Child Trauma, “Race,” & Urban Poverty

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Child Trauma, “Race,” & Urban Poverty

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Why “Race” and Urban Poverty?

The primary mission of the Chicago Child Trauma Center is to make expert trauma-focused services available to Black families living in economically distressed urban communities.

While racism and poverty affect members of many groups, the interaction of “race,” poverty, and racial and economic segregation creates a unique set of challenges for urban Black families and service providers in urban settings.
“Race”

“While race is a *dynamic* phenomenon rooted in political struggle, it is commonly considered a *fixed* characteristic of human populations; while it does not exist in terms of human biology, people routinely look to the human body for evidence about racial identity; while it is a biological *fiction*, it is nonetheless a social *fact.*” (James, 2001)

“The traditional concept of race as a biological fact is a myth....Most Americans still believe in the concept of race the way they believe in the law of gravity – they believe in it without even knowing what it is they believe in.” (Graves, 2004)
Trauma Exposure in Urban Black Children

Violent Crime & Loss Through Violent Death

Pallone & Hennessy (2000)
Risk of victimization in homicide 281% greater than representation in population

- 46% Witnessed homicide
- 37% Threat with gun
- 27% Threat with knife
- 24% Threat with other weapon
- 23% Shot
- 23% Injured with other weapon
- 19% Stabbed
Trauma Exposure in Urban Black Children

Violent Crime & Loss Through Violent Death

Gladstein & Slater (1988)
- 60% Witnessed assault
- 42% Witnessed shooting
- 24% Witnessed homicide
- 14% Witnessed rape

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (2005)
Increased risk for criminal victimization related to being Black, living in a city, and annual income <$10,000
Trauma Exposure in Urban Black Children

Violent Crime & Loss Through Violent Death

Chicago Police Department (2004)
61.5% of victims of violent crime in Chicago are Black
17.3% White
18.8% Hispanic

Bell & Jenkins (1993)
75% of elementary school children on the South Side of Chicago have witnessed a robbery, shooting, stabbing, or killing.
Trauma Exposure in Urban Black Children

**Domestic Violence**
Field & Caetano (2004)
    - African American couples at increased risk for intimate partner violence

Fantuzzo, Boruch, Beriama, Atkins, & Marcus (1997)
    - Risk factors for children’s exposure to DV included living in poverty & living in a female-headed household.

Chicago Police Department (2004)
    - 55% of all DV calls in 2003 occurred in districts served by CCTC.
Trauma Exposure in Urban Black Children

Residential Fire

FEMA (2001)
African Americans account for 25% of fire deaths in US and AA children are twice as likely as White children to die in a fire.

American Burn Association (2003)
African Americans 18.9% of burn patients in US, 1.5x representation in population.
Trauma Exposure in Urban Black Children

Maltreatment

U.S. DHHS (2005)
African American children have double the rate of reported maltreatment of White or Hispanic children

IL DCFS (2005)
AA children 15.1% of Illinois population and 36.6% of indicated maltreatment victims
33% of IL’s foster children reside in Chicago and over 50% in Cook County.
Over 50% of the foster children in Cook County reside in CCTC service area (South Side and South suburbs).
Children served by the Chicago Child Trauma Center
Trauma Exposure

Criterion A: Traumatic Stressors
n=432
Traumatic Stressors

- Sexual Abuse
- Burns/Fire
- Domestic Violence
- Physical Abuse
- Loss Through Violent Death
- Community Violence
- Torture
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Witnessing Homicide
- Motor Vehicle Accident
- Dog Attack
- Threatened with Weapon
- Victim of Other Violent Crime
Traumatic Stressors

Police Raid
Fall from Window
Kidnapping
Witnessing Sudden Death of Relative
Near Drowning
Other Medical Trauma
Hurricane Katrina
Other Adverse Experiences

- Impaired Caregiver: 32%
- Neglect: 31%
- Placement in Foster Care: 28%
- Other Substitute Care: 9%
- Death of Parent: 4%
What We Do
Some Basic Assumptions About Psychological Traumatization

Traumatic experiences are those which overwhelm an individual’s capacity to integrate experience in the normal way. (e.g., Putnam, 1985)

Following exposure to trauma, if integration does not occur, traumatic experience(s) are split off and an individual alternates between functioning as if the trauma is still occurring and functioning as if the trauma never occurred. (e.g., Nijenhuis et al., 2004)

Although traumatic memories and associations remain inaccessible to consciousness much of the time, they have the power to shape an individual’s daily functioning and behavior. (e.g., Allen, 1993)
Intervention

1. Establishment of safety both in and outside of therapy.
2. Healing injuries related to history of attachment disorganization, disruption, or loss.
3. Creation of an integrated narrative focused on the child’s experience of traumatic events through talking, playing, writing, drawing, etc.
4. Integration of the aspects of the child’s personality, self, or experiences that have been split off.
5. Educating the child’s caregiver(s) about symptoms and their meaning, as well as how best to intervene when symptoms occur.
6. Working with family, school, and others in the child’s life to support the child’s progress and adapt to changes as the child heals.
Keys to Success

- No fees
- Not connected to a mental health agency
- Commitment to high quality, effective services
- Highly qualified, integrated professional staff
- Psychology training program
- Multiple locations
- Accessible location in the service area
- Affiliation with established health care institution whose commitment to serving the community is well-established
- Collaborative relationships with child service system stakeholders
The Context
The Context

- Historical Trauma
- Institutional Racism
- Cultural Racism
- Individual Racism
- Criterion A Stressor

Child/Family

- Racism
  - Historical
  - Institutional
  - Cultural
  - Individual
  - Criterion A

NCTSN: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
The Stress of Being Black in America

Chronic Environmental Stress
   - Unemployment
   - Poverty
   - Race-based stressors
   - Microaggressions
   - Invisibility Syndrome
   - Role Strain
   - Disproportional Incarceration Rates
   - Health Disparities
   - Education Disparities
   - Residential Segregation
Individual Racism

Refers to both intentional and unintentional acts of discrimination that individuals exert on others who are not members of their racial group.

Includes acts that reflect the belief in cultural, emotional, intellectual, social, and moral superiority of White individuals. Some examples include:

- Overt race-based stressors
- Microaggressions
- Invisibility Syndrome
Individual Racism

“Cumulative experiences of confronting race-related stress, emotional abuse, and the psychological trauma of racism can lead to the development of the invisibility syndrome.”

“Symptoms of the syndrome are an outcome of psychological conditions produced when a person perceives that his or her talents and identity are not seen because of the dominance of preconceived attitudes and stereotypes.”

“Persons of color experience this as a slight or microaggression...Microaggressions, therefore, are acts of disregarding the person of color based on biased beliefs.”

(Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, and Kelly, 2006)
Cultural Racism

Occurs when White cultural phenomena and values (as reflected in art, music, religion, standards of beauty, etc.) are preferred and are held as standards and cultural norms for People of Color.

Cultural practices and norms that differ from those of Whites are minimized, erased, distorted, dismissed as fads, or pathologized.
Cultural Racism

Role Strain

People can feel role strain when they fail to adequately meet social expectations or experience conflict between their cultural values and the values of mainstream society.

When individuals compromise their cultural role demands in order to achieve within mainstream society, consequences can result in rejection and isolation from family and friends.

(Tolan et al., 1997)
Institutional Racism

Characterized by an organized network, such as an educational system, business, or healthcare system, that enacts normative practices that disadvantage others based on their racial or ethnic group membership.

General examples of present-day institutional racism against African Americans include:

- Housing discrimination
- Residential segregation
- Health care treatment inequities
- Policy practices such as racial profiling

(Constantine, 2006)
Poverty

In the vast majority (92%) of major metropolitan areas, 10% or fewer White families with children live in poverty. In sharp contrast over 20% of Black families live in poverty in 75% of major metropolitan areas.

In most major metropolitan areas (about 85%), more than 70% of White families with children own their home. In contrast, in almost all metros (96%), the homeownership rates of Black families are 50% or less

(Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2007)
Poverty

The neighborhood of an average Black child in Chicago:

- Families in poverty: 24.4%
- Unemployment: 16.0%
- Single females with children: 18.0%
- Home ownership: 48.8%

The neighborhood of an average White child in Chicago:

- Families in poverty: 4.6%
- Unemployment: 3.8%
- Single females with children: 4.3%
- Home ownership: 79.2%

(Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2007)
Health Disparities

Black infants are nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ times more likely than White infants to die before their first birthday. (Parker, 2003)

Nearly 70% of Black adults are overweight. Nationally, half of all Black neighborhoods lack access to a full-service grocery store or supermarket. (National Black Environmental Justice Network)

African Americans with diabetes have a 27% higher death rate than Whites with the disease. (NIH, 1998)
Incarceration Rates

Prevalence of imprisonment

- Black males: 16.6%
- Latino males: 7.7%
- White males: 2.6%

At current incarceration rates, 32% of Black males will enter Federal or State prison during their lifetime, as compared to 17% of Latino males and 5.9% of White males

(Bureau of Justice, 2001)

On any given day, one of every fourteen Black children has a parent in prison. (Mauer & King, 2006)
Children in State Custody

Blacks make up 15% of the general US population, yet 42% of children in foster care in the United States are Black.

In Chicago, 95% of children placed in foster care are Black.

In New York City, 73% of children placed in foster care are Black while 3% are White.

(Roberts, 2002)
Societal Traumatization and the Legacy of Slavery
Societal Traumatization and the Legacy of Slavery

“While slavery serves as an entry point for a dialogue on race, it also carries with it deep anger, resentment, indignation, and bitterness for some, and embarrassment, humiliation, and shame for others, along with large draughts of denial – sometimes through evasion or silence.” (Berlin, 2007)
Child Trauma, “Race” and Urban Poverty

Urban Black families face a unique set of adversities/stressors. The massive historical trauma of slavery has never been addressed, yet creates the context in which present traumas occur and are dealt with. Those of us working with children and families whose daily existence is shaped by the legacy of slavery and racial injustice cannot optimally treat trauma-related distress if we fail to understand and address the effects of the trauma of the past.
The Impact of Slavery

The era of slavery wounded African Americans and has had profound multigenerational consequence.

Enslavement had an impact on the physical, cultural, spiritual, and mental experience of its victims as well.

Estimates of those who died during slavery, including those lost in crossing the ocean, range from 25 million to over 100 million.

(Boyd-Franklin, 2003)
Slavery, “Race” and the Failure of Integration

Race does not exist at a biological level.
Most laws supporting racial discrimination in the United States have been abolished.
Most Americans can honestly say that they don’t harbor White supremacist beliefs.
More Black Americans have reached higher levels of fame and economic success than ever before.

Nonetheless, when one examines the statistics and current events, it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that nearly the same level of segregation, inequality, and oppression exists today as did 150 years ago.
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Societal Traumatization and the Legacy of Slavery

Just as in cases of individual traumatization, avoidance of acknowledging and addressing the traumatic past makes it impossible for integration to occur.

As long as slavery remains taboo, the racial divisions that pervade every aspect of American life will persist.
Societal Traumatization and the Legacy of Slavery

As trauma professionals, we specialize in helping people to communicate about and understand that which cannot be spoken so that they can overcome the horrific past and live in the present.

Our task in working with traumatized Black children and their families is to augment our medical model, evidence-based, individual approaches to therapy by developing ways of addressing slavery and its legacy in our work.
References


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