



Family Support for Schizophrenia

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

25 OCTOBER 2021

The role of childhood and adolescent trauma in schizophrenia



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The role of childhood and adolescent trauma in people with schizophrenia

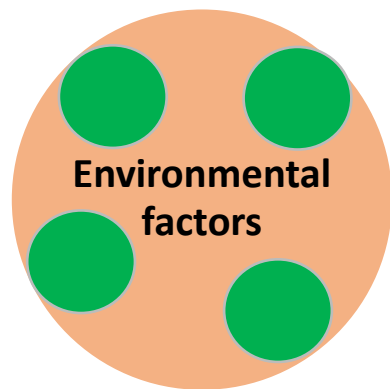
Prof Bonga Chiliza
25 October 2021

Outline

- Schizophrenia
- Pathways to psychosis
- What is trauma?
- Trauma and psychosis
- Lived experiences
- BREATHE intervention

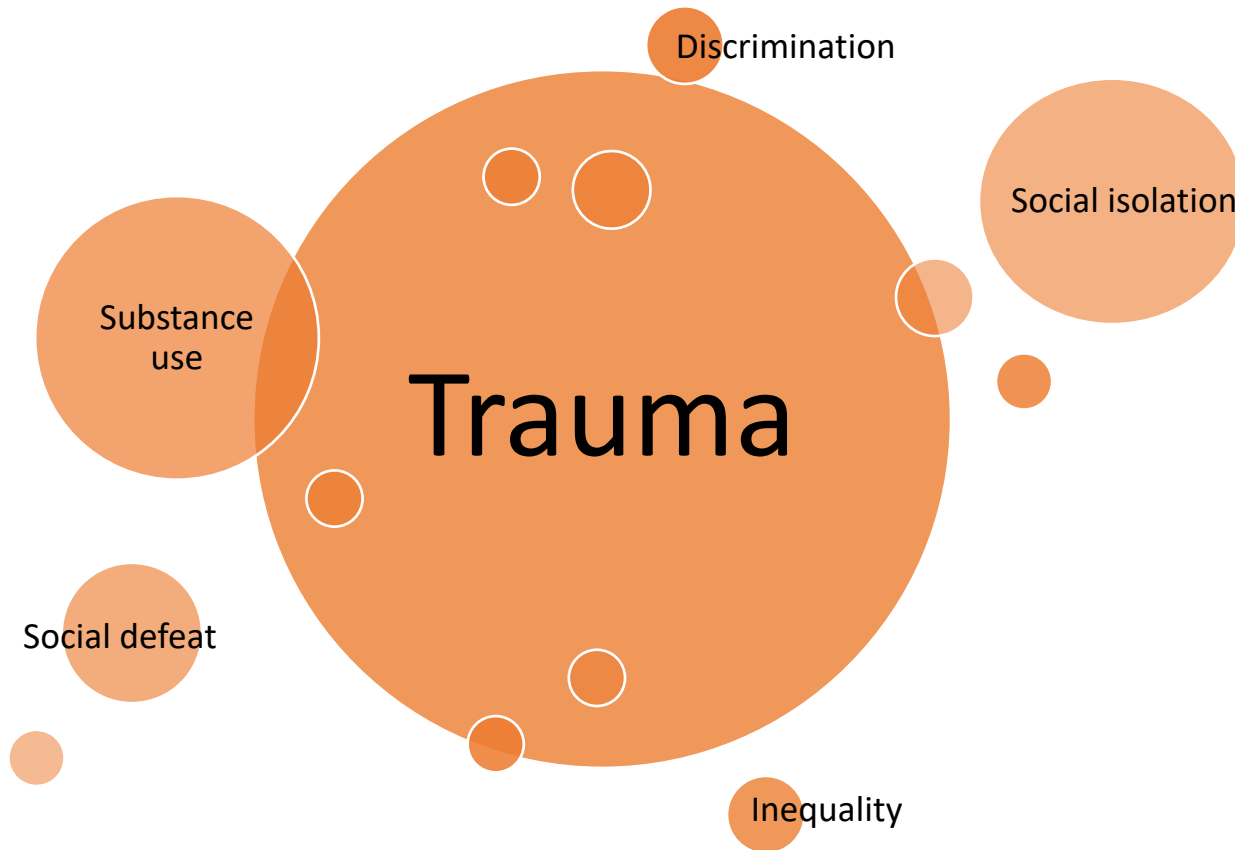
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Pathway to psychosis



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Environmental factors



What is trauma ?

- Difficult life event
- Affects 3 in 4 In south Africa



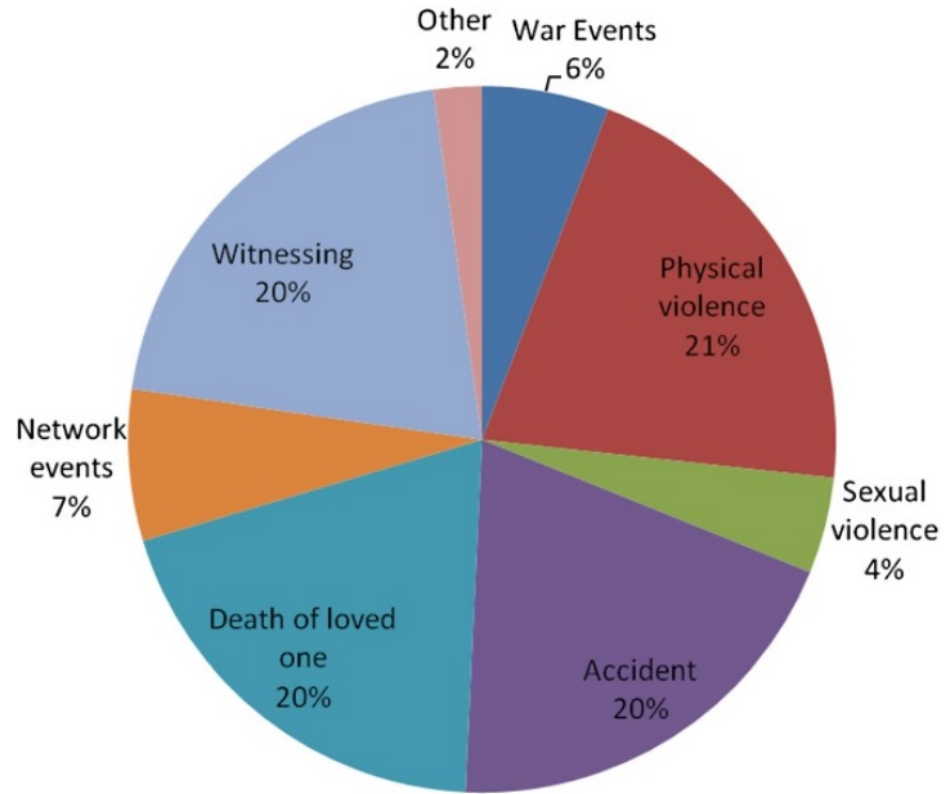
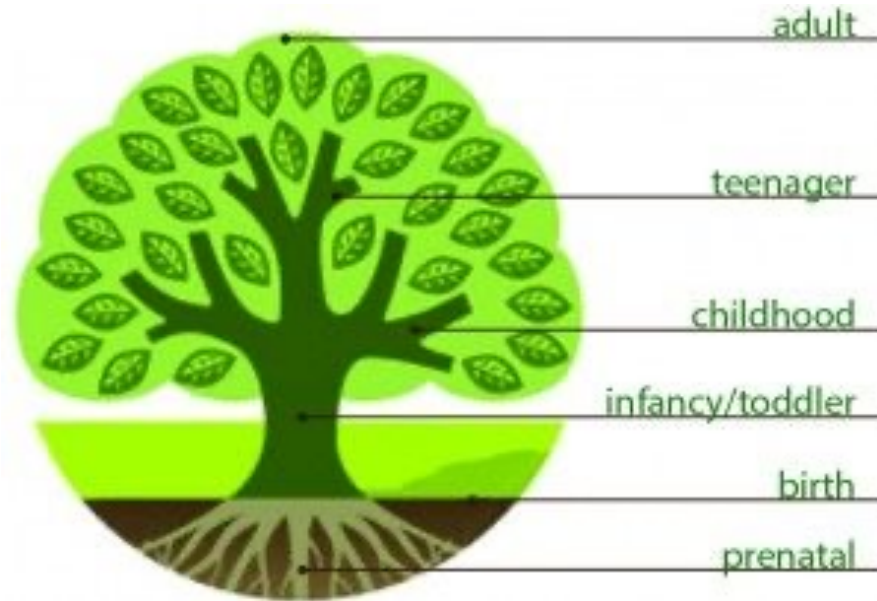


Figure 1 Traumatic events by category as percentage of all traumatic events.

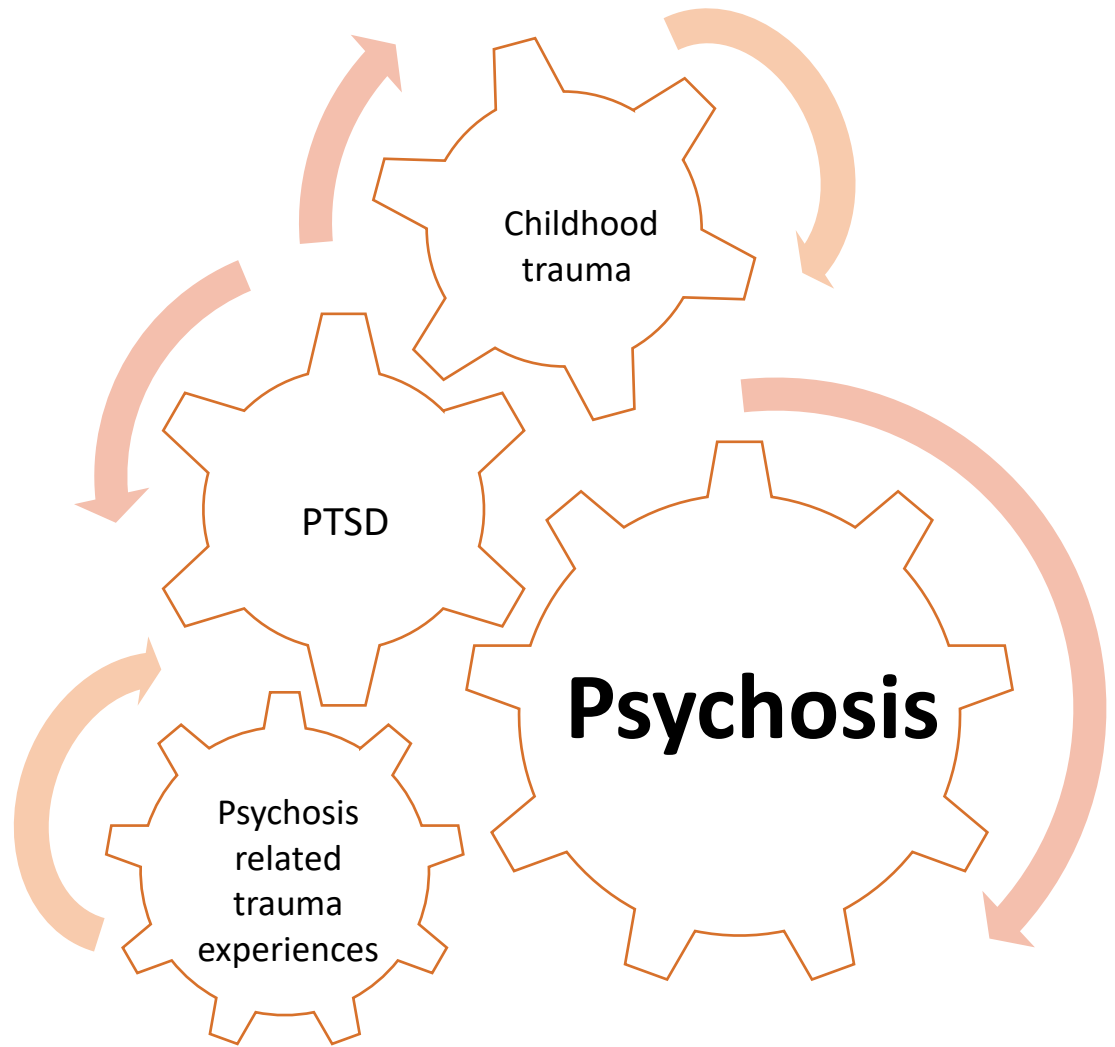
Atwoli et al. *BMC Psychiatry* 2013, **13**:182
<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-244X/13/182>

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Timing of
trauma is
important



Trauma and psychosis
-
The relationship is not linear



Shared clinical features create a diagnostic dilemma

Psychosis

Hallucinations

Negative symptoms

Metabolic syndrome
–
Due to lifestyle or medication

Trauma

Flashbacks of PTSD

Mood and negative cognitions

Inflammatory processes leading to weight gain and metabolic syndrome

The population

- A large birth cohort in the UK
- Researchers Croft et al. (2018) investigated the presence of psychotic experiences at 12 years then at 18 years

Findings:

- All types of trauma exposure were associated with increased odds of psychotic experiences

Background information

- KwaZulu-Natal
- Interviews of patients with early psychosis
- January – March 2020
- Aged 18-45

We found

- All participants (n=19) - traumatic events occurred in childhood and adolescence
- Trauma events had occurred before the diagnosis of psychosis
- All participants reported more than one traumatic event.

The
trauma
experiences

Early parental loss

- Unstable living circumstances

Abuse

- Physical
- Violence
Witnessing/Experiencing
- Emotional, bullying
- Sexual
- Neglect

Psychosis

- Diagnosis
- Subjective experience of symptoms

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Impact of
trauma

What the
people
said

A 44 year old lady who received excessive corporal punishment at home in the hands of relatives who brought her up as

“In the beginning of my sickness I thought everybody was out to harm me... you know. So getting beaten psychologically made me feel like most people want to harm me... when my sickness began I felt like, oh, everybody is out to harm me. Somebody is going to cause me to suffer. Only to find out that the people are not going to harm me, it's all in my head.”

Impact of
trauma

What the
people said

A 29 year old male who was brought up by a sister who experienced gender based violence

“At school I couldn’t concentrate because I heard her voice in my head... Because I’d wake up in the night and she’s calling me painfully. Because from her voice you could tell she needed help... One night I woke up he’d (husband) placed a knife on her head threatening to stab her ...Another night, I woke up he placed a hammer on her head, he was hitting her with a hammer”

A 30 year old male. He was bullied at school because of his stuttering.

Impact of trauma

"...The issue of being bullied and I have tongues, they call it stuttering. I call it tongues because if you say its stuttering, it hurts. You get laughed at by everyone (at school). And in a painful way, not laughing normally, the loud laugh and they even come up to the face laughing."

What the people said

"the way I reacted was to cry. I would feel angry and catch myself having already hit that person... I was beginning to fight for myself, and I was using this anger as a way of thinking. So, I learnt to fight for myself while I was in primary school, it made me have a short temper...I get angry, I can end up stabbing someone. It begins by thinking its best to beat up somebody who's going to irritate me... It began when I was small, it made me have a short temper. I don't know how I can describe it. I do feel sad. hey, I can't explain certain things."

Impact of
trauma

What the
people said

A 35 year old female who had been sexually abused

“Her (aunt’s) man used to sleep with me forcefully. He slept with me and said I must keep quiet because I used to live there and did cleaning and everything. He was the one who bought me clothes and everything. He bought me clothes and my aunt would be furious and say I receive everything from her man... I won’t tell my aunt, and I won’t tell my sisters too, because it’ll be as if I came to ruin.... And he was not doing it to me only. Everyone that came, everyone that came to the house, the uncle would sleep with them”

“When I think, (about the abuse) my breath is cut off and I cry. When I am alone in the house, I cry.”

Impact of
trauma

What the
people
said

A 25 year old male struggling with the diagnosis.

"I never thought I will ever be diagnosed with such an illness. I never thought actually I will ever take treatment for my brain. Yeah so I always think 'what did I do?' and so that's a traumatic problem for me... 'what happened, where did I fall off, what went wrong'. Yeah so that has been the worst part for me. For the world to know that I will never be myself again... That's the traumatic part... the fact that I'm diagnosed with schizophrenia, I'm not like somebody who's not"

Impact of
trauma

What the
people said

A 19 year old male who found symptoms of schizophrenia distressing

“I saw things that other people could not... ghosts. I saw ghosts. Water was changing, it changed and looked like blood and it was like I was living with a snake inside the house, that I didn’t know. I’d see a person riding a baboon.”

What we know

- People are willing to talk about their trauma experiences
- Trauma and psychosis co-morbidity disadvantage individuals
 - Lower rates of improvement on treatment
 - Leading to socioeconomic disadvantage
 - Lower levels of functioning

What we can do

- Actively looking for and identifying the trauma
- Psychotherapy
- Trauma interventions

Brief Relaxation, Education and Trauma Healing

- A brief intervention for people with PTSD and Serious mental illness including psychosis and schizophrenia
- Has been found to be effective for trauma symptoms in first world country settings
- Suitable for our setting because
 - Requires 3 sessions
 - Can be administered by lay health workers

Two components

- Psychoeducation
- Breathing retraining

Uses videos as visual aids

Requires 10 minutes daily breathing exercises

Results of the pilot study expected within the next year

Take home message

- Experiences of trauma a highly prevalent in our setting
- Trauma experiences in adolescence and early childhood predispose to psychosis
- Trauma prevention in early childhood and adolescence is priority
- The negative consequences of trauma can be prevented

- Aas, M., et al. (2016). "A history of childhood trauma is associated with slower improvement rates: Findings from a one-year follow-up study of patients with a first-episode psychosis." BMC psychiatry **16(1): 126.**
- Gaebel, W. and J. Zielasek (2015). "Focus on psychosis." Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience **17(1): 9-18.**
- Hardy, A. (2017). "Pathways from Trauma to Psychotic Experiences: A Theoretically Informed Model of Posttraumatic Stress in Psychosis." Front Psychol **8(697).**
- Morgan, C. and C. Gayer-Anderson (2016). "Childhood adversities and psychosis: evidence, challenges, implications." **15(2): 93-102.**