



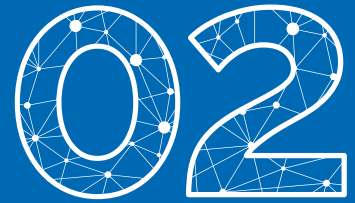
Trauma Informed
Community Action

Bringing a Human Rights Perspective to Trauma-Informed Approaches

Thursday, 6th February 2025

09:00 - 17:00

Oxford Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford, [OX1 1BX](#)



“Because the violence at the source of trauma aims at domination and oppression ...The suffering of traumatised people is a matter not only of individual psychology but also, always, of social justice.”

(Judith Herman, 2023)

This infographic has arisen from the Human Rights and Trauma-Informed Approaches project. This identified the pressing need to address the profound impact of human rights and its interface with trauma among individuals and communities.

Trauma-informed approaches are a whole-systems approach that creates environments that promote healing and prevent retraumatisation. At the heart is a conceptual shift from thinking “what’s wrong with you?” to “what happened to you?”. Trauma-informed care is not the same thing as trauma-specific therapies. They are relevant to multiple systems, including justice systems, benefits systems, education systems, social care systems and beyond. They are guided by the underpinning premise that ‘trauma is everyone’s business’.

Human rights are inherent rights for all human beings regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion or other status. Violations are when a person or country disregards or fails to protect internationally recognised human rights. This is important to understanding trauma - particularly human-inflicted trauma; for example, interpersonal violence infringes an individual's right to safety, liberty, and dignity.

Trauma-informed approaches and human rights frameworks share a goal: creating systems that promote healing, dignity, and justice. To fully support healing after trauma, we need to understand trauma not only on an individual level. We need to understand it as something that affects communities and is linked with other forms of injustice, marginalisation and disadvantage. We can show this through an ecological model which shows that efforts to support survivors to heal must address all the interconnected levels of their environment.

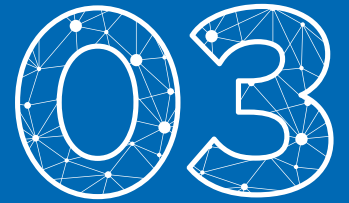
¹Herman, J. 2023. Truth and repair: How trauma survivors envision justice. Hachette UK.

²Sweeney, A., & Taggart, D. (2018). (Mis) understanding trauma-informed approaches in mental health. Journal of Mental Health, 27(5), 383-387.

³Universal Declaration of Human Rights: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁴Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design. Harvard university press.





Combining a human rights perspective and a trauma-informed approach starts with recognising that trauma affects communities and groups – not just individuals.

Here are some practical ideas to put this into practice.

1. Recognise trauma as more than an Individual Issue

Asking **"What happened to you?"** instead of **"what's wrong with you?"** in trauma-informed approaches is meant to be a conceptual or rhetorical shift and not a literal one. However, even shifting focus to 'what's happened to you?' risks neglecting the societal and historical causes of trauma, like racism, poverty, and colonialism, as well as ongoing and current sources of harm, like systemic racism and inequalities in access to and quality of care. To bring a human rights perspective, it is helpful to consider, 'What happened to your community in the past? What is happening to your community now?' and 'what do you and your community need?'. This can shift understanding to the communal. It should also recognise nuance; within families and communities there will not always be consensus.

Evolving solutions:

- Focus on systemic causes of harm, not just individual ones.
- Address shared traumas such as climate change and structural violence.
- Frame trauma as a human rights issue, emphasizing systemic accountability.
- Train professionals in both trauma-informed care and human rights.

2. Move Beyond Superficial Practices

Some organizations claim to be trauma-informed without making real changes, much like "greenwashing" in environmentalism. This needs deeper change and efforts to build integrated and shared visions for improvement which involve trauma survivors as well as minoritised and traumatised people and communities as partners in change.

Evolving solutions:

- Quality improvement and culture of learning
- Conduct audits to ensure practices align with trauma-informed values
- Train staff to identify and prevent retraumatising patterns
- Meaningful co-design with survivors from a range of backgrounds

3. Understand inequities and oppression

Trauma and human rights violations often intersect at an embodied level. People's identities can be politicised, and their rights denied or diminished. Individuals and communities facing racism, sexism, ableism and other inequalities require approaches that address these overlapping injustices.

Evolving solutions:

- Co- design systems, policies and services with survivors from diverse cultural and historical contexts.
- Meaningfully embed human rights principles, like equality and non-discrimination, into trauma-informed systems.

To achieve justice, we must go beyond rhetoric and take healing from the individual to the collective. This means challenging oppressive systems and creating accountable systems with relationships at the heart. By combining trauma-informed care with human rights principles, we can build systems that not only heal individuals but transform society into one rooted in fairness, respect, and collective well-being.