

A Harmful Taboo?

Addressing Fear of Harm in Asking Participants about Trauma History

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American Psychological Association Annual Meeting 2004

Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey

Goldberg and Freyd (under review)

For full measure: <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/~jff/bbts/>

- 12 behaviorally defined items
 - Been in a major earthquake, fire, flood, hurricane, or tornado that resulted in significant loss of personal property, serious injury to yourself or a significant other, the death of a significant other, or the fear of your own death.
 - Witnessed someone with whom you were very close deliberately attack another family member so severely as to result in marks, bruises, blood, broken bones, or broken teeth.
 - You were made to have some form of sexual contact, such as touching or penetration, by someone with whom you were very close (such as a parent or lover).

Asking about trauma

- Institutional Review Boards and other entities continue to raise concerns about potential harm to participants of asking about trauma history.
 - Empirical question regarding cost-benefit ratio
 - To evaluate the cost-benefit ratio in undergraduate samples, we asked participants to respond to three questions on their experience of completing the Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS), a 12 item behaviorally defined self-report measure.

Question 1

For the questionnaire that asked about different personal life events before and after age 18, **please rate whether you found answering the questions to be more or less distressing than other things you sometimes encounter in day to day life.**

1	2	3	4	5
Much More Distressing	Somewhat More Distressing	Neutral	Somewhat Less Distressing	Much Less Distressing

Cost-ratio balance in asking about trauma

- Newman, Walker and Gefland (1999)
 - Majority of 1,174 women who completed a trauma-focused health survey found participation to be a positive experience, did not regret participating and reported immediate perceptions of personal gain following the study. Held at 48 hours.
- Walker, Newman & Koss (1997)
 - 330 women completed health and trauma questionnaires
 - Participants reported that they generally found the study to be a positive experience
 - A small number of women felt more upset than they had anticipated feeling, but that these women indicated they would have completed the survey even if they had known in advance how they would feel.

Question 2

For the questionnaire that asked about different personal life events before and after age 18, **please rate how important you believe it is for psychologists to ask about these types of events in order to study the impact of such experiences:**

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely Not Important	Somewhat Not Important	Neutral	Somewhat Important	Very Important

Question 3

For the questionnaire that asked about different personal life events before and after age 18, **please consider both your experience answering the questions, and your feelings about how important it is that we ask the questions, and then rate how good of an idea it is to include such a measure in psychology research.**

1	2	3	4	5
Very	Somewhat	Neutral	Somewhat	Very
Bad	Bad		Good	Good

Distress

- Dissociation as measured by Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)
 - Average dissociation score = 23.5 (16.6)
 - DES Taxon membership, n=31
- Trauma Symptom Checklist
 - Average full scale score: 26.78 (13.7)

Sample 1

- 116 undergraduate volunteers at the University of Denver
 - 30 males, 86 females
 - Mean age =20.1

Q1: Sample 1

... please rate whether you found answering the questions to be more or less distressing than other things you sometimes encounter in day to day life.

1	2	3	4	5
Much More	Somewhat More	Neutral	Somewhat Less	Much Less
Distressing	Distressing		Distressing	Distressing

Distress	Frequency	%	Mean (SD)
Much more	5	4.3	3.01 (1.12)
Somewhat more	34	29.3	
Neutral	45	38.8	
Somewhat less	12	10.3	
Much less	20	17.2	

Reported Trauma History

- 61% (n=71) reported presence of sexual, physical or emotional abuse by someone close
 - before age 18, n=64
- 81% (n=94) reported presence of either sexual, physical, or emotional abuse perpetrated by someone not close or witnessing interpersonal violence
- 76% (n=88) reported presence of a non-interpersonal trauma

Follow up to Question 1

- Of the 5 who rated BBTS as much more distressing than day-to-day life
 - All said it was neutral (n=1), good (n=3) or very good (n=1) that psychologists asked about trauma.
 - 1 reported no trauma history

Q2: Sample 1

... please rate how important you believe it is for psychologists to ask about these types of events in order to study the impact of such experiences.

1 2 3 4 5
 Definitely Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Very
 Not Important Not Important Important Important

Important?	Frequency	%	Mean (SD)
Definitely not	1	0.9	4.32 (.80)
Somewhat not	1	0.9	
Neutral	15	12.9	
Somewhat	42	36.2	
Very	57	49.1	

Sample 2

- 64 DU undergraduate volunteers
 - 50 females
 - Mean age =20.54 (3.6)
 - Comparable self-report rates of trauma history and distress to Sample 1.
- Also asked participants to complete Response to Research Participation Questionnaire – Short Form (Newman & Kaloupek, Revised 2001).
 - 23 item self-report measure
 - Sample Items:
 - Knowing what I know now, I would participate in this study if given the opportunity.
 - I found participating in this study personally meaningful.

Q3: Sample 1

... please consider both your experience answering the questions, and your feelings about how important it is that we ask the questions, and then rate how good of an idea it is to include such a measure in psychology research.

1 2 3 4 5
 Very Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Very
 Bad Bad Good Good

Good idea?	Frequency	%	Mean (SD)
Very bad	0	0.0	4.28 (.67)
Somewhat bad	0	0.0	
Neutral	14	12.1	
Somewhat good	55	47.4	
Very good	47	40.5	

Q1: Sample 2

... please rate whether you found answering the questions to be more or less distressing than other things you sometimes encounter in day to day life.

1 2 3 4 5
 Much More Somewhat More Neutral Somewhat Less Much Less
 Distressing Distressing Distressing Distressing

Distress	Frequency	%	Mean (SD)
Much more	0	0.0	3.0 (1.1)
Somewhat more	2	3.1	
Neutral	9	14.1	
Somewhat less	13	20.3	
Much less	37	57.8	

Responses to BBTS, Trauma and Distress

- Reported Trauma History
 - No relationship to responses to 3 items.
- Dissociation
 - Higher DES scores were associated with rating trauma questions as less distressing than day-to-day life ($r=.205$, $p=.027$)
 - No relationship to responses to items 2 and 3
- Distress
 - No relationship between TSC-40 score and responses to 3 items.

Q1: Follow-up

- Of the 2 who rated BBTS as much more distressing than day-to-day life
 - Both rated the following 2 items as "5" – very important and very good.
- RRPQ
 - Both agreed that "knowing what I know now, I would participate in this study if given the opportunity"
 - Did not find questions too personal.
 - Agreed and strong agreed that "Had I known in advance what participating would be like I still would have agreed to participate."

Q2: Sample 2

... please rate how important you believe it is for psychologists to ask about these types of events in order to study the impact of such experiences.

1 2 3 4 5
 Definitely Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Very
 Not Important Not Important Important Important

Important?	Frequency	%	Mean (SD)
Definitely not	0	0.0	4.4 (.86)
Somewhat not	9	14.1	
Neutral	13	20.3	
Somewhat	37	57.8	
Very	61	95.3	

Q1: Community Sample

... please rate whether you found answering the questions to be more or less distressing than other things you sometimes encounter in day to day life.

1 2 3 4 5
 Much More Somewhat More Neutral Somewhat Less Much Less
 Distressing Distressing Distressing Distressing

Distress	Frequency	%
Much more	5	6.3
Somewhat more	26	32.9
Neutral	39	49.4
Somewhat less	2	2.5
Much less	7	8.9

Q3: Sample 2

... please consider both your experience answering the questions, and your feelings about how important it is that we ask the questions, and then rate how good of an idea it is to include such a measure in psychology research.

1 2 3 4 5
 Very Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Very
 Bad Bad Good Good

Good idea?	Frequency	%	Mean (SD)
Very bad	0	0.0	4.5 (.72)
Somewhat bad	0	0.0	
Neutral	8	12.5	
Somewhat good	16	25.0	
Very good	37	57.8	

Q2: Community Sample

... please rate how important you believe it is for psychologists to ask about these types of events in order to study the impact of such experiences.

1 2 3 4 5
 Definitely Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Very
 Not Important Not Important Important Important

Important?	Frequency	%
Definitely not	3	3.8
Somewhat not	3	3.8
Neutral	8	10.1
Somewhat	17	21.5
Very	48	60.8

Community Sample

- Collected at the University of Oregon
 - N=79
- Part of larger intervention study looking at effects of writing paradigm
- All participants reported some form of trauma history

Q3: Community Sample

... please consider both your experience answering the questions, and your feelings about how important it is that we ask the questions, and then rate how good of an idea it is to include such a measure in psychology research.

1 2 3 4 5
 Very Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Very
 Bad Bad Good Good

Good idea?	Frequency	%
Very bad	1	1.3
Somewhat bad	1	1.3
Neutral	17	21.5
Somewhat good	19	24.1
Very good	39	49.4

Additional Replications

- University of Denver
 - Undergraduate Samples
 - Health and Relationships Study (N=34)
 - Facial Emotion Study (N=61)
 - Collaborator: Paula Beall, Ph.D.
- University of Oregon
 - Undergraduate Samples
 - Dissociation & Procedural Learning (N=37)
 - Collaborator: Rose Barlow
 - Dissociation & Attention (N=48)
 - Collaborator: Jessica Kieras

Acknowledgements

- Volunteer participants
- DU Traumatic Stress Studies Lab, including:
 - Paula Beall, Ph.D. (Postdoctoral Fellow)
 - Melody Combs (Graduate Student)
 - Jackie Rea (Graduate Student)
 - Research Assistants
- UO Dynamics Lab, including:
 - Rose Barlow
 - Jessica Kieras
 - Bridget Klest
- Elana Newman for permission to use RRPQ

Implications

- Importance of Empirical Evidence
 - Both for responding to IRB and for monitoring responses to questions
- Results to date suggest the trauma questions are not unduly problematic
 - good benefit/risk ratio

References

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Implications

- Future research
 - Compare responses to being asked about trauma with other measures (e.g., personality assessment, financial information)
 - We may find that participants think the measures are slightly less distressing but also less useful
- Protocol Changes Resulting from this work at the University of Denver
 - All studies with BBTS include three follow up questions
 - All studies include Response to Research Participation Questionnaire (child or adult version)

Please visit us!

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 - <http://www.du.edu/~adeprinc/lab.html>
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