Race and Trauma

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What is Racial Trauma

• or race-based traumatic stress (RBTS), refers to the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes.

• Any individual that has experienced an emotionally painful, sudden, and uncontrollable racist encounter is at risk of suffering from a race-based traumatic stress injury.

• In the U.S., Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are most vulnerable due to historical and systemic oppression.

• Experiences of race-based discrimination can have detrimental psychological impacts on individuals and their wider communities. In some individuals, prolonged incidents of racism can lead to symptoms like those experienced with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
Understanding RBTS

• This can look like depression, anger, recurring thoughts of the event, physical reactions (e.g. headaches, chest pains, insomnia), hypervigilance, low-self-esteem, and mentally distancing from the traumatic events.

• Some or all of these symptoms may be present in someone with RBTS and symptoms can look different across different cultural groups.

• It is important to note that unlike PTSD, RBTS is not considered a mental health disorder. RBTS is a mental injury that can occur as the result of living within a racist system or experiencing events of racism.
Historical Overview of Race Relations in Louisiana

• 1719 - 1st slave ships from Africa, a year after New Orleans was founded.
• 130 years later - 331,726 enslaved people in Louisiana (before Civil War)
• Post-Civil War Reconstruction era, racist mobs (the Ku Klux Klan, the White League and former Confederate soldiers) killed Black people during massacres in New Orleans, Thibodaux, Opelousas, Colfax and St. Bernard Parish.
  • Between 1882-1936, at least 389 lynchings of Black people occurred in Louisiana.
• 1953, Baton Rouge was the site of the nation’s first bus boycott against segregated seating (2 years before the Montgomery Bus Boycott)
• 1960, four 6-year-old New Orleans girls became the first Black children to attend all-white elementary schools in the South.
• Black women in Louisiana are 4 times as likely as White women to die from pregnancy complications
• Black infant mortality rate (10.5 infants/1,000 live births) is more than twice the rate for White Louisianans.
Understanding Trauma

• Trauma is defined as a sudden, potentially deadly experience, often leaving lasting, troubling memories.
• Trauma can affect one’s beliefs about the future:
  • loss of hope, limited expectations about life, fear that life will end abruptly or early, or anticipation that normal life events won’t occur
Examples of historical trauma

- Slavery, segregation, and discrimination in the South
- Holocaust
- Katrina
- Displacement of indigenous
- Genocide
Data on ACEs by Race

- We don’t have Louisiana data on the prevalence of ACEs in Louisiana.
- Most important finding of ACEs study (1999) was that the relationship of # of ACEs with adult health (physical and mental).

Percentage of Children in the US that have Experienced at least one ACE:

- White
- Latino
- Black
Impact of ACEs vs PACEs

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Intergenerational Trauma and Epigenetics

- Mothers exposed to the Holocaust showed changes in the activity of a DNA segment involved in regulating the stress response.
- Their children, who were not directly exposed, also showed these changes.

**Depression:** 1.7 times higher
**Chronic depression:** 2.5 times higher in children of women who experienced severe child abuse compared with children of mothers who didn’t experience such abuse.
Intersectionality and Trauma

• BIPOC may intersect with other identities such as **gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, housing status, and socioeconomic status** in their experiences of trauma.

• The unique challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities experience further isolation, vulnerability, and exclusion.
What Can WE Do?

| Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms | • Enhanced primary care  
| | • Victim-centered services  
| | • Treatment to lessen the harms of ACEs  
| | • Treatment to prevent problem behavior and future involvement in violence  
| | • Family-centered treatment for substance use disorders |

From CDC: Fast Facts: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences
Carl Rogers: Unconditional Positive Regard

• According to Rogers, unhealthy behaviors like overeating, drinking too much, and not adhering to a medication regimen aren’t altered with confrontation, judgment, or punishment.

• According to Rogers, we are wired for self-actualization, or the need to fulfill our potential.

• Painful experiences like being bullied, shamed, or judged thwart our growth.

• **Unconditional positive regard restores hope** by showing us we are loved and accepted.

• When people feel safe, honesty follows. Honesty is crucial for growth and change.
Resources to Learn More

- Handouts for parents about Understanding ACEs, toxic stress, resilience & Parenting with ACEs
- Fast Facts: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences
- What is Trauma-Informed Care? - Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center (chcs.org)
- Mapping Disparities in Chronic Disease to Improve Health Equity—See the Maps to Close the Gaps
Reference List:

- Mental Health America (2024). Infographic: BIPOC and LGBTQ+ Mental Health accessed at: Infographic: BIPOC and LGBTQ+ Mental Health | Mental Health America (mhanational.org) on March 1, 2024
- Mental Health America (2024). Racial Trauma accessed at Racial Trauma | Mental Health America (mhanational.org) on March 1, 2024
Thank You for Being the Change