



The Council for Health &
Human Service Ministries

United Church of Christ

Historical Trauma

Understanding it, how to heal and move forward

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Welcome

- Thank you for joining me for this informative topic.
- My hope is to be able to provide you with more information in regards to Historical Trauma and Microaggressions and to start the conversation on healing and moving forward.
- We will learn what historical trauma is
- Who is affected by it
- How microaggressions are tied in to historical trauma
- How do we move forward
- Let me first start with some basics on trauma

Understanding Trauma

- Trauma can be defined as psychological, emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing.
- Many believe that trauma is perhaps the most avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, misunderstood and untreated cause of human suffering.
- Trauma is in the nervous system – not in the event (Levine & Kline 07)
- When traumatic events occur, the imprinting of neurological patterns is dramatically heightened.
- Everyone that experiences that stressful event does not always equate to a person having trauma.
- Many believe that there are 3 defining traumas – complex, PTSD and developmental but many over look Historical trauma and the impact that it has
- The body keeps the score- emotions literally have an anatomical mapping in the brain necessary for survival. That is to say the emotion of fear has a very specific neural circuitry etched in the brain corresponding to specific physical sensations from various parts of the body (Levine & Kline 07). This is key in helping understand historical trauma.

Understanding Historical Trauma



Historical Trauma defined



- Historical trauma is a multigenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural, racial or ethnic group (Sotero, MM 2006)
- It is related to major events that oppressed a particular group of people because of their status as oppressed such as slavery, the Holocaust, forced migration and the violent colonization of Native Americans.
- It is important to note that not all people in the subgroup will experience the effects of historical trauma but those that it does affect it affects them in significant ways.
- Many will experience low self-esteem, depression, self-destructive behavior, significant risk for violence or aggressive behavior, substance abuse, addiction and misuse, high rates of suicide, domestic violence, and cardiovascular disease.

Historical trauma defined con't.

- Many people that live in communities that have unaddressed grief and trauma have significant health issues.
- Historical trauma can also affect the way people parent. Research has shown that it could contribute to behavioral problems in children.
- Communities that are most significantly affected by historical trauma are Native Americans, African Americans, Japanese Americans and descendants of the Holocaust.
- Due to recent racial profiling, segregation and separation at the border we will soon be adding Hispanic Americans to the list as well.
- Some researchers are also questioning on if LGBTQ+ community may also be affected by historical trauma as well

Core concepts of historical trauma

- Dominant cultural perpetrates mass trauma on a population. In doing this it can cause devastation in the following areas: cultural, familial, economic and societal.
- The population affected responds to the trauma by showing biological and psychological symptoms
- Historical trauma is believed to be passed in many ways
 - Generations that have experienced traumatic events create a pathway that results in the present generation being at a higher risk of experiencing mental and physical distress
 - Research shows historical trauma can be passed on through our DNA and through traits children learn from their parents.
 - It can be passed on to future generations through environmental, psychological factors, prejudice, racism and discrimination.
 - Think if a parent is emotionally numb, dissociating or doing traumatic reliving they are not able to help their children develop a good sense of self and they are passing negative traits on
- Historical trauma events can live in our bodies and even though we may not have directly experienced the event it can still have a significant affect on you especially if the trauma is being passed down by parents that have untreated trauma and grief.
- It is also important to note that although traumatic experiences from our ancestors can leave scars on our DNA we can also pass on strengths and resiliencies as well.

Historical Trauma and Native Americans

The study of historical trauma in Native American Culture can be attributed to Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart.



Native Americans

- Brave Heart described historical trauma in the Native American community as the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experience”.
- Native Americans experienced repeated massacres and forced removal of children to federal and mission boarding and day schools.
- Native Americans experienced continuous cycles of genocide and disenfranchisement.
- It is important to note that different tribal communities respond to these losses and grief in different ways.
- Historical trauma has affected Native Americans in many ways some experience survivor guilt, depression, alcoholism, low self-esteem, anger, domestic violence and substance abuse.
- Brave Heart notes that many tribes have not been able to resolve their grief due to the fact that there has been federal prohibitions against some of their ceremonial practices and the continued takeover of sacred land.

Native Americans

- So how do we help Native Americans heal from this?
- Brave heart during her research with tribal communities developed the historical trauma intervention model.
- This model relies on four components to foster healing from the grief
 - Confronting the history
 - Understanding the trauma and its effects
 - Releasing the pain
 - Transcending the trauma

Native Americans need to be able to have a safe space to process through their trauma, a space that allows them to have their narratives, be heard, understood and validated.

Brave Heart states it is important to note that it is not about dredging up and staying stuck in the past. It's about starting a healing process to let go of that past collective trauma and moving forward.

Historical Trauma and African Americans



African Americans

- African Americans have experienced generations of slavery, segregation and institutionalized racism that has contributed to physical, psychological and spiritual trauma (DeGruy, 2005)
- For many African Americans being descendants of enslaved Africans, the dynamics of slavery itself; the institutionalized segregation and violence that followed emancipation; and ongoing struggle for racial justice continue to have a multifaceted impact on African Americans. (DeGruy 2005)
- African Americans continue to have daily reminders of racial discrimination and it can continue to exacerbate our trauma responses.
- Many African Americans suffer from what has been coined as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.
- Unaddressed historical trauma can shape how we respond to current traumatic events.
- According to DeGruy slavery has yielded stressors that were both disturbing and traumatic, exacting a wound upon the African American Psyche which continues to fester.

African Americans

- DeGruy's post traumatic slave syndrome theory takes into account the development of survival adaptations necessary for enduring the hostile slavery environment and how these adaptations, both positive and negative continue to be reflected in African American behaviors and beliefs.
- Unaddressed trauma of slavery has resulted behavior such as low or vacant self-esteem, ever-present anger, racist socialization, all of which can serve to undermine our ability to be successful.
- It is also important to note the role microaggressions play which I will cover later
- It is important to note that PTSS also acknowledge the fact that African Americans are resilient and resourceful which helped us survive slavery and is helpful in us healing today.
- When working with African Americans and trying to heal historical trauma you must first acknowledge that the history of what has happened to African Americans and what continues to happen to marginalize our communities.
- You must build on the family relationships, strong communities and faith in African American communities

Jewish Americans and Japanese Americans



Jewish Americans and Japanese Americans

- Jewish Americans suffer from Historical trauma as a result of the Holocaust.
- It has been stated that in Jewish Culture whether the trauma is a result from the diaspora, the holocaust, the Intifada, or other displacement, children of survivors are often expected to stand for more than themselves.
- Because survival was all or nothing during the Holocaust they are expected at times to continue to be that way.
- Jewish Americans and Japanese Americans like Native Americans and African Americans were taken from their homes, possessions were disposed of.
- Japanese and Jewish Americans were placed in camps and fought to survive. Many of them suffer from low self-esteem to avoidance or over achieving.
- Reminders of trauma can be very triggering for them. After 911 the call to round up suspicious Muslim Americans was a reminder to Japanese Americans about how they were treated after pearl harbor (Jackson 2014)

Why do we need to understand historical trauma



Why?

- It is important for us to understand historical trauma because the way these different affected groups respond has a significant effect on our communities. We as leaders in our communities, laymen, human service workers, teachers etc. need to know how to respond.
- We need to study it because of the impact that it has had on our communities:
 - Highest suicide rate – Native Americans
 - Highest rate of domestic violence – Native Americans
 - Highest rates of child maltreatment – Native Americans
 - Mistrust of police – African Americans
 - Internalized anger and aggression within the culture – African Americans
 - High levels of family stress
 - Child maltreatment
 - Substance Abuse
 - High levels of crime, poverty, under employment, illiteracy and gang violence
 - It can also play out in sexism and socially accepted misogyny

Why it is needed con't

- Understanding historical trauma is very important for human services agencies
- Be mindful of unresolved grief and distrust of majority of groups or government programs
- Need to deliver more programs to reduce family stress, child abuse and neglect, substance misuse, mental health challenges and domestic violence.
- To build that trust providers can be respectful and cognizant of different reactions to traumatic events within communities
- We need to study and learn it because historical trauma is cumulative and reverberates across generations
- It has an impact on psychological and physical health
- In working with communities of color you are dealing with multigenerational trauma and you need to be sensitive to the way in which people move through the world if you're trying to help them. You have to tread lightly and watch and Listen (DeGruy 2013)
- Understanding historical trauma also helps us to understand microaggressions

Microaggressions

- Where were you born?
- You speak good English
- You are a credit to your race
- When I look at you I don't see color
- A white woman clutching her purse when an African American or Hispanic American approaches
- There is only one race the human race
- I'm not a racist I have several black friends
- As a woman I know what you go through as a racial minority
- These are all examples of microaggressions

Microaggression

- Is a form of contemporary violence
- They are current events and are often covert in nature
- They are events involving discrimination, racism, and daily hassles that are targeted at individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups (Michaels 2010)
- They occur on a daily basis are chronic and affect the subgroups that are most commonly affected by historical trauma.
- Most microaggressions have developed from historical trauma
- There are three types of microaggressions
 - Microinsult - Is characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's heritage or identity.
 - Microinvalidations – communications that exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color
 - Microassault – is an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim

Examples of racial microaggressions

Theme	Microaggression	Message
1. Alien in own land	Where are you from? Where were you born? You speak good English?	You are not American You are a Foreigner
2. Ascription of intelligence	You are a credit to your race You are so articulate	People of color are generally not as intelligent as whites It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent
3. Color blindness	When I look at you I don't see color America is a melting pot	Denying a person of color's racial/ethnic experiences. Assimilate/acculturate to the dominant culture
4. Criminality/Assumption of criminality	A white woman clutching her purse when a black or Latino approaches	You are criminal You are dangerous
5. Denial of individual racism	I'm not racist, I have several black friends	I am immune to racism because I have friends of color

Examples con't

Theme	Microaggression	Message
6. Myth of meritocracy	I believe the most qualified person should get the job	People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race
7. Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles	Asking a black person why do you have to be so loud/animated. Just calm down. Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting	Assimilate to dominate culture Leave your cultural baggage outside
8. Second class citizen	Person of color mistaken for a service worker You people	People of color are servants to whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high-status positions. You don't belong. You are a lesser being
9. Environmental microaggressions	Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color	People of color don't/shouldn't value education

How do we move forward?

- One of the biggest ways to move forward is to allow healing. As previously stated many communities of color had their land and history taken from them and they need a space to reweave their personal narratives, a place to be heard and validated.
- When working with communities of color you need to be sensitive to the way in which people move through the world if you're trying to help them (DeGruy)
- Be honest sometimes society likes to say that racism and discrimination no longer exist but unfortunately that is not reflective of our current situation.
- Incorporate culturally and trauma informed work in education
- Be mindful of unresolved grief and distrust of majority groups or government programs
- Deliver more programs to reduce family stress, child abuse and neglect, substance misuse, mental health challenges and domestic violence
- Providers need to build trust and that can be done by being respectful, cognizant of different reactions to traumatic events within communities, and focus on community strengths and resilience.

Move Forward con't

- Cultural competency – understand the cultures that we serve and understand the impact that these events have had on their lives.
- Break the stigma around mental health. We have to let communities of color know that it is okay to get mental health help
- Make sure that they understand seeing a therapist to resolve their grief is not a sign of weakness.
- Connectedness – we need to connect to people again, gather around our elders and share our narratives.
- Rituals and spirituality need to be reinstated
- Change the narrative focus on the positive, the good things, identify the strengths
- Telling and retelling about traditions that are positive this can help lessen the impact of the distressing memories

Moving Forward con't

- As Human Services agencies and humans in general we need to make sure that communities that have experience historical trauma have:
 - A sense of purpose
 - Optimism/hope
 - Positive religious experience
 - Access to affordable health care and housing

Key Concepts to remember

- Historical trauma is multigenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural group that has a history of being systematically oppressed
- It can have an impact on psychological and physical health
- Descendants who have not directly experienced a trauma can still exhibit signs and symptoms of trauma
- Communities that have been subjected to historical trauma may believe systems do not support them.
- When working with members of affected communities gain a fuller understanding of client's historical and community context.
- Build alliances with local respected individuals
- Remember not every member of a group has the same response to current or past traumatic events

Closing

- Historical trauma did not happen over night and we will not heal from it overnight. It will take time, patience and understanding.
- As Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart stated the best way to heal is to:
 - Confront it
 - Understand it
 - Release the pain of it
 - Transcend it

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