

Research in Psychoanalysis

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November 19, 2022

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2022). *Research in Psychoanalysis*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES.
Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=37995>

Over a hundred years of case reports and studies in the journal *Modern Psychoanalysis*, the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* and the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* have analyzed efficacy of analysis in cases of neurosis and character or personality problems. Psychoanalysis modified by object relations techniques has been shown to be effective in many cases of ingrained problems of intimacy and relationship (cf. the many books of Otto Kernberg). As a therapeutic treatment, psychoanalytic techniques may be useful in a one-session consultation. Psychoanalytic treatment, in other situations, may run from about a year to many years, depending on the severity and complexity of the pathology.

Psychoanalytic theory has, from its inception, been the subject of criticism and controversy. Freud remarked on this early in his career, when other physicians in Vienna ostracized him for his findings that hysterical conversion symptoms were not limited to women. Challenges to analytic theory began with Otto Rank and Adler (turn of the 20th century), continued with behaviorists (e.g. Wolpe) into the 1940s and '50s, and have persisted. Criticisms come from those who object to the notion that there are mechanisms, thoughts or feelings in the mind that could be unconscious. Criticisms also have been leveled against the discovery of "infantile sexuality" (the recognition that children between ages two and six imagine things about procreation). Criticisms of theory have led to variations in analytic theories, such as the work of Fairbairn, Balint, and Bowlby. In the past 30 years or so, the criticisms have centered on the issue of empirical verification, in spite of many empirical, prospective research studies that have been empirically validated (e.g., See the studies of Barbara Milrod, at Cornell University Medical School, et al.). Recently in scientific literature we can find research supporting many Freud's ideas, e.g. unconsciousness, repression etc.

Psychoanalysis has been used as a research tool into childhood development (cf. the journal *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*), and has developed into a flexible, effective treatment for certain mental disturbances. In the 1960s, Freud's early (1905) thoughts on the childhood development of female sexuality were challenged; this challenge led to major research in the 1970s and 80s, and then to a reformulation of female sexual development that corrected some of Freud's concepts. Also see the various works of Eleanor Galenson, Nancy Chodorow, Karen Horney, Françoise Dolto, Melanie Klein, Selma Fraiberg, and others. Most recently, psychoanalytic researchers who have integrated attachment theory into their work, including Alicia Lieberman, Susan Coates, and Daniel Schechter have explored the role of parental traumatization in the development of young children's mental representations of self and others.

Several meta-analysis have shown psychoanalysis and psychodynamic therapy to be effective, with outcomes comparable or greater than other kinds of psychotherapy or antidepressant drugs. Empirical research has shown also that "proper", long-term psychoanalysis, when patient lies on a couch and meets with analyst at least three times a week, is also effective. A 2005 review of randomized controlled trials found that "psychoanalytic therapy is (1) more effective than no treatment or treatment as usual, and (2) more effective than shorter forms of psychodynamic

therapy". Empirical research on the efficacy of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy has also become prominent among psychoanalytic researchers.

Research on psychodynamic treatment of some populations shows mixed results. Research by analysts such as Bertram Karon and colleagues at Michigan State University had suggested that when trained properly, psychodynamic therapists can be effective with schizophrenic patients. More recent research casts doubt on these claims. The Schizophrenia Patient Outcomes Research Team (PORT) report argues in its Recommendation 22 against the use of psychodynamic therapy in cases of schizophrenia, noting that more trials are necessary to verify its effectiveness. However, the PORT recommendation is based on the opinions of clinicians rather than on empirical data, and empirical data exist that contradict this recommendation ([link to abstract](#)).

A review of current medical literature in The Cochrane Library, (the updated abstract of which is available online) reached the conclusion that no data exist that demonstrate that psychodynamic psychotherapy is effective in treating schizophrenia. Dr. Hyman Spotnitz and the practitioners of his theory known as Modern Psychoanalysis, a specific sub-specialty, still report (2007) much success in using their enhanced version of psychoanalytic technique in the treatment of schizophrenia. Further data also suggest that psychoanalysis is not effective (and possibly even detrimental) in the treatment of sex offenders. Experiences of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists and research into infant and child development have led to new insights. Theories have been further developed and the results of empirical research are now more integrated in the psychoanalytic theory.

There are different forms of psychoanalysis and psychotherapies in which psychoanalytic thinking is practiced. Besides classical psychoanalysis there is for example psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Other examples of well known therapies which also use insights of psychoanalysis are Mentalization-Based Treatment (MBT), and Transference-Focused Psychotherapy (TFP). There is also a continuing influence of psychoanalytic thinking in different settings in the mental health care. To give an example: in the psychotherapeutic training in the Netherlands, psychoanalytic and system therapeutic theories, drafts, and techniques are combined and integrated. Other psychoanalytic schools include the Kleinian, Lacanian, and Winnicottian schools.