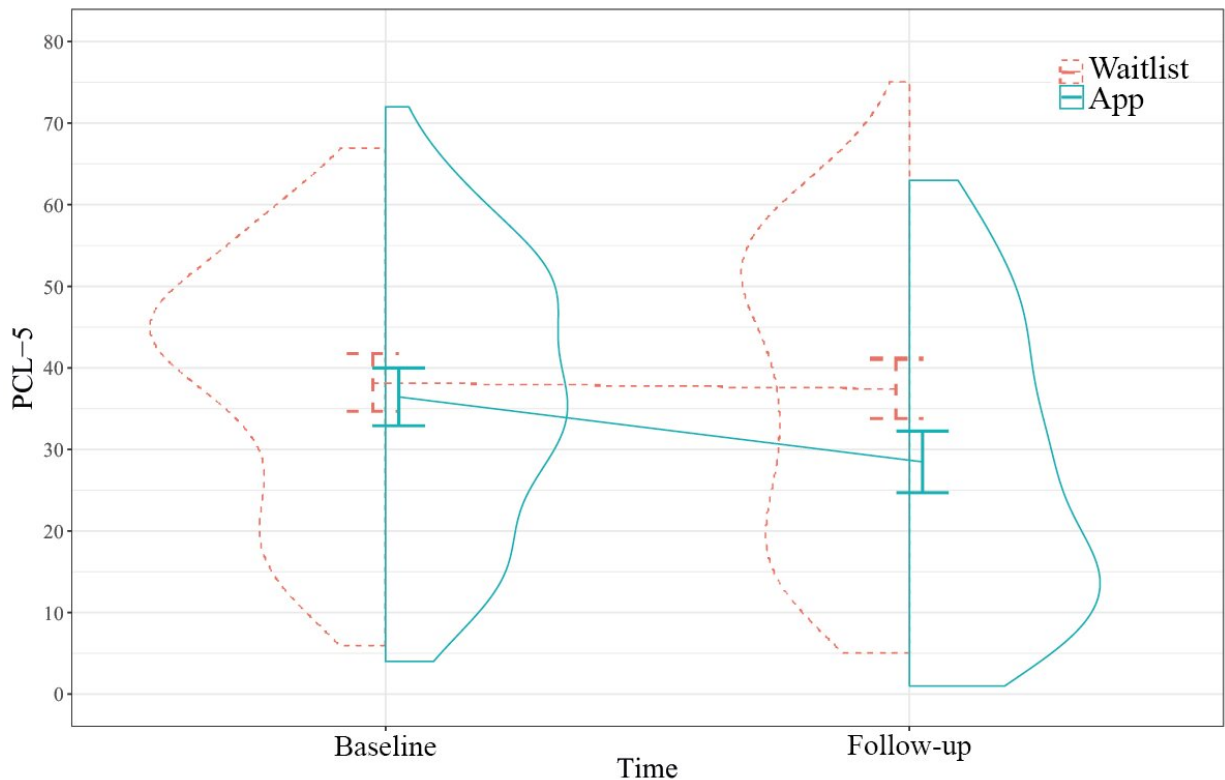


Mobile app reduces post-traumatic stress

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Posttraumatic stress from baseline to follow-up. The panels present pooled, model-based group means and 95% CIs and the distributions of unimputed observations (N=179). PCL-5: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition. Credit: *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2022). DOI: 10.2196/31419

Support offered by a phone app can relieve post-traumatic stress and depression. A new study from Uppsala University's National Centre for

Disaster Psychiatry involving 179 patients shows that a dedicated PTSD app, PTSD Coach, helps adults suffering from mental health issues after traumatic events.

Some people who experience traumatic events develop post-[traumatic stress disorder](#). This consists of [painful memories](#), constant acute anxiety, and persistent strong negative thoughts and feelings that do not dissipate over time. These problems can cause so much difficulty that the sufferer meets the criteria for a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If the symptoms do not pass, the sufferer may develop a sense of hopelessness about the future.

Until now, there has been little scientific research into apps that claim to alleviate [mental disorders](#). In a new study, researchers at Uppsala University's National Centre for Disaster Psychiatry have examined whether access to the PTSD Coach app can help people who have survived [traumatic events](#). The app has previously been included in a few studies in the US and a pilot study has been carried out in Sweden.

This study involved 179 adults with post-traumatic stress following a traumatic event in the preceding two years. Half of the group had access to the app for three months, while the other half had to wait. The participants were not actively undergoing any form of mental health treatment. If they were taking medication, they were not allowed to change or adjust their dosages during the period.

After three months, the individuals with access to the app had fewer problems with post-[traumatic stress](#) and their moods than the [control group](#).

"We hope that the content of this app, which helps the user understand their own reactions and includes simple exercises to relieve stress, can help PTSD sufferers begin their journey to feeling better. Individuals

can feel that seeking help is too difficult, especially if they are far from care, if they do not know where to turn or what can help them. The app also has a role to play after events like major accidents or disasters," says the study's lead author, Ida Hensler.

The study's participants were almost exclusively women, and more studies will be needed to fully understand how many people could benefit from the app and who they are.

"We don't see the app as a substitute for good care, like psychological treatment, and more knowledge is needed, but this study provides the basis for beginning to understand the possibilities of self-help apps that can complement the usual care pathways for this target group. The study is particularly important, since very few of the many apps claiming to ease [mental health issues](#) have been studied scientifically," says Ida Hensler.

More information: Ida Hensler et al, Efficacy, Benefits, and Harms of a Self-management App in a Swedish Trauma-Exposed Community Sample (PTSD Coach): Randomized Controlled Trial, *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.2196/31419](https://doi.org/10.2196/31419)

Provided by Uppsala University

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