

Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Offering Supports That Are Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed

Cathy Cave, Senior Training Consultant
National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health



Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, and Trauma

Domestic violence describes abuse among family members. Intimate partner violence more specifically is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors designed to dominate and control a partner through fear and intimidation (NCDVTMH, 2017). The terms are frequently used interchangeably. The result of these and other experiences of cultural and structural oppression, are cumulative and contribute to ongoing traumatic impacts across the lifespan of survivors, families, and communities.

Abuse occurs in many forms including (NCDVTMH, 2021):

- Psychological
- Sexual
- Stalking
- Threats
- Isolation
- Undermining health
- Undermining parenting
- Economic
- Spiritual
- Cultural
- Digital
- Physical violence
- Undermining treatment and recovery

Data from recent studies tells us that approximately 33%-43% of women and 25%-33% of men reported physical or sexual violence or stalking. These numbers are likely underestimated, as many cases go unreported.

What is Trauma?

Individual trauma is one person's experience of an event or enduring condition, in which there is a threat to physical or emotional safety, the safety of a loved one, or their community. The individual's coping capacity is overwhelmed as the body's automatic fear response engages. Potential sources of trauma include physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, grief, community threat, institutional abuse, poverty, and homelessness. Individuals experience violence through cultural oppression, structural oppression, and identity targeting such as race, language, gender expression, and immigration status.

What are Group Experiences with Trauma?

Collective trauma is an experience that impacts groups or communities. The COVID epidemic and mass casualty events are examples.

Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Offering Supports That Are Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed

Cultural trauma or genocide is the systematic destruction of traditions, values, language, and other elements that make one group of people distinct from another. These practices are clearly witnessed in the enslavement of Black people and in the loss of land and language in the colonization of Indigenous people.

Historical trauma is the legacy of cumulative emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounding over the lifespan and across generations emanating from massive cultural trauma experiences (NCDVTMH, 2012; Packard//NIWRC, 2012, & HSCADV, 2022)

What is the Connection Between Intimate Partner Violence and Trauma?

- Adverse experiences impact people in their homes, communities, and environments.
- At the core of traumatic responses is the use or misuse of power by one person or group over another to control a person, a family, or entire community.
- Resources for safety and healing may be inaccessible for individuals or may not be equitably disseminated in communities.
- One person can be impacted by individual and group trauma experiences, separately or all at once, over the course of their lives.
- Coping strategies that individuals develop to survive violence may also increase risk for additional harms.
- Many survivors never had opportunities to learn about rights to self-protection.
- Discrimination, stigma, and lack of human rights protections increase risks for harm.
- Abusive partners exploit these conditions whenever possible to undermine sanity, sobriety, parenting, and survivor safety.
- When providers do not understand the tactics of abuse, they blame survivors rather than keep accountability with the abusive person who caused the harm.

What are the Ongoing Impacts of Violence and Trauma?

Trauma affects people's capacity to trust themselves and others, making it very difficult to reach out for help or to plan and problem-solve. Screening out distractions to process information and make decisions can be extremely difficult. Providers often want to engage survivors to make commitments and follow through while survivors are at their moments of greatest distress and lack of safety. Trauma reminders may also exist in the spaces where we engage survivors, e.g., the tone of the interactions, rules, and service setting demands.

What is an Integrated Approach?

- Honor cultural, community, family, and individual resources, strengths, and resiliencies.
- Don't ignore the social, political, and economic legacies of cultural, historical, political, and structural oppression.
- Consider the ways victimization, revictimization, trauma reminders, and trauma responses intersect and impact engagement and participation (HSCADV, 2022).
- Consider the impacts of trauma on people working in organizations and the community as a whole.

What Can We Do?

- ✓ Partner with local and state domestic violence programs for training, technical assistance, and survivor support.
- ✓ Check the ways power and privilege are interfering with authentic connection to individuals, families, and communities. Consider who is included in discussions and ensure survivors and people directly impacted by trauma and central to processing and planning.
- ✓ Consider a holistic or integrated approach.
- ✓ Partner with local and state domestic violence programs for training, technical assistance, and survivor support.
- ✓ Check the ways power and privilege are interfering with authentic connection to individuals, families, and communities. Consider who is included in discussions and ensure survivors and people directly impacted by trauma and central to processing and planning.
- ✓ Consider a holistic or integrated approach.



Additional Information and Resources:

Learn more and find resources on the [National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health](#) website!

National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health, [Core Curriculum on Creating Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Services](#), 2021

PACES Connection, [The 3 Realms of ACES](#)

Novic, Elisa, [The concept of cultural genocide: an international law perspective](#), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, Cultural Heritage Law and Policy.

This publication was prepared for the [Mental Health Technology Transfer Center \(MHTTC\) Network](#) by the [Great Lakes Mental Health Technology Transfer Center](#) in collaboration with the [National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health](#) under a cooperative agreement from the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#). All material appearing in this publication, except that taken directly from copyrighted sources, is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission from SAMHSA or the authors. Citation of the source is appreciated. Do not reproduce or distribute this publication for a fee without specific, written authorization from the Great Lakes MHTTC and the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health. For information on obtaining copies of this publication, call (608) 263-0492.

At the time of this publication, Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, served as SAMHSA Assistant Secretary. The opinions expressed herein are the views of the Great Lakes MHTTC and National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this document is intended or should be inferred.