McMaster University

Family Medicine

Trauma-Informed Research Practice

Watch a recording of this session

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Session Overview

- Trauma defined
- Why considering trauma history matters in research
- What is a trauma-informed approach?
- Becoming more trauma-informed in your own research practice:
  - Planning and preparing research
  - Participant screening and recruitment
  - During data collection sessions
  - After sessions, and beyond
- Core learnings, perspectives, and conclusions
- Trauma-informed walkthrough

I am: being transparent and clear about what's to come

About Me

- Social worker with direct practice experience (study: specialty in trauma, practice: worked more in crisis)
- Research coordinator specialized in qualitative and other research, including on trauma-informed care

I am: giving an introduction as to why I'm here, starting the process of reflexivity

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Understanding Trauma-Informed Care in Correctional Facilities: A Scoping Review

Authors: Jessica Gaber, Eilish Scallan, and Fiona G. Kouyoumdjian

Trauma Defined

- **Trauma:** "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being"[1]

- Can have impacts throughout the life course, including mental and physical health issues, cognitive issues, social and relational issues, and behavioural changes

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.* https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/program/medicaid_health_homes/docs/samhsa_trauma_concept_paper.pdf

“If I’m not studying trauma, or a population more likely to have experienced trauma, should my research practice still be trauma-informed?”

…YES!

Why considering trauma histories matters

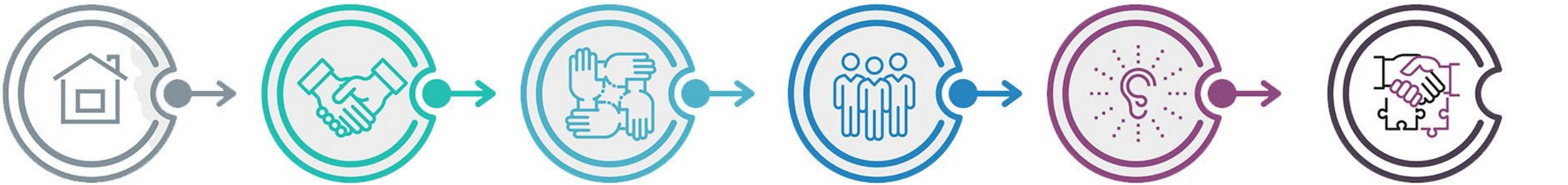
- There are certain populations more likely to have experienced trauma, and certain research topics that lend themselves more to potential trauma, but **any topic** may bring up memories of traumatic events, and **anyone** may have experienced trauma
- A trauma-informed approach isn't *trauma-specific*: it's not care for a specific person who has experienced trauma, it's an approach you apply to everyone, without knowing their history
- Building emotionally safe spaces can be good for all
- This is for any research with people: qualitative research particularly, but also methods such as observational research

What is trauma-informed care?

- It is a whole system change process, incorporating key trauma principles into organizational culture itself, at every level of work

- SAMHSA's "Four R"s of trauma-informed care:
  - **Realization** of trauma's effects and breadth
  - **Recognition** of signs of trauma
  - **Response** to trauma by the program or system
  - **Resistance** to re-traumatization of both clients and staff

6 GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH



https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm

“Trauma- and violence-informed care”?

- Term increasingly used in Canada
- Explicitly acknowledges historic and ongoing impact of both interpersonal violence and structural violence, e.g., racism, poverty, and colonialism, especially on people experiencing social inequities
- The initial term of trauma-informed care is also intended to include these aspects, and it is what I use here

Becoming more trauma-informed in your own research practice:

The how-to

During planning and preparing research

- Prepare to work with the community
  - Work with people from the community in planning research: codesign, collaborate
  - Acknowledge innate power differentials, and different expertise
  - Learn about history & historical trauma with specific communities (e.g., racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia)
- Prepare the physical space (e.g., through a trauma walk through)
- Prepare for the work yourself
  - Be prepared for verbalized strong feelings or experience of trauma
  - Use reflexivity: understand how your own trauma history may contribute to various reactions

During participant screening and recruitment

- Maximize participant choice and control in:
  - Location of the session
  - Timing of the session
  - If they want to bring a support person
  - Their preferences for contact method
- Be clear and transparent about what is coming:
  - The logistics (when, where, how long)
  - What to expect from the research
  - Whether there will be sensitive topics
- Thank them if they agree to participate

During data collection sessions

- Give them a choice about where to sit
- Be clear and transparent about what's to come throughout
- Give participants control over as many aspects of data collection as possible
- Start with the "least stressful" questions, move to more stressful questions, and finish with something affirming or strengths-based
- Focus on the person and their responses, even if it means there is a pause
- Be aware of signs of discomfort or retraumatization (e.g., going numb, blank, disengaged, angry, frustrated) – if so:
  - Acknowledge the distress
  - Focus on safety and promote agency (give choices)
  - Don't attempt to give advice or "fix" the issue

After data collection, and beyond

- For participants:
  - Supply info for mental health and social support services (to all)
  - Invite follow-up on the research topic, processes, and approach
  - Invite community members to collaborate on data analysis & reporting
  - In reporting, ask yourself ‘How would I feel reading these findings if I were one of the participants?’

- For the research team:
  - Do peer-debriefings with colleagues to help prevent vicarious trauma
  - Identify and engage in self-care strategies

Core learnings, perspectives, and conclusions

- Recognize potential of impacts of trauma – in participants and the research team
- Minimize the potential for re-traumatization
  - Prepare yourself and the space
  - Be clear and transparent
  - Focus on participant choice, agency, and empowerment

- But? Trauma-informed work can’t be just a buzzword: it’s continuous work to develop, learn, and do the work as you relate to eople

Sources Used in Preparing this Presentation

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Trauma-Informed Walk Through