How Resilience Can Triumph Over Childhood Trauma

BY GABRIELLE JOHNSTON, MPH

How do you live a happy and fulfilled life at any age? Our researchers have determined that psychological resilience has a positive effect on health outcomes for people living with schizophrenia. This is the first study to quantitatively assess the effects of both childhood trauma and psychological resilience on health and metabolic function in people living with schizophrenia.

There is a gap in longevity between the overall population and persons with schizophrenia—their life expectancy is fifteen to twenty years shorter than the general population.

Although the cause of schizophrenia is not entirely known, the disorder is linked to genetic and environmental risk factors, including childhood adversity.

The findings are published in the April 17 online issue of the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry.

"In this study, we found that people living with schizophrenia who had a history of severe childhood adversity and high levels of psychological resilience had health and metabolic biomarkers of insulin resistance similar to those in nonpsychiatric comparison participants (NCs) with severe adversity and low levels of resilience," said senior author Dilip V. Jeste, MD, senior associate dean for healthy aging and senior care and director of the Center for Healthy Aging at UC San Diego.

“What is further striking,” said Dr. Jeste, “is the observation that in both groups (those with schizophrenia and NCs), persons with high levels of resilience had overall better physical and mental health and metabolic biomarkers.”

Ellen Lee, MD, first author and a research fellow at UC San Diego described resilience as “a psychological trait that helps people cope with and recover from adversities or hardships of different kinds. It is essentially a personality trait that is partially genetic, but is also determined by a variety of life and social experiences.”

As such, Dr. Jeste said it should be possible to ameliorate some of the negative effects of adversities. “There are a variety of resilience-enhancing interventions that exist in a variety of settings. The military has been using resilience training for years to enhance this trait in soldiers before they head to war. Other resilience-enhancing interventions include mindfulness, meditation, and positive psychology,” he said.

Metabolic biomarkers of the most interest to the research team were Homeostatic Model Assessment of Insulin Resistance (HOMA-IR) and hemoglobin A1C. These were selected for their ability to indicate health problems, such as diabetes,

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JUNE

Mindfulness and Aging
Dr. Steve Hickman

Wednesday, July 18, 5:30 p.m.
Garren Auditorium, UC San Diego

Mindfulness is a particularly fast-growing and well-researched aspect of psychology based upon the practice of meditation and present-moment awareness as a way of coping, healing, and living with the challenges and opportunities of daily life.

Please join us for the public lecture to learn more about mindfulness from Steven Hickman, PhD. Dr. Hickman is a licensed clinical psychologist and has a joint appointment as an associate clinical professor in the UC San Diego Department of Psychiatry and Department of Family Medicine and Public Health. Dr. Hickman is the founder and executive director of the UC San Diego Center for Mindfulness, a program of community building, clinical, professional, teaching, and research. Since founding the Center for Mindfulness in 2000, he has taught more than fifty mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) courses, as well as adapting the program for nurses, medical students, and other professionals and clinical populations. Dr. Hickman is also a trainer of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) teachers and offers workshops and talks on a variety of related topics. The UC San Diego Center for Mindfulness is developing a global Professional Training Institute dedicated to providing professional training and certification in the full spectrum of mindfulness-based interventions. Dr. Hickman is also a member of the Executive Committee of the UC San Diego Center for Integrative Medicine.

He is married and has three teenage children, affording him ample opportunities to practice what he teaches.

Dr. Hickman is primarily a clinician but is involved in clinical research on the topics of MBSR, the role of mindfulness in the perception of pain and in coping with chronic pain and illness, and ways in which clinical psychology can facilitate and enhance treatment of serious medical illness like cancer.

Please register at aging.ucsd.edu.

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SUCCESSFUL AGERS IN ACTION

Meet This Month’s Successful Ager: Steve Clary

BY JANE SAWYER

When Steve Clary walked into his first lecture at the UC San Diego’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in late 2010, he did not expect to be seeing quite so much of that classroom. It’s now eight years later and Clary, a former vice president on his institute’s Executive Committee, still serves as the chairperson for their Curriculum Committee, where plans are laid out for classes that engage the institute’s 800-plus members in two well-used classrooms.

Whether it is one of the twice-daily lectures for 75-100 students, a literary discussion seminar, three small theater productions each academic quarter, or a Friday afternoon live music event, Clary and the fifteen-volunteer Curriculum Committee are busy planning and filling those classrooms during thirty-eight weeks each year.

Prior to being tapped by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Clary was recruited to take on a leadership role with the San Diego United Service Organizations (USO), where as treasurer and board president he helped establish a 14,000 sq. ft. USD recreation facility downtown and the permanent reception center at the San Diego International Airport. These volunteer positions have helped Clary maintain a sense of purpose and a commitment to success.

After a distinguished thirty-year career in the US Navy, where he retired as a rear admiral and a twelve-year civilian career at General Dynamics National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (NASSCO), Clary recognized that his retirement would be a juncture where he’d need to reinvent himself. He has appreciated the opportunity to become part of a distinguished research university and to join organizations like Osher—seeing them as enrichment opportunities and places for “psychic income.”

For Clary, Osher has been a place to join a group, enjoy new friends, and learn from them, while also being an opportunity for him to help make the organization a better one. Osher provides an expression for both his leadership skills and his passion for learning. Because the Bernard Osher Foundation has established Lifelong Learning Institutes at universities throughout the United States, including noncredit courses and activities for adults aged fifty or older, Clary and his fellow Osher members are happy to support this learning for the joy of it. Along with enjoying the knowledge and experiences, they appreciate their peers’ varied experiences and curiosity and are particularly grateful for professors and leading-edge experts who share their time in Osher programs.

Maintaining physical fitness is important to Clary as he continues to pursue his love of downhill skiing every year as well as summertime hiking and backpacking in the Sierra Nevadas. When his wife of fifty-five years, Bonnie, challenged him to read War and Peace, he took the audiobook to the gym three times a week and listened to all sixty-four hours of it while pacing himself on an elliptical machine. Trips to the Sierra Nevadas and more than a dozen worldwide trips that the Clary’s have taken with the Harvard and Williams College alumni associations keep them planning ahead.

Clary laughs at the notion of “successful aging”, insisting that we are all approaching it and to our lifetimes. As he and Bonnie have watched their son and daughter and four grandchildren grow through their own life experiences and shared friends and family face health challenges, they do appreciate their own resiliency and the opportunity to give back. Whether you believe that leaders are born or develop through experience, Clary provides us an opportunity to appreciate a purposeful life, approached with vigor and lived with honor.

Free Public Lectures

JULY

JULY’S LECTURE

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When you choose to support the Center for Healthy Aging and the Stein Institute for Research on Aging, you’re making the decision to support the pursuit of a healthier, longer life for you, your loved ones, and your local and global community. Your support is crucial to our ability to have an impact on our aging population here and around the world.

Our goal is to create a world in which older adults enjoy the highest level of well-being, through innovative science, interprofessional collaborations, and community partnerships. Our work seeks to transform the care of older adults in San Diego and beyond and improve their quality of life. Your support enables us to fund innovative pilot projects, create interprofessional local and global working groups, conduct important community projects, and host conferences and educational events for those in professional fields, as well as the public.

Here are some examples of our projects:

- Training for students and health-care professionals
- Research on technology for older adults
- Intergenerational housing and activities
- Making San Diego more age friendly

We Need Your Support!

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BY MAIL
Please make your check payable to UC San Diego Foundation; write Stein Institute or Center for Healthy Aging in the memo portion of the check and include a brief note specifying whether you would like your donation to go to the Stein Institute or the Center for Healthy Aging. Mail your gift to the address below:

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