CONCURRENT TREATMENT FOR CO-EXISTING POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS IN AN OUTPATIENT SETTING

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Abstract

Victimisation, violence, and trauma are often a part of the life history of individuals with substance use disorders (SUDS), and the disorders of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse commonly occur together. The long-term effects of childhood abuse, including repeated adult victimisation, are seen as contributing factors to drug and alcohol relapse. The existing research suggests the salient presence of substance abuse, major depression and other anxiety disorders among women with trauma histories and/or posttraumatic stress symptoms. Unfortunately, many individuals suffering with symptoms of PTSD cannot attain sobriety because PTSD symptoms, such as sleep disturbance and intrusive thoughts, can drive continued substance use. The development of treatments specifically tailored to address trauma-related issues during early recovery is therefore clinically important, because comorbidity has been found to have a negative impact on the course, treatment outcome, and prognosis of both disorders.

This study was a naturalistic study of a manualised, “present focused” therapy programme - Seeking Safety - for a group of 20 women with co-existing PTSD and SUDS in an outpatient setting, with assessment at intake, end of treatment, and at six months, and was the first such study in a New Zealand setting. In general, the results demonstrated a small but positive treatment effect which was sustained over the six months. This is in line with other research findings, both for treatment of PTSD in general, and for Seeking Safety in particular.