Trauma and its effects in the juvenile justice system

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Trauma and complex posttraumatic outcomes

- Early onset
- Repetitive
- Relational
- Acts of commission
  - Sexual, physical, psychological/emotional
- Acts of omission
  - Neglect, disattunment, non support
- Revictimization
- Social marginalization

Trauma in forensic settings

- Elevated child abuse and adult traumas in forensic settings
  - In most studies, youth involved in juvenile justice settings have a 70-90% likelihood of at least one major trauma
  - In one study (Abram et al, 2013)
    - over 90 percent of youth in detention had experienced at least one trauma,
    - 84 percent experienced more than one trauma,
    - Over 55 percent reported being exposed to trauma six or more times

Complex posttraumatic outcomes

- Anxiety, depression, anger
- Posttraumatic stress
- Emotional dysregulation
- Negative relational and self schema
- Avoidance responses
  - Dissociation
  - Distress reduction behaviors, including SIB
  - Substance abuse
  - Suicidality

Diagnoses often confused with complex trauma

- Conduct disorder
- Borderline personality disorder
- Antisocial personality disorder
- Bipolar Affective Disorder
- ADHD

Development of maladaptive behavior

- Imbalance between:
  - Triggerable attachment/trauma-related distress
    - Anger, anxiety, self-hatred

  AND

  - Inadequate emotional regulation
- Often in the context of identity/self-reference issues

Problematic behaviors

- Distress reduction behaviors
  - Self-injury
  - Problematic sexual behavior
  - Bulimic behaviors
  - "Impulsive" aggression
  - "Impulsive" suicidality
  - Other risky behavior
- Substance abuse
- Vulnerability to gangs, victimization, exploitation via prostitution

Criminality in particular

- Alienation by social marginalization
- Long-term effects of child maltreatment
  - Triggering (within PTSD or irrespective)
  - Source attribution errors
  - Anger
  - Inadequate distress tolerance/regulation
  - Modelling for aggression
- Exacerbation by substance abuse

Trauma-informed care

- To intervene in trauma-related inmate behaviors
  - To deescalate problematic events
  - For humanitarian reasons (symptom reduction)
  - To provide treatment that may reduce future offending

Trauma-informed care

- Screen for trauma history and its symptoms
- Understand the impact of trauma generally and in prison environments
  - Anger, aggression, passivity, self-injury, suicide, hypersensitivity, limited coping responses
- Be sensitive to trauma triggers
  - Authority, seemingly arbitrary rules, restricted movement, discipline, danger, chaos, lack of privacy, pat downs and strip searches

Trauma-informed care

- Solutions beyond physical control/ discipline
  - Assessment of operating conditions in confrontation or crisis
    - Motivation for behavior
  - Deescalation
  - Negotiation
  - Reduce or remove triggering aspects of environment
  - Teaching emotional regulation skills, anger management, trigger identification

Impact on Decision-makers

- Decision-makers/commissioners repeatedly exposed to
  - Impact statements/interviews from victims and their families
  - Dealing with individuals who have committed violent crimes, and descriptions of the crimes themselves
  - Parole suitability decisions in context of lengthy incarceration, conflicting information
    - Crimes vs. inmate psychological issues, trauma history
    - Protection of public vs. possible positive impacts of parole
- Need for structured debriefing, organizational support

Suggested readings

Briere, J. 2019). *Treating risky and compulsive behavior in trauma survivors.* NY: Guilford.

Briere, J., & Lanktree, C.B. (2013). *Integrative treatment of complex trauma for adolescents (ITCT-A): A guide for the treatment of multiply-traumatized youth, 2nd edition.* Los Angeles, CA: USC Adolescent Trauma Training Center, National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (Available at no cost at *attc.usc.edu)*

Briere, J., & Scott, C. (2015). Complex trauma in adolescents and adults: Effects and treatment. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 38*, 515-27.