

RISK & RESILIENCE FOLLOWING THE VIRGINIA TECH SHOOTINGS

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Methodological Overview

- ◎ Women who completed prior project contacted via email to complete web survey related to shooting
- ◎ Three waves of data collection:
 - 2 months post-shooting (n = 293; 36%)
 - 6 months post-shooting (n = 263)
 - 1 year post-shooting (n = 257)

Post-shooting Participants

- Similar demographically to VT undergrads as a whole
 - $M = 19.4$ years old ($SD = 1.4$, range 18-27)
 - 87% (82%) European American
 - 6% (7%) Asian American
 - 2% (5%) African American
- Completers (vs Noncompleters)
 - Similar in sexual assault history, initial anxiety and depression symptoms
 - slightly older (19.4 vs 19.1)
 - slightly less pre-shooting social support ($d = .22$)

Exposure and posttrauma symptoms

⦿ Exposure

- 21% had no direct exposure
- 46% less severe direct exposure
- 33% more severe direct exposure

⦿ Loss

- 65% knew someone killed in the shootings
- 30% lost a friend in the shootings

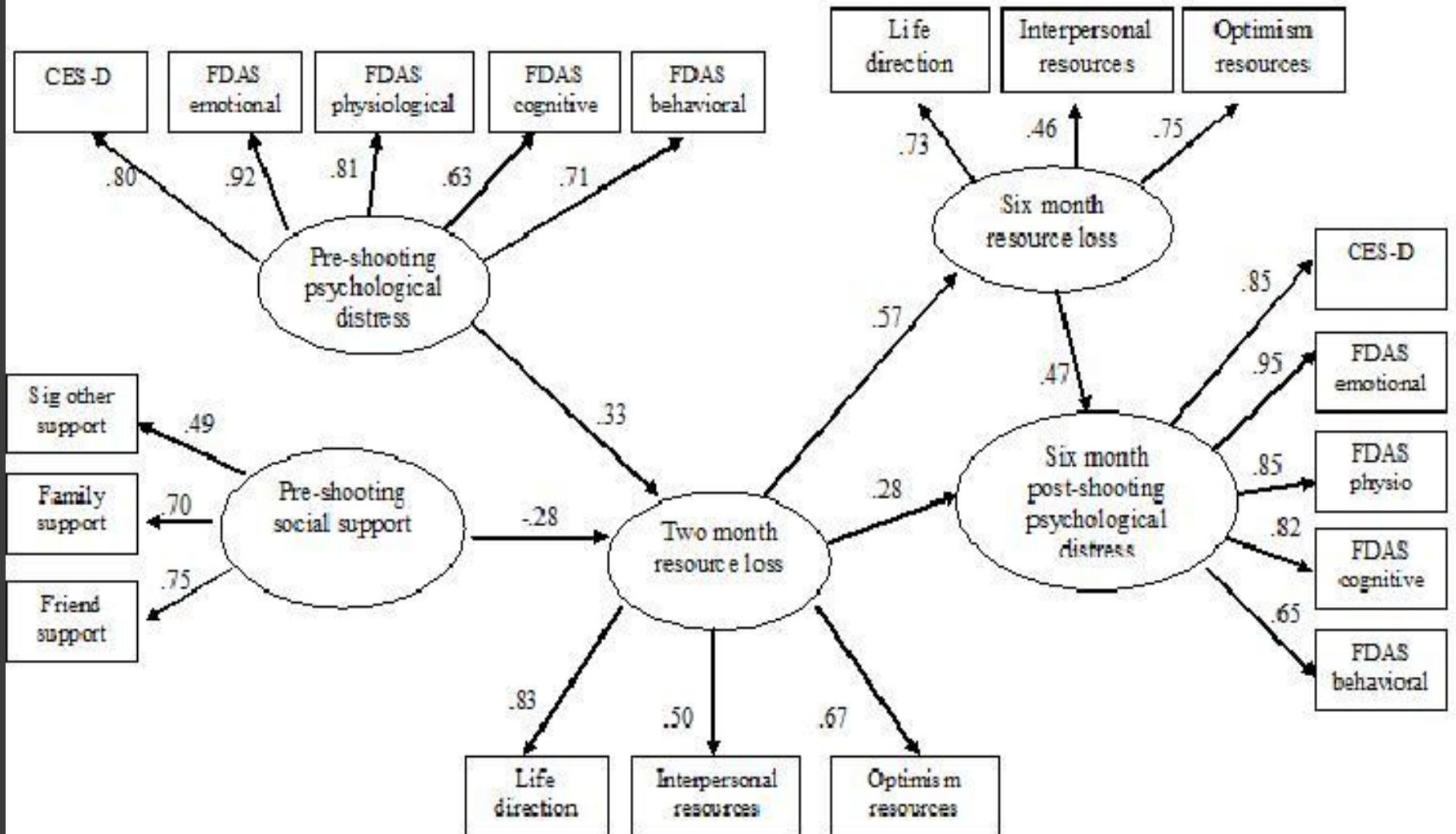
⦿ Two month posttrauma symptomatology

- 94% reported symptoms
- 30% scored above clinical cut-off

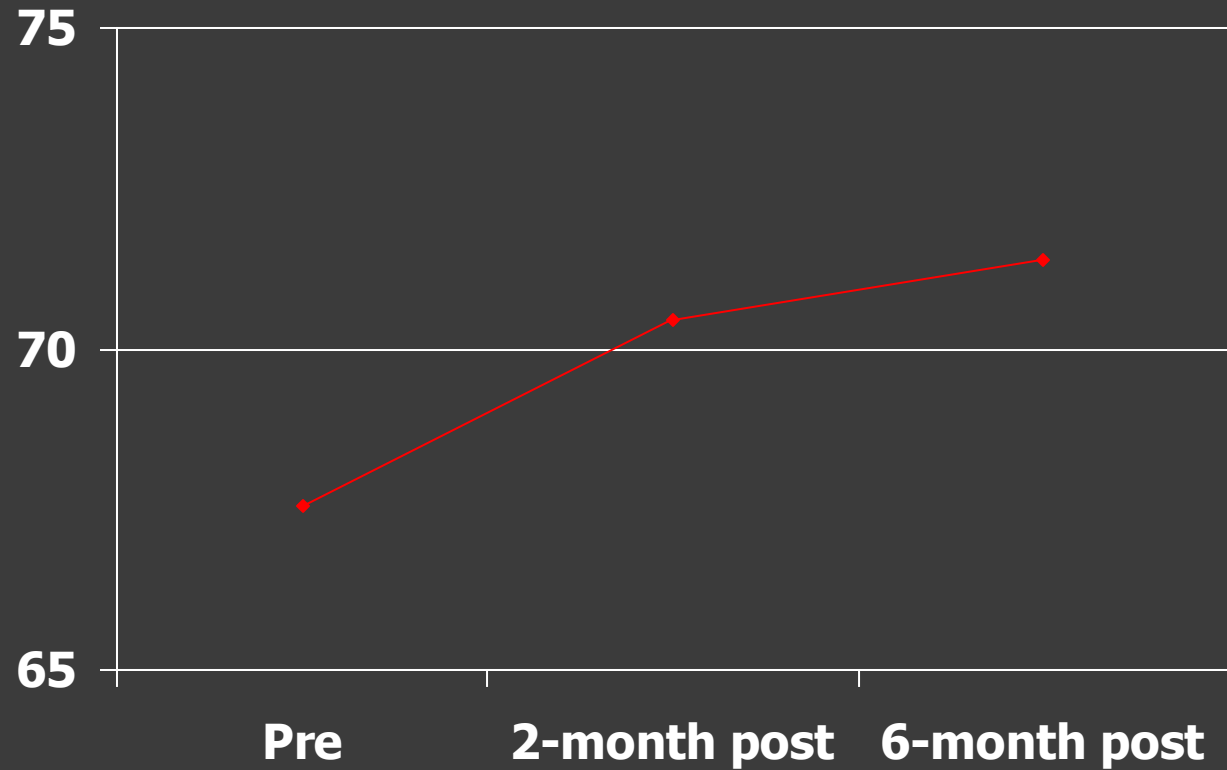
⦿ Six month posttrauma symptomatology

- 90% reported symptoms
- 24% scored above clinical cut-off

Resource Loss Spiral Model

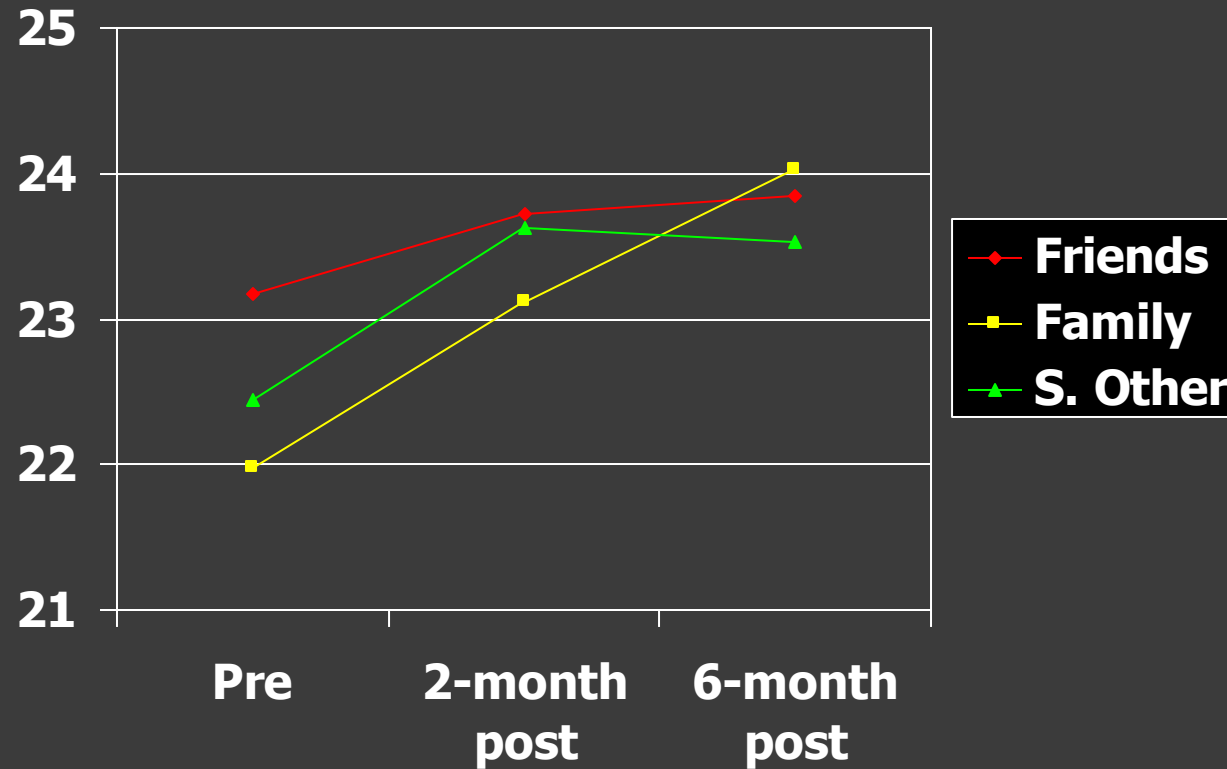


MSPSS Total



Linear Trend $p < .001$

MSPSS Subscales



Support Type x Time $p < .001$

MSPSS Items: Family Support

- ⦿ My family really tries to help me.
- ⦿ I get the emotional help and support that I need from my family.
- ⦿ * I can talk about my problems with my family.
- ⦿ My family is willing to help me make decisions.

What about help giving?

- Mass traumas present opportunities for receiving *and* giving help
- Because formal sources of help are often underutilized, we should look more closely at help-giving.

Help-giving: Possible Benefits for the Giver

- ⦿ Giving help gives us something to do; structures our experience
- ⦿ Similar to formal rituals such as wakes, funerals, memorials
 - University-wide convocation & candlelight vigil next day both heavily attended



Help-giving: Possible Benefits for the Giver

- ⦿ Giving help one way of addressing the existential threat represented by attacks such as 4-16, or 9-11
 - Highlights “the better angels of our nature”
- ⦿ A way of reasserting control over the meaning of the event
 - Common theme in University statements: We will not be defined by this shooting.

Help-giving: Possible Benefits for the Giver

- ⦿ Giving help may make it easier to *receive* help
- ⦿ A psychological barrier to help-seeking is reluctance to feel indebted to others
 - “thank you” = “much obliged”
- ⦿ Giving help to others creates a more favorable “balance sheet”

Help-giving: Possible Benefits for the Giver

- ⦿ Nature of help exchanged and parties to the exchange need not be the same
- ⦿ May not even know the recipient of our help (e.g., giving blood)

Does Help-giving Reduce Own Distress?

- ⦿ Despite potential benefits of help-giving, whether it reduces own distress, at least in short run, an open question
- ⦿ May bring giver in contact with people, knowledge, images, and situations that increase distress.
 - “wear and tear hypothesis”

Emotional Help-Giving Items

- Comforted/held someone (.85)
- Listened to someone's feelings (.82)
- Let someone know he/she was loved (.81)
- Helped cheer someone up (.77)
- Spent time with someone (.68)
- Reassured someone that he/she was a good person (.64)

Emotional Help-Giving Correlates

- Related to two exposure variables
 - Extent felt lives of loved ones in danger during shooting ($r=.27$)
 - Whether knew someone killed ($r=.17$)
- Related to social contact as a coping strategy for dealing with the shooting incident ($r=.44$)
 - Possible interplay between help giving and help receipt

Social Contact Coping Items

- “I found somebody who is a good listener”
- “I talked to someone about how I was feeling”
- “I talked to someone that I was very close to”
- “I asked a friend or relative I respect for advice”

Emotional Help-Giving Correlates

- Related to current perceived *social support* ($r=.21$)
- Related to belief in the benevolence of people (World Assumptions Scale; $r=.25$)
- Related to dispositional optimism ($r=.19$)
- Not significantly related to distress or PTS symptomatology

Emotional Help Giving & Reparative Actions

- Attend convocation
- Attend candlelight vigil
- Place items on Drillfield memorial
- Write on Drillfield tablets
- Attend funeral/memorial for specific victim
- Donate money to Hokie Spirit Memorial fund
- Emotional help giving associated with number of these actions undertaken ($r=.25$)

Some Limitations

- Self-reported help giving, with the usual caveats associated with this type of data
- We don't know who they helped.
- We don't know whether the help provided was useful, from the recipient's perspective.
- We don't know exactly how help giving and help receipt are related.
- Preliminary – more multivariate & longitudinal analyses needed, including relationship to resource loss.

Some closing thoughts

- Our data support notion that traumas such as mass shootings can affect whole communities
- Conservation of resources theory seems useful in understanding adjustment following trauma, including those without significant material loss
- Potential role of differential vulnerability to resource loss as predictor of adjustment
- Family support appears especially important after events of this sort, and understanding this dynamic merits further study

Some closing thoughts

- ⦿ Help giving a strong urge after mass traumas
 - VT Engage as institutional response
- ⦿ Help giving may be a competence worth developing
 - For personal resilience
 - Connection to interpersonal relationship training (Cloitre et al, 2002)
 - For community resilience
 - Resilience is a property not just of people, but of communities
- ⦿ As long as the great bulk of assistance provided after mass traumas is from informal, familiar sources, a better understanding of this dynamic, both in terms of social support and help-giving, would seem important for assessing both risk and resilience.

Thank You!

Methodological Overview

- Sample of 843 women recruited during 06-07 school year for multi-site, web-based survey of adjustment following negative sexual experiences
- Reported similar sexual assault experiences as most studies of college women
- Completed measures of mental health and social support

Help Giving Questions

- ◎ “...how often you have engaged in the following helping behaviors after the shootings”
 - “never” (1); “occasionally” ; “sometimes”; “often”; “very often” (5)
 - 20 different types of help, e.g., providing food, money, transportation, helping with schoolwork, comforting someone
- ◎ Responses factor analyzed, revealing two primary factors

Measures – Conservation of Resources Evaluation (Hobfall, 2001)

- 27 Items from the COR-E (Hobfall, 2001)
- Extent lost or gained each resource since the shooting (or, for 6-month follow-up, in past 4 months)
- Factor analysis indicated 3 interpretable factors
 - Life direction/pride (sense of pride in self)
 - Interpersonal resources (companionship)
 - Intrapersonal resources (optimism, hope)

Conservation of resources theory as a lens

- Posits that actual or threatened loss of resources helps determine adjustment following trauma (Hobfoll & Lilly, 1993)
- Resources: Objects, characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued either on their own or because they lead to the achievement or protection of valued resources

Potential protective and risk factors for resource loss

◎ Strength of social support

- More able to respond to actual loss of interpersonal resources
- Can rely on others to assist in restoring lost resources
- May be protective against intrapersonal resource loss

◎ Psychological distress

- Likely marker for relative lack of resources
- May be more likely to respond defensively to threat to resources

MSPSS Items: Friend Support

- ① My friends really try to help me.
- ① I can count on my friends when things go wrong.
- ① I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.
- ① I can talk about my problems with my friends.

MSPSS Items: Special Other

- ⦿ There is a special person around when I am in need.
- ⦿ There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows.
- ⦿ I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.
- ⦿ There is a special person in my life.

Tangible Help-Giving Items

- Ran errands for someone
- Helped someone out at his/her job
- Helped someone care for his/her pets
- Prepared food for someone
- Helped someone with his/her schoolwork
- Helped someone with chores/tasks around his/her home
- Helped someone organize tasks he/she needed to complete
- Planned something special for someone