The Importance of Talking & Tackling Trauma at HBCUs

Presented by
Dr. Lawrence Brown, Assistant Professor
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OVERVIEW

Through a Cooperative Agreement with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA), Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, (CSAT) and Center for Mental Health Services, (CMHS) Morehouse School of Medicine established the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Center for Excellence in Behavioral Health (HBCU-CFE), funded as Grant No. TI025590.
The Goals of the HBCU-CFE

• Promote student behavioral health to positively impact student retention

• Expand campus service capacity, including the provision of culturally appropriate behavioral health resources

• Facilitate best practices dissemination and behavioral health workforce development
## Our Team

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Lawrence Brown, PhD, MPA

Lawrence Brown is the grandson of sharecroppers who lived in the Mississippi Delta and is a native of West Memphis, Arkansas. His research interests include:

- the impact of displacement on Black health (i.e. gentrification, displacement, foreclosures, and the dismantling of public housing)
- understanding historical trauma in the forensic analysis of public health
- the effects of masculinity on Black men's health and health behaviors

He is leading a research and health engagement project entitled the #BaltimoreUprising Community Healing Project which aims to assess the level of PTSD in the communities where rioting took place in Baltimore on April 27. He has also written on the impact of historical trauma and forced displacement on the health of descendants of Africans enslaved in the U.S. He also teaches community needs and solutions at Morgan State University.
The Importance of Talking & Tackling Trauma at HBCUs

Lawrence Brown, PhD, MPA

Morgan State University
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Definition of Trauma

- A traumatic event is an experience that causes physical, emotional, psychological distress, or harm. It is an event that is perceived and experienced as a threat to one's safety or to the stability of one's world.

- Medline
Four Types of Traumas

- Historical trauma
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Race-based trauma
- Community trauma
Historical Trauma

The model posits that historical trauma originates with the subjugation of a population by a dominant group. Successful subjugation requires at least four elements:

- (1) overwhelming physical and psychological violence
- (2) segregation and/or displacement
- (3) economic deprivation or destruction
- (4) cultural dispossession
Historical Trauma

“A key feature of historical trauma theory is that the psychological and emotional consequences of the trauma experience are transmitted to subsequent generations through physiological, environmental and social pathways resulting in an intergenerational cycle of trauma response” (Michelle Sotero)
The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade
Mob Violence, Riots, & Pogroms against Black Communities (1824-1974)
3,959 Lynchings

In Phillips County Ark., 237 people were lynched in 1919 during the Elaine race riot.
Historical Trauma

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Historical Trauma

- **Dominant Group**
- **Subjugation of a Population**
  - Segregation/Displacement (plantation, reservation, refugee camp, etc.)
  - Physical/Psychological Violence (acute and chronic)
  - Economic Destruction (loss of resources, legal rights)
  - Cultural Dispossession (loss of cultural roles, language, religion, etc.)

First Generation or Primary Generations

**Trauma Response**
- Physical Response
  - Nutritional stress
  - Compromised immune system
  - Biochemical abnormalities
  - Endocrine impairment
  - Adrenal maladaptation
  - Gene impairment/expressions
  - Resulting in: malnutrition, diabetes, hyperglycemia, infectious disease, heart disease, hypertension, cancer

- Resilience
- Protective Factors

Social Response
  - Increased suicide rate
  - Domestic violence
  - Unemployment
  - Substance abuse
  - Child maltreatment
  - Poverty
  - Resulting in: breakdown of community/family structures and social networks, loss of resources, separation from loved ones

Psychological Response
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Depression
  - Panic/Anxiety Disorders
  - Anger/aggression
  - Social isolation
  - Shame
  - Loss of self-worth
  - Terror/fear
  - Grief
  - Withdrawal
  - Numbness

**Secondary and Subsequent Generations**
PTSD

Posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, can occur after someone goes through, sees, or learns about a traumatic event like:

- Combat exposure
- Child sexual or physical abuse
- Terrorist attack
- Sexual/physical assault
- Serious accident
- Natural disaster

Most people have some stress-related reactions after a traumatic event. If your reactions don’t go away over time and they disrupt your life, you may have PTSD.

See the next few pages for common reactions to trauma and PTSD symptoms.

How Common Is PTSD?

Many Americans have had a trauma. About 60% of men and 50% of women experience at least one traumatic event. Of those who do, about 8% of men and 20% of women will develop PTSD. For some events, like combat and sexual assault, more people develop PTSD.
PTSD Symptoms

- **Reliving the event (also called reexperiencing)**—Memories of the trauma can come back at any time. You may feel the same fear and horror you did when the event took place. You may have nightmares or feel like you’re going through it again. This is called a flashback. Sometimes there is a trigger—a sound or sight that causes you to relive the event.
  - Seeing someone who reminds you of the trauma may bring back memories of the event.
  - You may think about the trauma at work or school when you need to concentrate on something else.

- **Avoiding situations that remind you of the event**—You may try to avoid situations or people that trigger memories of the traumatic event. You may even avoid talking or thinking about the event.
  - You may avoid crowds, because they feel dangerous.
  - If you were in a car accident or if your military convoy was bombed, you may avoid driving.
  - Some people may keep very busy or avoid seeking help. This keeps them from having to think or talk about the event.

- **Feeling numb**—You may find it hard to express your feelings. This is another way to avoid memories. It may also be hard to remember or talk about parts of the trauma.
  - You may find it hard to experience your emotions.
  - You may not have positive or loving feelings toward other people and may stay away from relationships.
  - You may not be interested in activities you used to enjoy, like spending time with family and friends.

- **Feeling keyed up (also called hyperarousal)**—You may be jittery, or always on the alert and on the lookout for danger. You might suddenly become angry or irritable. This is known as hyperarousal.
  - You may want to have your back to a wall in a restaurant or waiting room.
  - A loud noise can startle you easily.
  - If someone bumps into you, you might fly into a rage.

U.S. Veterans Administration
Effects of Stress on the Body

**Brain and Nerves:** Headaches, feelings of despair, lack of energy, sadness, nervousness, anger, irritability, trouble concentrating, memory problems, difficulty sleeping, mental health disorders (anxiety, panic attacks, depression, etc.)

**Heart:** Faster heartbeat or palpitations, rise in blood pressure, increased risk of high cholesterol and heart attack

**Stomach:** Nausea, stomach ache, heartburn, weight gain, increased or decreased appetite

**Pancreas:** Increased risk of diabetes

**Intestines:** Diarrhea, constipation and other digestive problems

**Reproductive Organs:** For women: irregular or painful periods, reduced sexual desire. For men: impotence, low sperm production, reduced sexual desire

**Other:** Acne and other skin problems, muscle aches and tension, increased risk for low bone density and weakened immune system (making it harder to fight off or recover from illnesses)
Civil Disturbances Across America
Preliminary Data
For PTSD After the
April 27 Riot Among
The Sample of 85
People Surveyed on June 11 at
Penn & North
Race-based Trauma

Race-based traumatic stress injury can be a consequence of emotional pain that a person may feel after encounters with racism, which can be understood in terms of specific types of acts (as distinct types: racial harassment or hostility, racial discrimination or avoidance and/or discriminatory harassment, aversive hostility).
Race-based trauma

- **Race-based traumatic stressors** have the potential to affect victims cognitively, affectively, somatically, relationally, behaviorally, and spiritually.
- **Cognitive effects** may include difficulty concentrating, remembering, and focusing.
- **Affective effects** may include numbness, depression, anxiety, grief, and anger.
- **Somatic complaints** may include migraines, nausea, and body aches.
- **Relationally**, victims may demonstrate distrust of members of the dominant group or, in cases of internalized racism, distrust of members of their racial group.
- **Behaviorally**, victims may begin to self-medicate through substance misuse or other self-harming activities.
- **Spiritually**, victims may question their faith in God, humanity, or both.

*Healing Requires Recognition by Thema Bryant-Davis*
What is the effect of seeing these pictures and images of Black deaths on a repeated basis?

On social media?

On the news?
"We hear in the news about African-Americans being shot in a church, and this brings up all sorts of other things and experiences. Maybe that specific thing has never happened to us. But maybe we've had uncles or aunts who have experienced things like this, or we know people in our community [who have], and their stories have been passed down. So we have this whole cultural knowledge of these sorts of events happening, which then sort of primes us for this type of traumatization."
Calling in Black

- VIDEO
Calling in Black
Community-based trauma

Communities can collectively react to trauma in ways that are very similar to the ways in which individuals respond. They can become hyper-vigilant, fearful, or they can be re-traumatized, triggered by circumstances resembling earlier trauma. Trauma can be built into cultural norms and passed from generation to generation. Communities are often profoundly shaped by their trauma histories. Making sense of the trauma experience and telling the story of what happened using the language and framework of the community is an important step toward healing community trauma.

From SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma & Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach
Today, the neighborhood is home to many committed, long-term residents and strong community organizations. Bit by bit, with lots of hard work, some blocks that were once lined with boarded-up homes have been transformed with rows of new townhouses. There are parks and a community garden.

"You hear about the shootings, but you don't hear about the aftermath. It's like you're killing 10 other people when you kill one. It's just slowly."

- Annette March-Grier, executive director of Roberta's House, a grief support center that borders on the Broadway East and Oliver neighborhoods.

Yet it's still a neighborhood in distress, one that reflects the reality for millions of children in high-crime cities like Boston, Detroit, and Newark, N.J. Upton/Druid Heights has one of the highest concentrations of poverty in Baltimore. According to the most recent comprehensive data from the city health department, homicides and non-fatal shootings were about twice the city average in 2011, and the life expectancy of residents was 63 years compared to 72 years citywide. So far this year, as the number of homicides citywide has passed the 200 mark, there have been seven shootings and five homicides, among a total of 665 crimes in the neighborhood, which covers about 170 blocks.

Many preschoolers at Little Flowers also experience violence firsthand. At least four times a week, just outside the door of her center, Hardy-Flowers said, she sees some kind of crime. One day, the staff couldn't leave because police were crouched behind the center's bus, conducting surveillance.
Impact of Violence on Children’s Brain

**Prefrontal Cortex**
Center of executive functions; regulates thought, emotions, and actions. Especially vulnerable to elevation of brain chemicals caused by stress.

**Amygdala**
Triggers emotional responses; detects whether a stimulus is threatening. Elevated cortisol levels caused by stress can affect activity.

**Hippocampus**
Center of short-term memory; connects emotion of fear to the context in which the threatening event occurs. Elevated cortisol levels caused by stress can affect growth and performance.

Illustration by Betsy Hayes. In Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Young Children's Learning and Development (2010).
Caution: Labels Create Stigma

- video
Caution: Labels Create Stigma
Trauma & HBCU Students

- Many of our students have lived in redlined, disinvested Black communities with increased exposure to violence.
- Some students may have experienced a traumatic event or will experience one in the course of their time spent on campus.
- Many are heavy users of social media and thereby will have greater exposure to disturbing images & videos that can induce race-based trauma.
Providing Trauma-Informed Care for Our Students

- Safety
- Trustworthiness & Transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice, and choice
- Cultural, historical, and gender issues

SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach
Self-Care Tips in the Age of #BlackLivesMatter

- 1) It’s ok not to watch the latest video of brutality against people of color
- 2) take a break from trying to educate everyone about race and racism and from engaging with racist trolls online
- 3) Get away from the computer altogether and connect with nature
- 4) Create something (i.e. draw, paint, arts & craft)
Self-Care Tips in the Age of #BlackLivesMatter

- 5) It’s okay to feel sad, angry, or cry.
- 6) Watch funny movies or comedy skits.
- 7) Human touch reduces stress & anxiety.
- 8) Physical & spiritual activity.
- 9) Sleep well and eat well.
- 10) Reach out for help if you need it.

From “How Black people can emotionally protect themselves in the age of #BlackLivesMatter” by Karen Attiah, Washington Post
References

- SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative. (2014). SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. SAMHSA.
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