Trauma-Informed Care for African American Males: “Community Healing”

My story of Trauma

- Young Parents
- Conversation with mother – 12
- “I stayed for the children”
- First marriage Breakup
- Conversation with mother – 22
- Stop an Adult at 35

“Fear of the pain blinds us to the goal of healing. Only by seeing our problems clearly and experiencing them can we do something about them.” - Bob Hoffman

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES
THE ACE STUDY

- Collaboration between Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente HMO in California.
- Two survey waves were conducted during 1995 to 1997. The largest study ever that determined both the prevalence of traumatic life experiences in the first 18 years of life and the impacts on later well-being, social function, health risks, disease burden, health care costs, and life expectancy.
- More than 17,000 predominantly well educated, middle-class members of Kaiser Permanente HMO participated.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 9,367 (54%) women and 7,970 (46%) men
- Mean age was 56 years
- 39% were college graduates
- 36% had some college education
- 18% were high school graduates
- 7% had not graduated from high school

Categories of ACEs

ABUSE
- Abuse
  - Emotional
  - Physical
  - Sexual
- Neglect
  - Emotional
  - Physical

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
LEAD TO ACEs

- Health Risk Behaviors:
  - Smoking
  - Overeating
  - Physical inactivity
- Which Cause Disease, Disability and Social Problems in Adulthood:
  - Nicotine addiction
  - Alcoholism
  - Drug addiction
  - Obesity
  - Depression and Suicide
  - Injuries
  - Unintentional pregnancy
  - Heavy alcohol use
  - Drug use
  - Promiscuity

ACE Score and Health Problems

How do ACEs Affect Our Society?

- 1/3 of adults have an ACE score of 0 and have few, if any, risk factors for diseases that are common causes of death in the US.
- If one ACE is present, the ACE Score is likely to range from 2.4 to 4.
- An ACE Score of 4 or more results in having multiple risk factors for these diseases or the disease themselves.
- An ACE score of 6 or more results in a 20 year decrease in life expectancy.
What does it all mean?

- What was learned –
  - ACEs are very common
  - Strong predictor of later health and mortality risks
  - Combination of ACEs increases risks
  - Protective factors may buffer the effect of ACEs
  - Importance of prevention!

- How Is It Helpful – Focuses on social functioning, health risks, disease burden, health care costs, later well-being and life expectancy.

- What Are The Insufficiencies - cultural and experiential limitations

It's About Parents Too!

- Tough times as a child can affect an adult in unexpected ways.
- It’s important to know it’s not their fault.
- Finding healthier ways to manage that stress can help.
- Parents also need people to talk to and will be there for them.
- Provide education on ACE’s and generational trauma.
“The issue is not are we going to pay -- it's are we going to pay now, up front, or are we going to pay a whole lot more later on.”

Marian Wright Edelman

Toxic stress And Brain development

Positive stress response
- Normal and essential part of health development
- Brief increases in heart rate and mild elevations in hormone levels

Tolerable stress response
- Activities body's alter system to greater degree
- If activation is time-limited and buffered by relationships with adults who can help child adapt – ok

Toxic stress response
- Strong, frequent and/or prolonged adversity
- This type of response can possible disrupt typical development

Stress And The Brain

This slide shows positron emission tomography (PET) scan graphics of the temporal lobes in a healthy and abused brain.

Children with damage to this part of the brain suffer severe emotional and cognitive problems as well as have difficulty in making and/or sustaining positive relationships.
Researchers found signs of accelerated aging in African-American men who reported high levels of racial discrimination and “who had internalized [others’] anti-Black male attitudes.”

Telomeres naturally shorten as people age. But various types of intense chronic stress are believed to cause telomeres to shorten, and short telomeres are associated with an array of serious ailments including cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.

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

James Baldwin

TRAUMA RESPONSE
Survival Stress Management

- A process of adapting to stressful situations by acting or reacting without thinking of the consequences of our choices. Resulting in increased stress and/or depression:
  - Judgmental and distorted thoughts and feelings, impatience, exploitation, aggression, abuse and violence directed against one's self or others.
  - Addictive substances and behavior (i.e., drugs, alcohol, sex, shopping, fast money, gambling, food, video games, etc.) produces a limited sense of relief requires repetitions.
- Loss of a narrative of resilience of Hope.

“What DO I TELL MY CHILDREN NOW”
THE CRY OF THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS

“The village that hides the truth cannot expect to heal but to pass on the pain.” Uncle Big

OBSTACLES OR CHALLENGES
Beliefs and Obstacles

- Continued institutional racism, oppression and distrust
- Strong cultural stigma attached to mental illness and trauma
- Lack of culturally competent services and research
- Belief that suffering is a part of Black Life
- Gender Socialization of Black males

Parallel Trauma

- The process of when staff own unresolved issues or trauma (historical) or oppression parallels that of client.
- Powerlessness of the client parallels staff powerlessness, they feel the need to “fix it”
- The staff acts out against uncomfortable feelings in a negative way, including rejecting the clients
- Believing self-care is less important than the care they provide others.

“Human compassion is equal to human cruelty and …. It is up to each of us to tip the balance.” Alice Walker

MEETING THE CHALLENGE
### Community/Leadership
- African American institutions, community leaders, health professionals and clergy to encourage and promote
  - education about historical/generational trauma and its impacts.
  - Prepare them to experience increased anxiety, fear, and stress during their journey of learning healthier ways of adapting to trauma.
- Be aware of their own trauma
- Support and protect women and girls as well
- "Change does not come without people in power being willing to be uncomfortable."

### Compassionate Accountability
Some people we relate to and others we don’t or even repulse us. Doing what is easy can have consequences like…
- **Compassion without accountability** can encourage chaos.
- **Accountability without compassion** complacent, self-satisfying
- **Swing back and forth**, we are not consistent, fair or clear.

**Compassion Accountability**: help us seek truth, understanding, forgiveness, justice, humility and leave others empowered without blame and excuses.

### THE WORK

"A role model is one who is aware that the babies are watching and acts accordingly." Uncle Big
Two Black Men

- One activist (the past)
- One counselor (now)
- Both and......

Black Males and Trauma

- When discussing the ills and disparities within the black community like violence the accountability of black men often comes to the forefront.
- When African American men suffer, (directly or indirectly) he passes his trauma on to the women and children in their lives and the cycle pain continues and community suffers tenfold. “Hurt people hurt people”
- Trauma effect ideals of manhood and masculinity.

Groups and Training

- In 2009 Black Men Healing Conference to offer alternative ways of thinking about community building “from the inside out” not just “the outside in”
- Historical Trauma Training focused on both professionals and community leadership to increase the awareness of historical trauma and ACEs to improve outcomes.
- Healing Groups Focused is a culturally specific response aimed at exploring the links between intergenerational and/or historical trauma and current challenges to making sustainable growth and change.
The Healing Generations Curriculum/Relapse Prevention Support group aims to break the intergenerational cycle of violence and drug/alcohol abuse by allowing African American Men to explore different trauma experiences working toward healing.

The BeMore Campaign is a culturally competent model for increasing the skills of African American men and young men in conversations about nonviolent interpersonal relationships and ending violence against women and girls.

**The Family Partnership**

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**“Is there a child that you can believe in unconditionally? Teach them to value themselves and they’ll be able to take on the world.” Maya Angelou**

**BUILDING RESILIENCE**

- A strong parent-child relationship, or, when such a relationship is not available, a surrogate caregiving figure who serves a mentoring role.

- Good cognitive skills, which predict academic success and lead to rule-abiding behavior.

- The ability to self-regulate attention, emotions, and behaviors.

**Three Key Factors For Resilience**
Factors that Make a Difference

- Feeling social/emotional support and hope
- Experiencing hope and help (two or more people who give concrete help when needed)
- Community reciprocity in watching out for children, intervening when they are in trouble, doing favors for one another.
- Social Bridging – People reach outside their social circle to get help for their family and friends.

Questions and Answers

“Some change is just about being brave enough to get out the box.”

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