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Introduction

Have you ever heard the statement "Never judge a book by its cover "? Often as humans, we develop our perception of people which hinders of from getting to know the individual personally. No one person is the same and each of us comes with a history or a story to tell. We are different and our experiences and challenges form the person we become during our lifespan. Some of our experiences can be developed from childhood or adulthood as life changes. Some of these experiences can be traumatic which leads to some trauma or childhood adverse experiences. The famous David Kolb described experiential learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combinations of grasping and transforming the experience.” (Kolb, 1984). As we live, we learn, and we adapt to change. Hence as humans, we should demonstrate empathy to others because we will never know what one individual is feeling and challenges, they have survived. Learning is essential because it is the transaction between a person and their environment. Thus, if an individual encounters hostile treatment, violence, abuse, neglect, etc. the child will learn from their environment that is okay to be betrayed which leads to the manifestation of “disorganized attachment patterns, distorted cognitive schema, boundary violations, and emotional dysregulation (Levenson, 2017)". Therefore, as service workers, practitioners must never judge a client whether mandated or voluntarily. We must establish a positive relationship and develop trust so that the client can voluntarily share information about their past trauma. As trauma has no boundaries it can affect anyone at any time therefore it is important that as people develop and grow so does our research and theory to effectively cater to the client’s needs. Trauma has played an important part in a person's view of self and the world; therefore, social workers must focus on Trauma-informed practices or services that will better facilitate the healing process of a client.

This essay will address the definition of trauma-informed practice and how social workers use the principles of trauma-informed practice to facilitate healing that leads to self-efficacy, self-determination, and autonomy over one's life.

Trauma-Informed Practices

Trauma is a widespread illness that does not pick who will get affected but has the potential to affect anyone at any time. Trauma has no boundaries; it is best seen in results that lead to violence, abuse, neglect, loss, disaster, war, or emotionally harmful experiences. People are affected by trauma and carry their trauma hidden in some secret door within their cognitive, mental, and emotional spaces. Therefore, it is important to understand the definition of trauma. “Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being”. ([Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, 2012](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207192/), p. 2) (Services, 2012). When social workers or service workers concurrence trauma, it is not the objective to deal with the past trauma but for practitioners to be sensitive to the client's situation. Trauma can rob the client of their sense of self therefore it’s important to highlight the client’s strengths and develop some form of positivity since their experience may have a few negative impacts on them. Whether the client is mandated or voluntary it is important to normalize and validate the client's feelings and let them know that their thoughts and feelings are valued. With validation from a social worker clients can better analyze their present situation and conclude how their past can affect their choices or decisions in the forthcoming future.

Even though social workers are the experts in their field of study, the client is the expert in their own lives. Trauma affects everyone differently therefore social workers need to demonstrate a duty of care and social work code of ethics to everyone. "Trauma-informed social workers rely on their knowledge about trauma to respond to clients in ways that convey respect and compassion, honor self-determination, and enable the rebuilding of healthy interpersonal skills and coping strategies". (Levenson, 2017) Even though the objective is for clients to be the experts in their lives, frequently clients are not willing to experience change. Persons who experience trauma have taught themselves function ways to function in this dysfunctional environment. Thus Trauma- Inform practice is to” develop their capacities for managing distress and for engaging in more effective daily functioning”

The trauma-informed practices focus on some key principles that lead clients to self-discovery these are safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment these principles relate to social workers' core competencies and procedures which are intake, assessment, engagement, treatment, and termination. As social workers interact with clients who have survived a traumatic experience will most likely demonstrate negative behavior or reserve behaviors which is a form of coping mechanism for affected clients. Persons who have been exposed to trauma have learnt skills independently to hide or control their hurt therefore the social worker has to use trauma-informed practice and social worker core principles to scaffold the client to autonomy and self-healing. Trauma Informed Practice aims for "social justice driven and closely linked to advocacy work in that it is about “understanding the effects of trauma and what can be done to help mitigate those effects, while at the same time working to transform the conditions that allow for violence in our world” (Joshua Wilson, 2015).

Trauma-Inform Principle: Safety correlates with the Intake Process for Social Work.

As social workers start their intake process, we should be welcoming while facilitating a positive environment by ensuring client comfort within the space. When handling a client who has suffered from trauma they can get triggers of the past by simple pictures or colors. Therefore, asking or viewing body language can give the social worker an Insite into the client's comfort level. The first phase in Trauma Inform Practice speaks about safety and safety must be established so the client can feel a sense of security. Social workers must protect their environment from hazards and danger in the space such as scissors, mental trays, etc., that can cause harm to clients or social workers. Most clients who experience trauma may have never felt safe in an environment therefore it’s important to establish safety for clients. The trauma-informed practice focuses on how they can be advocates for the voiceless or persons who demonstrate neglect, hurt, war, loss, abuse, or violent misconduct. In essence, Safety should be consistent, predictable, and non-shaming. As social workers, no one case is the same hence preparing a safe and comforting environment is Utmost important.

Trauma-Inform Practice: Trust correlates with Assessment from social work procedures.

Safety alongside trust work closely together because safety allows humans to develop a sense of trust. Psychologist Erikson highlights that trust is the earliest relationship a baby has with its caregiver which establishes a positive and healthy relationship. When trust is broken it allows the person to feel neglect, lack of love, and mistrust. A person who experiences mistrust can take a long period to regain trust because trust should be earned by what is given. Hence as a [[1]](#footnote-1)social worker it is vital that a duty of care to the client. Social workers should establish their purpose to the client by being as transparent as possible. Social work should highlight the importance of confidentiality and state the only reason confidentiality will be broken unless there is harm to oneself or someone else. Social workers should aim to establish a professional relationship and clearly state the reason for their service. Establishing the goals of the service will decrease anticipation and uncertainty for the client. According to Jill Levenson “when a client’s basic needs for safety, respect, and acceptance in the helping relationship are understood, an atmosphere of trust can be established”. (Levenson, 2017) . A trusting relationship develops over time hence social workers and clients should give each other time to allow trust to be built. When trust is established, the client will be more comfortable sharing experiences and will be more receptive to change. During the social work assessment process, the client will demonstrate some level of trust in the social worker since the social worker is providing a service and the client believes that the social worker is giving them the best service the client requires. Establishing trust is the beginning step to a meaningful professional relationship.

Trauma-Inform Practice: Choice Correlates with Engagement from Social Work Process

Clients who have experienced some trauma whether it was indirect or direct the client have developed coping strategies like fight or flight response. Social workers should highlight that the clients are the ones who are in control of their lives. Allowing the client to see a sense of control and autonomy. In the engagement process, the client has a choice to choose how they respond to a stimulus or an uncomfortable situation. Many clients may not know how to make an independent decision because of their trauma which may have affected their cognitive and behavioral ability. For clients to see change they will have to take ownership in the process and be actively involved in their treatment.

Clients will have to accept that they are the writer of their story and that they can control their responses instead of trying to control others and their responses. A newfound self-determination and self-love can change the client’s outlook on life. Trauma-informed Practice highlights this strategy as a choice and uses the trauma-informed method that focuses on the holistic development of the person and their trauma. Many survivors of trauma have felt defeated therefore discovery of a new autonomy will decrease how clients react to any future traumas.

Trauma- Inform Practice: Treatment Correlates with Collaboration from Social Work Process

Survivors of Trauma have a way to be submissive to instructions because of fear that if they reject a given request they will be hurt or neglected. Social workers must use trauma-informed practices so that the client is aware that they can reject anything that makes them uncomfortable. There must be shared power between the client and the worker so that it gives the survivors some autonomy over themselves. The client needs to be aware that they are the creator of their roadmap to their destination. According to Levenson “By understanding each client’s life history and cultural background, and by allowing clients to participate in determining the course of the intervention, social workers can engage clients and dislodge barriers to change” (Levenson, 2017). When the client is a part of the decision process it allows the treatment to be more meaningful and personal to the client, which in return gives the client some pride and accomplishment.

Change is possible for a person who has been exposed to trauma however the trauma has placed many negative perceptions on the affected person. Hence during the treatment stage, it is important to start with positive characteristics of the survivor. The survivors may not see anything positive about themselves therefore the social worker needs to highlight one positive attribute. We must highlight positive attributes or behaviors so that we can change the negative experience to more of a positive approach. Psychologist B. F, Skinner speaks about operant conditioning theory where if you praise positive behavior, the positive behavior will recur. It is vital that the client sees positive things about themselves and gradually sees some change will occur. The client needs to see how they can take a negative and turn it into something positive and analyze the change that allows them to experience autonomy. This analysis plays a crucial role because it will allow the client to discover self-efficacy. “self-efficacy is assigned a central rule, for analyzing changes achieved fearful and avoidant behavior’. (Bandura, 1977)

Trauma-Inform Practice: Empowerment Correlates with Termination from the Social Work Process

Within life itself, there is a beginning and end, and so is a relationship. A survivor of trauma will achieve their goals thus the professional relationship between the social worker and the client will have to come to an end. This process should be handled with care and empathy since trust and relationships have been established. Survivors have been neglected and abundant therefore social workers must end the relationship on a welcoming and positive note. Which will eliminate the resurfacing of abundant feelings for the client. When a client has finished treatment there should be some level of empowerment. Clients should find a new self–efficacy and power. According to the Oxford Dictionary Empowerment is defined as "the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's right". At the end of the treatment, the client should be able to reflect on their journey and feel equipped to overcome any foreseen trauma.

Conclusion

Working with survivors of trauma, social workers may adjust some boundaries to meet the client's specific needs. The goal is for the client to become more efficacy for oneself. This process can be overwhelming but as a service worker, we must care for those who can't speak and care for themselves. As a social worker, it is our principle to demonstrate integrity, competence, dignity, social justice, service, and a human relationship. We need to give our clients tools and strategies that can create or foster self-determination and self-autonomy. Persons who have encountered trauma have a long-term effect some people hide those traumas while others demonstrate it. Therefore, everyone needs to be mindful of how we judge a person's reaction or statement within a private or public space. Trauma has no boundaries for anyone because it can happen at any time. Therefore, people need to demonstrate compassion to each other. Trauma-informed practice allows us to use a more gentle and understanding approach to get an understanding of how trauma can affect the whole person. According to an article Trauma – Inform “emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone and aims to empower individuals to re-establish control of their lives. Trauma-informed practice recognizes the prevalence of trauma and its impact on the emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing of people”.

As social workers, we must use trauma-informed because it correlates to social work values and ethics. A social worker aims to care for people and all their necessary needs to survive. Maslow hierarchy of needs highlights that humans need all five needs to feel safe and nurtured. Hence a social worker must ensure that a human are getting access to all needs to facilitate self-actualization and acceptance.

As people and time change so do the theory and practice. To better facilitate changes, we must recognize any problems that are dominant within our society. With the growth of information and practices it is the goal to see issues that affect human beings decrease so that we can have a more functional society. The beginning of functionality is to decrease the level of traumas so that we can create a better holistic approach for a better tomorrow.

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1. (Knight, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)