

2023

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Cooling, L. (2023). 'Development of trauma informed mental health assessment guidelines for use in a local Single Point of Access Service (SPoA)', South West Clinical School Journal, 3 (1). <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/handle/10026.1/20687>

<https://doi.org/10.24382/nm86-ve85>

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Special Edition

#400WORDS: CHIEF NURSE RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP EVIDENCE IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS

Development of trauma informed mental health assessment guidelines for use in a local Single Point of Access Service (SPoA)

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Submitted for publication: 25 February 2023

Accepted for publication: 01 March 2023

Published: 31 March 2023

Background

The concept of trauma informed practice within healthcare services can be traced back to the USA (Harris and Fallot, 2001). Over the subsequent two-decades, the theory of trauma and its application to practice has grown within the mental health field (Sweeney *et al.*, 2016). It is now widely accepted that there is a link between childhood trauma and mental health symptoms in adults (Read, *et al.*, 2018; Sweeney, *et al.*, 2016; Portman-Thompson, 2020). However, despite these advancements, there still appears to be a lack of practice-based guidelines for use within mental health services. Cornwall's Single Point of Access (SPoA) service triages and assesses adults between 18-75 for eligibility of treatment within secondary mental health services and there is opportunity to adopt trauma informed practice guidance in the assessment process.

Review of the evidence

CINAHL (EBSCO), PsycINFO (ProQuest) and Embase (Ovid) databases were searched using the terms "trauma-informed", "mental health", "assessment" and combined with Boolean operators. Results were limited to the last 10 years. From 200 articles three were of particular relevance with additional reference tracking identifying five further articles and guidance documents.

Trauma informed guidance has been developed from the early work of Fallot and Harris (2001) and further adapted to form five key principles of trauma informed practice: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment (Scottish Government, 2021).

The evidence clearly shows that survivors of childhood trauma are more likely to access adult mental health services (Read *et al.*, 2018). A systematic review of qualitative literature related to service users' experiences of mental health assessments found that when mental health assessments are not conducted in a trauma informed way, they can be distressing and retraumatising for service users leading to disengagement and poor health outcomes (Patel *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, Sweeney *et al.*, (2022) drew on the

experiences of service users accessing mental health assessments in addition to the five key principles of trauma informed practice to create evidence-based guidelines for conducting trauma informed talking therapy assessments.

Project plan

This project will use the JBI Evidence Implementation Model (Porritt, et al. 2020) to develop evidence-informed guidelines for conducting trauma informed mental health assessments in a local mental health SPoA service. Survey data will elicit existing understanding and confidence in conducting a trauma informed mental health assessment. A Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) group with experience of mental health assessments will inform project implementation plans that aims to improve the overall experience of future service users.

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