

Psychological Interventions

Background

Childhood adversities are stressful and potentially traumatic events during childhood that can have lasting negative effects on health and wellbeing, and significantly contribute to the development of mental health problems. Intervening early to reduce and prevent the impact of adversities could help lessen the mental health burden on children and families.

Thirty-two evidence-based interventions to reduce the occurrence and impact of adversities on children under 8 years of age were identified through a literature search.

These interventions were then taken through a Delphi study, which aimed to arrive at an informed group consensus on the most feasible interventions to implement in Australia. The Delphi method is a technique for systematically collecting expert opinions through a series of step-by-step surveys, and is a preferred method to establish consensus among experts, especially where there is a lack of evidence available to support decision making.

Therapies

Psychological interventions were one of six general intervention categories that received consensus from experts involved in the Delphi study. Psychological therapies, also known as talking therapies, can help change thinking patterns and improve coping skills of parents of caregivers so they are better equipped to deal with life's stresses and conflicts.

Why choose Psychological Interventions?

The current literature shows those exposed to adverse childhood experiences have greater risk of poor mental health outcomes (such as depression, suicide attempt, conduct disorder, alcohol dependence, anxiety). Psychological therapies aim to enhance child social, emotional and behavioural competencies and resilience and can reduce the onset of mental disorders in children exposed to adversity (Sahle et al. 2021).

Additionally, psychological therapies can be used across diverse population groups and can address more than one type of adversity.

An example of a psychological intervention has been provided below. You can find out more about this intervention and others via the website: <https://www.childhoodadversity.org.au/resources/for-service-providers/>



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Table 1. An example of a Psychological intervention

Intervention	Overview	Resources and personnel needed	Does it work? (Data from quasi-RCTs)
Psychological therapy for children exposed to trauma	Psychological therapy, includes cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT). These therapies focus on improving parent-child interactions, the parent's sensitivity to child, and positive parenting. They involve different approaches, including psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, behavioural activation, and problem-solving.	Delivered by trained nurses and psychologists.	Data from meta-analyses of randomised controlled trials (gold standard of studies) showed that psychological therapies: - Improved parent-child interaction. - Reduced global psychopathology and internalising problems in children. - Engaged parents and children jointly to produce larger effects.

Note: Cost-effectiveness for the above intervention is unknown.

Implications

No single intervention alone can be expected to effectively prevent adversity and reduce the impact on child and family mental health. Adopting psychological interventions early, such as psychological therapy for children exposed to trauma, prevents the onset of mental health disorders and reduces the risk of greater adverse outcomes from occurring in later life, such as suicide, alcohol dependence or anxiety.

References

1. Ricou, M., Marina, S., Vieira, P.M. *et al.* Psychological intervention at a primary health care center: predictors of success. *BMC Fam Pract* **20**, 116 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12875-019-1005-9>
2. Sahle, B., Reavley, N., Morgan A. *et al.* A Delphi study to identify intervention priorities to prevent the occurrence and reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry*. 2021 Jul 7:48674211025717. doi: 10.1177/00048674211025717. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 34231407.
3. Sahle B., Reavley N., Morgan A. *et al.* Communication Brief: Summary of interventions to prevent adverse childhood experiences and reduce their negative impact on mental health: An evidence based review.