

# Dialectical Behaviour Therapy for Common Mental Health Disorders: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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## Introduction

- **Context:** Emotion regulation deficits are increasingly recognized as an underlying mechanism of many disorders (Aldao et al., 2010; Cludius et al., 2020)
- Dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) holds potential as an effective transdiagnostic treatment for disorders with underlying emotion regulation deficits (Linehan, 2015)
- **Objective:** Highlight the potential of DBT as a transdiagnostic treatment for common mental health disorders through a systematic review and meta-analysis of extant research.

## Highlights

- Emotion regulation (ER) deficits are an underlying mechanism in many disorders.
- We examined DBT as a transdiagnostic treatment for common mental health disorders.
- 13 RCTs of DBT for mental health disorders, and no comorbid personality disorder, were included.
- DBT led to ER improvements and significant effects for depression and eating disorders.
- DBT is an effective treatment for common mental health disorders.

## Methods

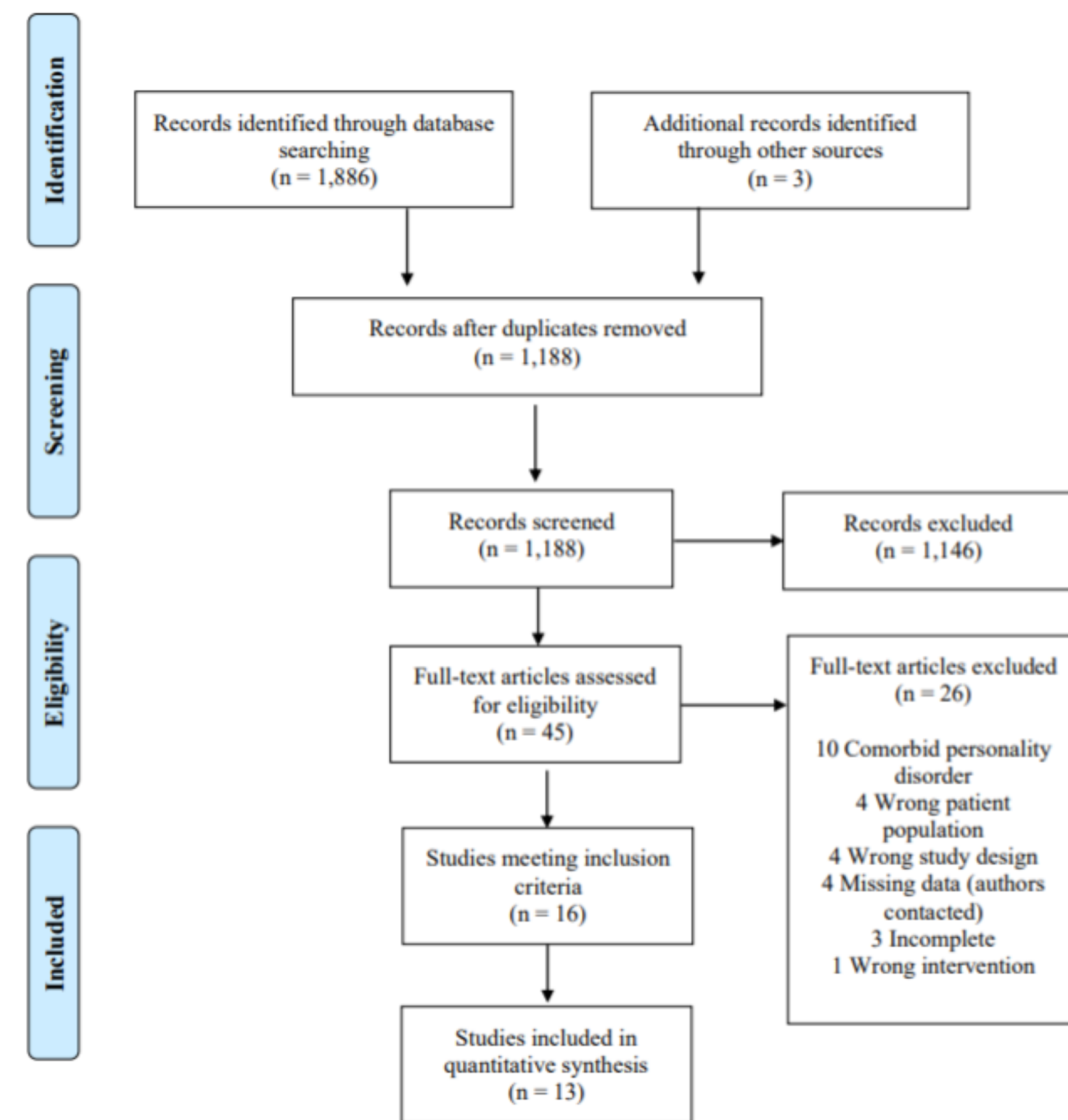


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram of the study inclusion process.

**Study Selection:** Randomized control trials of DBT skills training groups for adults with common mental health disorders, and no comorbid personality disorder, were included.

## Analyses

- Random effects meta-analysis
- Calculated with Hedges  $g$  to correct for small sample size
- Subgroup analyses by disorder and for emotion regulation
- Publication bias was assessed using Egger's Test, visual inspection of funnel plots, and the trim-and-fill procedure (Duval & Tweedie, 2000), which results in an effect size estimate after taking into account publication bias.

## Results

- Thirteen RCTs met inclusion criteria ( $N = 515$  participants)
- Overall, DBT resulted in a moderate effect on symptom reduction (outliers excluded) ( $g = 0.51$ , 95% CI [0.30, 0.72],  $p < .001$ )
- Improvements on emotion regulation outcomes yielded a small-to-moderate effect ( $g = 0.44$ , 95% CI [0.12, 0.75],  $p < .01$ )
- Results showed significant effects of DBT on:
  - Depression ( $g = 0.44$ , 95% CI [0.24, 0.65],  $p = .001$ )
  - Eating disorders ( $g = 0.83$ , 95% CI [0.49, 1.17],  $p = .001$ )
  - But not for anxiety ( $g = 0.33$ , 95% CI [-0.02, 0.67],  $p = .06$ )

Figure 2: Forest plot with outliers

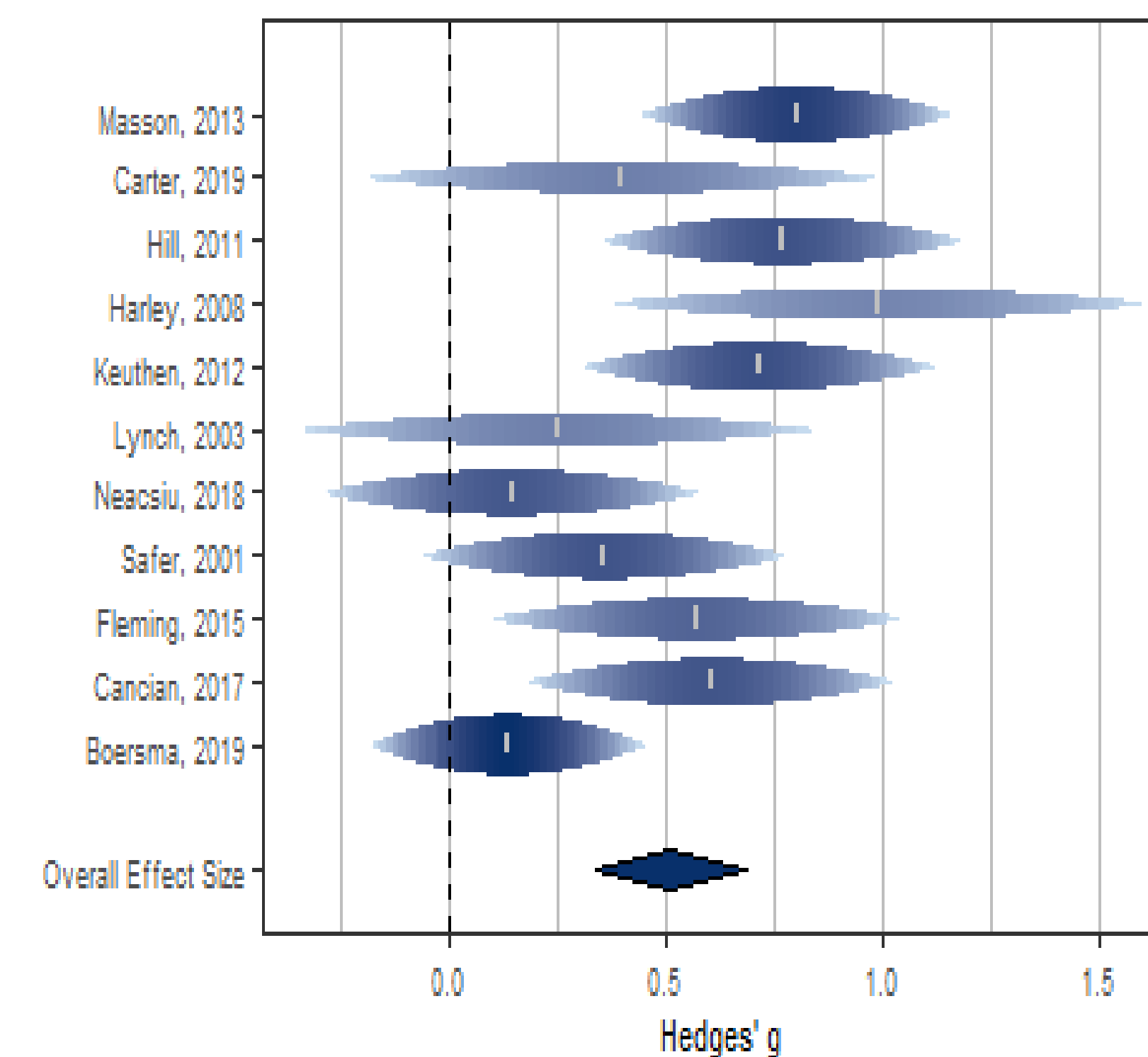
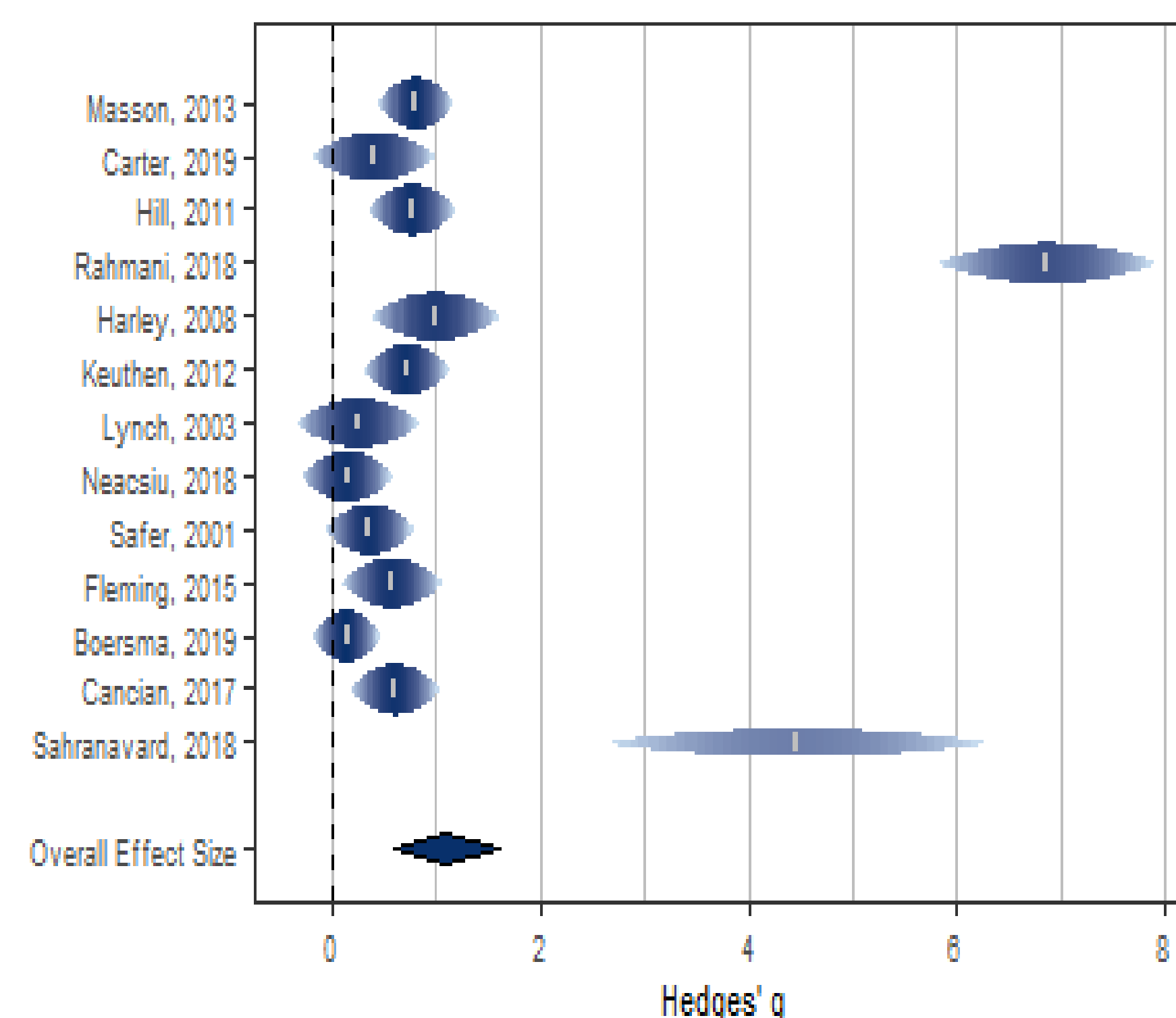


Figure 3: Forest plot without outliers

## Conclusions

- Results suggest DBT skills groups are effective:
  - Reduced overall psychiatric symptomatology (moderate effect)
  - Emotion regulation (small-to-moderate effect)
  - Symptoms of depression (small-to-moderate effect),
  - Eating disorders (large effect).
  - Not significant for anxiety
- First meta-analysis examining common mental health disorders without co-occurring BPD
- Provide emerging evidence for DBT skills training groups as an effective transdiagnostic treatment modality for treating a range of disorders.
- Future research: explore DBT as a transdiagnostic tool for treating emotion dysregulation & gain precision on both the mechanisms of change and critical components for best-practice guidelines across disorders.

## References

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