Interventions for adults with a history of complex traumatic events: the INCiTE mixed-methods systematic review

Hollie Melton,1 Nick Meader,1 Holly Dale,2 Kath Wright,1 Julie Jones-Diette,1 Melanie Temple,3 Iram Shah,3 Karina Lovell,4 Dean McMillan,5,6 Rachel Churchill,1 Corrado Barbui,7 Simon Gilbody5,6 and Peter Coventry1,5*

1Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, University of York, York, UK
2School of Health Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
3Schoen Clinic, York, UK
4Division of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
5Department of Health Sciences, University of York, York, UK
6Hull York Medical School, University of York, York, UK
7Department of Neurosciences, Biomedicine and Movement Sciences, University of Verona, Verona, Italy

*Corresponding author peter.coventry@york.ac.uk

Declared competing interests of authors: Rachel Churchill was part of a Systematic Reviews Programme Advisory Group. Simon Gilbody is/was a member of the following committees: Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Clinical Trials Board (2008–14), HTA Commissioning Board (2016–19), HTA Efficient Study Designs (2015–16), HTA End of Life Care and Add on Studies (2016), HTA Funding Boards Policy Group (formerly CSG) (2017–20), HTA Funding Teleconference Members (2015–16) and HTA Post-board Funding Teleconference (2017–20). Peter Coventry is a member of the following committees: HTA General Board (2018–19) and Health Services and Delivery Research Funding Committee Members (2019–22).

Published September 2020
DOI: 10.3310/hta24430

Plain English summary

The INCiTE study
Health Technology Assessment 2020; Vol. 24: No. 43
DOI: 10.3310/hta24430

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk
Plain English summary

Traumatic events that happen often and that are difficult to escape from, such as childhood abuse, are sometimes known as complex traumatic events. People who have a history of complex traumatic events can develop post-traumatic stress disorder and can also suffer from other mental health problems. It is not known if people who experience complex traumatic events can benefit from existing psychological treatments or medications, or if these treatments are acceptable. This review aimed to find out which treatments are most effective and acceptable for mental health problems in people with complex trauma histories, and to identify the frontrunners for future research. We searched electronic databases for evidence about treatment effectiveness and acceptability in adults with a history of complex traumatic events. We found 104 randomised controlled trials and nine non-randomised controlled trials that tested the effectiveness of psychological and/or medications, as well as nine studies that used interviews and focus groups to describe the acceptability of psychological treatments. The studies were split across different populations that included veterans, refugees, people who had experienced childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence, and civilians affected by war. We found that psychological treatments that focused on improving symptoms associated with trauma were effective for reducing post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and depression across all populations and fewer people dropped out of these treatments, suggesting that they are acceptable. However, trauma-focused treatments were less effective among veterans than among other groups and less effective for reducing other psychological symptoms commonly experienced by people with complex trauma histories. Phased treatments that first start with helping people to feel safe before focusing on trauma symptoms might be beneficial for both post-traumatic stress disorder and additional psychological symptoms. There was little evidence that medications, other than antipsychotics, were effective for post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Future work should test if phased treatments are more effective than non-phased treatments over the long term.
Criteria for inclusion in the Health Technology Assessment journal

Reports are published in Health Technology Assessment (HTA) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HTA programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

Reviews in Health Technology Assessment are termed ‘systematic’ when the account of the search appraisal and synthesis methods (to minimise biases and random errors) would, in theory, permit the replication of the review by others.

HTA programme

Health Technology Assessment (HTA) research is undertaken where some evidence already exists to show that a technology can be effective and this needs to be compared to the current standard intervention to see which works best. Research can evaluate any intervention used in the treatment, prevention or diagnosis of disease, provided the study outcomes lead to findings that have the potential to be of direct benefit to NHS patients. Technologies in this context mean any method used to promote health; prevent and treat disease; and improve rehabilitation or long-term care. They are not confined to new drugs and include any intervention used in the treatment, prevention or diagnosis of disease.

The journal is indexed in NHS Evidence via its abstracts included in MEDLINE and its Technology Assessment Reports inform National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance. HTA research is also an important source of evidence for National Screening Committee (NSC) policy decisions.

This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 16/11/03. The contractual start date was in March 2017. The draft report began editorial review in November 2018 and was accepted for publication in June 2019. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

© Queen’s Printer and Controller of HMSO 2020. This work was produced by Melton et al. under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.

Published by the NIHR Journals Library (www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland (www.prepress-projects.co.uk).
Editor-in-Chief of *Health Technology Assessment* and NIHR Journals Library

**Professor Ken Stein**  Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

NIHR Journals Library Editors

**Professor John Powell**  Chair of HTA and EME Editorial Board and Editor-in-Chief of HTA and EME journals. Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK, and Senior Clinical Researcher, Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford, UK

**Professor Andrée Le May**  Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals) and Editor-in-Chief of HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals

**Professor Matthias Beck**  Professor of Management, Cork University Business School, Department of Management and Marketing, University College Cork, Ireland

**Dr Tessa Crilly**  Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

**Dr Eugenia Cronin**  Senior Scientific Advisor, Wessex Institute, UK

**Dr Peter Davidson**  Consultant Advisor, Wessex Institute, University of Southampton, UK

**Ms Tara Lamont**  Senior Scientific Adviser (Evidence Use), Wessex Institute, University of Southampton, UK

**Dr Catriona McDaid**  Senior Research Fellow, York Trials Unit, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, UK

**Professor William McGuire**  Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

**Professor Geoffrey Meads**  Professor of Wellbeing Research, University of Winchester, UK

**Professor John Norrie**  Chair in Medical Statistics, University of Edinburgh, UK

**Professor James Raftery**  Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

**Dr Rob Riemsma**  Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

**Professor Helen Roberts**  Professor of Child Health Research, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, UK

**Professor Jonathan Ross**  Professor of Sexual Health and HIV, University Hospital Birmingham, UK

**Professor Helen Snooks**  Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

**Professor Ken Stein**  Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

**Professor Jim Thornton**  Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK

**Professor Martin Underwood**  Warwick Clinical Trials Unit, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

Please visit the website for a list of editors: [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors](http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors)

**Editorial contact:** journals.library@nihr.ac.uk