

New analysis challenges guidelines on treating anorexia nervosa

16 February 2021



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New international analysis published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* has shown a lack of strong evidence to support current guidance on psychological therapies for treating anorexia nervosa over expert treatment as usual.

The findings highlight a need for further research and support a call for individual trial data to be made available so the benefits of treatments in specific patient populations can be better understood.

Conducted by an international team of clinical experts and researchers, the analysis included 13 randomised controlled trials and a total of 1,049 patients. The studies compared [psychological therapies](#) to treatment as usual in adults receiving outpatient treatment for anorexia. The trials measured eating disorder symptoms, body-mass index (BMI) and all-cause dropout rate up to 52 weeks of follow up.

The study found some therapies to have modest benefit to patients. However, the therapies, currently recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and in clinical guidelines internationally, were not shown to differ

significantly from expert treatment as usual.

Lead author on the project, Professor Andrea Cipriani from University of Oxford, says: "Understanding the effectiveness of available treatments is particularly important for [anorexia nervosa](#) because it has one of the highest mortality rates of any psychiatric condition. This analysis highlights the gaps in existing evidence and the urgent need for more and better research into psychological therapies for treating Anorexia."

Because of the relatively low quality and quantity of data available, this analysis should be understood as exploratory rather than confirmatory. However, it highlights the shortcomings of existing research and emphasises the need for more robust data.

Flinders University Professor Tracey Wade, a lead collaborator on the project, says: "We have made progress in understanding the effective non-specific factors that need to be included in any treatment for anorexia nervosa. Our future challenge is to develop treatment factors tailored to individual presentations that can be added to the non-specific factors to increase effectiveness of our treatments for the condition."

The paper, Comparative efficacy and acceptability of psychological interventions for the treatment of adult outpatients with [anorexia nervosa](#): a [systematic review](#) and network meta-[analysis](#), published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*

More information: *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2021). DOI: [10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30566-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30566-6) , [protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/JuCo ... domain=thelancet.com](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/JuCo...domain=thelancet.com)

Provided by Flinders University

APA citation: New analysis challenges guidelines on treating anorexia nervosa (2021, February 16) retrieved 9 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-02-analysis-guidelines-anorexia-nervosa.html>

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