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The effect of different terror exposures on the course of schizophrenia

Yael Weinstein

University of Haifa, Israel

Statement of Problem: Between 40%-60% of the general population are victims of any lifetime trauma. Among persons with schizophrenia, however, this figure is estimated to be as high as 98%. Similarly, in the general population, the rate of exposure to man-made terror with reactive psychopathology of a posttraumatic psychiatric disorder is 7.5%, but among persons with schizophrenia disorder, this figure increases to 13%-29%. Despite these findings, few studies have examined the psychopathological aftermath of exposure to terror or the psychopathological consequences of different types of terrorist attacks among persons with schizophrenia.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: A nationally representative random sample with schizophrenia was merged with (I) psychiatric hospitalization data in the Israeli National Psychiatric Case Registry (1990-2012) and (II) terror attack data in the Global Terrorism Database. Time to psychiatric rehospitalization and the Colorado Symptom Index were examined following exposure to terror using Cox regression modeling and ANCOVAs after adjustment for confounders.

Findings: Increased likelihood of psychiatric rehospitalization was statistically ($P<.05$) associated with prior exposure to terrorist attacks involving bombings or explosions compared to exposure to armed assaults (adjusted HR=1.42, 95% CI=1.09-1.84); and for attacks involving 1-3 fatalities (adjusted HR=1.47, 95% CI=1.22, 1.77) compared with no fatalities. This trend of statistical significance replicated for terrorist attack types across five sensitivity analyses. The effect of likely exposure to attacks with 1-3 fatalities was significant ($P<.05$) among males, however, not significant for females, or for 60, 90 and 120 days of follow-up.

Conclusion & Significance: Exposure to attacks with bombings or explosions and 1-3 fatalities among males modestly, but significantly, exacerbated the course of schizophrenia for subjective and objective outcomes. A tentative mechanism is that earlier age of onset among males facilitates less time for premorbid learning and subsequent postmorbid stress adjustment, thereby increasing reactive psychopathology.

Recent Publications

1. Galea S, Ahern J, Resnick H, Kilpatrick D, Bucuvalas M, Gold J and Vlahov D (2002) Psychological sequelae of the september 11 terrorist attacks in new york city. *N Engl J Med.* 346:982-987. Doi: 10.1056/NEJMsa013404.
2. Peleikis D E, Varga M, Sundet K, Lorentzen S, Agartz I and Andreassen O A (2013) Schizophrenia patients with and without post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have different mood symptom levels but same cognitive functioning. *Acta Psychiatr. Scand.* 127 (6):455-463.
3. Resnick S G, Bond G R and Mueser K T (2003) Trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder in people with schizophrenia. *J Abnorm Psychol.* 112 (3): 415-423.
4. Spitzer C, Vogel M, Barnow S, Freyberger H J and Grabe H J (2007) Psychopathology and alexithymia in severe mental illness: the impact of trauma and posttraumatic stress symptoms. *Eur. Arch. Psychiatry Clin. Neurosci.* 257(4):191-196.
5. Varese F et al. (2012) Childhood adversities increase the risk of psychosis: A meta-analysis of patient-control, prospective- and cross-sectional cohort studies. *Schizophr Bull.* 38(4):661-671.

Biography

Yael Weinstein fields of interests are Trauma, Mental Health and Rehabilitation. Accordingly, her articles examine the connection between exposures to different types of trauma on a person's mental health, and even examine the effects on the offspring's, mental health. Her other field of interest is Statistical Methods. She currently teaches methodological courses in several academic universities in Israel. Furthermore, she is the R & D Director at Shekulo Tov Group, Israel. Shekulo Tov Group is an NGO which specializes in providing occupational services for people with mental disabilities all over Israel. As part of her job, she conducts internal research in the group, implement new methodological models, embed the Group's Integrative Unit Model in new businesses and manages national and international collaborations with other researcher and professionals.

wienstien@gmail.com