


Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma

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Transmission of Trauma

Why this conversation?
Why now?

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Why Now?

- Experience serving Holocaust Survivors
- Our work with JFNA
 - Drop In Center for Survivors
 - Trauma Informed Care Trainings
 - Trauma Informed Agency
- Work with the family of Survivors
 - Second Generation/impact
 - Caregiver Issues/challenges
 - Transmission of the trauma – crosses cultures/time

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Goals



- Broad stroke introduction
 - TIC/Transmission of Trauma
- Begin a dialogue/exchange
 - Expand knowledge and intervention
- Inspire and Intrigue
 - Personal, Clinical Practice, Agency

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...when the past is present...



People who have suffered trauma, experience the world through the lens of their past experience

**TRAUMA LEAVES
'FINGERPRINTS' ON
THE VICTIM. THESE
DON'T FADE WHEN
THE BRUISES DO.**

REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION Dr. Ellen Yelland

Trauma on the ground



A deeply personal and unsettling experience that shakes you to the core and which can prime you to be less resilient and more deeply effected by future events

What is Trauma



Trauma is an experience that is emotionally painful, distressing, overwhelming, interfering with a person's ability to cope. It is the individual's perception of an event as threatening to oneself or others

- Leaves a person feeling powerless
- Shatters a person's sense of security
- Causes extreme stress

Examples of Traumatic Experiences



- War
- Abuse
- Natural Disasters
- Oppression
- Terrorism
- Significant and multiple losses
- Accidents
- Witnessing violence
- Immigration
- Prison system
- Foster care

Trauma Symptoms



Trauma symptoms can last a few hours or they can last a lifetime, depending on how the person copes with the trauma. Some symptoms and behaviors we might see in people with long-term trauma include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flashbacks• Nightmares• Numbness• Avoiding thinking about or talking about the frightening experiences• Physical ailments, like stomach-aches or headaches• Hyper-vigilance | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problems falling or staying asleep• Depression• Anxiety• Low self-esteem• Problems with trust• Guilt• Being startled too easily or on edge• Thoughts of suicide• Difficulty relaxing |
|--|--|

Trauma



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Types of Trauma



- Individual
- Group
- Trauma affecting community and culture
- Political terror and war
- Historical Trauma

Historical Trauma



- Historical trauma is cumulative and collective
- The impact of this type of trauma manifests itself, emotionally and psychologically in members of different cultural groups (Brave Heart, 2011)
- As a collective phenomenon, those who never even experienced the traumatic stressor, such as children and descendants, can still exhibit signs and symptoms of trauma



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Effects of Historical Trauma

- First Generation**
 - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Subsequent Generations**

Historical Unresolved Trauma Survivor

 - Guilt, Depression, Anger
 - Psychic numbing
 - Preoccupation with trauma
 - Relational problems
 - Physical Symptoms include chronic health disease like diabetes and other diseases associated with high stress hormones.

Intergenerational Trauma

Defined:

Intergenerational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next.

Intergenerational trauma was first observed in 1966 by clinicians alarmed by the number of children of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust seeking treatment in clinics in Canada.

(Fosson, P., Rejas, M., Servais, L., Pelc, I. & Hirsch, S.(2003)

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Trauma Response

“People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them.”

James Baldwin

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Transmission of Trauma



- Children of Holocaust survivors
- African American Community/Slavery
- Native American Community/ post European Colonization
- Guatemalan Community/Genocide
- Armenian Community/Genocide
- Cambodian Community/War
- Immigration as Trauma/ Immigrated communities

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Intergenerational Trauma



"Historical Trauma morphs into a myriad of contemporary trauma."

Intergenerational Trauma — Legacies of Loss
By Sue Coyle, MSW
Social Work Today
Vol. 14 No. 3 P. 18

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Transmission of Trauma



"Intergenerational trauma is not only passed on through sociocultural environments, but also through DNA."

- What is the biological footprint of a Jewish mother who lost all her children during the Holocaust, but goes on to have more in Brooklyn?
- How does the experience of an Armenian sex slave impact the DNA expressions of her progeny?
- What about the offspring of a Vietnamese woman deformed by Agent Orange;
- or the child of an Argentinian who gave birth in prison during the Dirty War?"

Children of Genocide Survivors Can Inherit Trauma in Their DNA
By Amelia Pang, Epoch Times

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Transmission of Trauma



- Review of Holocaust Survivors/2nd Generation
- Ask your participation in identifying and discussing what you see in the communities you identify with or work with

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They couldn't take it, because to be a survivor is not easy
In a world that doesn't want to listen.
And to be a child of survivors is equally difficult
In a world that doesn't want to remember.
Elie Wiesel

What Makes the Survivor Population Unique



- Holocaust – (also known as the Shoah or catastrophe) a genocide in which 6 million Jews were killed by Nazis and their collaborators
- Survivor: “a person who survives, especially a person remaining alive after an event in which others have died.”... “The remainder of a group of people or things.”... “A person who copes well with difficulties in their life.”
- Trauma and resilience

Holocaust Survivor Trauma



2nd Generation reflects on her mother's experience:

"They didn't get therapy after; it was a free fall for them in a way. That created fermenting of feelings and emotions, sets of emotions and reactions... My mom's highly volatile; is it because of the Holocaust, well it didn't help, like an eggshell... Mom was very unavailable emotionally, very unavailable. Her experiences probably created its own version of conditions, symptoms of PTSD, fear, lack of trust... a real sensitivity that she has of everything harsh. If she's asked a lot of questions, she feels like she's being interrogated."

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What Makes the Survivor Population Unique



- **Adult Survivors**
Adults between 1933 - 1945
- **Child Survivors**
Born between 1933 – end of 1945

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Primary Trauma: Effects on the Holocaust survivor



- Repression of war experiences
- Intrusive memories
- Holocaust related associations
- Suicidal ideation
- Depression and anxiety
- Chronic state of mourning
- Survivor guilt
- Nightmares
- Anger regulation problems that turn into interpersonal conflicts
- Excessive worry – expecting a catastrophe to happen
- Suspiciousness, paranoia, lack of trust
- Continuing to use survival strategies from the war
- A low stress threshold for stress in difficult situations

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Primary Trauma: Effects on Child Survivors



"Children who cried, died"

- Child survivor trauma experiences –different than their adult counterparts
- Depending on their age, developmental stages of childhood have been affected
- Abandonment issues, identity issues (having to go under another identity and religion in order to survive), unable to remember (continually trying to drum up memories of their parents and siblings)
- Primitive defenses that made them grow up at an early age and to numb their feelings.
- Developmental arrest that can manifest into personality disorders

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Possible Triggers for Holocaust Survivors (Adult/Child survivors)



- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| • Crowded trains | • Barking dogs |
| • Train stations | • Major disasters |
| • Medical exam | • Discrimination |
| • A knock on the door | • Separations |
| • Uniforms | • Closed spaces |
| • Showers | • Standing in line |
| • Barbed wire | • The German language and German products in general |
| • Discarded food (especially bread) | • Aging |

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Happy Occasions as Triggers



- *Happy occasions such as weddings and Jewish holidays could trigger grief and mourning of loved ones that were not there to share it*
- *Aging appears to create difficulty of keeping traumatic war experiences at bay. After liberation many were eager to leave the past behind and create a new life, but later in life these unresolved experiences come back to haunt them.*

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Transmission of Trauma to 2nd Generation

"Post-traumatic Stress Syndrome inherited from our parents. Constant fear that everything will collapse into chaos and that the world is not safe."

"Me and siblings all went through unique trauma from parents... I'm better than I was but I don't think anyone gets over this, but you do the best you can."

"Second generation has an extra set of sadness in us and it was more just being around it - something so horrific and not know what to do with it."

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2nd Generation/2G

- Process of Transmission
 - *How the trauma was carried over from one generation to the next*
- Content of Transmission
 - *What was in fact transmitted*

(Kellerman, N. Transmission of Holocaust Trauma)

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Process of transmission/How

Models of Trauma Transmission (Kellermann, N.)

	Theory	Medium	Main Transmission Factor
1	Psychodynamic	Interpersonal Relations	Unconscious displaced emotion
2	Socio cultural	Socialization	Parenting and Role Models
3	Family Systems	Communication	Enmeshment
4	Biological	Genetic	Hereditary vulnerability to PTSD

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Process of Transmission



Psychodynamic/relational

Child unconsciously absorbs the repressed and insufficiently worked-through Holocaust experiences of survivor parents

Sociocultural/Socialization

Holocaust survivor parents influence their children not only through what they did to them in terms of actual child rearing behavior, but also through who they were in terms of inadequate role models.

Family Systems/Communication

Survivor parents who became overly involved and intrusive tended to enmesh their offspring in their own emotional problems and bound their children in a way that made independence difficult.

Biological/Genetics

Based on the assumption that there may be a genetic and/or bio-chemical predisposition to the etiology of a person's illness.

Kellermann, N

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What was transmitted/Content



Problems are centered around the following areas:

- Self
 - Identity problems, impair esteem, burden/memorial candle
- Cognition
 - Catastrophic expectancy, vicarious sharing of war experiences, dominates their inner world
- Affectivity
 - Increased vulnerability to stressful events
- Interpersonal Function
 - Exaggerated family attachments

Kellermann, N

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Aggravating Factors of Transmission



- *Children born right after the war*
- *The only or first child*
- *Both parents are survivors*
- *Children were "replacements" for their children who were killed in the war*
- *Parents who experienced huge suffering and losses*
- *Trauma experience either overly talked about or talked very little about*

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Aggravating Factors:

2nd Generation reflects on loss



"I feel like there's a missing link, most people talk to parents, there's a grandma and grandpa, none of that exists. Not having a history, stories, property, things, no nothing it was all taken. Pretty big thing, a big part of our history to not know about. No family on that side, they didn't exist. My mother hid in a forest for six months."

"My mom and dad needed to marry because they needed to. Dad may have had another family, there were pictures of a woman and baby, thought it was weird... my dad lost his whole family, was not the happiest."

"I had a need to have my own family to continue the lineage because my mom was the only survivor of her family so if I didn't have kids, there was a need for a family to call my own. I was jealous of others because they had aunts and uncles, and brothers and sisters. I always needed to have friends because we had no extended family and I had no siblings."

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Children of Child Survivors: (2GCS)



- Born to "orphan parents" (and how their parents survived at an early age could affect 2GCS)
- Their parent's issues revolving around abandonment could expose them to similar abandonment issues
- Their parent's early trauma affected parenting skills
- Role reversal and enmeshment in these families which in turn made the children in a sense parentless.
- CS parents can feel resentful that they did not have a childhood that their children have
- 2GCS have a tendency to minimize their own issues as not as important as their parent's issues.
- Tendency for complicated communication between family members

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Aggravating Factor:

2nd Generation reflects on unmet need



"If mom's ok, then I'm ok. I don't have time to think about me."

"At the end of the day, more concerned with her than me."

"... always thought about my parents, not myself."

"Our problems are not as big as parents."

"I never think about my needs ... thinking about my needs don't matter. I think about my mother's needs."

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3rd Generation Survivors



"Very painful and passed down to son. We went to the EPCOT center ride and he wouldn't go to the Germany part of the ride. Son refuses to go outside of the U.S."

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Mitigating (Protective) Factors



- *Children developed unique coping skills to help deal with their parent's issues*
- *If the parent's spoke to children about war experiences in an open discussion and in a digestible and open way*
- *Involvement in Holocaust organizations that offered support*
- *Support systems of other holocaust family and friends*

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Mitigating (Protective) Factors: 2nd Generation reflect on strengths/support



"I lived in a Jewish cocoon, parents and their friends were survivors, our social circle, tight friendships. This was important for friend's children, businesses, weddings, etc. All were very successful."

"Helpful to talk to friends who were children of Holocaust survivors."

"There was lots of pressure to be successful and be a good student, we were not coddled. I remember my mom saying, 'You'll be fine,' being tough and strong, no 'woe is me'. My mom's family was killed except for a few siblings, very strong, never complained, positive, cheerful."

Religion - "One thing, how it has affected me...my mom only had two kids...the importance of being an Orthodox Jew and continuing the Orthodox traditions."

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Resilience



"the activity of rebounding or springing back"

"elasticity; the power of resuming the original shape....the ability to return to the original position"

Oxford English Dictionary

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Present Day Aging Survivor Parents: 2G as Caregiver



- Aging as a trigger for survivors
- Aging survivors at an increased risk of re-living their past war experiences/Dementia
- For 2G Issues in regard to confronting parent's mortality
- Facing the possibility of putting their parent into a facility which is a big trigger for survivors
- Sandwich Generation – multiple stressors trying to take care of both their parents and their children
- Complications of intergenerational trauma

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The Work



What populations are you serving that you can identify as having experienced trauma/2nd Generation?

The Work



What behaviors, responses, or attitudes do you notice in your client populations/next generation who have suffered trauma that is different from other clients when they seek help from your agency?

The Work



How do you usually respond to these behaviors?

The Work



How have you been able to promote safety for your client?



{ THANK YOU }
