

A PLACE FOR OMT IN MANAGEMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an unprecedented number of individuals struggling with mental health challenges than ever before. There are few low-cost, non-pharmacological options approved and easily available to help manage these needs. Osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) is a cost-effective, hands-on approach proven efficacious for an array of physical conditions, specifically musculoskeletal (headache, low back pain). However, the relationship between OMT and mental health has not been well-explored and what is available is limited and scarce compounded by low powered study populations and weak study designs (usually case reports). This study aims to systematically review the current literature and assess the relationship between OMT and mental health outcomes.

OBJECTIVE

To systematically review the current literature and assess the role (if any) of OMT in the management of mental health outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Identification of studies of interest were guided by the PRISMA guidelines.

Data Sources: articles without publication-date or language restrictions were searched in Google Scholar, PubMed, Ovid, JSTOR, and EBSCO in October 2021. Search terms included osteopathic manipulative medicine/ treatment, OMT, OMM, osteopathic, osteopathy, mental health disease/ disorder/ illness, and mental health. Articles referenced in relevant studies were also obtained and included.

Study Selection: Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to original search results to studies of interest in three stages: (1) titles, (2) abstracts, and (3) full text. Studies remaining after stage three were fully included into systematic review. Initial selection was performed independently. Discrepancies were reviewed and resolved by both authors together before advancing to the next stage.

Criteria for inclusion were that studies be published, written in English, and of the following peer-reviewed designs: randomized control trial, cohort studies, pilot studies, or case reports. Must include known osteopathic techniques, OMM performed by licensed osteopathic physicians, and report at least one mental health outcome (depression, anxiety, avoidance, self-efficacy). General outcomes measures with a psychological component (health status, quality of life) were also included.

RESULTS

Of the 1104 studies found, 12 met the inclusion criteria. Three were RCTs and nine were other types. The OMM techniques most commonly utilized for treatment were indirect techniques (BLT, BMT, cranial-sacral, facilitated positional release) and direct techniques (articular, muscle energy). OMT was shown to significantly decrease the severity of depression in one study and the severity of anxiety in five.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this systematic literature review are promising and suggest that OMT may be effective adjunct in the treatment and management of mental health outcomes, particularly depression & anxiety. However, the current evidence is limited and reflects a critical need for more high-powered, evidence-based studies involving OMT.

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