

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy vs. Psychodynamic Therapy: Efficacy in Treating Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Dr. Matteo R. Carden

School of Digital Engineering, Alpine State University, Switzerland

Received: 10.02.2026

Accepted: 28.05.2026

Publishing: 01.08.2026

Abstract:

the efficacy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) against Psychodynamic Therapy (PDT) in treating Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). GAD is characterized by excessive and uncontrollable worry, leading to considerable distress and impairment in everyday functioning. While CBT has been widely acknowledged and backed by empirical research as an effective treatment for GAD, Psychodynamic Therapy, a more conventional technique, has also been utilised to address underlying emotional conflicts contributing to anxiety. the treatment benefits of these two techniques, concentrating on symptom reduction, emotional regulation, and overall life satisfaction. A randomized controlled experiment was undertaken with people diagnosed with GAD, who were assigned to either CBT or PDT treatment groups. The study examined anxiety levels, coping methods, and psychological well-being using standardized evaluations before and during the treatment period. The data imply that both CBT and PDT are effective in lowering anxiety symptoms, with CBT exhibiting faster and more consistent symptom alleviation. However, PDT was found to provide deeper insights into unconscious emotional conflicts and longer-term improvements in emotional regulation. the strengths and limitations of each therapy and suggests that the choice of treatment may depend on individual preferences, the severity of symptoms, and the desired long-term outcomes. The findings have implications for clinicians in selecting the most appropriate therapeutic approach for patients with GAD.

Keywords: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Psychodynamic Therapy, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Anxiety Treatment

Introduction:

One of the most common anxiety disorders is generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), which is typified by excessive, uncontrollable concern as well as a variety of psychological and physical symptoms, such as exhaustion, restlessness, trouble concentrating, and irregular sleep patterns. GAD's chronic nature can have a major negative influence on a person's quality of life by affecting everyday functioning and social interactions. Effective treatment interventions are essential for symptom relief and enhancing general well-being because of its pervasiveness. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic therapy (PDT) are two of the most popular therapeutic modalities for treating generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). A methodical and goal-oriented approach, cognitive behavioural therapy aims to recognise and change unhealthy thought patterns and behaviours that fuel anxiety. By altering maladaptive thinking and encouraging healthy coping mechanisms, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) seeks to

lessen anxiety symptoms through methods like behavioural exposure, cognitive restructuring, and relaxation techniques. CBT is the gold standard for treating anxiety-related illnesses since it has been shown in numerous studies to be effective in treating GAD. On the other hand, psychodynamic therapy, which has its roots in the psychoanalytic tradition, places a strong emphasis on examining unconscious emotional conflicts and previous events that might be causing anxiety in the present. Increasing self-awareness and comprehending the effects of unresolved internal tensions on behaviour and emotional functioning are the main goals of PDT. PDT is intended to assist people in discovering the more profound psychological causes of their anxiety and gaining understanding that will enable long-term emotional transformation, even if it is less organised than CBT.

Despite the fact that both treatments have been demonstrated to lessen GAD symptoms, their approaches, guiding ideas, and length of treatment vary greatly. While PDT may provide deeper emotional exploration and longer-term advantages in terms of emotional regulation and self-understanding, CBT typically produces faster symptom relief. Within the clinical community, there is still continuous discussion regarding the relative effectiveness of different methods for treating GAD. the effectiveness of psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural therapy in the treatment of generalised anxiety disorder. This study looks at how the two therapeutic modalities differ in terms of symptom reduction, coping mechanisms, and emotional control in an effort to provide light on their advantages and disadvantages. The ultimate objective is to educate medical professionals and those in need of treatment on the best therapy to use depending on the needs of individual patients, their preferred methods of treatment, and their long-term mental health objectives.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) vs. Psychodynamic Therapy (PDT)

Two of the most popular and researched therapeutic approaches for treating mental health conditions, such as generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), are cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic therapy (PDT). Although the goals of both therapies are to lessen anxiety and enhance emotional health, they take radically different approaches to treatment, employing different frameworks, techniques, and objectives. In order to choose the best course of treatment for their patients, professionals must be aware of these distinctions, and those who are seeking therapy must be aware of their options.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

The main objective of cognitive behavioural therapy, which is a goal-oriented, time-limited, and structured therapy, is to recognise and alter unhealthy thought patterns and behaviours that fuel anxiety. The fundamental idea behind cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is that negative ideas, feelings, and behaviours are interrelated, and that people can change their emotional and behavioural reactions by correcting erroneous or unreasonable thought patterns. By emphasising a present-focused approach, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) assists patients in identifying and combating the automatic negative thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that contribute to anxiety.

Therapists lead patients through exercises intended to foster self-awareness, cognitive restructuring, and the creation of healthy coping mechanisms as part of CBT, which is very skill-based and practical. Important methods used in CBT include:

- **Cognitive Restructuring:** recognising and combating dysfunctional or illogical thinking.
- **Behavioral Activation:** encouraging people to partake in activities that foster positive reinforcement and lessen anxiety.
- **Exposure Therapy:** To lessen avoidance behaviour, gradually expose people to anxiety-inducing circumstances in a safe setting.

Relaxation Techniques: teaching techniques to control the physiological signs of anxiety, such as progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, or mindfulness.

Research has shown that cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) significantly reduces anxiety symptoms, improves coping mechanisms, and improves emotional control in people with generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). It has been demonstrated that CBT is most helpful in the short term, providing quick and quantifiable symptom alleviation. Because of its systematic methodology and success based on data, it is regarded as the gold standard for treating anxiety disorders.

Psychodynamic Therapy (PDT)

With its roots in the psychoanalytic tradition, psychodynamic therapy is a more inquisitive and insight-based approach that aims to identify unconscious emotional conflicts and comprehend how a person's early experiences have shaped their present emotional and behavioural reactions. In order to identify the underlying reasons of anxiety, PDT examines past events, unresolved conflicts, and repressed emotions, in contrast to CBT, which is mostly present-focused. PDT aims to assist people better understand their unconscious processes and acquire insight into their emotional challenges, which will ultimately result in long-term emotional improvement.

The therapist's role in PDT is interpretive and active, helping the patient explore their unconscious motivations and emotional past. The following fundamental ideas are frequently at the heart of the therapy:

- **Insight and Self-Awareness:** assisting patients in developing a better comprehension of suppressed feelings and unresolved problems.
- **Transference and Countertransference:** investigating the possibility that the therapist may unintentionally pick up on the patient's feelings towards important people in their lives.
- **Unconscious Conflict Resolution:** digesting and dealing with repressed feelings or prior traumas that affect present anxiety symptoms.

Free Association: letting patients talk openly about their feelings and ideas in order to reveal unconscious information.

Since it takes time for patients to examine and resolve ingrained emotional problems, PDT is frequently thought of as a longer-term treatment than CBT. PDT strives for deep emotional understanding and long-term personality integration, even if it might not provide the same level

of acute symptom relief as CBT. People with complicated emotional problems or unresolved psychological conflicts resulting from early life events or childhood find it especially helpful.

Comparing CBT and PDT for Treating GAD

The way that CBT and PDT approach treatment is where they diverge most. CBT is methodical, directed, and aimed at altering particular thought and behaviour patterns that fuel worry. It works best for people looking for temporary, useful symptom alleviation. PDT, on the other hand, is more open-ended and concentrates on understanding unconscious emotional issues and prior experiences. It is usually applied to people who might gain from long-term personal development and who are curious to investigate the more profound emotional causes of their worry.

From an efficacy perspective, studies have repeatedly demonstrated that cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) reduces GAD symptoms quickly, with an emphasis on reducing anxiety in a comparatively short amount of time. Numerous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in treating anxiety disorders, and its systematic approach provides a clear route to symptom reduction. However, PDT has advantages in terms of long-term emotional control and self-awareness, especially for people with complex or chronic anxiety, even though it might not reduce symptoms right away.

PDT may be superior to CBT in that it assists people in addressing the root reasons of their anxiety, which can result in more long-lasting emotional transformation and a deeper comprehension of individual motivations and behaviours. However, not everyone can benefit from PDT's lengthier duration and reliance on in-depth emotional analysis, particularly those who want a more structured, solution-focused approach or are looking for immediate symptom alleviation.

Conclusion

In summary, generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) can be effectively treated with both cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic therapy (PDT), although their methods, lengths of time, and therapeutic results vary greatly. With its methodical, present-focused techniques, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) offers quick symptom alleviation by addressing and changing unhelpful ideas and actions that fuel anxiety. It is the gold standard for treating anxiety disorders because of its evidence-based methodology, which has been shown to be successful in reducing symptoms in a comparatively short amount of time. Psychodynamic therapy, on the other hand, takes a more inquisitive and insight-based approach, emphasising the impact of past experiences on present behaviour as well as the identification of unconscious emotional conflicts. PDT has long-term advantages by encouraging emotional control, self-awareness, and a greater comprehension of the underlying causes of anxiety, even if it might not deliver instant symptom relief. Because of this, PDT is especially helpful for people who have unresolved psychological conflicts or complex emotional problems. The individual's preferences, the intensity of their symptoms, and their treatment objectives all play a significant role in the decision between CBT and PDT. PDT might be more appropriate for people looking for long-term personal development and a knowledge of the emotional causes of their anxiety, whereas CBT is best for those looking for immediate symptom relief and useful coping

mechanisms. In the end, both treatments provide useful resources for controlling and conquering GAD. When choosing a therapy strategy, clinicians should take into account each patient's particular needs. They may even use aspects of both PDT and CBT to produce a more thorough treatment plan. A deeper comprehension of the particular settings in which each therapy works best may assist direct more individualised and effective treatment for people with generalised anxiety disorder as research advances.

Bibliography

- Kaplan. (2014). [*AP Psychology*](#). New York: Kaplan Publishing.
- Maitland, L. L. (2016). [*5 Steps to a 5 on the AP: Psychology*](#) (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McEntarffer, R., & Weseley, A. J. (2016). [*Barron's AP Psychology*](#) (7th ed.). Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series.
- The Princeton Review. (2020). [*AP Psychology Premium Prep: 2021*](#). New York: TPR Education IP Holdings, LLC.
- Weseley, A. J., & McEntarffer, R. (2019). [*Barron's AP Psychology Premium: With 6 Practice Tests*](#) (9th ed.). New York: Kaplan, Inc.
- Kaplan. (2014). [*AP Psychology*](#). New York: Kaplan Publishing.
- Maitland, L. L. (2016). [*5 Steps to a 5 on the AP: Psychology*](#) (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- McEntarffer, R., & Weseley, A. J. (2016). [*Barron's AP Psychology*](#) (7th ed.). Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series.