UBC Department of Psychiatry

# Weekday trauma therapy: a narrative review of effective intensive outpatient trauma therapy (IOTT) for PTSD treatment

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## Background & Objectives

Intensive outpatient trauma therapy (IOTT) programs, also known as day treatment programs, offer a unique treatment environment for management of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. In contrast to inpatient trauma treatment programs, IOTT programs offer weekday programming during business hours, allowing patients to stay living in their homes and to remain connected to their existing routines. In contrast to less frequent clinic appointments, IOTT offers a focused period of multimodal trauma treatment within a communal environment. The format of IOTT programs helps to mitigate the high dropout rates of conventional outpatient treatment for PTSD. The goal of my literature review was to assess which elements of IOTT programs have demonstrated benefit for treatment of PTSD.

## Methods

The study design was a qualitative systematic review with narrative synthesis. I completed a literature search across multiple databases, including PubMed, MEDLINE, PsycInfo, and Cochrane. Search terms included keywords related to trauma and the intensive outpatient treatment format. After generating this initial list of sources, I manually refined the citations to remove less relevant sources, then reviewed citations within these sources for other relevant studies while completing a full-text review. A full list of citations is available through the QR code in the reference section at the end of this poster.

## Results

The IOTT programs assessed were a heterogeneous group in terms of duration, programming, and format. All IOTT programs assessed demonstrated significant improvement in quantitative measures of PTSD symptom severity, per standard scales such as the PCL and CAPS-5. Some commonalities between these diverse programs were noted via this review, with the following themes identified from the literature:

**Modalities of Psychotherapy** 🛋️

Psychotherapeutic intervention, delivered both on an individual basis as well as via group psychotherapy, was prioritized over medication adjustments. Patients generally remained on existing medication regimens throughout their programs.

Effective psychotherapy modalities included:

- Prolonged exposure (PE)
- Cognitive processing therapy (CPT)
- Dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Complicated grief therapy
- Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)
- Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)

**Duration of Treatment** 🗓️

Program durations ranged from 4 to 15 days, with the most common formats being either 10 days (2 work weeks) or 15 days (3 work weeks). Weekends were consistently taken off when programs lasted longer than 5 days in duration.

## Results (con't)

**Supplemental Therapies** 🎨

Effective supplemental therapies included:

- Physical therapy
- Team sports (including badminton, ring hockey, baseball, basketball)
- Individual physical activity (including running, walking, hiking, yoga, circuit training, mountain biking)
- Art therapy
- Music therapy
- Psychoeducation (common topics included sleep and relationships)
- Nutrition education
- Acupuncture
- Massage therapy

**Adjunct Services** 🛠️

Adjunct services within the programs included:

- Case management
- Employment counselling
- Couples and family counselling

**Format of Delivery** 🖥️

The majority of programs were delivered in person. Since the onset of the COVID pandemic, there have been a few studies on IOTT programs delivered via telehealth, with promising results.

Image credit: https://www.pexels.com/@rdne/

## Discussion

**Demographics** 👥

The current evidence base for IOTT programs is strongest for male veterans. Additional research is needed into civilian and female populations.

**Ongoing Improvement** ⏳

Newer studies have begun to assess whether the improvement seen during IOTT programs for PTSD continues in the long-term. Recent studies showed positive initial findings at 3, 6, and 12 months post-treatment, but this is an emerging area of study.

**Mindfulness-Based Treatments** 📚

Prolonged exposure (PE) and cognitive processing therapy (CPT) were the most common psychotherapy modalities amongst the programs, with the strongest evidence base for their use. Recent studies have included mindfulness-based modalities such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), but further research is needed in this area.

## References

Please use the QR code below to access the list of references for this poster.