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NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING (NLP) BASED THERAPIES FOR THE TREATMENT OF PTSD: DO THEY WORK?

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Current mainstream treatments for PTSD require skilled therapists and at least eight, often more, sessions to work. Furthermore, many patients do not benefit from these interventions and drop out rates are considerable. These difficulties often mean that workers in routinely trauma-exposed roles (e.g. emergency services, media, military) who develop PTSD can find it hard to access effective treatments preventing them from staying in, or returning to, their primary role.

NLP-based therapies have historically claimed to be highly effective and rapidly delivered, despite a lack of high quality data substantiating these claims. This talk will present data from a recent randomised controlled pilot study of a NLP based therapy with UK veterans. Sixty veterans were randomised to NLP-based therapy (n=35) [mean of 3 sessions] or Trauma Focussed Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (TF-CBT) (n=25) [mean of 18 sessions]; patients were followed up for 20 weeks post randomisation. Both therapies were delivered by previously non-trauma specialist charity sector therapists trained by experts in both forms of therapy. At follow up participants receiving NLP-based therapy experienced an 18 point reduction on the PCL-5 (a measure of PTSD symptoms scored 0-80); the PCL-5 scores in the TF-CBT group reduced by 8 points. Forty eight percent of those receiving NLP-based therapy no longer met PTSD diagnostic criteria at 20 weeks post randomisation compared to 16% receiving TF-CBT.

NLP-based therapies may offer a rapidly delivered and easy to train treatment for PTSD. However, a larger, more definitive trial is required before NLP-based therapies can be made mainstream.

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