

Black Immigration Trauma: Cultural Approach to Re- Build Community and Resilience

Brenda Ingram, EdD, LCSW

And

Senait Admassu, MSW, ACSW

Learning Objectives

- Participants will be able to describe and discuss:
 1. Demographics, characteristics and stressors for black immigrants.
 2. Trauma theory as it relates to black immigrants.
 3. Community and healing approaches to reduce immigration traumatic stress and promote resilience.

The Black Immigrant

- The number of black immigrants is growing at a remarkable rate.
 - More than one-fourth of the black population in New York, Boston, and Miami is foreign-born.
 - Immigration contributed at least 25% of the growth in the U.S. black population between 2001 and 2011.
 - According to the Pew Research Center (2015) the number of foreign-born blacks is now 3.8 million.
- Is a multi-ethnic group, the majority are of Caribbean descent (45%), followed by those of African descent (29%) and then others come from Canada, Europe, South and Central America (26%)
 - The number of African refugees increased in 2000 due to advocacy from the Black Caucus (Kent, 2007).



The Black Immigrant

- There are differences between the black immigrants:
 - Caribbean black migrants are much more residentially concentrated than Africans, with only 10% living outside of the Northeast or Florida (Kent 2007).
 - Caribbean black immigrants come to the US for family connections and economic/educational opportunities.
 - African black immigrants tend to have higher education and less family connections here in the US.
 - More of the recent African immigrants are refugees, which reflects migration due to war and other civil conflicts (Waters et al, 2014)

The Black Immigrant

- Foreign-borne blacks differ from other U.S. immigrant groups:
 - Less likely to be in the U.S. illegally
 - More likely to be U.S. citizens
 - Speak English at a higher rate
 - Comparable rates of higher education (Africans > U.S.)
 - Lower rates of marriage
 - Lower household income, less likely to own their own home
 - Comparable rates of poverty

The Black Immigrant

- Foreign-born blacks differ from U.S-born blacks:
 - Older
 - Have higher education
 - Higher income
 - Less likely to live in poverty
 - Higher rates of marriage

Stressors for Black Immigrants

- Though black immigrants tend to have a health advantage compared to American born blacks, the longer they live in the US the greater the decline in that health advantage due to adjusting to minority status and racism (Case & Hunter, 2014; Williams, 2007; Anderson, 2015).
- Refugee status is an added stressor to immigrant status.
 - àrefugee status is a predictor of higher risk of psychotic disorders, according to lead researcher Kelly Anderson, a psychiatry and epidemiology professor, Canada Western University
 - Among refugees, those from East Africa had a 95 percent greater risk
 - The stress of leaving trauma behind in the home country, coupled with the stress of unemployment and other problems in the new country, could be working together to create higher rates of mental illness in certain refugee communities.

Stressors for Black Immigrants

- Under-employment impacts 39% of African immigrants—highly educated but working in lower paying jobs
- Black immigrants have higher numbers of deportations and detentions than Asian, Middle Eastern or White immigrants.
 - Even though black immigrants make up only 7% of the total immigrant population, they represent 20% of all immigrants in deportation proceedings due to criminal convictions.
- Intersectionality suggests that black immigrants have dual identities which are highly correlated with stress—immigrant status and black. This puts them at greater risk for mental health issues, especially traumatic stress reactions (Williams et al, 2007).

TRAUMA

- ▶ Understanding trauma is not just about acquiring knowledge.
- ▶ ItÆs about changing the way you view the world.
- ▶ ItÆs about changing the helping paradigm from “What is wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”
 - Sandra Bloom, 2007

What is Trauma?

- Trauma is defined using eight general dimensions:
 - Threat to life or limb;
 - severe physical harm or injury, including sexual assault;
 - receipt of intentional injury or harm;
 - exposure to the grotesque;

What is Trauma?

- violent, sudden loss of a loved one;
- witnessing or learning of violence to a loved one;
- learning of exposure to a noxious agent;
- and causing death or severe harm to another (Wilson & Sigman, 2000).

Types of Traumas

- Physical trauma,
- Medical trauma,
- Psychological trauma,
- Social or Collective trauma,
- Historical or Intergenerational trauma,
- Developmental trauma,
- Ongoing, chronic, and enduring trauma,
- vicarious or secondary trauma or compassion fatigue

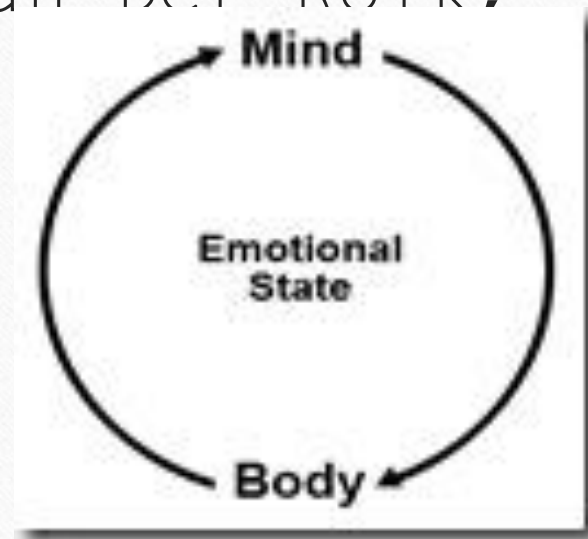
IMMIGRATION TRAUMA

- There are four stages of migration/immigration process (Perez Foster, 2001) at which there is significant potential for traumatogenic experiences that may lead to serious psychological distress:
 - Pre-migration trauma, i.e., events experienced just prior to migration that were a chief determinant of the relocation;
 - Traumatic events experienced during transit to the new country;
 - Continuing traumatogenic experiences during the process of asylum-seeking and resettlement;
 - Substandard living conditions in the host country due to unemployment, inadequate supports, and minority persecution.

Trauma

- Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind (Terr, 1990) and the body (Van Der Kolk, 2007).

- *Traumatic Event*



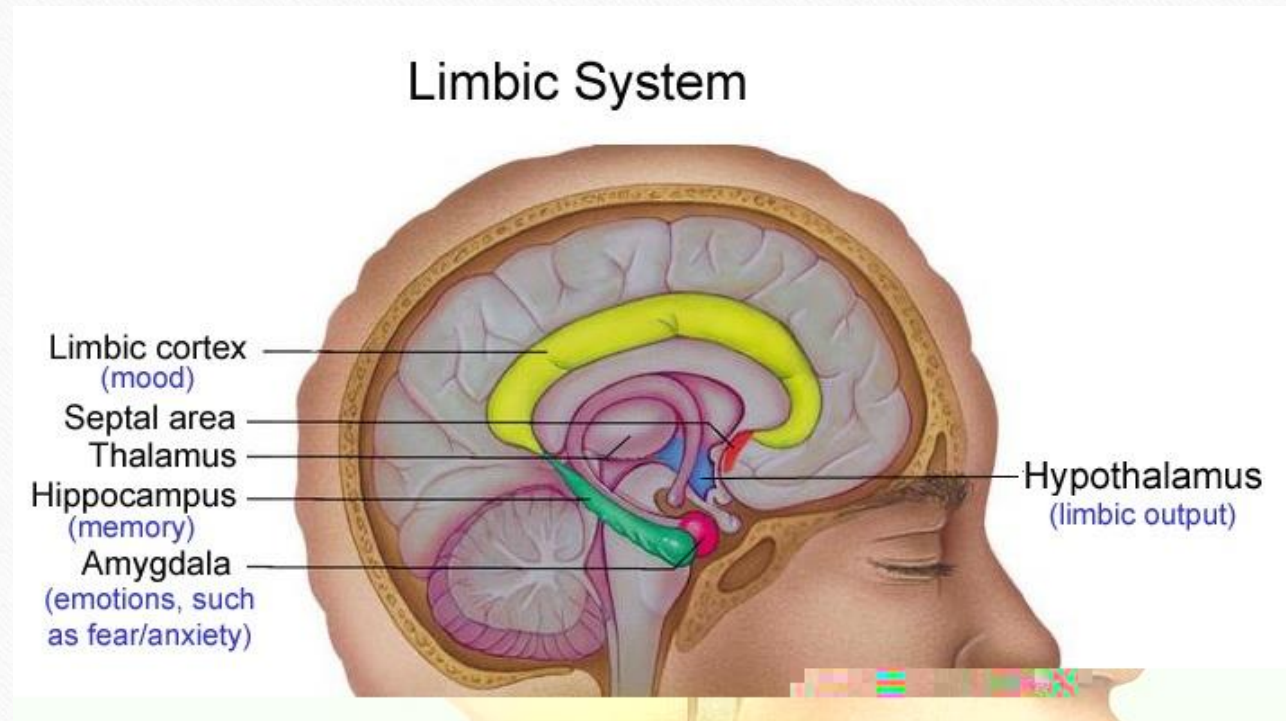
Trauma

- According to Judith Herman's book, *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), psychological trauma is characterized by feelings of:
 - Intense fear
 - Helplessness
 - Loss of control
 - Threat of annihilation



Trauma Response Neuroscience

The Brain



Traumatic Stress

- What is traumatic stress?
 - The reactions someone may develop after a traumatic event due to experiencing extreme stress.
 - Reactions vary considerably
 - Some people experience anxiety, fear, shock and upset or even numbness
 - Some report disturbances in sleep, with nightmares
- These reactions can interfere with activities of daily living.

Traumatic Stress in Black Immigrants

Immigrants and refugees often experience severe, chronic exposure to traumatic events that place at risk of consequences that may include altered neurophysiology, brain morphology and brain function; persistent hyper-reactivity and impulsivity; negative beliefs about the world at large and people in general; limited social skills and capacity for problem solving; multiple externalizing behaviors, often in association with substance abuse; and problems with authority (American Humane Society, 2010).



Traumatic Stress in Black Immigrants

- In one study done in San Diego (2012) on over 200 refugees living there from Africa (75% of the study participants were from Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan) it was found that 83% reported traumatic experiences (more than 70% reported 3 or more; 50% reported 10 or more and 10% reported more than 30) and 85% had at least one symptom of PTSD (L...



Immigration and Refugees

Approaches to Mitigate Immigration Traumatic Stress

- When working with black immigrants, service providers use Trauma Informed Services that are culturally relevant:
 - Service providers recognize immigration trauma symptoms and focus on building safe trusting relationships with immigrants;
 - Use bi-lingual and bi-cultural workers whenever possible;
 - The diagnostic assessment of clinical responses to trauma in various black immigrant subgroups should emphasize somatic vs. psychic symptoms, as these are more consistent with indigenous idioms of distress
 - Providers also understand and assess the role that culture plays in resiliency and the importance of community resources as potentially mediating the trauma experience.

Approaches to Mitigate Immigration Traumatic Stress

- Interventions need to be family-focused not just child-focused.
 - Children get more exposure to US culture and therefore may mis-interpret the cultural role of the family versus freedom and rights for children
- Since many black immigrants, especially African, have left behind immediate and extended family members; there tends to be an experience of great distress in longing for reunification with those left behind.
 - Building supportive relationships with others in a community is paramount to reducing isolation
 - Developing methods to increase connections with family members back home
- A holistic community response is comprehensive, providing personal and political advocacy in combination with community building, empowerment, and recovery/healing services.

Promising Practice for Refugee Families

- The Families Together Program (FTP) is a home visitation program provided by Horn of Africa, a community-based organization providing services to Somali and East African refugees who reside in the greater San Diego area.
 - The FTP provides support services to Somali families either expecting a child or with a child ages birth to five. Each new family is assigned to a Family Support Worker (FSW) who meets with them weekly to review the culturally-tailored curriculum, provide referrals to needed resources, interpret information, and support families throughout their participation.
- Key findings revealed that participants had positive feelings about their Family Support Worker (who was a woman due to cultural restrictions); reduced fears about medical procedures or immunizations for children; increased parenting knowledge; learned American systems; accessed better housing; increased communication with their children.

Promising Practice: Building Community Leadership and Resilience

- The Village