

## Clinical Psychology in Mental Health Treatment: The Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

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### Abstract

Mental health disorders have become a major global public health concern due to their increasing prevalence and impact on psychological wellbeing and quality of life. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is widely recognized as one of the most effective and evidence-based psychotherapeutic approaches used in clinical psychology for the treatment of various mental health conditions. This review article examines the role and effectiveness of CBT in managing disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and substance use disorders. The review also discusses the theoretical foundations of CBT, including cognitive and behavioral theories, as well as core therapeutic techniques such as cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, exposure therapy, and problem-solving training. Findings from previous clinical studies indicate that CBT significantly reduces psychological symptoms, improves emotional regulation, enhances coping skills, and supports relapse prevention across different populations and treatment settings. In addition, the review highlights several advantages of CBT, including its structured and short-term nature, evidence-based framework, and adaptability to individual, group, and online therapy formats. However, limitations related to cultural applicability, patient motivation, and emotional depth are also discussed. Overall, CBT remains a highly valuable and effective intervention in contemporary mental health treatment and clinical psychology practice.

**Keywords:** Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Clinical Psychology, Mental Health, Psychotherapy, Anxiety and Depression

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### 1. Introduction

The rise in the prevalence and impact of mental health disorders have made these a significant public health issue at a global scale. Depression, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders and other mental health disorders are common conditions that impact millions of people and significantly affecting disability and their quality of life globally. There is some recent evidence that mental health issues in children, adolescents and adults are still on the rise worldwide and psychological distress is increasing before and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Kieling et al., 2024; Nochaiwong et al., 2021). Moreover, mental health disorders are well linked with substance use behaviors, especially in adolescents and young adults, indicating that these co-occurrences have further impacts on treatment outcomes and psychosocial functioning (Esmaelzadeh et al., 2018).

The rising prevalence of mental illness has shed light on the need for mental illness reduction strategies, which can be anti-psychiatric or promote mental wellbeing, and for effective psychological interventions. Psychological treatments are well established and important methods for enhancing emotional regulation, behavioural functioning and coping skills for people with mental health problems. Evidence has demonstrated that psychological interventions have the potential to greatly improve psychological wellbeing and decrease psychological distress in a variety of populations (Van Agteren et al., 2021). In the face of crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, psychological support and intervention strategies are especially crucial during unprecedented times to alleviate anxiety, fear, stress, and social isolation amongst those impacted (Duan and Zhu, 2020). In this context, clinical psychology is crucial in assessing, diagnosing, treating and preventing mental

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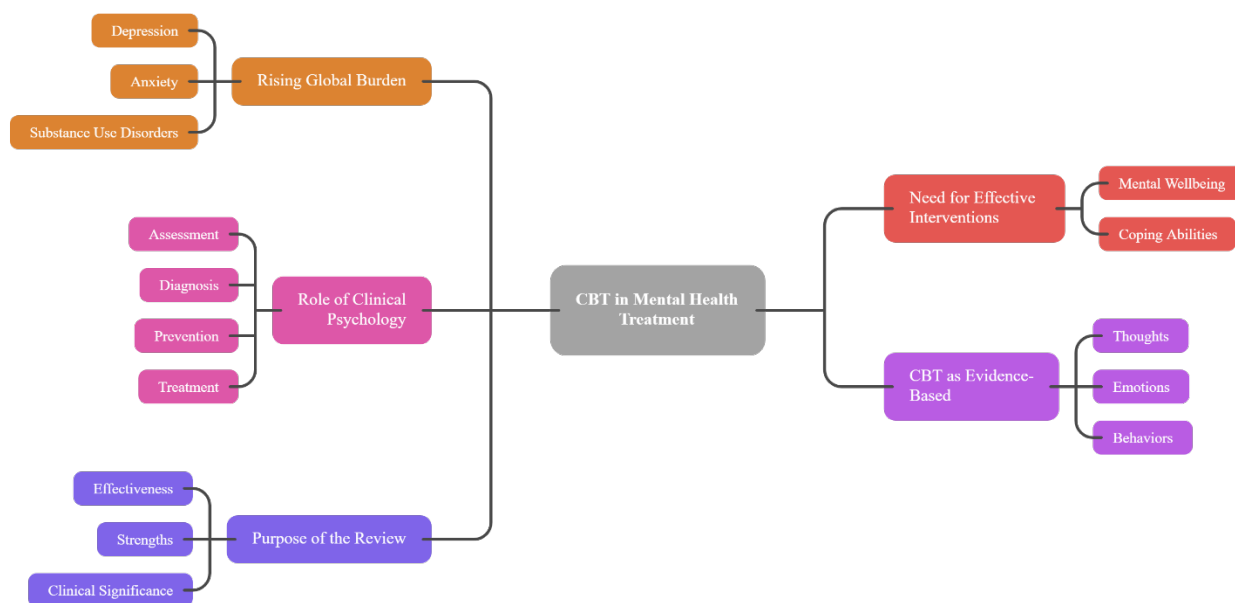
disorders using evidence-based therapeutic strategies (Davey, 2021).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the most popular and well-researched therapies in clinical psychology. CBT refers to a goal-oriented, structured psychotherapy approach that centers on recognizing and adjusting dysfunctional thoughts, feelings and actions that lead to psychological distress (Traeger and Wright, 2020). CBT was developed on the basis of both cognitive and behavioral theories and over time has become a well-rounded therapeutic approach for a variety of mental health issues. CBT evolved over time from early behaviors-based models to cognitive-behavioral models that highlight the role of thinking patterns in emotional and behavioral reactions (Ruggiero et al., 2018). CBT has established sound evidence and therapeutic strategies and is widely used in treating depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD, OCD and substance abuse disorders today.

The core elements of CBT emphasize the way negative thoughts affect emotions and actions, and that changing

the way that thoughts are structured will help to improve psychological functioning. CBT focuses on skill building, self-awareness, problem solving and behavior change, and uses structured interventions (Traeger and Wright, 2020) including cognitive restructuring, exposure therapy, and behavioral activation. Its group and time-sensitive framework has made CBT a very accessible and flexible therapeutic strategy in today's clinical practice.

Since mental health disorders are becoming commonplace, and CBT has been widely adopted in clinical practice, it is crucial to explore the efficacy of CBT in mental health treatment. This knowledge of the therapeutic effects, strengths and weaknesses of CBT can give insights into its contribution to clinical psychology and evidence-based mental health care. Hence, this review is designed to assess the effectiveness of the CBT in a variety of mental health disorders and to examine its role as a psychological treatment in current clinical practice as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in Mental Health Treatment**

The flowchart illustrates the relationship between the global burden of mental health disorders, the role of clinical psychology, the evidence-based principles of CBT, and the purpose of evaluating CBT effectiveness in mental health treatment.

**Objectives of the Review**

1. To examine the role of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in the treatment of mental health disorders within the field of clinical psychology
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of CBT in managing common mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance use disorders based on existing literature

3. To identify the strengths, limitations, and future directions of CBT as an evidence-based psychological intervention in mental health treatment

**2. Theoretical Foundations of CBT**

One of the most popular and evidence-based psychotherapeutic methods of contemporary clinical psychology is referred to as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT's theory is based mostly on cognitive and behavioral theory, both of which focus on the link between thoughts, feelings, and conduct. CBT assumes that unhealthy thought patterns and acquired behaviours are key factors in psychological distress and mental health issues. Changing these unhelpful thoughts and behaviors can help to regulate emotions and enhance

psychological well-being. CBT is the result of a gradual fusion of both cognitive and behavioral approaches that developed into a therapeutic framework that is clear, concrete and goal-oriented, which has been adopted globally in mental health treatment (Ruggiero et al., 2018).

Aaron Beck's cognitive theory is closely linked to the cognitive base of CBT, suggesting that psychological problems are related to abnormal cognitive processes and beliefs. According to Beck, people with mental

health issues tend to entertain automatic negative thoughts, which influence their perception of situations and experiences (Romanowska and Dobroczyński, 2020). This theory proposes that emotions and behaviors do not directly correlate to external events, but rather to the meaning that individuals give to the events. For instance, a person suffering from depression could think that a small error is a reflection of their personal failure, which may give them a sense of sadness, hopelessness, and isolation. CBT is thus concerned with identifying and addressing irrational beliefs and changing them for more realistic, adaptive thoughts. This association between cognition, emotion and behaviour is the core-rules of CBT and has emphasized the role of cognitive processes in emotional functioning (Ali, 2023). Another cognitive approach to CBT is a modern one, which recognizes that conscious and unconscious cognitive processes can play a role in psychological reactions and behavior patterns (Ruggiero et al., 2018).

Besides cognitive theory, behavioural theory is another key factor influencing the principles of CBT. Behavioral approaches focus on the learning of human behaviors in the context of interaction between the environment and the child, and thus suggest that behavioral interventions can change human behaviors. Classical and operant conditioning theories of learning provide explanations to the development and maintenance of maladaptive

behaviors over time (Rachmad, 2022). Classical conditioning is about learning by association between stimuli and operant conditioning is about the effect of rewards and punishments on behaviour. Avoidance actions in anxiety disorders, for example, can be reinforced since they momentarily do away with the dread or discomfort. This reinforcement acts to reinforce maladaptive coping and perpetuate psychological distress over time. It is believed that these learned behaviors can be altered with structured interventions, leading to better mental health outcomes according to the behavioural theory as shown in Table 1 .

CBT is a therapy that integrates cognitive and behavioral processes, and utilizes various practical therapeutic strategies to change dysfunctional thinking and behavior. Cognitive restructuring is one of the most significant techniques, in that it is the way people learn to recognize negative thoughts and learn to interpret them with more balance and realism. This process will help people to challenge negative thinking patterns like catastrophizing, overgeneralization, and self-blame (Pineda et al., 2020). Behavioral activation is another critical technique that involves participation in activities that are meaningful and rewarding to decrease depression and increase motivation. Another form of exposure therapy is common in many CBT treatments, especially anxiety disorders, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The method is called "gradual exposure" because it gradually exposes one to feared situations or stimuli, decreasing avoidance behavior and anxiety responses over time (Reid et al., 2021). Moreover, problem-solving training enables them to acquire coping strategies to deal with stressful situations and common problems. These techniques taken together illustrate the way in which CBT is able to bridge the gap between theory and intervention in an attempt to enhance psychological functioning and emotional wellbeing (Collard, 2023).

**Table 1.** Theoretical Foundations and Core Techniques of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

<b>Theoretical Component</b>	<b>Key Concepts</b>	<b>Contribution to CBT</b>	<b>Supporting References</b>
<b>Cognitive Theory</b>	Thoughts influence emotions and behaviors; cognitive distortions; automatic negative thoughts	Helps individuals identify and modify dysfunctional thinking patterns	Beck’s cognitive model (Romanowska and Dobroczyński, 2020; Ali, 2023)
<b>Behavioral Theory</b>	Learning through conditioning, reinforcement, and behavior modification	Focuses on changing maladaptive learned behaviors	Classical and operant conditioning (Rachmad, 2022)
<b>Cognitive Restructuring</b>	Challenging irrational beliefs and replacing negative thoughts	Improves emotional regulation and adaptive thinking	Pineda et al. (2020)
<b>Behavioral Activation</b>	Engagement in positive and meaningful activities	Reduces depressive symptoms and increases motivation	Collard (2023)
<b>Exposure Therapy</b>	Gradual exposure to feared stimuli or situations	Reduces anxiety and avoidance behaviors	Reid et al. (2021)
<b>Problem-Solving Training</b>	Developing coping and decision-making skills	Enhances resilience and stress management	Reid et al. (2021)

### **3. Role of CBT in Clinical Psychology**

#### **3.1 CBT as a Psychotherapeutic Approach**

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the psychotherapeutic methods, which is scientifically grounded and effective for the treatment of different mental health disorders and has gained significant popularity in clinical psychology. CBT is widely considered the evidence-based gold standard of psychotherapy due to its well-established therapeutic efficacy and principles in a variety of disorders, including depression, anxiety disorders, OCD, and PTSD (David et al., 2018). CBT's main goal is to identify and change such negative thoughts and behaviors that lead to emotional suffering and psychological problems.

One of the key features of CBT is its structured and goal-oriented approach. Therapy sessions are structured in a methodical fashion around treatment goals that are co-created by the therapist and client. This systematic framework helps clients identify distorted thinking, identify patterns of behavior, and learn effective strategies to cope with mental challenges (Hofmann, 2022). CBT also promotes active participation with homework, self-monitoring, and skill development exercises in which individuals practice therapeutic skills in their everyday activities.

One other key element of CBT is its short-term treatment model. CBT is not a long-term therapy, as it aims to achieve a significant reduction in symptoms in a relatively few numbers of sessions. Most CBT programs take between a couple of weeks and months, depending on the severity of the condition. Short-term CBT interventions have been proven to be effective in lowering symptoms of anxiety and enhancing emotional regulation and coping capacity (Stefan et al., 2019). One

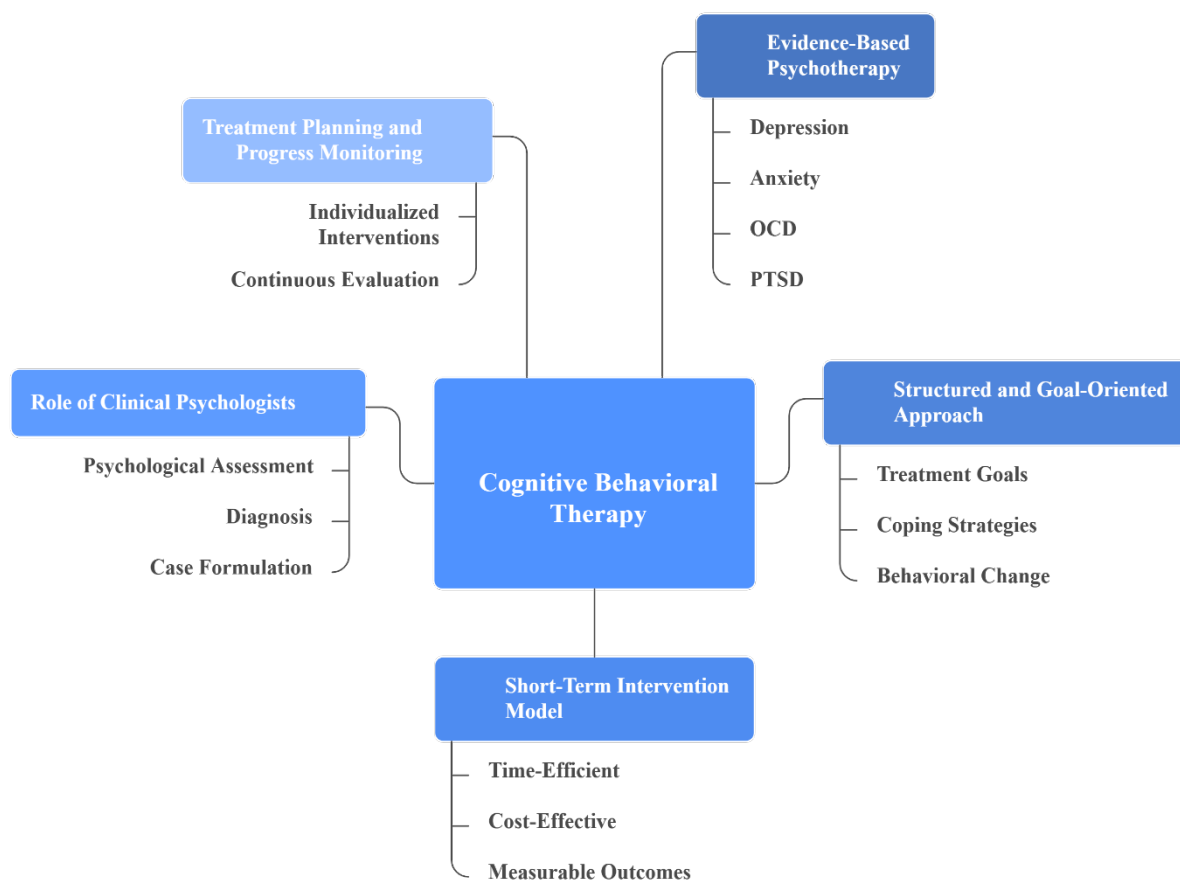
of the reasons that CBT is so popular is its time-saving and cost-effective nature.

#### **3.2 Role of Clinical Psychologists in CBT**

Clinical psychologists are key in the implementation and effectiveness of CBT. They are mainly involved in psychological assessment and diagnosis in order to determine the type of mental illness and its intensity in the client as shown in Figure 2. Clinicians collect the data they need to understand cognitive, emotional, and behavioral issues that might be present in the person through interviews, observations of their behaviour, and psychological testing (Huisman and Kangas, 2018). Accurate assessment can be used to identify if CBT is a suitable treatment for the client.

Another key role of a clinical psychologist in CBT practice is in the treatment planning. Therapists then tailor treatment approaches to address specific psychological symptoms and therapeutic goals, based on the evaluation results. Depending on the client's needs these plans can contain cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, exposure and stress management strategies. Evidence-based case formulation has been identified as a crucial component of a good CBT intervention (Huisman and Kangas, 2018).

Clinical psychologists also keep track of the progress of the patient during therapy. A symptom assessment, change in behaviors and client feedback are used to measure progress in order to determine effectiveness of treatment and necessary changes in intervention strategies. Ongoing assessment helps to ensure that therapy continues to have positive psychological outcomes and enhance mental wellbeing (Hancox et al., 2020).



**Figure 2. Role and Clinical Applications of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in Clinical Psychology**

The flowchart presents the major roles and characteristics of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in clinical psychology, including its evidence-based applications, structured therapeutic approach, short-term intervention model, and the responsibilities of clinical psychologists in assessment, treatment planning, and progress monitoring.

**4. Effectiveness of CBT in Mental Health Treatment**

**4.1 CBT for Depression**

CBT is a well-known treatment that has proven effective in the treatment of depression. CBT supports the process of recognizing unhelpful thinking patterns and behaviors that can worsen depression and then changing them for more positive alternatives. However, research has shown that CBT can be very effective at reducing depression symptoms through increasing emotional regulation, problem-solving skills, and behavioral activation (Santoft et al., 2019). CBT is also effective in preventing relapse because the individual learns coping skills and cognitive strategies after completing treatment that he or she can use afterwards. CBT is one of the most evidence-based psychological treatment options for depressive disorders that are available in various age groups and clinical contexts (Oud et al., 2019).

**4.2 CBT for Anxiety Disorders**

CBT has proved to be very effective in the treatment of anxiety disorders, such as generalised anxiety disorder,

panic disorder and social anxiety disorder. Therapy primarily involves uncovering irrational fears, as well as strategies to decrease avoidance and increase coping skills using cognitive restructuring and exposure-based strategies. CBT is effective for people with generalized anxiety disorder as it helps them to question their overthinking and learn to adopt more balanced views on concerns (Nakao et al., 2021). CBT can assist patients with panic disorder in becoming aware of and learning to control their thoughts and physical sensations that are associated with panic, and can also help to decrease the number and intensity of panic attacks. Also, CBT has been effective in the treatment of social anxiety disorder, and it helps to face social fears and boost confidence in social situations. CBT interventions have also shown robust reductions in anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents with a variety of therapeutic modalities (James et al., 2020; Sigurvinsdóttir et al., 2020).

**4.3 CBT for PTSD and Trauma**

CBT is effective for many trauma-related conditions and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). CBT is a therapy focused on trauma that targets negative thoughts, feelings, and memories about traumatic experiences. This therapeutic method allows individuals to experience trauma events in a safe and supportive environment, thereby minimizing symptoms of flashbacks, avoidance, hypervigilance, and emotional distress. CBT methods such as cognitive restructuring, relaxation training and exposure therapy are effective for

trauma survivors to help better manage symptoms and functioning in the emotional domain (Brown et al., 2018). CBT that is trauma focused is shown to be effective in decreasing symptoms of PTSD and psychological resilience in adults and younger populations.

**4.4 CBT for Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

CBT has been shown to be one of the most effective psychological therapies for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). One of the key elements of CBT for OCD is exposure and response prevention (ERP), a therapy in which anxiety-inducing thoughts or situations are gradually introduced and compulsive acts are avoided. This will help people over time to learn to lower their fear responses and to end the cycle of obsessions and compulsions. CBT + ERP is shown to be effective in reducing OCD symptoms and enhancing functioning and quality of life for those diagnosed with OCD (Spencer et al., 2022). CBT is also a structured therapy, which enables therapists to create individual interventions based on symptom level and treatment requirements.

**4.5 CBT for Substance Use Disorders**

CBT has also been shown to be effective in the treatment of substance use disorders through aiding in the identification and change in behaviors related to substance use. CBT aims to identify triggers, learn to manage them and improve coping skills and to prevent a

relapse. Behavioral modification techniques enable us to teach people a new way to cope with stress and environmental cues associated with substance use behaviors (Boness et al., 2023). CBT is also often used in conjunction with a medication to enhance the effectiveness of the treatment in the context of alcohol and drug dependence. The results of a meta-analysis provide evidence that individuals with a substance use disorder (SUD) who receive integrated CBT have a higher probability of recovery and lower risk of relapse than those who receive other treatment modalities (Ray et al., 2020).

**4.6 CBT in Children and Adolescents**

CBT is becoming increasingly significant in emotional and behavioural problems in children and youth. CBT interventions in schools have been extensively adopted to provide assistance for youth who are suffering from anxiety, depression, stress, and behavioral problems. These interventions are directed to emotional regulation, social skills, cognitive restructuring and problem-solving skills. CBT has been found to be effective in reducing depressive and anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents, and increasing psychological wellbeing and academic functioning (Oud et al., 2019; Sigurvinsdóttir et al., 2020). CBT's versatility in terms of developmental age and treatment context underscores its significance as a helpful treatment in child and adolescent mental health care as shown in Table 2 .

Table 2. Effectiveness of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Across Mental Health Conditions

Mental Health Condition	Role of CBT	Key Techniques	Major Outcomes	Supporting References
Depression	Reduces negative thinking and depressive symptoms	Cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation	Symptom reduction and relapse prevention	Santoft et al. (2019); Oud et al. (2019)
Anxiety Disorders	Manages excessive fear and worry	Exposure therapy, cognitive restructuring	Reduced anxiety and improved coping	James et al. (2020); Sigurvinsdóttir et al. (2020)
PTSD and Trauma	Helps process traumatic experiences	Trauma-focused CBT, relaxation training	Reduced PTSD symptoms and emotional distress	Brown et al. (2018)
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	Reduces obsessions and compulsions	Exposure and response prevention (ERP)	Improved daily functioning and symptom control	Spencer et al. (2022)
Substance Use Disorders	Modifies addictive behaviors and coping patterns	Behavioral modification, relapse prevention	Reduced substance use and relapse risk	Boness et al. (2023); Ray et al. (2020)
Children and Adolescents	Addresses emotional and behavioral disorders	School-based CBT, problem-solving training	Improved emotional wellbeing and behavior	Oud et al. (2019); Sigurvinsdóttir et al. (2020)

**5. Advantages of CBT**

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is the most popular and research-backed psychotherapeutic technique in contemporary clinical psychology. CBT has many advantages, one of the most important being its robust scientific evidence based on a number of clinical trials and systematic reviews and meta-analyses. CBT

has empirically been shown to be effective for a variety of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (David et al., 2018). CBT has been shown to be therapeutic across many settings, including with a variety of populations, and because of this, is regarded as the gold standard of

psychotherapy. The broad applicability of CBT has been demonstrated in studies examining its effects for elderly people with depression and physical diseases (Ping et al., 2024).

The second key benefit of CBT is that it is short, structured, and easily implemented. CBT is different from traditional long-term psychotherapies in its aim to achieve a quick response to the symptoms within a short number of sessions. The therapy is organized and has a clear objective in order to identify the maladaptive thoughts, to change the problematic behaviors and to build practical coping strategies (Traeger and Wright, 2020). The structured format ensures the efficiency, low cost and ease of clinical evaluation of CBT. CBT is also focused and this helps to foster active participation of clients, which can help them to use therapeutic skills in their daily lives.

CBT also focuses on the development of skills and self-management. Coping strategies, emotional regulation skills, problem solving skills and challenge of irrational thoughts are taught to individuals. These skills aid in stress management and psychological problems independently, which is beneficial in their long-term mental wellbeing and prevention from relapse (Traeger and Wright, 2020). In addition, the CBT is very flexible as it can be administered in group sessions, individual therapy, or online. CBT interventions delivered online have demonstrated very high effectiveness in enhancing accessibility, as well as providing mental health support remotely (Sweeney et al., 2021). CBT's adaptability and flexibility in various treatment environments highlight its value as a therapeutic method in today's mental health care (Schuster et al., 2020).

## 6. Limitations and Criticisms of CBT

While the use of therapy, specifically Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a well-known psychotherapeutic approach, it has been met with certain criticism and limitations. One of its drawbacks is that it is less effective in treating severe and complex forms of mental health. CBT is very effective for anxiety and depression, but those with very severe psychiatric illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, might need more intensive treatment, possibly involving medication or long-term psychiatric care. CBT may not be sufficient in these circumstances because of the nature and complexity of severe mental illness, involving biological and emotional factors.

Cultural and individual differences are another criticism of CBT. Most of the CBT was formulated by western psychologists, and focuses on rational thinking, self-control and personal responsibility. This means that certain CBT principles may not be completely accepted by people from other cultures, or fit into their beliefs, communication patterns, or cultural values. Some therapeutic strategies may need to be adapted in multicultural contexts to ensure that therapy is culturally sensitive and effective.

CBT also requires a great deal of client engagement and motivation. Patients who receive CBT should be

expected to do homework, self-monitoring exercises and activities involving behavior outside of therapy sessions. Some patients may, however, have difficulty in sticking to the therapeutic techniques and/or in being motivated. This is especially prevalent in people with severe depression, cognitive problems, or poor social support. If the patient is not engaged in treatment, it can decrease the effectiveness of treatment and the rate of therapeutic progress.

In addition, CBT has been called out as only addressing current thoughts and actions, and not looking into deeper emotional conflicts or unconscious psychological mechanisms. It is claimed that a focus on symptom reduction and rational thinking, alongside a lack of attention to childhood experiences, emotional depth and unconscious motivations, is limiting the effectiveness of CBT. Some psychologists think that the approach might be outdated, and fail to consider some important factors in human emotional functioning; indeed, emotional regulation and mindfulness strategies were added in more contemporary CBT approaches. Despite these critiques, CBT is a useful and evidence-based treatment when tailored to specific patients and treatment settings.

## 7. Future Directions in CBT Research

Research using Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) may continue to explore greater accessibility, effectiveness, and adaptability in various applications, populations, and mental health conditions. The direction that is important is the creation of culturally sensitive CBT models. As CBT was created first in the Western psychological paradigm, researchers point out that therapeutic methods must be adjusted to fit other cultural beliefs, values, and communication styles to enhance the effectiveness of treatment for multicultural samples. An additional key area for future developments is the incorporation of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) into CBT. With the growing popularity of online therapy platforms, mobile apps, and digital mental health programs, they are making mental health more accessible and convenient for those who cannot get to in-person therapy. AI-assisted interventions may also help therapists monitor patient progress and provide more personalized treatment approaches. More research is also required into the longer-term effectiveness of CBT. While numerous studies report short-term positive results, there is a need for more long-term studies that will assess relapse prevention and the long-term effectiveness of treatment. Moreover, personalized CBT interventions based on the individual's symptom severity and psychological characteristics could have better treatment outcomes. Overall, the progress made is anticipated to increase the efficacy and worldwide dissemination of CBT in mental health care.

## 8. Conclusion

CBT is one of the most researched and evidence-based forms of psychological treatment, and is still one of the most effective in modern clinical psychology and mental health treatment. This review has shown that CBT is a

powerful intervention for a diverse set of psychological disorders ranging from depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD, OCD and substance usage disorders. CBT is a structured, goal driven, and short-term therapy that can assist people recognize negative thinking and behaviours and establish a healthier way to cope and regulate their feelings. Numerous clinical studies and systematic reviews have confirmed the effectiveness of the therapy and it is widely accepted as an intervention in clinical and community settings. CBT has several benefits, such as being offered as a one-on-one, in groups, or online approach, and focusing on self-management and relapse prevention. CBT is beneficial, but also has some limits, as it is not universally applicable across cultures, lacks the patient motivation to engage in the process, and does not focus as much on the deeper emotional processes. Potential improvements in culturally targeted models, technology-based interventions, and tailored treatment strategies are expected to increase its effectiveness and reach. There is potential for further improvements in culturally targeted models, technology-driven interventions and tailored treatment approaches. CBT remains a significant area of contribution to mental health care in general, offering clinically effective and evidence-based therapeutic interventions that are patient-focused, effective in enhancing psychological wellbeing and quality of life.

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