



DEFENSE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
For Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury

Intergenerational PTSD

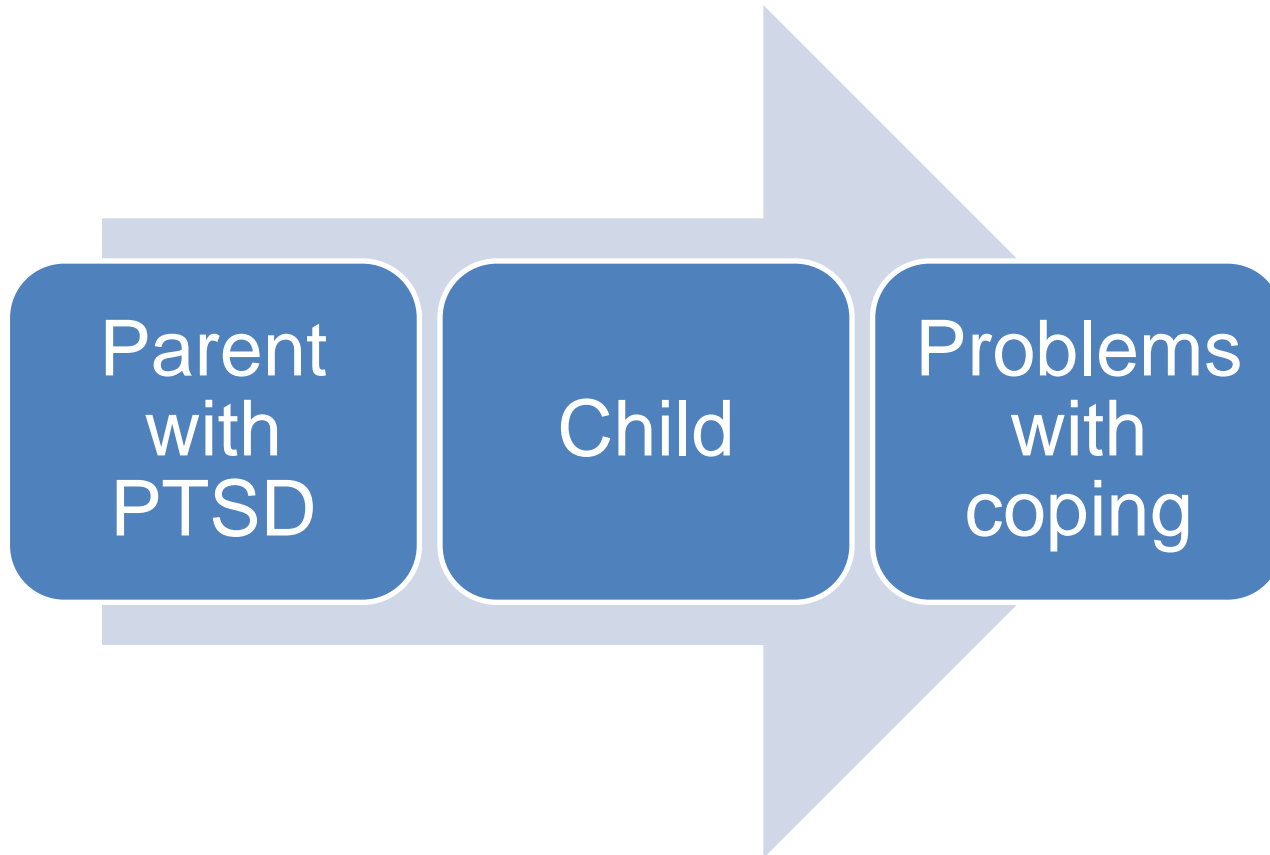
Historical shifts in understanding and treating effects of exposure to war trauma lead us to exploration of effects for families with children

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What is Intergenerational PTSD?

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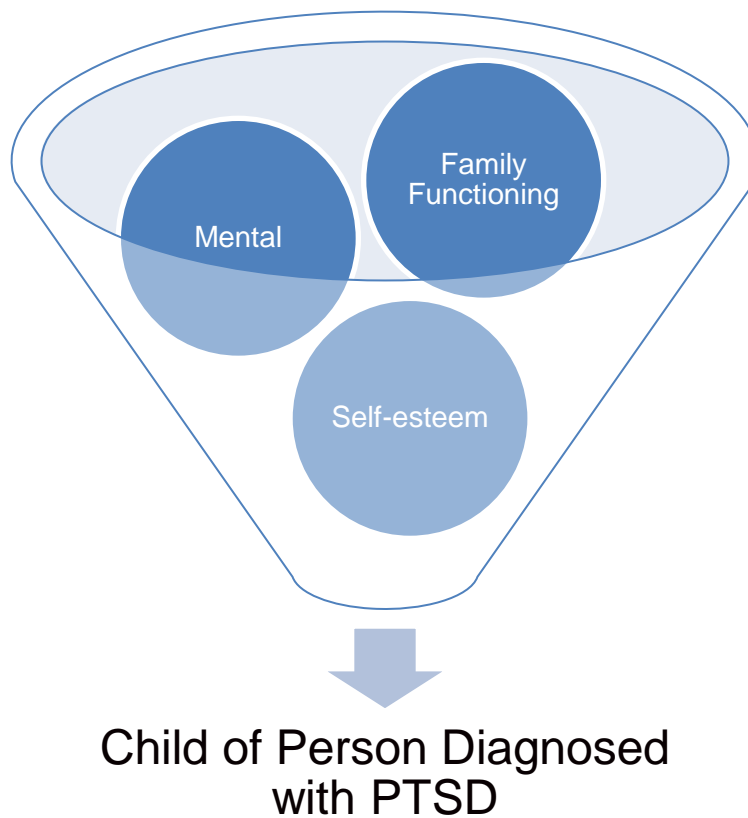
Research has suggested that secondary generations of individuals exposed to traumatic events are likely to experience symptoms consistent with PTSD:

- Anger/aggression
- Anxiety
- Headaches
- Breathing difficulties
- Intrusive imagery
- Heightened sense of vulnerability
- Difficulty trusting others
- Emotional numbing

Historical Research

- Robust literature base examining the transmission of trauma to family members
- Most studies failed to confirm increased rates of psychopathology in the children of Holocaust survivors as compared to matched control groups
- However, studies examining clinical populations of the children of Holocaust survivors found that this second generation presented difficulties in coping with stress and a higher vulnerability to PTSD as compared to other populations experiencing distress

Types of Distress Transmitted



Mental Distress

- Do children of parents diagnosed with PTSD have symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, depression or behavior problems?
- Findings are inconsistent

Family Functioning

- Do children of parents diagnosed with PTSD experience problems with family functioning?
- Several studies have examined family functioning. Findings have suggested that parents diagnosed with PTSD impact family functioning negatively.

Self Esteem

- Do children of parents meeting diagnostic criteria for PTSD experience problems with self-esteem?
- Studies found no significant differences in self-esteem between children of war veterans with PTSD and matched controls.

The Mechanisms of Transmission?

- Is distress learned (psychological response) or passed on genetically?
 - Learned behavior
 - Family functioning
 - Biological perspectives

Learned Behavior?

Hypothetical Case Example

Family Functioning?

Hypothetical Case Example

Biological: Is there a genetic link?

- Long recognized as a contributing factor to developing PTSD, little progress has been made in identifying true/causal risk genetic variants for PTSD.
- Research is limited to twin and candidate gene association studies.

PTSD is Heritable: Twin Studies

- Twin studies contribute to our understanding of the genetic etiology of PTSD in the following ways:
 - Genetic factors influence exposure to a potentially traumatic event
 - Genetic influences explain a substantial proportion of vulnerability to PTSD even after accounting for genetic influences on trauma exposure
 - Genetic influences on PTSD overlap with those for other mental disorders.
 - Provide important information regarding possible biological “endophenotypes,” or intervening phenotypes

Candidate Gene Association Studies

- Candidate gene association studies also contribute to our understanding of the genetic etiology of PTSD by potentially identifying biomarkers of vulnerability or resilience.
 - 11 published studies
 - Limited to a few biological pathways
 - Low rates of PTSD, with apparent inconsistencies in gene associations linked to marked differences in methodology

Future Research

- Co-occurring and comorbid conditions (e.g., depression, substance abuse/dependence)
- Secondary traumatization among children of war veterans who are not clinical populations
- Studies examining representative samples of veterans using qualitative and longitudinal designs
- Risk factors for child vulnerabilities for PTSD
- The role of the care giver in secondary traumatization

Future Research (cont'd)

- Mitigating factors that might reduce the intensity of distress caused by the parent's exposure to PTSD
- Research examining post-traumatic growth
- Studies that examine the genetic etiology of PTSD
- Studies that examine violence and aggressive behaviors of the children of veterans