

Perth Voices Clinic

CONSUMER UPDATE

The Perth Voices Clinic

is a psychological treatment, teaching and research clinic for people who hear voices or have other unusual perceptual experiences.

It also provides a facility for advanced training of future clinical psychologists and other mental health professionals

Trauma-focussed therapy for people who hear voices:

What do we already know about this topic?

Auditory hallucinations, or voice hearing (experiences of hearing a noise or voice in the absence of a corresponding external stimulus) is a symptom most people associate with psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia. Voice hearing, however, can be associated with a wide variety of mental health problems. In fact, instances of trauma and, in particular, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have been found in a high number of people experiencing voice hearing. One theory behind this is that those suffering from PTSD may process their past memories of traumatic events in a way that they become externalised in the present and therefore interpreted as an immediate outside threat, sometimes in the form of voices or visions. To date, few psychological treatments have addressed both trauma and voice hearing.

What did we find out? Imagery rescripting (ImRs) is a psychological therapy that has previously been found effective at reducing trauma intrusions. It requires the individual to recall the start of a traumatic event, but then rescript (or modify) the end - with help of a therapist to make it safer. In their 2019 study, Georgie Paulik (Perth Voices Clinic, Western Australia), Craig Steel (Oxford University, UK) and Arnoud Arntz (Amsterdam University, Netherlands) used up to 10 sessions of ImRs with 12 clients who experienced trauma related voice hearing. To assess the effectiveness of the therapy clients were asked questions relating to their experience of voices, trauma intrusions and other mental health symptoms on a weekly basis and at 3-month follow-up. Overall, the study evaluation found reductions in the reported levels of voice distress, voice frequency, and trauma intrusions experienced by those who participated, and that these improvements were maintained 3 months post-therapy.

How does it work? The potential success of ImRs as a treatment lies in that it not only reduces the amount of recall required of the most distressing part of the trauma (making it better tolerated by the client than traditional exposure therapies), the therapy attempts to change the meaning and beliefs that come from the traumatic event. It has also been found that ImRs generalises better from one memory to another resulting in fewer needed sessions, potentially resulting in faster benefits. This makes it an ideal and safe treatment option for those who are experiencing distressing voices that are linked to traumatic past experiences.

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