



# Trauma and Substance Abuse

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# Substance Abuse

- ▶ “My father was a heroin addict from the time I was conceived and ended up dying from his addiction. The underlying causes was untreated mental illness.”
- ▶ “When you don’t have support, you have to find ways to deal with it (mental health, trauma)” – Francis, Hatcher’s Pass
- ▶ “We can easily forgive children for being afraid of the dark; it’s the men and women afraid of the light that are the real tragedies in life.” (Attributed to Plato)
- ▶ Research shows a strong correlation between trauma and mental health issues and substance abuse.



# Old Research and New Research

- ▶ Studies conducted in 1992 and 1995 indicated a strong and direct correlation between the significance of early childhood abuse and the seriousness of substance abuse in adulthood (Paone, et al., 1992; Triffleman, et al., 1995)
- ▶ Studies in the late 90s and in 2006 continued to substantiate the earlier studies: “a history of serious traumatic experiences plays an often unrecognized (or acknowledged) role in a woman’s physical and mental health problems (Messina & Greta, 2006).
- ▶ Studies at Vanderbilt in 2011 showed the possibility and likelihood that sexual trauma in women forever changes the metabolic make-up in women. More studies being currently conducted.



# 2004 United Nations

“A world report found an association between addiction and all forms of interpersonal violence in women’s lives.”

- ▶ In 2004, the United Nations concluded the struggles of addicted women are universal and include:
  - ▶ Shame and stigma
  - ▶ Physical and sexual issues
  - ▶ Relationship Issues
    - ▶ Fear of losing children
    - ▶ Fear of losing a partner
    - ▶ Needing a partner’s permission to obtain treatment



# 2004 United Nations

(continued)

- ▶ Treatment Issues
  - ▶ Lack of services
  - ▶ Not understanding treatments needed
  - ▶ Long waiting lists for treatment (particularly for those in high need with lower socioeconomic status)
  - ▶ Lack of childcare services to allow for treatment
- ▶ Systemic Issues
  - ▶ Lack of financial resources
  - ▶ Lack of clean/sober housing
  - ▶ Poorly coordinated services



# Trauma and Addiction Leads to...

- Self-identify issues
    - See self as defective (the difference between shame and guilt)
  - Emotional states:
    - Anger
    - Shame
    - Fear
    - Sense of abandonment
    - Feeling alone
    - Powerlessness
- 



# Trauma and Addiction Leads to... (continued)

- ▶ Cognitive States
  - ▶ It was my fault (almost always, especially abuse in childhood)
  - ▶ Denial ("I am imagining this", "It didn't happen")
  - ▶ Minimizing ("It was not that bad")
  - ▶ Suicidal thoughts/significant depression
  - ▶ PTSD
  - ▶ Disassociation



# Trauma and Addiction Leads to... (continued)

- ▶ Behavioral Responses
    - ▶ Risky behavior (racing trains, driving too fast, etc.)
    - ▶ Risky sexual behaviors
    - ▶ Social withdrawal and isolation
    - ▶ Criminal behavior (particularly with men)
      - ▶ Compassionate Prison Project
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# Reasons for Addictive Behavior

- Numbing the pain, self medicating
  - Escape from reality – escape the flashbacks, escape the nightmares
  - Gain acceptance or belonging
- 



# Symptoms of PTSD

- Re-experiencing the event through nightmares and flashbacks
  - Avoidance of stimuli associated with event
  - Estrangement (inability to feel or be emotionally close to anyone)
  - Numbing of general responsiveness
  - Hypervigilance
  - Exaggerated startle response
- 



# Two Types of PTSD

- ▶ Simple and complex
    - ▶ Complex results from repetitive abuse and trauma
    - ▶ Simple usually one traumatic event
  
  - ▶ Veterans with comorbid SUD-PTSD are more likely to have a history of sexual victimization during childhood and during military service.
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# Sexual Abuse and Addiction

- ▶ Sexual trauma was associated with increased addiction severity
- ▶ Research shows “sexual trauma is especially pernicious” (Amstader & Vernon, 2008; Dworkin, et al., 2017)
- ▶ “The schism between trauma and substance abuse treatment fields has individuals bouncing back and forth between trauma and addiction programs, often with poor treatment retention rates and outcomes” (Zweben, Clark & Smith, 1994)



# Trauma and Addiction Recovery

- ▶ Most addiction programs do not address trauma as the underlying cause for the addiction.
  - ▶ Co-occurring trauma and substance abuse use disorders have not received effective treatment (Morrissey et al., 2005)
- ▶ Many times, trauma is not adequately addressed during intakes for the following reasons:
  - ▶ Discomfort in discussing sensitive issues around trauma, particularly sexual
  - ▶ Underestimation of the effects of trauma
  - ▶ Insufficient knowledge and training
  - ▶ Belief that addiction should be treated first



# Healing Trauma and Addiction

- ▶ Studies have shown women with PTSD and SUD can be helped when provided with a specific treatment designed for both trauma and SUD concurrently (Najavits 2001)
  - ▶ Addiction is often the result of an attempt to self-medicate or self-repair.
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# What is Needed?

- ▶ Trauma work is essential for people who have addiction and substance abuse disorder.
  - ▶ Not addressing the trauma is like putting a cast on the arm when it's the leg that is broken.
- ▶ Trauma work is hard – it's painful and difficult. People dealing with trauma need a lot of support – including weekly sessions with a therapist.
- ▶ When possible, the client will need support outside of professional services in personal life.
- ▶ Additional education for those providing addiction treatment – trauma informed care is essential.



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