
TRAUMA CAUSED BY THE MODERN PANDEMIA

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Abstract: The appearance of the coronavirus (Corona 19) in 2019 has literally caused putting our routines on hold or even stopping our lives. The first images and videos which went viral were as they were scenes from some sci-fi film. Firstly, it took a certain amount of time until people of different nations grasped the information, accept it and started behaving according to officials' advices. Then, some nations behavior was responsible and disciplinary opposite to others whose behavior led to serious consequences. Later, the *trauma* appeared. The Greeks used the word *trauma* for "wound". The first known use of *trauma* was circa 1693 and in the past, it was only associated with an injury, as a wound, to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent. In the past, people used this term for particular physical injuries, but nowadays it is also *used when one refers to emotional wounds*. The term *psychiatry* was first coined by the German physician Johann Christian Reil in 1808 and literally means the 'medical treatment of the soul'. As a result of the introducing of *psychiatry* and prioritizing the mental health today we are aware that a certain *traumatic* event can leave psychological symptoms after a considerable time, although the physical injuries have healed. By developing of medicine people in the 20th century became more and more informed that a person's mental health is very important. Unfortunately, human beings are first and foremost emotional creatures. The first known use of *emotion* was in 1579 and, as a term, was used much earlier than trauma and it has a substantial influence on the cognitive processes in humans, including perception, memory and reasoning, attention and learning, and even problem solving. Therefore, emotions help us to communicate with others, build better relationships etc. As humans, we are exposed to all kinds of *stress* on a daily basis. It can be defined as any type of change that causes emotional, physical or psychological strain. Some of us react, but some of us don't; some are tense, some are more relaxed, and yet each of us deals with stress differently. Since it has been proven that many diseases are stress-related people started to work on reducing stress so as to preserve and improve their mental health. It is not preferable to ignore and minimize the importance, presence and reactions of stress since an extreme stress can lead to trauma. The psychological reaction to emotional trauma now has a recognized name: *post-traumatic stress disorder*, or PTSD. Hence is it from extreme stress, a loss of a partner, a death of family member, natural disaster, wartime combat, or sexual or physical abuse, its symptoms include anxiety, flashbacks, depression, and recurring nightmares. The PTSD can also occur after an extremely long and stressful event, such as pandemic, and it reflects on all population – from teenagers to elderly. The fact that it is a collective matter is extremely worrying. And can you imagine, only three years ago we only believed that one's mental health is a state of well-being and major factor for quality life.

Keywords: Trauma, stress, emotion, mental health.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although trauma exposure is a global phenomenon, trauma reactions vary considerably across cultures. Patients which have suffered trauma can come from different countries, speak different languages and share different cultural values. Therefore, trauma is considered to be a global issue and therapists should be aware of the differences and need to increase their cultural competencies in order to become a good therapist.

2. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND ITS IMPACTS

We, as humans, are unique and that is in everything that we do, feel or believe in which separates people from the rest. Trauma, including one-time one, multiple, or enduring repetitive events, might affect everyone different in a different way. The responses to individual, place us between people from different backgrounds, environments, viewpoints and even beliefs that results from a single event or series of events, or variety of circumstances that an individual experiences as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening. Some individuals may clearly display criteria connected to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but many more individuals will express some resilient responses, or may have short subclinical symptoms. This can provoke lasting adverse effects on the one's functioning as well as its social, physical and emotional well-being. The impact of trauma can be subtle, insidious, or outright destructive. Among other things, the characteristics of the individual, the type and characteristics of the event(s), the developmental processes, the meaning of the trauma, and sociocultural factors, influence on how an

event affects an individual. In order to understand the term individual and collective trauma, we have to begin our journey by looking into the three main types of trauma:

1. Acute – which results from a single incident;
2. Chronic – which is repeated and prolonged such as domestic violence or abuse;
3. Complex – which is exposure to varied and multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature.

3. INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA

Although emotional trauma is observed as personal one, it can also be observed as individual, group and collective one. The individual trauma refers to an event that is only experienced by one person. It can be a single event as mugging, work-related physical injury, sexual assault, physical attack, natural disasters, such as a tornado, hurricane, fire, pandemic even divorce, a sudden death of a loved one (parent, spouse or child) or multiple or prolonged events as a life-threatening illness, multiple sexual assaults. From the above-mentioned events, we will single out only the event of sudden death of a close person. Death, loss and grief are natural parts of life. But when death surprises us in an unexpected and cruel way, as with a car accident or suicide, the traumatic experience followed by grief can imbricate or even overwhelm us. Glenda Dickinson, a clinical professional counselor, describes traumatic grief as “a sense-losing event — a free fall into a chasm of despair” (Phillips, 2021). As she explains, this sudden and unexpected death - experience literally tears apart their everyday lives and can cause people to go into a steep decline. “They are down there swirling,” she says, “experiencing all the issues that are part of grief — shock, disbelief, bewilderment.” A sudden bereavement is more likely to result in these reactions than an expected bereavement. According to Trauma Survivors Network, people with common symptoms of traumatic grief are:

- People preoccupied with the deceased
- People who experience pain in the same area as the deceased
- People who have upsetting memories
- People who feel that life is empty
- People who long for the person
- People who ‘hear’ the voice of the person who died or ‘see’ the person
- People who express disbelief or anger about the death
- People who think it is unfair to live when this person died
- People who feel dazed or stunned
- People who are envious of others
- People who face difficulties trusting or caring about others

People with such reactions may develop addictions or increase addictive behaviours they had before, such as use of drugs, alcohol or cigarettes. They may gain or lose weight. They may have continuing physical reactions such as stuttering, pains or illnesses. Sometimes, unexpectedly bereaved people have some previous medical conditions that hardens their recovery from their grief disorder and / or PTSD. Examples of medically-defined conditions include:

- Clinical depression, which can be treated with anti-depressants
- Injuries, which are sometimes caused in the same event (such as a road crash)
- Existing permanent illnesses, such as heart conditions, epilepsy or diabetes
- Addiction as alcohol or drugs

Abby Stanislaw, a Doctor of Psychology, defines three stages of grief - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance says that those emotions are common while coping with trauma or loss and claims that “the grieving process can be complicated and often doesn’t happen in a predictable order.” Among several things, she points out that one should be aware that the person is not alone in the emotional struggle and that “the feeling of grief can last for weeks, months and even years” (Stanislaw, 2021).

4. CHILDREN AND TRAUMA

There is a difference in how adults and children react to stress and traumatic experiences. Some trauma can be experienced as child and remain present in our lives as adults. In general, early childhood trauma refers to the traumatic experiences that are present among children aged 0-6. Likewise, children can experience numerous types of trauma including:

- Natural disasters
- Sexual/physical abuse
- Medical injury, illness, or procedures
- Community/domestic/school violence

- Neglect, deprivation
- Accidents
- Traumatic grief
- Victim of crime
- Loss/Kidnapping

The numerous research has proven that as a result of their rapidly developing brain, children are especially vulnerable to trauma. A child's brain is in heightened state of stress and hormones related to fear are activated during traumatic experiences. Although, stress is a normal part of life, when a child is exposed to chronic trauma, the child's brain remains in this heightened pattern. Remaining in this state can change the cognitive, emotional and behavioral functioning of the child in order to build up survival. With time, these traumatic experiences might have an important impact on a child's future mental and physical health. But not all children undergo child traumatic stress after being exposed to a traumatic event. With support, many children are able to recover and thrive. As a caring adult and/or family member, one plays an important role. Some useful tips:

- The child should be assured that he or she is safe.
- It should be explained that he or she is not responsible. They sometimes blame themselves for events that are completely out of their control.
- We should be patient. Some children recover quickly while others slowly.
- We should reassure them that they do not need to feel guilty or bad about any feelings or thoughts.
- We should seek the help of a trained professional. A mental health professional trained can help children and families in the process of recovery.

5. COVID-19 AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

Recently, our lives changed forever as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. When we experience things together (positive or negative), we're bound by the shared memory of that experience. When a generation lives through events so devastating that they defined an era, it's called collective trauma (or in other words, shared trauma). No matter who ones were, one couldn't escape the impacts of this global phenomenon. Collective trauma is the psychological distress that a group experience in response to a shared trauma and it is usually a community, another large group of people or even an entire culture. These events live in a group's collective memory long after the actual trauma has resolved. That impacts the decisions people make, the values they hold, and the way they live. Here are some few examples of events that can cause collective trauma:

- War, occupation/military conflicts
- Recessions and depressions
- Terrorist attacks/Mass killings
- Epidemics and pandemics
- Genocide and religious persecution
- Racial trauma, misogyny, apartheid, and violence in class
- Hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and other natural disasters

The coronavirus pandemic is definitely one of those "once in a lifetime" moments. The pandemic increased our emotions and feelings of anguish and PTSD not only among adults but among the general population. Research on earlier pandemics, like Ebola and SARS, confirmed that anxiety, increased stress, and depression after its appearance. The results of the extended lockdowns obviously caused, for both adults and children, isolation, loneliness, and anger. It is familiar that collective trauma is distinctive in the scale of its impact, but it does not affect the entire global community. Its impact can seep into our daily lives and if we don't know how to identify the effects, we won't know how to heal. Here are a few mental health conditions that can arise as a result of collective trauma:

- Psychological distress
- Anxiety disorders
- Low self-esteem
- Existential crisis

When bad things happen, it's not always easy to consume it or be able to move on with our lives. This can result into an existential crisis. People or even entire communities can feel unrelated, question their beliefs, or be uncertain of their place in the world. It is important to be aware that current trauma can reactivate previous trauma. "Collective traumas are significant because they become transformative for a society," Thomasian, a licensed therapist and owner of Playa Vista Counseling, told HuffPost. "Some cultures define themselves heavily by

a collective trauma and how they healed. Additionally, people change the way they live or create systems as a result of these events” (Bologna, 2021). As well as adults, children and young people (CYP) experienced a whole multitude of emotions and thoughts, and even changed during this time. It was manifested by loss of control, threat to life and possibly witnessed to people being unwell or, unfortunately, dying as a result of Coronavirus. Caroline Bologna, mental health expert, points out the concerns that “some CYP will have had increased exposure to ongoing domestic abuse, child abuse or neglect and online bullying during the time education settings were forced to close and also subsequently during other lockdowns /where individuals and groups of CYP have been asked to stay at home and isolate.” Let’s not exclude the fact that “there’s also the economic impact on families where parents/careers may have lost jobs and things such as free school meals haven’t necessarily been available for lower income households” (Barnardo’s Education Community, 2020).

6. HOW CAN TRAUMA PLAY OUT IN THE CLASSROOM

Children and young people who have experienced trauma as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak are likely to have issues around their focus, ability to learn and behaviour. This can directly result into a continuous being in risk mode, undergo trauma memory triggers, flashbacks and nightmares. These are classic PTSD symptoms. In order to provide support and promote children’s wellbeing as a part of a school approach, schools could consider implementing the 5 Key Principles of Recovery:

1. Emotional wellbeing should be put first
2. Relationships should be placed front and centre
3. Re-affirm school’s strengths and core values
4. Re-affirm safety and routines
5. Change, loss and bereavement should be acknowledged

Our education setting can have an immense positive effect on these children and young people by implementing each of the 5 key principles of recovery. Educators can access a numerous developments and ideas on how to embrace mindfulness into learning, play, self-care and ways to build and develop managing strategies that can be utilized to support our education setting.

7. CONCLUSION

In order to help a person who is grieving one should to know and apply some primary tips as to be a good listener and respect one’s action of grieving; accept person’s mood swings and avoid giving advice. Whether it is a child or an adult who suffered a COVID-19 trauma, we should simply have great *patience*, to be full of *understanding* and give a lot of *love*. If grief becomes overwhelming or symptoms continue for longer period without relief, uses or think about using alcohol and drugs as a surviving mechanism or one is experiencing a mental health crisis, it is immediately necessary to speak to a trained counselor. Or as Allaya Cooks-Campbell, a certified Integrative Wellness & Life Coach advises “If you’re struggling to process trauma, remember that you’re not alone. You can take your healing journey one step at a time. The most important thing is to ask for the support you need, when you need it.”

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