| **Title** | A systematic review of the effectiveness of occupational therapy interventions for improving functioning and mental health for individuals with anxiety and stress-related disorders |
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|**Publication Date** | 2017-07-06 |
|**Publisher** | ISAD LONDON 2017 |
|**Link to publisher’s version** | http://www.frontiersin.org/events/ISAD_LONDON_2017_Pers pectives_on_Mood_and_Anxiety_Disorders_Looking_to_the_f uture/4504 |
|**Item record** | http://hdl.handle.net/10379/6712 |
|**DOI** | http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/conf.fpsy.t.2017.48.00016 |
A systematic review of the effectiveness of Occupational Therapy interventions for improving functioning and mental health for individuals with anxiety and stress-related disorders

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Background

- Anxiety disorders are highly persistent over the lifetime (Kessler et al., 2009) and are associated with poor functioning in many activities of daily life (Iancu et al., 2014).
- Occupational therapists have a long history of practice with individuals with anxiety disorders (Creek & Lougher, 2012), but their interventions are individualised and vary widely across clinical settings.
- Very few manualised or standardised occupational therapy interventions exist for individuals with anxiety disorders, leading to a weak evidence base and a lack of rigorous research.
- The effectiveness of occupational-therapy led interventions for improving functioning and mental health is under-researched and systematic reviews are urgently required.

Objective

To determine the effectiveness of interventions designed/led by occupational therapists to improve functioning and mental health outcomes for individuals with anxiety and stress-related disorders.

Results

Records identified through database searching (n = 4231)

Records after duplicates removed (n = 2584)

Records published after 1994 (n = 2065)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 226)

Records included in narrative synthesis (n = 24)

- Lambert et al. (2007) showed significant improvements in panic symptoms in an individually delivered lifestyle intervention
- Garvey et al. (2015) showed significant improvements in daily functioning from a 6 week group self-management intervention
- Kitchener et al. (2009) showed no difference between an OT group, a stress management intervention and CAU.
- Heterogeneous theoretical approaches mean results cannot be combined

Randomised Controlled Trials (5)

- Prior 1998) showed a statistically significant improvement in anxiety symptoms following a 6 week group using mixed approaches
- Lack of randomisation increases risk of bias, but is common in clinical-based research.

Controlled Trials (3)

- Eklund & Erlandsson (2011) showed improved return-to-work rates for the Redesigning Daily Occupations programme compared to usual work rehabilitation

Uncontrolled trials (6)

- A surfing intervention (Rogers et al) and a life skills intervention showed potential for improving PTSD trauma symptoms
- Driving rehabilitation demonstrated improvement in driving skills (Classen)
- Lack of a control group increases risk of bias

Single-case designs (5)

- n = 1 designs using widely differing interventions
- The best quality study showed some emerging potential for a driving rehabilitation programme for veterans with PTSD

Implications

- Occupational therapy interventions that focus on changing how individuals perform daily activities have the potential to improve individual functioning and mental health symptoms
- Emerging evidence for replicable programmes such as OPTIMAL, ReDO and LAMP, as well as life skills and driving rehabilitation for specific populations.
- Occupational therapy interventions for anxiety are heterogeneous and high quality RCTs are urgently required.