

University of Southern Maine USM Digital Commons

Thinking Matters Symposium

2022 Thinking Matters Symposium

#### The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma: Conversations with Mental Health Professionals

Donnielle Woods MSW Candidate University of Southern Maine

Kayla Horner MSW Candidate University of Southern Maine

Adam Quinn Ph. D., MSW University of Southern Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking-matters-symposium

Part of the Social Work Commons

Woods, Donnielle MSW Candidate; Horner, Kayla MSW Candidate; and Quinn, Adam Ph. D., MSW, "The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma: Conversations with Mental Health Professionals" (2022). *Thinking Matters Symposium*. 4.

https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking-matters-symposium/2022/poster\_presentations/4

This Poster Session is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Thinking Matters Symposium by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

## **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE**

# The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma: Conversations with Mental Health Professionals

**PORTLAND • GORHAM • LEWISTON • ONLINE** 

### Background

- Intergenerational trauma refers to the impact a traumatic experience has on subsequent generations that were not directly exposed to the original traumatic event (Isobel et al, 2020).
- Intergenerational trauma is transmitted on biological, psychological, and societal levels (Bezo & Maggi, 2018).
- Cultural trauma happens when a collective group of people experience a traumatic event or experience (Aarons, 2017).
- Exposure to trauma is linked to the development of mental health conditions, and it also impacts physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being (Isobel, et al, 2020).

### **Research Question**

To what extent, if any, does intergenerational trauma affect and transmit among African and Middle Eastern American subgroups living in Portland, Maine?

#### Hypothesis

Intergenerational trauma is being transmitted among first and second generations of African and Middle Eastern descent Americans residing in Portland, Maine.

#### Methods

- In-depth, semi-structured interviews with mental health professionals
- Two Case Managers and one Supervisor
- Participants answered 7 open-ended questions plus follow up questions
- Results analyzed using thematic analysis

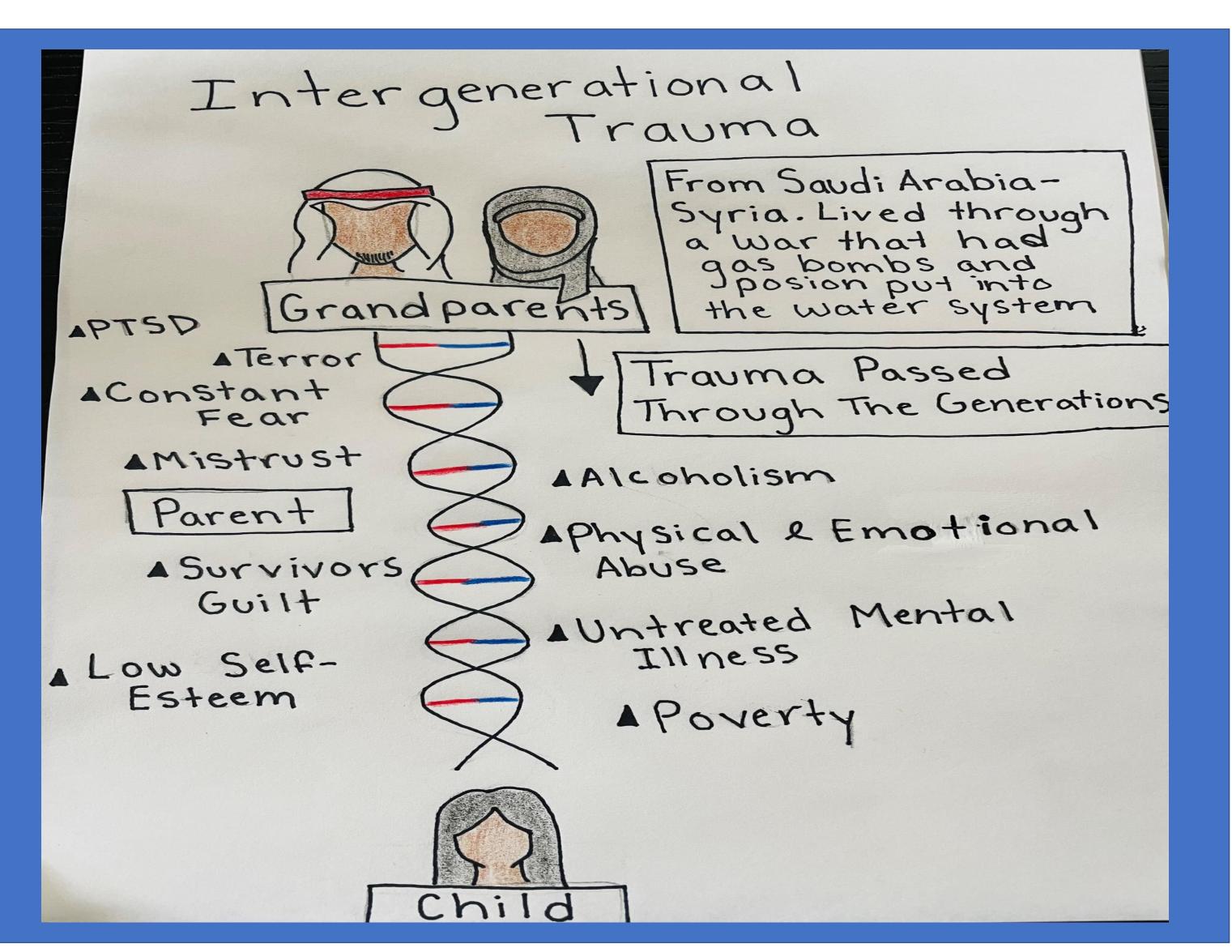
### References

- Aarons, V., & Berger, A. L. (2017). Nicole Krauss: Inheriting the burden of Holocaust trauma. *Third*-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, *History, and Memory* (pp. 147–170). Northwestern University Press.
- Bezo, B., & Maggi, S. (2018). Intergenerational perceptions of mass trauma's impact on physical health and well-being. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 10*(1), 87–94
- S., McCloughen, A., Goodyear, M., & Foster, K. (2020). Intergenerational trauma and its relationship to mental health care: A qualitative inquiry. Community Mental Health Journal.

Donnielle Woods, MSW Candidate; Kayla Horner, MSW Candidate; Adam Quinn, Ph.D., MSW, Faculty Member



Figure 1: Word cloud created from frequently used words in all three interviews. Words mentioned more often appear bigger than those mentioned less.



**Figure 2**: This image represents a story told from one of the interviews.

Theme 1: Open Discussion of Trauma within the Family

- with small children present
- versed in what happened
- Theme 2: Ongoing/Persistent Trauma
- origin who are enduring war, famine, and poverty
- **Theme 3: Survivor's Guilt**

- **\*** Theme 4: Mental Health
- health diagnoses
- hypervigilance, and depression
- Theme 5: Parenting Skills/ Style
- and the acceptable parenting style in the U.S.
- especially those living in Maine
- of intergenerational trauma in their client families
- depression after indirect exposure to trauma
- health workers who serve them

We would like to thank our community partners at Gateway Community Services and The Opportunity Alliance!

# Results

Families have detailed conversations of traumatic experiences, even

Children who were not exposed to the original trauma are well-

Families stay connected with family members in their country of Families are up-to-date on news and social media

Families feel guilty that they survived the traumatic events Families feel guilty that they left loved ones in their country of origin

Children witness their parents' struggles with PTSD and other mental

Children exhibit trauma related symptoms, such as anxiety,

Parents struggle with clashes between their cultural parenting style

### Discussion

Study findings fill gaps in the literature regarding intergenerational trauma transmission in African and Middle Eastern migrant families,

Mental health workers who serve African and Middle Eastern

migrant families in the Portland area have noticed the transmission

Second generation, U.S. born children who were not directly exposed to the original trauma in their family's country of origin are indirectly exposed to it due to storytelling, the news, and social media at home Children can exhibit trauma related symptoms such as anxiety and

Migrant parents find it difficult to navigate parenting in the U.S. due to cultural differences and mental health issues related to trauma Additional research is needed to better support the mental health needs of migrant families in the Portland area, as well as the mental