

Multiple Layers of Trauma

Multi-abuse trauma is a term used when a person is impacted by several co-occurring issues that negatively affect safety, health or well-being.

Examples of issues that negatively affect safety, health or wellbeing

- Sexual assault
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Child abuse or neglect
- Poverty
- Domestic violence
- Witnessing violence
- Substance use disorders
- Incarceration
- Homelessness
- Societal oppression
- Intergeneration grief
- Historical trauma

Multi-abuse trauma often involves both *active* forms of abuse and *coping* forms of abuse. *Active* abuse includes the kinds of harm that one human being does to another. *Coping* abuses are the methods that victims of active abuse may use to cope with their situation.

Examples of Active Abuse

Sexual assault
Domestic violence
Child abuse or neglect
Emotional or psychological abuse

Examples of Coping Abuse

Substance abuse
Compulsive eating/binging and purging
Self-mutilation (cutting)
Compulsive spending

Co-occurring issues

A survivor's situation may be further exacerbated by co-occurring barriers stemming from experiences such as poverty, medical issues, disabilities or mental health concerns. These issues may or may not be a direct result of trauma, but often complicate efforts to address it.

Another layer of trauma: Societal Abuse and Oppression

An additional layer of trauma may further complicate the situation for people who are survivors of multi-abuse trauma. In addition to the stigma surrounding issues such as a substance use disorder or psychiatric illness, they may face societal oppression due to racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism and other forms of discrimination.

Still more trauma

Coping forms of abuse may lead to further traumatic experiences, such as homelessness or incarceration, and may include the development of long-term consequences for the individual's children as well.

Yet another layer: Trauma from the system

People with multiple issues often face considerable barriers when trying to get help. Inability to access appropriate services creates its own stress. The system itself often traumatizes people with multiple issues, and adds to their problems.