

## **Social Psychiatry**

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### **Overview**

The purpose of the Social Psychiatry Research Unit has been to develop and sustain a program of research on important substantive and methodological issues in psychiatric epidemiology. The focus of the substantive research is on questions about the role of adversity and stress in the onset and course of psychiatric disorders that are inversely related to socioeconomic status (SES) -- especially schizophrenia, major depression, antisocial personality, alcoholism, substance use disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The methodological issues center on how to conceptualize and measure major stressful life events as risk factors for the development of disorders that are inversely related to SES.

The Community Research Group (CRG) studies community-level processes that affect health and mental health. Its work has examined AIDS, crack, violence, tuberculosis, asthma and other epidemics that have shaped life in poor neighborhoods in the US. On the basis of that work, CRG began to explore the public policies that have undermined urban life in the US, such as the federal urban renewal program in effect from 1940-1973.

### **Current Research**

#### *Social Psychiatry Research Unit*

Two main studies are being conducted in the Social Psychiatry Research Unit. One is a continuation of research on the conceptualization and measurement of major stressful events over the life course. This research has been supported by a five-year R01 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) which ends on January 31, 2007, and by a current one year grant from an anonymous private foundation. The second project involves research on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in U.S. veterans of the war in Vietnam. This research was conducted with a three-year R01 grant from NIMH and has been continued with grants from an anonymous private foundation.

#### *Community Research Group*

The Community Research Group has two major research projects with the Columbia Center for Youth Violence Prevention. The first is examining the effect of a new youth center on street life in Washington Heights. The second is examining the experiences of youth who are re-entering the community after incarceration. We are also working with Abyssinian Development Corporation, a major force in the revitalization of Harlem, to understand the organization's position and possibilities.

### **Education and Training**

Dr. Bruce Dohrenwend continues on the Steering Committee of the NIMH-supported Research Training Program in Psychiatric Epidemiology, which is co-sponsored by the School of Public Health and the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University. Dr. Mindy Fullilove continues as co-director of the Urbanism and Built Environment Track in the MPH program in the School of Public Health.

**Awards/Honors**

Dr. Mindy Fullilove was named a visiting professor at the National Conservatory of Arts and Trades in Paris, France.

The Community Research Group's film, "Urban Renewal is People Removal," was awarded "Best Short Documentary" at the Trenton Film Festival.

**Highlights**

Dr. Bruce Dohrenwend and his colleagues' paper, "The Psychological Risks of Vietnam for U.S. Veterans" was published in the August 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 issue of *Science*. The paper addresses major controversies about combat-related rates of PTSD and makes extensive use of new data from military records and historical accounts to demonstrate a strong dose/response relationship between severity of exposure to war-zone stressors and rates of PTSD. There was a great deal of media coverage of the paper, and a symposium about the implications of its findings was held on November 6<sup>th</sup> at the 2006 annual meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS).

Dr. Mindy Fullilove and her colleagues worked with other university and community groups to launch "City Life Is Moving Bodies" (CLIMB) at a June 17<sup>th</sup> festival in Highbridge Park.

Dr. Mindy Fullilove and colleagues also organized an AIDS conference called "New York Stop AIDS," which presented the structural underpinnings of the AIDS epidemic in New York. This conference was attended by African-American and Latino community and faith leaders.