

COMMENTARY

Back to School: Review of School Based Interventions: Comment on Rolfsness and Idsoe (2011)

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We comment on a recently published article in the Journal of Traumatic Stress that reviewed school-based interventions related to trauma. We point out the recent book published by Guilford Press on the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Practice Guidelines (2009), which also provides a thorough review of this literature, and discuss reasons why this review may have been missed.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms place children at high risk for psychological and medical problems but few receive effective treatments in clinical settings. Since most children attend school, school-based treatment may provide a more accessible alternative. In the April issue of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Rolfsnes and Idsoe (2011) provide an excellent review and meta-analysis of school-based intervention programs for youth PTSD symptoms exclusive of complex responses to child maltreatment. We commend the authors for raising awareness about the importance and diversity of school-based child trauma treatments.

This commentary is written to address the implications of a statement in that article, i.e., that although systematic reviews of interventions for traumatized children have been conducted, “reviews focusing specifically on school-based interventions are virtually nonexistent” (p. 155).

In 2009, The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) published the second edition of its PTSD practice guidelines book (Foa, Keane, Friedman, & Cohen, 2009), which

includes expanded child and adolescent review chapters and guidelines, respectively, on assessment, acute interventions, cognitive behavioral therapy, pharmacotherapy, psychodynamic therapy, creative arts therapy—and school-based interventions (Jaycox, Stein, & Amaya-Jackson, 2009). The latter review chapter largely overlaps with the review published in the April issue.

The ISTSS has made ongoing efforts to disseminate their PTSD practice guidelines. For example, all ISTSS members were invited to comment on the guidelines; since 2009, the ISTSS has continuously posted the guidelines on its website (<http://www.istss.org/TreatmentGuidelines/3337.htm>). Guilford Press has widely publicized the guidelines book.

Despite these efforts, the guidelines failed to reach the authors of the above article or those involved in the peer-review process. How did this happen? Like most book chapters, the ISTSS guidelines are not indexed in databases, highlighting the limitations of relying only on databases for literature reviews. The original ISTSS practice guidelines were published in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* in 2000, but the second edition of the guidelines were not, thus eliminating this route of guideline dissemination. Dozens of psychology, psychiatry, and child trauma peer-reviewed journals as well as online journals, books, blogs, webinars, and other resources compete for professionals’ attention; simply keeping up with the child treatment literature can be a fulltime job. Several other organizations distribute treatment guidelines (e.g., Forbes et al., 2010); non-ISTSS members might not be aware of our guidelines and some view ISTSS as an “adult” organization

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and might not consider it a likely source for school-based practice guidelines.

What can we learn from this experience? Because review articles of the same topic are likely to include overlapping information, searching beyond databases specifically for practice guidelines and review chapters could inform potential authors of existing reviews. Organizations like ISTSS that publish both peer-review journals and practice guidelines should use the former to optimally disseminate the latter. This could include publishing the treatment guidelines in the journal as is done by many organizations (e.g., American Psychiatric Association; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry); or alternatively by prominently publicizing the guidelines so that authors who submit manuscripts to the journal would be expected to know about the guidelines. We strongly recommend publication in the peer-reviewed journal so that the guidelines are included in a searchable database since this provides much broader dissemination. This would likely have prevented the current situation. Finally, this is an opportunity to remind readers of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* about all of the ISTSS practice guidelines, including those for children

and adolescents. These outstanding resources address treatment of traumatized individuals across the developmental spectrum and we encourage readers to explore them further.

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