

The Evidence-basis of Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy: How We Reviewed and Extended Its Empirical Foundations Through a Comprehensive Research Programme

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Recommended duration: 60 minutes

Transactional Analysis stands at a crossroads. Professional bodies and health services increasingly demand systematic research evidence before funding therapeutic approaches. How do we translate a rich therapeutic tradition into a framework that meets contemporary standards of evidence-based practice? This presentation describes the comprehensive research programme that my colleagues and I conducted (co-led by Biljana van Rijn) to review and extend TA's empirical foundations—not to constrain its creativity, but to demonstrate how TA works, for whom, under what conditions, and how we can improve our effectiveness.

Our journey began by standing on the shoulders of giants who conducted research before us, systematically reviewing the TA research literature. First, we examined 56 questionnaires from 263 studies to determine which TA concepts have empirical validity, including life positions and the basic ego-state model. Second, we conducted a meta-analysis of 41 clinical trials, which revealed that TA produces moderate-to-large effects on psychopathology, social functioning, self-efficacy, and well-being—comparable to other evidence-based therapies. Third, we surveyed 238 European TA therapists to understand actual practices across schools. Fourth, we synthesized these findings into an evidence-based conceptual framework spanning clinical phenomena (ego-states, life-positions), aetiological factors (childhood context, core messages, responses), therapeutic aims and outcomes (symptom reduction, self-realization, quality-of-life), and change mechanisms. This revealed five core evidence-based competencies across TA schools: assessment, relational, structuring, experiential, and integrative-therapeutic.

Fifth, we clinically validated our conceptual framework by developing a 16-session treatment manual applying these evidence-based components. Sixth, our feasibility study with 9 clients with depression and a pilot randomized controlled trial with 28 clients with depression demonstrated significant improvements in depression, anxiety, distress, and quality of life, matching or exceeding control conditions (CBT, relational-humanistic psychotherapy). Crucially, TA's psychological effects were mediated by improvements in ego-states and life positions, precisely as our conceptual framework hypothesized.

These steps culminated in our Handbook of Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy for practitioners, students, and researchers, which includes an overview of the

research, evidence-based competencies, treatment manual, and evidence-based applications for specific psychological presentations and diagnoses.

In this presentation, I will share not only why we did this research and the main findings, but also how we can use these findings in therapeutic practice, TA training, and lobbying for formal recognition by health services and insurance companies. I will close by sharing ideas and hopes for future research that can build upon this foundation.

Reading recommendations:

I will base this lecture on our comprehensive book for practitioners, students, and researchers on TA's theory, evidence-base and practice: *The Handbook of Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy: An Evidence-based Guide* (Sage, 2025)(for sale with 25% discount with the code SAGEAUTH25 via uk.sagepub.com).

You may want to read two free downloadable articles before the lecture (not required): Vos, Joel and van Rijn, Biljana (2022) The Effectiveness of Transactional Analysis Treatments and Their Predictors: A Systematic Literature Review and Explorative Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. pp. 1-3 (<https://mirep.metanoia.ac.uk/id/eprint/410/>). and Vos, J., & van Rijn, B. (2024). Brief transactional analysis psychotherapy for depression: The systematic development of a treatment manual. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 34(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1037/int0000304>

Our TA Publications include:

-Vos, J. & Van Rijn, B. (2025). *Handbook of Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy: An Evidence-based Guide*. SAGE. -Vos, J. & Van Rijn, B. (2025). Brief Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy for Depression: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. [Online publication ahead of print.] x

-Vos, J. & Van Rijn, B. (2025). Using mixed methods in feasibility studies: The example of brief transactional analysis psychotherapy for depression. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* x

-Vos, J. & Van Rijn, B. (2023). Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy for depression: development of a treatment manual. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 34(1), 1. x

-Vos, J. & Van Rijn, B. (2022). Transactional Analysis Psychotherapy: a systematic literature review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678221117111> x

-Vos, J., & van Rijn, B. (2021). A systematic review of psychometric transactional analysis instruments. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 51(2), 127-159. x

-Vos, J., & van Rijn, B. (2021). The evidence-based conceptual model of transactional analysis: A focused review of the research literature. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 51(2), 160-201. x

-Vos, J., & van Rijn, B. (2021). The Transactional Analysis Review Survey: An Investigation Into Self-Reported Practices and Philosophies of Psychotherapists. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 51(2), 111-126. X

The audience may also be interested in:

-Vos, J. (2023). *Doing research in psychological therapies: A step-by-step guide*. Sage.

Bio

Dr. Joel Vos, PhD, MSc, MA, CPsychol, FHEA, AFBPS, is a chartered psychologist, philosopher, existential/humanistic, and cognitive-behavioural therapist. He is a senior lecturer at the Metanoia Institute (United Kingdom), a researcher at KU Leuven (Belgium), and Director of IMEC International Meaning Events and Community (UK). Dr. Vos has published over 150 scientific studies and chapters, with a focus on reviews, meta-analyses, and clinical trials on humanistic and existential psychology and psychotherapies. His expertise lies in meaning in life and society, social justice, radicalization and extremism, existential emotions, and risk perception. He has published nine books, including *Handbook of Transactional Analysis: An Evidence-Based Approach* (Vos & Van Rijn, Sage, 2025), *Doing Research in Psychological Therapies: a Step-by-step Guide* (Sage, 2023), *Meaning in Life: an Evidence-based Handbook for Practitioners* (Bloomsbury, 2019), *Mental Health in Crisis* (Vos, Roberts & Davies, Sage, 2019), *The Psychology of COVID-19* (Sage, 2021), and *The Economics of Meaning in Life* (University Professors Press, 2020) For more information, visit <https://joelvos.com>