

Trauma: A Developmental Science Perspective
Society for the Study of Human Development
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The central focus of the Society for the Study of Human Development is to provide an organization that moves beyond age-segmented scholarly organizations to take an integrative, interdisciplinary approach to ages and stages across the life span, generational and ecological contexts of human development, as well as research and applications to human development policies and programs. A review of articles that address the topic of disaster/trauma in the last decade and published in the society's flagship journal, *Research on Human Development* suggest that trauma has been studied, but not disaster.

Useful conceptual frameworks. In the study of trauma, both a lifespan and life course perspective dominates the conceptual frameworks applied. Each framework allows for testing the extent to which trauma experiences at one point in life continues to shape development and well-being over time.

The lifespan developmental perspective assumes that human development is life-long. Individual behavior is the unit of analysis with an emphasis on plasticity and malleability over and above social structural factors that impinge on human experience. Hence, trauma experiences are studied within this framework by focusing on individual-level resources. The life course perspective involves highlighting the significance of context to human development and aging. The personal and biographical level of human experience is examined with simultaneous consideration of timing, social institutions/policies, and structural position within a historical time period. Social institutions and policies shape life experiences over time, influencing social roles, positions, and statuses as well as providing meaning to such experiences. More specifically, in the study of trauma it posits that historical circumstances encountered earlier in life shape the experiences of different groups, and may do so differently by age. Hence, trauma experiences are studied within this framework by stressing the impact of history, timing, age, and linked lives on individual development and well-being.

Both a lifespan and life course perspective serve as umbrella frameworks to introduce concepts of resilience (Ardelt, Landes & Vaillant, 2010; Park et al., 2012), social support (Feldman, Conger & Burzette, 2004), stress-growth (Ardelt, Landes & Vaillant, 2010; Jahn, et al., 2012) and meaning-making (Jahn, et al., 2012) in the study of trauma.

Hot topics/excellent studies. Trauma studies, for the most part, examined the long-term effects of experiencing war on well-being. Findings show instances in which trauma can lead to both negative and positive outcomes. For instance, Ardel, Landes & Vaillant (2010) examined effects of WWII on well-being. In so doing, they moved beyond individual development, that may be positive or negative, to focus on Erikson's generativity as a moderator. This focus allowed for consideration of lifespan development and life course events. *Resilience to high combat exposure* was defined as the experience of stress-related growth and the achievement of generativity in midlife. Those who achieved generativity in midlife were said to have psychosocial growth. Findings showed that high combat exposure

is not associated with psychosocial growth or well-being. Yet, generative veterans consistently reported better well-being outcomes in the high combat groups. Overall, the major strength of Ardel, Landes & Vaillant's study is its ability to trace prospectively the long-term effects of heavy combat exposure on later life physical and psychological health, wisdom characteristics, and well-being moderated by the attainment of generativity in midlife without resorting to retrospective measures. The study linked traumatic events in early adulthood with psychosocial development through midlife, suggesting that successful or unsuccessful coping with early trauma and hardship can have far-reaching consequences for physical and psychological well-being across the whole life course. In addition, the results indicate a possible link between stress-related growth and the development of wisdom in later life.

Park, Kaiser, Spiro, King and King (2012) examined Vietnam veterans to see if wartime captivity affected late-life mental health. The purpose of this study was to examine the associations of demographic factors, specific aspects of the prisoner of war experience, and mental health status upon repatriation with long-term mental health outcomes (posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD], anxiety, and depressive symptoms) in later life for American servicemen who were prisoners of war in Vietnam. A noteworthy finding was that age at capture rather than years of education at capture or officer/enlisted status uniquely predicted subsequent mental health. Age at capture appears to be a marker for greater maturity and experience, serving as a protective factor against the lasting effects of captivity stressors. Psychological torture did not predict mental distress 30 years later, but posttraumatic stress symptoms at repatriation demonstrated a remarkable persistence in positively predicting PTSD as well as anxiety and depressive symptoms nearly 30 years later. Findings may have particular relevance for understanding the importance of resilience resources that accumulate with age such as training, experience, and education in protecting individuals from the long-term consequences of traumatic experiences.

One study examined trauma in childhood as a predictor of well-being in young adulthood (Feldman, Conger & Burzette, 2004). Findings showed social support in various domains appear to promote resilience to trauma through both compensatory and buffering processes. Social support, from family and school, is found more likely to reduce risk of behavior problems in adulthood. Buffering effects were not as prominent, only apparent when predicting affective disorders. The study suggests understanding the processes of development in the context of trauma may be more helpful than identifying causes, because it is by intervening in processes that we may affect outcomes.

The experience of trauma clearly has long-term effects. Both individual and social resources matter, yet are best understood in context. The lifespan and life course perspectives draw attention to the various ways trauma affects human development both positively and negatively over time.

Individuals good at and willing to work on the topic

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