

RESEARCH REVIEWS

Pick of the (Other) Papers 9/1

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Once again, we offer a selection of several papers about solution-focused practice that have been published elsewhere in 2024-2025. This current edition features a diverse selection of empirical and practice-oriented theoretical papers on the Solution Focused Approach, encompassing various methodologies and areas of interest recently published in other journals.

In this latest edition, we have selected a wide variety of papers, coming from very different corners of the world, published in other journals in 2024-2025 with consideration of diverse interests. First, we present two theoretical articles describing the practical application of the Solution-Focused Approach (SFA) in couple therapy and child protection services. These papers reflect the flexibility of the approach and provide some practical tips for working with various client groups. Among the recommended empirical papers, we present a process study describing the use and ethics of robotic solution-focused well-being coaching, a correlational study showing the mechanism behind the relationship between solution-focused thinking and psychological health, and an experimental study comparing the effectiveness of SFA with narrative therapy on distress tolerance in the medical setting. From the medical setting, we also present a systematic review on the effectiveness of the approach in the management of cancer-related symptoms. We conclude with a powerful study of the benefits of using Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) with older care-home resident adults in China. More references can be found on the online lists hosted by [EBTA](#) and [SFBTA](#).

Recommended Papers on Practice Description and Development

Negotiating preferred futures in solution-focused couple therapy

Authored by: Zatloukal, L.

Published in: International Journal of Systemic Therapy, 1–18, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2692398X.2025.2492816>

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Availability: Open access

This practice description paper shows how the SFA is applied when working with couples. More specifically, it addresses one of the most important themes in solution-focused conversations - preferred future and how it can be negotiated when working with couples. Considering that the literature on solution-focused work with couples is somewhat limited and often general, this attempt to address a specific aspect of it is timely and valuable.

The first part of the paper briefly mentions the already available literature and research on the topic, introduces basic tenets of the SFA, and explains the specificity of working with couples. The second part begins with the description of the main methods for working with the preferred future theme, such as negotiating best hopes (or common project), a detailed vision of the preferred future, goals, etc. Further, the author distinguishes several possible scenarios: when a couple has a common vision of the preferred future, a different one, or partners disagree about the direction for them to go. These scenarios are discussed in detail, providing some practical insights on how a solution-focused practitioner can be useful in each of them. The main highlight of the paper is five case examples illustrating how the discussed ideas and methods were creatively applied by the author when working with couples in each of the mentioned scenarios.

In conclusion, the author stresses that solution-focused work with couples is not a simple juggling with pre-prepared questions, but rather an artful co-construction of the conversations meaningful to the partners and the couple as a whole.

Solution-focused approach: A way of facilitating children's participation and understanding children's experiences, needs, and wishes

Authored by: Toros, K., & Falch-Eriksen, A.

Published in: Journal of Family Social Work, 28(1), 22–31, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10522158.2024.2435814>

Availability: Subscription or purchase required

This practice note explores the experiences of 14 graduate students in social work, who participated in the course 'Solution-Focused Work with Children and Families' and conducted an assignment to apply solution-focused questions with children and families they were seeing as their clients in the context of child protective services in Estonia.

The graduate students found scaling and miracle questions as the most valuable in their work with children, leading to a better mutual understanding, acknowledging the children's voices, and co-constructing solutions. Further, authors provide a detailed overview of students' insights from their practice with specific examples of how scaling and miracle questions were applied and creatively tailored in various situations. Finally, they conclude by summarising the main findings and the advantages of applying the SFA in child protective services.

Although this description does not follow any specific research methodology, it provides some valuable insights into how solution-focused techniques can be creatively adapted to specific client groups and tailored to their personal needs. By reading the paper, solution-focused practitioners can take away some nice practical tips to use in their practice.

Recommended Empirical Papers

Robots as mental well-being coaches: Design and ethical recommendations

Authored by: Axelsson, M., Spitale, M, & Gunes, H.

Published in: ACM Transactions on Human-Robot Interaction, 13(2), Article 19, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3643457>

Availability: Open access

Suppose that you are having a coaching conversation with a humanoid robot... Well, we are not there yet, but the future is coming on faster than we might think.

This thought-provoking article attempts to take a step towards this kind of future by providing a list of design guidelines and ethical considerations for developing robots as mental well-being coaches. The list is based on a synthesis of the results of three user-centered qualitative studies involving participants in solution-focused, positive psychology, and mindfulness coaching sessions led by human coaches and a robotic well-being coach - Pepper.

The paper discusses each study in detail, followed by an analysis of convergent and divergent results, leading to the formulation of a list of seven design and ethical recommendations, e.g., “the robot voice should emphasize variable prosody and slow pace”; “acknowledgement and active listening should be implemented through backchanneling and appropriate turn-taking”; “researchers should educate users keeping in mind emotional considerations and user characteristics”, to mention just a few. The paper is rich with specific details and suggestions for everyone interested in integrating technologies and robotics into the field of consulting and psychological support. We think it’s a must-read for everyone wondering about the future of helping professions in general and the limits of the applications of the SFA.

The impact of solution-focused thinking on psychological health: The chain mediation role of mindfulness and perceived stress

Authored by: Zhang, Y., & Zhuang, M.

Published in: International Journal of Social Science Research and Review, 7(11), 75–83, 2024, <http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v7i11.2319>

Availability: Open access

This correlational study aimed to examine the effect of solution-focused thinking on psychological health as mediated by mindfulness awareness and perceived stress. For this purpose, an online survey was conducted on adults in China. Participants were asked to fill in specific scales measuring the

variables of interest twice, with a one-month interval. A total of 345 participants responded at both measurements, with an attrition rate of 5.9% and no significant differences in demographic characteristics or variables of interest. Correlation analyses indicated statistically significant results in the expected direction, in line with previous studies: increased solution-focused thinking was associated with higher mindfulness awareness and life satisfaction, and lower depression and perceived stress. In turn, regression analysis showed that both mindfulness awareness and perceived stress significantly mediated the effect of solution-focused thinking on depression. The effect of solution-focused thinking on depression was completely explained by mindfulness awareness and perceived stress, both as individual mediators and in interaction. The more an individual had solution-focused thinking, the higher the mindfulness awareness, which led to both decreased perceived stress and depression scores, in addition to the fact that lower perceived stress alone was associated with lower depression levels. In turn, only perceived stress partially mediated the effect of solution-focused thinking on life satisfaction, meaning that the more an individual had solution-focused thinking, the more life satisfaction, in addition to having more mindful awareness and decreased perceived stress, and in turn, lower perceived stress led again to higher life satisfaction.

This study shows the possible mechanism between solution-focused thinking and psychological health, as explained by cognitive variables such as mindfulness awareness and perceived stress. The results are important in showing the impact of solution-focused thinking on depression scores and life satisfaction. Thus, results provide empirical support for the mechanism of change specific to SFA, with potential impact on the recognition of SFBT as a psychotherapeutic approach in the context of depression. Of course, more studies are required to be performed on the clinical population and to replicate these findings from the general population.

Comparative effectiveness of solution focused therapy and narrative therapy on distress tolerance in mothers of children with celiac disease

Authored by: Akafian, Y., Atashpour, S. H., & Farhadi, H.

Published in: Journal of Research in Behavioural Sciences, 22(4), 725-734, 2025, <https://rbs.mui.ac.ir/article-1-1850-en.html>

Availability: Open access (Persian language)

This experimental study, performed in Iran, examined the effect of SFBT on the distress tolerance of mothers of children with celiac disease as compared to narrative therapy and no therapy. For this purpose, 60 participants recruited from the Celiac Association of Iran, Isfahan, were randomly assigned to the three equal conditions (20 participants per group). Each of the two intervention groups received 8 sessions of therapy (90-minute sessions). Quantitative analyses indicated a similar positive significant increase in tolerance distress in mothers following either SFBT or narrative therapy; an effect which was maintained at the three-month follow-up. No significant

differences in distress tolerance were observed in mothers who received no intervention. The results indicate that SFBT is as effective as narrative therapy in terms of distress tolerance of mothers of children with celiac disease.

This study is one among the many outcome studies performed in Iran, with a specific focus on a particular group of individuals and analyzing the effectiveness of SFBT by taking into account both active comparison (other known approaches) and passive ones (no intervention). The results are largely in line with the previously found tendency to show similar effectiveness with other approaches, and at the same time, better outcomes than when no intervention is applied. The large number of publications in Iran also allows for the publication of various systematic reviews. It is worth noting that just in the past six months, two systematic reviews were published (references below), one employing meta-analysis. The Iranian success story in researching the SFA in various contexts is still to be followed.

- Naseh, M., Badiezadeh, S., Rafieifar, M., Taridashti, S., Reddy, S. M., & Panisch, L. S. (2025). Solution-Focused Brief Therapy for Improving Couple Dyadic Relationships in Iran: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 51(1), e12758. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12758>
- Froerer, A. S., Bolghan-Abadi, M., Chen, M., & Zhang, A. (2025). Meta-Analysis of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Research Conducted in Iran: Does Outcome Type, Intervention Modality, or Delivery Format Make a Difference?. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 51(1), e12759. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12759>

The effectiveness of solution-focused therapy in cancer-related symptom management: A systematic review

Authored by: Maleki, M., Mardani, A., Gholami, M., Hanifi, N., & Vaismoradi, M.

Published in: *Support Care in Cancer*, 32, Article 803, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-024-09008-x>

Availability: Subscription or purchase required

In this systematic review, the effectiveness of SFA was explored concerning cancer-related symptoms. Randomized clinical trials and non-randomized studies of intervention were selected from five online databases. From all identified papers, eight fit the inclusion criteria and were examined in a narrative synthesis. The studies were performed on a total of 555 patients, with a predominance of females (69.6%). Randomization was used in half of the selected studies. Results indicated positive impact of SFA-based interventions on a wide variety of outcomes covering psychological distress (e.g., stress, anxiety) and well-being (e.g., hope, quality of life), medical aspects (e.g., cancer-related fatigue, somatization), and coping and self-efficacy. The

authors conclude that SFA-based interventions are a valuable addition in the context of cancer-related symptom management, alongside other routine medical care and therapeutic interventions.

The results of this study are valuable in showing that interventions based on the SFA can positively impact a wide range of relevant aspects. Considering that only 8 out of the 239 identified studies were fit to be included in the review, more studies are needed in the context of cancer-related issues. The cumulation of data can, in the future, allow the performance of meta-analysis, which can strengthen the confidence in the effectiveness found and argue for the promotion of SFA in the medical context.

Evaluating solution-focused brief therapy for Chinese older adults

Authored by: Jing, S., Zhang, A., Yang, X., Wang, Y., & Solomon, P.

Published in: Research on Social Work Practice, 35(4), 421-431, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315241271951>

Availability: Subscription or purchase required

This eye-catching randomized controlled study describes work with older adults in China, to measure the alleviation of psychological distress of older adults (all over 60 years of age, average age 83.5 and 75% women) living in nursing homes. 20 participants were given four sessions of SFBT over an 8-10 week period. The protocol was closely based on the [2013 SFBTA manual](#). The initial session looked at building rapport and setting goals. The following session sought to build on past solutions from the client's life, with the fourth and final session wrapping up the process and pointing to other resources for the client. A copy of the protocol used for the study (in Chinese) is available from the lead author.

The control group (also 20 participants) followed a 'Treatment As Usual' protocol, also with four sessions over 8-10 weeks, including some cognitive behavioural interventions. This created an 'active' control group. The study assessed outcomes using four standardized instruments: Brief Symptom Inventory-18, Patient Health Questionnaire 9, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (CGAD), and Herth Hope Index (CHHI), all well-established and empirically validated measures, used in their Chinese versions.

For all the measures (depression, anxiety, health and hope) the SFBT group showed significantly greater positive effects than the control group, mostly at the $p < 0.001$ level. While both groups showed improvements, the SFBT group's average change was some 3-5 times greater on each measure. These results show not only statistical significance but also clinically meaningful differences across outcome domains. The authors note limitations in the small sample size, the lack of ability to review individual sessions for fidelity and the lack of later follow-ups. However, the results show a clear and significant benefit to using SFBT with this population over the more commonly applied CBT methods. The paper is very clearly written, well-referenced and thorough - a fine example for those engaging in this kind of study.

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