

Women's experiences of trauma and approaches to help seeking

Caroline Hattersley MEd MIOD

Definition of Trauma

Trauma occurs when an external event overwhelms a person's physical and psychological coping mechanisms or strategies.

(Van der Kolk, 1989).

Traumatic Events

Trauma can take many forms:

- Emotional abuse
- Sexual or physical abuse – including domestic violence, assault, and rape
- Catastrophic injuries and illnesses
- Extremely painful and frightening medical procedures
- Historical or cultural trauma

Differences in Risk

- Worldwide, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 8 men experience psychological abuse from partner
- 38% of female homicides are committed by male partners, while 6% of male homicides are committed by female partners
- 1 in 5 women will be raped, while 1 in 71 men will be raped

Gender and Trauma

Childhood:

- Girls and boys at equal risk from family members and people they know

Adolescence:

- Young men at risk from people who dislike or hate them. Boys at greater risk if they are gay, young men of colour, or gang members.
- Young women at risk from lovers or partners – people to whom they are saying, “I love you.”

Adulthood:

- Men at risk from combat or being victims of crime
- Women at risk from those they love

ACE Study (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

- Before age 18:
- Recurrent and severe emotional abuse
- Recurrent and severe physical abuse
- Contact sexual abuse
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect

ACE Study

Results of ACEs:

- Profound effects 50 years later
- Greater risk of having certain physical diseases and mental illnesses
- Substance abuse
- (Felitti and Anda, 2010)

Link Between Childhood Trauma and Adult Outcomes

- Those with ACE score of 4 or more are more likely to have learning or behavioural problems in school (51%) than those with an ACE score of 0 (3%)
- People with an ACE score of 4 or more are over 5 times more likely to struggle with alcoholism than people with an ACE score of 0.
- Those with ACE score of 6 are 30 times more likely to have attempted suicide.
- Women 50% more likely than men to have a score of 5 or more.

Responses to Trauma

There are mental and emotional responses, which occur in the inner self, and there are external responses, which show up as physical reactions in the body and as behaviour

- Fight, Flight or Freeze and....
- Altered state of consciousness, body sensations, numbing,
- Hyper-vigilance, hyper-arousal, collapse
- Harmful behaviour to others
- Aggression, violence, rages, threats
- Isolation, dissociation, depression, anxiety
- Physical health Issues
- Compliance and apathy
- PTSD and Complex PTSD

Across the Lifespan

- Behavioural problems
- Emotional dysregulation
- Adverse childhood experiences
- Family dysfunction
- Trauma & loss
- Chronic hyper arousal and chronic inflammation
- Physical illness
- Social dysfunction

Trauma Recovery

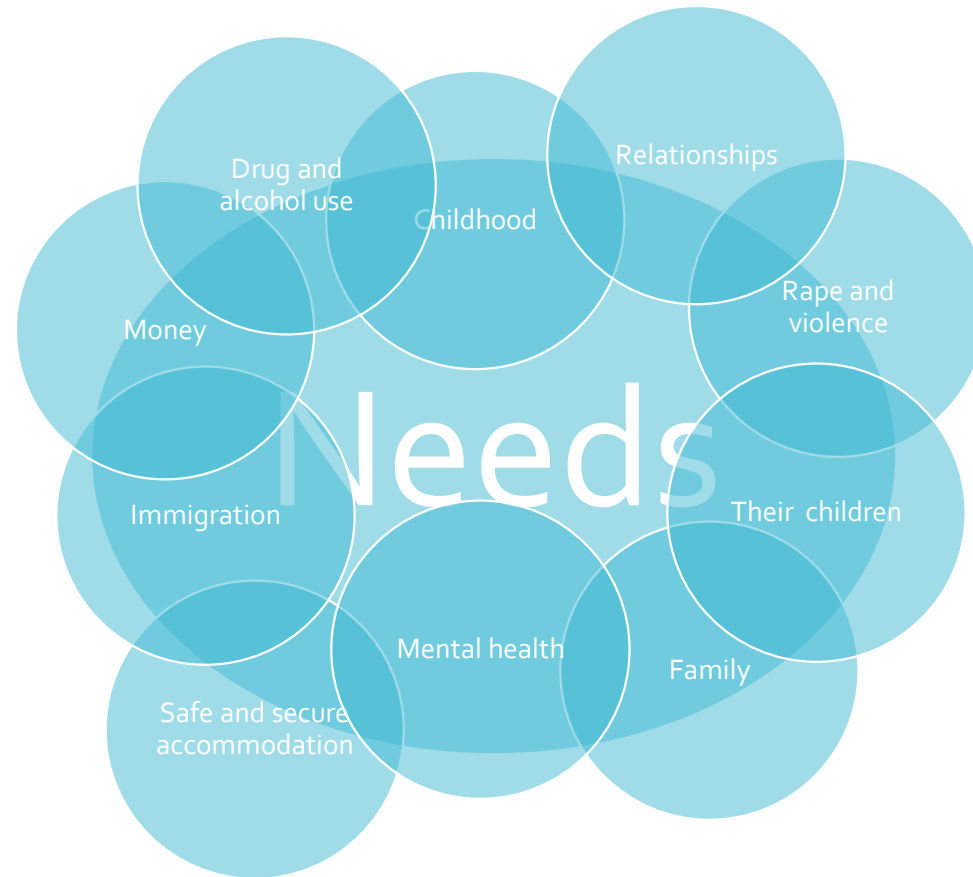
- Safety
 - Remembrance and mourning
 - Reconnection
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- Source: Herman, 1992, 1997

Therefore.....

We need to presume the clients we serve have a history of traumatic stress and exercise “universal precautions” by creating systems of care that are trauma-informed.

(Hodas, 2005)

Women experience intersecting needs



Trauma



Facilitating healing, resilience and well-being

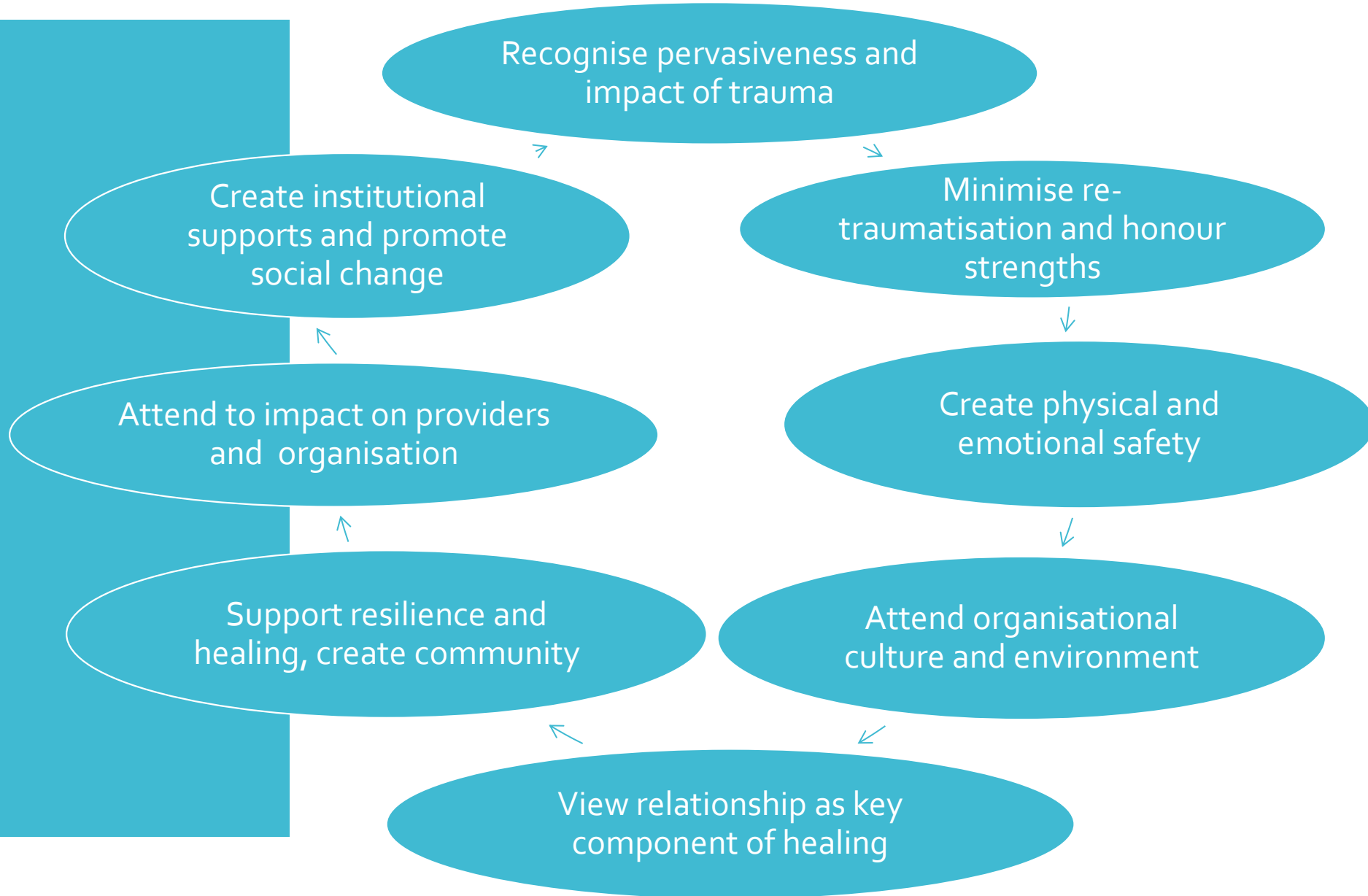
Healing from trauma often begins by:

- Restoring safety, connections, capacities, trust, meaning and hope
- Accessing empowering information
- Honouring strengths and resilience
- Emotional and interpersonal skill-building - enhancing affect regulation and interpersonal skills, anticipate & prepare for trauma triggers
- Developing or reconnecting with supportive aspects of culture, community & spirituality and engaging meaningful activities.



Core values of trauma and gender informed services

- Safety (physical and emotional)
- Trustworthiness
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Safety: eye contact; consistency; explanations; procedure to report abuse
- Trustworthiness: following through; model trust; maintaining appropriate boundaries; and making tasks clear
- Choice: emphasising individual choice and control; informed consent
- Collaboration: solicit input; acknowledge insights about herself/himself; explain options
- Empowerment: teaching skills; provide tasks where she can succeed
- (Fallot & Harris, 2006)



Approaching help

- An individual's approach to help stems from their childhood experiences, where care-seeking behaviours are developed
- For women we must be aware of the trauma they have experienced as this will impact on help seeking
- To get a need met, one must first know they have a need.
- Women tend to describe experiences rather than needs



What matters

- Where and how long they wait to be seen, what is the waiting environment like?
- What the very first interaction with a service is like (receptionist?)
- Authenticity of the practitioners
- Honesty and explanations of limitations and possible points of frustration
- Flexibility, flexibility, flexibility (in as much as one is able)

Practical issues and barriers

- Multiple appointments in different places across a town or a city
- Worries about meeting people in particular areas
- Returning to places they don't want to
- Split second ability to read people and make decisions about whether they will help them
- Finding a place of safety
- Staff behaviour
- Environmental factors



What hurts



- *When they don't listen*
- *When they manipulated my cooperation*
- *When they treated me the same way every time I had a re-admission*
- *When I am excluded from decisions*
- *When the different service systems I was in, didn't talk to each other*
- *When I feel judged*
- *When they make me jump through hoops*
- *When I have to wait a long time*

Key themes

- Not listening
- Not telling the truth
- Not sharing information
- Not recognising what's changed

What helps

- *People doing what they say they will*
- *When I was shown respect & dignity*
- *When a rapport was establish with my helpers*
- *When they shared the power with me*
- *When they showed me how to, instead of telling me*
- *When I was given choices and alternatives*
- *When services followed me out into the community*
- *When they listened to me*
- *When I felt like they cared*
- *When they listened and tried to help me*



Key themes

- Listening
- Being honest
- Trusting the women
- Showing not telling
- Giving choices
- Recognising women are more than just what they present to a particular service
- Working to overcome the barriers for each individual woman

References

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Any questions

