

# A Randomized Effectiveness Study Comparing Trauma-Focused Behavioral Therapy with Therapy as Usual for Youth

Jensen, T. K., Holt, T., Ormhaug, S. M., Egeland, K., Granly, L., Hoass, L. C., Hukkelberg, S. S., Indregard, T., Stormyren, S. D., & Wentzel-Larson, T. (2014). A Randomized effectiveness study comparing trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy with therapy as usual for youth, *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 43(3), 356-369. doi:[10.1080/15374416.2013.822307](https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2013.822307)

## What is the study about?

This study examined the effectiveness of Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress by comparing it with Treatment as Usual (TAU) in community mental health clinics. Participants were youth ages 10-18 who had experienced one or more traumatic event. Each participant was randomly assigned to a TF-CBT therapist or a TAU therapist and worked with them for 12-15 sessions.

## What did they find?

The researchers found that those who were assigned to the TF-CBT group had reported significantly lower symptoms in areas related to post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and general mental health symptoms than those who were assigned to the TAU group.

### Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Integrates cognitive, behavioral, interpersonal, family therapy, and trauma interventions
- Components of TF-CBT include psychoeducation, relaxation/coping skills, trauma narrative, cognitive processing, in vivo mastery of trauma reminders, and safety development

### Self-Monitoring and Functional Communication Tools

- Relaxation techniques/coping skills: deep breathing and meditation
- Affective regulation skills worked on via journaling and being able to identify emotions being felt within oneself and others
- Working through the cognitive triad to understand the linkage between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Safety established by identifying who they can trust in and outside of therapy; creating safety plans if they find themselves in a dangerous situation

## Why Is This Study Important?

- Trauma can impact a person in a number of ways and the emotional responses it can evoke in someone can range from mild to severe
- This was one of the first studies to use multi-traumatized youth, indicating how versatile TF-CBT can be when working with more than one type of trauma
- This is an empirically-supported intervention that addresses the complexity of trauma

## What Can School Social Workers Do?

- Incorporate components of TF-CBT with their students who have experienced trauma
- Use this study as a guideline and working with students where they are at in terms of processing their trauma
- Work with parents/guardians by implementing psycho-education and supporting them empathically