Telehealth Implementation of Trauma-Focused Treatment for Underserved Youth in Low-Resourced Contexts in the U.S. and Puerto Rico

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The development of this presentation was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the National Telehealth Center of Excellence Award (U66 RH31458) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) of HHS as part of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network Initiative Award (1H79SM085079) and the Mental Health Awareness Training Award (1H79SM081934). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, SAMHSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.
Disparities in Access to Mental Health Care

Very few receive services
- People don’t get the services they need: Less than 1/2 of individuals with mental health problems are estimated to receive needed services (NAMI, 2021)
- Significant disparities exist for mental health access for ethnic minorities and rural populations

Even fewer complete services
- High premature termination in community treatment
  - 28%-75% depending on the study (de Haan et al., 2013)
- Hispanic and African American children are at greater risk for treatment dropout (Pellerin et al., 2010)
- Attrition rates in office-based TF-CBT are still a problem (25-50%) (Cohen et al., 2011; Olfson et al., 2009, Scheeringa et al., 2011; Sprang et al., 2012)
The Bottom Line:

We are only serving the tip of the iceberg!
Is telehealth effective?
Is telehealth as good as in-person therapy?

Effective in the U.S. & globally\(^1\)

As effective as in-person treatment\(^2\)

High satisfaction\(^2,3\)

Standard of care is the same as in-person treatment\(^4\)

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Trauma Treatment via Telehealth for Adults

Prolonged Exposure
- Clinic-based (Gros et al., 2011; Strachan et al., 2012; Tuerk et al., 2010)
- Home-based (Gros et al., 2011; Strachan et al., 2012; Tuerk et al., 2010)

Cognitive Processing Therapy
- Home-based (Maieritsch et al., 2016; Moreland et al., 2015)

Meta-Analysis
- Telehealth treatment for PTSD symptoms is effective (Sloan et al., 2011)
Trauma Treatment via Telehealth for Children

Evidence-Based Treatment Protocols with Published Telehealth Studies

- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)

Other Evidence-Based Treatment Protocols

- Child and Family Traumatic Stress Intervention (CFTSI)
- Alternatives for Families Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (AF-CBT)
- Problematic Sexual Behavior Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (PSB-CBT)
MUSC Telehealth Outreach Program for Traumatic Stress (2015)

• Established 2015

• Evidence-based trauma-focused treatment via telehealth for children across SC

• Goal of increasing access to care for populations that are underserved by office-based mental healthcare programs
  • Especially, rural populations, and racial/ethnic minorities

• School-based & home-based
How does it work?

- HIPAA compliant videoconference software
- Use of laptop computer or tablet
- Private location at school or home
- Referrals from school staff members, children’s advocacy centers, law enforcement, child welfare agencies, etc.
- Weekly therapy visits (TF-CBT) & psychiatric medication management as needed
- Access to interpreter services
TOP-TS Clinic

- Small training clinic
  - Multidisciplinary team: psychology interns, MSW, MD
- Approximately 500 visits per year
  - 70% school-based
  - 30% home-based
Program Evaluation/Outcome Data

- Over 3,700 visits with over 400 clients in 14 counties in South Carolina to date (30% of all counties in SC)
- 60% school-based, 30% home-based, 10% combination
- 85% treatment completion rate
- The first ever studies documenting the feasibility, safety, and effectiveness of telehealth delivery of child trauma treatment are published by our team at MUSC

Bottom line: Telehealth for child trauma treatment is feasible and it works!
TF-CBT Via Telehealth Pilot Study
Participants and Context

- **70** children participated in the pilot study
  - **19%**
  - **81%**

**Ages 7 to 18**
\( M=12.73; \ SD=3.34 \)

**88.6%** Racial/Ethnic Minorities
- **58.6%** Hispanic
- **30%** African American

**7 Underserved Communities**
In South Carolina

**34%**
*Received TF-CBT in Spanish*

**63%**
School-based

**34%**
Home-Based

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TF-CBT Via Telehealth Pilot Study Results

- 62 of 70 completed all components of TF-CBT (88.6%) vs. 25-60% typical completion rate for TF-CBT in studies in the United States

96.8% of children
No longer had PTSD after completing telehealth TF-CBT

81% of caregivers
Participated in TF-CBT with their child

High caregiver satisfaction

Tx effects similar to in-person TF-CBT
Kids got better (effect size=2.42)

High Caregiver Satisfaction

100% satisfied with telehealth

100% said level of rapport with therapist was as good as in-person

86% said telehealth equipment was easy to use

100% would recommend telehealth to a family member or friend.


https://doi.apa.org/doi/10.1037/ser0000605
Expansion of the TOP-TS Program (2017)

AND THEN....we receive several other grants and additional funding to expand the program.

- Calls & emails from across the country
- Telehealth webinars & presentations
The TOP-TS team has trained over 7,000 individuals in telehealth delivery of evidence-based trauma-informed practices in 23 U.S. states/territories and 3 countries since 2019.
TOP-TS Expands to a Consortium - North Dakota

First Children’s Advocacy Centers that TOP trained (2018-2019)

After 2 years of working with ND, they started working with us in a train-the-trainer model

Telehealth Outreach Program Consortium is Created
COVID-19 Pandemic Increased Demand for Telehealth (2020)

• Significant increase in requests for training and resources
• Created website to share resources
• Applied for additional grant funding to expand training & technical assistance
Videos & Fact Sheets for Caregivers & Therapists

- Worked with National Children’s Alliance to create fact sheets & brief animated videos about benefits of telemental health (English & Spanish)

[Links for Caregivers and Therapists]

https://learn.nationalchildrensalliance.org/telehealth
TOP-TS Expands to Puerto Rico (2019)

• Collaboration between MUSC, Puerto Rico Department of Education, University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus, Albizu University-Mayagüez Campus

• Created the first school-based telepsychiatry consultation program in Puerto Rico

• 5 under-served schools in the Mayagüez region of Puerto Rico
Significant Events Impacting Puerto Rico

Colonial Context

Corruption

Poverty

System Collapsing (health, education, energy)

Fiscal Board Imposing Austerity Measures

Zika Endemic

Sept 2017
Hurricanes Irma y María

Jan-Feb 2020
Earthquakes & Aftershocks

March 2020- Ongoing
COVID 19 Pandemic

2021-Ongoing
Energy Crisis

- 3,000+ deaths
- 90+ billion in damages
- Lack of access to food, water, shelter, communications
- School Closures
- Delay in aid

- Destruction of infrastructure
- School Closures
- New type of disaster
- Uncertainty and fear

- New type of disaster
- Daily impact on routines, economy, health, life
- School Closures
- Disparities in access to mental/physical healthcare and education

- Daily power outages
- Impacts healthcare, education, well-being
- Decaying infrastructure
- Mismanagement on behalf of sole energy company in PR (i.e., Luma)
Project Goals

- **Partner** with Puerto Rico’s Largest Managed Behavioral Health Organization (MBHO) to **listen** and see how we could help
- **Tailor TF-CBT** training and implementation materials for the Puerto Rican context
- **Train** Puerto Rican mental health providers in TF-CBT and provide ongoing implementation **support**
- **Evaluate** feasibility of implementation and effectiveness of TF-CBT in the Puerto Rican context

This work was supported by a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Category III grant (1U79SM063224). The funding agency had no role in the study design, collection, analysis, or writing of the manuscript. We thank our Puerto Rican partners and all our collaborators who made this work possible. Together we can change the world, one child at a time.
Implementation Timeline

**Partnership & Tailoring Based on Needs**
- APS Healthcare, largest Managed Behavioral Health Organization (MBHO) in PR + MUSC team

**Training of 15 Psychologists**
- In TF-CBT with cultural and linguistic tailoring based on Needs Assessment & Partnerships Meetings

**Technical Assistance and Consultation**
- With implementation, fidelity to the model, metrics, consultation calls, adaptation of protocols, shift to telehealth when pandemic started

Spring/Summer 2019  |  Fall 2019/Spring 2020  |  Fall 2020

~18 Months
Participants and Context

- 56 children participated in the pilot study
  - 52% boys
  - 48% girls
- Ages 5 to 18
  \((M=10.75; SD=3.43)\)
- 100% Puerto Rican Sample
- 98% Received TF-CBT in Spanish

Started as Office-Based Services

Transitioned to Telehealth

89.6% of active cases successfully transitioned within 1 month of pandemic
## Types of Index Traumas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index Trauma</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic loss/grief</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Maria</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquakes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Violence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Bullying</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Four patients reported being unable to decide between two index traumas (both were counted).

### 9 out of 10 Endorsed Polyvictimization

- Average # of Traumas: 4 (SD=2.23; Range: 1-9)
TF-CBT Pilot Implementation

36 of 56 completed all components of TF-CBT (64%)

- 5 unable to transition to telehealth (no equipment, internet, or preferred to wait for in-person services)
- 2 left treatment (moved)
- 2 left treatment (medical reasons/hospitalization)
- 11 left treatment for unknown reasons (likely due to pandemic-related stressors)

Vs. 40-60% Typical completion rate for TF-CBT in studies in the US
Vs. 86% Completion rate for TF-CBT pilot in El Salvador

6 out of 10 children
Completed all components of TF-CBT

100% of caregivers
Participated in TF-CBT with their child

18 Sessions (average for child/teens)
13 Sessions (average for caregivers)
PTSD Results Pre/Post
TF-CBT: Did Children Get Better?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metrics</th>
<th>Before M (SD) N = 56</th>
<th>After M (SD) N = 56</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Caregiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPSS-5 (&gt;31 Clinically Significant for PTSD)</td>
<td>33.13  (12.70)</td>
<td>34.67  (14.30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CPSS-5 = Child Posttraumatic Stress Scale for DSM-5 (Spanish version) 
***P<0.001
# Depression and Anxiety Results Pre/Post TF-CBT: Did Children Get Better?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Before M (SD) N = 56</th>
<th>After M (SD) N = 56</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCADS-R (T-Score &gt;70, elevated)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>57.30 (12.36)</td>
<td>67.42 (12.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>56.17 (11.75)</td>
<td>65.97 (13.79)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Large Effects
Youth report
Depression d=1.32
Anxiety d=1.18

Large Effects
Caregiver report
Depression d=1.28
Anxiety d=1.26
TF-CBT Puerto Rico Pilot Conclusions

- **Feasible to train** Puerto Rican mental health providers to fidelity on the TF-CBT model
- **Feasible to implement** TF-CBT within the largest MBHO in the island
- **Clinically significant and large effects** pre to post on PTSD, Depression and Anxiety outcomes via child and caregiver report
- **Comparable treatment completion rates** to US-based TF-CBT trials
- **Feasible to implement** TF-CBT both via office-based and telehealth services but access to equipment and internet and implementation support is crucial

**TF-CBT was feasible, acceptable and effective** in Puerto Rico despite significant disasters and hardships affecting the island before and during the project.
First School-Based Telepsychiatry Clinic in Puerto Rico: Culebra, PR (2023)

- First school-based telehealth site in Puerto Rico
- Connecting to psychiatrists in San Juan, PR to Culebra, PR
TOP-TS Expands to Colombia

- Collaboration between MUSC and Fundación Los Pisingos starting in January of 2019 at the The Annual San Diego International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment.
- Re-connected in 2020 during pandemic to provide training and technical assistance with telehealth
- Now Colombia has its first ever child-focused telemental health program in the country!
Lessons Learned along the Way

1. **Listen** to your partners and **follow the need**
2. **Team up** (e.g., North Dakota team and PR team)
3. **Address barriers** as they show up (e.g., Ipad & hotspot loaner program/telehealth boxes)
4. If there isn’t a resource, **create it and share it** (e.g., telehealthfortrauma.com/ webinars/ bilingual resources)
5. **Equitable access** to broadband internet and telehealth equipment is the greatest challenge of the future of telehealth implementation. We must work collaboratively to address these disparities in access.
6. **Partnerships with schools** are crucial for successful telehealth programs
7. Its ok if things don’t work out (at first)... some of our most successful initiatives faced roadblocks for 2-3 years... **persistence is key**
What our TOP-TS team can offer you!

The mission of the *Telehealth Outreach Program for Traumatic Stress (TOP-TS)* is for children & families to have access to evidence-based trauma services regardless of location, SES, or language.

TOP-TS will provide expert guidance to educate, train and support the mental health workforce in best practices for implementation of TF-CBT via telehealth to better reach underserved children/families in the mainland United States and Puerto Rico.

We will provide:

1. Training & Technical Assistance
2. Resources
3. Ongoing consultation

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