According to Historical Trauma theory, African American survivors experience higher rates of PTSD symptoms and consequences of traumas survived in common by their familial and cultural ancestors (Danzer et al. 2016; Nguyen et al. 2014). However, throughout the field of Counseling and Counselor Education, there appears to be a missing link between the consequences of chronic exposure to trauma when counseling African Americans which can lead one to believe that slavery and the present-day impact of trauma are unrelated. Topics such as social justice, race, class, privilege, systemic issues, and inequality could be overarching themes that may be catalyzing the deeper issue of slavery.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO DISCUSS SLAVERY AS A GENERATIONAL TRAUMA?

Race Based Traumatic Stress (RBT): racial encounter can be painful emotionally and beyond the scope of an individual’s ability to cope and control their reactions.


Trauma and stress that is a consequence of slavery and racism can be experienced collectively and transgenerationally (Peters, 2004; Harrell, 1997). Epigenetics: Heritable changes in gene expression (Coosby & Heidbrink, 2013).

Evidence points to higher rates of lifetime prevalence of PTSD among African Americans (8.7%).

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>8.7%</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>African Americans</td>
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PTSD:
Looking back to move forward.

What do we Know?

• Traumatic events resound throughout the population, which creates a shared traumatic experience.
• Trauma is not a singular event, it is a continuous and prolonged exposure.
• Historical trauma symptoms often manifest in therapeutic dyads with White clinicians.
• Traumatic experiences interact with development over time and exist in a cultural context.
• Lower rates of recovery and less likely to receive affect diagnoses.
• The continuous and prolonged exposure alters the developmental trajectory of the population, a disadvantage that results in universal disparities that persist through the generations.

What can we do?

Broach conversations that include dialog and feelings of discomfort, anger, guilt, or resentment highlights the role of White Privilege in preserving the effects of slavery and race-related trauma on this country.

DSM-5: Encourages exploring the patient’s perspective, his/her cultural syndromes, and understanding of the problem.

• cultural sensitivity
• cultural competence
• proficiency regarding the immediate and historical factors impinging on the lives of African American clients.

References


