

Research Update: Somatic Symptom Disorder Outcome Studies of ISTDP

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There are a large number of studies of Intensive Short-term Dynamic Psychotherapy for somatic symptoms. We see in the table below there are case series and randomized control trials for conditions affecting all body systems. Beyond these there are case reports detailing the method including one by Patricia Coughlin on Inflammatory Bowel Disease <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jclp.20247> . Overall the effects are significant and endure in follow-up.

In 2012 Dr Joel Town and Ellen Drisessen did a meta-analysis of available somatic studies. They found that the treatment effect sizes were medium to large across the available studies. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2013-43689-005>

Condition	Country	Study Type	Number Cases	Outcome
Urethral Syndrome/ Pelvic Pain (1)	Italy	RCT	36	ISTDP > Medical TAU
Mixed MUS (2)	Canada	Case Series	29	Sig symptom reduction
Back Pain (3)	USA	Case Series	47	Sig Pain Reduction
Functional Movement Disorders (4)	USA	Case Series	9	Sig Symptom Reduction
Chronic Headache (5)	Canada	Case Series	29	Sig Symptom and cost reduction
Pseudoseizures (6)	Canada/ UK	Case Series	28	Sig symptom and cost reduction
Chronic Pain (7)	Iran	RCT	63	ISTDP> Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and TAU
Chronic Pain (8)	Iran	RCT	81	ISTDP in person > Skype
Chronic Pain (9)	Iran	RCT	100	ISTDP by Skype > TAU
Irritable Bowel Syndrome (10)	UK	RCT	102	ISTDP > Medical TAU
MUS in Emergency (11)	Canada	Controlled	77	Sig reduction pre post and vs referred control
Mixed MUS + (12)	Canada	Controlled	890	Sig symptom reduction
Atopic Dermatitis (13)	Denmark	RCT	32	ISTDP> Ctrl in Anxious Cases
Bruxism (14)	Italy	RCT In Progress		ISTDP> control
Functional Neurological (15)	UK	Case Series	11	Improvement on multiple domains
Mixed MUS in Family Practice (16)	Canada	Case Series	37	Sig symptom improvement

Inflammatory Bowel Disease** (17)	Australia	Case Series	7	Improvement on IBD symptoms
Fibromyalgia (18)	Canada	Case Series	67	Sig Symptom reduction
Chronic Pain (19)	Iran	RCT	341	Sig symptom effects ISTDP=CBT
Chronic Pain (20)	Canada	Case Series	228	Symptoms and interpersonal problems improved.
Chronic Pain in Veterans ** (21)	USA	RCT	64	ISTDP>CBT
Chronic Pain** (22)	USA	RCT	230	ISTDP> or equal to CBT
Irritable Bowel **(23)	USA	RCT	106	ISTDP > Structured Relaxation

*MUS= Medically Unexplained Symptoms, TAU= Treatment as Usual, RCT=Randomized Controlled Trial. Though not a somatic symptom disorders, emotional stress is factor in generating symptoms and in relapses. ** Emotion Awareness and Expression Therapy derived from ISTDP and related models*

Cost Effectiveness Studies of ISTDP for Somatic Symptom Disorders and Related Condition

There are several studies pointing to cost reduction that persist in long follow-up of these treated patients.

Location of Service (n)	Service Use % Reduction	Service cost reduction
Emergency Department (n=50): all with somatic disorders 11	70% drop in repeat emergency visits	\$45,500 by 1 year later
Centre for Emotions and Health (n=890): 2/3 with somatic symptom disorders 12	31% reduction Doctor costs 71% reduction in Hospital costs	\$11,303,000 by 3 years later
Chronic Headache (n=29) 5	Return to work and medication stopping	\$203,261 by 1 year later
Dalhousie Department of Family Medicine (n=87): nearly all somatic 16	32.4% drop in Family Doctor use 37.5% drop in Emergency use	\$37,930 by 2 years later
Centre for Emotions and Health: Pseudoseizures (n=28) 6	87% reduction in all healthcare costs	\$1,607,000 by 3 years later
Chronic Pain (n=221) 22	65% reduction in all health care costs	\$3,107.480 by 3 years later

There are other studies examining some of the processes of change in the samples.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10503307.2017.1300353>

Patients report the key issue is emotional processing. ([Globe and Mail Article here /](#))

So, these are important findings because of the massive burden and cost of somatic symptom conditions and a major need for available short-term treatments. Once again treatments like ISTDP, emphasizing powerful therapeutic engagement, emotional processing toward healing attachment trauma, appear to be important, effective and able to provide long-term benefits.

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