

Afghan Asylum Screening and the Trauma - Informed Approach

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Agenda

- What is trauma?
- Compassion exercise
- The trauma -informed approach and asylum screening
- Vicarious trauma and self -care

What Is Trauma?

Defining trauma

“Individual trauma results from 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.”

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

The Effects of Trauma

- Physical: nervous energy, lack of energy, upset stomach, dizziness, muscle tension, headaches
- Emotional: fear, loss of trust, inability to feel safe, emotional distance, intense or extreme feelings, sadness, grief, depression, loss of self-esteem
- Behavioral: becoming withdrawn, startling easily, avoiding places or situations, sleep disturbances
- Mental: flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, difficulty concentrating, difficulty making decisions, difficulty recollecting memories

Trauma and Memory

A traumatic incident triggers the survival response.

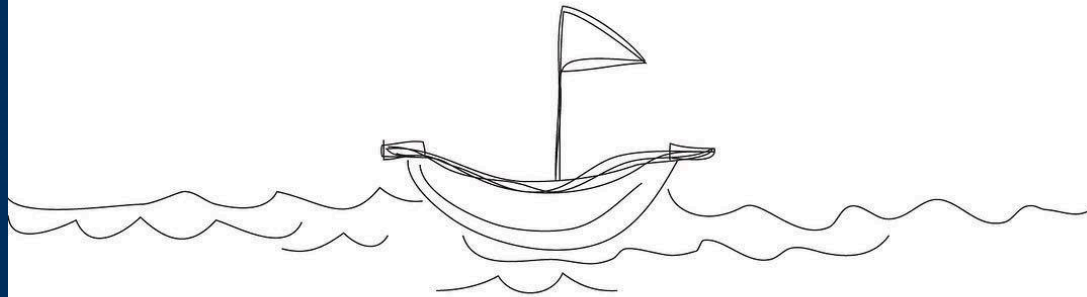
- She might focus on some details and not others
- She might “check out” or dissociate
- She might have trouble remembering details later, or accessing the emotions she felt at the time of the traumatic incident
- Traumatic brain injury can affect the memory

What possible kinds of trauma has your client faced?

- Gender-based violence: domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, forced marriage, and other types of violence
- Living in conditions of war, occupation, political upheaval
- Evacuation, leaving home country, separation from family and loved ones, loss of home and belongings
- Possible stay at military bases in U.S.

they have no idea what it's like
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never finding home again
to have your entire life
split between two lands and
become the bridge between two countries

immigrant - rupi kaur



Compassion Exercise

The Trauma - Informed Approach

Assumptions of the Trauma Informed Approach: The Four R's -

- Realize what trauma is and how it can affect people
- Recognize the signs of trauma
- Respond by applying the trauma-informed approach
- Resist retraumatization

The Trauma - Informed Approach: Six Principles

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

Safety

- Take steps to promote her physical and psychological safety
- Are you in a private place and able to speak freely? If not, let's consider delaying this conversation.
- Can we safely call this phone number, send messages to this email, and send mail to this address? Is it ok to leave voicemail messages on this line?
- Safety is defined by the client.

Responding to Client Distress

- Speak calmly, slowly, sensitively
- Be comfortable with silence
- Paraphrase
- Validate
- Pay attention to safety
- Respond with resiliency strategies:
 - identify existing coping strategies
 - offer new coping strategies
 - encourage social supports

Trustworthiness and transparency

- Introduce yourself clearly.
- Be clear about what you can do and how long you will be working with this client.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, offer to find out or refer her to someone who can answer.
- Make no guarantees about case outcomes.
- Refrain from asking her to recall trauma unless necessary.

Peer support and mutual self - help

- Peers are others with lived experiences of trauma.
- May also include family members and community members who are caregivers in recovery.

Collaboration and mutuality

- Consider power differentials in the situation, and work to level power differences.
- Explain the process clearly.
- Ask for consent before beginning.
- Provide choices whenever possible.
- Offer opportunities to pause or stop.
- Thank her for her time and for sharing her story.

Empowerment, voice, and choice

- Avoid making assumptions about what she wants. Instead, offer options and ask her.
- Explain that the purpose of this session is to screen for eligibility for asylum. Ask whether she would like to apply for asylum. Evaluate alternatives.
- If client discloses trauma, offer resiliency cues. Who supported you in that difficult time? What helped you to make that choice?

Cultural, historical and gender issues

- Focus on the individual
- Avoid making assumptions
- Ask when uncertain
- Prioritize learning and keep an open mind
- Release cultural stereotypes and biases. Take the initiative to learn about cultural context.

Historical issues

- Pre-1978: Stable government
- 1978-1989: Communist coup and Soviet invasion
- 1990s-2001: Taliban takeover and Afghan civil war
- 2001-August 2021: US war in Afghanistan

Cultural issues

- Diversity: 20 ethnic groups; 41 languages. The majority ethnic group is Pashtun. In the past 20 years, opportunities increased for all ethnic groups to raise their voices. This resulted in increased tensions.
- High-context culture: Focus on facial expressions and gestures; slower to build trust; reluctance to disagree openly
- Somaticization of psychology/emotions
- Diversity in practice of Islam

Gender Issues

- Provide gender-responsive services. Men may prefer male service providers and women may prefer female service providers.
- Gender dynamics: laws and cultural norms regarding treatment of women differ in the United States and Afghanistan. Seek to understand individual experiences, needs, belief systems.
- A survivor of gender-based violence may be uncomfortable discussing her story with a male interpreter or attorney. Confirm client preference before the appointment and do your best to accommodate her preference. Seek consent or offer to reschedule.

Working with Interpreters

- Confirm client's preferred language before scheduling an interpreter.
- Afghanistan's two official languages are Pashto and Dari. Ethnic Pashtuns speak Pashto and often also speak Dari well; those who speak Dari often do not speak Pashto fluently. Recall that there are inter-ethnic tensions between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns. Check in about client's comfort with interpreter.
- The Afghan diaspora in the United States remains small. People may know each other or have common acquaintances.
- Do your best to find an interpreter who shares linguistic, ethnic and gender traits with client. Be flexible and creative.
- Budget twice as much time when working with interpreters.

Vicarious Trauma and Self - Care

Receiving a trauma story with openness and empathy impacts you.

- Respond in the moment: deep breaths, soft gaze, feet flat on the floor, relax shoulders, rub a stone, mold play-doh, moisturize your hands, butterfly hug, 5-4-3-2-1 sensory exercise
- Take care of yourself afterward: wash hands, water a plant, take a walk, give a hug, sip tea, journal, meditate, list gritudes

Questions?

Use as needed

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