

## Dialectical behavior therapy Adult Criminal Justice

Literature review updated September 2015.

As part of WSIPP’s research approach to identifying evidence-based programs and policies, WSIPP determines “what works” (and what does not work) to improve outcomes using an approach called meta-analysis. For detail on our methods, see our [Technical Documentation](#). At this time, WSIPP has not yet calculated benefits and costs for this topic.

Program Description: Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is a type of cognitive behavioral therapy that focuses on mindfulness, interpersonal, emotion-regulating, and self-management skills. DBT was originally developed for women with borderline personality disorder. DBT is typically used with individuals involved in the criminal justice system who have a diagnosis of mental illness. Treatment may occur in an individual or group setting, typically weekly, for several hours per session. DBT can be delivered during incarceration or in a residential treatment setting. Therapists often modify the curriculum to be relevant for incarcerated individuals and their day-to-day life in prison. Treatment length can vary depending on the individuals’ progress.

### Meta-Analysis of Program Effects

Outcomes measured	No. of effect sizes	Treatment N	Adjusted effect size and standard error			Unadjusted effect size (random effects model)	
			ES	SE	Age	ES	p-value
Psychiatric symptoms	2	49	-0.356	0.205	34	-0.356	0.082

Meta-analysis is a statistical method to combine the results from separate studies on a program, policy, or topic in order to estimate its effect on an outcome. WSIPP systematically evaluates all credible evaluations we can locate on each topic. The outcomes measured are the types of program impacts that were measured in the research literature (for example, crime or educational attainment). Treatment N represents the total number of individuals or units in the treatment group across the included studies.

An effect size (ES) is a standard metric that summarizes the degree to which a program or policy affects a measured outcome. If the effect size is positive, the outcome increases. If the effect size is negative, the outcome decreases.

Adjusted effect sizes are used to calculate the benefits from our benefit cost model. WSIPP may adjust effect sizes based on methodological characteristics of the study. For example, we may adjust effect sizes when a study has a weak research design or when the program developer is involved in the research. The magnitude of these adjustments varies depending on the topic area.

WSIPP may also adjust the second ES measurement. Research shows the magnitude of some effect sizes decrease over time. For those effect sizes, we estimate outcome-based adjustments which we apply between the first time ES is estimated and the second time ES is estimated. We also report the unadjusted effect size to show the effect sizes before any adjustments have been made. More details about these adjustments can be found in our [Technical Documentation](#).

### Citations Used in the Meta-Analysis

- Shelton, D., Sampl, S., Kesten, K.L., Zhang, W., & Trestman, R.L. (2009). Treatment of impulsive aggression in correctional settings. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 27(5), 787-800.
- Wahl, C.T. (2011). *Evaluation of a dialectical behavior therapy skills group for female inmates who voluntarily seek treatment: A pilot study*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Louisville.

For further information, contact:  
(360) 664-9800, [institute@wsipp.wa.gov](mailto:institute@wsipp.wa.gov)

Printed on 03-21-2024



## Washington State Institute for Public Policy

The Washington State Legislature created the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in 1983. A Board of Directors—representing the legislature, the governor, and public universities—governs WSIPP and guides the development of all activities. WSIPP's mission is to carry out practical research, at legislative direction, on issues of importance to Washington State.