How Being Trauma Informed Improves Criminal Justice System Responses

Rachel Halleck, MA, LMHC, LAC
Treatment Counselor
Healing Families
Volunteers of America, Indiana
rhalleck@voain.org
What is Volunteers of America?

- A social service agency serving over 400 communities in 46 states
- A faith based human service organization
- Noted for being first halfway house in the country
  - NYC in the early 1900s
- Serve men and women (trauma-informed, gender-responsive since 2004)
- Historically developed knowledge of reentry
Why Learn about Trauma?
How we think about something affects how we respond!
Why Learn About Trauma?
Two Sets of Goals:

- **Personally**
  - Develop understanding
  - Increase overall awareness
  - Recognize signs of trauma
  - Learn how to respond to symptoms of trauma

- **Professionally**
  - Increase Safety!
  - Reduce recidivism rates
  - Promote recovery of those in your care
What is Trauma?

- Exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical integrity
- Witnessing a similar event
- Learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.
- A situation in which a person feels intense fear, helplessness, and/or horror in regards to the situation.
Examples of Trauma

- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Domestic Violence
- Witnessing Abuse/Violence
- Self-inflicted Violence
- Floods, hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis, etc.
- Shootings, bombings, etc.
- Situational vs. personal
Video

• Take note of the words Officer Tully uses to describe her experience with trauma.
What percentage of incarcerated men and women have experienced trauma in their lifetime?
Jail Diversion Study

Women
- 96% lifetime
- 74% current (12 mos.)

Men
- 89% lifetime
- 86% current (12 mos.)
# Mental Health Court Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abuse (self report)</th>
<th>% Women</th>
<th>% Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse or rape (prior to age 20)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents hit or threw things at one another</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents beat them with belt whip or strap</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents hit them with something hard</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents beat or really hurt them with their hands</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents injured them enough to need medical attention</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Women**

67% child physical abuse

34% current (12 mos.)

**Men**

73% child physical abuse

32% current (12 mos.)
The past is never dead.
It’s not even past.
-William Faulkner
Effects of Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Effects</th>
<th>Emotional Effects</th>
<th>Physical Effects</th>
<th>Relationship Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Difficulty concentrating</td>
<td>- Wild mood swings and out of control emotions</td>
<td>- Increased startle response</td>
<td>- Hostility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Difficulty remembering some aspects of the trauma or the time just before or after it occurred</td>
<td>- Anxiety</td>
<td>- Exhaustion</td>
<td>- Withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fear or Terror</td>
<td>- Fear or Terror</td>
<td>- Insomnia</td>
<td>- Lack of or increased interest in sexual relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Anger/Irritability</td>
<td>- Shock</td>
<td>- Headaches</td>
<td>- Poor work/school performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shock</td>
<td>- Grief</td>
<td>- Nausea/digestive problems</td>
<td>- Blame (self, other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling numb or detached</td>
<td>- Guilt</td>
<td>- Rapid heartbeat</td>
<td>- Desire to “nest”- stay home and avoid contact with outside world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Guilt</td>
<td>- Helplessness</td>
<td>- Feeling “spacey”</td>
<td>- Overprotectiveness/ distorted feelings regarding individuals involved in trauma (Stockholm Syndrome)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Alienation</td>
<td>- Alienation</td>
<td>- Loss of interest in activities that the person once enjoyed doing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling of increased vulnerability</td>
<td>- Loss of meaning in life</td>
<td>- Loss of interest in health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling of abandonment</td>
<td>- Short circuited goals (May abandon long-term career plans and settle for something that pays day-to-day bills. May focus on short-term romantic attachments instead of fostering meaningful relationships)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trauma has a pervasive impact
Problematic Behaviors are Attempts at Self-Cure

- Substance Abuse
- Relationship Problems
  - Anger, mistrust, being easily manipulated, etc
- Snap decisions without thought of consequence
Trauma shapes a person’s world view - often in a dysfunctional manner.
Trauma “breaks” a person’s fire alarm
Gender Differences in Trauma

• As children, physical and sexual abuse is equal in both sexes

• As males age, they become victimized more by those who “hate” them (gang, bullying, combat, law enforcement, etc.)

• As females age, they become victimized more by those who “love” them (family member, partner)
Why Be Trauma Informed?

- Reduce Incident Reports (Rhode Island WP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Violence</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inmates assaulting inmates</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inmate fights</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inmates assaulting staff</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Force</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Be Trauma Informed?

• Decrease recidivism rates, particularly for technical rule violators
• Decrease in reactive and resistant behaviors.
• Promotes recovery
• Less resistance to change
• Keeps you from burning out!
The Basics of Trauma Informed Care

- UNIVERSAL ASSUMPTION OF TRAUMA

  - Think about your approach “What happened to you?” vs. “What’s wrong with you?”
  - Consider which aspects of your interactions with an individual may be retraumatizing.
People Need...

Respect
• It is essential to offer and expect respect
• Respect is key to help people gain self-esteem; self-esteem is necessary for people to take charge of their own lives
• People involved with the justice system and others who have been marginalized may not be accustomed to being offered respect
• Respect is a big factor in street and prison culture; people who do not expect or demand respect are considered weak and worthless

Information
• Providing information can help to reassure the person
• It also goes a long way in keeping the person calm, which can be key in avoiding aggressive responses

Safety
• To begin to take charge of one’s life, means relinquishing old patterns
• To do so, one must feel safe
People Need...

Trust
- Trustworthiness is an essential antidote to the lack of trust so predominant in both women and men with trauma histories
- Consistency and following through are key – honor your promises, return calls, be on time for appointments

Choice
- In some circumstances (as dictated by the law) we don’t always have a choice, so how can we build choice in?
- Provide choices wherever possible to enhance decision making skills

Collaboration
- Ask for examples of ways we can collaborate
- Collaboration is key
- A collaboration stance helps to enhance personal responsibility
Understand Your ...

- History of trauma and how this may affect your interactions with others
- Triggers for anger
- Situations that are likely to make you lose your temper
Avoid

- Overreacting
  - Power Struggles
  - False Promises
  - Using Force
  - Aggressive Behavior
- Inappropriate Use of Authority
  - Ordering
  - Shouting
  - Demeaning
  - Deceiving
  - Staring
  - Minimizing Symptoms or seriousness
Creating a Trauma Informed Environment

- Think about what aspects of safety are mandatory and what aspects you may be able to be flexible with
- Avoid triggers and re-traumatizing approaches:
  - Loud noises
  - Foul language / yelling
- Strip searches / property searches
  - Explain calmly
  - Allow for dignity
  - Same-sex staff
  - Tell them before you touch them
- Consider the manner in which your office is organized
  - A person with trauma who has to sit with their back to the door may become on edge the second they are seated.
- Know the people with whom you are working
Questions or Comments?

Rachel Halleck, MA, LMHC, LAC
Treatment Counselor
Healing Families
Volunteers of America, Indiana
rhalleck@voain.org
References

• American Psychiatric Association. (2005). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders- IV- TR.*
• SAMHSA Gains Center