

## **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing in children and adolescents with congenital heart disease (ConHD) and medically related subthreshold PTSD: a randomized controlled trial**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** About 3 in every 10 children and adolescents admitted to a hospital or undergoing medical treatment, develop elevated symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When untreated, subthreshold PTSD can have a serious impact on quality of life, psychosocial functioning and long-term psychiatric comorbidity. However, research into subthreshold PTSD following pediatric medical treatment and/or hospitalization is still scarce. Even less is known about the treatment of subthreshold PTSD in youth with ConHD. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is an innovative, fast and non-invasive psychosocial treatment for posttraumatic stress complaints. The effectiveness of EMDR in medically related trauma in children has not previously been systematically investigated.

**Methods:** Included are children aged 4 to 16 who have undergone a one-time (trauma type I; patients from emergency unit) or repeated (trauma type II) hospitalization/ medical treatment for ConHD up to 5 years ago. Participating children are first screened for PTSD symptoms. Subsequently, children with subthreshold PTSD are randomly assigned to 1) ca. 6 sessions of standardized EMDR or 2) care as usual (CAU = medical care only). Follow-up measurements take place after 2 and 8 months.

**Results:** Preliminary analysis reveals that 68% of all participating children are symptom-free and 32% show elevated PTSD symptoms at baseline. Recruitment and screening of participants are still going on until February 2018. Outcomes of the assessment will be discussed during the conference.

**Conclusions:** One in every three pediatric patients experiences symptoms of PTSD. This high proportion indicates that children undergoing hospitalization or medical treatment should be structurally screened and treated for PTSD symptoms.