The Effects of Trauma on Learning & Family Homelessness

Justice Resource Institute

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Psychological Trauma

- Overwhelming Demands Placed upon the Physiological System that result in a **profound felt sense** of Loss of Control, Vulnerability, and Immobilization.
Situations that can be traumatic:

- Physical or Sexual Abuse
- Abandonment or Neglect
- Death or loss of a loved one
- Life-threatening illness in a caregiver
- Witnessing domestic violence/living in chronically chaotic environments
- Automobile accidents
- Bullying or Harassment
- Witnessing or experiencing community violence
- Natural Disasters
“We Are Biologically Primed to Seek Survival Data”

Normal adaptations to threat: “stress response”
vs.
Breakdown in adaptation to stress: PTSD
The Human Stress Response Continuum

- **STRESSOR**
  *(PERCEIVED THREATS TO SURVIVAL)*

- **STRESS RESPONSE**
  *(Neurobiology-Neurophysiology)*
  *(Body-Brain)*

- **BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS TO STRESS RESPONSE**
Reactions to Stress Response

• Physical Reactions
  ▫ Aches and pains (headaches, stomachaches)
  ▫ Changes in sleep or appetite
  ▫ Increased startle response
  ▫ Sudden heart palpitations
  ▫ More susceptible to colds and illnesses
  ▫ Increased use of alcohol or drugs and/or overeating

Others??
Reactions to Stress Response

- **Emotional Reactions**
  - Shock/disbelief/fear/anxiety/grief/denial
  - Hypervigilance
  - Irritability/restlessness/outbursts of anger
  - Emotional swings/depression
  - Worrying/ruminating-intrusive thoughts
  - Feeling helpless/panic/out of control
  - Increased need to control everyday experiences
  - Minimizing experience/withdrawal/avoidance
  - Difficulty trusting others
  - Loss of sense of order or fairness in the world
The Human Stress Response Continuum

- STRESS STATES
  (THREAT DETECTION)
  (SAFETY SEEKING)

Mediator: Appraisal System

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Stress Response

Regulation of Responses

Sympathetic Nervous System
manages normal reactions
to fear/threats
to promote survival
(adrenaline)
Flight/Fight/Flee

Parasympathetic Nervous System
Responsible for stopping these
responses so we can rest & regenerate
and recognize when we are safe
(serotonin)
Neurophysiology

- Frontal lobe ceases to function
- Unable to make decisions/executive functioning
- Limbic system/Reptilian brain takes over
Normal Assumptions
When Threat is Minimal

• I Am In Control
• I Am Safe
• I Am Worthy
• The World Is Meaningful
• It Can’t Happen To Me
(Janoff-Bulman: 1992)
When *Threat is Maximized: Shattered Assumptions*

- I Am Not In Control
  - I Am Not Safe
  - I Am Not Worthy
- The World Is Not Meaningful
- It Can Happen To Me or Those I Love

(Janoff-Bulman: 1992)
Age-Related Reactions to Trauma

- Preschool and young school-age children
  - May experience a feeling of helplessness and/or uncertainty about whether there is continued danger
  - A general fear could emerge that extends beyond the event
  - May experience difficulty describing in words what is bothering them or what they are experiencing emotionally

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Age-Related Reactions to Trauma

• Middle school children
  ▫ Persistent concern over their safety and the safety of others may emerge
  ▫ May be preoccupied with their own actions during the event
  ▫ Often experience guilt or shame over what they did or did not do
  ▫ May engage in constant retelling of event or may describe being overwhelmed by feelings of fear or sadness
  ▫ May experience regression as well- sleep disturbances
  ▫ Greater difficulty concentrating
  ▫ May complain of headaches/stomachaches without obvious cause
  ▫ May engage in reckless or aggressive behaviors

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Age-Related Reactions to Trauma

- High school adolescents
  - May feel self-conscious about their emotional responses
  - Feelings of fear, vulnerability and concern over being judged/labeled may result in withdrawal
  - Experience feelings of shame and guilt
  - May express fantasies about revenge/retribution
  - May foster a radical shift in the way they think about the world
  - May engage in self-destructive or accident-prone behaviors

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Psychological Impact of Large Scale Violence

- Reactions to Danger
  - There are widespread fears of recurrence increased by misinformation and rumors.
  - Danger increases the need and desire to be close to others, making separation from friends and family more challenging

- Physical Symptoms
  - Headaches, stomachaches, rapid heartbeat, change in appetite or sleep, digestive problems...
  - More general anxiety reactions are also to be expected

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Psychological Impact of Large Scale Violence

- Posttraumatic Stress Reactions
  - Intrusive Reactions - the ways the experience comes back to mind (upsetting thoughts, images, strong emotional reactions)
  - Avoidance and Withdrawal Reactions - avoiding people, places and things that remind you of the event, feeling numb, losing interest in activities
  - Physical Arousal Reactions - sleep disturbances, poor concentration, irritability, nervousness

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Psychological Impact of Large Scale Violence

• Grief Reactions
  ▫ Vary from person to person and can last for many years—there is no “correct” course of grieving.
  ▫ Personal, family, religious, and cultural factors affect the course of grief
  ▫ Traumatic Grief—people who suffer the loss of a loved one under traumatic circumstances find grieving more difficult. They may become preoccupied on how it could have been prevented, what the last moments were like and issues of accountability—this changes the course of grieving.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Psychological Impact of Large Scale Violence

Trauma and Loss Reminders

- Trauma Reminders—many will encounter places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and inner feelings that remind them of the shooting.
- Loss Reminders—those who have lost loved ones continue to encounter situations that remind them of the absence of their loved one.
Consequences of These Reactions

• Intrusive images and reactivity can seriously interfere with work/school performance
• Avoidance can lead to restrictions in activities, relationships, interests and future plans
• Irritability can interfere with relationships
• Sleep disturbances can affect overall daily functioning
• Depressive reactions can lead to a major decline in school/work performance
• Adolescents may respond to a loss by trying to become too self sufficient and independent or by becoming more dependent and taking less initiative
Putting It All Together-
Our Why...

• Physiological impact on learning
• Neurobiological impact on learning
• Shattered Assumptions/Attachments
• Age-Related Reactions
• Reactions to Large Scale Violence
YouthHarbors
Getting to Graduation: A Successful School-Housing Partnership
Why...?
What do we believe?

Opportunity
Independence
Social Justice

To END youth homelessness
Objectives

• Understand the impact of positive school based relationships on a young person’s life who is struggling with being homeless and on their own

• Identify unaccompanied young adults in schools
The Youth Chasm

Child Services

Foster Care
Public education
Transitional Assistance (welfare)
School based health centers
Free health insurance programs
School meals programs
Youth violence prevention
Teen pregnancy prevention
Free legal services
Youth and community centers
Special education
Teen parent programs
Youth violence prevention

16 to 22 Years

The most underserved segment of the population

Homelessness, Unemployment, Dropout, Crime, Drugs, Prostitution

Adult Services

Section 8 housing
Adult Shelters
Welfare
Medicaid

www.youthharbors.org
Unaccompanied Youth
Homelessness in High School

5,000
High School Students Are Homeless
and Alone Each Year in Massachusetts
(Four-year average of MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data)

Homeless youth are 87% more likely to drop out
of high school than their housed peers

Source: America’s Promise Alliance Center for Promise. (2014). Don’t Call Them Dropouts: Understanding the experiences of young people who leave high school before graduation. A Report from America’s Promise Alliance and its Center for Promise at Tufts University.
Consequences of Youth Homelessness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Homeless</th>
<th>Housed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members of a gang</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had alcohol in the past 30 days</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used marijuana in the past month</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Felt sad or hopeless for 2 or more weeks</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Made a suicide attempt that resulted in injury</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had sexual contact against their will</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever been or gotten someone pregnant</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Homelessness in Massachusetts Public Schools, MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014

47% of homeless adults reported first experiencing homelessness as a teen

Partnerhitship Model

School Partnerships

- School becomes the “home”
- Accessible, low barrier & resource
- Building school capacity

Community Partnerships

- Education of stakeholders, funders, and partner organizations
- CoC’s, regional TF’s, Youth Count
- Building community capacity
Post-Grad Transition Planning

➢ 2/4 year college
  • FAFSA Assistance (www.naehcy.org)
  • Writing verifications
  • Organizing tours/class sit-ins
  • Communication with SPOC’s

➢ Trade/Vocational Training
  • Year Up * YouthBuild * JobCorps

➢ Armed Services
  • School-based ROTC officers

➢ Work force
  • Sound financial literacy
  • Housing stability plan
Cost of a High School Dropout

**Net Fiscal Impact of High School Graduation** Massachusetts 2002-2004

- 6 times more likely to be incarcerated
- 3 times more likely to be unemployed
- Lifetime cost to Massachusetts is $467,023
- Lifetime cost to the U.S. is $306,096

**Source**
YouthHarbors’ Goals

- Homelessness
- Graduation rates
- Access to secondary education
- Employment experience & opportunities
- Successful transition to adulthood
- Incarceration
- Increased risk factors that may lead to
  - Sexual exploitation
  - Substance abuse
  - Death
YouthHarbors Report Card

At the end of 7 school years
YouthHarbors outcomes:

- **535** YouthHarbors students served
- **93%** of youth are housed
- **97%** graduated or are on-track to graduate
- **233+** ineligible referrals connected to services

Every program graduate not requiring aid saves the state an estimated $467,000 over his/her lifetime
YouthHarbors
Housing. School. Success.

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