

22nd World Congress on

PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

July 31-August 01, 2019 | Amsterdam, Netherlands



Owen Connolly

Owen Connolly Counselling Therapy & Education Centre, Ireland

Infantile post-traumatic stress (Re-set therapy)

I will be presenting a reflection of my body of clinical trauma work, also represented in my book 'On the Shoulders of Giants' which was published in 2006. This work was first presented at the PSI Conference in 2012 and again in 2013. My clinical work centres around infantile post-traumatic stress, whereby symptoms of present anxieties are traced back to birth. This treatment programme is referred to as 'Re-set therapy'.

Areas being addressed in this presentation centre around the first brain region to be visible in the womb; the reptilian function of the brain. This is deepest, most ancient part of the human brain, largely unchanged by evolution. The reptilian brain activates instinctive behaviour related to survival, and controls essential bodily functions required for sustaining life, including hunger, digestion, breathing, circulation, temperature, movement, and territorial instincts. The reptilian function is visible twenty-two days after conception. From very early on, this region appears to have a defensive role, which we now recognise as the 'fight-or-flight' response. The fight-or-flight response is a survival response, designed to respond appropriately to real or perceived threat. When the fight-or-flight response is triggered, cortisol levels are understood to increase. An increase in cortisol levels correlate with physical and psychological presentations of anxiety and related behavioural and self-regulatory disorders, such as ADD, ADHD, OCD and others, which clinicians have been seeking to address for some time, with mixed levels of success.

The individual's unique DNA is being formed from conception, through in-utero development and into the delivery process. Recent developments in availability of procedures such as amnio-sentis have provided unprecedented opportunity to assess the foetus from early stage development. However, practitioners using such procedures have presented ultrasound evidence of the foetus seemingly attempting an escape – a defence mechanism against a real or perceived threat, long before the rational brain has formed. Similarly, the delivery process can be a traumatic event, where tools such as forceps and suction-cups (ventouse) correlate with the experience of distress, which can have an interfering effect on the regulation within the child. The use of fMRI scans has demonstrated changes which arise in the brain of a child separated from their caregiver. Etiological studies of attachment patterns, grounded on theories of Bowlby and others, propose vast evidence of the effect of maternal anxiety on the affective regulation of the child, in-utero. These brain changes have been indicated to negatively influence subsequent self-regulation capacity for the child as well as the capacity to effectively trust others.

The design for survival is present, active and well-formed in the brain of the individual. The body's alarm system is well-placed, and 'perfectly' created. The alarm system was never designed to be triggered constantly. We consider the alarm system within the brain as we would consider an alarm system of a building. The alarm must always be present but should only be triggered in the event of a 'break in'. Where the alarm system is triggered, there are demonstrable neurobiological alterations. We use this information to retrain the brain and the body, and to re-set the alarm. We teach our brains to be in-charge of the alarm once again; to be able to re-set and to reverse the reptilian override of the rational brain, the so-called 'brain hijack'. That is the hope which Re-set therapy proposes and succeeds to bring. We are at a cutting-edge crossroads in that the empirical evidence is catching up with what clinical practice of Re-set therapy has demonstrated for years.

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My presentation will explore the identification of and treatment plan for individuals presenting with the vast number of anxieties and neurological ailments throughout the lifespan. Case studies and reference to emergent and established data will be used throughout, in order to illustrate comprehensively beyond theory and into the clinical experience of Re-set therapy.

Biography

Owen Connolly is the Owner & Senior Counselling Psychologist at the Owen Connolly Counselling Therapy & Education Centre. He has practised in the USA, Lebanon and the UK, now full-time in Ireland. He has over 50,000 client hours as a Counsellor. He is the chairman of the Education Research Trust Ltd. He is also an author of the best-selling book, the Father's role as a parent: 'Standing on the Shoulders of Giants' and also a co-author of 'Parenting in the Millenium'. He has been the director and Board Member of PPS (Psychologists Protection Society), Protecting counsellors, psychologists & psychotherapists for over 35 years.

connollycounselling@gmail.com