



RESEARCH

INFORMATION

The PICASSO Trial: Psychological Interventions for Complex PTSD and Schizophrenia-Spectrum Disorder



AIMS

Traumatic life events (e.g. childhood abuse or domestic violence), can lead to both Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) and psychosis, which are both debilitating mental health conditions. PICASSO aimed to find out whether interventions which are effective for CPTSD could be adapted to help individuals with a diagnosis of psychosis.

PICASSO also aimed to test whether people were willing to take part, whether they were happy to complete the study, and to find out if trial procedures and therapies were safe for everyone. This information is essential for a bigger trial.



KEY FINDINGS

- PICASSO was an 'umbrella trial' in which three clinical trials are run side by side, each using a different intervention to tackle CPTSD symptoms. These include one for self-concept (i.e. how people view themselves), one for emotion regulation (i.e. how people manage their emotions) and one about how people create close meaningful relationships. There were a maximum of 20 places in each trial (60 in total) and we recruited 57 people (95% of target).
- The 8-week assessment was completed by 44 of the participants (77.2%). Fifty-one participants were eligible for the 12-week assessment with 36 completing this assessment (70.5%). The other six participants joined the trial when there were less than 12 weeks until the closure date.
- We found no evidence that procedures and interventions were not safe nor acceptable.
- Eligibility and allocation was even across the different trials with 19 taking part in self-esteem, 20 in emotion regulation and 18 in relationships.
- Participants reported multiple experiences of previous trauma. The average number of life events reported was 11. Negative experiences, such as hearing voices or separation from a caregiver, were endorsed by almost everybody.





WHAT DID THE STUDY INVOLVE?

Participants could self-refer or were referred by their clinical care team to take part in the study. If eligible, they were allocated to one of the three trials. Within each trial, half of the participants took part in six sessions with a psychologist or psychiatrist, and half continued with their usual care (with no additional psychology input).

Participants were assessed by a researcher at the beginning of the study, and again after 8 and 12 weeks.

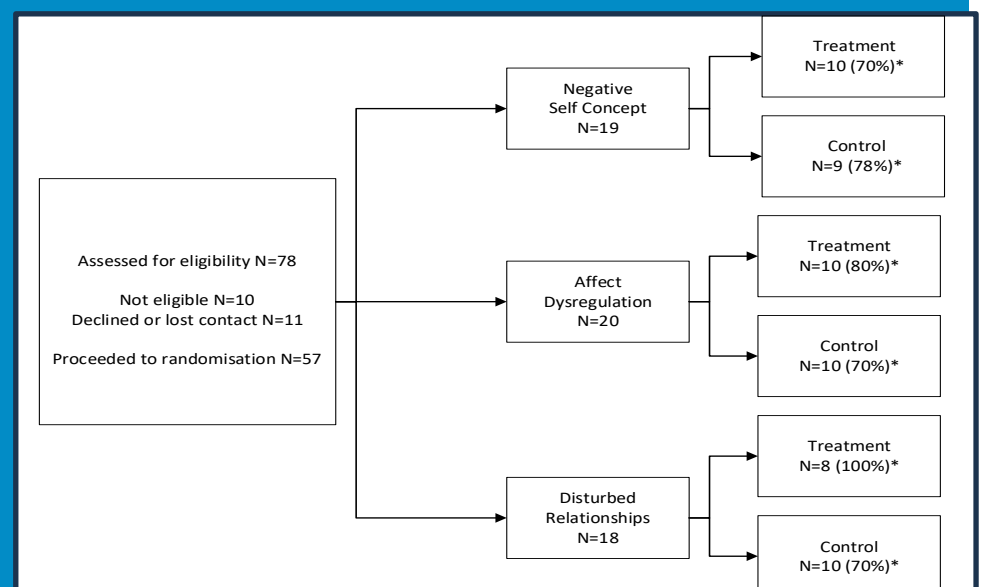
A trial steering group which included clinical staff, service users and academics worked together to monitor the study throughout.



WHAT WERE THE RESULTS AND WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

- We succeeded in conducting 57 randomisations, and in gathering post-treatment data from 77.2% of participants. The study was acceptable and safe for most participants. These findings suggest that it is feasible to conduct clinical trials of interventions to address CPTSD symptoms in people with psychosis. They also suggest that umbrella trials are feasible to conduct in this group, and in mental health generally.
- Most people presented with CPTSD difficulties in more than one CPTSD domains (e.g. emotion dysregulation, low self-concept, disturbed relationships). This means that in future it is worth exploring whether targeting more than one symptom cluster can help reduce symptoms in those with a diagnosis of psychosis.
- People with psychosis experience 'polytraumatisation' (multiple traumatic life events) which indicates that they can benefit from trauma interventions especially designed for CPTSD.

The figure summarises the flow of participants in the study. The percentage marked with a * refer to the proportion of people in each arm who attended their post-treatment assessment.





WHAT IMPACT COULD THE FINDINGS HAVE?

- **Patients:** The feasibility of PICASSO means it will now be possible to do a larger-scale study to explore whether therapies we use for CPTSD can help people with psychosis.
- **Policy:** Umbrella trials involving psychological therapies are feasible to run in a mental health setting. This could accelerate the development of psychological treatments, not only for people with psychosis but also for people with other mental health problems.
- **Practice:** People with psychosis who have also experienced psychological trauma are willing to work with health care professionals on addressing symptoms of CPTSD.



HOW WILL THE OUTCOMES BE DISSEMINATED?

- A dissemination event for PPI members has been conducted. Results from this study were discussed and PPI members have been consulted for their input into the development of PICASSO². This is next stage of the research which will involve more research sites and more participants to continue testing the effectiveness of CPTSD therapies for improving symptoms of psychosis.
- A results paper will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.
- Results have been and will continue to be presented at Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and academic conference events.



CONCLUSION

- It is feasible to conduct clinical trials of psychological interventions to target CPTSD symptoms in people with psychosis.
- It is feasible to conduct Umbrella trials in this group, and in mental health generally.
- A larger-scale version of PICASSO is warranted.



RESEARCH TEAM & CONTACT

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Additional Information

CSO funded all research costs (£277,519). The study took place between 01 January 2022 and 31 August 2023 in two Scotland sites; NHS Lothian & NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, with an additional person identification centre set up in NHS Lanarkshire.

