

Benchmark Research Proposal

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Author Note

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I acknowledge a personal history with the therapeutic technique mentioned here, which informs my interest in the topic, but does not hinder my ability to be objective in the study of this subject.

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Abstract

After finding the gap in the literature and mapping out the research design, the next step in writing a research paper is writing your research proposal, which will be shown to all stakeholders involved. Research proposals cover how the research found the gap through literature, how the study they are conducting fills the gap, what research question was created due to this gap, why it is important, as well as the research design the researcher has created and why. Since the research conducted for this paper is qualitative, the author will also find the strategy of inquiry used, how the strategy can enhance trust in the data, and how the research conducted will contribute to the counseling field. As the research is done in a faith-based university, the author will also connect the research to biblical principles and/or scripture.

Keywords: EMDR, adolescents, PTSD, abuse/neglect, biblical principles/scripture

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Literature Review

While EMDR is a validated treatment for adults, there is a critical gap in understanding how it specifically addresses complex trauma that is caused by abuse and/or neglect in adolescents. As Rolling et al. state, while there is evidence in using EMDR to treat PTSD in adolescents and children due to a single traumatic experience, there are only a few studies that cover C-PTSD (which is complex PTSD due to prolonged exposure to trauma). In fact, at the time of the study done in 2024, there were only three controlled studies, and only two of them were connected to complex trauma. (Rolling et al., 2024).

Because the adolescent brain is still in development, standard adult EMDR protocols may not account for the levels of cognitive maturity. As Grant & Wethers (2024) point out, neurodivergent children and adolescents, which are children who have an abnormal neural pathway often due to a disability or from adverse childhood experiences, often process information differently than neurotypical children. Things such as processing speed, cognitive awareness, receptive language ability, and executive functioning may present differently for neurodiverse children and adolescents. (Grant & Wethers, 2024). Research must include these developmental influences to maximize the treatment effectiveness for this specific population.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of EMDR treatment for adolescents suffering from PTSD due to abuse or neglect. EMDR is mainly a treatment that uses many psychotherapeutic techniques. According to Amery & Serrano (2025). EMDR uses things such as “mindfulness, resource development, imagined exposure, identifying core beliefs, cognitive appraisal of the trauma, desensitisation, cognitive change, and accessing adaptive

memories” for treatment. However, these techniques need to be adapted to the age and development of the patient.

By examining how developmental factors and cognitive maturity impact the processing of trauma, this study can provide evidence-based insights for the EMDR protocols. As Cruz et al. (2022) point out, children and adolescents are more likely to lack the cognitive and behavioral capacity to cope with trauma effectively. Especially when the trauma is a repeated event such as abuse or neglect. Oftentimes, the repeated trauma can break the development of secure attachment. (Cruz et al., 2022). Ultimately, by taking these things into account, this study can improve EMDR treatment outcomes for victims of early childhood mistreatment.

This research is significant to the field as it addresses the critical need for evidence-based interventions such as EMDR for adolescents suffering from the complex aftermath of trauma inflicted from abuse and neglect. This aftermath can lead to a case of C-PTSD, which, according to Atmaram et al. (2023), can lead to symptoms such as negative beliefs about self, sudden and/or frequent mood changes, emotional outbursts, trouble keeping relationships, disorientating episodes, and self-harm/suicidal ideation. (Atmaram et al., 2023). This study will help advocate (either positively or negatively) for the use of EMDR and include adaptations that can be used to the protocol to ensure efficacy of the treatment, which will ultimately improve long-term psychological care for vulnerable youth.

Method

Research Question

The research question, as followed by the literature review, is: What is the effectiveness of EMDR for treating adolescents with PTSD due to abuse and/or neglect?

The Importance of the Research Question

The significance of this research question is on a more in-depth look at the effectiveness of EMDR on C-PTSD or Complex PTSD. Most present literature only provides evidence of a single case incident and the effectiveness of EMDR used in these cases. This research question looks into the use of EMDR on long-term exposure to trauma (i.e., abuse/neglect).

Research Design

This study would use an experimental field design. Since the study is testing the effectiveness of EMDR and not describing it, the study would need to manipulate a variable (giving EMDR to one group while another group receives usual treatment for PTSD and compare outcomes) The study will lean more towards a factorial design since it will also be looking at the interaction between the treatment and the age/development of the adolescent.

Qualitative data

The data from this research will be qualitative. The best strategy of inquiry will be a qualitative case study. The study will have cases of adolescents from the different ages/developmental stages when applying EMDR and measure the effectiveness in each stage and any adaptations made. Using interview transcripts, therapist clinical notes, and observations as gathered data. One way we can enhance trustworthiness is to include interviews of family, friends, and community members. This provides outside data showcasing improvement in daily life. This research investigation will contribute to the counseling field by providing more evidence of the effectiveness of EMDR on c-PTSD.

Integration

Biblical Principle

The biblical principle this research covers is in the healing of past (or in this case, childhood) trauma. God likes to remind us that we are not alone in our suffering, for Jesus is suffering alongside us. (Hebrews 4: 15-16). However, he longs to help us renew ourselves to take off the old self and put on the new self. (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:22-24, 2 Corinthians 4:16). Throughout our healing, God is there to remind us that he has good plans for our future (Jeremiah 29:11). So he wants us to find the peace we search for in the present. (*How to Seek Christ as You Cope with Trauma* | *Core Christianity*, 2023)

Biblical Integration into Research

As Jarrell (2025) states, although many Christian counselors (CC) hesitate to use EMDR in their practice, it is still important to train the counselors in EMDR because it expedites healing from past trauma. Christian counselors can adapt EMDR using the Adaptive Information Processing Model, which works alongside the biblical principles CC's hold. He also adds,

“EMDR works as a functioning tool that brings genuine resolution to traumatic experiences that clients struggle to process and, therefore, requires training. Therefore, licensed and unlicensed counselors can meld biblical principles and EMDR” (Jarrell, 2025). Jarrell stresses the importance of CC’s being willing and able to undergo training to use EMDR with their clients since many more of them are facing clients from traumatic background that cannot or struggle to use traditional talk therapy.

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