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# Trauma Informed Approaches to Researcher-Participant Relationships: Examples from a Housing and Health Study

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# **TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACHES TO RESEARCHER-PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIPS**

**EXAMPLES FROM A HOUSING AND HEALTH STUDY**

**CRISTINA FLORES, JADE GARZA, JUDITH SOLOMON, & MARISA WESTBROOK  
HOUSE RESEARCH LAB – OHSU-PSU SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**



# **TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE**

**FRAMEWORKS AND BACKGROUND**

# Trauma

- Response to overwhelming profound and/or prolonged distress
  - directly experienced or witnessed
  - acute or chronic
- Unstable housing is associated with trauma (Padgett, 2020)
- Migration is associated with trauma (Bustamante et al, 2017)
- Biological
  - Limbic System Dysfunction
  - Hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis dysfunction
  - Neurotransmitter Dysregulation
  - Chronic Health Conditions
  - Somatization
  - Sleep Disturbance / Hyperarousal
- Cognitive
  - Guilt, Idealization, hallucinations/delusions, intrusive thoughts
  - Dissociation, depersonalization, and derealization
- Behavioral
  - Substance Use
  - High Risk/Self-Injurious Behavior
- Emotional
  - Numbing

# Guiding Principles of Trauma Informed Care

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, 2014 <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf>

## Safety

Throughout the organization, staff and the people they serve feel physically and psychologically safe.

## Trustworthiness and transparency

Organizational operations and decisions are conducted with transparency and the goal of building and maintaining trust among staff, clients, and family members of those receiving services.

## Peer support and mutual self-help

These are integral to the organizational and service delivery approach and are understood as a key vehicle for building trust, establishing safety, and empowerment.

## Collaboration and mutuality

There is recognition that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The organization recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach. One does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.

## Empowerment, voice, and choice

Organization aims to strengthen the staff, client, and family members's experience of choice and recognizes that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualized approach. This builds on what clients, staff, and communities have to offer, rather than responding to perceived deficits.

## Cultural, historical, and gender issues

The organization actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases, offers culturally responsive services, leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections, and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.



# Applying TIC to Research

How can researchers use reflexivity and change traditional research-participant power dynamics using their study protocols?

How can researchers move beyond "trauma-informed care" as a buzzword phrase to concrete changes in methodologies and collaboration?

How can researchers create space for participants to be feel safe and be authentic and vulnerable in sharing their experiences, while avoiding exploitation and unnecessary oversharing?



# **STUDY BACKGROUND**

**EXPLORING HOUSING-HEALTH RELATIONSHIPS**

# DOUBLED-UP PORTLAND

- We will conduct interviews, alongside PhotoVoice elicitation and survey data collection, to address: **How do low-income Hispanic/Latinx doubled-up households navigate housing insecurity and mental health?**
- Doubling up is typically seen as an emergency response to housing needs (Skobba & Goetz, 2014)
  - Increasingly common particularly during periods of economic recession for low-income families (Mykyta et al, 2011)
  - Informal housing arrangements are not readily visible, create a “hidden” housing insecure community
- 9,500 residents of Multnomah County live in shared or “doubled-up” households
  - Hispanic/Latinx and Black families are more likely to experience “double up” due to economic hardship or loss of housing
  - This study responds to a gap in the empirical data about doubled-up households by focusing on low-income Hispanic/Latinx communities



# Methods

Research question: How do low-income Hispanic/Latinx doubled-up households navigate housing insecurity and mental health?

- Interviews
  - 2 semi-structured interviews focused on mental health challenges and opportunities related to living doubled-up, about a year apart
- Survey
  - Data to compare with ACS
- Photovoice
  - Visual CBPR tool that allows participants to document their own housing realities (Nykiforuk et al, 2011)
  - Used successfully with the Hispanic/Latinx immigrant community, as well as individuals that have experienced trauma, poverty, social exclusion, and housing insecurity (Lightfoot et al, 2017; McKinsey et al., 2021; Miterko & Bruna, 2022; Muroff et al, 2023)



# **APPLYING TIC**

**TO RESEARCHER-PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIPS**

# Safety

## Interview Methods:

- Setting- comfortable, familiar, and assuring environment for participants- consideration for meeting via phone or Google Voice
- Anticipating uncomfortable topics; tailoring our responses/follow-up
  - TIC response (empathetic, emphasizing adaptation and resilience)
- Appropriately discussing housing insecurity

*How can researchers create comfortable interviewing environments for participants?*

*How might TIC inform our responses to triggering topics?*

# Trustworthiness and Transparency

## Recruitment:

- Explicitly clear and translatable information and material
- Efficient understanding and consent of the study, their involvement, and the data to be collected
- Offering culturally responsive and relevant material
  - Considering barriers of participation

## Interview Methods:

- Eliminating jargon, making information easily comprehensible
- Avoiding an authoritative researcher-participant dynamic
  - Shared power over data

# Peer Support & Self-Help

- Having resource list available to offer participants should needs arise during interview/engagement
- Following-up with participants
- Continually offering resources of support
- Assisting with literacy around material
- Interpreter services that enable personnel to support dialect in interviews/surveys/outreach
- Offering gifts cards for participation

# Collaboration & Mutuality

- Allowing participants to choose place of interview/survey
- Emphasizes participants role in the study as impactful
- Shared power around decision making towards data collection/identifiable information.

*How can a study truly benefit the involved community?*

# Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

- Questions and decision-making at each step of the process (re: interview location, reminding them of volunteer nature of project, etc.)
- Team contribution in offering support in navigating resources for participants
  - ‘How can we help?’
- Making our study measures easily accessible to participants/eliminating barriers to participation

# Cultural , Historical, & Gender Issues


- Recognizing positionality, and historically formed hesitancy around external organizations (like ourselves)
- Emphasizing that we are NOT government affiliated
  - Ensure protection of identify
- Considering cultural biases and stereotypes

*How can researchers consider use reflexivity as it relates to cultural, historical, and gender issues?*



# OPPORTUNITIES FORWARD

Throughout our processes, we look to uplift and provide support for the Hispanic/Latinx community and the experiences they embody, while also providing a safe and welcoming environment to talk about sensitive issues/topics



# Thank you! Questions? Ideas?

Study funded by PSU Faculty Development Grant & National  
Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families

Get in touch: [HOUSEResearch@pdx.edu](mailto:HOUSEResearch@pdx.edu)

Learn more: [marisawestbrook.com/house-lab](http://marisawestbrook.com/house-lab)

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**Recommended new resource: UC Berkeley’s Transformative Research Toolkit**