

Systemic therapy works beyond symptoms! Multi-Level Meta-Analyses on the Efficacy of Systemic Therapy for Youth and Adults

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Summary:

Background: Previous meta-analyses on Systemic Therapy focused primarily on symptom reduction (e.g., depression, anxiety). This study broadens the scope by including family system functioning and family members' mental health, as well as evaluating the effects of informants (e.g., self-report vs. parent-report) and assessment methods (e.g., questionnaires vs. behavioral observations).

Methodology: We conducted two separate meta-analyses for children/adolescents and adults. For adults, we analyzed 32 RCTs, yielding 171 effect sizes, while for children and adolescents, we included 44 RCTs with 370 effect sizes. Studies included various therapy approaches (e.g., solution-focused therapy) and a range of disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety) while excluding medication and waitlist-control groups.

Results: For adults, Systemic Therapy proved equally effective in reducing symptoms and enhancing family system functioning. For youth, Systemic Therapy effectively improved symptoms, family system functioning, and mental health outcomes across informants and assessment methods. However, most outcomes focused on symptoms, patient self-reports, and questionnaire-based assessments.

Conclusion: While a family system perspective provides valuable insights, it remains challenging to implement in clinical settings focused on symptom reduction as the primary outcome. The results for children and adolescents suggest a multi-domain, multi-method and multi-informant approach on outcomes assessment that could also be fruitful for adults.

Short-CV:

Niels Braus studied clinical psychology at the University of Heidelberg and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (M.Sc., 2014-2020). He is currently working as a Phd-Student and research assistant at Witten/Herdecke University since 2020. He works as psychotherapist at the outpatient clinic for psychotherapy for adults. He received training as a systemic therapist at the Helm Stierlin Institute in Heidelberg and is currently pursuing his licensed psychotherapy training at the Institute of Family Therapy and Supervision (IFS) in Essen.