



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science - 2017

I21 Resiliency and Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Team Approach to the Evaluation of Individuals in Mass Tort Cases

Marc A. Cohen, MD*, 360 N Bedford Drive, Ste 317, Beverly Hills, CA 90210; Park E. Dietz, MD, PhD*, 2906 Lafayette Road, Newport Beach, CA 92663; and Daniel A. Martell, PhD*, Park Dietz & Associates, 2906 Lafayette, Newport Beach, CA 92663

The goals of this presentation are to: (1) introduce attendees to an interdisciplinary team approach to mass tort evaluation; (2) familiarize attendees with the concept of resiliency in the forensic evaluation of individuals exposed to stressful and life-threatening events; and, (3) provide attendees with greater awareness into the most common reaction to trauma.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing attendees about the common reactions to life threatening events.

Estimates of the likelihood of developing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after exposure to a life-threatening event have ranged from 6.6% to 9.7%, with survivors of rape, military combat, and captivity experiencing the highest rates of PTSD, ranging from one-third to more than one-half of those exposed.^{1,2} The revised *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)* criteria for PTSD broadens the definition of a qualifying trauma and expands and reorganizes the list of accompanying symptoms, which is expected to affect both civil litigation and criminal defense in a wide range of cases that involve trauma. Importantly, available evidence suggests that resilience to life-threatening events is far more common than developing symptoms of PTSD or other psychiatric sequelae. Although definitions of resilience vary in the scientific literature, the concept of resilience is distinct and separate from the process of recovery. One definition of resilience involves the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium based on protective factors, which promote positive outcomes when exposed to stressful and traumatic life events.³ Resilience to trauma can, therefore, best be understood as the ability to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning despite exposure to life-threatening events. In children, resilience has been defined as the capacity to negotiate developmental tasks in the face of adversity. Several protective factors are listed as important for the development of resilience in children, such as intelligence, good communication and problem solving skills, the capacity for self-reflection and regulation, and the ability to plan. Similarly, posttraumatic resilience is associated with a cluster of personality traits, including extraversion, high self-esteem, assertiveness, and an internal locus of control.^{3,4}

This presentation will begin by reviewing the methodology of the interdisciplinary team approach to conducting forensic evaluations in mass tort cases. A series of case examples will then be presented demonstrating the full range of responses, including resiliency to trauma in a mass tort case evaluated using the interdisciplinary team approach. This presentation will then conclude with a review of the scientific literature on resilience to trauma, including the factors and traits associated with resiliency.

Reference(s):

1. Kessler R.C. et al. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*. 2005; 62(6): 593-602.
2. Beals J. et al. The Prevalence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among American Indian Vietnam Veterans: Disparities and Context. *Journal of Trauma Stress*. 2002; 15(2): 89-97.

Copyright 2017 by the AAFS. Unless stated otherwise, noncommercial *photocopying* of editorial published in this periodical is permitted by AAFS. Permission to reprint, publish, or otherwise reproduce such material in any form other than photocopying must be obtained by AAFS.



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science - 2017

3. Agaibi C. et al. Trauma, PTSD, and Resilience: A Review of the Literature. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. 2005; 6(3): 195-216.
 4. Bonanno G. et al. What Predicts Psychological Resilience After Disaster? The Role of Demographics, Resources, and Life Stress. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 2007; 75(5): 671-682.
-

Resilience, Trauma, Mass Tort