

Lanier, P., Jensen, T., Bryant, K., Chung, G., Rose, R., Smith, Q., & Lackmann, L. (2020). A systematic review of the effectiveness of children's behavioral health interventions in psychiatric residential treatment facilities. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104951>.

## **What we know**

Psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTFs) are a more restrictive type of residential treatment that serve youth with significant emotional and behavioral problems, many of whom have other conditions like anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, or other psychoses. PRTFs are meant to provide evidence-based intensive behavioral therapy and pharmacological treatment. While the prescribing practices of drugs is well monitored and implemented based on scientific evidence, the behavioral therapies are not. There are more than 350 PRTFs in the United States, many of which use different trainings and have distinct staffing requirements and bureaucratic structures. Consequently, each uses different therapies and services, some of which may not be backed by science. Further, we do not know which therapies are being used, how often, and for which youth. This makes it very hard to tell whether PRTFs are helping kids. While a certain therapy may be effective in a normal outpatient facility or private practice, there is little evidence that the same therapy may work in the setting of a youth PRTF.

## **What the study adds**

The authors found that the current research surrounding the different treatment, therapies, and care planning used in PRTFs was insufficient to determine the effectiveness of these facilities. While they do not condemn the use of these facilities, they do question whether there are other, more suitable, options for treating youth psychiatric needs. Additionally, the lack of evidence-based practices in youth PRTFs is a cause for concern for the authors, though they did find that youth PRTFs generally have positive outcomes for patients.

## **What does this mean for practice or policy**

Overall, this article can be used as a beginner's guide that describes which therapies are being used in PRTFs. This article also advocates for more research on the effectiveness of youth PRTFs compared to other treatment and placement options in child welfare, and shares a concern that we need more evidence about these practices before using them widely.

## **How do we know this is a good study**

The type of research design used in this study is called a systematic review, and it is used when scientists want to summarize a broad range of scientific evidence on a particular topic. For this study, using four separate academic search engines and the expertise of a university social science librarian, the authors sifted through over 1,500 articles and narrowed them down to 47 that were relevant to their research.