Torture Treatment Literature Selection, Q3 2014

The PATH bibliography is a resource for current literature on the topic of the mental health status of and treatments for torture survivors, war trauma survivors, refugees, and asylum seekers. This also includes research in the areas of social work that relate directly to the psychological wellbeing of these populations. The bibliography includes peer reviewed journal article citations in these areas; select original summaries of those articles; and links to their publicly available abstracts and full text versions. This bibliography is updated and distributed on a quarterly basis. It does not currently include articles on policy or advocacy.

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Selected Article Summaries:

Community Partnerships between Undergraduate Students and African Refugees address the Social Determinants of Mental Health


Summary by: Eden Almasude, Qualitative Researcher at the Center for Victims of Torture

This study presents the model and results of a project to partner African refugees with undergraduate students in a community-based intervention to promote advocacy, post-migration stressors, and English language proficiency. The goal of the program was to address the social determinants of mental health, which are particularly salient for a refugee population that deals with issues navigating a new system, often with a lack of financial resources and language barriers. These daily stressors compound any psychological stress resulting from refugee-related trauma.

The project, adapted from the Refugee Well-Being Project, had two primary components: twice-weekly Learning Circles (LCs) and a community advocacy model. The LCs took place between African-origin refugees and undergraduate students, with the involvement of interpreters, and took the form of facilitated discussions on topics of healthcare, U.S. culture, and arts. These created a safe space for the refugees to express their struggles before and since arriving in the U.S., including experiences of racism and cultural alienation. The advocacy component was based on another model used with women and children with experiences of domestic violence, and allowed each refugee-student partnership to take on the unmet needs of the refugee partner and work in the community to improve that lack or barrier to access a range of activities. The students and refugees shared their languages with each other and students aided their refugee partners in getting these and other necessary items.

The intervention was evaluated across three years, monitored by weekly progress reports, logbooks, qualitative interviews, and quantitative analysis of psychological well-being, quality of life, and other scales. The outcomes demonstrated decreased psychological distress, increased quality of life, resources accessed, enculturation, English proficiency, and social support. The study suggests that this model may be used to address mental health disparities for refugees, but also for other communities in the U.S. who have experienced trauma. In addition, it deals with cultural integration and allows universities, clinics, and communities to connect with each other through a community-building effort. Under the Affordable Care Act, some clinics could receive insurance reimbursements for such programs.
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Depressive Symptoms


Summary by: Hollie Nyseth Brehm, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Ohio State University

Despite the prevalence of the co-occurrence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, little is known about the relationship between symptoms of these two manifestations of trauma. Some scholars claim that they are part of the same general traumatic stress construct, while others maintain that PTSD and depression are distinct. In this article, the authors follow a cohort of men over 17 years in order to better understand the long-term prevalence, course, and interrelation of symptoms of PTSD and depression.

To analyze the relationships between PTSD and depression, the authors draw a sample of veterans from the October 1973 Yom Kippur War. Using the Israel Defense Force files, they identified 240 individuals who had been prisoners of war (POWs) and asked them to participate in the study. They also sampled 280 veterans who had been exposed to general stressors during the war (e.g., combat, deaths) but who had not been POWs. They then matched the ex-POWs and the control group based on socioeconomic status and military background. All participants were men, and their mean age was 53.

The authors analyzed participants’ symptoms of depression and PTSD in 1991, 2003, and 2008. To assess symptoms of PTSD, the authors used a self-reported measure of symptoms over the previous month corresponding to the 17 PTSD symptoms in the DSM-II-R. To assess symptoms of depression, the authors administered a subscale of the Symptom Checklist-90 and asked participants to indicate the frequency of symptoms during the previous two-week period.

Overall, the authors found that depressive symptoms were more prevalent than symptoms of PTSD in both groups. Comparing the groups revealed that PTSD and depressive symptoms, as well as their co-occurrence, were higher among ex-POWs at all points in time. Furthermore, while depressive symptoms increased among members in each group over time, symptoms of PTSD only increased among ex-POWs. The severity of ex-POW’s PTSD levels also increased over time, while the control group’s PTSD levels did not change. The trauma of captivity (beyond the general trauma of war) likely partially explains these differences.

Despite this, the authors find that the symptoms of PTSD and depression are interrelated over time. Symptoms of PTSD appeared to mediate the effect of captivity on depressive symptoms, and depressive symptoms likewise mediated the effect of captivity on PTSD symptoms. Confirmatory Factor Analysis also revealed a single underlying dimension of PTSD and depressive symptoms. This suggests that PTSD and depression may be part of a single general
traumatic response and that health professions should monitor depressive symptoms, as they may be markers of ensuing symptoms of PTSD.

When interpreting these results, it is important to keep in mind that this study does not provide information on causal relationships between symptoms of depression and PTSD. The focus on long-term changes may also mask changes over shorter periods of time. Additionally, all participants did not take part in assessments at each of the three time periods. Lastly, the use of self-reported measures may influence overestimation of symptom prevalence, and future research should consider including clinical assessments.

**Selected Article Citations (organized by topic):**

**Trauma, Treatment, and Rehabilitation:**


**Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers:**


Conflict and Post-Conflict:


Women and Girls:


Children and Adolescents:


Illness and Disease:


**Miscellaneous:**


**Additional Relevant Resources:**

- Dignity (The Danish Institute Against Torture) provides a database that allows you to search for a wider range of articles, books, and other publications on the topic of torture ([http://www.reindex.org/RCT/rss/Portal.php](http://www.reindex.org/RCT/rss/Portal.php))

**CVT Volunteer and Staff Contributions to this Bibliography:**

- **Carolyn Easton** conducted the literature search and compiled the citations for this bibliography
- **Eden Almasude (CVT staff)** and **Hollie Nyseth Brehm** wrote summaries of selected articles for this bibliography
- **Jared Del Rosso** reviewed and provided feedback on the summaries of selected articles for this bibliography
- **Austin Dufort** organized, formatted, and edited the content of this bibliography
- **Jennifer Esala (CVT staff)** oversaw and coordinated the development of this bibliography