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TRAUMA INFORMED  
ACADEMY



# The Trauma of Poverty

Elizabeth Power, M.Ed.



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Elizabeth is the Founder of The Trauma Informed Academy®, offering online and onsite training to help folks become Trauma Informed while increasing their Emotional Intelligence.

Her background as an Adjunct Instructor in Psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center, and as an adult educator who survived multiple types of traumatic events. She grew up in poverty in Appalachia.

The TIA's model is used on every continent except Antarctica.





# Agenda

- 1 Poverty: What it Is
- 2 Trauma: Definition
- 3 Impact on Health, Learning, Earning
- 4 The Role of Learning & Therapy
- 5 Long Term Challenges



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“ The trauma of poverty now—especially poverty caused by trauma—dooms future health, learning, and work. It dims some of our brightest lights by requiring Herculean effort to overcome, often in situations where others hold us back.

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# 1 *Poverty: What It Is*

Poverty is:

- Hunger.
- Lack of shelter.
- Being sick > not being able to see a doctor.
- Not having access to education and not knowing how to read.
- Not having a job.
- Fear for the future, living one day at a time.
- Being “othered” and shut out of access to opportunities.



## 2 Trauma: what it is / is not

Any seen, heard, or experienced event that overwhelms the person and causes them to think they might:

- Lose their mind,
- Be badly injured, or
- Die

If it **doesn't** meet these criteria. it is...

Upsetting, distressing, maddening,  
annoying, terrible, vexing, scary,  
troublesome, disgusting...



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## Trauma: Categories

- Medical crises
- Natural disasters
- Being “Othered”
- Accidents
- Immigration





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## Trauma: Categories, 2

- Generational trauma
  - Structural oppression
  - Chronic toxic stressors
  - Abuse, neglect, betrayal
  - Crime | conflict | war
- ...and more



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***How might overwhelming,  
traumatic events impact  
poverty and vice versa?***



## Your constituents

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- Who are they?
- What types of overwhelming events might they have been exposed to?
- How do you think this might show up in their daily living?
- In their families, to what might their ancestors been exposed?



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100% of the people you serve—and perhaps all of you—deal with poverty, even if it's only the impact of toxic stress.



# 3 The Impact of Trauma



- Choicemaking skills (“good judgment”)
- Limited Emotional Elasticity (self-regulation)
- Expressive and receptive communication
- Dips in self-esteem
- Becoming “sitting ducks”





# 3 The Impact of Trauma, 2



- Chronic fear (from anxiety to terror)
- Sense of not belonging, isolation
- Turbulent relationships
- Clumsiness
- Self-shaming and –injury
- Fear of being “seen” or “heard”



# 3 Trauma's Impact on Health

Increases long-term health issues:

- Obesity
- Addiction
- Heart disease
- Autoimmune disorders
- Cancer
- Asthma
- Substance Use
- Depression
- Suicidality
- Self-neglect



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# 3 *Trauma's Impact on Learning*

- Impacts expressive | receptive communication
- Decreases attentiveness
- Increases anxiety
- Impacts memory
- Impairs organizational skills
- Stunts creative play
- Dulls ability to establish cause-effect relationships



# 3 *Trauma's Impact on Earning*

- Impairs SEL-EQ (learning instead of therapy)
- Inability to participate in different activities due to costs
- Increases anxiety which makes managing money more difficult
- Money may be used to buy comfort
- Work may become a form of self-injury
- Stunts creative play
- Dulls ability to establish cause-effect relationships



# 3 Trauma's Impact on Earning

- Average Black |Hispanic | Latino households earn about 50% less than the average white household (2021, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System).
- Black women earn an average of 64 cents to every dollar that white, non-Hispanic men earn (2021, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau)
- LGBTQ+ people face higher rates of workplace discrimination, earning less and impacting their ability to manage expenses, build savings and buy homes (Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research)
- Early death and chronic disease among survivors of abuse and neglect are costly



# 3 *Trauma's Impact on Earning*

- Overworking
- Overspending and avoiding taking stock of finances
- Being overly frugal
- Feeling ashamed of needing financial help





# 3 *What do people need?*

- Food, shelter, clothing
- **Helpful relationships**
- Reduction in risks
- Healing for injuries
- **Knowledge and skills to collaborate in their new world**
- **Relationships with people who model the new skills**



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## 4 Long-term challenges

- Emotional Elasticity
- Use of positive inner connections for self-soothing
- Choice-making skills
- Relational skills (self- and social-awareness, regulation, skills)
- Present-focused, strength-based, collaborative relationships







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# *Thank you!*

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