Abstract

Introduction: Historical trauma (HT) is a collective trauma inflicted on a group of people who share an identity or affiliation, and is often characterized by the transgenerational legacy of traumatic experiences, and expressed through various psychological and social responses. This construct is proposed in contrast to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to limitations identified with the latter diagnostic category when addressing collective trauma, especially in situations of political and social violence. The purpose of this article is to review the literature published so far on HT. Methods: A search was performed using the terms “historical trauma” and “mental health” or “trauma histórico” and “salud mental” in the scientific databases, EMBASE, Ebscohost, JSTOR, ProQuest, LILACS, SciELO, PsycARTICLES, ISI Web of Science and PubMed. Results: The authors reviewed HT definition, paramount characteristics of its traumatic experience, and several theories of on the transgenerational succession if these experiences occur, as well as possible consequences of traumatic events at individual, family and social level. Common characteristics of different therapeutic models are highlighted, in addition to some recommendations for their application. Conclusions: PTSD has clear limitations in addressing community and cumulative traumatic experiences related to specific social and historical contexts. The authors discuss the potential utility of HT in this task. Finally, several gaps in current knowledge regarding this construct are mentioned, and some recommendations for future research are indicated.

Keywords

Historical trauma, Armed conflict, Political violence, Mental health.