Triumph over trauma: Understanding and Addressing the Needs of youth exposed to community violence

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  – Grant Award #SM061260 (Co-PIs Abdul-Adil & Suarez)
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• National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)
  – Community Violence, Justice Consortium, and Substance Abuse Committees

• Bright Promises Foundation

• Oak Park Township Community Mental Health Board
Community Violence Speaker Series

• Building Resiliency: Supporting youth affected by community violence
  – Triumph over trauma: Understanding and Addressing the Needs of youth exposed to community violence
  – Trauma Informed Services and Treatments for Crossover Youth
  – Refugee Youth and Community Violence
  – Addressing Disproportionate Ethnic Minority Contact in Juvenile Justice using a Trauma Framework
Overview

• Community Violence and its impact on youth
• Socioecological model of violence prevention
• Best Practices for violence prevention and trauma intervention
• Future directions
• Brief discussion
Community violence – NCTSN notions

• NCTSN Community Violence webpage:
  http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-types/community-violence

• “Community violence can be defined as exposure to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim”
Common types

• “Common types of community violence that affect youth include individual and group conflicts (e.g., bullying, fights among gangs and other groups, shootings in public areas such as schools and communities, civil wars in foreign countries or ‘war-like’ conditions in U.S. cities, spontaneous or terrorist attacks, etc.)”
Prevalent problem among youth

• Youth have higher exposure to violence and crime than adults in the U.S. (Finkelhor, 2008)

• National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (Finkelhor et al, 2009):
  – Over 60% of youth suffered violence exposure in the past year
  – Most common types among younger children (6-9 years old): assaults without a weapon/injury, assaults by juvenile or sibling, and bullying/teasing
  – Most common types among older children (10-13 year olds): kidnapping, assaults, and witnessing violence within the home
  – Most common types among adolescents (14-17): physical assaults with injury, gang-related assaults, sexual victimization, physical/emotional abuse, and witnessing violence in the community
An Inner-City Epidemic?

- Violent crime rate in urban areas 74% higher than the rural crime rate, and 34% higher than suburban areas (McCart et al., 2007).
- Higher rates of youth community violence exposure in low income, urban and predominantly minority communities (Stein et al., 2003)
  - Homicide rate highest among African American youth (Anderson et al., 2001)
  - School homicide rate in urban schools twice larger than in suburban areas, and four times the rate of rural areas (Anderson et al., 2001)
  - African American and Latino youth were twice as likely to witnessing a stabbing or a shooting in the past year compared to Caucasian youth (Stone et al., 1995)
Distinct stressors with community violence

• Significant loss of interpersonal safety
  – Events often occur without warning
  – Results in sudden and terrifying shock
  – Increased fears world is unsafe, unstable, and harmful

• Intentional attempt at interpersonal harm
  – Targets one or more people
  – Malicious methods include homicides, sexual assaults, robberies, and weapons attacks (bats, knives, guns, etc.)
Child trauma – NCTSN notions

• NCTSN brochure *Understanding Child Traumatic Stress*

• "When a child feels intensely threatened by an event he or she is involved in or witnesses, we call that event a trauma. Child traumatic stress (CTS) is a psychological reaction that some children have to a traumatic experience."
Child trauma – NCTSN notions

• “Not every child experiences CTS after a trauma. All children are different, and many children are able to adapt to and overcome difficult events and situations.”

• “But one out of every four children will experience a traumatic event before the age of sixteen, and some of these children will develop CTS.”

• “If left untreated, CTS can interfere with a child’s healthy development and lead to long-term difficulties.”
**Traumagenic community violence**

- **Nature of community violence exposure**
  - Single episode or chronic pattern
  - Can be survivor and/or perpetrator
  - Layers of interpersonal and institutional violence

- **Consequences of community violence exposure**
  - “Just” stress or trauma – neither is positive!
  - Brain and body development problems
  - Psychological, emotional, social, and behavioral difficulties
  - Home, school, community, and society conflicts
Where Do We Go From Here?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1967) posed similar question
“Where there is breath, there is hope!”

Tonier “Neen” Cain (violence survivor)
Rising to the challenge

• An integrated continuum of needs and responses
  – Adoption of comprehensive model
  – Synergy between prevention and intervention

• Tapping hidden strengths
  – Engaging youth, families, communities, and providers
  – Recognizing neglected resources (ex., ex-gang members who “give back” to their communities, etc.)

• Advancing creativity and partnership
  – Innovation, dedication, and collaboration by professionals, communities, policymakers, and funders
Urban Youth Trauma Center

Treatment Dissemination

- **I-CARE:** Integrated Care for Youth Struggling with Traumatic Stress and Substance Abuse: The Trauma Systems Therapy Approach
- **STRONG Families:** A Family Systems Treatment Program for Youth with Traumatic Stress and Disruptive Behavior

Resource Development/ NCTSN Collaboration

- Develop resources for youth and families affected by community violence who are experiencing traumatic stress and co-occurring substance abuse and disruptive behavior problems
- Collaboration with NCTSN committees: Community Violence, Trauma and Substance abuse, Partnering with Youth and Families

Community Collaboration & Mobilization

- Identify and share information and resources about local needs of urban youth and families exposed to community violence.
- Provide training and consultation to increase awareness, use of best practices, and increase participation in targeted responses to community violence impacting youth and families in Chicago and surrounding areas
A framework for understanding and addressing community violence

- The causes of trauma and violence are complex
- Solutions should be comprehensive
Socioecological Model of Community Violence
Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dahlberg & Krug, 2002

- **Individual**
  - Child Maltreatment
  - Alcohol/Sub Abuse
  - Mental Health Problems
  - History of violent behavior

- **Family, Peer, School**
  - Poor Parenting
  - Marital Discord
  - Domestic Violence
  - Relationship stress due to financial strain
  - Peer violence

- **Community Neighborhood**
  - Poverty
  - High Crime
  - Unemployment
  - Illicit Drug Availability
  - Lack of recreational opportunities

- **Society Culture**
  - Rapid Social Change
  - Gender/Social/Economic Inequalities
  - Poverty, Weak economic safety net
  - Poor rule of law
  - Cultural norms that support violence

- **Environment**
  - Poverty
  - High Crime
  - Unemployment
  - Illicit Drug Availability
  - Lack of recreational opportunities

- **NCTSN**
  - The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Finding Solutions: Best Practices for Addressing Trauma and Violence

- Developing life skills in children and adolescents
- Promoting a safe environment in the community
- Identifying, helping, and supporting victims of community violence
- Developing safe, stable, and nurturing relationships between children and their parents and caregivers
- Changing rules and expectations in society (cultural norms) that support violence
Collaborative Approach

Schools / Youth workers

Developing safe, stable & nurturing relationships between children & caregivers

Government Agencies/ Representatives & Coalitions

Developing life skills in children and adolescents

Relationship Family, Peer, School

Identifying, helping and supporting victims of community violence

Community Neighborhood

Promoting a safe environment in the community

Society Culture

Changing rules and expectations in society (cultural norms) that support violence

Law Enforcement/ Juvenile Justice

Faith-Based Organizations

Mental Health & Healthcare Providers

Youth & Families
Training & collaboration initiative

Youth Overcoming Urban Trauma & Healing: A Community Action Network

Training initiative focused on trauma awareness, collaboration and supporting best practices for violence prevention and trauma intervention
YOUTH-CAN Goals

1: Increase awareness about trauma and community violence

2: Promote use of best practices for violence prevention & trauma informed care

3: Promote individual level participation and responsiveness to address community violence

4: Support connections and collaborations to address community violence
Best Practices for Addressing Community Violence

- Developing safe, stable and nurturing relationships between children and their parents and caregivers
- Developing life skills in children and adolescents
- Promoting a safe environment in the community
- Changing rules and expectations in society (cultural norms) that support violence
- Identifying, helping and supporting victims of community violence

Parent support
Parent training
Youth Mentoring

Sports & recreation
Arts & music
Leadership skills
Vocational skills
Academic support
Coping skills

Enhanced community resources
Enhanced monitoring & response capacity
Advocacy

Promoting equality, education & safety

Trauma and mental health screening
Trauma informed interventions
Know the signs…give support

Experiencing violence and trauma increases risk of
- Mental and physical health problems
- Relationships problems
- Difficulty in schoolwork and jobs.
- Being a victim of violence again
- Becoming a perpetrator of additional violence in the future.

For this reason, it is important to...

*Identify, help and support victims of trauma and violence*
Identifying, helping and supporting victims of trauma and violence

- Helpers should know and understand the signs of someone who is struggling with trauma.
- There are effective tools for identifying and helping youth and families who have been affected by violence and trauma.
### Supporting youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluating my behavior</th>
<th>How might my own interactions with youth inadvertently lead to possible triggered responses?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying</td>
<td>How can I tell that someone might be showing a triggered response?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>What can I do to support youth when they are reacting to trauma reminders?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Being Trauma Informed

Individual and family
- Recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on youth, families and service providers

Agency and program
- Infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into organizational cultures, practices, and policies.

Community
- Act in collaboration with all those who are involved with the child, using the best available science, to facilitate and support the recovery and resiliency of the child and family
## Being Trauma Informed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premise</th>
<th>Punishment Lens</th>
<th>Trauma Informed Lens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth is acting rationally</td>
<td>Youth feels threatened and overreacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth is reacting to external events</td>
<td>Youth has an inherent mental illness or substantial distress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priorities</td>
<td>Focus on eliminating problem behaviors</td>
<td>Focus on youth’s strengths, teaches alternatives (e.g. coping &amp; self regulation skills, vocational training), increases resiliency to future negative events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Role</td>
<td>You refer youth for services and monitor compliance</td>
<td>You are integral to the goal of building supportive adult relationships</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## What can you do?

**Identifying, helping and supporting victims of community violence**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>If your role is…</th>
<th>Here’s an example of what you could do</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Administrator</td>
<td>Ensuring staff are trained on how to identify youth and families affected by trauma and are aware of existing resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Clinician                  | - Using trauma screening and assessment tools  
- Applying evidence based trauma interventions                                                                                                                          |
| Community Worker / Advocate| - Knowing how to recognize when someone is affected by trauma  
- Becoming informed about community resources  
Connecting youth/families with trauma specific services                                                                                                                     |
| Youth / caregiver          | - Sharing information about the importance of getting support                                                                                                             |
Re-establishing a sense of trust

- Trauma exposure may affect children’s ability to trust others.
- When trauma is associated with the failure of those who should be protecting and nurturing the child, it has profound and far-reaching effects on nearly every aspect of the child’s life.
- Traumatized children can feel that the world is uncertain and unpredictable. They can become socially isolated and have difficulty relating to and empathizing with others.
- For this reason, it is important to …

Support safe, stable and nurturing relationships between children, caregivers and caring adults.
Re-establishing a sense of trust

- Children do best when they are well cared for and have stable relationships with caregivers.
- They are less likely to be victims of maltreatment or have problems because of aggressive behavior.

Parenting Classes
Can help caretakers know what to expect, positive and effective ways to help children follow rules, and improve communication.
**What can you do?**

Support safe, stable and nurturing relationships between children, caregivers and caring adults

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| Program Administrator     | - Support the development of a parenting support group in your agency  
- Make sure that staff who work with youth and parents are trained on how to address trauma and violence |
| Clinician                 | Help youth and families ways to improve their relationship by better understanding the impact of trauma                                                                  |
| Community Worker / Advocate| - Connect parents to needed resources (e.g., Parenting support group for families affected by violence  
- Share information about how trauma can affect relationships |
| Youth / caregiver         | - Become a mentor or help youth connect with other supportive adults                                                                                                    |
Developing a sense of mastery

- Trauma exposure may affect children’s effectiveness in navigating life changes
  - Learning skills in sports, arts, music, leadership, academics, vocational programs, and other positive activities can help youth manage themselves better and deal with everyday life challenges.
  - This can protect them against aggression, lead to better social skills, and better school and job performances.

- For this reason it is important to help…

*Develop life skills in children and adolescents*
Coping with traumatic stress

Coping
- How people take care of their thoughts, feelings and behaviors under stress

Suggestions for youth
- Learn about your feelings
  - Write about it in a diary.
  - Express feelings through art, music, poems.
- Find ways relieve stress
  - Relaxation, meditation, exercise, yoga, prayer
- Do something you love to bring joy into your life.

Developing a sense of mastery
**Self care**

**Developing a sense of mastery**

**Helpers need help too**

- Hearing people’s stories can lead to
  - Secondary Traumatic stress (similar reactions to youths’ distress)
  - Bringing up distress from previous trauma you may have experienced
  - Burnout (stressors can bring about exhaustion, depersonalization and inefficacy)

**Essential self care tools**

- **Awareness**: Being attuned to your needs, limits, emotions, and resources.
- **Balance**: Maintaining balance among work, play, and rest.
- **Connection**: Connections to oneself, to loved ones, to colleagues, and to the larger community.
What can you do?

Develop a sense of mastery

**Develop life skills in children and adolescents**

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<tr>
<td>Program Administrator</td>
<td>- Bring programming that supports life skill development (sports, arts, music, leadership, academic achievement, vocational assistance) for youth affected by trauma and violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinician</td>
<td>- Connect youth with available programming, teach coping skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Help family see the links to self esteem and emotional well being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Worker / Advocate</td>
<td>- Connect youth with available programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Help youth affected by trauma feel comfortable participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth / caregiver</td>
<td>Share with other youth and families information on the importance of feeling good about yourself</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Feeling Safe

Trauma exposure may affect children’s sense of personal safety. The magnitude of impact of trauma can depend on:

- The child’s perception of the danger faced
- The adversities the child faces following the trauma
- The presence/availability of adults who can offer help and protection

Promote a safe environment in the community
# Dealing with threat and safety

## Feeling Safe

### Surviving
- The threat of harm might not be over
- Find safe places to go (safety mapping)
- Take care of immediate needs

### Stabilizing
- Returning to normal/usual routines to get a sense of stability
  - Mealtimes
  - Getting enough sleep
  - Doing something together with loved ones
## Working together for safety

### Feeling Safe

### Building Safe Communities
- Everyone plays a role in keeping a community safe, but no one person, family, organization, or system can make a difference without support.

### Examples
- Having monitored and safe areas for youth and families to go,
- Having a plan for what to do and who to contact to protect yourself if and when violence happens,
- Taking steps to improve the positive relationships and peaceful activities in communities.
**What can you do?**

*Promote a safe environment in the community*

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| Program Administrator              | - Helping bring local residents, businesses and organizations together to make changes that lead to a safer and healthier community  
                                           - Promote programs that offer monitoring or safe passage                                               |
| Clinician                          | Helping youth and families find places they feel safe and stay out of harm’s way                       |
| Community Worker / Advocate        | Talking with youth to prevent escalation of violence                                                    |
| Youth / caregiver                  | - Reporting and responding to community violence  
                                           - Reaching out to peers struggling with violence or safety  
                                           - Participate in peace rallies or safe passage programs                                                  |
Sending the right message

- The rules or expectations of behavior (cultural norms) in our society can sometimes encourage or normalize violence.
- Aggressive verbal and physical behavior among youth and adults can influence other youth to show or support aggression.
- For this reason, it is important to...

Change rules and expectations in society (cultural norms) that support violence
### The influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expecting the worst</th>
<th>Having the wrong impression about other people’s intentions can lead to violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An accidental bump may be interpreted as an “intentional hit”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Getting desensitized | Violence in the media, internet, and computers can make people more accepting of violence |
Alternatives

Restorative Justice

- Emphasizes repairing harm through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders.

Examples

- Peer mediation
- Peer juries
- Restorative chat
- Peace circles

Sending the right message
**What can you do?**

*Change rules and expectations in society (cultural norms) that support violence*

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<tr>
<td>Program Administrator</td>
<td>Ensuring that staff are trained in being positive role models, showing mutual respect and using non-violent / non-aggressive conflict resolution skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinician</td>
<td>Stressing the importance of mutual respect and encouraging conflict resolution without aggression or violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Worker / Advocate</td>
<td>Organizing/supporting discussions on attitudes towards community violence, aggressive and violent behaviors, and weapons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Youth / caregiver | - Participating in community efforts to change attitudes about violence  
- Speak up and make your voice heard to ensure that positive, supportive, and non-violent messages are out there too |
Consultation and support

• Feedback and resources relating to Individual Community Action Plan
• Consultation calls
  – Provide advanced consultation on topics of interest
  – Check-in regarding achievement of goals included in the plan
• Advanced training opportunities
• Train the trainer track
• Annual conference
Evaluation

• Provider characteristics
• Provider personal and professional experiences with violence
• Activation and responsiveness around violence prevention
• Use of Best Practices
• Training feedback
• Implementation of Individual Community Action Plan
Future Directions

• Disentangling the definitions
• Lost in translation
  – how do we meaningfully change lives?
  – how do we empirically evaluate results?
• Structural violence
  – Yes, oppression still exists … and history matters
• Community conflicts
  – Trayvon Martin, #HandsUpDontShoot, #ICantBreathe, etc.
  – How can we help the healing?
Thank you!

Questions?

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Facebook: Urban Youth Trauma Center
Brief Discussion