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**AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF METHODOLOGICAL QUALITY RELATED TO ALLEGIANCE BIAS HYPOTHESIS IN RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIALS**

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**Introduction:** Previous studies have found an association between allegiance bias and methodological quality of psychological treatment comparisons.

**Objective:** To test the hypothesis whether poorer designed randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of psychotherapeutic interventions could be yield increased allegiance effects.

**Aims:** Using a systematic approach with meta-analysis we aimed to assess the relationships between allegiance effect and outcomes with respect to treatment integrity, quality of treatment and overall quality of RCTs.

**Methods:** We searched meta-analyses of RCTs of different types of psychotherapies in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. Eligible articles included were meta-analyses of RCTs with at least 1 study with allegiance of the experimenter. Effect sizes in allegiance trials were compared with non-allegiance by sensitivity analysis using random and fixed models and a summary relative odds ratio was calculated. Heterogeneity was quantified with the I<sup>2</sup> metric.

**Results:** A total of 30 meta-analyses including 240 RCTs were analyzed. The analysis addressing the quality of studies did not show any significant association between allegiance and non-allegiance studies, whereas significant differences were observed in cases where treatment integrity were not evaluated (sROR=1.54 [95% CI 1.01 to 2.35], P=0.047 and I<sup>2</sup>=74). Regarding the overall quality of administered psychotherapy the magnitude of the effect was stronger only in the case of low quality (sROR=1.61 [95% CI 1.00 to 2.59], P=0.049 and I<sup>2</sup>=76).

**Conclusions:** The results support the view that experimenter's allegiance acts as a systematic bias and can be explained through low quality and integrity of delivered psychotherapy.