

Dialectical Behavior Therapy in Managing Emotional Dysregulation, Depression, and Suicidality in Autism Spectrum Disorder Patients: A Systematic Review

Authors : Alvin Saputra, Felix Wijovi

Abstract : Background: Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often experience emotional dysregulation and heightened suicidality. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Radically Open DBT (RO-DBT) have shown promise in addressing these challenges, though research on their effectiveness in ASD populations remains limited. This systematic review aims to evaluate the impact of DBT and RO-DBT on emotional regulation, depression, and suicidality in adults with ASD. Methods: A systematic review was conducted by searching databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, and Scopus for studies published on DBT and RO-DBT interventions in adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed studies that reported on emotional regulation, suicidality, or depression outcomes. Data extraction focused on sample characteristics, intervention details, and outcome measures. Quality assessment was performed using standard systematic review criteria to ensure the reliability and relevance of findings. Results: 4 studies comprising a total of 343 participants were included in this study. DBT and RO-DBT interventions demonstrated a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.53$) in improving emotional regulation for adults with ASD, with ASD participants achieving significantly better outcomes than non-ASD individuals. RO-DBT was particularly effective in reducing maladaptive overcontrol, though high attrition and a predominantly White British sample limited generalizability. At the end of treatment, DBT significantly reduced suicidal ideation ($z = -2.24$; $p = 0.025$) and suicide attempts ($z = -3.15$; $p = 0.002$) compared to treatment as usual (TAU), although this effect did not sustain at 12 months. Depression severity decreased with DBT ($z = -1.99$; $p = 0.046$), maintaining significance at follow-up ($z = -2.46$; $p = 0.014$). No significant effects were observed for social anxiety, and two suicides occurred in the TAU group. Conclusions: DBT and RO-DBT show potential efficacy in reducing emotional dysregulation, suicidality, and depression in adults with ASD, though the effects on suicidality may diminish over time. High dropout rates and limited sample diversity suggest further research is needed to confirm long-term benefits and improve applicability across broader populations.

Keywords : dialectical behaviour therapy, emotional dysregulation, autism spectrum disorder, suicidality

Conference Title : ICAR 2025 : International Conference on Autism Research

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : February 24-25, 2025