

[OLTHIUS] - *Firefighters accessing care for trauma: A clinical case series testing the efficacy of distance-delivered narrative exposure therapy in reducing PTSD symptoms*

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Priority Research Area: PTSD among PSP

Relevant PSP Population(s): Firefighters

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What is the issue? Firefighting is one of the most dangerous and stressful occupations. For firefighters, repeated exposure to trauma is unavoidable, putting them at elevated risk for developing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its sequelae. Canadian data show that 13.5% of firefighters screen positive for PTSD (Carleton et al., 2017). Evidence-based PTSD interventions are needed; while some exist, firefighters often cannot access treatment due to barriers (e.g., clinician shortages, waiting lists, costs, stigma, distance to service, fear of lack of privacy). Efforts are needed to increase timely access to effective PTSD service.

What was the aim of the study? This study aims to test the preliminary efficacy and feasibility of an innovative distance-delivered intervention for firefighters with PTSD that addresses the experience of multiple traumas, is delivered via videoconferencing (reducing the need to travel to receive care, increasing client confidentiality, and reducing fear of stigma), and is delivered via a supervised paraprofessional coach. The study adapts narrative exposure therapy (NET), a PTSD intervention that addresses the experience of multiple traumas, to a firefighting population.

How was the study conducted? The study is a clinical case series that includes four main components: (1) NET has been adapted for firefighters, (2) 25 firefighters will be recruited via various means (e.g., newsletters, information sent to PSP organizations, social media) to receive the NET intervention delivered by Zoom by a paraprofessional, (3) participants will complete online self-report questionnaires before and after the intervention and two and six months later reporting on their PTSD and depression symptoms and disability, and (4) participants, the paraprofessional, and their supervisor will complete a qualitative interview of their experience at the end of the intervention.

What did the study find? This study is still in progress. We are going to need the extension year to complete the clinical case series. To date, the research team has been focused on: (a) adapting intervention content to the firefighting population, (b) developing needed online tools with web design consultants to allow for certain elements of the intervention to be completed via a shared workspace and shared tools on Zoom, (c) hiring an appropriate paraprofessional, (d) negotiating the ethics and safety parameters of a paraprofessional-delivered, distance-delivered PTSD intervention.

Notwithstanding recent changes to operations in light of COVID-19, the research team anticipates a start to recruitment for the clinical case series in April/May.

What are the implications of this study? Findings from this study will ideally provide preliminary support for the identification of an evidence-based, distance-delivered PTSD intervention for

firefighters. Key characteristics of the intervention - namely its delivery via videoconferencing, its ability to address the experience of repeated traumas, and its low use of specialized resources in the context of paraprofessional service delivery - will make it an accessible intervention for firefighters across Canada. In our current over-burdened mental health care system, such an intervention could facilitate PTSD recovery for firefighters. Findings from this study will be used to inform the execution of a large-scale randomized controlled trial. In the long-term, this alternative intervention delivery model could shape the way mental health care is delivered to PSP in Canada.

What are the key messages? Key messages will be identified upon study completion. At this stage, the key messages are that the research team is working actively to ensure that an intervention that is developed allows for the delivery of evidence-based care in an accessible way without requiring high specialized resource use.

Provide a list of potential target audiences for this research: PTSI for PSP researchers, PSP mental health clinicians, PSP, insurance providers, PSP organizations