

**Breaking the Silence:
Healing from Collective Trauma
Learning from Central and South
American cases**



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Introductions



☞ Objectives of this workshop:

- ☞ To define collective and community trauma
- ☞ To identify its signs & effects in our communities, environments, cultures, families
- ☞ To share stories of resilience and post traumatic growth.
- ☞ To visualize responses, and learn how to better live through, and mobilize, in the midst of or after trauma
- ☞ To learn skills & care strategies ('Coping & resilience mechanisms')

Program:

How do peoples and communities recover and reconstruct after collective traumatic experiences?

- ☞ In this workshop, we will draw from the Southern Cone of Latin America and Central American experiences of military dictatorship, political violence, civil war, authoritarianism and deep and growing socio-economic inequalities.
- ☞ What lessons so we learn from individuals and communities for survival, repair, community-building and growth after trauma?
- ☞ Words of wisdom, steps to mourning the losses, historical lessons for reconnecting and healing, directly from witness voices.

PLAN



- ☞ 1- What is Collective and Community Trauma
 - ☞ * Sharing Activity
- ☞ 2-How to recognize it/ effects?
 - ☞ *Sharing Activity
- ☞ 3- How to cope with trauma
 - ☞ * Sharing Activity
- ☞ 4-Strategies for fostering resilience, healing & Growth.
 - ☞ *Stories and Lessons from the community

PERSONAL INTRODUCTIONS



- ☞ Make a circle and introduce yourselves
- ☞ Say the name you want to go by here
- ☞ Say a word (a verb or a noun, for examples) of your choice that gives a glimpse of what brings you here

Setting up a Safe Space for Sharing

- ☞ Breathing
- ☞ Listening (active listening)
- ☞ Writing
- ☞ Sharing
- ☞ Telling Stories
- ☞ Drawing
- ☞ Learning, Exchanging
- ☞ Confidentiality of the participant members
- ☞ Comfort Zone/ Stepping out of comfort zone

I am... Yo soy.... 2 min

- ☞ Write 10 words that define you in order of appearance- do not censor yourself, do not overthink, just write the first thing that comes to mind (You will not be required to share)
- ☞ Escriba 10 palabras que la/lo definen por orden de aparición - sin censurarse ni pensar demasiado, simplemente escriba lo primero que se le ocurra (No se requiere que comparta o que escribió)

1. WHAT IS TRAUMA

Classic Definitions

- ☞ "Greek verb **titrosko** = pierce, damage or defeat.
- ☞ Normally refers to a highly **stressful** event.
- ☞ Can involve **physical damage** to the body caused by violence or other physical impact, e.g. an accident, aggression, political conflict, war
- ☞ Usually seen as an **emotional wound or shock to the psyche**, that can have long-lasting harmful effects.
- ☞ Feeling of utter **vulnerability** and helplessness
- ☞ Psychological trauma is usually defined as a psychic wound=>
- ☞ **It creates emotionally charged memories (it registers in memory)**
- ☞ "**Before and after**" experiences
- ☞ Overwhelming emotion that the individual cannot integrate (it can be responded to with avoidance, silence, forgetting)
- ☞ Based on and defined by **the subjective experience** of those who are exposed to it

Collective Trauma I

- ☞ "A State of Shock..."
- ☞ Psychological Trauma
- ☞ vs. Community and Collective trauma
- ☞ It is important to understand its origins, development, impact
- ☞ To develop coping and healing strategies
- ☞ Important not to pathologize, nor normalize
- ☞ **There may be no visible signs of injury**

Collective Trauma II

- ☞ Traumatic experiences develop through long-term exposure to the intimate relational and emotional worlds of those who experience it
- ☞ Can be culturally and psychologically communicated/ transmitted to the next generation
- ☞ **There may be no visible physical signs of injury**
- ☞ Signs or even somatization may appear over time, and it may be hard to establish the connection to the original event, situation or

Collective Trauma III

- ☞ **Psychosocial or collective trauma** Impacts peoples & society as a whole.
- ☞ Refers to the **social impact** of political, cultural and economic oppression, as effects of fear, grief and poverty take their toll on the community.
- ☞ Usually refers to situations where most of the population experienced a **human made** (thus preventable, not inevitable) disaster made by (mostly) their own people or a community of "others"
- ☞ It is experienced and communicated in **cultural-specific ways**
- ☞ Involves mass situations of extreme fear, where **relationships** between people are changed dramatically (erosion or dissolution of **trust**)

Historical Trauma I

- ☞ May include **nationwide atrocities** (war, genocide) or **community** disasters (targeted violence, forms of endemic discrimination)
- ☞ **Civil society** is very affected or even destroyed (war, genocide, mass displacement)
- ☞ Massive atrocities may be followed by politically-sustained silencing and repression

Historical Trauma II

- ☞ A historical (cultural, political, socio-economic) experience where people were forced into collective situations and experiences together as a **peoples**
- ☞ Daily experiences and rituals are threatened
- ☞ Their way of life, bodily or geographic **integrity, identity, and/or sanity** felt threatened
- ☞ Their ability to integrate their emotional experiences as a culture was overwhelmed, leading to **social silence / or social silencing**.
- ☞ (It might not be a discrete event but an ongoing process of social vulnerability)

Imagine scenarios....

- ☞ If the 9/11 twin towers tragedy (which happened in a few minutes in front of both live witnesses and cameras) had unfolded over 10 years and shrouded in media silence?
- ☞ E.g. The persistent & ongoing effects of socio-economic of political violence, conflict escalation and war, authoritarianism, suspension of civil rights or economic programs; neo-liberalism, "Shock Doctrine"

2. EFFECTS

Historical Silence and Denial

- ☞ It is an **individual's inter-subjective experience** that determines whether an event is traumatic
- ☞ Many of the worlds' historical and collective (and even personal) traumas have been shrouded in **silence** and "**oblivion**" during its initial years/decades
- ☞ Affects **memory and identity processes**

Collective Trauma

- What is typically **excluded** from the publicly addressed collective **memory** paradoxically retains a profound cultural **presence** (“**elephant in the room**”-like)
- It has the potential to push its way into the communal and public memory and become explicit, becoming **historical** or **cultural trauma**.
- Unless addressed, far from forgetting or healing, it develops **legacies**- secondary witnessing or “**vicarious**” trauma.

3-HOW TO RECOGNIZE ITS SIGNS

How to recognize it in collectives?

- Fragmented experience** –narratives (“un-knowability” and “un-sayability” of the traumatic a experience)
- Psychological **defense** mechanisms – avoidance, time “freeze,” **distrust, distancing**
- Socially Edited, softened or silenced **versions**
- Ongoing search for the **meaning** of the events
- You need not know how to be able to ‘**name the experience**’ to be a bearer of trauma

Lessons Learned

- Life’s powerfully lessons are **passed down** in families and communities can be infused with post-traumatic experience and post-traumatic **growth** (both non-narrative and narrative)
- a sense of “**unfinished business**” or
- “**pending duty**” (energy in the past)
- Revolve around **identity and ancestry**
- Historical trauma may not be in the witness’ experience but in the familial, community or cultural transmission

4- FOSTERING RESILIENCE, HEALING GROWTH COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

There is healing and recovery

- Trauma is not “passed on as “**bad genes**
- Breaking the silence** and change is possible
- Changing trauma’s legacy** is an ongoing task
- It is reversible and communities can heal and grow from it
- Communities learn from their practices
- *Sharing Activity

A Contra-reloj la vida...



- ☞ <http://hijosuruguay.blogspot.com/2011/08/contrar-reloj.html>
- ☞ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIGveg4xg-4>

Imagine an EARTHQUAKE...



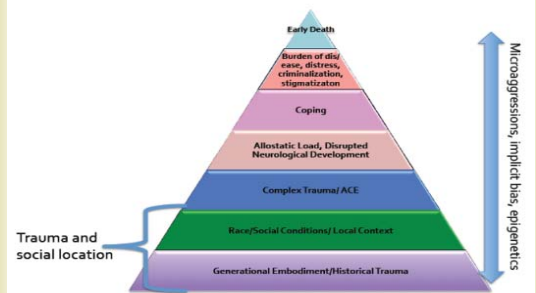
- ☞ An overwhelming experience for which we have no preparation and no expectations
- ☞ It tears our sense of identity and well-being and sense of safety
- ☞ Life is divided between a "Before" and an "After" the overwhelming experience
- ☞ Presents developmental, psychological, relational, existential and even spiritual extra-ordinary challenges
- ☞ **Name examples**

"Trauma"



- ☞ "Trauma results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual (or community) as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's (or group's) functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being"
- ☞ (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration or SAMHSA on Trauma-informed care in Behavioral Health Services TIP Series 57. HHS Publication No. SMA 13-4801, 2014)
- ☞ Development of clinical symptoms: Intrusion, Avoidance, Negativity/ Mood alterations, Arousal/Reactivity
- ☞ Significantly affects Identity (how individual sees herself and is seen by others) and Relational World

"Collective Trauma"



Are individuals or people aware of trauma?



- ☞ Are people aware that they are reacting from a place of trauma?
- ☞ **No**
- ☞ Individuals and groups do not usually "connect the dots" between their traumatic reactions and their presenting problems
- ☞ The tendency is to **avoid** the problem altogether
- ☞ Others (including providers) **do not ask questions** about a person's probable or known history of trauma (training, constraints, time, fear of hurting the other)

Can peoples or cultures suffer from trauma?



- ☞ Yes.
- ☞ How one's family and/or culture handles and faces traumatic events and reactions shelters, mediates or enhances the impact how the person or group coping or managing trauma responses or reactions
- ☞ The group or collective itself can suffer from the losses of a traumatic event or set of circumstances and be impacted by trauma
- ☞ Trauma affects the social fabric of community, collective or even nation

How Trauma affects us



- ☞ **Environmental factors**, including cultural factors play an important role in physical, mental and social well-being (non pathological)
- ☞ Wellbeing relates to the “degree of fit” between individual’s biological, behavioral and sociocultural **needs** and the **resources** available to them”
- ☞ Interventions have to combine strategies targeting **individual, interpersonal, family and community** systems and psycho-social resources

Trauma happens through social relations



- ☞ We can learn from different cultures how they differently cope with traumatic events or experiences
- ☞ Cultures shape how certain events are perceived
- ☞ Cultures shape how individuals and collectives interpret and assign meaning to trauma
- ☞ Even though trauma is interpretive and subjective /intersubjective, certain types of events or experiences (such as military action and political violence) cause high rates of traumatic stress across diverse populations and cultures

II



- ☞ Some traumas may have greater impact depending on what they represent for a given culture/ disrupts cultural practices
- ☞ Cultures shape what is considered an “acceptable response” as well as “expressions of distress” and how people convey traumatic stress through their behavior, emotions and thoughts following trauma
- ☞ Traumatic signs and symptoms vary according to the type of trauma within a culture, and culture assesses what is considered legitimate **health** and **help-seeking behavior** and **healing practices** after trauma
- ☞ Culture also provides sources of strength, culturally diverse or unique coping strategies, and specific resources

Trauma informed care & pedagogy



- ☞ Being **aware** of traumatic experience
- ☞ **Recognizing** how trauma affects individuals, groups, organizations, communities
- ☞ Responding by putting our **knowledge into practice**
- ☞ Developing appropriate and effective **copng & resilience** mechanisms
- ☞ What are forms of **growth and healing**?

Sharing Activity



Steps towards healing:



- ☞ Developing / Helping Develop:
- ☞ **Inner sense of security**
- ☞ **Sense of Trust**
- ☞ **Mourning and Working through**
- ☞ **Resources & Skills for reintegrating memories and emotions into psychic and communal life**
- ☞ **Resources & Skills for reintegrating in daily life**

COPING MECHANISMS

- ☞ **Mourning the Loss** → Grieving needs to start and be processed when possible (includes processing Anger and Sense of Loss & Grief)
- ☞ **Compassion and Empathy** as Empowering Movement/ De-freezing
- ☞ **Reconnecting** with feelings, relationships, community, communications, solidarity-- **hope** in daily life
- ☞ Time does not heal all wounds or pain –sometimes time is frozen within the person's subjectivity (relates to ability to mourn the losses)

Re-Experiencing the Present

- ☞ Subjects need to re-experience time "Jump-starting timeliness" ("That was then, this is now")
- ☞ To become present to their experiences without reenacting or being triggered (physical/psychological/social)
- ☞ Through Art & Sharing the Story (Community Truth telling projects)
- ☞ Through community solidarity
- ☞ Through community engagement

Sharing Activity

- 1) What does "movement" or 'un-freezing' look like for you?
- 2) Write down, and then share stories that you find inspiring (Pair work)
- 3) If you cannot find inspiring movements or actions, Share stories where you can imagine different scenarios

☞ **Every culture & community group may have different approaches to coping & healing arts that are culturally specific**

EXPERINCES IN LATIN AMERICA

- ☞ Through Art & Sharing the Story (Community Truth telling projects)
- ☞ Through community solidarity
- ☞ Through community engagement projects
- ☞ Through educational projects
- ☞ Transmission projects

- ☞ Education
- ☞ Breathing
- ☞ Memory work
- ☞ Reaching Out
- ☞ Narrating in a safe place
- ☞ Sharing
- ☞ Behavior that addresses the issues

- ☞ Recognizing the traumatic effects
- ☞ Moving to **de-pathologize and understanding adaptations** or reactions to overwhelming situations
- ☞ Recognizing the avoidance or denial
- ☞ "Breaking the silence" and developing Hope
- ☞ Narrative and non narrative techniques
- ☞ Knowing the story, Telling the story, Sharing
- ☞ Focusing on strengths and resilience & growth rather than (re) victimization
- ☞ Recognizing identity changes and identity transitions -**Recovery is possible & Post-Traumatic growth does develop 85 % of cases**



Sharing Activity: Trauma and Hope

- ☞ How do you manage overwhelming stress?
- ☞ What coping strategies work for you?
- ☞ What responses from others appear to work best when you feel overwhelmed?
- ☞ You have survived trauma or someone you know/work with has. What characteristics have helped you manage these experiences and the challenges these have created in your life? What are the accomplishments that you feel most pride for?
- ☞ If you were to ask someone who knows your story of survival from trauma, to name two positive characteristics that helped you survive, what would they be?
- ☞ What coping tools have you learned from your _____? (spiritual practice/cultural history/life pursuits/family legacy)
- ☞ Who is standing with you in support? (imagine them, dead or alive)
- ☞ How do you gain support today? (include family& friends, activities, other supports and balancing strategies in life)

"Collective Trauma" signs?

- ☞ Is the "problem" publicly acknowledged?
- ☞ Is there any project of "Truth-telling" (in the family, community, public at large)?
- ☞ Are there any legal cases filed? Is there any legal recourse? Are there any alternative routes for transmission and accountability of the experience?
- ☞ Is the experience transmitted, lessons learned & pedagogies to refer to the past violence suffered?



CONCLUDING



☞ Wrap Up/ Sharing Lessons

☞ Body Movement

☞ BREATH

☞ REACH OUT

☞ MOVE

☞ CONNECT