

# Neuro-linguistic Programming for the Treatment of Adults With Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, General Anxiety Disorder, or Depression: A Review

## Context

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), general anxiety disorder (GAD), and major depressive disorder are common debilitating conditions with a lifetime prevalence rate in Canada of approximately 12%, 2.6%, and 8% respectively. In addition to pharmacotherapies, some have suggested non-drug treatment options for these conditions, such as psychotherapy, electroconvulsive therapy, transcranial magnetic stimulation, vagus nerve stimulation, deep brain stimulation, and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP).

## Technology

NLP is a therapeutic technique for detecting and reprogramming unconscious patterns of thought and behaviour in order to alter psychological responses. It is based on the idea that there is a connection between the neurological processes (neuro), language (linguistic), and behavioural patterns learned through experience (programming). NLP typically involves building a rapport between the physician and patient, gathering information and defining the desired health outcome, and using techniques and tools to change the patient's thinking and behaviour.

## Issue

A review of the clinical evidence regarding NLP for the treatment of PTSD, GAD, and depression, as well as of evidence-based guidelines, will help inform treatment decisions for patients with these conditions.

## Methods

A limited literature search was conducted of key resources, and titles and abstracts of the retrieved publications were reviewed. Full-text publications were evaluated for final article selection according to predetermined selection criteria (population, intervention, comparator, outcomes, and study designs).

## Key Messages

- No clinical evidence was found on the use of NLP for the treatment of adults with PTSD, GAD, or depression.
- One guideline that provides recommendations for treating depression also reports that there is no evidence that NLP is an effective treatment for it.
- No guidelines were found on the use of NLP for the treatment of adults with PTSD or GAD.

## Results

The literature search identified 399 citations, with 2 additional articles identified from other sources. After screening the abstracts, 1 evidence-based guideline met the criteria for inclusion in this review.

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