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WHEN THE COURTROOM GETS IT WRONG: WHAT PSYCHOLOGY KNOWS THAT JUSTICE SYSTEMS DON'T

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Abstract

Justice systems worldwide are built on assumptions about how trauma looks -- and those assumptions are wrong. When a survivor appears emotionally flat, fails to report immediately, or cannot recall events in linear sequence, legal professionals routinely interpret these responses as indicators of deception or unreliability. In reality, they are among the most well-documented expressions of trauma in the clinical literature. The gap between what psychology knows and what courtrooms assume has profound consequences: credible survivors are disbelieved, perpetrators go unaccountable, and professionals tasked with protecting the public inadvertently cause harm. This presentation draws on forensic psychology practice, trauma science, and interdisciplinary training experience to examine how trauma responses are systematically misread within legal and investigative contexts. Attendees will explore the neurobiology of trauma and its behavioral manifestations, common points of misinterpretation in forensic and legal settings, and the consequences of trauma-uninformed practice for clients, practitioners, and justice outcomes. The presentation introduces a practical framework for trauma-informed forensic engagement

applicable across clinical, legal, and investigative roles -- equipping practitioners to recognize, interpret, and respond to trauma presentation with greater accuracy and ethical clarity. This work is drawn from the presenter's direct experience training law enforcement, legal professionals, and government agencies in trauma-informed practice, and reflects a growing international imperative to align justice systems with psychological science. Practitioners across disciplines -- psychology, psychiatry, nursing, social work, and law -- will leave with concrete tools they can integrate into their professional practice immediately.

Keywords:

Trauma-Informed Practice, Forensic Psychology, Trauma and Memory, Legal and Investigative Contexts, Justice System