

What are Evidence-Based Treatments and Evidence-Based Practices?

Disentangling the Terminology

Several terms are used interchangeably, and often inaccurately, to describe a mental health treatment as being effective. You've probably heard 'evidence-based practice' or 'empirically supported treatment,' for example. Sometimes these terms are used interchangeably, but it turns out they are not synonymous, which can make it quite confusing. Let's sort it out.

Evidence-based practices (EBPs) integrate available research evidence and clinical expertise and apply them to trying to solve the problems of a particular group of patients to achieve the best possible outcomes (APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006). These practices are based on someone's reasoning and logic about what is likely to be effective, but the practice hasn't actually been subjected to a careful scientific analysis.

In contrast, **Evidence-based or empirically supported treatments (EBTs, ESTs)** are therapeutic interventions that have scientific data to indicate that they are effective in achieving a desired outcome. Most researchers and professionals agree that at least two rigorous research studies, specifically *randomized controlled* trials, are needed for a treatment to be labeled as an EST.

What is a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)?

- RCTs are the gold standard in scientific research studies.
- An RCT involves comparing the outcomes of one treatment intervention to something else, like another treatment, or a waitlist control group (i.e., clients who are placed on a waiting list for a period of time and then receive the treatment).
- Clients are 'randomly assigned' to the active treatment vs. comparison treatment group. Randomization is key to ensuring that the two groups are similar to one another.
- A treatment is considered to be effective if clients in the active treatment condition achieve significantly better outcomes than those in the comparison group.

Why Should We Care about EBTs & EBPs?

- EBTs have been rigorously tested and demonstrated to be effective.
- EBTs can shorten recovery time and result in better outcomes than usual care or no treatment at all.
- A failure to use proven treatment interventions can impede recovery and in some cases, increase the risk of harm.

How to Select an EST for Problems Related to Mass Violence Incident (MVI)

While there are a number of interventions that claim to treat problems related to traumatic events, not all of them are evidence-supported or even evidence-based. So, how to choose?

- Several organizations have websites or online databases that provide descriptions of interventions for symptoms related to a traumatic event, such as an MVI, and some of these do include ratings for the level of research support:
 - The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (www.cebc4cw.org/) promotes effective implementation of EBPs for children and families involved in the child welfare system. This site includes a searchable database of programs and the available research evidence. This includes ESTs that target trauma-related mental health and behavioral problems.
 - The National Center for PTSD (www.ptsd.va.gov/understand_tx/choose_tx.asph) includes brief descriptions of ESTs for posttraumatic stress disorder specifically.
 - The American Psychological Association (<https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/index>) provides a clinical practice guideline for the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder, which includes a listing of interventions that are 'strongly' and 'conditionally' recommended.
 - The Cochrane Collaboration (www.cochrane.org) publishes results of extensive high-quality, up- to date systematic reviews of the available research literature to inform decisions in health care.
 - The Campbell Collaboration (www.campbellcollaboration.org) also produces systematic reviews for evidence-based policy and practice.
 - The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (www.nctsn.org), funded by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, publishes fact sheets and information about a variety of ESTs for trauma-related mental health and behavioral problems for youth and their families.