Wisconsin Public Psychiatry Network Teleconference (WPPNT)

- This teleconference is brought to you by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) Bureau of Prevention, Treatment and Recovery and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Psychiatry.
- The Department of Health Services makes no representation or warranty as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, quality, suitability or completeness of or results of the materials in this presentation. Use of information contained in this presentation may require express authority from a third party.

Treating trauma in the Hmong community

Alyssa Kaying Vang, PsyD, LP
AKV Psychological & Consulting Services, LLC
April 6, 2017

Trauma
- Experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing
- Overwhelm people’s ability to cope
- Powerlessness
- Intergenerational trauma
- Transgenerational trauma
- Examples of traumatic events:
  - war, death, accidents, natural disasters, rape, abuse, chronic illnesses
**Trauma-informed care**
- Strength-based framework
- Sensitivity to and understand of trauma
- Respond to the impact trauma has
- Focus on physical, physiological, emotional safety
- Creates opportunities to rebuild a sense of control and self-empowerment

**Hmong view of health**

- Our physical well-being is dependent on how well our spiritual functioning is and vice versa
- The condition of a person’s soul is crucial to overall health, both in life and after death
- Treatment includes both spiritual and physiological approaches

**Hmong view of Mental Health**
Mental Health Concepts and Framework:

Western:
- Connection is between the mind and the body
- The way I think affects the way I feel
  - Therefore, if I change the way I think about something, it might change how I feel about it

Hmong:
- Connection is between the body and the soul
- Feeling = lungs and liver
- "Hloov kev xav" is unfamiliar.
- Rather, "txhob xav txog" is more familiar
- "Hloov siab" – our "siab" is part of our essence and our values system, which can be difficult to change or control unless:
  - Something significant or life-changing happens
  - Spiritual transformation

Important Cultural Concepts to Consider:

Western:
- Internal Locus of Control
  - The behaviors and choices I engaged in influenced the outcome
  - "Grin and bear it"
- "Because Western mental health services are based on Western beliefs about the self and healing, the benefits of talk therapy have historically been minimal for the Hmong.

Hmong:
- External locus of control
  - The outcome is based on luck, fate, VISA, timing, other people
  - "Suffer and endure"
- "Uv tis tuag, oot slab ngej lub neej khi rau menyuam"

Mental Illness:
- Natural/Non-spiritual
  - Life stressors (Financial, housing, schooling)
  - Psychosocial stressors (loss of status, marital discord)
- Spiritual/Religious Factor
  - Loss of soul
  - Possessed by spirit
  - Treatment dependent on belief of cause
Hmong conceptualization and treatment of “trauma”

Muscle tension, body tension

Xais ceeb

Nchos ceeb

Loss of soul

Symptoms suggestive of trauma—“poob plig, ceeb”

- Physiological symptoms are indications of having been frightened or experiencing soul loss
  - Shivering body
  - Difficulty sleeping
  - Startled responses
  - Loss of appetite
  - Fever
  - Cold hands and feet
  - Hearing things, seeing things

Symptoms of trauma

- Any symptoms not associated with such physiological symptoms are not attributed to traumatic experiences
  - More withdrawn, more isolated
  - Difficulty focusing
  - Grades falling, unable to hold a job
  - Increased behavioral or emotional difficulties
  - More emotional dysregulation
Hmong conceptualization, decision-making and treatment of "trauma":

- Accident, mass killing, exposure to death = "poob plig" (soul loss) or "ceeb, ntshai" (frightened, startled)
- Muscle tension, body tension, shivers, jumpy

  Xais ceeb (massage the fright)

  Nchos ceeb (shake the fright)

- Sleep problems, weight loss, fatigue, nightmares, changed personality, withdrawn, jumpy, vigilant

  Spiritual ritual/ceremony (shaman, soul calling healer, 'hu plig" prayer)

Culturally appropriate treatment considerations in general:

- Acknowledge benefits of traditional treatment and encourage integration of holistic and alternative approaches to the healing process
- Identify any disruption in the afflicted person's life as equally concerning and deserving of attention
- Psychoeducation (What therapy is, what it isn't)
- Balancing in the therapeutic relationship:
  - acceptance/respect, expertise, hope
  - Use of metaphors and analogies

Culturally appropriate treatment considerations for trauma:

- No direct language translation for "psychological trauma" in Hmong
- Psychoeducation
  - Burnt pot, stained white cloth
  - Physical problems (headaches, muscle tension, compromised mental capacity)
  - Common reactions to trauma
- Variable benefits
  - Deep breathing
  - Visual imagery
  - EMDR
  - Gradual exposure
References:


Alyssa K. Vang, PsyD, LP
(651) 283-3794
akvpsych@gmail.com
www.dralyssakvang.com