

PTSD Awareness Day 2026

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a complex and often misunderstood condition that can develop following exposure to traumatic events such as violence, abuse, accidents, disasters, armed conflict, or other experiences that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope. Far from being a sign of weakness, PTSD reflects the profound impact that trauma can have on both the mind and the brain.

Research in neuropsychology continues to demonstrate that trauma can affect memory, attention, executive functioning, emotional regulation, and the brain's ability to process and respond to stress. These effects may influence learning, relationships, work performance, and overall quality of life. Integrated Treatment targets:

Effective trauma-informed care must address all three layers simultaneously:

1. **Somatic/Medical:** Calming the nervous system (e.g., neurofeedback, medication, breathwork), often provided by a psychiatrist working with a psychologist.
2. **Cognitive/Emotional:** Processing fragmented memories (e.g., EMDR, Trauma-Focused CBT) provided by a psychologist suitably trained.
3. **Interpersonal/Systemic:** Restoring relational safety and establishing community support systems provided by a psychologist working with other relevant health care professionals such as a clinical social worker.

On PTSD Awareness Day, the PsySSA Division of Neuro and Forensic Psychology joins the global call to break stigma, build resilience, and promote greater understanding of trauma and its effects. We recognise the importance of evidence-based assessment, early intervention, and access to effective psychological care. We also acknowledge the role of forensic and legal systems in responding sensitively and appropriately to trauma survivors whose experiences may intersect with courts, investigations, or medico-legal processes.

Too often, individuals living with PTSD suffer in silence due to misconceptions, fear of judgment, or concerns that others may not understand their experiences. By increasing awareness and fostering informed conversations, we can create environments where survivors are met with compassion, dignity, and support, rather than stigma.

Members: Prof Theophilus Lazarus (Chairperson); Dr Ann Watts (deputy Chairperson; Barry Viljoen (General Secretary and Treasurer); Dr Louise Olivier; Dr Lindiwe Mabena; Dr Karl Swain; and Hendrina Mosima

Trauma in varying forms is a prominent feature of human societies the world over, starkly evident given the prevalence of conflict across the globe, including South Africa.

This PTSD Awareness Day, we encourage communities, professionals, policymakers, and the public to recognise the realities of trauma, support those affected, and promote pathways to healing. Recovery does not mean forgetting what happened—it means reclaiming one's life, relationships, and sense of hope.

References:

1. American Psychiatric Association (APA). (2022). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). (DSM-5-TR). Washington, DC.

PTSD is classified under "Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders," emphasizing intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions/mood, and hyperarousal.

2. World Health Organization. (2019/2022). *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (11th ed.). (ICD-11).

Distinguishes between standard PTSD and Complex PTSD (CPTSD), adding core social/psychological elements like severe disturbances in relationships and self-concept.



DIVISION OF NEURO- AND FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

division

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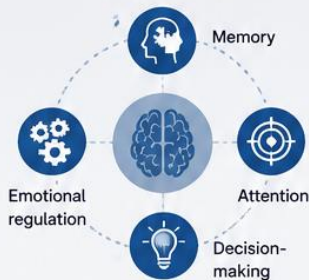
Breaking Stigma. Building Resilience. Supporting Recovery.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can affect anyone after experiencing trauma such as violence, abuse, accidents, disasters, or other life-threatening events. PTSD is not a sign of weakness—it is a normal response to an abnormal experience. With understanding, support, and evidence-based care, **recovery is possible.**



THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA

Trauma can affect how the brain thinks, feels, and functions.



These changes are real, measurable, and treatable. **You are not alone.**

ASSESSMENT, UNDERSTANDING, AND EVIDENCE

Neuropsychological assessment helps us understand how trauma may be affecting thinking, behaviour, and daily functioning.



Comprehensive assessment provides clarity, guides intervention, and supports recovery.



Neuroscience research continues to deepen our understanding of trauma and the brain.



Evidence-based treatments can improve symptoms, strengthen functioning, and restore quality of life.

FORENSIC CONTEXT MATTERS

Many trauma survivors come into contact with legal, medico-legal, or investigative systems. Our role is to:



Provide objective, ethical, and scientific assessments.



Ensure that trauma-informed approaches are central to justice and decision-making.



Advocate for fairness, dignity, and the rights of all individuals.



BREAK THE STIGMA

PTSD is not something to be ashamed of. Talking about it helps break the silence and opens the door to healing.



BUILD RESILIENCE

Resilience is not about "bouncing back" alone. It grows through connection, support, and self-compassion.



SUPPORT RECOVERY

With the right support, people living with PTSD can heal, rebuild, and reclaim their lives and futures.



CREATE SAFE SPACES

Let's create communities, workplaces, and systems that listen, believe, and support survivors of trauma.



Recovery is possible. Understanding matters. Stigma has no place in healing.



You are not alone. Help is available. Hope is real.

If you or someone you know is struggling, please reach out for support. Early help makes a difference.



Talk to someone you trust



Contact a mental health professional



Find resources at www.psyssa.com

PsySSA Division of Neuro- and Forensic Psychology

Recovery is possible. Resilience can be strengthened. Understanding and support make a difference.

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