

Evidence Update

Mental Health Series

February 2006

Do psychological treatments delivered by paraprofessionals improve symptoms in people with anxiety or depressive disorders?

Psychological treatment by paraprofessionals may improve the severity of symptoms.

Inclusion criteria

Studies:

Randomized controlled trials.

Participants:

Adults with anxiety or depressive disorders, or both.

Intervention:

Psychological treatments provided by paraprofessionals (staff or lay volunteers that do not have qualifications for psychological treatment).

Outcomes:

Standard measures of anxiety or depression.

Results

- Five trials were included. Allocation concealment was adequate in three trials, and all used self-reported measures.
- Compared to no treatment, symptom severity was lower with paraprofessional psychological treatment (odds ratio 0.34, 95% confidence interval 0.13 to 0.88; 5 trials, 220 participants, random effects model; see graph).
- Compared to treatments provided by professionals, no differences were detected in symptom severity, either immediately after treatment (160 participants across 5 trials; see graph) or 6 to 12 months later (61 participants, 1 trial).

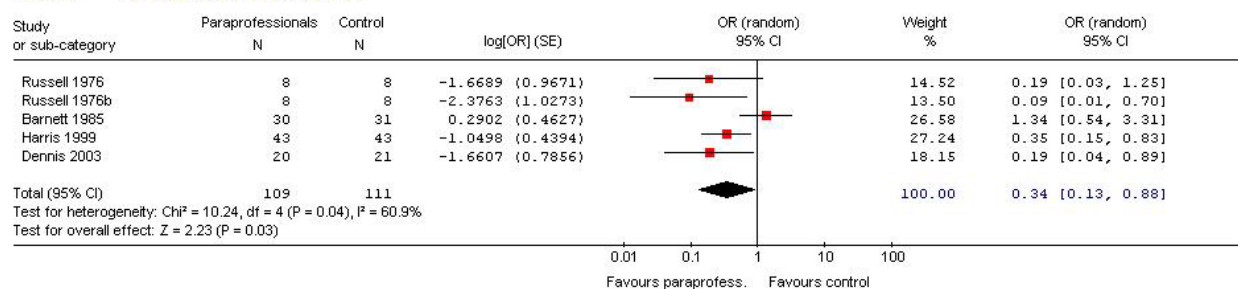


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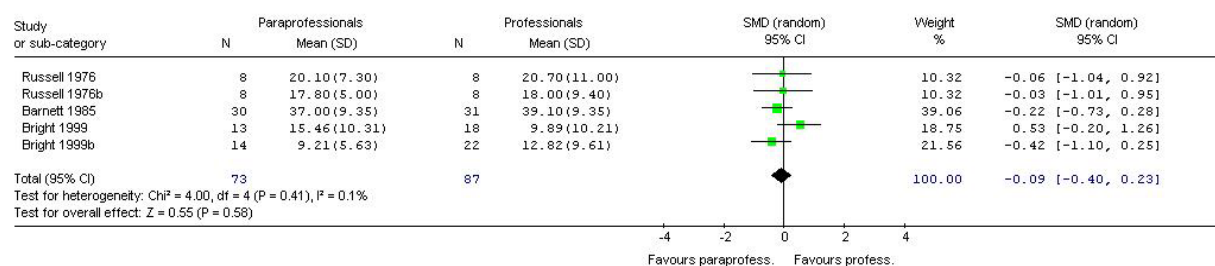
Adapted from den Boer PCAM, Wiersma D, Russo S, van den Bosch RJ. Paraprofessionals for anxiety and depressive disorders. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2005, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD004688.pub2. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004688.pub2.

Produced by the Effective Health Care Alliance Programme (www.liv.ac.uk/evidence), Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, supported by the Department for International Development UK; and the Australasian Cochrane Centre. *Evidence Update* can be distributed free of charge.

Paraprofessionals versus no treatment: symptom severity



Paraprofessionals versus professionals: symptom severity



Authors' conclusions

Implications for practice:

In some circumstances, paraprofessionals appear effective, and could be part of treatment programmes for anxiety or depressive disorders. There is insufficient data to evaluate the effects of paraprofessionals replacing professionals.

Implications for research:

Further well-designed trials evaluating the effectiveness of paraprofessionals as alternatives to professionals for treating anxiety and depressive disorders are needed.