

Conceptualizing Trauma-focused Physiotherapy: A Specialized Treatment Approach for Survivors of Trauma

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Background: The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) provide ‘Trauma- Focused’ (TF) physiotherapy services and have conceptualized this as specialized mental health physiotherapy service that directly addresses the physical, psychological, and social effects of psychological trauma and ongoing stress within the unique scope of practice of the physiotherapist. This conceptualization is the first of its kind and can bolster the role of physiotherapy in providing services for survivors of trauma.

Purpose: Conceptualizing TF physiotherapy supports the development and delivery of services in CVT and can drive the physiotherapy profession to increase access to services for survivors of trauma globally.

Methods: The conceptualization includes foundational literature, scope of practice, models and techniques, and examples of applications in treatment and clinical education. CVT has applied it for over 10 years through its international programs with biopsychosocial outcomes evaluated by CVT’s research department and additional initiatives.

Results: CVT developed and trained multiple partner organizations globally in treatment programmes that center on this conceptualization of TF physiotherapy. Evaluations of these services reveal TF physiotherapy to be feasible and relevant in a variety of contexts including communities in Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, and Kenya. Higher education physiotherapy institutions globally have requested support in identifying the TF learning needs for students.

Conclusions: This conceptualization has proved relevant for physiotherapy services for survivors of trauma in various areas of the world. It provides a foundation for the mental health physiotherapy community to further drive services that directly address the physical, emotional, and social effects of psychological trauma.

Keywords: Trauma; Biopsychosocial, PTSD, Ongoing-stress

