

UNIT 4.2

Trauma pedagogy

Traumatology and
theoretical background

What is a trauma?

Psychological definition

"In clinical psychology, a trauma or psychological trauma is defined as an extrinsic injury to a person's mental integrity.

The term does not refer to the existence-threatening experience itself, but to the psychological injury caused by the event.

Thus, a trauma is a psychological wound, which can be entirely invisible to the eye. But even if a person seems untouched on the outside, there may be lingering internal wounds.

These wounds can be detected on the mental and on the bodily level. Caused by deep shock, any person's physical organism may experience a severe disturbance, which might manifest itself in insomnia, eating disorders, asthma and many things more.

The external events that cause psychological injuries include war, natural disaster, flight, expulsion, accidents, abuse, torture, neglect, sexual abuse, bullying and witnessing such catastrophic events.

It is not the objective intensity of the actual event that is crucial for the subsequent traumatic effect, but the intensity of the subjective experience (Fischer / Riedesser, 1998).

As a consequence, each and every person shows different reactions to disturbing events. While some people remain stable and healthy, others are scared, panicked and unable to overcome the events even after months have passed.

In many cases, the traumatic experience results in feelings of helplessness and in a shock to one's self-perception and understanding of the world. If this is not promptly dealt with, a trauma can have a negative impact on a person's further mental development and lead to an acute stress reaction, post-traumatic stress disorder, adjustment disorder, or to the development of neurotic disorders (Streeck-Fischer, 2006).

After traumatic experiences, prompt pedagogical and therapeutic interventions administered by competent personnel help counteract the development of possible negative consequences in a person's biography."

From *Trauma Pedagogy – Guidelines for pedagogical first aid – Friends of Waldorf Education* (M4-A8)

Causes of trauma

Children may experience trauma as a result of different circumstances, such as:

- ✓ *Abuse, including sexual, physical or emotional;*
- ✓ *Exposure to domestic violence;*
- ✓ *Severe natural disaster, such as flood, fire, earthquake or tornado;*
- ✓ *War or other military actions;*
- ✓ *Abandonment;*
- ✓ *Witness to violence at home, in the neighbourhood or in school setting, including fights, drive by shootings and law enforcement actions;*
- ✓ *Personal attack by another person or animal;*
- ✓ *Kidnapping;*
- ✓ *Medical procedure, surgery, accident or serious illness*

What is a complex trauma?

"The traumatic stress field has adopted the term **complex trauma** to describe the experience of multiple and/or chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an **interpersonal nature** (e.g., sexual or physical abuse, war, community violence) and **early-life onset**.

These exposures often occur within the child's caregiving system and include physical, emotional, and educational neglect and child maltreatment beginning in early childhood (see Cook et al, this issue, Spinazzola et al this issue)."

From **van der Kolk, B.A. 2005. Developmental trauma disorder: toward a rational diagnosis for children with complex trauma Histories, Psychiatric Annals (M4-A9)**

Trauma related symptoms and behaviour

*"Numerous studies documented that exposure to interpersonal trauma during childhood is related to **increased incidence of affect and impulse dysregulation, alterations in attention and consciousness, disturbances of attribution and schema, and interpersonal difficulties.** [...]"*

Dysregulation of Affect and Behaviour

[...] Affective symptoms commonly found in children exposed to interpersonal violence include **labiality, anhedonia, flat or numbed affect, explosive or sudden anger, and incongruous or inappropriate affect.** Behavioural expressions may include **withdrawal, self-injury, aggression, oppositional behaviour, substance use, or other compulsive behaviour.** Behavioural dysregulation may represent **affective overload as well as attempts to dispel, reduce, or recover from negative affect states.**

Trauma related symptoms and behaviour

[...] Disturbances of Attention and Consciousness

Disturbances of attention and consciousness following exposure to interpersonal trauma may manifest as **dissociation, depersonalisation, memory disturbance, inability to concentrate** (regardless of whether the task evokes trauma reminders), **and disrupted executive functioning** (e.g., ability to plan, problem solve).

[...] Distortions in Attributions

Children exposed to interpersonal trauma often have **distorted attributions about themselves and the world** that may set the stage for globalised shame and guilt, **a negative cognitive style, distorted locus of control, and poor self-efficacy.**

Trauma related symptoms and behaviour

[...] Interpersonal Difficulties

Interpersonal difficulties in children following abuse or neglect may include **disrupted attachment styles, difficulties with trust, low interpersonal effectiveness, diminished social skills, inability to understand social interactions, poor perspective-taking abilities, expectations of harm from others, and poor boundaries.**

From **D'Andrea W., Ford J., Stolbach B., Spinazzola J., Van der Kolk BA, 2012, Understanding interpersonal trauma in children: why we need a developmentally appropriate trauma diagnosis, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 2012, Vol. 82, No. 2, 187–200**

***For further reading, please download annexes
M4-A08, M4-A09, M4-10
from the web platform.***

Thank you for your attention!



Jugend in Aktion
Österreichische Agentur

