that is administered. These studies can look more like “real-world” treatment, as compared to efficacy studies. A range of clients and range of therapists (sometimes with varied training and supervision) are included. A treatment is considered effective to the extent that clients report clinically significant benefit from it. Effectiveness studies may or may not include control groups or random assignment.

Empirical evidence supports the efficacy of psychotherapy but this does not mean that everyone benefits from psychotherapy. Rather, on average, individuals who seek out and receive psychotherapy achieve some degree of relief. For example, a frequently cited meta-analytic review of more than 475 psychotherapy outcome studies reported that the *average* person receiving psychological treatment is functioning better than 80% of those not receiving treatment.

There are fewer studies of the effectiveness of psychotherapy, however. One major survey on the benefits of psychotherapy published in November 1995 issue of *Consumer Reports* ("Mental Health," 1995) summarized the results of a survey of 4,000 readers who had sought treatment for a psychological problem from a mental health professional, family doctor, or self-help group during the years 1991–1994. Most of the respondents were well educated, their median age was 46 years, and about half were women. Of this sample, 43% described their emotional state at the time that treatment was sought as "very poor" ("I barely managed to deal with things") or "fairly poor" ("Life was usually pretty tough"). The 4,000 respondents presented for treatment of a wide range of problems, including depression, anxiety, panic, phobias, marital or sexual problems, alcohol or drug problems, and problems with children. The major findings were as follows:

- Psychotherapy resulted in some improvement for the majority of respondents. Those who felt the worst before treatment began reported the most improvement.
- As for which types of mental health professionals were most helpful, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers all received high marks. All appeared to be equally effective even after controlling for severity and type of psychological problem.
- Respondents who received psychotherapy alone improved as much as those who received psychotherapy plus medication as part of their treatment.
- In the survey, longer treatment (more sessions) was related to more improvement. These findings are both interesting and provocative.

## METHODS OF EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Knowledge about effectiveness of psychotherapy has been gained in a number of ways. Some of the methods are

1. Case Studies

2. Clinical Surveys
3. Correlational Studies
4. Experimental Studies
5. Analogue Studies
6. Personolistic Studies

Case studies are the method by which effectiveness of psychotherapy can be studied by in-depth study of individual cases.

Clinical Surveys is simple type of clinical survey that is recording the patient status as “improved” or “not improved” and then combining the judgments of diverse clinicians in diverse settings.

Correlational Studies is a method in which no effort is made to manipulate systematically independent variables and then study changes in dependent variables but rather measurements of the phenomena are taken as they occur naturally. Thereafter, the ways in which variables are associated are discovered through correlation, including more sophisticated methods, such as factor or cluster analysis.

Experimental Studies- The experimental method is designed to test particular hypothesis, sharply and directly, by setting up contrasting conditions ideally under laboratory control.

Analogue Studies- It is an experimental design in which the procedures or participants used are similar but not identical to the situation of interest. It is a research tool by which a subject is observed in an artificial setting.

Personolistic Studies- In this method each individual therapist-patient situation is studied in sufficient detail so that criteria of process and change can be individualized while, at the same time, having sufficient numbers of patients treated under sufficiently controlled conditioned