Ow! When Challenges Become Trauma

Kasia Kozlowska
Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist
The Children’s Hospital at Westmead
The University of Sydney

References to papers about epidemiology data

- Post-traumatic stress disorder: findings from the Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being, Psychological Medicine, 2001; 31 (7):1237-1247.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adversity reported</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother suffered nervous or emotional trouble or depression</td>
<td>19.30%</td>
<td>27.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father had trouble with drinking or other drug use</td>
<td>16.50%</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father suffered nervous or emotional trouble or depression</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>18.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household conflict and tension</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
<td>19.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict, authoritarian or regimented upbringing</td>
<td>14.20%</td>
<td>17.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents divorced or permanently separated</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
<td>13.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grew up in poverty or financial hardship</td>
<td>11.00%</td>
<td>11.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father unaffectionate</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much physical punishment</td>
<td>7.75%</td>
<td>6.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically abused by a parent - punched, kicked, etc.</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-esteem abused by a parent</td>
<td>6.60%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother had trouble with drinking or other drug use</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed physical or sexual abuse of others in family</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment, ridicule, bullying or mental cruelty from a parent</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
<td>7.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother unaffectionate</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglected</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abused</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What the stats tell us

Warm and harmonious family relationships protect children from becoming traumatized by adversity and that only a small number of people who are exposed to adversity go on to develop a trauma-related condition.

Burgess and McFarlane study about the mental health and well-being of Australians (2001)

Approximately 1-33% of Australians suffer from PTSD at any one point in time.

Mammals have inbuilt defensive responses
**HPA Axis**

- Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal Axis
- Stress Hormones: "catecholamines" "Cortisol"
- Adaptive short-term and increased incidence of stress-related disorders

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**THE AUTONOMIC SYSTEM**

Network of parasympathetic and sympathetic nerves involved in monitoring and second by second adjustments of body state (homeostasis).
- Parasympathetic (blue) – states of calm, rejuvenation and renewal
- Sympathetic (red) – activation of the body to meet environmental challenges


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**Motor system**

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**Immune system slide.**

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**Activation of brain systems mediating the stress response**

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Sleep and the circadian clock

Old reptilian brain = brain stem and limbic cortex

When does the adverse event become a trauma?

Amygdala

All brain and body responses activated in the face of danger are normal.

Trauma-related symptoms (1)

- Intrusive memories of trauma
- Nightmares
- Symptoms of stress, anxiety and poor sleep
- Muscle tension and pain (eg headache)
- Abdominal symptoms (nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea)
Trauma-related symptoms (2)

- Activation of the ancient defense responses mediated by the amygdala-related circuits
  - Freezing (immobility with hypervigilance)
  - Fight and flight
  - Tonic immobility (immobility with shutdown)
  - Collapsed immobility (fainting)

Fear responses

- Freeze
- Flight
- Fight
- Tonic immobility
- Collapsed immobility


Trauma-related symptoms (3)

- Long term endocrine changes

Factors that come into play to increase the risk for trauma-related symptoms.

Genetics (presence or absence of a gene)

Models of disorder: different lenses

A Hierarchy of Systemic Influences

Genetic, epigenetic

Psychological, Integrative

Psychological, Integrative

Attachment, family systems

Community support, cultural values

Genetics
So what is the key message about trauma?