Support for Survivors of Domestic Abuse: Aligning Therapeutic and Advocacy work within a Feminist Trauma Informed Framework

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Questions to explore in the workshop:

➢ How are feminist empowerment models, (historically deployed by domestic abuse advocates), similar to and different from a Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA)?

➢ Where is the line between trauma-informed advocacy and mental health specialists & therapy /counselling?

➢ Are there different types of TIAs? (with & without feminism?) What does a feminist TIA looks like?

➢ More questions?
Traditional empowerment models for advocates working with DA survivors

• Grew out of early feminist movement (‘personal is political’; ‘consciousness raising’, ‘sisterhood is powerful’)

• Strong woman–centred ethos – DA services for women by women

• Development & application of empowerment model – basis for advocates and feminist therapy work

• Principles embedded in Women’s Aid Service Standards
Women define trauma

“Simply living in the body of an oppressed person is traumatic and exhausting” (Women Making Waves, Volume 18, Issue 3, 2007).

- Trauma is a psychological dimension of oppression – ‘Oppression is the primary traumatising condition’ (Burstow, B 2003: 1308)

- Awareness of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender among oppressed groups - socio-political complexity of trauma (Quiros, L & Berger, R 2013)

- Maintain a focus on women’s external lived conditions – to understand internal (psychological) issues.

Women’s trauma is different – often involves not one off event – it can be ‘chronic, interpersonal nature’ (Bath, 2008). Amendments to PTSD (complex PTSD, Herman, insidious trauma; ‘everyday sexism’)

- Trauma symptoms – as copying / adaptive strategies - question the representation of the world as benign

- Trauma-Informed and Gender-Responsive Interventions for Women (Covington, S, 2008b)

Critiques & concerns about the proliferation of trauma theory – without feminism (Tseris, E.J. 2013)
Comparison

TIA – what might be gained?

• The centrality of the concept of ‘trauma’ & in-depth understanding of trauma

• More attention on women’s psychological pain, struggles and needs

• Refining support skills to address psychological needs / distress of the practitioners

• Greater awareness of the potential impact of the service environment & delivery on women’s trauma

• Awareness of the psychological impact of women’s trauma on staff & service delivery

What might be lost?

• Depoliticising language – e.g. talking about ‘wide spread trauma’ rather than ‘wide spread oppression’

• (Therapeutic) language that does not come from women’s lived experiences

• Potentiality for seeing women as damaged goods, pathologised via different concept

• Endless assessments of women’s ‘trauma’. (How do we for e.g. guard against such assessments being used in courts against her?)

• ‘Treating’ the trauma – not the source of it

• Gender power relations less visible. Not deploying ‘consciousness raising as an empowerments tool

• Some dangers for practitioners assuming positions of power as ‘trauma ‘experts’

• Losing sight of women’s material needs & needs for social justice
Five Core Values of Trauma Informed Care

• SAFETY
• TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TRANSPARENCY
• CHOICE
• COLLABORATION AND MUTUALITY
• EMPOWERMENT

Cultural, Historical & Gender Issues

Group work

• What do you think the similarities between frontline practitioner work and counselling / therapy?

• What are the tensions or differences between the two?
Empowerment: values & practice

- **Listening & believing**
- **Establish safety**
- **Establish trust**
- **Equality in relationships**
- **Woman's perspective voice valued**
- **Woman's decisions honoured; Self-determination**
- **Psychoeducation**
- **Work from / with her strengths**
- **Reconnections – to self & others**
- **Non-judgmental**
- **Empathy**

**DA Advocacy**
- Advocate for woman
- Practical support

**Therapy/ counselling**
- TIA
Integrated Feminist and Trauma Models, some resources


- BEST PRACTICES MANUAL for Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs in British Columbia

- Gender Specific Mentoring Guidance Tool
  - [file:///C:/Users/WAuser/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/Gender%20Specific%20Mentoring%20Guidance%20Tool.pdf](file:///C:/Users/WAuser/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/Gender%20Specific%20Mentoring%20Guidance%20Tool.pdf)
Recourses

- **Trauma and recovery**: The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror. Herman, J.L. (1997).
- **Healing the Trauma of Abuse: A Women's Workbook** by Mary Ellen Copeland & Maxine Harris
- **Our Bodies, Ourselves** Boston Women's Health Book Collective and Judy Norsigian
- **Feminist Perspectives in Therapy: Empowering Diverse Women**
- **J. Worrell & P. Remer 2006**