

# Trauma and the Deaf Community



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# Outline

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- I. Deaf Culture
- II. General Trauma: Overview
- III. Trauma in the Deaf Community



# Introduction

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Deaf = Cultural Group



# Introduction Cont.

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## Important Issues:

- ASL is NOT English
- Lip-reading Myth
- English Literacy Myth
- **Fund of Information Gaps**
- Sociocultural & Language Minority

# Deaf Culture

## Deaf Education

1818 – Gallaudet/Clerc	1 <sup>st</sup> Deaf School
1880 – AGB and Milan Conference	Oralism Born
1972	Total Communication
1986	Bi-Cultural/Bi Lingual





# Deaf Culture

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## Audism

-Aristotle

-1880 Milan Conference

-1906 American Breeders Association



# Deaf Culture

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“The simple fact is that if Deaf culture could be reliably wiped out, it would be a good thing to wipe out”

-Psychologist Dr. Michael Marzwich,  
University of California – San Francisco,  
APA Publication, July 1997.





# Deaf Culture

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# Trauma Overview

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## Merriam-Webster Dictionary

**Definition:** A very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems, usually for a long time

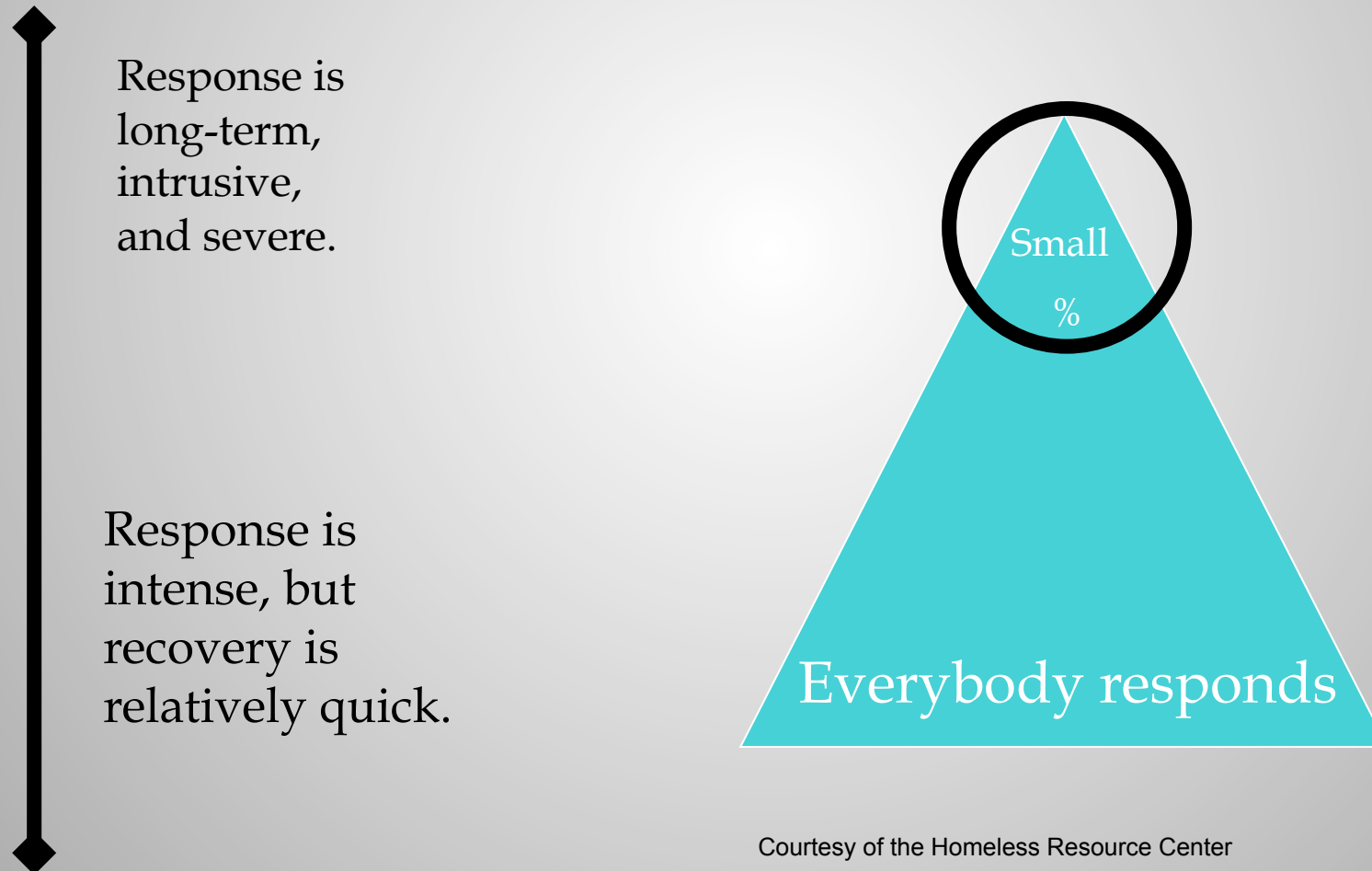
# Trauma Overview

Average Person = 3 traumatic events in lifetime



# Trauma Overview

## Continuum of Responses





# Trauma Overview

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## Factors that Influence Responses to Trauma

1. History and current functioning
2. Characteristics of the traumatic event
3. Culture
4. Stage of Development
5. Relationships/Social Supports



# Deaf Trauma

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## Key Themes

1. Greater Risk of MI and bigger burden
2. Little to No Access to Services



# Deaf Trauma

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## Prevalence

- Very few studies available
- Higher and more severe trauma exposure

### Research Suggest:

- Deaf female undergraduates **twice** as likely than hearing
- Sexual Assault** = 20.6% of Deaf men and 37.8% Deaf women
- Unwanted Sexual Experience** = 38.2% of Deaf men and 42.2% Deaf women --
- Physical Assault** = 73.5% of Deaf men and 71.1% Deaf women
- 69% of Deaf adults reported childhood abuse or maltreatment
- Childhood Sexual Abuse** = 50%-54% Deaf versus 10%-25% Hearing
- Perpetrators view Deaf as easy targets due to their inability to share their experiences with others because of the communication barriers



# Deaf Trauma

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“My parents did not take the effort to understand me as a Deaf child. I was ‘left’ at school because they did not want to deal with it. They would hit me in the head for not hearing something they said. If it landed on my hearing aid, my ear would bleed. My parents were my worst enemies.”

-Female informant





# Deaf Trauma

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“One source of trauma for Deaf children is being unable to meet expectations and being severely punished for their physical inability to comply with those expectations. The teachers for the Deaf forced all of the students to come down to their level of sign language ability. If we signed better than they did and they could not understand us, they punished us.”

-Male Informant



# Deaf Trauma

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## Information Deprivation Trauma

Schild (2010) *Trauma Exposure and Trauma Symptoms in Deaf Adults*

An event that is experienced as traumatic or more traumatic because information or knowledge about the event is limited or not available.

1. Families trying to protect loved ones
2. Lack of access to communication
3. Lack of foreknowledge of event
4. FOI Gaps



# Deaf Trauma

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## Experiences in Treatment

- Trauma often misidentified/misdiagnosed
  - Dismissal of linguistic/cultural differences
  - Deliberate or through ignorance
- Untrained clinicians and/or interpreters
- Communication Access not being granted (interpreters, IDT)
- Often further traumatized, communication isolation



# Deaf Trauma

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“The pain of my rape continues. Instead of being able to communicate with doctors about the reasons for my symptoms, they just shove medication at me... medication to calm me down....medication to stop the pain. Now they suspect drug abuse. I feel hopeless and betrayed.”

-Female Informant



# Deaf Trauma

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## Glickman (2003) – Common Misunderstandings

- Erroneous conclusions from inappropriate psychological testing
- Inappropriate diagnosing
- Believing Deaf are disabled, not just in inability to hear, but intellectually, emotionally, and morally
- Promoting the idea of 'psychology of deafness, that Deaf people are unintelligent, egocentric, concrete, irresponsible, impulsive, immature, or paranoid;
- Exclusion of the Deaf community from decision-making on key matters such as policy and procedure pertaining to Deaf



# Deaf Trauma

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## How to Be Deaf Trauma-Informed

**#1** – Get training on cultural competency in mental health and Deaf culture!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

- Get training on Deafness and Trauma (as available)  
-Go you!!!-
- Figure out the resources available for Deaf treatment in Missouri, who are the experts that can help?
- Develop policies/procedures to ensure communication access in your organization
- Ask the Deaf how your organization can improve, seek their input



# Contact Information

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Questions/Comments??



The End