

Historic Trauma and It's Effects



Mark Panasiewicz
Tribal Law & Policy Institute

Trauma

- Trauma affects the functioning of the sympathetic nervous system and the endocrine system.
- The body provides a short-term remedy, allowing the body to react quicker to new stressors.

Chronic Trauma

- Chronic exposure to trauma can cause either a hypo- or hyper-stress response in the brain.
- Researchers have found a connection between PTSD and susceptibility to physical illness.

Natives Today

- Native adults are at greater risk of experiencing psychological distress, and more likely to have poorer overall physical and mental health
- Highest suicide rate
- Lowest income, least education, highest poverty level, and lowest life expectancy of any population

What is historic trauma?

Definition: “The *collective* emotional and psychological injury both over the life span and across generations, resulting from a cataclysmic history of genocide”

“It’s the *cumulative* emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma.”

- Dr. Maria Yellowhorse-Braveheart

Historical Trauma

- It is transferred to subsequent generations.
- Considered clinically applicable to Natives by counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists.

Three Phases

1. Dominant culture perpetuates mass trauma on a population
2. Original population responds
3. Initial responses to trauma are conveyed to successive generations

Sources of Historic Trauma

- Contact – disease
- Colonization – alcohol/drugs, traumatic events
- Banned religion – no ability to mourn
- Dislocation/Loss of land – loss of economy
- Boarding school – children kidnapped, **destroyed family system**, physical violence, rape, language loss, spirituality threatened extinction
- Forced relocation & termination
- Loss of justice system and authority - assimilation policies & erosion of tribal and individual sovereignty
- Unrecognition of this trauma – no justice

Societal-Environmental Concerns

- 3.5x higher domestic violence and sexual assault
- High number of child abuse
- Overrepresentation in the child welfare systems
- Limited education and employment

Psychological Concerns

- Highest weekly alcohol consumption rate
- High rate of co-occurring disorders related to substance abuse and mental health disorders
- High rate of mood disorders and PTSD

Physiological Concerns

- Shorter life expectancy
- Overrepresented in areas of heart disease, tuberculosis, STDs, and diabetes

Transmission of Trauma Across Generations

- Children identifying with their parents' suffering
- Children being influenced by the style of communication caregivers use to describe the trauma
- Children being influenced by particular parenting style

How it manifests itself

- Unresolved grief
- Disenfranchised grief
- Difficulty with trust/intimacy, which leads to challenging attachment with children
- Internalized oppression

Consider Our Diversity

- Remember, with 566 different tribal nations, numerous different cultures and languages, and numerous different experiences of historical loss, avoid the temptation to generalize

Impact for Counselors

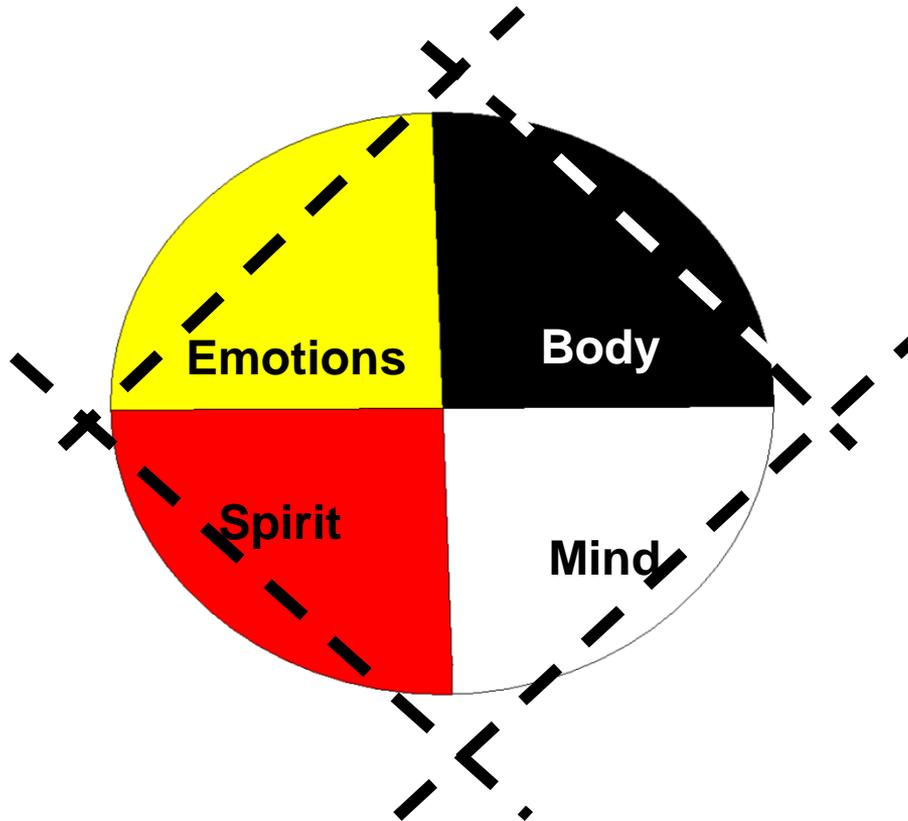
- Motivational Phase – historical context around current difficulties in Native communities is discussed
- Intervention Phase – utilizing mainstream evidence-based interventions that are culturally competent
- Traumas were systemic in nature, and so our response must be a collective response

Historical Trauma Intervention: Four Major Intervention Components

- Confronting historical trauma
- Understanding the trauma
- Releasing our pain
- Transcending the trauma

(From: Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD)

Impact of Historic Trauma: Wholistic Impact

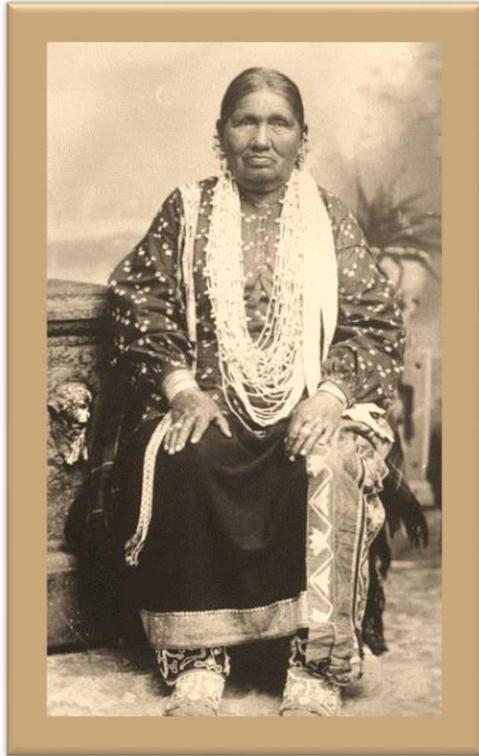


Healing and Justice

- Regenerating cultural traditions & ceremonies
- Collective grieving and healing
- Knowledge/education is empowering – understand the history and source of trauma
- Reclamation
- Reinstating traditional justice

Pre-colonization Beliefs & Practices

- Utmost respect for elders – keepers of traditions, stories, customs, language
- No nursing homes
- Grandparents helped raise grandchildren
- Life expectancy where people lived long
- Leaders, center of our Nations
- Gatekeepers



“Tribal nations are of a culture that reveres the elder in their communities. Elders are the carriers of the culture/history; they are the storytellers, holders of wisdom, and strength of the community. They assist in raising children; teach languages, customs, and ceremonies; and often comprise leadership groups of spiritual leaders, healers, and council chairs.”

(From: Elder Abuse in American Indian Communities: Briana Anisko)

Tribal Nations Regenerating Sovereign Status & Reclaiming Traditions

- Taking care of elders
- Prioritizing and allocating resources needed to provide culturally appropriate care for elders
- Utilizing elders in programs, education programs for language preservation
- Tribal elder abuse codes
- Tribal elder protection programs with elder foster care programs
- Exercise sovereignty, holding offenders accountable, protecting vulnerable

Essential Services for Elders

“Essential Services” are the things necessary to sustain a person's life physical and mental health, and general well-being, like food, clothing, shelter, and health care. It may include service or items considered essential under the person's customs, tradition or religion, including but not limited to, access to traditional foods and access to religious ceremonies or services.

Self Care

- Trauma informed care for each of us
- Healing our nations starts with healing ourselves
- Resiliency



“Our elders, preserving our past in their memories, influencing our present when we dare to listen, aiming us toward our future, rooted in their wisdom, they deserve our respect not our abuse.”

Pueblo of Laguna Elderly Code