Becoming Trauma Aware: The Long Term Implications of Adverse Childhood Experiences

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Understanding Trauma

Event – Actual experience or threat of physical or psychological harm OR the withholding of material or relational resources crucial to health and development. Can be a single event or repeated events.

Experience – How someone assigns meaning to the event, which depends on the perception of the individual.

Effects – Results of the person’s experience of the event. This can include neurological, physical, emotional, and cognitive effects.

*Including definition - SAMHSA, Trauma and Justice

Private Event Trauma

Characterized By:
*Secrecy
*Power Imbalance
*Sense of hopelessness
*Sense of isolation
*Sense of irretrievable loss

Public Event Trauma

Characterized By:
*Shared experience
*Lack of judgement
*Sense of helplessness
*Forces beyond control
*Sense of irretrievable loss

Chronic Trauma

Multiple instances of the same traumatic event OR Multiple traumatic events happening to the same person

Environmental or community trauma

Chronic trauma

*Impacts the brain, body, development

OUR EMOTIONAL & PHYSICAL REACTION

When we are faced with stressful situations, our mind and body automatically respond in one of three ways.....
Controlled by the most basic part of the brain
Decides how to act to best support our survival
Activated whenever we are faced with a stressful situation
Stimulates a dump of hormones and chemicals
Designed to only be used on an infrequent basis

** Fight **
** Flight **
** FREEZE **

THE ACES STUDY

Study started in 1995
Weight loss program through Kaiser Permanente
Partnership between Kaiser and CDC
17,000 participants
Medical and social history examined

** It was here that the relationship between childhood abuse & negative household functioning was found to be related to long term health and social outcomes **

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

What are ACEs?

- Parental death or divorce
- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Parental emotional abuse or neglect

How common are ACEs?

- Female: 36%
- Male: 29%
- Age 16-19: 16%
- Age 20-24: 19%
- Age 25+ 12%

** Participants in this study reflect a cross-section of Midwestern American adults. **
What about the prevalence of trauma in our community?

Impact of Trauma

First published in 1998, the Adverse Childhood Experience Study showed that:
1) Traumatic experiences are vastly more common than recognized or acknowledged
2) There is a powerful relationship between emotional experiences as children and physical and mental health as adults
3) Traumatic events during childhood can be converted into chronic disease as adults
4) Adverse events and stress can lead to chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer, as well as depression, alcoholism and drug abuse

Impact of Trauma

• Women have higher rate across the board
• ACE 0 = less than 20% of women diagnosed with depression
• ACE >4 = almost 60% diagnosed with depression

Impact of Trauma

• ACE 0 = <4% rate
• ACE >4 = 16% rate
• Same dose/response pattern seen with injection of street drugs
• Note with ACE of 6+ has 4,600% increase in the likelihood of becoming an IV drug abuser

Impact of Trauma

• Women with ACE Score of 4+ are 500% more likely to become victims of domestic violence
• Women with an ACE Score of 6+ are 900% more likely to become victims of rape

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Cost Of Trauma $$$$$

- Absenteeism, serious financial problems, serious problems with job performance, frequent disciplinary actions, difficulty maintaining employment, decreased promotion rate
- Increased prevalence for chronic disease= more sick days
- Domestic violence victims lose nearly 8 million days of paid work per year
- Intimate partner violence = $5.8 billion a year
- Over $184 million a day – hospitalizations, mental health care, child welfare, law enforcement, Special Ed, juvenile delinquency

Brain Development

- At birth, the brain is about 25% the size of the adult brain in weight and volume
- Contains nearly same number of brain cells or neurons (100 billion)
- Brain stem and lower brain are well developed (reflexes, breathing, swallowing, heart rate, BP)
- Higher regions are less developed
- Characteristics of prefrontal cortex area is last to develop
- Natural growth and pruning process for neural connections
- First five years are most critical period
- Need positive stimulation and responsive, attuned caregiver to make strong synaptic connections
- As the child ages, the same number of neurons are in place
- Number of synaptic connections drastically increases until adolescence
- During adolescence (2nd most critical period of development) the unused connections are pruned and the more frequently used connections are strengthened

Impact of Trauma on the Brain

- Reduces the number of connections formed
- Reduces the size of the prefrontal cortex
- Strengthens survival connections
- Trauma rewires the brain for survival
- Results in:
  - Memory problems
  - Attention difficulty
  - Language delays
  - Emotional and behavioral regulation issues
  - Learning disabilities/delays

Fight Flight Freeze

- Glucocorticoids create “flashbulb” memories (vivid snapshots of event)
- Cortisol - counter pain and inflammation, regulates metabolism, affects water balance
- Increased cortisol levels - GI symptoms, back pain, headaches
- Increased HR
- Increased platelet levels
- Changes in blood flow - blood diverted toward brain & major muscle groups & away from hands/feet/stomach
- Increased catecholamines - natural opiate release
- Increased Calcium production
- Increased blood sugar levels to feed brain & heart
Hyper-arousal

Hypo-arousal

Impact of trauma on young children

Trauma can result in............

- Delayed development of verbal skills
- Memory problems
- Regressive behaviors
- Aggression/behavior problems
- Inability to focus
- Learning disabilities
- Poor appetite, low weight gain, digestive problems
- Irritability, depression, anxiety
- Nightmares, sleep difficulty
- Compulsion to re-enact or imitate traumatic event
- Exaggerated startle response
- Difficulty trusting others
- Lack of self confidence
- Somatic complaints
- Bed wetting

Impact of trauma on adolescents

- Anxiety, fear
- Worry about safety of self & others
- Sudden changes in behavior
- Difficulty trusting others
- Suicidal thoughts/Attempts
- Heightened difficulty with authority, redirection, criticism
- Nightmares, sleep difficulties
- Exaggerated startle response
- Avoidance behaviors
- Emotional numbing

Impact of trauma on adults

- At any time an adult may experience the impact of compounded, unaddressed childhood trauma
- May experience new traumatic events
- Certain events may trigger trauma response
- Parenting with history of trauma
- Depression
- Difficulty trusting others especially those in authoritative roles
- Impaired social/sexual relationships
- Hypervigilance
- Inertia
- Substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Emotional dysregulation

Trauma and mental health.....

- PTSD
- Chronic depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Drug/alcohol dependence
- OCD
- Eating disorders
- Personality disorders

Intervention

- Many effective therapeutic interventions are available for all ages
- Therapy
- Trauma is “not cured”
- Cannot erase traumatic events
- Don’t have to be a therapist
- Trauma aware
- Recognize the presence of trauma symptoms & acknowledge the role of trauma in their lives
Re-Traumatization
A situation, attitude, or interaction, or environment that replicates the events or dynamics of the original trauma and triggers the overwhelming feelings and reactions associated with them

- Assault
- SANE Exam
- Law enforcement involvement
- Restraints or seclusion
- Privacy
- Gathering health history

Impact on individuals
- Decrease or loss of trust
- Higher rates of self injury
- Significantly less willing to engage in treatment
- Intrusive memories, nightmares and flashbacks
- Re-experiencing symptoms and emotions from previous trauma
- Increase in chronicity of stress
- Increased symptom relapse and re-hospitalization

We need to change the question from……
What is wrong with you?
To
What has happened to you?

Responding to those who have experienced trauma..........
- Acknowledge that we may unintentionally trigger someone’s trauma response
- Better understanding of their behaviors and responses
- Strive to see the world through the lens of trauma

Trauma Informed Care
5 Principles

1) Safety: ensuring physical & emotional safety “do no harm”
2) Trustworthiness: Maximizing trustworthiness, making tasks clear, maintaining appropriate boundaries
3) Choice: Prioritizing patient choice & control over recovery
4) Collaboration: Maximizing collaboration & sharing of power
5) Empowerment: Identifying what they are able to do for themselves; helping patient find inner strengths needed to heal

Learn More
- www.aliveendwellstl.com
- (National Institute of Mental Health)
- http://www.k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/pdfsdoc/HeartofLearningandTeaching.pdf
- www.annainstitute.org