

Borderline Personality Disorder as Debilitating as Bipolar Disorder

Mark Zimmerman, MD, compared psychiatric disorders to predict morbidity

PROVIDENCE – The deterioration of psychiatric and physical health caused by borderline personality disorder (BPD) rivals that of bipolar disorder, according to **MARK ZIMMERMAN, MD**, a researcher at Rhode Island Hospital. His research was published online in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* last week.

“The level of psychosocial morbidity and suicidality associated with BPD is as great, or greater, than that experienced by patients with bipolar disorder,” said Zimmerman, director of outpatient psychiatry at Rhode Island Hospital and director of the Rhode Island Methods to Improve Diagnostic Assessment and Services (MIDAS) project. “From a public health perspective, improving the detection and treatment of BPD is as imperative as diagnosing and treating bipolar disorders.”

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that 1.6 percent of the U.S. population is diagnosed with BPD, compared with 2.6 percent of those with bipolar disorder.

This is the largest comparison of patients who have been diagnosed with BPD or bipolar disorder. Persons with BPD have difficulty regulating emotions and thoughts, often teetering at extremes. They engage in impulsive and reckless behavior, and their relationships with other people are rocky. While persons with bipolar disorder experience the same mood for weeks, those with BPD cope with intense bouts of anger, depression and anxiety that are short in duration. According to Zimmerman’s study, clinical experience suggests that BPD is as disabling as bipolar disorders. In psychiatric patient samples, BPD is as frequent as bipolar disorder.

Like bipolar patients, persons with BPD are likely to also suffer from depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, eating disorders and suicidal behaviors. These co-occurring mental illnesses may have symptoms that overlap with BPD, making it difficult to recognize BPD in patients with these other mental illnesses.

“Despite the clinical and public health significance of both of these disorders, it sometimes seems as if BPD lives in the shadow of bipolar disorder,” said Zimmerman. “Bipolar disorder is a widely researched, well-publicized, well-funded topic. By contrast, BPD is seldom discussed and it is not included in the Global Burden of Disease study, a comprehensive registry that quantifies diseases by cost, mortality, geography, risk and other factors.”

This study was a component of the MIDAS project, which is an ongoing clinical research study at Rhode Island Hospital involving the integration of research assessment methods into routine clinical practice.

No external financial support was provided for this research study. Zimmerman’s principal affiliation is Rhode Island Hospital and The Miriam Hospital, members of the Lifespan health system in Rhode Island. He also has an academic appointment at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University, department of psychiatry and human behavior. Other researchers from that department involved in the study were **WILLIAM ELLISON, PhD, THERESA A. MORGAN, PhD, DIANE YOUNG, PhD, IWONA CHELMINSKI, PhD, and KRISTY DALRYMPLE, PhD.** ❖

Sandra Salzillo to speak at international trauma treatment conference

PROVIDENCE – **SANDRA SALZILLO, MA, CAGS, LMHC, APA**, a licensed mental health clinician with the Program in Women’s Oncology at Women & Infants Hospital, was invited to serve on the faculty for an international conference on trauma treatment.

“After the Storms: Psyche’s Response to Trauma, Resilience and Healing” will take place June 18 to 21, at The Assisi Institute, an international psychological organization founded in 1989 and located in Mystic, CT. Salzillo joins some of the world’s leading scholars, psychologists and trauma experts on the faculty.

“The psychological, emotional and

physical impact of trauma is a daily reality for millions of Americans,” Salzillo says. “About 70 percent of us have experienced some type of traumatic event at least once in their lives. Of these people, at least 20 percent, or about 44 million people, will develop post-traumatic stress syndrome or PTSD as a result.”

The conference will highlight the need for a more nuanced approach in working with people who struggle with the daily realities of PTSD, and will offer some of the latest research in neurological and somatic studies. In addition, presentations on innovative approaches to helping integrate

and work with the ongoing effects of trauma are planned.

Salzillo is a nationally-acclaimed visual artist, expressive arts facilitator and archetypal pattern analyst. She is a senior faculty member at the Assisi Institute and an adjunct professor in the holistic counseling master’s program at Salve Regina University. At Women & Infants, she facilitates groups and workshops, and provides individual counseling to patients. Her work is based on connecting women to their imaginative abilities, which allows for a deeper understanding of their personal process. ❖