



Trauma Response and the Criminal Justice System: A Virtual Summit on Knowledge, Healing, and Resilience

First, Do No Harm: Trauma-Informed Interviewing During the COVID-19 Pandemic”-John Wilkinson, Attorney Advisor, Aequitas

Victims of gender-based violence and human trafficking often experience difficulty relating the details of what happened to them. Trauma-informed interviewing techniques reduce the pain and distress associated with the necessity of recounting traumatic events and improve the quantity and quality of information victims are able to share. Victims who are treated with respect and compassion are also more likely to remain engaged throughout the course of the criminal justice process.

This presentation will identify barriers to successful interviews and explore techniques for overcoming those barriers, with a special emphasis on virtual interviews that are COVID-19 compliant. The presenters will discuss the limitations of a traditional fact-gathering approach and introduce alternative techniques to minimize re-traumatization and enhance our ability to re-create the reality of the crime at trial. An emphasis will be placed on strategies for integrating a trauma-informed response from the first contact with a victim through the conclusion of the case, with realistic goals for interviews and virtual meetings at every stage of the process.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be better able to:

- Identify the signs and symptoms of trauma;
- Conduct interviews that minimize re-traumatization and yield evidence of the victim’s experience of the crime;
- Implement trauma-informed strategies that enhance victim safety and participation
- Incorporate evidence of trauma during direct examination of the victim at trial

Presenter: John Wilkinson

As an Attorney Advisor with AEquitas, John presents on trial strategy, legal analysis and policy, and ethical issues related to violence against women at the local, state, national and international level. He conducts research; develops training materials, resources, and publications; and provides case consultation and technical assistance for prosecutors and allied professionals. John has presented extensively on the investigation and prosecution of domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking and human trafficking both in the United States and abroad. John's international work includes developing and implementing training for police, prosecutors, judges and allied professionals in national and international conferences in Brazil, Cameroon, Egypt, Fiji, France, and South Africa. Additionally, John leads AEquitas' Innovative Prosecution Solutions Project, working with prosecutor's offices around the country on innovative and evaluated approaches to violent crime.

Prior to working with AEquitas, John was the Program Manager for the Gun Violence Prosecution Program, Homeland Security Program and Southwest Border Crime Program of the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA) where he traveled extensively throughout the United States presenting on gun and gang violence and homeland security issues. He also regularly collaborated with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to bring data-driven best practices to criminal justice professionals. Under his direction, the Homeland Security Program created a unique counter-terrorism training program for prosecutors and probation/parole officers. Additionally, his Southwest Border Crime Program created a curriculum for prosecutors and allied professionals covering all aspects of the Drug Cartel Business Model and focusing on human trafficking, human smuggling, drug and gun trafficking, home invasions and kidnappings and undocumented alien victim/witness issues.

From 1998 through 2005, John served as an Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney in Fredericksburg, VA prosecuting cases involving intimate partner violence and sexual assault, including cases of campus sexual assaults and domestic violence homicide. He also served on the Fredericksburg Area Sexual Assault Response Team and prosecuted child sexual and physical abuse and neglect cases and infant homicides. He assisted in the development of the Mary Washington Hospital Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program. Additionally, John completed Virginia's Top Gun Investigation and Prosecution of Drug Cases course and prosecuted numerous drug and firearms related offenses. He was a regular lecturer at the Rappahannock Regional Criminal Justice Academy and spoke at the Virginia Association of Commonwealth's Attorneys. From 1994 to 1998, John served as an Assistant Public Defender in Fredericksburg, VA representing indigent clients in matters ranging from first-degree murder to summary offenses. In 1997 he was presented the Phillip M. Sadler Award for excellence in public defense. From 1991 to 1994, John worked at the Offices of William E. Gardner in Fairfax, VA primarily engaged in criminal defense and civil litigation.