

Implications of Trauma and Mental Health in the Juvenile Legal System

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DISCLAIMER

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PRIORITIES

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP),
Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice

- Treating Children as Children
- Serve Children at Home, with their Families, In their Communities
- Open up Opportunities for Young People Involved in the Justice System

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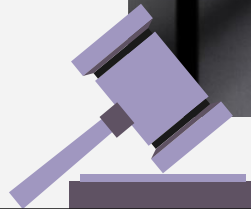


Who are our legally-involved youth?

1, 032 youth in HCJPD in 2024
1,340 referrals to HCJPD

2022 Annual Report Data:

- 960 female & 3,836 male
- 52.21% Black, 39.45% Hispanic, 7.53% White, 0.81 % Other
- Schools are largest referral agency aside from HPD



Referrals by Offense

Referral Type	2020	2021	2022
Felonies			
Arson	15	25	20
Assault - Felony	318	314	391
Auto Theft	34	28	37
Burglary	193	98	127
Drugs - Felony	77	70	87
Evade/Resisting Arrest Felony	167	186	185
Homicide	9	21	24
Mischief/Felony	32	31	41
Other	98	166	207
Other Personal	33	31	52
Robbery	420	419	326
Sexual Assault	65	73	77
Theft - Felony	69	70	114
Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle	216	195	211
Sub-Total	1,746	1,727	1,899
Misdemeanor A & B			
Assault	508	573	1,103
Drugs	64	40	35
DWI - MA/MB	15	5	7
Evade/Resisting Arrest	364	297	384
Mischief	82	65	93
Other	425	434	622
Theft	302	163	219
Trespass - MA/MB	124	98	144
Sub-Total	1,884	1,675	2,607
Violations of Probation			
Violation of Probation - Technical	94	82	110
Violation of Probation - Other Juris.	104	109	180
Sub-Total	198	191	290
Grand Total	3,828	3,593	4,796

Court Activity

Court Decisions	Youth
Certification	16
TJJ/D Commitment	16
TJJ/D-Determinate Sentence	44
Probation	690
Placement	273
Field Supervision	416
Probation Other	1
Deferred Adjudication	212
Non-Suit/Dismissed	306
Total	1,284

Mental Health in the Juvenile Legal System

- OJJDP Study – 70.4% of youth in JJ system have at least 1 mental health disorder
 - Disruptive disorders → substance use disorders → anxiety disorders → mood disorders
 - With conduct & substance use disorders removed almost half (45.5%) of youth still met criteria for a disorder

Figure 1. Number of diagnoses among youth with at least one disorder.

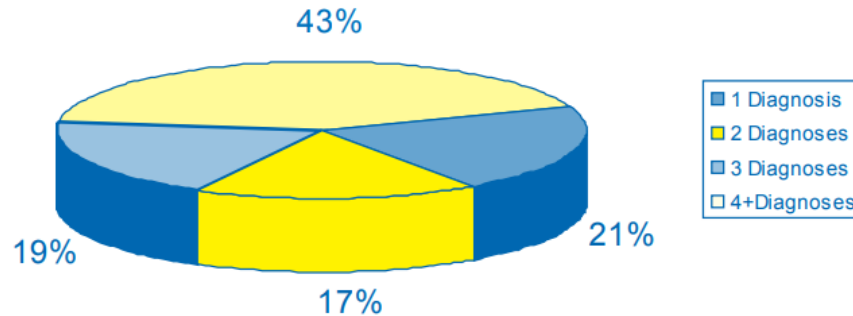
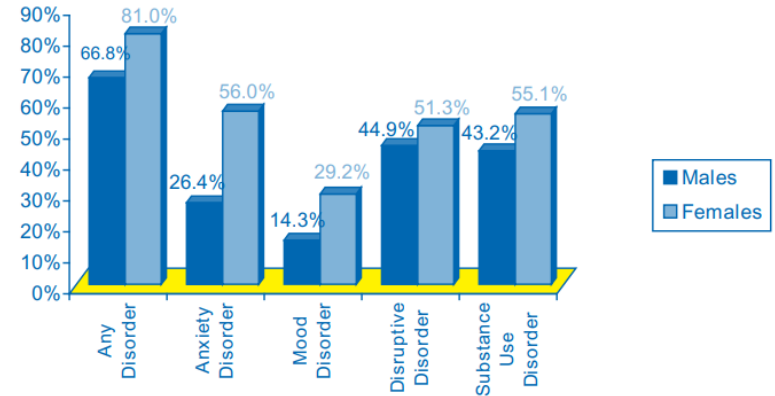
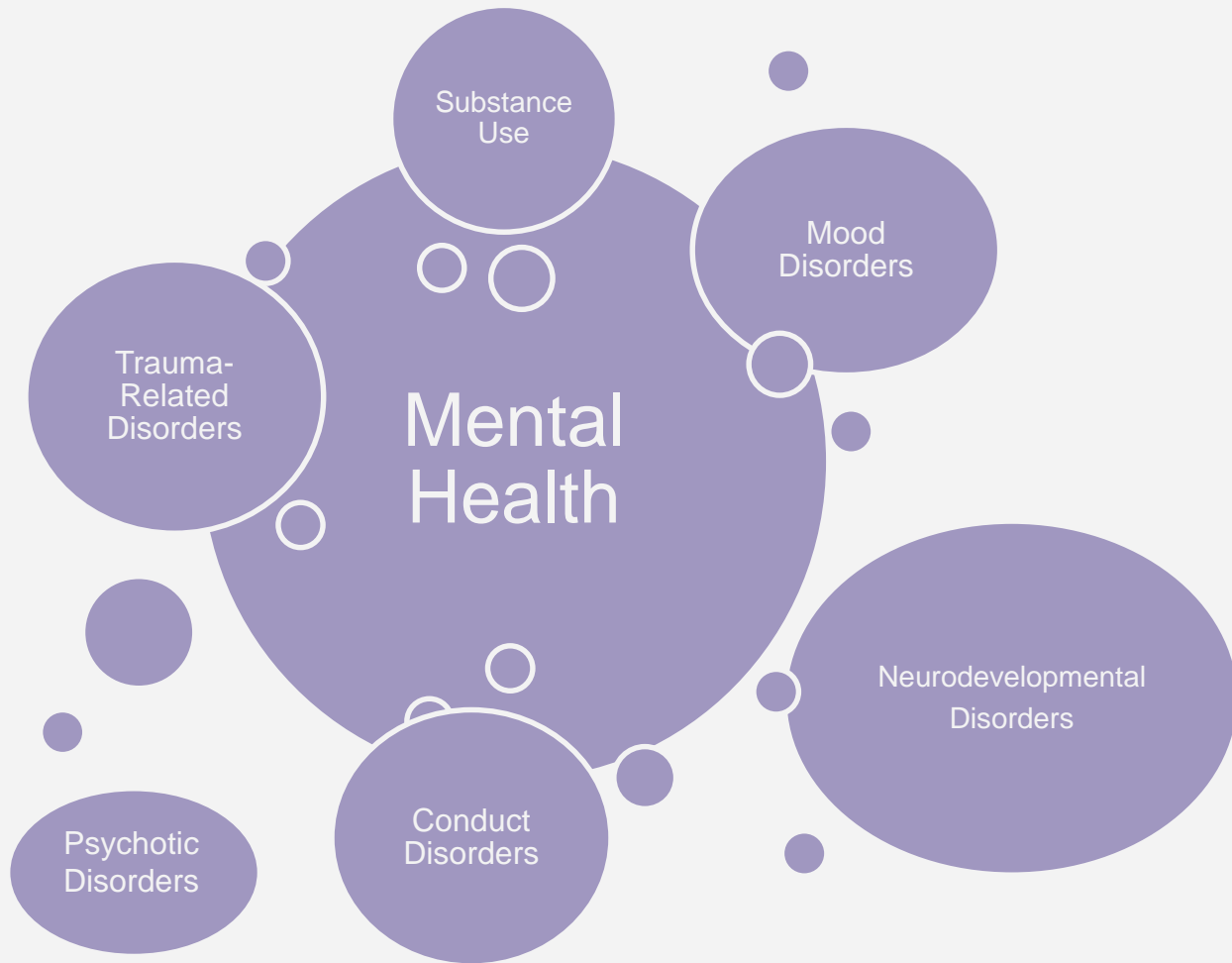


Figure 2. Prevalence of mental health disorders among males and females in the juvenile justice system.





Adolescence – Developmental Perspective



Trauma

Big “T” Trauma

- Exposure to actual or threatened death
- Serious injury
- Sexual violence
- Directly experienced, witnessed, or learned of death of loved one
- Ex: abuse, national disasters, serious accidents or life-threatening illness, human trafficking, family/community violence, etc.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

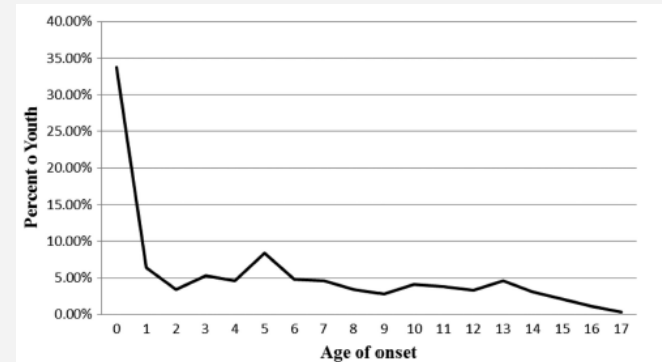
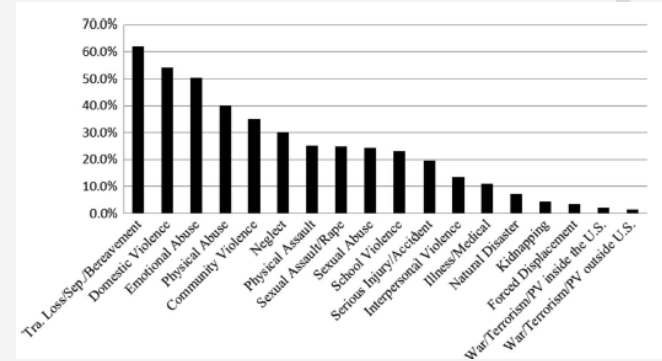
- Abuse & neglect
- Intimate partner violence in home
- Substance use in home
- Mental illness in home
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member

COMPLEX TRAUMA

Exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature, and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure

Prevalence of Trauma in Legally-Involved Youth

- ~90% prevalence rate of trauma exposure in the juvenile legal system
 - Maltreatment identified as a risk factor for severe, chronic delinquent behavior
- Varying rates of PTSD (3 – 50%) in incarcerated youth
- Some gender differences in types of trauma
- Early trauma exposure has lasting impact



Dierkhising, C. B., Ko, S. J., Woods-Jaeger, B., Briggs, E. C., Lee, R., & Pynoos, R. S. (2013). Trauma histories among justice-involved youth: Findings from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *European journal of psychotraumatology*, 4(1), 20274.

Case Example

JJ

- Black male
- Six prior referrals since age 12
- **Referrals:**
- **Theft (diversion)**
- **Aggravated Robbery & Aggravated Assault with a Deadly Weapon (CJPO)**
- **Capital Murder (Certification)**
- Selling drugs
- Allegations of involvement in shootings
- Gang involvement

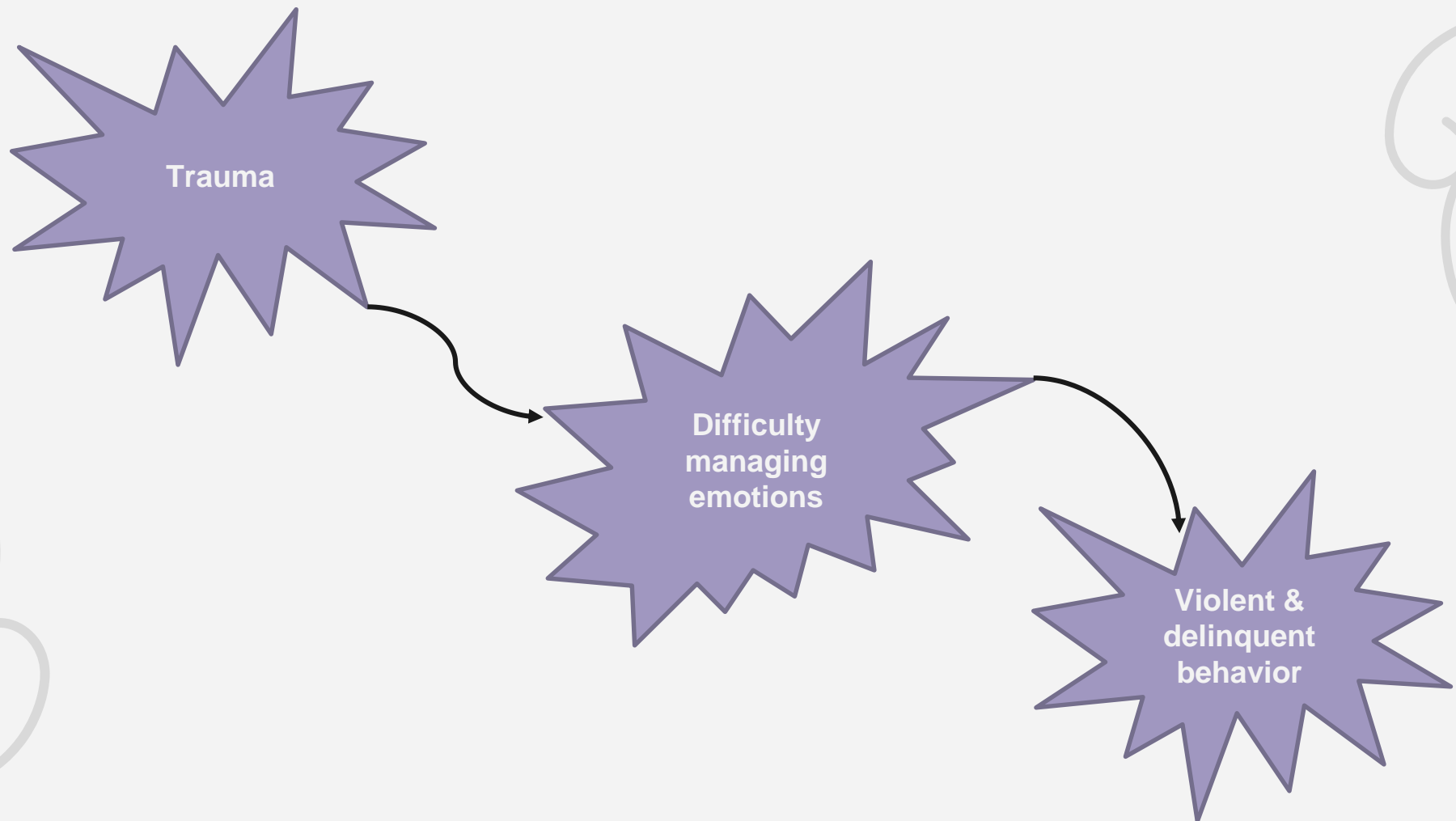
- History of caregiver instability (bio parents & grandparents)
- CPS involvement since age 2 & removal from primary caregivers
- Running away to live between parents
- Both parents w/ criminal history, gang involvement, & substance abuse
- Allegations of neglect & exposure to domestic violence
- Multiple instances of exposure to violence
- Possible substance exposure in utero

Brain Science of Trauma

Disruption of several brain systems

- **Stress response system**
- Responsibilities: coping with negative emotions & reaction to external stressors
- **Limbic system**
- Responsibilities: behavioral and emotional response & memory
- **Reward and motivation system**
- Responsibilities: attention, learning, initiating/completing tasks, social/moral judgment
- **Executive functioning system**
- Responsibilities: problem-solving, sustained attention, planning, organization, impulse control, using emotions as a guide





Effects of Trauma

Secondary Effects

- Maladaptive coping strategies/behavior
 - Management
 - Distraction
 - Suppression
- Behavioral manifestations
 - Behavioral dysregulation

Tertiary Effects

- System-induced trauma effects
 - Confinement
 - Interaction with staff and other youth
 - Rupture familial and community bonds

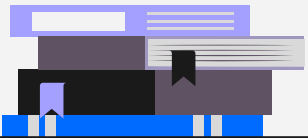
Trauma of Legal Involvement

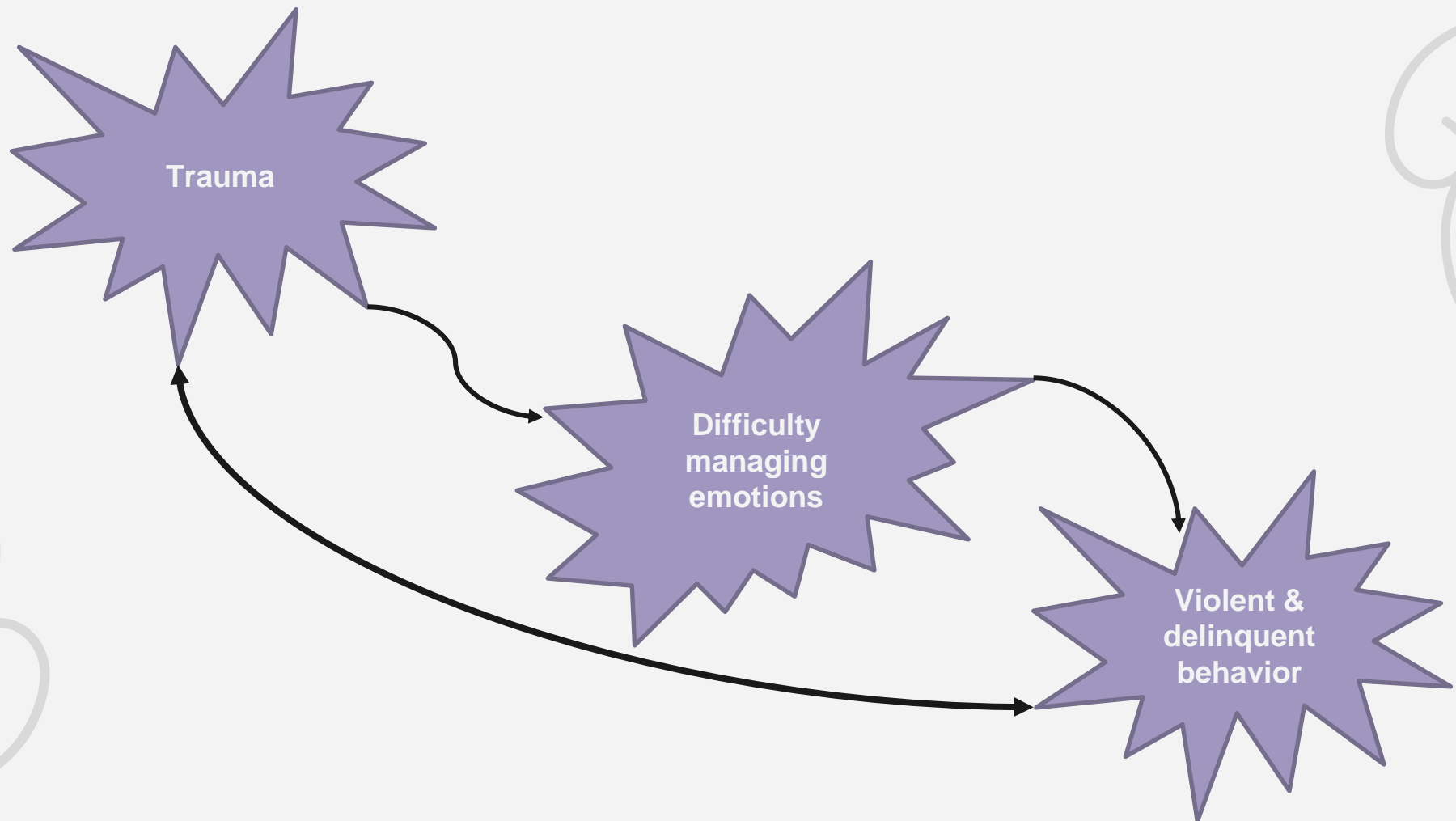
Trauma of the Offense

Violence exposure
Injuries
Accidents
Police interaction

Detainment/Incarceration

Violent victimization
Exposure to violence
Separation from support
system
Dehumanization
Negative emotions





Case Example

JJ

- Stopped attending school in 9th grade
- History of alternative school
- Substance use beginning at age 12 (marijuana, Xanax, alcohol, vape)
- Emotionally reactive

- **Past diagnoses:** ADHD, Trauma, Anxiety, Disruptive Behavior Disorders, substance use disorders
- Past counseling for anger and behavior & trauma (in placement)

- **Depression:** sadness, irritability, restlessness, reduced appetite, fatigue, insomnia, suicidal ideation, & self-harm
- **PTSD:** nightmares, flashbacks, hypervigilance, paranoia, anger, isolation/withdrawal, poor emotion regulation



How does trauma lead to legal involvement?



Distrust adults & become oppositional

Increased paranoia & misperceived threats can lead to reactive aggression

Feel guilty or bad about self so seek peer approval

Feel helpless/hopeless & disregard consequences or concern for anything

Re-enact trauma to make sense of it

Poor coping skills like using drugs, harming self or others, running away, or associating with negative peers

Diminished empathy and normalized aggression can lead to violence

How does trauma lead to legal involvement?

Posttraumatic Risk Seeking - "...the emergence in the aftermath of trauma of the active pursuit of experiences that serve the function of imparting danger to the self or others"

Serve posttraumatic functions

- Mastery
- Turning passive to active
- Masking vulnerability with fear defiance
- Escape
- Activation of reward centers

Risk-seeking behaviors following exposure to trauma

Case Example

- Smoked marijuana as means to cope
- History of living with negative peers and on the street
- Lack of self-concept
- Poor decision-making and conflict resolution abilities
- Limited understanding of behavioral norms due to his environment
- Lack of future orientation (e.g., “what if I am not alive to make it to college?”)
- “Crash dummy”
- Identified some prosocial goals without a plan



Trauma & mental health symptoms do not *cause* violence

Interaction of risk & protective factors

- Exposure to violence, hopelessness, emotional detachment, & more increase likelihood of violence
- Academic progress, a supportive community, & access to resources decrease likelihood of violence

A small percentage of individuals with traumatic backgrounds and mental health issues become violent

- People are generally resilient
- Many people struggle with mental health issues and do NOT commit crimes
- Only about 5% of people with mental health diagnoses engage in violence
- Only about 3-15% of youth in the legal system commit offenses as adults

HCJPD Evaluations

Psychological

- Psychological screener
- Full psychological evaluation
- Intellectual Disability evaluation

Forensic

- Fitness to Proceed (FTP)
- Certification/Waiver to Adult Jurisdiction
- Lack of Responsibility (LOR)



Psychological Evaluations

Psychological Screener

- Background/clinical interview
- Brief IQ testing
- Brief achievement testing

Psychological Full

- Background/clinical interview
- IQ testing
- Achievement testing
- Personality/behavioral measures
- Parent interview

IDD Evaluation

- Background/clinical interview
- Full IQ testing
- Achievement testing
- Adaptive functioning
- Parent interview

Collateral
Records



Evidence Based Treatments/Resources at HCJPD

Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)

- “an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children”
- Principles: empowering, connecting, correcting

Specialty Courts

- Court 360
- CARE Court/Human Trafficking Court (Creating Advocacy Recovery and Empowerment)
- GRIP Court (Gang Recidivism Intervention Program)
- SOAR Court (Sobriety Over Addiction and Relapse)
- Dual Status

Specialty Mental Health Programs

- Special Needs Diversionary Program (SNDP)
- Multisystemic Therapy (MST)
- Functional Family Therapy (FFT)



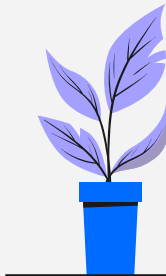
Other Trauma-Informed Interventions

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TFCBT)

- An evidence-based short-term treatment for individuals ages 3-18
- Addresses PTSD symptoms, as well as, affective, cognitive, and behavioral problems
- Parenting component

Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)

- A type of cognitive behavioral therapy aimed at reducing symptoms of PTSD
- Involves processing the trauma and skill building to address unhelpful thoughts



How can we address trauma in the juvenile system at the community and system level?

- Early intervention
- School-based diversion

- Law enforcement building relationships with youth and families
- Trauma-informed policing and crisis intervention

- Expanding access to mental health care in the community (i.e., programs, funding, transportation, etc.)
- Community psychoeducation
- Comprehensive and individualized intervention plans
- Connecting youth to services

- Juvenile mental health courts
- Problem-solving/specialty courts – separate dockets, multidisciplinary approach, intensive supervision
- Developmentally informed systems
- Minimizing use of formal processing

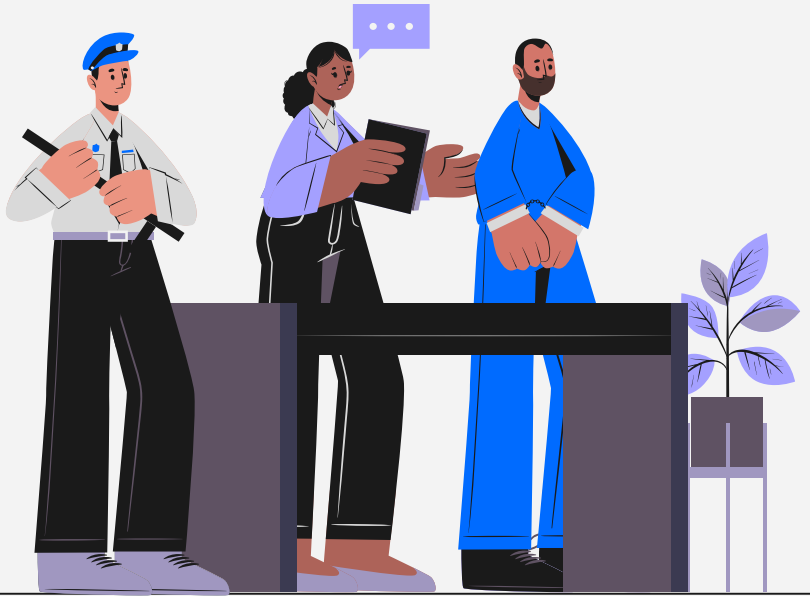


Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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