

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: A Handbook of Evidence-Based Practice

Cynthia Franklin, Terry S. Trepper, Wallace Gingerich and Eric E. McCollum (Eds.)

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Review by Alasdair Macdonald

This book was conceived by Insoo Kim Berg as a memorial to Steve de Shazer. She had planned a book based on previously published work to summarise the current state of research into SFBT. After Insoo's sudden death in 2007 the project was expanded to form a comprehensive record of current and future studies. This project required a group of eminent editors and an Editorial Board from around the world.

There have been previous reviews of psychotherapy literature in general (Smith, Glass and Miller, 1980) and of psychotherapy process (Wampold, 2001). The European Brief Therapy Association has maintained a list of published outcome studies in SFBT since 1995 (latest version available at www.ebta.nu and www.solutionsdoc.co.uk). This list represents summaries for initial guidance but includes no critical analysis. The present book offers detailed critical analysis of the existing research in a timely and lucid fashion.

This handbook is remarkably concise at 426 pages. It is divided into five sections: Origins and treatment manual for SFBT; Measuring SFBT practice; Reviews of the research; SFBT effectiveness with clinical populations; and Research on innovative practice programs. It covers an enormous amount of research and study into SFBT. A standard layout has been used for each chapter, which makes it easy to compare progress in a variety of fields. Practice guidelines,

suggestions for future research and key findings are included in each case. Some of the sources are hard to find for the general reader, for example because they are in unpublished dissertations or in journals not indexed outside specialist databases. This book is therefore of specific value as a starting point for a comprehensive literature search.

Any new trainee should start their studies by reading this text. Whatever their area of interest, they will know more about it by the end of the book. Topics covered include the evolution of SFBT, (Lipchik, Trepper), healthcare in adults and children (Corcoran, Panatoyov, Shennan, Pakrosnis, Mishima), nursing (Mishima), schooling (Franklin, Kelly), troubled adolescents (Thompson, Harris, Pakrosnis), runaways (Thompson, Pakrosnis), child protection (Wheeler), schizophrenia (Panayotov), alcohol and drug problems (Hendrick) and intimate partner violence (Lee, McCollum). The chapters on coaching and management (McKergow, Green) are important because there are few scientific studies carried out in these areas. SF workers lead the way in such assessments and these chapters bring together some diverse findings for the benefit of the reader. Interested buyers of this book will learn a great deal about how to conduct good research in the field of psychotherapy generally (Trepper, Lehmann, Smock, Gillaspay). There are chapters bringing together the fruits of many examinations of psychotherapy process (Gingerich, Kim, Corcoran, McKeel, Bavelas). These writers have analysed and detailed some of the pros and cons of the methods currently available. The Epilogue by Trepper and Franklin pulls together many of the topics in the book and points the way for further work.

The book was originally conceived as ‘the story so far’. Many of the data reported have indeed been published already. However, there is also some previously unpublished work of considerable interest. Chapter 6 includes the first English language publication of Stam’s 2006 meta-analysis of outcome studies in SFBT. It is presented alongside Kim’s 2008 meta-analysis. Interestingly, of the 43 studies included in the two meta-analyses, only eight are in both. Thus a wide

range of work is explored with essentially the same findings in both reports. Lehmann's work on fidelity instruments in SF research is of special interest because one of the bugbears of research is whether and to what extent the model tested is actually the model as practised. McCollum and his co-workers provide an update of the Stith et al. (2004) publication on intimate partner violence, which confirms the relative success of SF approaches for different aspects of this challenging social phenomenon. In this volume we have the first publication of the study by the Bulgarian psychiatrist Plamen Panayotov and his collaborators. They report that adding SF therapy to treatment as usual for patients with schizophrenia leads to a significant improvement in medication adherence: 51 patients, with an average increase from 244 days to 827 days. We know that medication adherence reduces relapse and attendant handicaps in this illness so the findings are of major significance. Thompson and Sanchez write interestingly on troubled youth. A home-based SF programme (42 families) produced twice as many sessions as the office-based programme (41 families), but outcomes were equally good for both groups at the end of therapy. Kelly and colleagues provide one of the first pilot assessments of the WOWW programme in the classroom in Chicago. Good results were reported by this preliminary group of 27 teachers in eight elementary schools. Hendricks and his colleagues update de Shazer and Isebaert (2003) on the successful SF alcohol treatment programmes in Belgium. Additionally they report two smaller studies with one-year follow-up producing similar promising results. Jay McKeel's analysis of process research in SFBT has been an important document. Here it is updated with a concise and helpful analysis of process research in SF therapy.

The book is very readable and none of the chapters is of excessive length. There are some proof-reading errors, of which one or two are significant. For example, 'Perez-Grande' instead of 'George' at page 96; 'SD +' in chapter 15 instead of (presumably) '+/-'; Hendrick gives 132 patients instead of 131 as previously published (de Shazer

and Isebaert, 2003). There are a number of typographical errors in several chapters. Personal communications are usually identified by method (letter, email) and by date sent or received. Some personal communications are not referenced in this fashion (e.g. in chapter 14).

References

- Smith, M.L., Glass, G.V., & Miller, T.I. (1980). *The benefits of psychotherapy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wampold, B.E. (2001). *The Great Psychotherapy Debate: Models, Methods and Findings*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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Competing interest: I contributed to the initial work of the Editorial Board and to Chapter 6 on outcome research.