**Mortality in adolescents after therapeutic intervention for self-harm: a systematic review and meta-analysis**

Faraz Mughal1\*, Paul Young2, Daniel Stahl3, Joan R Asarnow4 and Dennis Ougrin5

1School of Medicine, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire, UK

2School of Sport, Exercise, and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, UK

3Department of Biostatistics and Health Informatics, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Neuroscience, Kings College London, UK

4Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioural Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

5Youth Resilience Unit, Queen Mary University of London, UK

\*Corresponding author

**Correspondence**

Dr Faraz Mughal, School of Medicine, Keele University, UK, ST5 5BG. Email: [f.mughal@keele.ac.uk](mailto:f.mughal@keele.ac.uk); Tel: +44 (0) 1782 733991.

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**Abstract**

**Background**

Self-harm in adolescents is an international concern. Evidence highlights that therapeutic intervention (TI), such as cognitive behaviour therapy informed treatments, after self-harm leads to reduced self-harm repetition. However, there is no prior literature about the effects of TI on future mortality in adolescents. We examined the effect of TI on mortality rates in adolescents across RCTs.

**Methods**

This review was reported in accordance with PRISMA guidance. MEDLINE, EMBASE, PsycINFO, and Cochrane Library were searched to 19 June 2024. Two authors independently screened titles, abstracts, and full texts against pre-defined criteria. RCTs were included if they compared a TI versus a comparator in adolescents up to 18 years with at least one prior self-harm episode. There was no lower age limit. For the pooled effect size of mortality, the DerSimonian-Laird method was used, and a random effects model for self-harm and suicide attempts. The primary outcome was intra or post-trial mortality in adolescent post TI, and the effect of TIs on self-harm including attempted suicide episodes were secondary outcomes. Analyses were done in Stata.

**Results**

Twenty-four trials of TIs consisting of 3470 randomised adolescents were included. The pooled risk difference for mortality of participants in the TI group was 0.002 (95% CI −0.003 to 0.008, p = 0.42). There were 6 deaths in the TI group compared to 15 deaths in the comparator group. The pooled risk difference for TI on repeat self-harm was −0.07 (95% CI −0.132 to -0.007, p =0.028), and −0.05 (95% CI −0.086 to -0.007, p = 0.022) for suicide attempts compared to comparator.

**Conclusions**

This review found no significant impact of TIs on future mortality in adolescents. We also demonstrated that TIs can reduce suicide attempts which can lead to substantial benefits for adolescents, families, and clinical services.

**KEYWORDS**

Mortality; self-harm; suicide attempts; adolescents; therapeutic intervention

**Key Points**

* Therapeutic intervention (TI) after self-harm in adolescents did not impact on future mortality
* For the first time we found TI led to reduced episodes of suicide attempts
* We confirmed that TIs lead to reduced individual repetition of self-harm in adolescents
* These findings, in particular, for repeat self-harm and suicide attempts, highlight the need for enhanced provision of TIs in mental health services

**Introduction**

Self-harm, defined as self-injury or poisoning irrespective of motive, is an international priority in adolescents.(Knipe et al., 2022; National Institute For Health and Care Excellence, 2004) Previous self-harm (including suicide attempts and non-suicidal self-injury) is strongly associated with death by suicide: increasing the likelihood up to 50 times compared to the general population.(Hawton et al., 2015) Suicide occurs throughout the lifespan, but has a greater proportional influence on mortality within younger age ranges.(Rodway et al., 2016) Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds and the third leading cause of death in 15-19-year-olds globally.(World Health Organization, 2014)

A recent national study indicated that more than half of young people who die by suicide have a history of self-harm.(National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness (NCISH), 2017) Adolescents who have previously self-harmed are nine times more likely to die from unnatural causes, and 34 times more likely to die from fatal poisoning.(Morgan et al., 2017) Some randomised controlled trials (RCT) of TIs have reported reduced mortality in adolescents who received an TI at long term follow-up. (King et al., 2019) The effect, however, of TIs for self-harm on future mortality in adolescents has not been rigorously studied.

A 2015 meta-analysis of therapeutic interventions (TI) (defined as replicable pharmacological or psychosocial interventions such as cognitive behaviour therapy informed treatments) for self-harm in adolescents found that TI after self-harm led to reduced repetition of self-harm when compared to treatment as usual.(Ougrin et al., 2015) There have been a number of TIs evaluated for adolescents after self-harm, with mixed results, since this review was conducted (searches completed May 2014), and so it remains useful to understand how TIs influence self-harm repetition. (Cottrell et al., 2020; Santamarina-Perez et al., 2020)

We therefore aimed in this meta-analysis, the first in our knowledge, to compare follow-up mortality rates among adolescents who received a TI for self-harm with those who had not across randomised controlled trials (RCT). In addition, we examined the effect of TIs on repeat self-harm episodes in adolescents. We hypothesised there would be lower mortality rates among adolescents who received a TI compared to those who did not. These findings can provide new and updated evidence about the effectiveness of TIs for adolescents after self-harm and inform future intervention strategies.

**Methods**

**Protocol**

The protocol was registered with PROSPERO (CRD42020178764). This review was conducted and reported in accordance with Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidance.(Moher et al., 2009)

**Data sources and search strategy**

Searches were conducted in four electronic databases: MEDLINE, EMBASE, PsycINFO, and Cochrane Library from inception to initially 14 May 2020 using refined and tailored search strategies for each database. Searches were updated on 19 June 2024.

The following subject headings or MeSH keywords were incorporated into searches: *Self-injurious behaviour; Self-harm; Self-mutilation; Suicide; Suicidal ideation; Suicide attempted; Drug overdose; Poisoning; Adolescent; Child; Therapeutics; Randomised Controlled Trials*. The search strategies are listed in Appendix S1. The search term ‘self-harm’ encompassed the terms suicide attempts, non-suicidal self-injury, and self-harm with undetermined intent; adhering to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence definition of self-harm: self-poisoning or injury, irrespective of the apparent purpose of the act.(National Institute For Health and Care Excellence, 2004)

No language or location restrictions were applied. To ensure that all relevant studies were identified, reference lists of eligible studies were hand-searched. Additional RCTs not captured in the searches but known to co-authors DO and JA (topic experts) were also screened for inclusion.

**Study screening and selection**

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: RCTs comparing a TI defined as a replicable psychosocial or pharmacological intervention versus comparator condition;(Ougrin et al., 2015) in adolescents up to 18 years that had engaged with treatment following at least one episode of self-harm. Trial papers with the longest follow-up data published were included over the original trial publication.

Studies were excluded if they were pilot studies; less than 50% of the participant sample had engaged in self-harm prior to inclusion in the study; and studies in which most of the participants had neurological or developmental disorders, for example autism.

Two authors (FM and PY) independently reviewed all titles and abstracts, and then full texts, against predefined eligibility criteria in a two-staged approach. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion with a third author (DO). Corresponding authors were contacted directly for data clarification queries at full text screening stage. Reasons for excluded studies after full text review are stated in the PRISMA flow chart (Figure 1). Study screening was managed in Endnote X9.(The Endnote Team, 2013)

**Data extraction and assessment of bias**

Eligible full-text studies were subjected to data extraction and assessment of bias independently by two authors (FM and PY) on a pre-piloted Excel spreadsheet. Data were extracted on study setting, country, and aim; participant characteristics; type of intervention and delivery; intervention components; number of participants randomised to trial arms; adherence to intervention; repeat self-harm and suicide attempt individual participant and mean episodes; and mortality in participants at longest follow-up. For most published, studies mortality data was not reported in the paper and therefore FM, PY, and DO emailed study authors to request data. We defined mortality as death by any cause, including suicide.

Assessment of bias was undertaken using the Cochrane Collaboration’s tool for assessing the risk of bias: <https://handbook-5-1.cochrane.org/chapter_8/table_8_5_a_the_cochrane_collaborations_tool_for_assessing.htm> which captures domains of selection, performance, detection, attrition, and reporting bias. Discrepancies across study domains were resolved through discussion. To assess the influence of bias on outcomes we pooled the six items into a total score by summing up the number of high or unknown bias which can range from 0 to 6.

**Outcomes**

The primary outcome was intra-or-post trial mortality among included participants. The study hypothesis was generated prior to the commencement of this meta-analysis. The effect of TIs on repeat self-harm and suicide attempts were examined as post-hoc secondary outcomes.

**Statistical Analysis**

As an absolute effect size, we calculated the risk difference which is the difference of observed risks (proportions of individuals with the outcome of interest) in the two groups. The risk difference is asymptotically normally distributed and does not require a transformation in meta-analyses. Due to the small number of observed mortalities, the DerSimonian-Laird method was used because REML estimation did not converge.(DerSimonian & Laird, 1986) Absolute mortality numbers in individual RCTs were concealed to protect patient confidentiality.(Office for National Statistics) Pooled overall effect sizes for self-harm and suicide attempts were estimated by a random-effects model using restricted maximum likelihood (REML) estimation.(Borenstein et al., 2021) Analyses for self-harm and suicide attempts were kept separate because of how they were reported in included studies.

A random-effect analysis model assumes that individual studies are estimating different treatment effects due to the diversity of clinical interventions and methodological factors. We calculated the I²statistic to estimate total variation across studies that is due to heterogeneity relative to pure sampling variation.(Higgins & Thompson, 2002) I2 describes the percentage of total variation across studies that is due to heterogeneity rather than sampling error and ranges between 0% (no inconsistency) and 100% (high heterogeneity) with values of 25%, 50%, and 75% suggesting low, moderate, and high heterogeneity.

Results are presented as forest plots which shows study-specific risk differences and the overall effect size with their respective confidence intervals, information about study heterogeneity, and the significance of the overall test.

Finally, meta-regression was performed to assess the influence of group therapy (only group versus not only group) and TIs with family treatment components (present or not present) on the risk difference of self-harm.(Higgins et al., 2019)

Sensitivity analyses

Sensitivity analyses were conducted by repeating the meta-analyses omitting one study at a time to investigate the influence of a single study on the overall effect size estimate. We also assessed the influence of trial bias by assessing the influence of the bias score on the risk difference for self-harm.

Publication and other bias

Statistically significant results are more likely to be published than studies with non-significant results. Therefore, the presence of publication bias was assessed informally by visual inspections of funnel plots, which represent a plot of effect size on the x-axis against a study's precision (standard error) on the y-axis. The absence of studies in the right bottom corner (low precision and small treatment effect sizes (here positive risk differences)) of a funnel plot are usually taken as an indication of publication bias.

We also used the Duval and Tweedie non-parametric 'trim and fill' method of accounting for potential publication bias in a meta-analysis by estimating the number of missing studies, imputing values for missing studies and estimating a revised effect size.(Duval & Tweedie, 2000) If the conclusion of the meta-analysis remains unchanged following adjustment for the publication bias using the trim and fill method, the results can be considered robust, excluding major publication bias.

Data were analysed using Stata using the meta command.(Statacorp, 2021)

**Results**

**Search results and study characteristics**

The searches yielded 6090 unique citations post deduplication, of which 72 full texts were assessed for eligibility, and 24 studies were included for meta-analyses (Figure 1 for PRISMA flow chart).(Asarnow et al., 2011; Asarnow et al., 2017; Bjureberg et al., 2023; Chanen et al., 2008; Cottrell et al., 2020; Diamond et al., 2019; Diamond et al., 2010; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2019; Goldstein et al., 2024; Green et al., 2011; Hazell et al., 2009; Kennard et al., 2018; King et al., 2019; King et al., 2006; McCauley et al., 2018; Mehlum et al., 2019; Ougrin et al., 2013; Pineda & Dadds, 2013; Rockstroh et al., 2023; Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012; Santamarina-Perez et al., 2020; Stallard et al., 2024; Wood et al., 2001)

The characteristics of included studies are listed in Table 1. The RCTs included 3470 randomised participants, of which 1729 were randomised to a TI. RCTs were conducted in USA(Asarnow et al., 2011; Asarnow et al., 2017; Diamond et al., 2019; Diamond et al., 2010; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2019; Goldstein et al., 2024; Kennard et al., 2018; King et al., 2019; King et al., 2006; McCauley et al., 2018) (N=11), UK(Cottrell et al., 2020; Green et al., 2011; Ougrin et al., 2013; Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012; Stallard et al., 2024; Wood et al., 2001) (N=6), Australia(Chanen et al., 2008; Hazell et al., 2009; Pineda & Dadds, 2013) (N=3), Norway(Mehlum et al., 2019) (N=1), Spain(Santamarina-Perez et al., 2020) (N=1), Sweden(Bjureberg et al., 2023) (N=1), and Germany(Rockstroh et al., 2023) (N=1).

Most included RCTs (n=21) compared TIs to treatment as usual or enhanced usual care except three where active comparators were used: manualised good clinical care (Chanen et al., 2008); individual and group supported therapy (McCauley et al., 2018); family-enhanced nondirective supportive therapy (Diamond et al., 2019). The included RCTs tested a variety of TIs: family-focused(Asarnow et al., 2011; Asarnow et al., 2017; Cottrell et al., 2020; Diamond et al., 2019; Diamond et al., 2010; Pineda & Dadds, 2013) (N=6), group based(Green et al., 2011; Hazell et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2001) (N=3), youth nominated support team(King et al., 2019; King et al., 2006) (N=2), cognitive analytical therapy(Chanen et al., 2008) (N=1), cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)(Bjureberg et al., 2023; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2019) (N=2), DBT(McCauley et al., 2018) (N=1), DBT-A(Goldstein et al., 2024; Mehlum et al., 2019; Santamarina-Perez et al., 2020) (N=3), mentalisation-based therapy for adolescents (MBT-A)(Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012) (N=1), programmes informed by both CBT and DBT(Rockstroh et al., 2023; Stallard et al., 2024) (N=2), the ‘as safe as possible’ intervention focused on emotion regulation and safety planning with post-discharge mobile phone app support(Kennard et al., 2018) (N=1), and therapeutic assessment(Ougrin et al., 2013) (N=1). Two TIs were single session interventions(Kennard et al., 2018; Ougrin et al., 2013). 15 RCTs included a family treatment component within interventions(Asarnow et al., 2011; Asarnow et al., 2017; Cottrell et al., 2020; Diamond et al., 2019; Diamond et al., 2010; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2019; Kennard et al., 2018; King et al., 2019; King et al., 2006; McCauley et al., 2018; Mehlum et al., 2019; Pineda & Dadds, 2013; Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012; Santamarina-Perez et al., 2020).

17 RCTs provided sufficient data for meta-analyses about self-harm; six on suicide attempts; and 24 about mortality. Across all RCTs, four scored low (0) on bias across all six domains, none in one, two in two, six in three, six in four, and six in five. Table 2 lists the risk of bias scores for each RCT.

**Mortality meta-analysis**

Data on mortality was obtained from all RCTs (N=24). Mortalities were observed in six (25%) RCTs. In the TI group, 6 (0.33%) out of 1822 participants died while in the comparator group 15 (0.82%) out of 1829 participants died. The pooled risk difference for mortality of participants in the TI group was 0.0024 (95% CI, −0.0035 to 0.0083, z = 0.81 p = 0.42, using DerSimonian–Laird estimator, I2=0) (see Figure 2). All RCTs provided data for mortality and in 18 trials there were no observed events. RCTs with no mortality events contributed no information about the risk ratio. Further analyses were not feasible due to the small number of events.

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**Figure 2.** Effect of TI for self-harm versus comparator condition on mortality in adolescents

**Repeat self-harm meta-analyses**

Across 17 RCTs, 38.5 % (491/1275) of adolescents who received a TI repeated self-harm compared to 41.8% (527/1261) of adolescents who did not (Figure 3). Heterogeneity between studies was moderate to high (I2=67.6%). The pooled risk difference for repeat self-harm in the TI group compared to comparator was −0.07 (95% CI, −0.132 to -0.007, z = -2.19, p =0.028). Including total bias as a covariate in a meta-regression, showed a non-significant small effect (-0.021 (95% CI, -0.067 to 0.025), z=0.88, p=0.38).



**Figure 3.** Effect of TIs versus comparator condition on repeat self-harm in adolescents**.**

A subgroup analysis showed that self-harm risk reduction was slightly larger in studies with active comparator (N=3) (-0.079, (95% CI, -0.132 to -0.007), z= -1.43 p=0.15) compared to studies with treatment as usual (N=14) (-0.070 (95% CI, -0.146 to 0.006), z=-1.81, p=0.07) (Figure 3b). A meta-regression did not reveal significant differences between the two groups (mean difference 0.014 (95% CI, -0.176 to 0.149), z=0.16, p=0.87).

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**Figure 3b.** Effect of TIs versus comparator on repeat self-harm in adolescents separated by active comparator and treatment as usual

A subgroup analysis showed that self-harm risk reduction was slightly smaller in studies where the TI was a single session intervention (N=2) (-0.040, (95% CI, -0.196 to 0.177), z= -0.50, p=0.62) compared to studies that were not (N=15) (-0.075 (95% CI, -0.145 to -0.006), z=-2.12, p=0.034) (Figure 3c). A meta-regression did not reveal significant differences between the two groups (mean difference -0.038 (95% CI, -0.263 to 0.187), z=-0.33, p=0.74).

**Figure 3c.** Effect of TI versus comparator on repeat self-harm separated out by single session interventions or not

A subgroup analysis showed that self-harm risk reduction was slightly smaller in studies with group therapy (N=3) (-0.029, (95% CI, -0.281 to 0.223), z= -0.23, p=0.82) compared to studies that were not group therapy (N=14) (-0.074 (95% CI, -0.137 to -0.011), z=-2.31, p=0.021) (Figure 4). A meta-regression did not reveal significant differences between the two groups (mean difference 0.050 (95% CI, -0.216 to 0.116), z=-0.59, p=0.56).



**Figure 4.** Effect of only group therapy versus not only group therapy on repeat self-harm

There were little differences in risk reduction between trials with family treatment components (N=11) (mean risk difference: -0.075 (95% CI, -0.151 to 0.002, z=-1.92, p=0.055) and no family treatment components (N=6) (mean risk difference: -0.058 (95% CI, -0.180 to 0.063, z= -0.94, p=0.35) (Figure 5). A meta-regression revealed no significant differences between both groups (estimated mean difference between family components present and not present: -0.019 (95% CI, -0.156 to 0.118, z=-0.27, p=0.79)).

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**Figure 5.** Effect of TIs with family treatment components versus TIs with no family treatment components on repeat self-harm

**Suicide attempts meta-analysis**

Across six RCTs with data specifically on individual suicide attempts, 17 adolescents (5.3%, 17/318) in the TI group attempted suicide compared to 35 (11.0%, 35/317) adolescents in the comparator group. Heterogeneity between studies was small (I2=29.4%). The pooled risk difference for suicide attempts post TI compared to a comparator was −0.046 (95% CI, −0.086 to -0.007, z = -2.29, p = 0.022). All RCTs were TIs of individual therapy with family treatment components (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Effect of TI for self-harm versus comparator on individual suicide attempts in adolescents

**Publication bias and sensitivity analyses**

A leave-one-out sensitivity analysis showed that individual studies do not strongly influence the overall estimate of self-harm, suicide attempts, or mortality. The change range was from -0.057 to -0.081 for self-harm, -0.006 to -0.004 for mortality and -0.037 to 0.067 for suicide attempts. Confidence intervals contain the overall effect estimate of each outcome based on all studies. A funnel plot suggests some possible small bias towards lower risk reductions (Figure 7), but a “trim and fill” analysis did not estimate any missing study. Publication bias could only be assessed for self-harm studies.

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**Figure 7.** Funnel plot with pseudo-95% confidence limits for meta-analysis from RCTs with data on self-harm only

**Discussion**

This systematic review and meta-analysis of RCTs of TIs for adolescents after self-harm, to our knowledge, provides the first pooled risk difference for mortality in adolescents who received a TI compared to a comparator. We found that the risk difference of subsequent mortality was not significantly reduced after TI. This, however, needs to be considered in the context of a very low number of total participant deaths (n=21), which limits the stability of estimates and requires these findings to be viewed as suggestive.

It is not clear, nor did we aim to understand why deaths may have occurred in RCTs, however, one reason may be that participant inclusion criteria led to adolescents recruited into trials who were more likely to die by suicide or other causes of death. In addition, the small number of deaths across RCTs may suggest that participation in a trial may have a protective component against death.

We identified a small but statistically significant important reduction in risk of both individual self-harm repetition and attempted suicide following TI. This identified reduction in risk of repeat self-harm after TI in adolescents aligns with recent meta-analyses (2015 and 2019)(Kothgassner et al., 2020; Ougrin et al., 2015), but our analysis included six new large RCTs and highlights stability and replication of treatment effect over time.(Bjureberg et al., 2023; Diamond et al., 2019; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2019; Goldstein et al., 2024; Santamarina-Perez et al., 2020; Stallard et al., 2024)

Of importance is the identification that TIs led to reduced individual episodes of suicide attempts specifically and this has not been found previously. This may indicate similar treatment responses for both self-harm, and suicide attempts, suggesting that intervention strategies can successfully target both constructs, but this requires future replication with more adolescents.

Implications for clinical practice and future research

It is crucial in future RCTs of TIs for adolescents after self-harm that mortality is an outcome captured and reported openly. Research needs to also aim to explore and understand why deaths may occur in participating adolescents.

Although significant differences for both self-harm and suicide attempts were small, these can translate into meaningful clinical outcomes for adolescents in clinical services. Any reduction in repeat self-harm and attempted suicide episodes is likely to have substantial effects on young people, their families, and health and care services, especially as engagement of young people with TIs has improved and digital delivery of psychological therapies is developing.(Kennard et al., 2018; Yuan et al., 2019)

The recently updated National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance for self-harm recommends DBT-A is considered in adolescents with emotion dysregulation and frequent self-harm and this should translate into a benefit for adolescents because services are often informed by latest clinical guidance.(National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2022) This mention of DBT-A in national guidance should facilitate the adoption of this particular therapeutic approach, but more trial evidence is needed with heterogenous participant samples and longer follow-up times.(National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2022) Individual participant data meta-analyses would allow understanding of whether reductions in self-harm and suicide attempts occur in certain subgroups of adolescents compared to others after TI.(Witt et al., 2021)

Our subgroup analyses found no significant differences for the risk of repeat self-harm in RCTs delivering group treatment compared to non-group; in RCTs with active comparators compared to treatment as usual; single-session TIs compared to non-single session; and in TIs with family treatment components compared to no family treatment components.

Strengths and limitations

This review was conducted and reported adhering to PRISMA guidance for meta-analyses, and searches were updated to reduce the likelihood of missed trials. Study screening, selection, data extraction, and risk of bias scoring were conducted by two independent authors. Study authors were personally contacted to obtain mortality data because data were either not published at the time of searches or reported in the original trial paper. A leave-one-out analysis suggested that individual studies did not strongly influence the pooled estimate for mortality, repeat self-harm, and attempted suicide.

There are, however, several limitations to note. First, dependent on when trial recruitment closed there were different mortality follow-up periods for RCTs which introduces potential bias. Analysis was combined across diverse intervention types and subpopulations of self-harming youth, and generally brief follow-up intervals were likely insufficient to detect effects on mortality. The timing of TI after self-harm varied across trials and in some trials not all adolescents included had self-harmed. In addition, further mortality analyses were restricted due to a small number of events across trials. There was diversity across TIs which led to a random effects model being used that assumed a distribution of treatment effect and thus the estimated effect sizes need to be considered as average treatment effects. Although not an aim of this review future meta-analyses should examine treatment effects within specific groups of TIs. Meta-regression for outcomes less than 10 studies per covariate need to be treated with care.(Higgins et al., 2019) All RCTs were conducted in developed countries and these findings are likely thus not applicable to lower-and-middle income country clinical settings.

**Conclusion**

In this systematic review and meta-analysis of 3470 randomised adolescents, therapeutic intervention did not lead to reduced risk of future death in adolescents after self-harm, but this needs to be interpreted with caution. There were significant effects identified for therapeutic interventions on both individual repeat self-harm and suicide attempts. Future trials should attempt to recruit heterogeneous samples and capture long-term outcome data.

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**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

**Faraz Mughal:** Conceptualization; Data curation; Methodology; Project administration; Software; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing. **Paul Young:** Conceptualization; Data curation; Methodology; Project administration; Writing - review & editing. **Daniel Stahl:** Data curation; Formal analysis; Software; Writing - review & editing. **Joan R. Asarnow:** Investigation; Writing - review & editing. **Dennis Ougrin:** Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Writing - review & editing.

**DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

The corresponding author will consider appropriate data sharing requests.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

FM was a member of the NICE 2022 self-harm guideline development committee. The remaining authors have declared that they have no competing or potential conflicts of interest.

**ETHICS STATEMENT**

Ethical approval is not applicable to this article as no new data were collected in this systematic review.

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8272 records identified through database searches

2182 duplicates removed

6090 titles and abstracts screened  
(n = 4,819)

6023 records excluded

72 full-text studies assessed for eligibility

48 excluded

11 - conference paper/abstract

13 - not met self-harm criteria

9 - not in age range

3 – secondary analysis

2 - had follow-up paper

5 – pilot or feasibility study

3 - not available in English

1 – RCT with no control arm

1 – data not attainable

5 additional studies identified through author knowledge and hand searching of references

24 papers included in meta-analysis

**Figure 1**. PRISMA flow chart

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study (country)** | **Age**  **(years)** | **Intervention type** | **Comparator arm** | **Trial setting** | **Family treatment component** | **No. participants randomized to the intervention** | **No. participants randomized to comparator** |
| \*Asarnow et al, 2011(Asarnow et al., 2011)  (USA) | Mean: 14.7 | Family Intervention for Suicide Prevention | Enhanced TAU | Hospital setting with telephone follow-up | Yes | 89 | 92 |
| \*Asarnow et al, 2017(Asarnow et al., 2017)  (USA) | Mean: 14.6 | CBT and DBT informed the family treatment | Enhanced TAU | Outpatient hospital setting | Yes | 20 | 22 |
| \*Bjureberg et al, 2023(Bjureberg et al., 2023)  (Sweden) | Mean: 15.0 | Online CBT informed emotion regulation programme | TAU | CAMHS | Yes | 84 | 82 |
| Chanen et al, 2008(Chanen et al., 2008) (Australia) | 15-18 | Cognitive analytical therapy | Manualised good clinical care | Specialist young people’s mental health clinic | No | 44 | 42 |
| Cottrell et al, 2020(Cottrell et al., 2020)  (UK) | 11-17 | Family therapy | TAU | CAMHS | Yes | 416 | 416 |
| Diamond et al, 2010(Diamond et al., 2010)  (USA) | 12-17 (mean: 15.1) | Attachment based family therapy | Enhanced usual care | Children’s hospital | Yes | 35 | 31 |
| \*Diamond et al, 2019(Diamond et al., 2019) (USA) | 12-18 years (mean: 14.9) | Attachment based family therapy | Family enhanced nondirective supportive therapy | Children’s hospital | Yes | 66 | 63 |
| \*Esposito-Smythers et al, 2011(Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011)  (USA) | 13-17 (mean: 15.7) | Integrated-CBT | Enhanced TAU | Outpatient therapist-led sessions | Yes | 20 | 20 |
| \*Esposito-Smythers et al, 2019(Esposito-Smythers et al., 2019)  (USA) | 12-18 (mean: 14.9) | Family focused-CBT | Enhanced TAU | Outpatient therapist led | Yes | 74 | 73 |
| \*Goldstein et al, 2024(Goldstein et al., 2024)  (USA) | Mean: 16.1 | DBT for adolescents | Standard of Care Psychotherapy | Outpatient therapist led | No | 47 | 53 |
| \*Green et al, 2011(Green et al., 2011)  (UK) | 12-17 | Developmental group psychotherapy | TAU | Therapist-led in CAMHS | No | 183 | 183 |
| \*Hazel et al, 2009(Hazell et al., 2009)  (Australia) | 12-16 | Group therapy | TAU | CAMHS | No | 35 | 37 |
| \*Kennard et al, 2018(Kennard et al., 2018)  (USA) | Mean:  14.9 (intervention) vs 15.3 (TAU) | As Safe As Possible (ASAP) focused on emotion regulation and safety planning and post-discharge mobile app | TAU | Inpatient therapist led | Yes | 34 | 32 |
| \*King et al, 2006(King et al., 2006)  (USA) | Mean: 15.3 | Youth Nominated Support Team for suicidal adolescents I | TAU | Hospital-based | Yes | 151 | 138 |
| \*King et al, 2019(King et al., 2019)  (USA) | 13-17 (mean: 15.6) | Youth Nominated Support Team for suicidal adolescents II | TAU | Hospital-based | Yes | 223 | 225 |
| \*McCauley et al, 2018(McCauley et al., 2018)  (USA) | Mean:14.89 | DBT | Individual and group supported therapy | Medical centres | Yes | 86 | 87 |
| \*Mehlum et al, 2019(Mehlum et al., 2019)  (Norway) | Mean age: 15.6 | DBT-A | Enhanced TAU | CAMHS | Yes | 39 | 38 |
| Ougrin et al, 2013(Ougrin et al., 2013)  (UK) | 12-18 | Therapeutic assessment | TAU | CAMHS | No | 35 | 35 |
| \*Pineda et al, 2013(Pineda & Dadds, 2013)  (Australia) | 12-17 | Family intervention: resourceful adolescent parent program | TAU | Specialist public mental health service | Yes | 24 | 24 |
| \*Rockstroh et al 2023(Rockstroh et al., 2023) (Germany) | 12-17 (mean: 14.9) | Cutting Down Programme – CBT and DBT informed | TAU | CAMHS | No | 37 | 37 |
| Rossouw and Fonagy, 2012(Rossouw & Fonagy, 2012)  (UK) | 12-17 (mean: 14.7) | MBT-A | TAU | CAMHS | Yes | 40 | 40 |
| \*Santamarina-Perez et al, 2020(Santamarina-Perez et al., 2020)  (Spain) | Mean: 15.3 vs 15.2 | DBT-A | Enhanced TAU | Community mental health clinic | Yes | 18 | 17 |
| \*Stallard et al, 2024 (Stallard et al., 2024)  (UK) | Mean: 15.6 | Co-designed smartphone app informed by CBT and DBT | TAU | CAMHS | No | 85 | 85 |
| Wood et al, 2001(Wood et al., 2001)  (UK) | Mean: treatment arm 14.2 vs control 14.3 | Developmental group therapy | TAU | CAMHS | No | 32 | 31 |

**Table 1.** Characteristics of included RCTs

*CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services; TAU – treatment as usual*

*\* authors provided outcome data*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Risk of bias domain** | **Asarnow 2011** | **Asarnow 2017** | **Bjureberg 2023** | **Chanen 2008** | **Cottrell 2020** | **Diamond 2010** | **Diamond 2019** | **Esposito-Smythers 2011** | **Esposito-Smythers 2019** |
| Random sequence generation (selection bias) | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Allocation concealment (selection bias) | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Unclear | Low |
| Blinding of participants and researchers (performance bias) | Unclear | Unclear | Low | Low | Low | High | Unclear | Unclear | Unclear |
| Blinding of outcome assessment (detection bias) | Low | High | Low | Low | Low | High | Low | High | Unclear |
| Incomplete outcome data  (attrition bias) | Low | Low | Unclear | Low | Low | High | Low | Low | Low |
| Selective reporting  (reporting bias) | Low | Low | Unclear | Low | Low | Low | High | Low | Low |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Risk of bias domain** | **Goldstein 2024** | **Green 2011** | **Hazell 2009** | **Kennard 2018** | **King 2006** | **King 2019** | **McCauley 2018** | **Mehlum 2019** | **Ougrin 2013** |
| Random sequence generation (selection bias) | Low | Low | Unclear | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Allocation concealment (selection bias) | Unclear | Low | Unclear | Unclear | Unclear | Unclear | Low | Unclear | Unclear |
| Blinding of participants and researchers (performance bias) | High | Low | High | Unclear | Unclear | Unclear | High | Unclear | Low |
| Blinding of outcome assessment (detection bias) | Low | Low | Low | Low | High | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Incomplete outcome data  (attrition bias) | Low | Low | Unclear | Low | Unclear | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Selective reporting  (reporting bias) | Unclear | Low | Low | Low | Low | High | Low | High | Low |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Risk of bias domain** | **Pineda**  **2013** | **Rockstroh**  **2023** | **Rossouw**  **2012** | **Santamarina-Perez**  **2020** | **Stallard**  **2024** | **Wood**  **2021** |
| Random sequence generation (selection bias) | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Allocation concealment (selection bias) | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Unclear |
| Blinding of participants and researchers (performance bias) | Unclear | High | Low | High | Low | Unclear |
| Blinding of outcome assessment (detection bias) | Low | Low | Low | Low | Unclear | Low |
| Incomplete outcome data  (attrition bias) | Low | High | Low | Low | Low | Unclear |
| Selective reporting  (reporting bias) | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |

**Table 2**. Risk of bias scores for included RCT