

Changes in your world view

Why researching SV alters much more than the evidence base

Nothing seems the same anymore!

- Worldview is a cognitive structure that helps us organise our experiences. It gives us a sense of competency and the confidence to function in everyday life
- Our worldview serves as lens through which we perceive reality
- Disruption of worldview is likely to happen when we are constantly exposed to traumatic materials (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).
- Worldview is a concept postulated by Janoff-Bulman (1992), Epstein (1991), Parkes (1975), and Bowlby (1969).

When our positive worldview comes under pressure

- Our sense of existential security- trust in self and others can shatter
- Values are threatened – eg that people are fundamentally good
- Fears increase – for self and others
- Preoccupations and concerns change
- Beliefs in self efficacy, control and agency are undermined
- Religious beliefs may be lost (47% of rape victims in one study lost their religion)

What happens to core cognitive schema after trauma?

Often these are undermined. Critical negative schemas develop involving feelings of incompetence, loss of control and danger

Our appraisal and perception of threats alters significantly and may lead to nonadaptive coping behaviours and increased distress

A schematic change is reflected in distorted generalities and all or nothing thinking. Eg the violent, degrading intentions and behaviours of the rapist are attributed to all men.

‘All men are rapists’ ‘I am not safe anywhere’

The struggle to make sense of a world in which CSA and SV occurs

Pretrauma belief:

Family members and adults are responsible for protecting and nurturing children.

After being exposed to detailed accounts of CSA, this belief is no longer tenable

Intense reordering of one's worldview is unavoidable, although initial disbelief can persist and prevent the full internalization of the traumatic material/events to which one has been exposed

- *“When I first saw the victim, it was like (silent for a while, preoccupied with the thought) you never thought it could happen.”*
- *“It was beyond imagination that we have this kind of people in our society. She is young and look at what have you done to the child?”*
- *“You never expected it could be worse than you thought. You never expected it could happen. Even now, I still feel...disbelief it could happen.”*

Existentially, we have to try to make sense of the fundamental and unforgivable betrayal of trust inherent in the perpetration by an adult of CSA.

Experiences

Recall the story from one of your research participants that is still vivid in your mind

Tell us their story and how it challenged your worldview (beliefs, values etc)?

What were the most difficult questions it raised for you and how have you tried to answer them?

Existential challenges

What do we do with our sense of anger and impotence at the gross violation of human rights we hear about?

How do we reforge a purpose and meaning in life AFTER our worldview has come under seige?

‘I try not to think about my father, he doesn’t make sense’

What as researchers can we do?

Shaking the foundations

- Being faced with the reality of SV especially CSA often makes researchers feel as if they have been metaphorically cut off at the feet and can no longer stand on solid ground
- Erik Erikson's theory of development gives a clue as to why this might be the case
- The first and most important developmental challenge, and the one that lays the foundation for all future psychological development, is:
- Establishing a sense of TRUST versus MISTRUST

- Confronting and attempting to understand SV recapitulates this task
- Many of the beliefs/assumptions about the world and other people that underpin a sense of basic trust are shown to unreliable
- Mistrust can overrun trust and be accompanied by other painful emotions

Trauma and recovery

- What Judith Herman (1992) wrote about the abused child is also relevant to us:
- The child...is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness...(p. 96)

Challenges- reestablishing safety

- Unlike the child we are not alone or helpless:
- We can confide in and gain support from friends, partners and family members
- We can act to take precautions and protect ourselves- agency and autonomy
- Problem solve and contest our own thoughts
- Understand our experiences and begin to make sense of suffering
- Know where to find help if we need it
- Understand stress and how to alleviate it