

The Normandy Landings Revisited: 80 Years of Traumatic Stress Studies...

A few conference highlights – by Jana Javakhishvili

On May 22-24, a conference commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings took place in Caen, France. The meeting was hosted by Caen University and sponsored by ISTSS and ESTSS. More than 30 experts from around the globe attended and contributed to discussions on current challenges and advances in the traumatic stress field.



Opening panel, from left to right: Eric Bui (conference chair), Miranda Olf^{1&2}, Dean Ajdukovic¹, Diane Elmore², Angela Nickerson², Marit Sijbrandij², Joanne Mouthaan¹, Barbara Rothbaum², Ulrich Schnyder^{1&2}, Evaldas Kaslauskas¹, Jana Javakhishvili¹

¹ (past) president ESTSS

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At the opening of the conference, a presidential panel uniting current and past presidents of ISTSS and ESTSS was held. The presidents discussed the role of the traumatic stress community in decreasing the suffering of individuals, communities, and societies exposed to large-scale potentially traumatic stressors such as armed conflicts, environmental hazards, and political oppression. The potential role of traumatic stress societies was discussed not only in dealing with the consequences of catastrophes but also in their possible contributions to preventing them—such as reducing carbon footprints and introducing an early

warning system for interpersonal violence. Other topics included achieving a balance between different dimensions of our work: focusing on evidence-based interventions while also allowing space for innovative developments, focusing on individual, family, and group formats of treatment, and addressing social dimensions such as socio-political context and justice.

During a panel dedicated to the underlying mechanisms of refugees' mental health, Prof. Angela Nickerson from UNSW Sydney, the president of ISTSS, spoke about the role of emotional avoidance in refugees' mental health. She shared findings of the study revealing that emotional avoidance is associated with increased psychological distress in refugees living in insecure settings, and that avoidance of positive emotions is a more powerful predictor of subsequent increases in psychopathology.

Prof. Joanne Mouthaan from the University of Leiden, the president of ESTSS, presented the experience of ESTSS in the elaboration, promotion, and dissemination of Pan-European Standards for Psychotraumatology Training and Certification. She used the example of Ukraine, where local mental health professionals are currently undergoing certification training in psychotraumatology based on the ESTSS training curricula developed by the ESTSS Task Force.

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