



PCL-5

Brief Description

The PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5) is a 20-item self-report measure that assesses the presence and severity of PTSD symptoms. Items on the PCL-5 correspond with DSM-5 criteria for PTSD. The PCL-5 can be used to quantify and monitor symptoms over time, to screen individuals for PTSD, and to assist in making a provisional or temporary diagnosis of PTSD.

Note: Two formats of the PCL-5 measure are available: one with a Criterion A component and one without a Criterion A component (see National Center for PTSD website for additional details):

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-sr/ptsd-checklist.asp>).

Intended Population

Patients aged 18 and older

Number of Items

20 items

Cost

Free

Frequency of administration

The PCL-5 can be used to screen individuals for PTSD, make a provisional PTSD diagnosis and/or for monitoring symptom change during and after treatment

Responses

Responders are asked to rate how bothered they have been by each item in the past month on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0-4. Items are summed to provide a total score. • 0 = not at all • 1 = a little bit • 2 = moderately • 3 = quite a bit • 4 = extremely

Scales and Subscales:

A provisional PTSD diagnosis can be made by treating each item rated as 2 = "Moderately" or higher as a symptom endorsed, then following the DSM-5 diagnostic rule which requires at least: 1 Criterion B item (questions 1-5), 1 Criterion C item (questions 6-7), 2 Criterion D items (questions 8-14), 2 Criterion E items (questions 15-20).

Scoring

A PCL-5 cut-point of 33 appears to be a reasonable value to use for provisional PTSD diagnosis. Updated information regarding the PCL-5 will be available at the National Center for PTSD website when it becomes available (<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adultsr/ptsd-checklist.asp>).

Severity can be determined by adding scores of each item together to determine a total score. The range is 0-80.

A total score of 33 or higher suggests the patient needs further assessment to confirm a diagnosis of PTSD. It may also suggest the patient may need to "step up" in their level of PTSD care – either be referred to a PTSD specialty clinic or offered an evidence-based treatment for PTSD such as Prolonged Exposure (PE) or Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT).

Scores lower than 33 may indicate the patient either has subthreshold symptoms of PTSD or does not meet criteria for PTSD.



Feedback Elements

- Current severity rating
- Trend over time
- Change since last administration

Risk Management Considerations

The PCL-5 should not be used as a stand-alone diagnostic tool. When considering a diagnosis, the clinician will still need to use clinical interviewing skills, and a recommended structured interview (e.g., Clinician Administered PTSD Scale - CAPS-5) to determine whether the symptoms meet criteria for PTSD, are causing clinically significant distress or impairment, and whether those symptoms are not better explained or attributed to other conditions (i.e. substance use, medical conditions, bereavement, etc.).

Psychometrics

The PCL-5 is a psychometrically sound measure of DSM-5 PTSD. It is valid and reliable, useful in quantifying PTSD symptom severity, and sensitive to change over time.

References

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