Understanding the Impact of Trauma in Developing Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs for Tribal Youth

Gwendolyn Packard
National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center

Carole Warshaw, MD
National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health

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Family and Youth Services Bureau
Tribal Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP)
Introductions
Objectives

- Define trauma, including historical trauma;
- Provide an overview of the biological responses to stress and trauma;
- Recognize how trauma (including from teen dating violence) presents itself in Tribal communities;
- Understand the effects of trauma on individuals’ ability to absorb prevention messaging; and
- Describe trauma-informed services and discuss how to create a trauma-informed environment.
First, find your right distance…
What Do We Mean by “Trauma”?

Individual Trauma: Trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or enduring condition, in which:

- The individual experiences a threat to life or to his or her psychic or bodily integrity (or to a loved one)
- The individual’s coping capacity and/or ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is overwhelmed

Collective Trauma

- Cultural and historical trauma can impact individuals and communities across generations

Giller 1999
What Do We Mean by “Historical Trauma”?

- Historical trauma is the cumulative emotional, psychological and spiritual wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences.

- The collective traumas of colonization affect nearly 100% of Indigenous Peoples.
Historical Context of Trauma

- Contact
- Genocide
- Violence against women and children
- Forced removal
- Boarding schools
- Removal of children
- Sterilization
- Changing federal policies
- Reservations
- Oppression
Understanding Trauma and Its Effects

Trauma theory
Development, attachment, neurobiology & social context
Understanding the Traumatic Effects of Abuse

Why a Developmental Framework Is Important

- Our brains grow in relation to our experience
- The nature and quality of those experiences help to shape our development
Our Brains Are Made Up of Billions of Nerve Cells with Trillions of Connections

Thompson K, Gradinaru V, Deisseroth K., Stanford University
Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company
Impact of Experience on Brain Development:
Brain Development Requires Stimulation

- Experience stimulates certain brain pathways
- Those consistently stimulated are strengthened
- Genes and experience work together but play different roles
- Genes provide the basic wiring plan
- Experience fine-tunes brain architecture

Civitas & Wurman 2002
Understanding Trauma: Importance of Early Attachment Relationships

- Model for future relationships and trust
- Important source of resilience and ability to manage stress
- Template for developing self-regulating, integrative and empathic capacities
- Active throughout life

How Does This Translate?
Impact of Trauma on the Brain

- Stress
- Traumatic stress
- Complex trauma
Optimal Stress: Yerkes-Dodson Curve
Normal Stress Response

- Necessary for growth and survival
  - Sensory input to brain of potential threat
  - Mobilizes rapid response/state of arousal:
    - Fight, flight or freeze; intense focus on immediate danger and/or dissociation
    - Neurochemical cascade to mobilize response
  - Higher brain centers then evaluate threat, take appropriate action or disregard
  - Return to baseline

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Stress Response: Fight, Flight, or Freeze

Normal Stress Response

Cortex
Thinking

Hippocampus
Memory

Thalamus
Sensory Relay

Amygdala
Alarm

(LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007)
Normal Stress Response

Cortex
Thinking

Thalamus
Sensory Relay

Hippocampus
Memory

Amygdala
Alarm

Threat

(LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007)
Normal Stress Response

Thalamus
Sensory Relay

Cortex
Thinking

Hippocampus
Memory

Amygdala
Alarm

Very fast

Threat
(LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007)
Normal Stress Response

Thalamus Sensory Relay

Cortex Thinking

Hippocampus Memory

Amygdala Alarm

Response

Threat

(LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007)
Normal Stress Response

Thalamus
Sensory Relay

Cortex
Thinking

Hippocampus
Memory

Amygdala
Alarm

Very fast

Slower

Response

Threat

(LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007)
Normal Stress Response

Cortex Thinking

Hippocampus Memory

Thalamus Sensory Relay

Amygdala Alarm

Back to Baseline

LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007
What Does Stress Do?

Shifts people away from emotional balance and predictability and calls on our system to restore it.
What Does Traumatic Stress Do?

Shifts people away from emotional safety and predictability, and disrupts our system’s ability to restore it.
Traumatic Stress Response
Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways

Cortex

Hippocampus

Sensory Thalamus

Amygdala

LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007
Traumatic Stress Response
Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways

Abuse, violence, coercive control, and oppression

LeDoux 1996, Bassuk 2007
Traumatic Stress Response
Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways

- Cortex
- Hippocampus
- Sensory Thalamus
- Amygdala

Abuse, violence, coercive control, and oppression

Traumatic Stress Response
Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways

Threat

Sensory Thalamus → Amygdala

Very fast

Abuse, violence, coercive control, and oppression

Hippocampus

Slower

Cortex

Traumatic Stress Response
Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways

Cortex

Hippocampus

Amygdala

Sensory Thalamus

Threat

Abuse, violence, coercive control, and oppression

Response

Traumatic Stress Response
Sensitized Nervous System: Under-modulation of Fear Pathways

- Sensory Thalamus
- Cortex
- Hippocampus
- Amygdala

Very fast pathway:
- Sensory Thalamus to Amygdala

Slower pathway:
- Amygdala to Hippocampus to Cortex

Abuse, violence, coercive control, and oppression

Threat

Trauma & Dissociation

- A physiological response to danger and threat

- A psychological coping strategy used to protect oneself from overwhelming experiences

- A separation of mental processes and contents (e.g., thoughts, images, and sensations) that would ordinarily be connected

- The over-modulation of fear pathways

Saakvitne et al. 2000, Lanius et al. 2011
Trauma Can Lead to Changes in Arousal, Attention, Perception, and Emotion

May move between extremes....

**Arousal** - Extreme excitability response to stimuli *or* numbing-detachment from the world

- Hyper-arousal ↔ Numbing

**Attention** - Directed away from stimuli - completely absent *or* deeply, exclusively focused

- Dissociation ↔ Hyper-focus

**Perception** - Pupils dilated, vision and hearing sharpened *or* dulled with memory absent

- Heightened ↔ Dulled

**Emotion** - Devastating, painful feelings *or* inappropriately detached from experience

- Absent ↔ Overwhelming

Miller 2008
Neurobiology of Abuse, Trauma & Oppression

Threat

Sensory Thalamus

Hippocampus

Cortex

Amygdala

Abuse, violence, coercive control, and oppression

Response

How Interventions Help

Cortex

Hippocampus

Amygdala

Sensory Thalamus

SAFETY
Social, Political
Economic, Environmental
Change

Response

How Interventions Help

Cortex

Hippocampus

Sensory Thalamus

Amygdala

Neuroregulatory Intervention

Psychopharmacology

Response

SAFETY
Social, Political
Economic, Environmental Change

(LeDoux, 1996)
How Interventions Help

SAFETY
Social, Political, Economic, Environmental Change

Cortex

Neuroregulatory Interventions
Psychotherapy
Social Support
Advocacy Skills
Psychopharmacology

Response

Sensory Thalamus

Hippocampus

Amygdala

How Does this Translate?
Understanding the Impact of Trauma

Trauma can affect our capacity to:

- **Trust other people**
  - Harder to reach out for or respond to help

- **Trust ourselves**
  - Experience ourselves as deserving and worthwhile
  - Solve problems, exercise judgment, process information
  - Take initiative, thoughtfully plan

- **Manage internal states** in ways that do not create other difficulties or increase risk
  - Stay present and connected

Summary

- Brain develops in relation to early relationships and experiences
- Neglect, stress and trauma particularly at hands of caregivers impact development
- There are many opportunities to counteract these effects
How Trauma Presents Itself in Tribal Communities
Historical Trauma Response

- Child abuse and/or neglect
- Racism
- Bloodism
- Bullying/lateral violence
- Crime or antisocial behavior
- Mental health impacts
- Addiction/substance abuse
- Physical illness
- Sexual abuse
- Chronic depression and/or suicide
- Disconnection from education system
- Internalized oppression
- Family violence
Intergenerational Trauma

"over the lifespan and across generations"

Exposure/Observation → Experience

New Generation is Born → Adaptive Coping Response(s)

Normalization in Family → Behavior Carried to Adult

Normalization in Family → Use in Relationships
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the Context of Historical Trauma
Adverse Childhood Exposures and Alcohol Dependence among 7 Native American Tribes

N = 1660

- 10 categories of adverse childhood experiences: boarding school, foster care and adoption added and cultural variables assessed

- 86% of participants experienced one or more categories of exposure, and 33% reported four or more categories

- Strong relationship between childhood sexual abuse and subsequent drinking problems among the general population; similar in AI/AN population

- Significant Tribal differences in rates of alcohol dependence and adverse childhood exposures

- Lifetime prevalence of alcohol dependence was high among all tribes but one

Koss et al. 2003
High rates of alcohol dependence were associated with one or more types of adverse childhood experiences
- Men: 74%–100%; Women: 83%–93%
- Combined sexual and physical abuse increased alcohol dependence for men
- Combined sexual abuse and boarding school attendance were significant for women
- Women with 4 or more ACEs had a 7x increase in alcohol dependence

Koss et al. 2003
Trauma in Indian Country

Oppression & cultural trauma

Accidental Death

Incarceration

Violence

Substance Abuse

Cumulative (Collective) Trauma

Suicide

Child Abuse and Neglect

Domestic/Family Violence

Poverty

Individual situations

Historical events and historical trauma

Bigfoot 2008
Indian People Today

- There are 4.5 million Indigenous People in the US
- Indigenous People make up 1.5% of the total US population
- 1.3 million Indian People are under the age of 18
- Less that 336,000 are over 65
- Over 65% live in off-reservation communities
Roots of Violence Against Indian Women and Girls
Historical Trauma and Contemporary Pain

Understanding the Impact of Historical Trauma on Tribal Youth
Questions

- With regard to historical trauma, what have you seen in your community?
- What has been the impact of historical trauma on your youth?
Youth exposed to violence more likely to become teen parents; teen parents have high rates of abuse

- Youth who experience physical or sexual abuse more likely to have rapid repeat pregnancy
- Young teen mothers (15 or younger vs. 16-19) more than 2x as likely to have experienced childhood physical or sexual abuse
- Exposure to abuse, neglect and violence increases risk for victimization, mental health problems and delinquency and linked to poorer outcomes

Trauma and Teen Pregnancy

- Teen parents with histories of childhood trauma may use experience of parenthood and feelings of parental protectiveness as source of renewed hope for the future

- **Northern Plains** adolescents being served by an American Indian Teen Mother Program
  - 61% reported IPV; 37.5% during pregnancy
  - 22.5% reported current sexual trauma

Mylant & Mann 2008
Teen Dating Violence

- Ongoing pattern of coercive control in the context of a dating relationship
- May include physical, sexual or psychological abuse, electronic aggression or economic coercion
- May include sexual or reproductive coercion, mental health coercion or substance abuse coercion
Teen Dating Violence

- **Question:** Based on your experience, are there other dimensions you would add to this definition?
Childhood Trauma and DV Increase Adolescents’ Risks

- **Trauma** increases the risk for substance abuse.

- **Dating violence** increases the risk for reproductive coercion and birth control sabotage and for mental health and substance abuse coercion.

- **Substance abuse coercion** increases the risk for sexual coercion.

- **Mental health and substance abuse coercion** increase the risk for behavioral health symptoms, undermine credibility, reduce access to services and resources, and increase the risk for incarceration.

Trauma and Adolescents: What You May See

- Experiencing intrusive and distressing feelings:
  - Feeling guilty and ashamed about what happened
  - Feeling self-conscious about their intense feelings
  - Being upset at and trying to avoid reminders of what happened
  - Nightmares or insomnia
  - Hypervigilance and fear, hopelessness, anger and irritability

- Attempts to manage feelings
  - Wishes or plans to seek revenge
  - Sensation-seeking and/or potentially self-harming behaviors such as substance use, reckless driving, high risk sexual activities

- Difficulty concentrating and learning

- Dramatic changes in self-image, relationships, and attitudes
In a Strength-Based Approach, Resilience Is a Critical Ingredient

**Resilience:** Capacity for successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances

**Question:** What are some examples of resilience that you’ve seen in working with young people?

McLewin & Muller 2006, Bell 2001
Summary: Trauma & Adolescents

- Teens experience multiple types of trauma
- Responses to trauma and coping strategies can increase risk
- Adverse childhood experiences increase risk for subsequent health, mental health and substance abuse problems
- Gender-based violence increases the risk of developing health, mental health, and substance abuse conditions
- Stigma, poverty, institutionalization, oppression, and discrimination compound these risks
- All increase the risk for teen pregnancy
- Addressing previous trauma and current DV increases likelihood of success

Trauma and Adolescents

- How does this fit with what you are seeing?
- What else are you seeing in the young people you are working with?
- How does trauma affect their response to your program?
How Does Understanding Trauma & DV Help?

- Normalizes and makes sense of responses
- Acknowledges importance and challenges of connection
- Recognizes the role of coercive control
- Helps us respond in more effective and empathic ways
- Helps us understand our own responses and their impact
- Acknowledges a broader context
The Importance of Culture, DV and Trauma-Informed Approaches

- Without a trauma framework, services can be retraumatizing
- Without a DV framework, services can be endangering
- Without a culture lens, services may not be relevant
- Without a human rights lens, services may not be inclusive
- Understanding and responding appropriately can counter these effects

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Creating Trauma-Informed Services

- Recognize pervasiveness and impact of trauma
  - On participants, staff, organizations & communities

- Use collaborative, strength-based approach to counteract experience of abuse
  - Attend to physical and emotional safety
  - Provide information, tools and resources
  - Support empowerment through skill-building

- Minimize retraumatization
  - Empathic engagement: offer respect, connection and hope
  - Provide clarity, consistency, transparency, choice, and control
  - Prepare for trauma triggers

- Promote safety and healing

- Attend to the role of culture, and…….

Harris & Fallot 2001
Sustain Ourselves in the Work by

- Recognizing the role trauma plays in our own lives
- Providing support and opportunity for reflection and for effective supervision
- Supporting self-care to nourish empathy
- Modeling in our day-to-day interactions the systemic changes we are trying to make

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The Environment We Create

Communicates our beliefs about the people who participate in our programs

- The policy and programmatic environment
- The physical and sensory environment
- The interpersonal environment
A Welcoming Environment Says

“You belong here.”
What Would this Look Like in Our Programs and Organizations?

- In what ways do trauma-informed services have relevance for your work?
- What do you already know about trauma and trauma-informed practice?
- What are you already doing that is trauma-informed?
Do You Ever Wonder?

“What do you do when adolescents’ behavior gets in the way of the work, gets in the way of their responding to the information we offer, and in the way of their using the services we provide?”
What If You Wondered…

“What do I do when trauma’s impact gets in the way of the work, gets in the way of their responding to the information we give, and in the way they use the services we have?”
In Becoming Trauma-Informed, First Change How We Are, and That Will Change What We Do
Cultural Values and Traditional Practices
Cultural Practices

The language of healing through such cultural practices as

- Welcoming women, offering sweet grass, sage, and something to drink in a warm caring environment
- Promoting cultural awareness, education, sharing, and practices unique to each tribe
- Offering traditional healing, sacred medicines, sweat lodges, drumming, singing, and dancing
- Incorporating traditional values and ceremonies, making relatives
Spiritual Beings

- We are emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual

- We are spiritual beings on a human journey, not human beings on a spiritual journey

- For victims of violence, often a westernized approach does not acknowledge the spiritual wound of our whole being

- Holistic approach is necessary to help victims/survivors heal
  - Both traditional and western approaches can be utilized at the same time
Way of Knowing

1. Native life is centered on the four seasons, four directions, and the natural world

2. Traditional spirituality is not a ‘religion’ so much as it is an integral seamless part of the very being of our society

3. Native spirituality and beliefs are sacred; to use them in any way other than the way they were intended would be sacrilegious

4. Learning to live in the traditional ways is not easy
Ceremonial and Sacred Ways

- Women’s Full Moon Ceremony
- Cedar Bath
- Sweat Lodges
- Fasting
- Wiping of Tears Ceremony
- Healing Women’s Camp
- Healing Camp for Men
- Picking Medicines
- Drums and Songs
- Use of Feathers
- Sacred Fires
- Sacred Directions, Seasons, Winds
“IF THE EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, PHYSICAL, AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING OF A WOMAN IS INTACT, SO TOO IS THAT OF HER FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETY.” Indigenous Proverb
References and Resources


References and Resources


References and Resources


- National Teen Dating Violence Hotline: [http://www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)


References and Resources


- SAMHSA Report AI/AN Communities Trauma-Informed Care Work Group, January 2009.


Carole Warshaw, MD

29 E. Madison St., Suite 1750
Chicago, IL 60602
P: 312-726-7020, ext. 17
TTY: 312-726-4110
http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org
Clwarshaw@aol.com
National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center
http://www.niwrc.org

Gwendolyn Packard
gpackard@niwrc.org
(505) 259-3693

Strengthening Sovereignty, Working to End Violence Against Indian Women