

## ***The Efficacy of Bibliotherapy in Rehabilitation Context***

**Carmela Mento - Francesco Pira**

**Valentina Gueli Alletti - Maria Catena Silvestri**

University of Messina - IT

### ***Abstract***

*The aim of the present study was to explore the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in rehabilitation settings. The term bibliotherapy, coined in the 1930's by the psychiatrist William Menninger, conveys the importance of reading as a tool for cultural promotion and growth, as a means through which to acquire knowledge, enhance one's cognitive and emotional abilities, develop strategies for managing discomfort, as well as a psychoeducational and cognitive technique in the psychotherapeutic field. A study carried out on Pubmed showed that recent research on bibliotherapy, in particular experimental research, would be lacking and requires a humanistic medical approach, drawing on the knowledge and methods of psychology and cognitive literary studies, as well as clinical disciplines to broaden our understanding of how the dynamic processes of interpretation mediate between the textual and characteristic structures of mental health and illness. This narrative review was conducted on PubMed database and used two key terms "Bibliotherapy" AND "rehabilitation" AND "prison". Studies in line with this specific issue were included. The search of PubMed database provided a total of 470 items recruited online; of these 464 studies*

*were excluded according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. After the screening, a total of 6 studies assessing the bibliotherapy in rehabilitation setting, met the inclusion criteria and were included in the narrative review. Bibliotherapy as a self-help approach also in psychotherapeutic treatments can activate the desire to seek changes in attitudes and behaviour, to acquire knowledge of symptoms, and the value of self-care. A psychological intervention self-administered through ACT bibliotherapy with minimal therapeutic support can improve the physical and emotional functioning of adults with chronic pain. If studies report the efficacy of parent-mediated bibliotherapy in situations of childhood anxiety, nocturnal fears, specific phobias, in adolescence chatbot-delivered self-help depression intervention was proven to be superior to the minimal level of bibliotherapy in terms of reduction on depression and anxiety. Bibliotherapy interventions may be helpful to fight against weight gain and potentially facilitate smoking cessation.*

**Keywords:** bibliotherapy, rehabilitation, prison

## **1. Introduction**

Bibliotherapy, or book therapy is a method of therapy that uses the reading of books. Through analysis of the subject, the therapist is able to select a book suitable for the user's situation. By reading, the individuals implement a process of introspection which induces them to reflect on themselves (Veillette *et al.*, 2019). The hypothesis that reading could lead to beneficial effects dates back to Ancient Greece. Apollo, the son of Zeus, is the god of poetry. At the same time, he was also the God of medicine. Indeed, in Greek culture these two elements are placed in a direct relationship (Dalla Valle 2005). Three stages of the bibliotherapeutic process have been found: identification, catharsis

and introspection. Identification is what happens to readers when they perceive strong affinities and similarities with a character. During catharsis, a change of thinking. Finally, through introspection, change becomes fixed, stable and permanent (Dalla Valle, 2005). According to literature bibliotherapy, is an important strategy to help individuals cope with and process difficult experiences. In a study by Watson *et al.* (2020), authors used bibliotherapy as coping strategies for children in their grief. Interesting is the study by Veillette and colleagues (2019), in which through bibliotherapy they managed chronic pain in a sample of patients. Previous studies, for example, Vetri *et al.*, (2022), used bibliotherapy to manage children of parents with a mental illnesses, and bibliotherapy was positively perceived by families. The results of this study suggested that for children and parents bibliotherapy is an effective tool for psychological support. In particular, this tool is important to support resilience capability. Moreover, bibliotherapy, has emerged as an effective treatment for anxiety symptoms (Radtke *et al.*, 2023). The intervention provided by bibliotherapy for depression has also been shown to be helpful in treating depression (Liu *et al.*, 2022). Bibliotherapy is about using the narrative properties of the human mind. A narrative is built on the patient through the reading of the books, the themes include specific experiences on emotions, feelings and how the subjects perceive the world and reality (Kasperek-Zimowska *et al.*, 2021). In the past, Tomasik (1994) defined bibliotherapy as an intentional activity that uses the book for rehabilitative, resocializing purposes, suitable for all patients, with different psychopathologies and coming from different social and cultural classes, suitable for different ages. Pardini and colleagues (2014) used bibliotherapy for the treatment of depressive symptoms in jail and prison, in the prison sample, these findings indicated that the treatment with bibliotherapy reduces depression, anxiety, psychological distress, and improved quality of life in prison.

In the light of this, the aim of this work is to explore the positive effects on the psyche of bibliotherapy.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### *2.1. Research Strategy*

The main purpose of this narrative review is to map empirical research concerning the efficacy of bibliotherapy in rehabilitation settings.

There are different approaches to collecting and gathering empirical evidence in literature. Narrative review is the most common type of literature review and given the paucity of studies in literature about this topic, we chose the narrative review, as it has a less systematic methodology. Usually, in narrative reviews, there is usually no specific research question or defined search strategy, unlike systematic reviews. So we simply studied and developed the concept in a qualitative way given the paucity of studies present in the scientific panorama. Systematic reviews, on the other hand, are characterized by a methodical and replicable methodology and presentation. They involve a comprehensive search to locate all relevant published and unpublished works on a topic; a systematic integration of research results; and a critique of the extent, nature, and quality of evidence as it relates to a particular research topic (Siddaway *et al.*, 2019).

This narrative review was conducted to PubMed database and used two key terms "*Bibliotherapy*" and "*rehabilitation*". We included studies in line with this specific topic. This approach allowed us to include studies and highlight the importance of this topic.

The criteria for inclusion and the methods of the review have been pre-specified in a protocol. In detail, exclusion criteria included were as follows: (a) comments, commentaries, opinions, letters to editors, interviews, specific editorials, conference abstracts or posters, book chapters and books; (b) lacking details or quantitative information.

Resources with these characteristics were not included in this review.

The search of PubMed database provided a total of 470 quotations; no additional studies meeting inclusion criteria were identified by checking the reference list of the selected papers. Of these 464 studies were excluded according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. After the screening, a total of 6 studies assessing the bibliotherapy in rehabilitation setting, met the inclusion criteria and were included in the narrative review. Search was carried out from January 2018 to January 2023, to give a recent view on the topic.

### *2.2. Identifying the research question*

Studies about the topic of bibliotherapy in rehabilitation settings have been included.

A variety of studies was included: qualitative information on this topic. Studies in languages other than English, were excluded, as well as studies not in line with this topic. Moreover, exclusion criteria were review articles, books, reviews, editorial comments, and case reports/series.

(See: *Insert table 1*).

## **3. Results**

The studies examined showed the efficacy of bibliotherapeutic approach in a variety of mental illnesses. Although studies present in literature are outdated, it is an important issue, as it allows subjects to rewrite their own story. Bibliotherapy positively influences psychiatric patients' emotions, for example, it can normalize them, having an impact on their functioning and interpersonal relationships. Certainly in psychiatric rehabilitation there are several effective methods of intervention, such as psychoeducation, pharmacotherapy, psychotherapy, but bibliotherapy, as previously described if integrated with these other methods is effective, bringing better and faster

outcomes. This technique was found to be effective to reduce depression and anxiety. Bibliotherapy is a concept with few boundaries that leaves room for ideas and creativity. Bibliotherapy is a discipline with blurred boundaries, adaptable to any reality, bearer of those potentialities known by professionals who work with books.

(See: *Insert table 2*).

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The current study explored the effectiveness of a bibliotherapeutic intervention supported by therapists for various psychopathologies. The specificity of the application of bibliotherapy in clinical settings with a rehabilitative and psychiatric nature, is based on the narrative character of this approach. It allows to help patients adequately express their emotions, process and manage them, re-telling their own personal stories, through identification with the characters of a specific story. Patients learn to know each other, to know their thoughts, their emotions (Szabo *et al.*, 2018). Generally, materials are about literary texts related to the topic to be covered. It is dedicated to patients with emotional or behavioural problems and its main purpose is to generate insights and alter psychological situations of patients, including thought disorders (Rubin 1978). Bibliotherapy provides a variety of content, can activate emotional experiences, helping patients reading books, to build self-knowledge, thus contributing to an adequate representation of the world and of oneself. It refers to yourself and improves the expression of your thoughts. The therapeutic role of the book is achieved by helping patients to become aware of their own emotional experiences and to have access to them. Also, bibliotherapy can be an effective universal prevention tool for promoting mental health (Kasperek-Zimowska *et al.*, 2020). Given that, the results present in literature underline the importance of the combination of narrative and activities suited to developmental level of primary school children, as

books capture their attention and facilitates learning. Results in literature therefore underline the importance of the combination of developmentally appropriate narrative and activities of primary school children (Vetri *et al.*, 2022).

This model of intervention should not be understood as an isolated one, but should be included within a team work, together with other clinical practices to manage psychiatric patients. The studies reviewed emphasize the importance of the combination of narration with other clinical rehabilitation interventions. Books captures their attention and facilitates learning, and the use of adapted tools can promote patients' understanding of content, metacognition, facilitate debate about sensitive issues, normalize their experiences and strengthen their interest. These cognitive, emotional and relational aspects are very important in design rehabilitation, especially in psychiatric, inpatient or prison rehabilitation settings where the patient can work on enhancing residual skills or affective regulation and metacognition deficits, as well as implementing personal cultural and literacy levels.

This topic has been little studied empirically, so this study aims at presenting the results of mentioned studies, albeit with different methodologies, and offers some interesting insights for healthcare professionals (e.g., doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists). However, our results have brought us to recognize the effectiveness of this method of intervention in clinical and rehabilitation settings, and further investigations are needed.

The limitations of this study are about the limited literature produced so far. Another important limitation is the heterogeneous nature of these studies in which methodological uniformity is lacking.

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**Table 1: List of search terms entered into the PubMed search engines for identification the studies for this review.**

Number	Search term
1	Bibliotherapy [all fields]
2	Rehabilitation [all fields]
3	1 AND 2
4	English [language]



**Table 2. Characteristics of the studies included in the review.**

<b>REFERENCES (Autor, year)</b>	<b>AIM</b>	<b>SAMPL E</b>	<b>TYPE OF MEASUREMENT</b>	<b>FINDINGS</b>
Liu <i>et al.</i> , (2022)	This study aims to compare chatbot therapy to other psychological interventions	41 Particip ants	-the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)  -the Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7)  -the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)  -the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire-8 (CSQ-8)  -the Working Alliance Inventory-Short Revised (WAI-SR)	Bibliotherapy for reduction of depression and anxiety
Radtke <i>et al.</i> , (2022)	This research testes a new bibliotherapy for the fear of dogs	7 Childre n	-Cognitive behavioural bibliotherapy is delivered via an unpublished chapter 9 (66p, a story book whit topics on dogs).	This study shows a significant reduction in cases of severe diagnosed phobias

<p>Veillette <i>et al.</i>, (2019)</p>	<p>This work aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of bibliotherapy</p>	<p>140 Adults</p>	<p>-8 weeks bibliotherapy -type: self-administered psychological intervention with minimal therapeutic contact in the treatment of chronic pain / it is based on ACT</p>	<p>This study shows that a self-administered psychological intervention via ACT bibliotherapy and with minimal therapeutic support can improve physical and emotional functioning</p>
<p>Vetri <i>et al.</i>, (2022)</p>	<p>This study evaluates an interpersonal based book psychotherapy</p>	<p>22 Particip ants</p>	<p>-Answers collected online - open-ended questions after reading</p>	<p>The book strengthens resilience of elementary school-aged children having a parent suffering from mental problems</p>

<p>Watson <i>et al.</i>, (2021)</p>	<p>This study aims to explore children's experience of facing a parent's suicide</p>	<p>7 Participants</p>	<p>- Interviews concluded with an opportunity for participants to review and express their impressions on 10 children's picture books</p>	<p>Participants generally had positive experiences with a programme for preventing suicide</p>
<p>Zhang <i>et al.</i>, (2022)</p>	<p>This study creates bibliotherapeutic material database and examines the effectiveness of bibliotherapy on subjective well-being. It focuses on older adults living in nursing homes.</p>	<p>64 Participants</p>	<p>-the Optimism Pessimism Scale -the Memorial University of Newfoundland Scale of Happiness</p>	<p>This study shows how bibliotherapy promotes optimistic attitude and reduces negative emotions</p>

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