

## **Rationale for Separating PTSD, Depressive and Anxiety Disorders: A Belgian Study Based on the Terrorist Attacks of March 22th 2016**

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### **Abstract**

The DSM-V separates posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD) from anxiety disorders. The authors conducted a prospective study aiming to observe the evolution of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); depressive and anxiety disorders symptoms (DAD); and the protective role of Sense of Coherence (SOC) after the Brussels March 2016 terrorist attacks.

They collected data in a non-clinical sample of 464 participants two days (time 1) and three months (time 2) after the attacks. They measured the level of PTSD, DAD and SOC at time 1 and 2. They observed a negative relationship between SOC and both DAD (effect size of .40) and PTSD symptoms (effect size of .10). A high level of SOC enables subjects to overcome DAD symptoms (Effect size .02) faster than subjects with lower level of SOC. This effect is not present regarding the evolution of PTSD symptoms. This study presents some limitations. All scales are self-reported measures. Second, there might be a selection bias since among 2017 participants at time 1 only 464 completed the follow up questionnaire at time 2. Third, the considered trauma is a Secondary Traumatic Stress since participants were not direct victims of the attacks. However, results confirm the relevance of the current separation of PTSD from anxiety disorders. Authors propose an interpretation of this relevance taking into account the cognitive distortion observed in PTSD. At a clinical level, PTSD and DAD should benefit from different therapeutic interventions after trauma exposure.

### **Keywords**

Terrorism, PTSD, Depressive and Anxiety Disorders, Sense of Coherence.

