

Understanding Trauma: Cultivating Compassion, Cultural Congruency, and Healing

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Topics We Will Cover

What is trauma?

Why is it important to understand?

Understanding Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Manifestations of Trauma (Behavioral, Psychological, Physical, Cognitive)

Evidence Based Treatment Modalities for Trauma

Examples of Trauma Informed Care

Importance of Cultural Competency in Trauma Informed Care

Compassion vs Compassion Fatigue in Trauma Informed Care

Resources

What is Trauma?

Definition of Trauma

- Trauma is an emotional, psychological, or physical response to a distressing event or series of events that are deeply disturbing or harmful.

2. Types of Trauma

- Trauma can be categorized into various types, including acute, chronic, complex, and developmental trauma.

3. Common Traumatic Events

- Examples of traumatic events include accidents, abuse, combat, natural disasters, loss of a loved one, and more.

4. Understanding PTSD

- PTSD stands for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- It is a mental health condition that can develop after an individual experiences or witnesses a traumatic event.

5. Symptoms of PTSD

- PTSD symptoms can include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts related to the trauma, hypervigilance.

6. Diagnosis and Assessment

- PTSD is diagnosed through clinical assessment and criteria established in the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).

7. Impact of Trauma and PTSD

- Trauma and PTSD can have profound effects on mental, emotional, and physical well-being.
- They may lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders.

Examples of Traumatic Events

- **Natural Disasters:** Earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, and tornadoes can lead to traumatic experiences.
- **Physical Assault:** Being a victim of physical violence, such as assault or mugging, can be traumatic.
- **Sexual Assault:** Experiencing sexual assault or abuse is a highly traumatic event.
- **Combat or War:** Soldiers exposed to combat situations can suffer from trauma.
- **Accidents:** Severe accidents like car crashes or workplace incidents can lead to trauma.
- **Childhood Abuse:** Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse during childhood is often traumatic.
- **Loss of a Loved One:** The death of a close family member or friend can be a source of trauma.
- **Terrorist Attacks:** Witnessing or being directly affected by acts of terrorism can cause trauma.
- **Medical Trauma:** Traumatic experiences during medical procedures or surgeries can lead to psychological distress.
- **Kidnapping or Hostage Situations:** Being held against one's will in such situations is traumatic.
- **Transitional Life Changes:** Divorce, Breakup

Types of Trauma:

- **Acute Trauma:** Acute trauma is a single traumatic event, often with a clear beginning and end. For example, a car accident or a natural disaster can lead to acute trauma.
- **Chronic Trauma:** Chronic trauma results from repeated exposure to distressing events over an extended period. Examples include ongoing domestic abuse or living in a war-torn region.
- **Complex Trauma:** Complex trauma involves exposure to multiple traumatic events, often during childhood. It can result from abuse, neglect, or instability in the home environment.
- **Developmental Trauma:** Developmental trauma occurs during crucial developmental stages in childhood, impacting emotional and psychological growth. Examples include abandonment, emotional abuse, or neglect during childhood.

Physical and Psychological Impact of Trauma

1. Physical Impact of Trauma

- **Stress Response:** Trauma triggers the body's stress response, leading to increased heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones (e.g., cortisol).
- **Chronic Health Issues:** Prolonged stress from trauma can contribute to chronic health problems such as cardiovascular issues, gastrointestinal disorders, and autoimmune diseases.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Insomnia, nightmares, and sleep disruptions are common physical effects of trauma.

2. Psychological Impact of Trauma

- **Mental Health Disorders:** Trauma can lead to conditions such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders.
- **Emotional Dysregulation:** Individuals may struggle with managing emotions, leading to mood swings, anger, or emotional numbness.
- **Flashbacks and Intrusive Thoughts:** Re-experiencing traumatic memories can be distressing and intrusive.

3. Cognitive Impact

- **Memory and Concentration:** Trauma may impair memory, focus, and cognitive abilities.
- **Negative Self-Perception:** Individuals may develop negative beliefs about themselves and a sense of guilt or shame.

4. Social and Interpersonal Impact

- **Social Withdrawal:** Trauma can lead to isolation and difficulty trusting others.
- **Relationship Strain:** It may affect relationships due to emotional dysregulation, withdrawal, or trust issues.

5. Coping Mechanisms

- **Substance Abuse:** Individuals may turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with trauma, which can lead to addiction.
- **Self-Harming Behaviors:** Some individuals engage in self-destructive behaviors to manage emotional pain.

Behavioral Manifestations of Trauma

1. Avoidance Behaviors

- **Isolation:** Individuals may withdraw from social activities, friends, or family.
- **Avoidance of Triggers:** Trauma survivors may steer clear of places, people, or situations that remind them of the traumatic event.

2. Hyperarousal Behaviors

- **Irritability:** Frequent outbursts of anger or frustration, even over minor issues.
- **Hypervigilance:** Being constantly on guard, with heightened sensitivity to perceived threats.
- **Startle Response:** Exaggerated startle reflex, reacting strongly to unexpected noises or situations.

3. Re-Experiencing Behaviors

- **Flashbacks:** Vivid and distressing recollections of the traumatic event, feeling as if they are happening in the present.
- **Nightmares:** Recurrent distressing dreams about the trauma.
- **Intrusive Thoughts:** Unwanted and distressing thoughts about the traumatic event that are hard to control.

4. Emotional Dysregulation

- **Mood Swings:** Frequent and extreme changes in mood, such as from anger to sadness.
- **Emotional Numbing:** Difficulty experiencing positive emotions or even feeling emotionally flat.

5. Self-Harming Behaviors

- **Self-Mutilation:** Some individuals engage in self-harming behaviors as a coping mechanism for emotional pain.
- **Suicidal Ideation:** Trauma can lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

6. Substance Abuse

- **Drug and Alcohol Use:** Some turn to substance abuse as a way to cope with emotional distress.

7. Relationship Difficulties

- **Trust Issues:** Difficulty in trusting others, even loved ones.
- **Conflict in Relationships:** Strained relationships due to mood swings and emotional dysregulation.

8. Coping Strategies

- **Avoidance:** Turning to avoidance or denial as a way to cope with painful emotions.
- **Isolation:** Choosing to be alone as a protective measure against potential triggers.

Nonclinical Manifestations of Trauma

1. Impact on Relationships

- **Trust Issues:** Trauma survivors may find it challenging to trust others, even in personal relationships.
- **Communication Difficulties:** Trauma can lead to difficulties in effective communication, causing misunderstandings and conflicts.

2. Social Withdrawal

- **Isolation:** Individuals may withdraw from social activities, avoiding gatherings or public places.
- **Loss of Social Support:** Trauma can lead to a reduction in social support networks.

3. Employment and Career

- **Job Performance:** Trauma may affect concentration and focus, impacting job performance.
- **Career Implications:** Trauma can limit career advancement and opportunities.

4. Parenting and Family Life

- **Parent-Child Relationships:** Trauma can affect parenting abilities, impacting the parent-child relationship.
- **Family Dynamics:** Trauma can lead to tension and changes in family dynamics.

5. Impact on Education

- **Academic Performance:** Trauma may impact a student's ability to focus and excel in school.
- **Educational Goals:** Trauma can disrupt educational and career goals.

6. Interpersonal Conflict

- **Conflict Resolution:** Difficulty in resolving conflicts and disagreements effectively.
- **Relationship Strain:** Strain in personal relationships due to mood swings and emotional dysregulation.

7. Coping Strategies

- **Isolation:** Choosing to be alone as a protective measure against potential triggers.
- **Self-Medication:** Using substances as a coping mechanism to deal with trauma-related stress.

8. Recovery and Support

- **Therapeutic Intervention:** Trauma-focused therapies can assist in managing nonclinical manifestations.
- **Support Systems:** Friends, family, and support groups can be instrumental in the healing process.

Trauma Informed Care

- **Trauma-Informed Care (TIC):** TIC is an approach to caregiving and service provision that acknowledges the impact of trauma on individuals and seeks to create a safe and supportive environment for those affected by trauma.

2. Key Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

- **Safety:** Prioritizing safety for individuals and staff by creating a physically and emotionally safe environment.
- **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Building trust through open communication and transparent practices.
- **Peer Support:** Recognizing the importance of peer support in the healing process.

3. Empowerment and Choice

- **Empowerment:** Encouraging individuals to have a say in their care and treatment.
- **Choice:** Offering choices within therapeutic options to promote autonomy.

4. Collaboration and Mutuality

- **Collaboration:** Fostering collaboration between individuals and service providers to create a sense of shared responsibility.
- **Mutuality:** Recognizing the impact of trauma on both individuals and service providers, promoting a mutual understanding of trauma.

5. Understanding the Prevalence of Trauma

- **Trauma Awareness:** Staff are trained to understand the prevalence and impact of trauma.
- **Screening and Assessment:** Conducting trauma-informed screening and assessment when relevant.

6. Avoiding Re-Traumatization

- **Re-Traumatization:** Ensuring that services and interventions do not inadvertently re-traumatize individuals.
- **Sensitive Language and Approach:** Using language and approaches that respect an individual's trauma history.

7. Trauma-Informed Environments

- **Physical Safety:** Ensuring the physical environment is safe and comfortable.
- **Emotional Safety:** Creating an emotionally supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere.

8. Impact on Practice

- **Adapting Practice:** Adapting service provision and care practices to be trauma-informed.
- **Incorporating Trauma-Informed Care Across Disciplines:** Utilizing trauma-informed care in diverse settings such as healthcare, education, and social services.

Evidence Based Trauma Therapy in Trauma Informed Care

- Evidence-based trauma therapy refers to therapeutic approaches and interventions that have been rigorously researched and proven effective in treating trauma-related conditions.

2. Common Evidence-Based Trauma Therapies

- **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Focuses on identifying and challenging negative thought patterns and behaviors associated with trauma. Includes Trauma-Focused CBT (TF-CBT).
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):** A structured therapy that helps individuals process traumatic memories using bilateral stimulation.
- **Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE):** Gradual, systematic exposure to trauma-related memories and situations to reduce fear and anxiety.

3. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

- **Overview:** Originally developed for individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder, DBT's mindfulness-based approach is increasingly used in trauma treatment to improve emotional regulation.

4. Seeking Safety

- **Overview:** A cognitive-behavioral therapy designed to treat individuals with co-occurring trauma and substance abuse issues.

5. Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET)

- **Overview:** Often used for individuals who have experienced complex trauma, NET helps individuals reprocess traumatic memories by creating a coherent narrative.

6. Trauma-Informed Implementation

- **Integration into Trauma-Informed Care:** Evidence-based trauma therapy is a crucial component of a trauma-informed care approach.
- **Training and Supervision:** Staff members are trained and supervised to deliver evidence-based therapies.

7. Benefits of Evidence-Based Trauma Therapy

- **Improved Outcomes:** Research supports the effectiveness of these therapies in reducing PTSD symptoms and improving overall well-being.
- **Empowerment:** Evidence-based therapies often focus on empowering individuals to regain control over their lives.

8. Multimodal Approaches

- **Complementary Therapies:** Some programs combine evidence-based therapies with complementary approaches, such as art therapy, yoga, or mindfulness.

Cultural Competency and Trauma

- Cultural competency refers to the ability to understand, appreciate, and respect the cultural backgrounds and diverse experiences of individuals.

2. The Impact of Culture on Trauma

- **Cultural Variability:** Cultural factors can influence how individuals perceive and respond to trauma.
- **Cultural Expressions of Distress:** Trauma can manifest differently in various cultures, affecting symptom presentation and coping mechanisms.

3. Importance of Cultural Competency in Trauma

- **Enhanced Trust:** Demonstrating cultural competency builds trust between individuals and care providers.
- **Effective Communication:** Cultural competency improves communication, ensuring trauma survivors are heard and understood.

4. Tailoring Treatment Approaches

- **Customized Therapies:** Cultural competency allows for the adaptation of trauma therapies to align with cultural values and beliefs.
- **Incorporating Cultural Practices:** Integrating traditional healing practices can enhance the effectiveness of trauma treatment.

5. Barriers to Cultural Competency

- **Implicit Bias:** Unconscious bias can affect cultural understanding and interactions.
- **Lack of Cultural Awareness:** Insufficient knowledge of diverse cultures can hinder cultural competency.

6. Trauma-Informed Cultural Competency

- **Combining Approaches:** The integration of trauma-informed care with cultural competency ensures trauma survivors receive respectful and culturally sensitive support.

7. Training and Education

- **Cultural Competency Training:** Continuous training and education help professionals develop cultural competency skills.
- **Awareness of Cultural Practices:** Learning about cultural practices, beliefs, and values enhances cultural understanding.

8. Benefits of Cultural Competency in Trauma Care

- **Improved Outcomes:** Culturally competent care leads to better engagement and improved treatment outcomes.
- **Reduced Health Disparities:** Cultural competency contributes to reducing disparities in access to care and health outcomes.

9. Conclusion

- The intersection of cultural competency and trauma-informed care is essential for providing effective and respectful support to individuals from diverse backgrounds who have experienced trauma.

Different Forms of Healing

A Look at Other Cultural Perspectives

1. Native American Healing Circles:

- Native American communities often use healing circles as a therapeutic approach to trauma. These circles provide a safe space for sharing experiences, offering support, and integrating traditional healing practices, such as smudging and ceremonies, into the recovery process.

2. Chinese Acupuncture and Traditional Medicine:

- Chinese culture utilizes acupuncture and traditional medicine to address the physical and emotional manifestations of trauma. Acupuncture is believed to restore the balance of energy in the body and promote emotional well-being.

3. Hawaiian Ho'oponopono:

- In Hawaiian culture, Ho'oponopono is a practice used for conflict resolution and emotional healing. It involves acknowledging and addressing past traumas or conflicts within the family or community through open communication and reconciliation.

4. Latino Folk Healing Practices:

- Latino cultures may incorporate folk healing practices, such as curanderismo or yerberia, involving the use of herbs, rituals, and spiritual guidance to treat trauma and distress. Traditional healers often play a significant role in these practices.

5. African Ancestral Healing Rituals:

- African cultures may engage in ancestral healing rituals, which involve connecting with ancestors through ceremonies, songs, and dances. These rituals are believed to bring healing and closure to trauma.

6. Japanese Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing):

- Shinrin-Yoku, or forest bathing, is a Japanese practice that involves immersing oneself in nature to promote emotional and psychological well-being. This practice is believed to reduce stress and improve mental health.

7. Indigenous Australian Art Therapy:

- Indigenous Australian cultures often use art as a therapeutic tool to express and heal from trauma. Traditional dot paintings and storytelling through art are commonly employed to convey their experiences.

8. South Asian Mindfulness and Yoga:

- South Asian cultures have popularized mindfulness and yoga practices as tools to manage trauma and emotional distress. Mindfulness meditation and yoga are used to promote emotional self-awareness and well-being.

It's essential to recognize that cultural approaches to trauma treatment can vary widely within each culture and may be influenced by factors such as location, community, and individual beliefs.

Understanding and respecting these cultural practices is a critical aspect of providing culturally competent trauma care.

Cultivating Compassion in Trauma Care

- **Empathetic Presence:** Compassion in trauma care begins with being fully present for the individuals you are supporting. Listening without judgment and acknowledging their experiences can make a significant difference.
- **Validation:** Validate the feelings and experiences of trauma survivors. Let them know that their reactions are natural responses to extraordinary circumstances.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Be culturally sensitive and aware of the diverse ways that trauma is experienced and expressed. Respect individual beliefs and practices.
- **Self-Compassion:** Practicing self-compassion is crucial. Caregivers must take care of themselves and manage their own stress to provide effective support.
- **Boundaries:** Setting clear and healthy boundaries is part of compassion. It helps prevent burnout and ensures the sustainability of care.
- **Trauma-Informed Approach:** Implement a trauma-informed approach to care. This includes understanding the impact of trauma, avoiding re-traumatization, and using evidence-based trauma therapies

Compassion Fatigue

- **Definition:** Compassion fatigue is the emotional and physical exhaustion experienced by caregivers and professionals who provide support to individuals who have experienced trauma. It results from the continuous exposure to traumatic stories and the emotional toll of care.
- **Symptoms:** Compassion fatigue can manifest as symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, feelings of hopelessness, increased irritability, reduced empathy, and physical symptoms like sleep disturbances and fatigue.
- **Risk Factors:** Caregivers who are highly empathetic, have little support, or work with a high volume of trauma cases are at a higher risk of experiencing compassion fatigue.
- **Prevention and Mitigation:**
 - Self-Care: Practicing self-care and seeking support from colleagues, supervisors, or mental health professionals is essential.
 - Supervision and Peer Support: Regular supervision and peer support can help professionals process their emotions and experiences.
 - Education and Training: Training in trauma-informed care and self-awareness can help mitigate compassion fatigue.
- **Recovery:** When compassion fatigue occurs, taking time to recover is crucial. This may involve temporary leave from work, counseling, and self-care practices.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** For long-term sustainability, it's vital for trauma care professionals to balance their work with personal well-being and develop strategies for self-compassion.

Resources

1. Books

- Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Penguin Books.
- Walker, P. A. (2013). *Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing.
- Williams, M. B., & Poijula, S. (2013). *The PTSD Workbook: Simple, Effective Techniques for Overcoming Traumatic Stress Symptoms*. New Harbinger Publications.

2. Websites and Online Resources

- National Center for PTSD: www.ptsd.va.gov
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org
- Sidran Institute: www.sidran.org
- RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network): www.rainn.org
- SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator: www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

3. Online Support Communities

- MyPTSD: www.myptsd.com
- DailyStrength: www.dailystrength.org

4. Trauma-Informed Care

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): www.samhsa.gov/trauma-informed-care
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): www.nctsn.org

Questions:
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