

INTRODUCTION

Translational Trauma Research: Implications for Policy and Intervention

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Translational Issues in Psychological Science is a unique peer-reviewed journal in that each issue focuses on different topic areas in translational science, the goal of which is to use basic and clinical science to improve outcomes for individuals and the public. This issue is focused on traumatic stress and factors related to exposure, response, and treatment. While some scientists may see the topic of trauma as relatively new to the field of psychology, a very long historical narrative exists on the impact of trauma and stress; for example, descriptions of similarities between veterans of the Vietnam War and the soldiers in Homer's *Iliad* (Shay, 1994). Indeed, scholars have demonstrated that posttraumatic stress disorder is not a new phenomenon; prior historical references trauma response include "railway spine" in the late 1800s, physio-neurosis or shell shock following World War I, and "gross-stress reaction" in the

first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM; Brewin, 2003; Monson & Friedman, 2006). Patterns of traumatic stress symptoms were formally acknowledged in the third version of the DSM (3rd ed.; DSM-III; American Psychiatric Association, 1980) with the introduction of clear diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, the constellation of symptoms commonly seen in response to negative events. Posttraumatic stress disorder was contingent on establishing Criterion A, which defined a traumatic event as a catastrophic event outside the range of normal human experience. Since then, the field of traumatic stress has elicited great deal of controversy and, as Brewin (2003) notes, trauma researchers have frequently been labeled as either "saviors or skeptics" (p. 1). Despite ongoing debate about what exactly constitutes a traumatic event and the psychological sequelae associated with exposure to one (cf. Rosen & Lilienfeld, 2008), a cursory review of the daily news reveals the devastating effects of a myriad of events such as war, rape, natural disasters, and genocide, making the study of trauma responses a relevant national interest.

Editor's Note. This is an introduction to the special issue "The Psychology of Trauma." Please see the Table of Contents here: <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/tps/2/4/>.—MBK

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Need for Translational Research

In focusing on how trauma research is represented in translational science, we acknowledge that a significant amount of research involving the impact of stress and trauma on animals and humans is completed in tightly controlled laboratories. While this work is critical for evolving our understanding of how stress and trauma

alters immediate biological and psychological functioning (Nusslock & Miller, 2016), it is largely unable to identify the multitude of individual difference factors that increase risk for negative psychological sequelae. That is, despite a relatively secure understanding of how basic biological mechanisms are altered in the face of trauma (Yehuda & LeDoux, 2007), we also know that traumatic experiences affect people differently, dependent on characteristics such as age, gender, and social status (Hostinar, Johnson, & Gunnar, 2015; Kinner, Het, & Wolf, 2014; Muscatell et al., 2016). In other words, in the presence of shared common neurobiology, significant variability in trauma response does occur (Lanius, 2007). Future research in this arena may benefit most by strategic investigation of the individual difference factors that moderate the relationship between stress and trauma exposure and development of psychiatric illness.

Policy Implications

Given marked variability in trauma responses, evidence-based practices are essential to meet the needs of survivors of individual (e.g., assault, rape) and collective (e.g., natural disasters, terrorist attacks) traumas. Clinicians need training and experience informed by empirical findings; governments and service organizations need treatment and outreach recommendations generated from rigorous science. Posttrauma interventions can be costly and labor intensive (DiMaggio, Galea, & Richardson, 2007; Feeney, Goldberg, Blumenthal, & Wallack, 2005) and should not necessarily be uniformly administered after a traumatic event (McNally, Bryant, & Ehlers, 2003; Rose, Bisson, Churchill, & Wessely, 2009). This mandates research that can inform practical, cost-effective policies to reduce the burden of traumatic stress.

Further, many people will exhibit striking resiliency after traumatic events (Bonanno, Brewin, Kaniasty, & Greca, 2010); broad-based interventions should allow for this natural healing process to occur, while offering services to those who are currently suffering or develop symptoms over time. Public service announcements can provide broad information to the population that normalize distress responses (reducing stigma) and inform people about

available services. “Screen-and-treat” approaches can be administered in emergency departments or other acute care settings (Kenardy, Spense, & Macleod, 2006) or broadly in the community after a collective trauma (Watson, Brymer, & Bonanno, 2011). These approaches identify early risk factors that tend to correlate with subsequent problems; those at risk are then followed over time for targeted interventions, while those in need of immediate care are referred to specialists (cf., Silver & Garfin, 2016).

Introducing This Special Issue

In considering the aforementioned approaches to the field of trauma research, this Special Issue on the Psychology of Trauma includes articles that capture some of these varied aspects, including the diverse forms of potentially traumatic events (e.g., mass violence, disaster, war-related, and interpersonal) across populations. Articles concern a broad range of ideas, including the impact of stressors and functioning over the life span (from adolescents to older adults). Some articles highlight the roles of institutions (e.g., the military, college campuses) on mental health outcomes and how this should inform institutional policy. Other articles focus on practiced-based applications through evaluating intervention strategies that may help ameliorate suffering. Findings from these articles make important contributions to understanding the complex nature of stress reactions to traumatic events and may be informative for researchers and policymakers, practitioners, and the general public.

In addition, in line with the *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* mission, this issue supports the mentoring of junior scientists in developing expertise in a range of roles working as associate editors, authors, and reviewers. There are often expected competencies of early psychologists, yet these skills are infrequently explicitly taught in graduate school. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* provides the opportunity to engage in practices relevant to becoming a scholar in the psychological sciences and to contribute as a trainee and develop new abilities. In its own manner, *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* provides psychologists-in-training the opportunity to transform their fundamentals of scientific and scholarly pursuit into meaningful research that can be

disseminated to a broad audience. Associate editors, authors, and reviewers came from different areas of psychology, which likely shaped the type and form of translational applications discussed. For example, whether authors chose to highlight large social policy or specific clinical recommendations for a population is evident in this issue. The cross-disciplinary nature offered varied methodology while the associate editors learned how to navigate and critically evaluate manuscripts outside of their own primary areas of focus. Due to the vast complexity of defining trauma itself, varied reactions to potentially traumatic events, and policy and intervention implications, there is a need for researchers to work cross disciplinary to advance this field of study.

Summary

Posttrauma policies and practices mandate rigorous trauma-focused research that draws from clinical, community, and epidemiological samples. It is essential for research to identify risk factors such as demographic indicators, type of exposure, prior experiences, acute stress responses, and prior mental health problems that correlate with and predict adverse responses over time. Intervention studies can then identify best practices that can be used for policymakers to allocate resources in both clinical and community settings. Our goal in this special issue was to support the work of developing scientists in contributing to the growing body of research that will further advancement the field of traumatic stress research in order to make a meaningful difference in the lives of survivors.

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Received October 25, 2016

Accepted October 25, 2016 ■

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