Pathways linking trauma and ill health

www.lucyaphramor.com

Talk given at: "Trauma Informed Services – What Next?: Trauma resulting from Gender Based Violence - Putting Theory Into Practice. 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Highland Council, Inverness
By Lucy Aphramor RD PhD

Health, Health Behaviours and Trauma

- Lifestyle change
- Diet and exercise
- Fatness and thinness
- Resilience
- Social determinants: ACEs, trauma
- Moral response?

Physiology and After-Effects of Trauma

- Difficulty forming growth-enhancing relationships
- Shame and lack of self-worth
- Disturbed sleep patterns
- Abnormal pain perception
- Disturbed eating patterns
- Altered endocrine cycles
- Alienation from the body
- Substance abuse
- Self-harm
- Genito-urinary problems
- Avoids medical examinations

- Chronic pelvic pain
- Difficulty decision-making
- Gastrointestinal illness
- Dental problems
- Chronic fatigue
- Sexual and reproductive problems
- Headache and migraine
- Chronic pain
- Somatization
- High risk behaviour
- Increased risk of violence and violation
“Traditional explanations focus on genetic and lifestyle causes, but increasing evidence is coming to support the view that type 2 diabetes is primarily a disease of material and social deprivation associated with poverty and marginalization.”

Raphael D et al. Type 2 Diabetes: Poverty, Priorities and Policy. The Social Determinants of the Incidence and Management of Type 2 Diabetes. Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management and School of Nursing, 2010
Lifestyle behaviour change models:

- Do not and cannot accommodate trauma
- Reinforce and hide trauma and inequity
- Prevent appropriate care being received
- Block progress and transformation
- Ignore vast amounts of data
- Enable the continuation of toxic power
- Shame and oppress

Biochemistry of Discrimination

- Activation of SNS and HPA axis
- ↑ cortisol + inhibition of sex steroids + GH → insulin resistance
- ↑ cortisol = ↑ cholesterol
- ? Disrupt balance of leptin and neuropeptideY
- HT from parallel activation of SNS/insulin

Internalized racism, body fat distribution, and abnormal fasting glucose among African-Caribbean women in Dominica, West Indies.

J Natl Med Assoc 2002 94(3):143-8

- High IR → larger waist circumference, =BMI
- Significant relationship between IR and abnormal [fasting glucose]
“Much of the world’s disease burden results from a few largely preventable risk factors, most of which are related to diet and lifestyle” (p.2)

“Mortality and morbidity from chronic diseases are greatest in those who are least advantaged, much of it attributable to adverse diet and lifestyle influences” (p.4)

… there is a simple confusion that tends to arise whenever we are presented with a complex array of new facts and perceptions

• However, when the mind is trying to escape the awareness of conflict, there is a very different kind of self-sustaining confusion, in which one’s deep intention is really to avoid perceiving the fact, rather than to sort it out and make it clear.

David Bohm, On Creativity, P 21

In Scotland’s Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan: A Healthier Future

To make a meaningful impact, we need to tackle the factors that encourage us to make unhealthy choices. Food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt is widely available, and heavily promoted – in fact, UK consumer expenditure on price promotions is the highest in Europe. Evidence suggests that, overall, the food and drink provided out of home is skewed towards less healthy options.

It’s clear our plans to tackle the Scottish diet need to be ambitious and decisive.

Fat phobia
Body shame
Self distrust
Confusion
Self blame
Guilt
Classism
Neoliberalism

• In the end she said, well, if you’re not going to cooperate, there’s no point in coming, and I just felt that she was part of Big Brother, everybody was on my case and, you know, and I just thought, well, if that’s how you feel, stuff it. I didn’t want to come, anyway, you know.

• I used to think I was nobody because I was fat.
RCT Evidence on Dieting


“the studies do not provide consistent evidence that dieting results in significant health improvements, regardless of weight change...The benefits of dieting are simply too small and the potential harms of dieting are too large for it to be recommended as a safe and effective treatment ...

“Although these were the best studies available according to the principles of evidence based medicine, many did not fulfil its requirements.... These flaws bias the results and can exaggerate the effects..... Rather than showing what does work ... research to date shows us clearly what does not (Jain BMJ 2006)

• "Weight cycling is a common condition as only a minority of people who lose weight through weight management interventions are able to maintain their weight loss.115,116 ... Weight cycling is a risk factor for all-cause mortality and cardiovascular mortality (hazard ratio (HR) approximately 1.8 for both).118,119

When someone explains health outcomes as being primarily a result of ‘lifestyle behaviours’ and/or weight they are calspaining.

Among other problems, calspaining is inherently racist and sexist as its deep assumptions are that experiences of gendered and racialised injustice do not count as relevant in the health conversation.

When should I use an approach, like attempted weight conversion, that ignores trauma?

When should I use an approach that shames and oppresses?
When should I use an approach that disregards ‘gold standard’ RCT data?

Never

Based on Politics of Health Group slide regarding healthcare for migrants

We may feel more comfortable educating young girls about the perils of dieting than we are about trying to achieve social change necessary to reduce physical and sexual victimization — yet perhaps the latter will be more effective than the former in reducing the incidence of eating disorders. 

Levine and Smolak 1998

Experiencing trauma, poverty and marginalization and seeking help in a culture that silences trauma, are the main modifiable risk factors for type 2 diabetes.

Truth is not Academic

“The repossession by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers.”

Adrienne Rich

Trauma-ignored practice is trauma-reinforced
• Health requires a fair and safe (and comprehensible) world

• The goal of evidence-based practice stands in the way of this

• Praxis-based action, which necessarily engages with all types of relevant evidence, is needed instead
Empowerment refers to a meaningful sense of one’s power-from-within. Lifestyle change falls under the rubric of empowerment, which relates to self-care. Becoming aware of how stigma, trauma and structural factors shape lives (consciousness raising) can help people make sense of their experiences and increase feelings of empowerment.

Empowerment - a process that involves systemic social change and communal healing, with action preceded by collective consciousness raising. It does not stop at self-esteem. It is not about compliance or coercion or tokenistic engagement.

- Ampowerment fosters empowerment through links with a critical awareness of power-over, healing, and increased capacity to engage in and influence power-with relationships.

We can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods.

*Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas*
Well Now promotes health-gain (health-justice) and body respect for all.

- It does this by fostering compassionate self-care, integrating the bigger picture of health, and using a teaching style that enhances deep change.

“I think it’s amazing in the way that it’s made me more confident, made me love myself, yes it has. Alright, I’m not that intelligent in the way of reading but I do have good points and things I can do.

Nobody had ever done that [listened without judging] before and that was a relief such as almost made me cry really

“It is a grave responsibility not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe”

Audre Lorde
Acknowledgements – with thanks for support to ~