

Post-traumatic stress, injustice and long-term imprisonment

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Overview

- ◆ Effects of wrongful conviction and imprisonment
- ◆ Treatment and support needs
- ◆ Wider implications





Psychiatric assessments following wrongful conviction & imprisonment

Cases		n=46
Offences	murder	30
	other	16
Time in custody	0-5 yrs	15
	6-10 yrs	9
	11-15 yrs	10
	16 + yrs	12
Average age on arrest		31
Average age on release		41

Partners & children before arrest

- ◆ 32 of the 46 individuals had 63 children under 16
- ◆ 22 were living with their spouses & children
- ◆ Ages of children in these 22 families (n=49)

0-5 yrs	31
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6-10 yrs	12
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11-15 yrs	6
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Psychiatric conditions post-release

- ◆ Enduring personality change 30
- ◆ Post-traumatic stress disorder 23

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In prison

- ◆ Depressive disorder 32 30
- ◆ Paranoid symptoms 8 1
- ◆ Alcohol /drug dependence 18 19

Enduring personality change after catastrophic experience (F 62.0 ICD-10)

- ◆ Persistent and disabling personality change
- ◆ Characteristics not previously seen, such as:
 - hostile or mistrustful attitude towards the world
 - social withdrawal
 - feelings of emptiness or hopelessness,
 - chronic feeling of threat
 - estrangement.
- ◆ Onset after catastrophic experience
- ◆ Change present for at least two years and not due to pre-existing disorders

Other forms of suffering

◆ Physical

- assaults in police custody
- assaults in prison

◆ Psychological

- threats / deprivations / terror after arrest
- fear in prison
- prison conditions
- family separations and losses
- coping with the miscarriage of justice
- bitterness

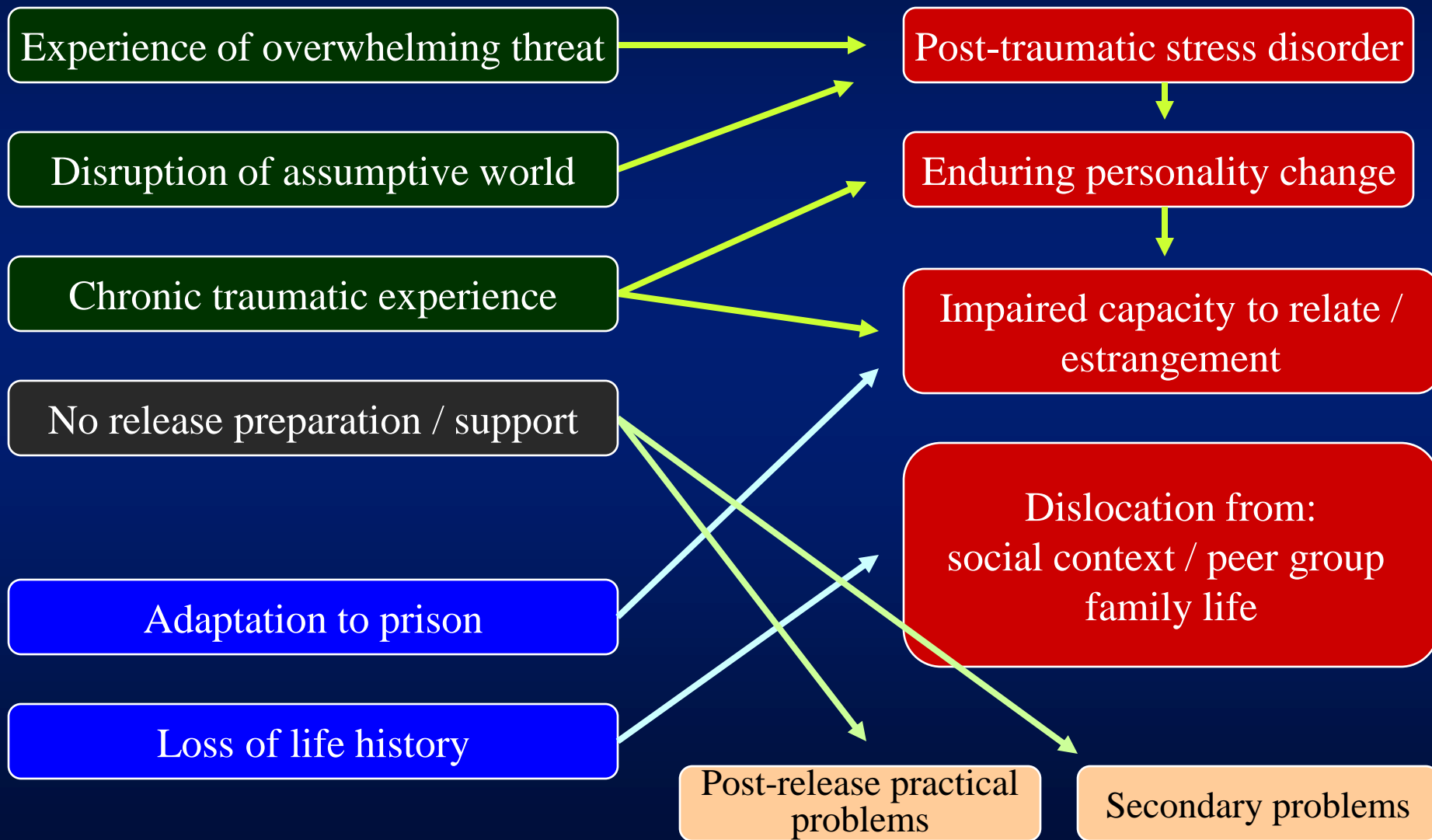
Problems of adjustment after release

- ◆ Practical skills
- ◆ Adaptation to prison
- ◆ Social circumstances
- ◆ Notoriety
- ◆ Effects of long-term detention
- ◆ Family relationships

Clinical literature

- ◆ Effects of chronic psychological trauma
- ◆ Parent-child separation
- ◆ Family adjustment in analogous groups
(war veterans)

Explaining the effects



Treatment and support needs

- ◆ Pre-release
 - psycho-educational advice
- ◆ Release
 - immediate residential facility
 - housing & finances
- ◆ Post-release
 - specific treatment interventions
 - longer term individual counselling
- ◆ Family support
- ◆ Compensation

Wider issues

- ◆ Do the findings relate only to wrongful convictions?
 - If not: implications for understanding prison effects
 - If so: implications for understanding psychological correlates of injustice

Limitations of research on psychological effects of imprisonment

- ◆ Lack of substantial longitudinal studies
- ◆ Samples studied during custody only
- ◆ Inadequate measures
- ◆ Lack of a developmental perspective

Developmental life history perspective

- ◆ Focus on change/adaptation in prison insufficient
- ◆ Two other comparisons relevant:
 - Expected life course if not imprisoned
 - Changes in the pre-arrest / outside world

Unjust detention and psychological harm

- ◆ Conditions of detention?
- ◆ Indeterminacy of detention??
- ◆ Non-legitimacy of detention?

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