



Recommendations for education and training of psychologists when working with psychological trauma

Thanos Karatzias
Edinburgh Napier University & NHS Lothian
Rivers Centre for Traumatic Stress

Christina Buxton
University of Chester Programme Lead MSc
Psychological Trauma

We would like to thank the British Psychological Society Crisis Disaster and Trauma section (BPS CDT) for supporting the development of these recommendations. We would also like to thank the BPS CDT committee members for their helpful feedback on drafts of these recommendations, in particular Henryk Holowenko for his valuable contributions to early discussions. We would also like to thank Dr Sandra Ferguson for her contribution.

Recommendations for education and training of psychologists when working with psychological trauma

Context

Psychological trauma is a concern in the wider public health arena and awareness of the impact of psychological trauma is increasingly a part of the role of every psychologist, regardless of the area of psychology that they work or have been trained in. These recommendations for education and training were constructed by psychologists who are experts in the field of psychological trauma with regard to research and clinical practice, and who are also involved in the training of psychologists, and those that work with psychological trauma in the UK. These recommendations are endorsed by British Psychological Society Crisis, Disaster and Trauma Section Committee.

Purpose

The document describes a training framework that details competencies, skills and attitudes designed to act as recommendations for education and training of psychologists when working with trauma across undergraduate, postgraduate and professional training in the UK, and different areas of professional psychological practice. This framework has not been designed to instruct curricula of undergraduate and postgraduate psychology courses in the UK. Nor do they attempt to provide a prescriptive list for training in psychological trauma. Instead we envisage that these recommendations would inspire those who are responsible for the design and implementation of curricula in UK HE institutions and professional bodies. Professional psychologists may see this as informing their own best practice and similarly for those for whom they have supervisory responsibility. These recommendations can also serve as a means of identifying appropriate training needs for working with psychological trauma at all levels

Audience

Considering the above, the intended target audience for these recommendations are those involved in designing and delivering training at HE institutions, those designing curricula for professional training and practice, those who wish to engage in training in psychological trauma and those who are involved in the supervision of training and professional practice.

In developing this framework we have considered both the level of training and the potential future role of the trainees involved. The framework sits within three tiers that represent three levels of expertise (Informed, Skilled, Expert) and corresponds to the psychological knowledge and the types of practice expected at the end of that training point. The framework also recognises that appropriate supervision is necessary at every level for effective and safe practice and for good self-care.

Benchmarks

This framework was informed by a number of existing guidelines for education and training in psychological trauma and relevant higher education frameworks, these being:

Weine, S., Danieli, Y., Silove, D., Van Ommeren, M., Fairbanl, J. A., Saul, J (2002) Guidelines for international training in mental health and psychosocial intervention for trauma exposed populations in clinical and community settings. *Psychiatry* Summer 65 (2)

Cook, J. M & Newman, E (2014) A consensus statement on trauma mental health: The new haven competency conference process and major findings. *Psychological Trauma: Theory Research Practice and Policy*, Vol 6, No 4, pp 300-307

American Psychological Society (APA) (2015) Guidelines on trauma competencies for education and training. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/ed/resources/trauma-competencies-training.pdf>

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2008) The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. August 2008. Retrieved from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Framework-Higher-Education-Qualifications-08.pdf>

These recommendations are benchmarked against the above documents both in terms of the academic attainment as well as the general psychological knowledge and skills that are appropriate for that particular level.

Structure

The recommendations within the following framework are presented in tabular summary format showing by tier and level of education the outline of the recommended knowledge, skills, attitudes and responses at each. The final column represents the expected appropriate supervision and self-care needs. The remainder of the document addresses each individual tier in more detail offering a fuller description of what that entails

Framework for Guidelines on Psychological Trauma Competencies for Education & Training

Tier	Level / Qualification	Role	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes	Responses	Supervision
One: Trauma Informed	Undergraduate / BSc	Graduate psychologists who work at any setting and may be in limited contact with survivors of psychological trauma.	Systematic understanding of key areas of different psychological traumas (e.g. childhood, natural disasters) and its impacts on the individual and society.	Able to understand and critically evaluate research on psychological trauma. Demonstrate appropriate responses to disclosures.	Being mindful of individual and cultural diversity. Being respectful the needs of survivors. Understanding the limitations of own role and competencies	Be able to respond appropriately to those in psychological distress. Appropriate signposting for further support.	Any role related contact with survivors closely supervised. Access to regular supervision. Being a reflexive practitioner.
Two: Trauma Skilled	Post-graduate / MSc	Psychologists who provide a service to survivors of, and those affected by psychological trauma.	Have sufficient understanding of appropriate assessments for psychological trauma.	Assessing trauma impact and the needs of survivors for treatment and support. Provide effective trauma informed case formulation and treatment planning.	Show an understanding of the ways in which patients and professional identities can interact. Respecting agency of the individual in decision making and the power dynamics in any interactions.	To carry out effective assessment of psychological trauma and delivery of trauma informed interventions if appropriate to their role and training.	Regular reflexive supervision.

Tier	Level / Qualification	Role	Knowledge	Skills	Attitudes	Responses	Supervision
Three: Trauma Expert	Post-graduate / PhD / Professional Doctorate	Psychologists who provide services to survivors who require specialised care.	Being able to appreciate idiosyncratic responses to life events and develop appropriate care plans to meet survivor's needs.	Providing tailor made assessments and interventions to a range of trauma populations Advanced trauma specific formulations.	Commitment to ongoing training and multidisciplinary work. Be open to challenge and scrutiny from and to patients and peers.	Delivery of tailor made assessments and interventions.	Clinical supervision with an appropriate qualified supervisor Supervising others who provide trauma informed care.

Tier One: Trauma Informed

This tier describes the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes and responses attained by an individual at the point of graduation from a BPS accredited undergraduate psychology course of study. Graduate psychologists are expected to work in a variety of settings and their contact with survivors of psychological trauma is likely to be limited and delivery of interventions not part of their professional role.

Knowledge

An individual at this level must be able to demonstrate:

An appreciation of the impact of traumatic stress on individual, family and wider groups in society and an awareness of cultural influences on the experience of traumatic stress.

A systematic understanding of key areas of different psychological traumas including theoretical models, definitions of potentially traumatic events, psychological, neurological and physical health sequelae of potentially traumatic event, risk and protective factors for traumatic exposure across the lifespan.

A theoretical knowledge and understanding of a range of evidence based psychological therapies for traumatic distress, and recovery trajectories.

An awareness of the different assessment strategies for traumatic stress.

Skills

An individual at this level must be able to evidence:

An ability to apply techniques of data collection and analysis.

An ability to understand and critically evaluate research on psychological trauma.

An ability to make appropriate responses to disclosures in a sensitive and respectful manner that does not contribute to a survivor's distress.

Attitudes

An individual at this level must be able to show:

An understanding and appreciating the limitations of their role and their competency at that level.

A capacity to reflect on one's assumptions about nature and impact of life events and on how that might influence one's attitude to others.

A respect for cultural diversity and the impact of one's cultural bias.

November 2016

A respectful and compassionate attitude towards those who suffer from traumatic distress.

Responses

An individual at this level must be able to demonstrate:

A capacity to respond to those in psychological distress in a sensitive and compassionate manner

An ability to give appropriate signposting for further support.

Supervision

An individual at this level is expected to :

Have regular supervision with a chartered psychologist where any role related contact brings them into contact with trauma survivors.

Be able to access supervision, when needed and as appropriate to the role, where they are affected by unpredictable events.

Practice as a reflexive practitioner.

Tier Two: Trauma Skilled

Knowledge

An individual at this level must be able to demonstrate:

An understanding of the principles of psychological assessment and its design and delivery

An understanding of the purpose and function of assessments in order to be able to make choices of appropriate tests to be used in a range of settings and populations (different age groups or cultural groups).

An understanding of appropriate assessments for traumatic stress that can account for factors in the developmental lifespan at the time of the trauma life event(s).

Skills

An individual at this level must be able to evidence:

An ability to apply the tools and processes used in the assessment and diagnoses of traumatic distress.

An ability to utilise a bio psychosocial approach to case conceptualisation and recommend appropriate interventions to address psychological distress.

An ability to provide psychological first aid to trauma survivors, psychoeducational approaches and trauma informed interventions, *if appropriately trained to do so.*

Attitudes

An individual at this level must be able to show:

An understanding of the ways in which patients and professionals identities (gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, background, religion and national origin) can intersect in relation to trauma work and approach any interactions sensitively.

A capacity to reflect and account for personal biases in any interaction with people suffering from psychological distress.

A respect for the agency of the individual in any decision making about their care and to appreciate the power imbalance between survivors and psychologists.

Responses

An individual at this level must be able to demonstrate:

A capacity to carry out effective and sensitive assessment of traumatic life events and their impact on the individual.

November 2016

A proficiency in the effective delivery of trauma informed interventions for traumatic stress, if appropriate to their role and training.

The ability to respond to all trauma survivors in a way that enhances their sense of psychological safety.

The ability to operate within the boundaries, principles and values of the professions governing body

Supervision

An individual at this level is expected to :

Engage in reflexive practices with regard to the assessment of levels of their psychological health and engage in self-care activities that address any issues arising from that process.

Have an ongoing self-awareness of one's personal trauma history and how this may impact on trauma work.

Practice as a reflexive practitioner

Tier Three: Trauma Expert

Knowledge

An individual at this level must be able to demonstrate:

An advanced and current knowledge and understanding of the impact of traumatic stress on health and well-being.

An in depth knowledge of existing science based practices for the assessment and treatment of traumatic stress.

Skills

An individual at this level must be able to evidence:

A familiarity with the mechanisms of change of evidence based treatments of traumatic stress.

Advanced skills in intervention planning, implementation, evaluation and practice management with survivors.

The ability to produce advanced biopsychosocial case formulation and subsequent treatment planning and interventions.

A capacity to deliver evidence based and tailor made interventions for trauma survivors.

An ability to tailor any assessment and intervention to account for the nature and duration of the trauma, considering any potential or existing co-morbidities and any effects that the wider environment of the patient is likely to have on any treatment and potential recovery.

An ability to incorporate survivors' strengths and resilience into any assessment and intervention.

Being able to work appropriately with the needs of families, care givers and the wider care system.

Engagement in the production of evidence that relates to the impact and treatment of traumatic stress.

The ability to tolerate intense affect and content.

Attitudes

An individual at this level must be able to show:

A commitment to ongoing training and development to ensure that knowledge in relation to all areas is at the forefront of the discipline.

The capacity to challenge and overcome barriers to effective care for trauma survivors.

A willingness to question and challenge one clinical intervention choices.

An openness to scrutiny and feedback patients and peers.

A commitment to facilitate production of new knowledge in the field.

An ethical ongoing commitment to self-care and to ensuring good psychological health.

A commitment to multidisciplinary work and an appreciation of the skills of other health care professionals in trauma informed work.

Responses

An individual at this level must be able to demonstrate:

The ability to provide tailor made assessment and interventions to a range of trauma populations.

An ability to collaborate with wider organisations and service user groups in order construct wider future plans for trauma care in the community.

A contribution to, and promotion of, policy and practice that safeguards the welfare of trauma survivors including disaster planning.

An ability to carry out work with trauma survivors in a way that shows sensitivity to individual, cultural, organisational and community diversity.

The ability to ensure that the patient is fully informed about all stages of their assessment and treatment and that they are involved directly in any decisions made on an ongoing basis.

The capacity to safeguard the welfare of survivors by effectively liaising and cooperating with the legal and political systems ensuring all actions are in the best interest of the patient.

An ongoing contribution to appropriate training of psychologists and other health and social care professions and ensuring effective implementation of their trauma informed care.

Supervision

An individual at this level is expected to :

To have ongoing and regular clinical supervision with an appropriately qualified trauma informed supervisor.

November 2016

To ensure that there is clear separation between clinical supervisions and managerial supervision.

To build regular self-care activities into your routine and maintain a reflexive monitoring of your own psychological health.

Practice trauma work with a continual awareness of any current or historical personal vulnerability and take appropriate action where these may connect with the work carried out.

Provide supervision to those who work with trauma populations as an expert in the field.