White Paper

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Early Intervention (EMDR EI)

Developed by members of the 2018 EMDR Early Intervention and Crisis Response Summit Conference Organizing Committee

Clare Blenkinsop
Rolf Carriere
Derek Farrell
Marilyn Luber

Louise Maxfield
Mark Nickerson
Udi Oren
Rosalie Thomas

Introduction

The purpose of this White Paper is to encourage the further development of EMDR Early Intervention (EMDR EI), to describe its uses and advantages, to identify questions and topics for priority research, and to identify strategies to expand its use in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs). These topics will be discussed and explored in depth during the Global Summit Conference EMDR Early Intervention and Crisis Response: Current Practices, Research Findings, Global Needs and Future Directions, to be held in Boston, 20-22 April 2018. The White Paper will remain a work-in-progress before, during and after the Summit Conference, and will serve as the basis of a subsequent overview journal article.

Problem statement

Exposure to traumatic events and circumstances has a devastating impact on the lives of tens of millions of people around the world each year. The twin crises caused by man-made and natural disasters mean that the incidence of trauma is on the rise. Research has shown that the adverse effects of such events and circumstances go well beyond mental and physical health problems. Trauma also takes its toll on communities and nations, for example by reducing productivity, compromised educability, and an increased probability of violence, abuse and renewed trauma.

The treatment gap (defined as the difference between need for, and availability of/access to professional services) is almost certainly widening, especially in situations of violent conflict and natural disasters in economically under-resourced locations. The shortage of mental health professionals worldwide, that has severe negative impacts on communities already facing overwhelming challenges, is a major concern.

A substantial portion of Individuals experiencing recent traumatic events suffer from acute traumatic distress, with symptoms of intrusion, avoidance and hyperarousal, associated with significant impairment in daily functioning. Many will recover spontaneously, but some will go on to develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mood disorder, or other psychological and physical disorders, with associated functional impairments. Research suggests the possibility that early intervention, which reduces or eliminates acute distress, may prevent the development of subsequent disorders.
Many EMDR-based psychological approaches and protocols have been developed, with the goal of addressing acute distress and preventing the development of PTSD, other disorders, and future complications. Positive results have been reported with several EMDR-based interventions. However, many of these innovative approaches have yet to be adequately tested and supported by research. Many questions remain unanswered and there is an urgent need to investigate how effective and efficient these protocols are, and how they compare to other early interventions. Further questions relate to conceptual and scientific issues, and still others focus on operational and organizational issues. See Appendix 4 for a list of published EMDR EI research studies.

**EMDR therapy**

EMDR therapy, originally developed for the treatment of PTSD, has evolved into a comprehensive psychotherapy approach to a variety of mental health and physical difficulties. It includes a standardized three-pronged protocol that should only be administered by licensed mental health professionals. It is based on the Adaptive Information Processing (AIP) model. As EMDR therapy has evolved, a number of specialized adaptations and variants have come to the fore, all based on the AIP model. One of these is EMDR EI.

**Definition of EMDR EI**

The term EMDR EI is currently used in various ways. For the purpose of this White Paper, EMDR Early Intervention (EMDR EI) describes the use of several specific protocols, intended to address trauma at the earliest possible time. Sometimes administered within hours of a traumatic event, treatment is typically provided within the first three months after exposure. Some writers have suggested that EI need not arbitrarily be limited to that three-month period, but for the purpose of this White Paper we will use the three-month definition to focus our discussions. All EMDR EI protocols include the client focusing attention on the disturbing memory while experiencing bilateral stimulation, as well as other specific and unique procedural elements. See Appendix 3 for a list of EMDR EI protocols.

**Use of EMDR EI**

EMDR EI protocols include both individual and group interventions and are designed to reduce the negative impact of acute stress from recent events, or even from certain types of ongoing circumstances, by focusing on stabilization, symptom reduction, and reprocessing of trauma memories.

EMDR EI procedures have been explored in many settings and locations since the early days of EMDR therapy. They have been applied with children, adolescents, and adults, after man-made and natural disasters, in refugee camps, with first responders, medical and military personnel, in schools, and in many other circumstances. EMDR EI is increasingly being offered to trauma survivors throughout the world. It is provided by independent EMDR practitioners, by agencies and organizations, and by

---


2 Different presenters often use different terms to describe their own adaptations or variants of EMDR EI: EMDR-based EI, EMDR-EI, EEI, EI, Early Psychological Intervention or EPI, Early Psychological Preventive Intervention, Immediate EMDR Intervention, Early EMDR Intervention and early intervention(s), Low-intensity EMDR, and Restricted Processing Interventions. For the purpose of this White Paper, the term used is EMDR Early Intervention, EMDR EI, or simply EI.

3
EMDR EI Research

There are at least 23 published research studies that have investigated the use of EMDR EI procedures in the treatment of posttraumatic stress, within 3 months following the traumatic episode. (See Appendix 4). These studies consistently showed a significant decrease in posttraumatic symptoms with results being maintained at follow-up. Fourteen studies were uncontrolled, three were non-randomized controlled studies, and six were randomized controlled trials (RCTs). All nine controlled studies evaluated the effectiveness of individual EMDR EI. Most used a waitlist control and all found a significant difference between the improvement noted for EMDR EI participants compared to those waiting for treatment.

Three of the controlled studies compared an EMDR EI intervention to another therapy. An RCT\(^4\) comparing one session of Francine Shapiro’s Recent Event Protocol (REP) with Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) and another RCT\(^5\) comparing three sessions of EMDR PROPARA with supportive counseling found the EMDR EI interventions to produce significantly reduced symptoms of PTSD, compared to the treatment control. Similarly, a matched control study\(^6\) compared one session of URG-EMDR and eclectic therapy, reporting significantly superior results for URG-EMDR, compared to eclectic therapy. All results were maintained at 3-month follow-up. The effect of R-TEP on symptoms of depression was studied in two RCTs\(^7,8\), finding a significant decrease in depressive symptoms, and, in one study, a significant difference between treated and waitlist participants. That study is also the only study to examine whether EMDR-EI increased resilience, but the results showed no significant effect.

These positive results are promising, and there is strong consistent evidence that EMDR EI reduces distress, with effects maintained at follow-up. However, no study has yet examined whether EMDR EI prevents the development of, or results in the remission of diagnosed PTSD or any other mental health disorder. No study has shown whether EMDR EI increases resilience. No study has compared EMDR EI to a trauma-focused CBT intervention. Future research is needed to investigate these and other critical questions. In addition, as innovative EMDR EI protocols are developed and applied, attention needs to be focused on conducting systematic research.

EMDR EI’s advantages

Some EMDR EI procedures are known to reduce and/or eliminate symptoms of traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety, with results maintained at follow-up (usually about three months post-}


Adverse reactions have not been reported and EMDR EI’s appear to be safe and effective, with individuals of all ages, genders, and varied nationalities and ethnicities.

EMDR EI treatments are brief interventions, which can be administered on consecutive days, and/or twice a day. They are easy to use, portable, accessible, and short-term treatments. They can be used in disaster zones, hospitals, emergency rooms, schools, clinics, agencies, refugee camps, and private therapy practices. They can be provided in a group format or to individuals.

EMDR EI interventions can also be viewed as efficient and inexpensive screening tools, providing a low intensity treatment that is adequate for the majority of sufferers, while simultaneously identifying individuals who require more intensive and costly treatment.

Any successful trauma treatment produces significant economic, social and cultural benefits for individuals, families and communities, although the efforts to quantify these benefits remain limited.

Possible future directions for the advancement of EMDR EI

The immense backlog of trauma, and the continuous addition of new cases, challenges the world’s capacity to deal with this largely unrecognized global burden of trauma. EMDR EI holds the promise to make a significant contribution, by professionals, towards the elimination of this burden.

But bridging the treatment gap altogether requires the creation of additional capacities. There is a need for training and deploying large numbers of non-mental health professionals as well as fully trained and licensed professionals. This shortage of mental health personnel is particularly apparent following large-scale crises in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Non-mental-health professionals (see Appendix 1) are needed to extend mental health capacity, not to replace or compete with licensed mental health professionals.

The WHO has recently rolled out its CBT-based Low Intensity Intervention (LII) program for implementation by non-specialists, covering the whole range of mental health conditions, including depression, suicidality, epilepsy, substance abuse etc. This program, part of WHO’s mental health global action plan (mhGAP), comprises a large-scale training and evaluation scheme aimed at the shifting and sharing of tasks involving mental health interventions previously reserved for professionals. While this program is still in its test stage, it is based on earlier trials that provided scientific evidence of effectiveness. WHO has already developed guidelines and packages for the training, deployment and supervision of their LII non-specialists. For more information on Low Intensity CBT, see Appendix 2.

EMDR EI guidelines and implementation standards and procedures need to be further articulated and established. This should be followed by the development of recommended intervention packages designed for specific intervention conditions. Appropriate training methods for such interventions should be developed. Maximum use should be made of the new possibilities offered by the new technologies (MOOCs, apps, social media, etc.)

Reports and research regarding the value of EMDR EI should be gathered and evaluated, including those related to medium- to large-scale intervention projects. Presentations at the Summit Conference will

---

bring together many new studies. A series of research questions, both scientific and conceptual are
listed below, together with some operational and implementation issues.

Open questions regarding EMDR EI

Research is needed to answer the following clinical questions.

- **What is the potential impact of EMDR EI following a traumatic event?** Does it reduce
development of physical or psychological symptoms? Reduce the number of problematic
behaviors, such as substance abuse? Prevent the development of PTSD? Increase resilience?
Positively impact quality of life? Assist in economic recovery for individuals and communities?

- **What is the optimal utilization of EMDR EI?** What is the optimal timing of interventions, choice
of protocol, selection of participants, length of intervention? What data can readily be collected
in time of crises?

- **How do the EMDR EIs compare with other early mental health interventions?** Data is needed
regarding safety, effectiveness, ease of delivery, and ability to utilize non-mental health
professionals as part of an intervention team.

Conceptual or policy questions

- **Access:** How can EMDR EI services be better known and more easily accessed by agencies,
organizations, first-responders, individual consumers?

- **Disaster and crises response in low and middle-income countries (LMICs).** What is the best
way to identify mental health needs and gain community support for intervention? Can EMDR
EI services extend their reach and be implemented effectively by task sharing with trained non-
specialist health care providers? To build capacity in LMICs, what is needed to ensure that such
services are sustainable and of sufficient quality? Is the provision of EMDR EI economically
efficient? What is the benefit/cost ratio for EMDR EI when compared to other interventions, or
to no mental health intervention?

- **Should EMDR EIs be included in large-scale and ongoing intervention models around the
globe?** If so, how can EMDR EI methods be integrated with comprehensive health and mental
health care services globally?
Appendix 1. Categories of non-mental-health professionals

It is not easy to delineate who is included in the term non-mental-health professional, given the differences in needs, resources, settings and cultures. WHO now uses the term non-specialist health care provider. This term can be considered to cover the following three groups:

(i) allied professionals-- medical professionals, including doctors, nurses, midwives who come in frequent contact with traumatized people
(ii) first-responders-- including emergency service providers, firefighters, police and military, who have first-hand involvement with traumatic events and affected people, and who are increasingly prepared to offer early psychological treatment to their colleagues and peers, and to others
(iii) paraprofessionals-- trained, skilled and supervised caregivers (but not licensed mental health professionals), including religious counsellors, voluntary health workers, trusted community caregivers and elders, and others.

Where there are no better alternatives, all these non-mental-health professionals are the best ‘mental health people’ available in low-resource settings and crisis situations.

Appendix 2. Low Intensity CBT

Low-intensity CBT (LI CBT) is a relatively new, empirically-supported, cost-effective treatment intervention that aims at ‘improving access’ by ensuring availability, utilization, effectiveness, equity, efficiency and client-centeredness. It is delivered in a variety of different forms, including guided and unguided internet-based formats, CBT group interventions, and self-help strategies. In addition, it utilises several delivery formats and platforms, including telephone, email, SMS, as well as face-to-face sessions. These formats can be either personalised or automated.

Paraprofessionals trained in LI CBT are supported by licensed mental health workers to ensure treatment fidelity, provide support (particularly with difficult/challenging clients), enhance skills, and reinforce application. LI CBT paraprofessional training involves LI CBT programme delivery models; developing safe and effective working relationships; promoting self-help and providing support; developing and fostering relationships with key collaborative partners and stakeholders and conducting risk assessment, triage and referring on. The advantages of LI CBT include improving speed of access and the total number of people who can access evidence-based treatment interventions, flexibility in service delivery, capacity building, improved responsiveness, promoting client choice and informed decision making, and cost-effectiveness of services.

---

Appendix 3.

EMDR EI PROTOCOLS
Rosalie Thomas, Ph.D., Psychologist

Stabilization protocols (Use within minutes or hours)
- **EMDR Emergency Room (EMDR-ER)** Guedalia & Yoeli (2003)
- **Immediate Stabilization Procedure (ISP)** Quinn (2018)

EEI protocols for individual treatment (Use from 24 hours to 78 hours)

EEI protocols for individual treatment (Use from two days to six months)
- **EMDR Protocol for Recent Critical Incidents (EMDR PRECI)** Jarero & Artigas (2011)

EEI protocols for group treatment (Use from two days and beyond)
- **EMDR Integrative Group Treatment Protocol (EMDR IGTP):**
  - **Adult** - Jarero & Artigas (2000)
  - **Adolescents (Between 14 and 17 Years) and Adults Living with Ongoing Traumatic Stress** Artigas & Jarero (2009)
- **Group Traumatic Episode Protocol (G-TEP)** E. Shapiro (2013)
- **Imma Group Protocol** (Based on IGTP for children 5 years and older). Laub & Bar-Sade (2009, 2013)

Descriptions of these protocols may be available in related research studies listed in Appendix 4. For more information, please contact the developers, or see:


Appendix 4.

RESEARCH ON EMDR EARLY INTERVENTION PROTOCOLS
Louise Maxfield, Ph.D., Psychologist

Part A: Studies in which treatment was provided within 3 months post-trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recent Event Protocol (EMDR-RE) Developed by Francine Shapiro</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recent Traumatic Episode Protocol (R-TEP) Developed by Elan Shapiro and Brurit Laub</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCTs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controlled Study</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMDR Protocol for Recent Critical Incidents (EMDR-PRECI) Developed by Jarero et al.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCTs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controlled Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EMDR Protocol with Paraprofessionals in Acute Trauma Situations (EMDR-PROPARA) Developed by Jarero et al.

RCT
Jarero, I., Amaya, C., Givaudan, M., & Miranda, A. (2013). EMDR individual protocol for paraprofessional use: A randomized controlled trial with first responders. *Journal of EMDR Practice and Research, 7*(2), 55-64. [https://doi.org/10.1891/1933-3196.7.2.55](https://doi.org/10.1891/1933-3196.7.2.55)

Urgent EMDR Treatment Protocol (URG-EMDR) Developed by Cyril Tarquino & Marie-Jo Brennsthuhl

Controlled Study

Case Study

Group Treatment

**EMDR Integrated Group Treatment Protocol (EMDR-IGTP) Developed by Jarero et al.**

Case Studies

Allon, M. (2015). EMDR group therapy with women who were sexually assaulted in the Congo. *Journal of EMDR Practice and Research, 9*(1), 28-34. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/1933-3196.9.1.28](http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/1933-3196.9.1.28)


## RESEARCH ON EMDR EARLY INTERVENTION PROTOCOLS
### Part B: Studies providing treatment for “ongoing” or historical trauma

### Individual Treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocol</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Group Treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocol</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### EMDR Integrated Group Treatment Protocol Adapted for Adolescents and Adults with Ongoing Traumatic Stress (EMDR-IGTP-OTS) Developed by Jarero et al.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocol</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>