

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

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## Plain English summary

### The INCiTE study

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## Plain English summary

**T**raumatic 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.

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