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Melissa L. Anderson
University of Massachusetts Medical School

Kelly S. Wolf Craig
Department of Developmental Services, East Hartford, CT

Amanda Sortwell
Deaf Community Behavioral Health Services, San Diego, CA

See next page for additional authors

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Melissa L. Anderson, Kelly S. Wolf Craig, Amanda Sortwell, and Douglas M. Ziedonis

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Piloting Signs of Safety: A Deaf-Accessible Toolkit for Trauma and Addiction
Melissa L. Anderson, PhD1, Kelly S. Wolf Craig, PhD2, Amanda Sortwell, MS, IMF3, Douglas M. Ziedonis, MD, MPH1
1Department of Psychiatry, Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC), University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA; 2Department of Developmental Services, East Hartford, CT; 3Deaf 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