Field of Practice: Crisis and Trauma Intervention

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The field of social work impacts a diverse group of people of different sizes and in different ways. The intention of this paper is to identify the ways social workers who are specialized in crisis and trauma intervention work in their field. This includes analysis of the micro-, mezzo-, and macro levels of social work in practice, as well as the overlap identified between the levels. This paper will discuss the role of tele-therapy to combat social isolation, refugee group therapy, and systematic change for domestic violence response teams. This paper will also analyze the ways in which diversity and social justice impact crisis and trauma interventions, and how such interventions can be seen in current events and policy implications.

Levels of Crisis and Trauma Intervention

What are the Levels

This paper aims to enhance reader knowledge on what crisis and trauma intervention measures look like on each level of social work practices. This interdisciplinary aspect of the field of social work requires professionals to be able to adapt to myriad settings, and therefore requires a proficient understanding of what each level entails (Wu & Greig, 2022).

Micro-Interventions

Micro-level interventions are "smaller units like families or relationships," (/Baylor School of Social Work Team, 2023). Because of the individual aspect of this form, many crisis interventions include developing close relationships with clients as a means of support. One example of micro-level crisis and trauma intervention is the use of tele-therapy for "older people" who were socially isolated due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. For older people who are already often struggling with physical change, and declining cognition and health, they are at a greater vulnerability than the vast majority of the population. Because of this, social isolation has

a greater impact on feelings of loneliness and depression, as well as a depleted source of social support. (Eliezer et al., 2021, pp. 1–2). These potentially harmful feelings in older people as a result of the COVID-19 crisis required intervention to develop individual relationships through tele-therapy. The data collected during the initial stages of tele-therapy crisis intervention indicated that the consistent positive effect of tele-therapy in older populations was "the experience of having a meaningful and emotional connection," (Eliezer et al., 2021, p. 10). This indicates that the individual relationships the social workers were able to build with clients had a positive impact on their circumstances following a crisis.

Mezzo-Interventions

Mezzo-levels involve working with "medium sized systems like a community," (/Baylor School of Social Work Team, 2023). Communities can be defined as organizations, groups or teams in need of assistance. Social workers involved in crisis and trauma intervention at this level can be found in settings such as support and recovery groups, businesses or schools. One example of mezzo-level crisis and trauma intervention can be found in group-therapy for Syrian refugees.

The literature suggests that, "forced migration contributes to new social-relational losses by separating families, changing family roles and disrupting connection to community," (Bunn et al., 2021, p. 111). Groups have been proven to have a positive effect on refugees because it encourages the development of new relationships, which can evolve into the development of a community. This specific study was conducted in partnership with the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), where groups met for 90 minutes once a week. The data suggested that the group interventions led to psychosocial improvements as a result of commonality in their sufferings as refugees. "Acknowledging aspects of their own experiences fostered support from group

members… Listening to group member's stories provided perspective on their own experiences, which served as a reminder that they were not alone in their suffering," (Bunn et al., 2021, pp. 118–119). Social workers' ability to implement group therapy for the specific community of refugees created an environment where the individuals could find support from each other, and build stronger relationships outside of social worker-client relationships, which resulted in long-lasting improvements.

Macro-Interventions

Macro-level interventions are on a societal scale, and are "involved in the policy and governmental systems that play a larger role in the lives of entire communities and regions," (/Baylor School of Social Work Team, 2023). Macro-level social workers conducted a study regarding the benefits of incorporating a police-social worker partnership in domestic violence responses. The traditional response regarding domestic violence is primarily reactive and dependent on law enforcement officials. New literature focuses on an evolving practice that depends more heavily on interplay between officers and social workers, which has resulted in a newly developed method, or systematic change, regarding the intervention of domestic violence cases. One popular model encourages "specialist police family violence units and joint police-social services teams" (Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 142, as cited in Skein 2009 and Segrave et al., 2016). This systematic, macro-level change was able to alter and improve domestic violence intervention— not only for the victim, but for those working to intervene, (Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 145).

Equity in Crisis and Trauma Intervention

Diversity

Though the field of social work aims at providing assistance to everyone, with a special attention to the vulnerable, oppressed, and those living in poverty (Read the Code of Ethics, 2021), there have been occurrences where certain groups are not getting equal access to the necessary support that others are being provided. One area the field can improve is by advancing the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training in the police force. Though this specialized force was designed to have a mental health-sensitive crisis intervention process, studies have shown the behavior of CIT trained officers and those who do not have said training respond with equal force and similar intervention tactics. This leaves the community struggling with mental health disadvantaged in their time of need, as the police officers are unable to appropriately respond to crises they are involved in. (Townsend et al., 2023, p. 229).

A possible solution to this diversity issue would be to implement a macro-level change in the law enforcement system. Two possible approaches to this would be generalized training on mental health crisis intervention, or specific teams that undergo additional and extensive training. While the former has a greater probability of low-grade change in behavior for all law enforcement officials, the latter would most likely have the greatest change because of the extensive training provided to a select group of individuals - if implemented correctly. To truly be effective, a new policy would need to be established requiring a trained mental health crisis officer to be notified for each mental-health intervention.

Social Justice

Mental health issues are not only a diversity issue with police force training, but are also a social justice issue regarding the emergency department (ED) medical responses. Hospital staff report having negative attitudes toward people seeking mental health services, which shows a lack of adequate crisis intervention and trauma sensitivity training in hospital systems (Sacre et

al., 2022). This social justice issue can be addressed on a macro-level as well, through a systematic change on health providers training. By providing trauma-informed training — especially regarding mental health crises — health officials may be better prepared to handle mental health crises in the ED with correct judgment.

Triumphs

Social workers are always seeking to improve the field, which includes continuing to develop new policies that combat diversity and social justice issues. A trauma-informed practice recently created incorperates a new perspective in school systems. The "Therapeutic Crisis Intervention in Schools (TCI-S)" model focuses on faculty interventions when student-based crises occur. This new perspective aims to better educate faculty on a leading cause of potentially dangerous student behavior, trauma response or unmet emotional needs. By incorporating emotional competence into the training process, the TCI-S provides faculty with the necessary information to address challenging behavior in a way that targets the underlying need. (Rodgers & Hassan, 2021).

Crisis and Trauma Intervention Access

The aim of adequate crisis and trauma intervention is for availability to all individuals, in any crisis or trauma related circumstance. One way in which the field of social work could apply crisis intervention into the practice is through support program implementations for teachers and educators dealing with stress (Farmer, 2020); especially regarding the stress of school shootings.

The literature indicates, "research to examine public school recovery measures related to school shootings has led to possible methods of providing support to students but lacks information regarding ways to support faculty and staff," (Alexander, 2021). This shows a current need for crisis and trauma intervention research regarding faculty and staff needs

following a school shooting, which ought to be followed by the implementation of support systems in the event of a school shooting crisis.

Current Policy Implication

The current literature shows that trauma-informed policy is prevalent in the field of social work both as an implementation and education. The relevance of trauma-informed care (TIC) is viewed at the same degree of importance as basic human rights issues (Mersky et al., 2019, p. 646), and awareness of the effects of trauma has also been broken down to say, "nearly all social work services and social workers should be trauma sensitive, whereas many should be trauma informed and only some trauma focused," (Mersky et al., 2019, p. 650).

Conclusion

Crisis and trauma intervention in the field of social work has made an impact in a variety of ways. Through individual interactions with older adults on a micro-level, group therapy for refugees on a mezzo-level and systematic changes in police domestic violence responses on a macro-level, crisis and trauma intervention holds a crucial role in the field. Additionally, this aspect of social work can be refined through awareness of diversity and social issue shortcomings This branch of the field of social work can be improved in current events still today — however current policy indicates that there is a growing sense of need to educate all social workers on TIC and its benefits in practice.

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