

# COMPLEX TRAUMA IN ADULTS

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# TSS

- Single episode adult trauma → PTSD
- Complex trauma including asylum seekers and refugees
- Developmental trauma
- Groups and organizations
- Teaching and training

Clinical Case



# Complex trauma

# Spectrum of trauma



- Transitory trauma reactions
- PTSD
- Complex trauma
- Developmental trauma

# PTSD

- Actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to self or others
- Intense fear, helplessness or horror (DSM)
- 50% exposed at least one in lifetime
- 8% survivors will develop PTSD
- Symptoms around 3 months , occasionally years later
- Present at least one month (DSM)

# PTSD

- Re-experiencing phenomena
- ✓ Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections
- ✓ Recurrent distressing dreams
- ✓ Acting or feeling as if events are recurring
- ✓ Intense physiological distress to cues
- ✓ Physiological reactivity to cues

# PTSD

- Avoidance and numbing
- ✓ Avoidance of thoughts, feelings and conversations
- ✓ Avoidance of reminders
- ✓ Psychological amnesia
- ✓ Reduced interest in related activities
- ✓ Detachment or estrangement feelings
- ✓ Restricted range of affect
- ✓ Sense of a foreshortened future

# PTSD

- Increased arousal
- ✓ Difficulty sleeping
- ✓ Irritability or outbursts of anger
- ✓ Difficulty in concentrating
- ✓ Hyper-vigilance
- ✓ Exaggerated startle response



# PTSD Epidemiology

- Lifetime prevalence PTSD 6.8%
- Women 10.4% ( 2 x men)
- Men 60% lifetime exposure, women 51%
- 12 month prevalence 3.5%

# Co-morbidity

- Co-morbidity rates often over 80%
- 44% with PTSD meet criteria for 3 or more other diagnoses in lifetime
- Most commonly depression, anxiety and substance misuse / dependence
- Suicide risk 6 times general pop'n

# Complex trauma



Judith Herman 1992 Trauma and Recovery

Chronic repetitive trauma → PTSD symptoms and:

- Dissociation
- Somatisation
- Re-victimization
- Affect dysregulation
- Disruptions in identity

# DSM IV R Constellation

- Impaired affect modulation
- Self destructive and impulsive behaviour
- Dissociative symptoms
- Somatic complaints
- Feelings of ineffectiveness
- Shame, despair, hopelessness
- Feeling permanently damaged
- Loss of previously sustained beliefs
- Social withdrawal
- Feeling constantly threatened
- Impaired relationships with others
- A change from previous personality characteristics

# DSM V Working party on adult trauma

- PTSD criteria
- Acute Stress disorder criteria
- Dissociative Disorder criteria
- Adjustment Disorder criteria
- Proposing new categories of Disorders of External Stress NOS and Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD)
- Re-grouping of trauma with Dissociative disorder
- Highlighting need to consider cross-cultural issues

# Current evidence base

1. PTSD NICE guidelines
  - Tf-CBT and EMDR
  - Limited trials psychodynamic
2. Complex trauma

No current NICE guidelines

Australian Review – Nickerson, Bryant et al 2010

4-86% PTSD Dx

# Trauma themes

- 1. the centrality of meaning
- 2. the importance of words
- 3. the repetition compulsion
- 4. loss and mourning

# Trauma

- Freud – piercing of the protective shield
- Flooding of the mind
- Excesses of excitation
- Discriminatory processes lost



# Stages of trauma

## First Stage

- Chaos, helplessness, horror
- Primitive anxiety
- Loss of symbolic functioning

## Second stage

- Organization and meaning through binding
- Past and present linked

# Melanie Klein

- The internal world
- Paranoid schizoid position
- Persecution, disintegration, annihilation anxieties
- Defences of splitting, projection and projective identification

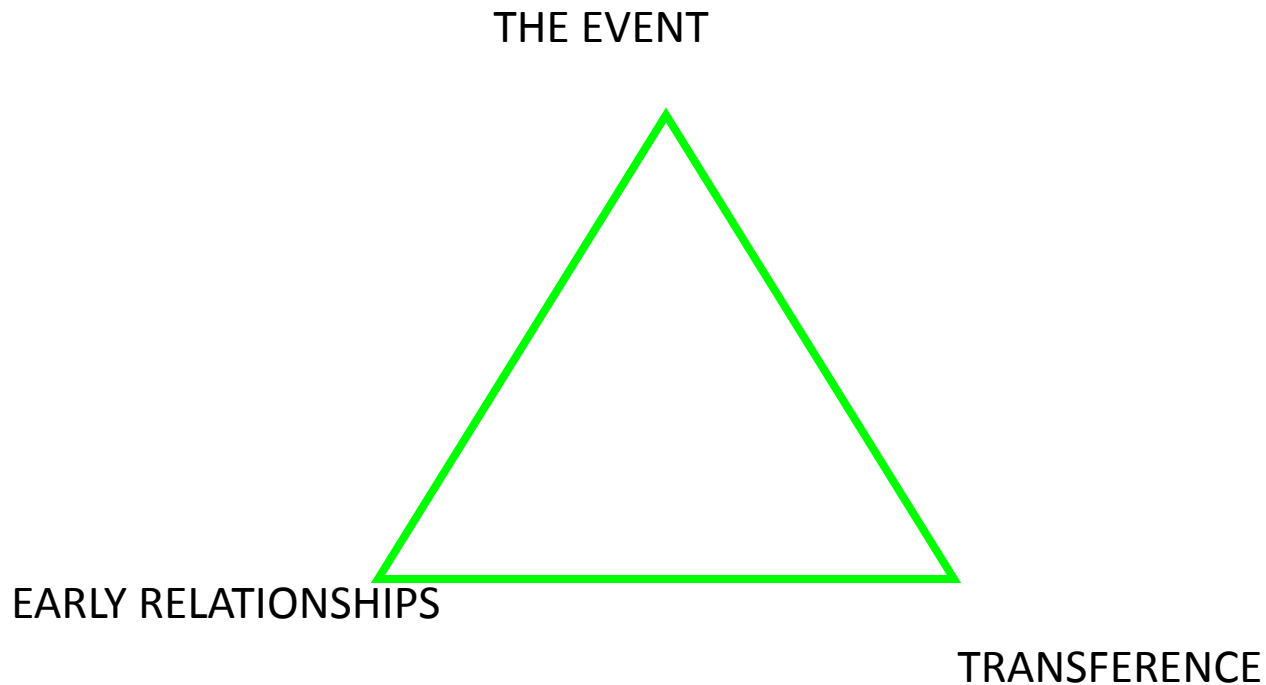
# Trauma stage two

- Binding of the traumatic event with the relationship linked to the re-awakened primitive anxieties
- The meaning of the event becomes inextricably linked with the past

# Words

- Loss of symbolic functioning
- Words as symbolic equations i.e. things in themselves
- No “as if” or thinking about

# Repetition compulsion



# Mourning in Trauma

- Real losses
- Survivor guilt
- Psychic changes
- Facing the extent of human destructiveness
- Facing the psychic reality of mortality

# Identification

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- Identification with the aggressor
- Identification with dead / damaged object
- Persistent victim state

# Refugee phases of experience

- 1 Anticipation
- 2 Devastating events
- 3 Survival
- 4 adjustment



# Refugees

- Papadopolous – nostalgic yearning
- Levy – Containment and Validation
- Fox – loss of home = loss of good object  
= loss of containment

# Treatment

- Adaptation of psychoanalytic principles – an applied method
- Transference / counter-transference
- Flexibility in approach, setting, modality
- External and internal realities
- Containment of the therapist