ASSESSING HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS AWARENESS OF PTSD IN CHILDREN WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

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Background Information

- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder research in the past has focused on adults – veterans, assault survivors, etc.

- Research now shows that children who experience medical trauma such as chronic illness or injury requiring hospitalization or surgery are also at risk for developing PTSD

- Approximately 20% of children treated in hospital emergency rooms develop PTSD (Berkowitz & Fein, 2013)
Background Information

- Symptoms of PTSD in children may not develop immediately, can be hard to miss, or may be attributed to other problems or events.

- Symptoms of PTSD are slightly different in children than adults: acting out the event in play, nightmares, general fear or sadness, irritability, or difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
Background Information

• Prevention is preferable to treatment, and awareness of risk is key to prevention
Research Questions

• Are healthcare professionals aware that some children with chronic and complex illnesses may be at risk of developing PTSD due to lengthy and/or multiple hospitalizations?

• Are healthcare professionals interested in learning more about this issue?
Hypotheses

• Awareness of this issue among healthcare providers would be low

• Providers would rate this issue as important

• Providers would be interested in further training
  • Unsure which kind(s) of trainings they might be interested in
Methods

• Correlational study

• Participants: Healthcare workers in Austin, TX

• Materials
  • PTSD in children survey, 10-item multiple choice measure
  • PTSD in children interview, 9-question measure
1. How much do you know about PTSD in this population?
2. How did you learn about PTSD in this population?
3. What percentage of children with chronic illness do you think develop PTSD?
4. How important do you think this issue is?
5. Are you interested in learning more about PTSD in this population and how it can be prevented?
6. If you are interested in learning more, how you would like to learn about it?
7. If your workplace was offering an in-person training on this issue, how likely would you be to attend this training?
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Demographics

1. What is your profession?

2. Do you currently work with children professionally?

3. Do you see children who might be at risk of PTSD in your place of work?
PTSD in children interview

1. What do you know about PTSD in children with chronic illness?
2. How would you define PTSD in children with chronic illness?
3. How is this problem currently addressed in your field? Your place of work?
4. Were you ever formally trained in how to address this problem? If so, how? Was that training sufficient?
5. Are health care workers and parents aware of this problem?
6. What could help prevent this problem?
7. What do you think should be done to address this problem? What do you think is realistic?
8. What is your profession? Do you currently work with children?
9. Would you be interested in more information about this problems and prevention efforts? and if so what format would be best for that training?
Sample Characteristics

- $N = 44$

- Psychologist/Psych Student (45%)
- Physician/Med student (32%)
- Skip (10%)
- Social Worker (7%)
- Nurse (2%)
- Medical Assistant (2%)
- Child Life Specialist (2%)
Sample Characteristics cont.

- Work with children (55%)
- Do not work with children (43%)
- Not sure (2%)
3 Assessment Areas

1. Awareness
2. Importance
3. Interest in further training
Awareness of PSTD in children

- Skip
- A lot, work with this population
- Quite a bit
- Moderate amount
- Not much
- Just learned about it now
Awareness

- “I would say most healthcare workers are aware of the problem, especially ones that have been in the field a long time, because they see it in the kids they treat.”
  - Dell Children’s Research Scientist

- “I would define it as reactions to difficult hospital experiences.”
  - Child Life Specialist

- “It manifests as nightmares, terrors, avoidance, withdrawal, crying, and having an abnormal fear response to needles, etc.”
  - Pediatric Palliative Care Physician

- “It is caused by the fear that develops around medical treatment.”
  - Social Worker
Importance of PTSD in children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance Level</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderately important</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Not important</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not important at all</td>
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Importance

• “The disorder can actually interfere with children getting the treatment that they need.”
  - Psychology Doctoral Student

• “We need a population-based public health approach with all the stakeholders involved.”
  - Psychiatrist
Interest in Further Training

- 81% interested in more training

![Pie chart showing:
- Website: 37%
- In person class or workshop: 32%
- Brochure: 23%
- Other: 7%]
Interest in Further Training

• “Trainings are great, but colleagues talking to one another is also really important.”
  - Dell Children’s Research Scientist

• “I would want a manual or something to refer back to.”
  - Psychology Doctoral Student

• “Incorporate it into the training of health care professionals. It should be built into the work hospitals do and continuing education for doctors.”
  - Psychologist
Awareness for Patients and Families

- “We need education around effects of loss of control and empowering kids.”
  - Child Life Specialist

- “Parents should be warned about signs of PTSD during and after the illness or procedure.”
  - Social Worker
Issues that came up

• “It is hard to give emotional support to a child when you are causing that child necessary pain at the same time.”
  - Child Life Specialist

• “The intention is to heal but is actually harms. This makes it harder to accept and view as PTSD.”
  - Psychologist
Implications

- Providers are somewhat aware of this issue
- Providers find this issue important
- Providers are interested in future training
  - In-person workshop/class
  - Website
  - Brochure/Manual
- Limitations
Next Steps

• In-person training
  • Who best to lead it?
  • Necessary content

• Prevention
  • Educate patients
  • Educate families

• Empirically supported treatments?
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