

Division of Social Psychiatry

Bruce P. Dohrenwend, PhD, Division Chief
Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University
College of Physicians and Surgeons
New York State Psychiatric Institute
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Main Faculty/Staff

Bruce P. Dohrenwend, Ph.D, Chief of Research
Mindy T. Fullilove, M.D., Research Psychiatrist II
Bruce G. Link, Ph.D., Research Scientist VI

Overview

The Division of Social Psychiatry has three component groups:

The Social Psychiatry Research Unit headed by Dr. Dohrenwend. The purpose of this unit is to develop and sustain a program of research on important substantive and methodological issues in psychiatric epidemiology. The focus of the substantive research is on questions about the role of adversity and stress in the onset and course of psychiatric disorders that are differentially related to gender, to ethnic/racial background, and to socioeconomic status. These include schizophrenia, major depression, antisocial personality disorder, substance use disorders (including alcoholism), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The methodological issues center on how to conceptualize and measure major stressful life events as risk factors for the development of these disorders.

Cities Research Group headed by Dr. Fullilove. The work of this group is carried out in conjunction with a team of people. Since 1992, their group has been known as the “Community Research Group.” At an October 2012 celebration of CRG’s twentieth anniversary, the group renamed itself the “Cities Research Group.” This change highlights the most important finding from 20 years of work, that cities are both essential to the health of the nation, and the critical point of intervention for eliminating inequality and health disparity. The Cities Research Group is active in several community demonstration projects, urbanism teaching and urbanism research.

The Stigma and Mental Illness and Violence Group headed by Dr. Link. This group is focused on understanding the impact of stigma related processes on people with mental illnesses and their families. The initiative tracks public conceptions about mental illness such as whether members of the public are optimistic about treatment and whether they believe people with mental illnesses are dangerous and to be avoided. The initiative also addresses the experience of stigma for people with mental illnesses by examining whether and to what extent stigma seriously complicates their lives and keeps them from receiving the

treatment they need. A recent grant from NIMH is implementing an intervention designed to reduce stigma in the critical period of adolescence. A further initiative is directed toward understanding the connection between mental illnesses and violent behaviors. Dr. Link is also developing research that implements a life course approach to health disparities

Current Research

Bruce P. Dohrenwend

Research on war-related PTSD with data from military records and interviews conducted in the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS) has continued. This research with data from a nationwide probability sample of veterans has led to substantial previous publications on the incidence and course of war-related PTSD, and the reasons for gender and racial/ethnic difference in the rates on onset and course. Recent analyses have been completed on the question of the primacy of the stressor exposures in war-related PTSD.

Analyses are continuing on the questions of whether the changing public attitudes in the U.S. over the course of the war was a risk factor for the development of war-related PTSD in U.S. veterans. We are also investigating the nature and role of the involvement of some veterans in personally harming civilians or prisoners. A Congressionally mandated and much needed longitudinal follow-up of the above NVVRS samples of Vietnam Theater and Vietnam Era veterans is underway. Dohrenwend was a member of the Scientific Advisory Board that consulted with the Veterans Administration for the purpose of drawing up the Request for Proposals for this research. He continues to be involved with colleagues from Abt Associates and NYU who bid for and obtained the contract for the study from the VA. Field work is underway and should be completed within the next few months.

Analysis of data from a pilot study of new interview procedures for measuring major stressful life events over the life course has been completed as far as it was useful to take it. This study involved a sequence of three intensive interviews with a sample of convenience consisting of 62 adults. The aim was to investigate the extent to which fully structured gatekeeper questions with structured machine-scorable probes could approximate the ratings of important characteristics of the events based on detailed narrative materials about what happened in each event reported. The latter, labor-intensive approach has been found to be far more reliable and valid than more economical checklists.

However, because of the time and expense involved, the labor intensive narrative/rating approaches are rarely used. The pilot study was designed to address this problem of economy. Our analyses so far suggest that the job of constructing accurate algorithms for some of the most important characteristics of the events such as magnitude has proved extremely difficult. We are turning our attention to writing up the results of the narrative/rating method we developed

as it has been applied by ourselves and others to four diverse samples from military and general population samples.

Mindy Thompson Fullilove

Dr. Fullilove is carrying out a study called “Main Street New Jersey,” examining the role of Main Streets in the mental health of populations. This study includes visits to Main Streets in New Jersey and elsewhere in the US, France and Japan, as well as participant observation in three NJ cities. The first publications are being prepared.

Bruce G. Link

Dr. Link is conducting a school-based field experiment to evaluate a comprehensive multifaceted intervention designed to change attitudes and behaviors regarding mental illnesses during the critical period of early adolescence. The research provides a rigorous test, with long term follow-up, of a comprehensive intervention in sixth grade that is designed to 1) improve knowledge attitudes and beliefs about mental illnesses, 2) change behaviors toward people with mental illnesses and 3) facilitate appropriate help seeking for mental health problems. The research evaluates the individual and combined effects of three arms of a multi-component intervention that includes: 1) a curriculum that actively engages youth to learn about mental illnesses, alter negative attitudes and address negative emotions (e.g. fear), 2) an opportunity for school-based contact with a person who has had a mental illness, and 3) a saturation of the context with positive messages and cues about mental illnesses. The evaluation assesses changes in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and help seeking behaviors in a fully crossed design of 740 youths arrayed in an 8-cell (2x2x2) design with follow ups post intervention and 6, 12 and 24 months. Pre and post intervention data are complete and 6 month follow up interviews are underway.

Dr. Link joined with Dr. Lawrence Yang and Dr. Cheryl Corcoran to secure NIMH funding to study the potential for stigma in identifying youths at “High Risk for Psychosis.” The study addresses the longitudinal trajectory of stigma among a High Risk for Psychosis (HRP) group, as well as the neurocognitive and social cognitive underpinnings of stigma perceptions in this group. We examine how these factors may adversely impact psychological, social, and developmental outcomes among HRP individuals.

Education and Training

Dr. Dohrenwend continued as a Co-Director and member of Steering Committee of the Research Training Program in Psychiatric Epidemiology (PET). He has continued work on the Vietnam and Life Events research with three post-doctoral fellows who have graduated from the program: Dr. Ben Adams, Dr. Alicia

Lukachko, and Dr. Eleanor Murphy. The work began when they held fellowships and continued after they completed their fellowships.

Dr. Fullilove participates in the Public Psychiatry Fellowship and gives an annual lecture to the Child Psychiatry Fellowship. Jacob Izenberg, a medical student at Yale, spent three months working on Main Street New Jersey.

The T32 grant that supports the Psychiatric Epidemiology Training Program (PET) began the first of a five-year award period after a successful competing continuation application submitted by Dr. Link. PET funds four post and four predoctoral fellows. All three of the main members of the Division of Social Psychiatry are involved in this program: Bruce Link as Director, Bruce Dohrenwend as Co-Director, and Mindy Fullilove as faculty member of this 41 year-old program.

Honors and Awards

Dr. Link received the Emily Mumford Award for Distinguished Social Science Contributions to Psychiatry.

Dr Fullilove received the following honors and awards:

Elected to a three-year term as a Public Director of the American Institute of Architects

Gave a plenary address to the American Academy of Family Therapy Annual Meeting in San Francisco

Gave the Design Center Lecture at Pittsburgh's August Wilson Center

Divisional Highlights

Dr. Dohrenwend received two grants from an anonymous private foundation to support continued development of a monograph on his colleagues and his research on PTSD and other psychiatric disorders in U.S. Vietnam veterans.

He also published an article (Dohrenwend et al. cited below under Publications) reporting some of the most important results of the Vietnam research so far. The Abstract of the article is as follows:

“The diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was introduced in 1980 amidst debate about the psychiatric toll of the Vietnam War. There is controversy, however, about its central assumption that potentially traumatic stressors are more important than personal vulnerability in causing the disorder. We tested this assumption with data from a rigorously diagnosed male subsample (n = 260) from the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS). Combat exposure, pre-war vulnerability, and personal involvement in harming civilians or prisoners were examined, with only combat exposure proving necessary for disorder onset. While none of the three factors proved sufficient, estimated onset reached 97% for veterans high on all three; with harm to civilians

or prisoners showing the largest independent contribution. Severity of combat exposure proved more important than pre-war vulnerability in onset; pre-war vulnerability at least as important in long-term persistence. Implications for the primacy of the stressor assumption, further research, and policy are discussed.”

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Publications (Selected)

Bruce P. Dohrenwend, Thomas J. Yager, Melanie M. Wall, and Ben G. Adams, The roles of combat exposure, personal vulnerability, and involvement in harm to civilians or prisoners in Vietnam war-related posttraumatic stress disorder, *Clinical Psychological Science*, published on line 15 February 2013 in advance of journal publication.

Fullilove, MT. (June 2013) *Urban Alchemy: Restoring Joy in America’s Sorted-Out Cities*, NY: New Village Press.

Hankerson SH, Watson KT, Lukachko A, Fullilove MT, Weissman M. Ministers’ Perceptions of Church-Based Programs to Provide Depression Care for African Americans. *J Urban Health*. 2013 Mar 8. [Epub ahead of print]

Hatzenbuehler, Mark L., Phelan, Jo C., Link, Bruce G. “Stigma as a fundamental cause of population health inequalities.’ *American Journal of Public Health* 103:813-21, 2013.

Link, Bruce G., Richard Carpiano and Margaret Weden. “Can honorific awards give us clues about the connection between socioeconomic status and mortality.” *American Sociological Review* 78:192-213, 2013.

