

Trauma: The Tie That Binds

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The Honorable Stephen Goss

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Trauma – A Given?

Our work with many different types of problem-solving courts over the years has impressed upon us the sense that, irrespective of the specific type of court or the means of entry into the court, participants share many commonalities.

Trauma – A Given?

Commonalities include:

- Substance abuse and other risky behaviors
- Mental health issues
- Poor employment, education histories
- Relationship and parenting issues
- Family of origin issues
- Physical health issues
- Histories of childhood abuse and/or neglect

Trauma – A Given?

Questions:

- Is this just a coincidence?
- What, other than being justice-involved, do these individuals have in common with one another?
- A large body of research suggests that the one commonality underlying many of the issues we see in problem solving courts is...

TRAUMA

What is Trauma?

SAMHSA's concept of trauma: Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening **and** that has lasting effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

The Three Es of Trauma

Event

Experience

Effects

Event

The occurrences or circumstances, either single or recurring, that bring about the actual or perceived threat of physical or psychological harm or severe neglect that threatens healthy development.

Experience

The individual's interpretation of the event(s) or circumstances that helps determine the degree to which the person experiences trauma.

Experience, cont.

Two people can experience the same event but their subjective experiences of the event may be very different (Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon* – the role played by subjective experience)

Effects

Those exposed to traumatic events often attempt to avoid reminders of the trauma, have changes in mood and cognitions (e.g., emotional numbing), intrusive experiences (e.g., nightmares), and arousal (e.g., hypervigilance to threat).

Effects, cont.

- Immediate and/or delayed
- Short and/or long-term
- Psychological, emotional, behavioral, and/or physiological (neurobiological)
- Can impact *all* aspects of a person's existence – from physical to spiritual

ACE Study

The Adverse Childhood Events Study (ACE Study) opened our eyes to the incidence and long term, pervasive impacts of childhood trauma.



Felitti et. al., (1998). Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study.

The Pervasiveness of Trauma

The original ACE Study, conducted at Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997, included over 17,000 HMO members from Southern California who received physical examinations. They completed confidential surveys regarding their childhood experiences and current health status and behaviors. The CDC continues to follow participants, and the results of the ongoing study are extraordinary.



The ACE Score

- The higher the ACE score, the greater the likelihood of significant health and behavioral dysfunction – a step-wise relationship.
- A score of four or higher (polyvictimization) is considered by many to be the “tipping point”, in that it is associated with significantly increased risk.



The Pervasiveness of Trauma

ACE scores are significantly correlated with: Depression; attempted suicide; substance abuse; mental illness; risky sexual behaviors; increased likelihood of becoming a victim of sexual assault or domestic violence; liver disease; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; heart disease; autoimmune disease; lung cancer, and premature death.



The Pervasiveness of Trauma

- A male with an ACE score of 6 has is 46 times more likely to later become an IV drug user, compared to a male with an ACEs score of 0.
- A 2001 U.S. DOJ study found that experiencing childhood trauma increases the probability of being arrested as a juvenile by 59 percent, as an adult by 28 percent, and for a violent crime by 30 percent.

The Pervasiveness of Trauma

- Trauma is a public health issue, given its pervasiveness and costs to society.
- As such, it requires a comprehensive, collaborative public health approach that includes education, prevention, early identification, assessment, and treatment.
- SAMHSA: *“It is an almost universal experience of people with mental health and substance use disorders.”*

The Pervasiveness of Trauma

- Trauma adversely impacts neurodevelopment and immune system functioning.
- Trauma can lead to chronic behavioral and physical health disorders.
- Unaddressed and unresolved trauma puts people at risk for a range of mental health, substance use, and physical health disorders and conditions.
- Trauma can be overcome with appropriate intervention and support.

From Trauma to Impacts

ACEs likely impact the health and behavior of adults through two primary mechanisms:

1. Increase risk factors (e.g., substance abuse, self-injury, engaging in risky sex) used to cope with the pain of the trauma.
2. Childhood trauma affects the developing brain and body, causing deregulation of the stress response and reward/pleasure pathways.

Incidence and Prevalence

SAMSHA reports that:

- Up to 65% of all clients in treatment for substance abuse report histories of childhood abuse
- Up to 75% of females in treatment for substance abuse report trauma histories
- About one third of veterans with PTSD have a co-occurring substance use disorder

Identification and Diagnosis

Assess for trauma – from childhood to the present. Trauma begets trauma, and assessing trauma throughout the lifespan is critical to gaining a complete picture.



Screening and Assessment

The ACE Questionnaire



John Briere's measures, such as the Brief Trauma Questionnaire and the Trauma Symptom Checklist

PTSD Checklist – Military and Civilian versions

Types of Trauma

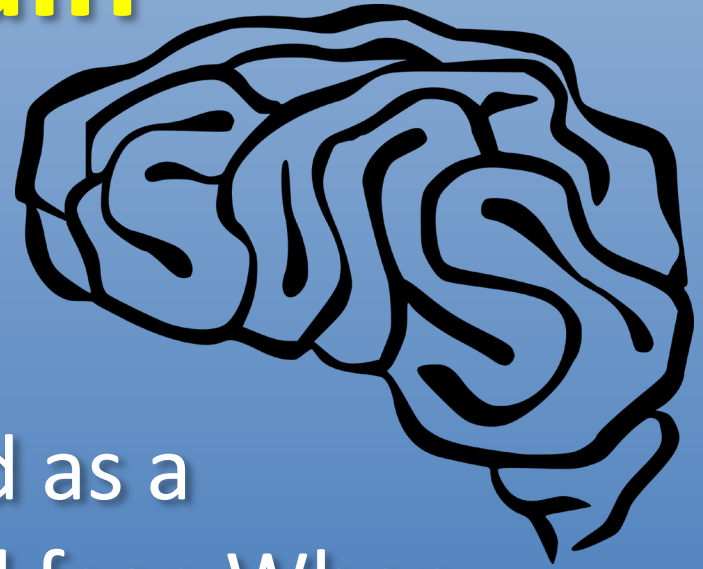
Acute trauma - a single traumatic event that is time-limited

Chronic trauma - multiple traumatic events over an extended period of time

Complex trauma
chronic trauma,
most often inflicted
by a caregiver



Trauma and the Brain



Threats are often experienced as a combination of confusion and fear. When people are victimized personally, it is difficult to reconcile our experience and cognitive maps with objective reality (“You don’t even know me”) or being abused by someone you trust and who is supposed to protect you.



Addressing Trauma

Trauma-Informed

The contexts and manner in which we assess, manage, and treat trauma and its effects must be trauma-informed: therefore our interactions, materials, and interventions are to be based on a knowledge of trauma and its far-reaching effects.

Trauma-Informed, cont.

- Unfortunately, some of our interventions and interactions can be traumatogenic themselves: We need to minimize the risk of re-traumatization.
- We don't want to re-traumatize and re-activate prior traumatic experiences – hence the need for a trauma-informed approach.

Trauma-Informed, cont.

The Four Rs:

Realization

Recognize

Respond

Resist Re-traumatization

Trauma-Informed, cont.

Realization: Everyone at all levels of the system has an understanding of trauma, its pervasiveness and how it impacts individuals, families, groups, organizations, and entire communities. They also understand the role trauma plays in mental health and substance use disorders, and understand how trauma impacts behavior and health more generally.

Trauma-Informed, cont.

Recognize: People in the system recognize the signs of trauma.

Respond: The system applies a trauma-informed approach to all aspects of its operation. There exists a focus on providing a culture of resilience, recovery, and healing from trauma.

Trauma-Informed, cont.

Resist Re-traumatization: Understand and avoid circumstances, policies, procedures, and behaviors that have the potential to re-traumatize individuals.

Treatment for Trauma

- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) for trauma and PTSD
- Prolonged Exposure (PE), and other exposure-based therapies for PTSD
- Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) for anxiety and depression
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) for emotional dysregulation (good for polyvictimization)

Treatment for Trauma, cont.

- Coping skills training focused on stress management, assertiveness, and distress tolerance can be additional important components of treatment
- Psychoeducation and normalization of symptoms are also often helpful
- The *Seeking Safety* curriculum to address trauma and substance abuse



Trauma Informed Practices in Criminal Justice Settings

Six Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Peer Support
- Collaboration and Mutuality
- Empowerment, Voice and Choice
- Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Six Principles, cont.

- Safety: Individuals feel physically and psychologically safe, due both to the setting and the interpersonal interactions.
- Trustworthiness and Transparency: Building and maintaining trust is paramount.
- Peer Support: Trauma survivors provide peer support and self-help is viewed as central to recovery and healing.

Six Principles, cont.

- *Collaboration and Mutuality*: The entire endeavor is seen as a collaborative effort of peers.
- *Empowerment, Voice, and Choice*: Individuals' strengths and experiences are leveraged and built upon, with a primary belief in the critical importance of those being served. All have a voice, and the impact of power differentials are understood.

Six Principles, cont.

- *Cultural, historical, and gender issues*: The organization moves beyond stereotypes and incorporates policies, procedures, and practices that are inclusive and responsive to differences among and between individuals.

The Importance of Self Care

- Our work frequently involves being exposed to traumatic situations and traumatized individuals
- This can result in secondary trauma (AKA vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue), *which is still trauma*
- Unaddressed, this can lead to the effects of trauma noted earlier, as well as burnout

The Importance of Self-Care

The ABCs of self-care (Saakvitne, K. & Pearlman, L., 1996):

- Awareness: Know your triggers, personal trauma history, and how these impact you
- Balance: Take care of yourself and your personal needs, experience emotions, exercise appropriate boundaries
- Connection: foster and maintain healthy relationships, don't isolate, seek out others to help cope with difficult cases

Remember...

Avoid viewing symptoms (e.g., behaviors, responses) as pathological and remember that trauma reactions are often means of coping that play a critical survival purpose in the face of traumatic events. It is when these largely normative coping responses persist in environments that are safe that they become out of place or maladaptive.

Resources

- SAMHSA National Center for Trauma-Informed Care:
<https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic>
- SAMSHA TIPs:
<https://store.samhsa.gov/list/series?name=TIP-Series-Treatment-Improvement-Protocols-TIPS->
- Seeking Safety: <http://www.treatment-innovations.org/seeking-safety.html>

Resources, cont.

- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges: www.ncjfcj.org
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: www.nctsn.org
- The NCTSN Learning Center for Child and Adolescent Trauma: www.learn.nctsn.org
- Saakvitne, K. & Pearlman, L. (1996). *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization for Helping Professionals who Work with Traumatized Clients.*

Resources, cont.

- Futures Without Violence:
www.futureswithoutviolence.org
- The Adverse Child Experiences Study:
www.acestudy.org
- Sanctuary Institute:
www.thesanctuaryinstitute.org
- National Center for PTSD:
www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp

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Based in Atlanta, GA, Applied Research Services, Inc. (ARS) is a private, small business consulting firm specializing in complex research design and analysis. Founded in 1994, ARS employs state-of-the-art analytical, survey, data and business intelligence tools to deliver decision support. With extensive experience in dissecting criminal justice agency data, we are able to convert data into empirically based decision-making devices such as risk assessment tools and simulation models. Our clients include state and local courts, secure and community corrections agencies as well as various public policy stakeholders.

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ARS in the news

Kevin Baldwin, ARS team member speaks about the heroin use in Fulton County.



Dr. John Speir, ARS partner, speaking about overcrowding in the Alabama prison system.



Kevin Baldwin, ARS team member, is interviewed by CNN for his expertise on sex offender crimes.

