Understanding the Role of Maternal Trauma in Family Engagement and Child Welfare

Charleston Child Trauma Conference 2019

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Objectives

1. Examine the impact of high doses of adversity and stress on the developing brain and body.
2. Learn from the lived experiences of Women of Color and articulate how maternal trauma can impact attachment and parenting styles.
3. Understand and articulate the potential impact of maternal trauma on family engagement in child-centered clinical services.

Community Meeting: Creating “Sanctuary”

- What is your name?
- What is your professional role/ within what organization or system?
- What is your goal for our time together?
- If you need help, who will you ask?

Racial Literacy: CLC-B/E (Stevenson, 2015)

- Calculate 1-10, how intense is the feeling?
- Locate Where in your body do you notice the stress?
- Communicate What is your self-talk?
- Breathe & Exhale Engage the parasympathetic Nervous System

Safe Space

Presence
Expect to experience discomfort
Speak your truth
Expect and accept a lack of closure

ROAD MAP

- National public health crisis
- Pennsylvania state context
- Community partner
- Study design and methodology
- Emergent results and findings
- Implications and next steps
Reproductive Justice Framework

Fundamental human right for a person to decide: If, when, and how to have children and to parent those children in safe ways, in safe communities with safe providers, under safe conditions under their own control, with autonomy and consent, free from coercion.

(Black Mammas Matter Alliance)
What Is Trauma?

“Trauma is an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person’s capacity to cope.”

(Rice & Groves, 2005, p. 3)

ACE Pyramid

Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan
Chronic Stress and Birthing Women

- Stress contributes to both immune and endocrine system dysregulation and that prenatal stress can impact offspring well into adulthood.\(^7\)
- Immune and endocrine dysregulation contribute to stress-related increases in premature labor and poor birth outcomes.\(^8\)
- The impact of ‘weathering,’ health deterioration and chronic traumatic stress among communities of color is indicated, particularly when considering the role of system racism.\(^17\)

A Mother’s Unresolved Trauma...

...may interfere with her ability to *sensitively respond to her infant,*

*affecting the development of attachment in her own child,*

and potentially **contributing to the intergenerational transmission of trauma.**
National Public Health Crisis

- Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes than white women in the United States.  
- Compared to other high-income countries, the United States has one of the highest maternal mortality rates, despite global trends of decreasing maternal deaths.

Pennsylvania State Crisis

- PA Maternal Mortality is three times as high for Black women (27.2 per 100,000 births) compared to white women (8.7 per 100,000 births).
- Pennsylvania ranks 21st among states with highest mortality rates across the country.

Racial Health Disparities

- Refer to the "systematic, plausibly avoidable health differences adversely affecting socially disadvantaged groups." (Braverman)
- Racialized health disparities associated with childbirth are present irrespective of other factors like income, insurance status or education level.
- These inequities have been linked to multiple factors including persistent marginalization, oppression, and racism across multiple systems directed at minority women.
Community Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State of Residence</th>
<th>County of Interest</th>
<th>City of Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of People in Residence</td>
<td>12,800,000</td>
<td>516,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of population by Race (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>7.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>7.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Median Household Income ($) | For all residents | 56,907 | 92,407 | 36,212 |
| Poverty Rate (%) | | 12.9 | 7.35 | 31.5 |
| Median Property Value ($) | | 174,100 | 247,700 | 123,000 |
| Home Ownership Status (%) | Housing units occupied by owner | | | |

Study Design and Methodology

- **Research Framework:** Critical Qualitative Inquiry

**DATA COLLECTION PROCESS**

- N= 7, 15 interviews, approximately 2 hours each
- Interviews conducted in participant’s home
- PI and research team coding interviews
- Descriptive coding, Linguistic coding, Conceptual coding

**RQ1:** What are the lived experiences of young Women of Color who are participating in a Maternal and Child Health Home Visiting Program in Southeastern Pennsylvania.
Table 2. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant’s Age</td>
<td>21-28 years</td>
<td>23.4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>1-3 children</td>
<td>2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at first pregnancy</td>
<td>14-24 years</td>
<td>17.2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at first live birth</td>
<td>17-24 years</td>
<td>19.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at first sexual encounter</td>
<td>5-16 years</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at first parental separation</td>
<td>7 months – 4 years</td>
<td>2.6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study Results

Emergent themes

Reproductive Health Control, Access, IPV

I tried to secretly go get an abortion. [...] we went to the abortion clinic to get an abortion pill. I took it, and I laid on the floor for like the whole week, waiting and waiting and waiting for something to happen. And I bled and I thought it was over [...] and I took another test and I was still pregnant. And I was like, "Oh my God."
CHILDHOOD TRAUMA
NEGLECT, ATTACHMENT DISRUPTION, RESILIENCE

I've been through a lot [...] Like I've been molested. I don't let my daughter around guys. [...] I pride myself on being a good mom because most of my time, if I'm not working to take care of them, I'm with them. I make a lot of sacrifices when it comes to my time with them, because I wanna work. I don't wanna have to ask somebody for anything. I don't need to depend on anybody.

NATURAL DISASTERS
SURVIVAL, POVERTY, DAILY STRUGGLES

We're just in the midst of a natural disaster. Natural disasters you have no control over. I have no control that he's not making enough money to pay the bills. He has no control of me not making enough money to pay the bills. [...] I'm just trying to make it through. [...] We live life, go through chaos, you're trying to find a job, you're trying to make money.

NATURAL DISASTERS
SURVIVAL, POVERTY, DAILY STRUGGLES

I don't know, like I make things work, I do. Because one thing after the next just always comes. Like I was out of my house for what, like three months, because of mold, and I came home, and my heat didn't work. I've been making it work, trying to struggle to take care of three kids, work, pay a babysitter daily, and try to spend time with them.

TRAUMA and RESILIENCE

I was basically a single mom. Did everything on my own, and I was scared for the simple fact that, with me coming from the molestation, I didn't want him touching my daughter. [...] I had to like grow up more, and mature more. [...] I learned from that relationship was to not let anybody take advantage of you. I'm strong, stronger than what I thought I am.

TRAUMA and RESILIENCE

When I first ended up pregnant with my son, it wasn't necessarily planned, but it wasn't an accident either. My boyfriend at the time, which is my husband now, we pretty much knew where life was going. We were participating in unprotected sex. When I found out I was pregnant, neither both of us, one of me or my boyfriend at the time, we weren't discouraged, we weren't upset. We just knew that we needed to prepare.

TRANSACTIONAL NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS:
CARRY LIGHTLY

If you're carrying baggage around, don't you think your load is gonna be heavy? Carry lightly. Just get rid of it. It's tough, because I think a lot more women in the city of Coatesville put more effort trying to get the relationship back when they know they could do it on their own.
TRANSACTIONAL NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS:
CARRY LIGHTLY

I live each and every one of my days as if he [husband] is not gonna be there the next day.

I love my husband. I cherish him being here, but even with him, I want him to learn how to be stable with the kids if I were to leave today or tomorrow.

TRANSACTIONAL NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS:
LOVE AT A DISTANCE

But till this day, I love her at a distance. I don't have that mommy relationship. I take my kids to visit her but they do not call her grandmother. They call her pumpkin pie which is like a nickname. That's only a way of bypassing the real.

ISOLATION & PROTECTION

When I would go to my mother-in-law's house, I would sit up in her bedroom the whole day and they would question me, what are you doing? I'm nursing. I gotta pump. I gotta pump. But really I didn't want to come out. I didn't want anybody to have a hold of my son, nothing.

LOOKING FOR LOVE

I used to think she thought I was a hood chick from the city that didn't have no standards. And all I was doing was looking for was love.

BIRTHING EXPERIENCE
MICROAGGRESSIONS, IDENTITY, POSTPARTUM MENTAL HEALTH

When I gave birth to my son, she was mad at me because I was in labor, I called my sister telling her I was in labor, and he was working. She's mad at me that I said I didn't want them to take me to the hospital, I wanted to go home and wait for my husband. The reason why I wanted to wait, is because this is our first child, I want to deliver with him, to be there.
MICROAGGRESSIONS, POSTPARTUM

I think it was more so how they were treating me. I was like, "The last doctor just told me that doesn't really run in African American babies, so why are [doing that]? I'm trying to feel as comfortable as possible." I don't know, it was difficult. I think I started to replay those things in my head later as to why I went through postpartum.

BIRTHING EXPERIENCE, LABOR PAIN

I was in pain, but I was still smiling. They were like, "You must not be in that much pain, because you're still beautiful." I'm like, "No, I'm in pain." I pretty much stayed there. I got up to eight centimeters dilated and couldn't take it no more. I don't even really remember from three centimeters to eight centimeters because the pain was so crazy.

LESSONS FOR PROVIDERS

None of those goals meant anything to me... and not once did they stop and try and work with me on [my goals]. I didn't feel like I was focused on. They didn't focus on me.

INDIVIDUAL APPROACH

...there was a lady named [AA social worker] and she was like a mom... she basically said to me like, "You got to put your best foot forward. A closed mouth won't be fed." I kind of knew that because [social worker] is from my background. She lived where my parents lived in the projects. So, she's like "I know why your Mom did the things that she did. It wasn't because she wanted to live that lifestyle. She had mouths to feed. She had eight kids to feed." And what's the best way to do, sell drugs, make money fast to bring money in.

GIVE THEM MORE LOVING

They could've educated me more. I feel like they need to wrap their arms around the younger moms, give them more loving than making them feel like they're not good enough.

RACE AND PLACE MATTER

...
RACE AND PLACE MATTER

Like looking at [AA social worker], I didn’t have my sisters when I was growing up although I had my sisters, I didn’t have them to talk to. The joy of seeing another woman happy to see my daughter or going to different programs knowing that I won’t be judged or looked at differently. I’m no different then she is. So, it was definitely a life changer.

RACE AND PLACE MATTER

Sometimes, I think talking about things like gender, ethnicity, race, can be difficult. Particularly when we look so different, too. We’re clearly not from the same cultural background, but I would really like to hear from you what those relationships mean to you, and how that all fits in, if you’re open to it.

Racial Literacy: CLC-B/E  
Stevenson, (2015)

| Calculate | 1-10, how intense is the feeling? |
| Locate    | Where in your body do you notice the stress? |
| Communicate | What is your self-talk? |
| Breathe & Exhale | Engage the parasympathetic Nervous System |

Implications and Impact

How do we approach the work?

Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (2016) defines privilege as the following:
- a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor
- special enjoyment of a good or exemption from an evil or burden
- a special opportunity to do something that makes you proud
- the advantage that wealthy and powerful people have over other people in a society

White Privilege

- Premised on the mistaken notion of individual meritocracy and destitution (that work, family values, and the like) rather than favoritism
- Deeply embedded in the structural, systemic, and cultural workings of U.S. society, and it operates within the cultural understanding that we are all protected society (p. 125)
Insight and Awareness

“Recognizing that you have privilege does not require feeling guilty for your privilege. Rather, it is an essential step toward understanding how that privilege might shape your views or negatively affect others, even unintentionally, and what steps we can take to break down barriers created.”

Implicit Bias

Implicit biases are pervasive. Everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality such as judges.

Implicit and explicit biases are related but distinct mental constructs. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.

Microaggressions

- Occur frequently in everyday situations
- Create uncertainty and anxiety in ethnic/racial minorities

1. Assumption about Citizenship color
2. Pervasive Racial Category color
3. Assumption about Intelligence, Competence or Status color
4. Police Colorblindness color
5. Criminality or Dangerousness color
6. Dental of an individual bias color
7. Myth of Meritocracy color
8. Reverse racism anxiety color

How does Racism impact mental health?

- PTSD (Perinatal et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2014)
- Stress (Clark et al., 2015, Burick & Sampi, 2015)
- Anxiety (Gott, Gorman-Murray, & Belin, 2011)
- Depression (Inaba & Kato, 2007; Torres et al., 2009)
- Substance use (Merrett et al., 2012)
- Alcohol abuse (Flumess et al., 2015, Hurd et al., 2014)
- Binge-eating (Harrison et al., 2010)
How does Racism impact mental health?

- Binge eating (Harrington et al., 2010)
- Severe psychological distress (Chae et al., 2011; Chao, Mallinckrodt, & Wei, 2012)
- Psychosis (Anglin et al., 2014; Janissen et al., 2003; Oh et al., 2014)
- Disability (Carter & Foryth, 2009)
- Suicide (O’Keefe et al., 2015; Hollingsworth et al., 2017)
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (Williams et al., 2017)

Next Steps

- Ongoing data collection, prolonged engagement
- Continuation of relationship building in community
- Legislative and policy impact
- Dissemination