



Return to Balance:

Finding Strength and Resilience through Historical Trauma



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Historical Trauma...



- Historical trauma is collective and cumulative emotional wounding across generations that results from cataclysmic events targeting a community.
- Historical trauma is held personally and collectively and is transmitted over generations. Thus, even family members who have not directly experienced the trauma can feel the effects of the event generations later.
- Intergenerational transmission of trauma is a relatively recent focus of mental health as it was first observed in 1966 by clinicians alarmed by the number of children of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust seeking treatment.
- The multigenerational aspects of trauma continue to be treated as secondary and, consequently, the behavior of many children of survivors of massive trauma is misunderstood and not treated appropriately.
- What are some things you can think of that meet this definition in communities?



Historically Traumatic Events

- Historically Traumatic Events consist of...
 - Communally-based incidents that cause catastrophic upheaval or high levels of community distress among and within communities.
 - Events include planned phenomenon by government and government-sponsored institutions (e.g., boarding school, massacres, slavery, aftermath of Katrina).
 - Environmental trauma (e.g., radioactive dumping into rivers, global warming).
 - Spiritual trauma (prohibition or imprisonment for practicing traditions, forced religion).
 - What else might fit into these kind of events? How does this play out in the lives of women? How does this play out in the lives of impoverished?





Historical Trauma Responses



- Historical Trauma Response: Bio-psycho-social-cultural-spiritual wounding from historical trauma (HT) and historically traumatic events (THE). A collective wounding response (depression, anxiety, d/a abuse, somatization).
- For children, a historical trauma implies a predisposition or vulnerability to stress, an increased sensitivity or hyper-arousal to stressful events as well as an increased risk of historical trauma response symptoms and behaviors (Evans-Campbell & Walters, 2006).
- What does this look like in your communities?



The Effects of Historical Trauma Stressors on Health or Mental Health Outcomes



- Historical and contemporary traumatic events can lead to a “soul wound” (Duran & Duran).



- The soul wound or ‘spirit wounding’ is the cumulative effect of historical trauma brought on by centuries of colonialism, genocide, and oppression.



- Psychological ramifications include internalization of the oppressor, unresolved grief and mourning, and suicidality. (Braveheart, 2000).



- Diagnostic categories such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) fail to capture the complete and utter wounding of the spirit that is caused by such traumas.





Ongoing and Current Traumas: Micro-aggressions



- Appropriation of culture and exoticizing (rap videos, gang culture fashion, excessive sexualizing).



- Invisibility (being mistaken for other races, “color-blind treatment”).



- Being a target of racial profiling.



- Not having access to resources, structural inequalities.



- What does this look like for the people with whom we work?



Discrimination and Health Outcomes



- Discrimination has been related to depressive symptoms; global measures of distress; anxiety symptoms; and poor general health.



- Everyday discrimination is much more stressful than time-limited discrimination, and as a result, daily hassles have a greater impact on health outcomes.



- Among Natives, one study found that perceived discrimination was related to AOD use and depression. (Whitbeck & Morris, 2001).



- Evidence suggests that oppressed statuses associated with multiple forms of discrimination may lead to more cumulative physical and mental health symptoms (Diaz & Ayala, 2001) -- this is true despite economic gains in certain communities...what does this means? Making connections to capitalism...





Embodiment



“What happens to mother earth happens to her people” –
Chief Seattle



- Nancy Krieger’s notion of embodiment makes three claims:
 - (1) bodies tell stories about-and cannot be studied divorced from--the conditions of our existence;
 - (2) bodies tell stories that often--but not always--match people's stated accounts; and
 - (3) bodies tell stories that people cannot or will not tell, either because they are unable, forbidden, or choose not to tell.
- Stories/experiences of historical trauma are showing up on our bodies.





Discrete Trauma (interpersonal)



- What does looking at historical tell us about discrete traumas?
- What are the kinds of interpersonal traumas we can expect to see in the communities with whom we work?
- How are these connected to the larger picture?
- How do we respond appropriately to the immediate presentations while keeping in mind the larger socio-cultural-political? And biological?
- Hopefully we are starting to see the embedded structures of the major “isms” in the role of trauma and violence in the micro-world.



Narrativity



- Social science research is showing the power of narrativity in interrupting the transmission of intergenerational trauma in Native populations (Evans-Campbell & Walters, 2006; Lowery, 1999; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999).
- “We have come from similar places and we use those places to solidify our relationships with one another. Some of us recognize each other in the stories we tell. And when we are no longer together, we take our joined narratives with us” (Lowery, 1999; p.26)
- How do we as Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) workers figure into this?



A Model of Embodiment...

