



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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Center for Victims of Torture Starts an Innovative Study

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT) today announces a groundbreaking research study on pain, sleep and heart health in a population of refugees and asylum seekers.

Who: Refugees and asylum seeker clients at CVT clinics in St. Paul, Minn who experience significant levels of chronic pain will receive trauma-Informed and culturally-responsive integrated massage therapy (TCI-Massage).

What: CVT is conducting a randomized controlled trial on the impact of trauma-informed and culturally-responsive integrated massage therapy (TCI-Massage) on pain, sleep and heart health in a population of refugees and asylum seekers at CVT clinics in St. Paul, Minn.

Where: CVT's Healing Hearts program, CVT's St. Paul Healing Center, and Roselawn Clinic.

When: Starting in May 2024 ending in August 2025.

Why: Refugees and asylum seekers experience disproportionately high levels of chronic conditions, including chronic pain, sleep disturbance and cardiovascular conditions, which are caused by many factors, including trauma and physical injuries sustained during torture. Massage represents a promising treatment for pain, sleep disturbance and cardiovascular conditions. Refugees and asylum seekers experience significant barriers to receiving massage and similar treatments. For instance, there is no evidence-based guidance on massage therapy for populations who have experienced severe trauma and are linguistically diverse.

Cultural adaptation is essential. Research indicates cultural adaptations can make health interventions more effective. CVT tailors its massage services to respect cultural considerations. This includes respecting clients' preferences for clothing during massage, providing language interpretation, and adapting the massage environment and physical contact to fit their comfort level. By addressing these factors, CVT ensures clients can more fully benefit from massage.

Massage is a healing tool. Massage is a powerful tool to engage the relaxation response (by activating the parasympathetic nervous system). The parasympathetic response is necessary to help relax and recover from danger or stress, but can be difficult to access for those who have experienced violence, trauma, loss or grief. Traumatic experiences live on in the body, and safe activation of the relaxation response in the nervous system can assist in releasing tension, pain or stress. We are integrating massage into CVT psychosocial services, and we hope that relaxation found through massage will support the overall therapeutic work provided at CVT.

Cutting edge research. This study will provide cutting edge information about the influence of massage on cardiovascular health indicators, addressing a gap in the research literature. CVT is partnering with the University of Minnesota's Neurobiology of Emotion, Sleep and Trauma Lab to examine the impact of massage on hypertension and heartrate variability – two key indicators of heart health.

Funder: The Massage Therapy Foundation is a 501(c)3 public charity supporting scientific research, education, and community service for the massage therapy profession.

For reference, here is [the press release](#) by the study funder.

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The Center for Victims of Torture is a nonprofit organization with offices in Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Uganda, United States and additional project sites around the world.

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