

# What Have We Learned From The Oklahoma City Federal Building Bombing?


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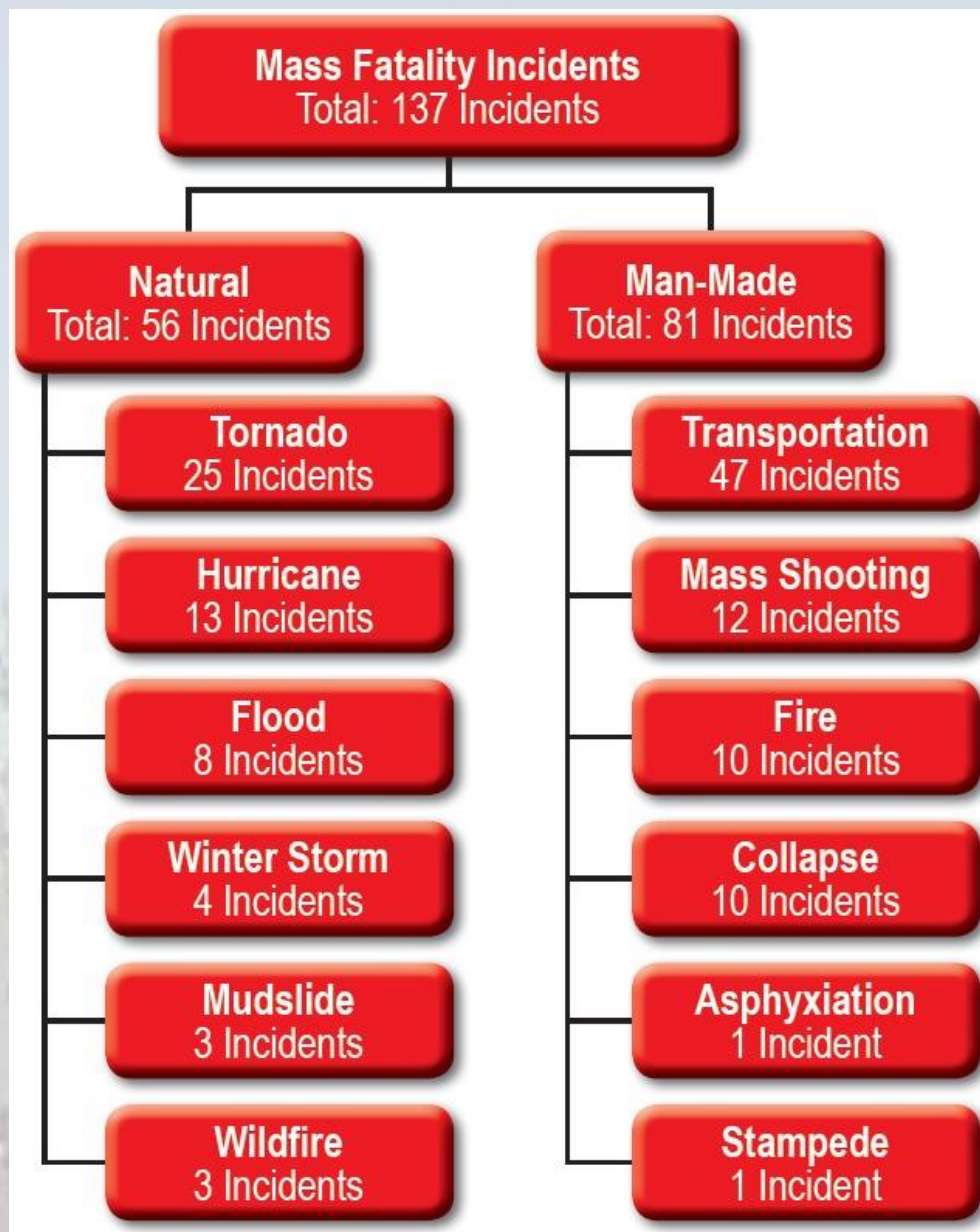
# Relevant Disclosure

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I have no relevant financial relationships or affiliations with commercial interests to disclose.



The following content may be disturbing for some workshop participants, and they should use their own judgment about whether to attend. The following material will contain text and images of, or inferences of, violence, injury and death. I apologize in advance for any distress caused by this presentation.



Mass fatality incidents occurring in the United States  
from January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2016





“The day of the bombing is a standard by which all Oklahomans now measure time... “We are simply not the same people we were before.”

Stephen Jones

Timothy McVeigh’s lead defense attorney

# Policy and Advocacy Matters



“When someone is a victim, he or she should be at the center of the criminal justice process, not on the outside looking in.”

President William Jefferson Clinton

Oklahoma City 1997



# “The Oklahoma Standard”



**Mass Fatality Family Assistance Operations:**  
**Recommended Strategies for Local and State Agencies.** U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Office for Victim Assistance*

# The Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act of 1996

(49 USC § 1136, 41313 and 41113).



- The NTSB Transportation Disaster Assistance Division (TDA) Family Assistance Center (FAC) will be established (modeled on “Compassion Center”)
- TDA coordinates with the American Red Cross to provide crisis counseling and short-term disaster mental health services for family members, friends and survivors.



# Oklahoma's Worker's Comp, circa 1995



“Compensable injury” *shall not include mental injury that does not arise directly as a result of a compensable physical injury,* except in the case of rape or other crime of violence which arises out of and in the course of employment.

# Oklahoma's Worker's Comp 2025

- Allows first responders to get workers' comp benefits for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suffered due to their jobs.
  - Professional and volunteer firefighters,
  - Law enforcement officers,
  - Emergency medical technicians (EMTs).
- The law specifies that a first responder can receive benefits for
  - Treatment and time away from the job for up to a year
  - Permanently disabled by their PTSD, they may be eligible for up to \$50,000 in benefits



*Gov. Kevin Stitt signed in Spring 2024*

# Importance of Early Intervention

- Optimally, intervention begins before the event
  - *Resilience*
- The wrong intervention is worse than no intervention at all
- Timing is **EVERYTHING!**



# Consensus Conference on Best Practices

- National Institute of Mental Health (2002). **Mental Health and Mass Violence Evidence-Based Early Psychological Intervention for Victims/Survivors of Mass Violence. A Workshop to Reach Consensus on Best Practices.** *NIH Publication No. 02-5138, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.*
- Nearly 60 experts in disaster mental health met to examine research on the psychological interventions that are often the first responses to incidents of mass violence.
- Participants came to consensus in seven areas (e.g., early intervention, timing of early intervention, screening survivors, and follow up)

# Early Interventions

- A sensible working principle in the immediate post-incident phase is to ***expect normal recovery***;
- Presuming clinically significant disorder in the early post-incident phase is inappropriate, ***except when there is a preexisting condition***;
- Participation of survivors of mass violence in early intervention sessions, whether administered to a group or individually, should be voluntary.
- The term "debriefing" should be used only to describe operational debriefings (done primarily for reasons other than preventing or reducing mental disorders)

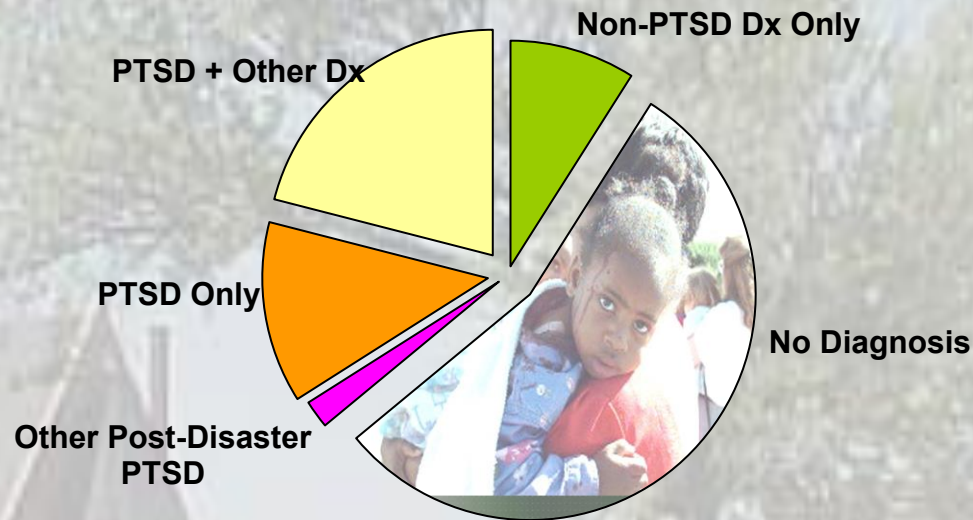
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# Post-Disaster Psychiatric Diagnoses

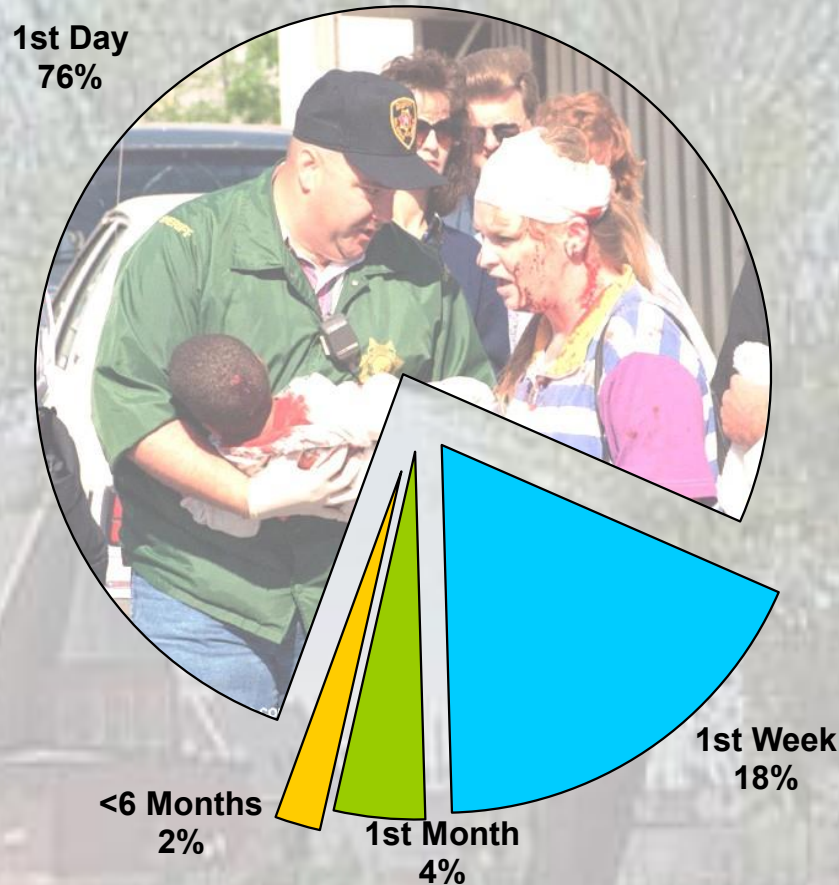
## Oklahoma City Bombing (N= 182)



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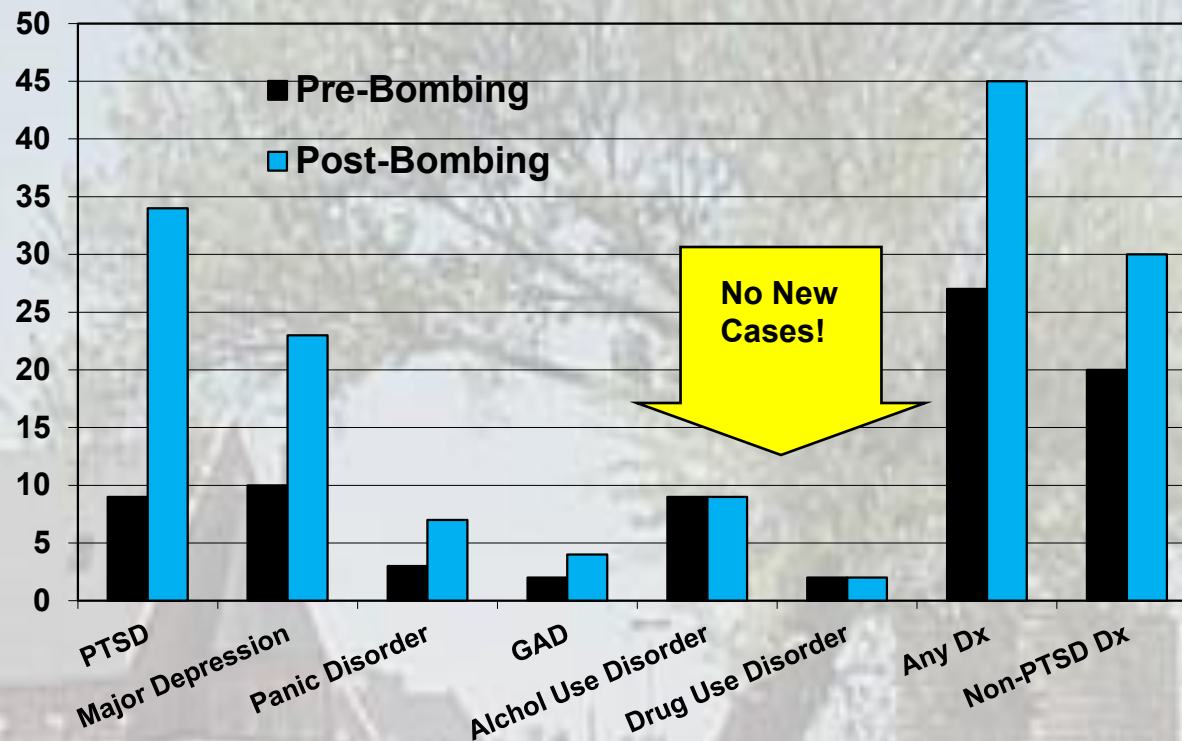
# Survivors of 1995 OKC Bombing Reported onset of “Post Traumatic Stress” Symptoms





# Prevalence of Pre - & Post- Disaster Disorders

## Oklahoma City Bombing (N= 182)



# PTSD Symptom Follow-up Data

- 137 survivors assessed at approximately 6- and 17-months post disaster
- Combined index and follow-up data yielded a higher (41%) incidence of PTSD than detected at index (32% or follow-up 31%)
- All PTSD was chronic 89% unremitted at 17 months (*with no delayed-onset cases*)
- Criterion C, unlike B and D alone, was pivotal to current PTSD status
- The findings at index were sustainable

# PTSD in OKC Bombing Firefighters' Partners

- Assessed 43 to 44 months later
- 40% met both B (intrusive re-experiencing) and D (hyperarousal) criteria
- More than one half of the sample exhibited autonomic reactivity on at least one measurement
- One participant met all DSM-III-R symptom group criteria for bombing-related posttraumatic stress disorder
- *Most of the participants with post-bombing disorders suffered from pre-existing conditions*

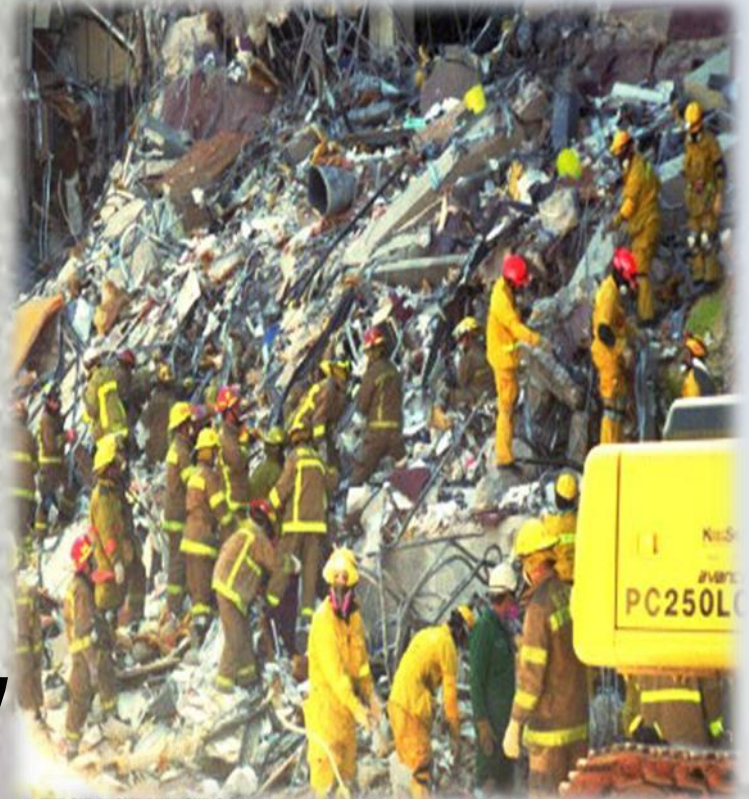


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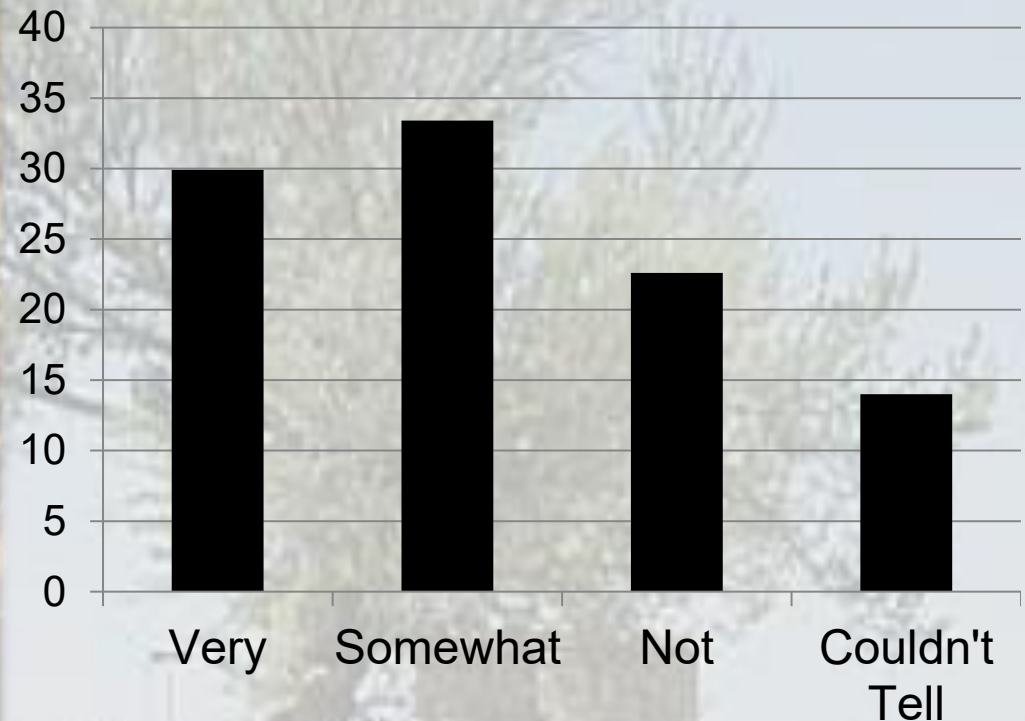
# The Role of CISM in Mass Casualty Incidents

- Proven benefit for first responders following conclusion of critical incident
- Proven detriment to victims and survivors of the incident
- ***One size does not fit all!***





# Helpfulness of Mitchell-Model CISM with OKC Firefighters, circa 1995



Nixon, et. al. (1999). Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association. Vol. 92, No. 4, April. Pp. 172 - 177.





"Time heals nothing, "It makes it a little more bearable, but it heals nothing"

Debi, whose brother, a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development worker, was killed in the OKC Bombing

# Mental Health Services need to be Accessible

- Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depression Who Had an Unmet Need for Counseling
  - Oklahoma 27.5%
  - United States 28.2%

# Reduce Stigma to Seek Mental Health Care

- Public personal narratives from
  - First Responders
  - Physical and Mental Health Providers
  - Utilities and Construction Workers





# Emergence of Evidence-Based Therapies

Several evidence-based therapeutic interventions have been developed or refined to address trauma

- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR),
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT),
- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
- Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE)

# Focus on Resilience and Strength-Building

Trauma-informed care emphasizes

- Addressing the symptoms of trauma
- Building on the strengths and resilience of individuals.
- Help survivors gain a sense of control and empowerment in their recovery journey

# Mental Health Treatment, circa 1995

- 63% of survivors utilized psychological counseling services
- 14% Morgue and forensic workers reported seeking mental health treatment
- Majority of first responders (OKC firefighters and law enforcement officers) sought mental health care beginning 9 years after the OKC bombing

Shariat, Mallonee, Stidham. (1998). Oklahoma City Bombing Injuries . Injury Prevention Service Oklahoma State Department of Health. December.

Tucker, et. al. (2002) Am J Orthopsy Vol. 72, No 4, 469-475.



# Role of Physical Health



- Psychological trauma can be accompanied by physical trauma
- Physical trauma (and its treatment) can be accompanied by psychological trauma

# Morgue and Forensic Recovery Workers at OKC DMORT site

- Occurrence of new physical problems
- Exaggerated startle response persisted 1 year later
- Increased alcohol use



Tucker, et. al. (2002) Am J Orthopsy Vol. 72, No 4, 469-475.



# Physiologic Reactivity Seven Years After Exposure to Terrorist Event

- Sixty survivors
- Sixty age- and gender-matched “controls”
- Compared on both psychometric and physiologic assessments
  - Heart rate and systolic, diastolic, and mean arterial blood pressures were
- Measured before, during, and after bombing-related interviews
- Posttraumatic stress was significantly more prevalent in the survivor group
- Survivors had significantly greater autonomic reactivity to trauma reminders on all measures than comparison subjects.
- The results suggest that physiologic assessment may capture long-term effects of terrorism that are not identified by psychometric instruments.

Tucker, Pfefferbaum, North, Kent, Burgin, Parker, Hossain, Jeon-Slaughter, and Trautman. Physiologic Reactivity Despite Emotional Resilience Several Years After Direct Exposure to Terrorism . Am J Psychiatry 164:230-235, **February 2007**.



# Integration of Community and Social Support



- “Best practices” from diverse cultures
- Holistic approaches
- Pockets of vulnerability



# Did divorces decrease after the Oklahoma City bombing?

Lower observed divorce rates following the Oklahoma City bombing than the prevailing 10-year cubic divorce trend would have predicted

Comparison of counties in and around Oklahoma City to those farther away showed divorces were lower closer to Oklahoma City

The noted effect dampen over time

Did Divorces Decline after the Oklahoma City Bombing? Nakonezny, Reddick and Rodgers, Journal of Marriage and Family. Vol. 66, No. 1 (Feb., 2004), pp. 90-100.

# Did divorces increase after the Oklahoma City bombing?

In the first year after the bombing, relations with significant others worsened more often for Oklahoma City firefighters than for the comparison group

One-half Oklahoma City firefighters reported lasting changes in their relationship; equally divided between positive and negative changes

*Among Oklahoma City firefighters, 10 divorces occurred during the three years prior to the bombing, while 24 divorces occurred between 1995 and 1997*

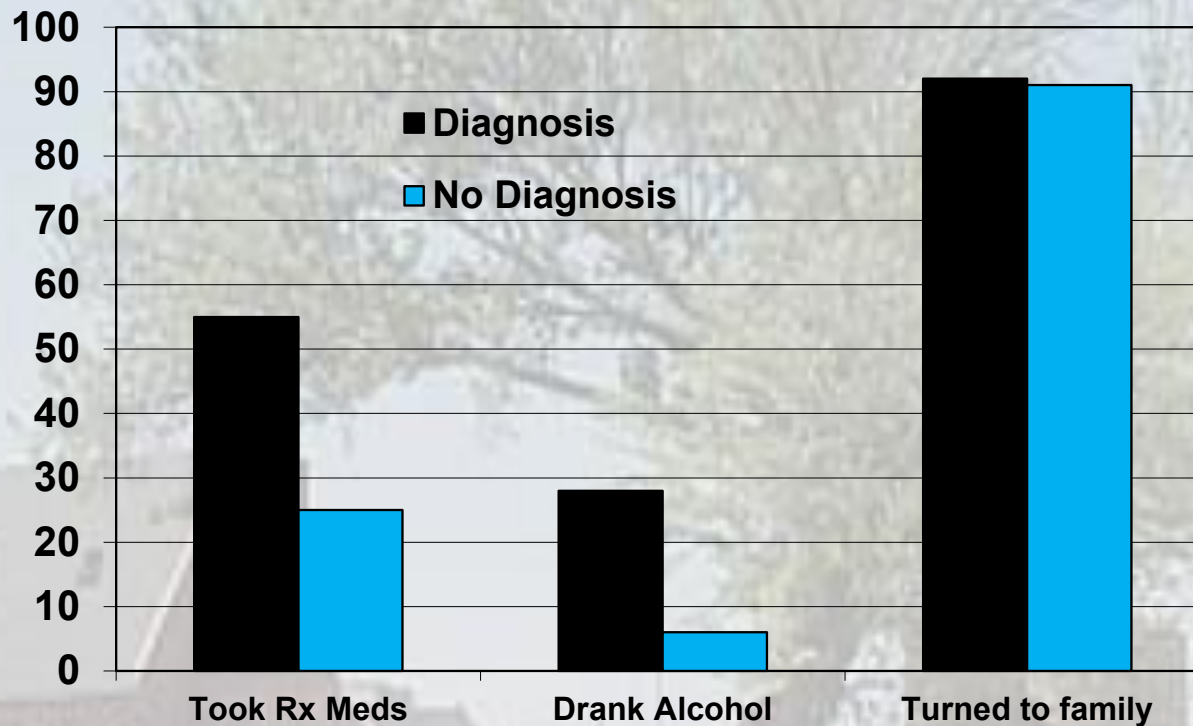
The upward trend in the divorce rate among OCFD personnel began well before the year of the bombing

Nixon, et. al. (1999). Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association. Vol. 92, No. 4, April. Pp. 172 - 177.



# Survivors of 1995 OKC Bombing

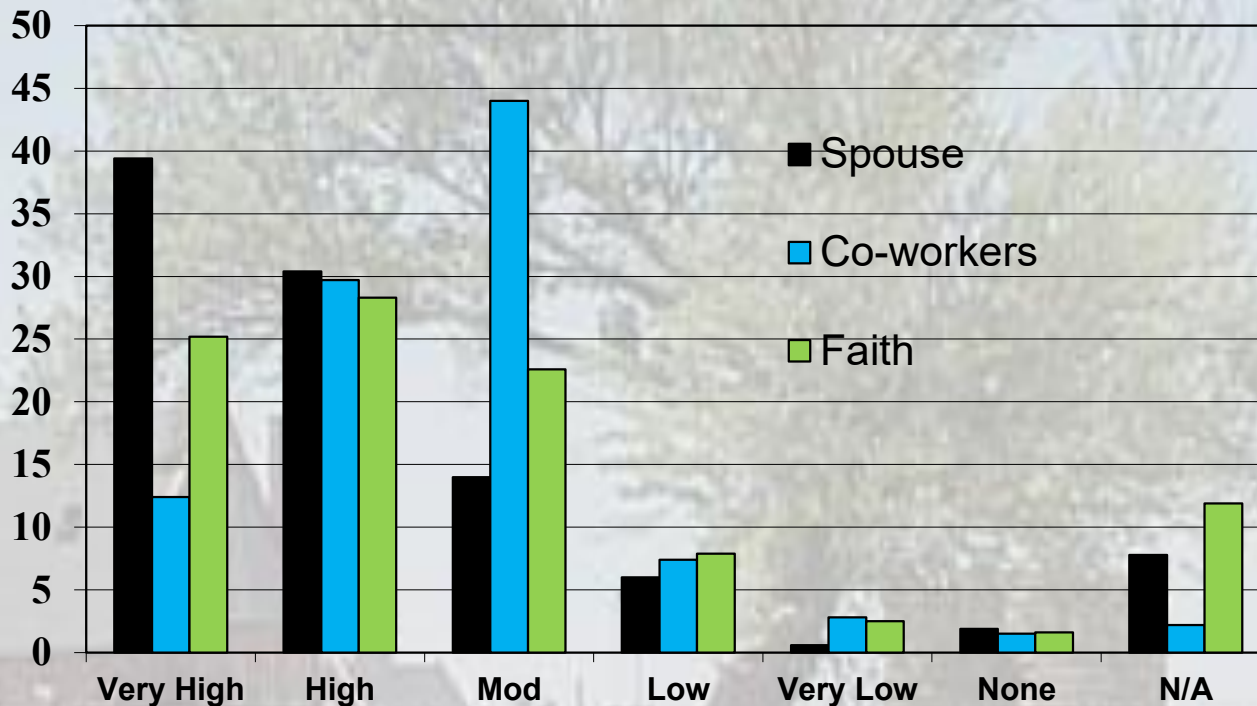
## Reported coping measures



North, et. al., JAMA 1999 282:755-62.

# OKC Firefighters

## Perceived Levels of Emotional Support



Nixon, et. al. (1999). Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association. Vol. 92, No. 4, April. Pp. 172 - 177.

# Importance of Self Care

- “Pre-” selection is optimal but rarely implemented
- Potential for vicarious trauma
- Likelihood of compassion fatigue





# Relationship Between Unrealistic Optimism and Secondary Traumatic Stress

Shalvi, S., Shenkman, G., Handgraaf, M. J. J., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2011). The danger of unrealistic optimism: Linking caregivers' perceived ability to help victims of terror with their own secondary traumatic stress. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 41(11), 2656–2672. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2011.00844.x>



# Observations from OKC Bombing

- Occurrence of new physical symptoms can be associated with depression/ PTSD in responders
- A mass casualty/terrorist event may reduce divorce, but not for everyone and not for long
- Physiological arousal persists and can also be measured in responders' spouses
- Mental health care is sought well into the second decade
- First responders are the last group to seek mental health care.





“We remember the day of the bombing not because we can’t forget but because we choose to remember. “

Mick Cornett, Mayor  
Oklahoma City 2010