

Feb-March 2017

Trauma, Conflict and Suicide in Northern Ireland; Lessons learned and how to move forward

The NI study of the world mental health surveys demonstrated the high levels of mental disorders and suicidal behaviour that exist within the population and the associations with exposure to conflict related trauma. NI continues to have the highest suicide rates of any UK region and the figures are continuing to rise. There is increasing concern for the impact of the conflict's legacy on subsequent generations, and in particular the transgenerational transmission of the consequences of psychological trauma. In this keynote Professor O'Neill will discuss the evidence on the transgenerational transmission of trauma, including the effects on epigenetic risk and maladaptive parenting behavior. She will demonstrate how the high rates of childhood physical punishment demonstrated in her research studies is associated with trauma exposure and adverse mental health outcomes. The ways in which poverty serves to exacerbate the mental health impact of adverse events in the life of a family and the risks of these cycles contributing to new episodes of organised community violence will be identified. Together her studies highlight the need to identify and treat trauma related psychopathology in parents and to concurrently build their capacities to reduce the risk of transgenerational trauma transmission. Parents need to be supported to construct age and stage appropriate narratives for explaining their trauma related experiences to their children. In order to halt this cycle of transmission it is also important that evidence based social and emotional learning programmes are embedded within the early years' and school curricula, and that risk factors and symptoms of mental disorders in children are identified and treated.