

An Examination of PTSD in Ethnoracial Minorities

The majority of people in the United States are exposed to at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. A recent study by Ozer, Best, Lipsey, and Weiss (2003) estimated that 50%-60% of the U.S. population is exposed to traumatic stress. However, not all of those that are exposed to trauma go on to develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In other words, exposure to a trauma may not always be sufficient in explaining the development of PTSD. Thus, examining individual vulnerabilities and the role they play is important in understanding this condition (Yehuda, 1999). Resilience is an important topic in mental health in general and in trauma research in particular, but can be difficult to define given its complex nature. Researchers in the area of trauma have identified that social support, hardiness, coping styles, and several personality factors including extraversion, internal locus of control (efficacy and determination), and altruism to be associated with effective adaptation to traumatic stress (e.g., Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Zuckerman, 1999; Wilson, 1995; Raphael, 1993).

Ethnic minorities constitute over 30% of the U.S. population; however, minority mental health is often difficult to find in mainstream psychology journals (Pole, Gone, & Kulkarni, 2008). Research on ethnoracial minorities has somewhat consistently revealed that these populations have higher rates of PTSD than their European American counterparts. A review of the literature by Pole, Gone, & Kulkarni, (2008) revealed that there is evidence of higher rates of PTSD and more severe symptomology in African Americans, Latin Americans, Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, and American Indians compared to their European American counterparts. Several factors have been found to contribute to these higher rates of PTSD, and examining these factors in ethnoracial minorities' response to trauma is essential in identifying what factors contribute to greater risk and resilience to the development of PTSD.

In order to effectively model the development of PTSD following a trauma, a better understanding of the factors that put an individual at risk and the factors that are protective is needed. Although risk and resilience factors for PTSD following trauma have been well documented for the general population, little is known about protective factors for ethnoracial minorities. As such, traditional theoretical approaches to treating trauma and PTSD may be ineffective for treating PTSD in ethnic and racial minorities. Several factors have been identified that put ethnoracial minorities at greater risk for developing PTSD. These factors include differences in exposure to traumatic stress, discrimination and its unique contribution to PTSD, differences in coping and social support, acculturation, and differences in dissociation.

This poster will review current literature on risk and resilience factors relating to the development of PTSD following a traumatic experience in the general population. In addition, the experience of PTSD in ethnoracial minorities and the limitations of current treatment modalities in relation to treating diverse samples will be outlined. Finally, implications for social justice and future directions will be discussed including a discussion of the need to expand research on PTSD and resilience within ethnoracial minority groups.

References

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