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Melissa L. Anderson
University of Massachusetts Medical School

Et al.

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Piloting Signs of Safety: A Deaf-Accessible Toolkit for Trauma and Addiction
Melissa L. Anderson, PhD\textsuperscript{1}, Kelly S. Wolf Craig, PhD\textsuperscript{2}, Amanda Sortwell, MS, IMF\textsuperscript{3}, Douglas M. Ziedonis, MD, MPH\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}Department of Psychiatry, Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC), University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA; \textsuperscript{2}Department of Developmental Services, East Hartford, CT; \textsuperscript{3}Deaf Community Behavioral Health Services, San Diego, CA

The Deaf community - a minority group of 500,000 Americans who use American Sign Language (ASL) - experiences trauma and addiction at rates double to the general population. Yet, there are no evidence-based treatments that have been evaluated to treat trauma, addiction, or other behavioral health conditions among Deaf people.

Current evidence-based treatments fail to meet the needs of Deaf clients. One example is Seeking Safety, a well-validated therapy for people recovering from trauma and addiction. Seeking Safety includes a therapist guide and client handouts for 25 therapy sessions, each teaching clients a safe coping skill. When Seeking Safety was used with Deaf clients, unique barriers were revealed with regard to the client materials: they were presented in complex English instead of ASL, nor sensitive to Deaf people’s culture, social norms, and history of oppression.

To address these barriers, Dr. Anderson assembled a team of Deaf and hearing researchers, clinicians, filmmakers, actors, artists, and Deaf people in recovery to develop Signs of Safety, a Deaf-accessible toolkit to be used with Seeking Safety. Signs of Safety is comprised of a therapist companion guide and population-specific client materials, including visual handouts and ASL teaching stories on digital video, which present key learning points via an “educational soap opera.”

Dr. Anderson is currently leading a pilot study of Signs of Safety. Preliminary results show that participants are reporting symptom reduction from baseline to follow-up and high levels of satisfaction with the model, giving us the confidence to further pursue this line of research.

Contact:
Melissa L. Anderson, Ph.D.
Psychologist and Clinical Researcher
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry
University of Massachusetts Medical School
Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center
Voice: 508-856-5820; VP: 774-670-4486; Fax: 508-856-8700