

# Treatment strategy provides mental health benefits to war trauma survivors

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A study shows that a certain intervention called testimony therapy plus ceremony reduced symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression among Khmer Rouge torture survivors from across Cambodia.

Testimony therapy included individual counselling, whereby the clients told their life stories, including [traumatic events](#), and counselors provided support and documented the details of the narratives. After sessions, the counselors transcribed the narratives, which were compiled into books for the clients. Next, a culturally adapted ceremony involved a Buddhist ritual and a truth-telling event to which community members and non-governmental organization representatives were invited.

"We found that testimony therapy was effective at reducing the symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD among Khmer Rouge survivors. This is especially notable because the intervention was brief (five days), culturally adapted (and adaptable), and was conducted in a low resource context," said Dr. Jennifer Esala, co-author of the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* study. "We hope that these findings encourage researchers to continue to study testimony therapy more closely and for practitioners to consider its applicability in their work."

Co-author Sopheap Taing noted that participants often shared their experiences related to the ceremony component of the intervention. "[It] is a healing process that allows us to honor the deceased person and to feel forgiveness towards the perpetrators and to let it go," said one

participant. "When it comes to our suffering, [it] means taking the thorn out from our heart. If we keep it there, it will still hurt us."

**More information:** Testimony Therapy With Ritual: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. [DOI: 10.1002/jts..22163](https://doi.org/10.1002/jts..22163)

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