

Researchers demonstrate efficacy of novel depression therapy

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(Medical Xpress)—Depression among older adults can lead to serious health problems. Jojanneke Korte, PhD student at the University of Twente, investigated the effects of the life-review group therapy programme "The Stories we live by" ("Op verhaal komen" in Dutch) in some two hundred older patients (55+) with mild depressive symptoms. According to Korte, "The process of systematically recalling memories, otherwise known as life-review', is found to be effective. Depressive symptoms had disappeared in more than half of participants by the end of the course, and these participants were still symptom-free nine months later."

Approximately 40% of mental health institutions in the Netherlands offer "The stories we live by" [group therapy](#). The therapy consists of eight [group meetings](#) lasting two hours each. Korte's research has shown that a diverse target group can be helped by "The stories we live by". The RIVM has now officially endorsed the programme as an effective treatment for mild [depressive symptoms](#) in older adults (55+). "In contrast to [cognitive behavioural therapy](#), for example, this method is highly accessible and provides a positive approach," said Jojanneke Korte. "The costs are currently somewhat higher than for regular care. They could be lowered, however, for example by making the groups larger or reducing the number of group mentors."

Korte distinguishes four mechanisms in the Life-review therapy which act to reduce [symptoms of depression](#) and anxiety. Firstly, people's sense of [bitterness](#) can be reduced by encouraging them to focus on the

balance of positive and negative events in their past life. Secondly, attainable future goals can be set for people who have a tendency to get stuck in the past. Thirdly, people who have had difficult experiences in the past can learn from reviewing how they tackled these problems at the time; the same approach is likely to be effective for new problems they encounter later. The final, and most effective, technique, according to Korte, is to encourage people to relate as many positive memories as possible, in as much detail as possible.

The evidence suggests that life-review is most beneficial in a group setting. Participants reported that they appreciated the diversity of social processes involved, which probably enhance the effectiveness of the life-review. The following factors were mentioned most often: the feeling of belonging, the feeling of being accepted, sharing of personal and intimate experiences and realizing that others also have problems.

Korte carried out both quantitative and qualitative research with [older adults](#) who had taken part in "The stories we live by" therapy. This is the largest study in the world to date of the effectiveness of life-review. It has emerged in the meantime that the therapy can also be effectively delivered by individual E-mail correspondence with a counsellor and the use of a handbook. An evaluation of the effectiveness of "The stories we live by" when delivered online will start in February. Anyone interested in this online course can e-mail opverhaalkomen@utwente.nl.

Provided by University of Twente

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