ABSTRACT

Although traumas higher in betrayal, as measured by the Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS; Goldberg & Freyd, 2006), have been associated with greater physical and psychological symptomatology than traumas lower in betrayal (Freyd et al., 2005), it is not known whether betrayal-trauma survivors subjectively appraise—or evaluate—themselves as being betrayed. Participants were 274 college students who had experienced a betrayal event(s) lower in betrayal only (LBT; n = 89) higher in betrayal only (HBT; n = 57) or both lower and higher—combined—in betrayal (CBT; n = 130). HBT and CBT survivors reported stronger trauma-related appraisals, especially betrayal appraisals, compared to LBT survivors. These results provide convergent validity for the BBTS, confirming its ability to categorize trauma survivors according to the level of betrayal involved.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Betrayal-traumas (BTs) are traumas that occur when close individuals (i.e., caregivers, partners) violate or abuse their trust (i.e., incest; Freyd, 1996).

Traumas higher in betrayal have repeatedly been associated with greater physical and psychological symptomatology (e.g., Freyd, Klest, & Allard, 2005).

Betrayal-traumas, as measured by the BBTS, are defined by the type of event experienced. Respondents’ recognition of betrayal is not assessed.

Negative self-appraisals—evaluations—have also been found to account for symptomatology beyond other factors, such as amount of trauma exposure and abuse severity (e.g., Cromer & Smyth, 2010; Fairbrother & Rachman, 2006).

Current Study

The current study examines trauma appraisals by level of betrayal. Provided the relationship between betrayal traumas and post-trauma symptomatology and negative post-trauma appraisals and symptomatology we hypothesized that: 1) High betrayal trauma survivors will make stronger negative trauma appraisals
2) High betrayal trauma survivors will make more betrayal appraisals compared to other trauma-related appraisals.

METHOD

Participants

N = 274 undergraduates who reported experiencing at least one traumatic event

Ages ranged from 18 to 52 (M = 20.36, SD = 3.98)

82% Caucasian, 7% Multi-racial, 6% Asian, 5% Other/Declined to respond

70% female

Measures

The Brief Betrayal-Trauma Survey (BBTS: Goldberg & Freyd, 2006) was used to group participants as experiencing: 1) lower betrayal traumas only (LBT; n = 89), higher betrayal traumas only (HBT; n = 57), or 3) lower and higher (combined) betrayal traumas (CBT; n = 130).

The Trauma Appraisal Questionnaire (TAQ: DePrince, Zurbriggen, Chu, & Smart, 2010) was used to assess the strength of trauma appraisals related to 1) betrayal, 2) self-blame, 3) fear, 4) anger, 5) shame, and 6) alienation. Responses ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). Only items that were specific to trauma-related beliefs (in contrast to emotions or behaviors) were utilized (n = 33).

Procedure

Participants completed consent and all study measures online. Participants did not select into the study based on knowledge of its content.

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