



Collective Trauma and the Global Climate Emergency

For the Community Resilience Initiative

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The Past is Always Alive and Present & Adds to Current Factors to Make Trauma and Toxic Stress Epidemic Today

Pandemic Health Impacts and Fears

Low Wages and High Poverty

Political Polarization

Vast Economic and Social Inequalities

**Many Other Individual, Family,
Community & Societal Traumatic Stresses**



Racism and Other Qualities & Oppressions

Violence and Fear of It

Loss of Close Family/ Social Bonds

Many of today's traumatic stressors are manifestations of unresolved past traumas that combine with and aggravate new sources of trauma

To These Stressors Now Add Accelerating Climate Traumas

- We **cannot prevent** global temps. from **exceeding the 2.7 F** temp. threshold that will activate **horrific & likely irreversible impacts**--and it might happen **this decade!**
(World Meteorological Association, July 2020; Australia National Climate Restoration Program 2021)
- Under current emission path abrupt **“collapses of ecosystems”** and **“catastrophic” biodiversity loss** begin **before 2030** in tropical oceans and **then spread northward.**
(Nature, April 2020)



We Are In the Midst of a Civilization-Altering Mega-Emergency!

If people remain unprepared, it will produce individual and collective traumas on a scale never before seen in modern society:

The “Traumacene!”

Most Pervasive Impact of the Traumacene:

Cascading Disruptions to Vital Ecological, Social and Economic Systems **Resulting in 'Toxic Stress Pileups' that Affect Everyone**



- Water, food, power, and other resource disruptions & shortages
- Job and income losses
- New illnesses and diseases
- Loss of place, community, culture, and natural environment
- Disruption of close family and friend social support networks
- Involuntary migration and in-migration
- Disaster and stress-triggered crime, aggression, and violence
- Intensified racism, sexism, and other systemic oppressions
- Worries about our future and our children's future
- Many other surprising never-ending 'stress pileups'

Mixed With More Frequent, Extreme & Prolonged Disasters That Traumatize Millions

- Each year more than **47 million Americans** experience extreme storms, wildfires, heatwaves, droughts, floods, or other disasters: the number impacted will **at least double** by 2050. (Oak Ridge National Lab. May 2020)
- **20-50% of impacted people** can experience mental health problems—as can those who **know some** impacted, or even **watch it** from afar.
- **Low-income, BIPOCs** and other **marginalized populations** often hardest hit.

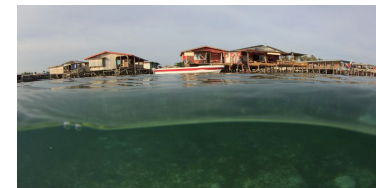
Wind, Rain, and
Snow Storms



Heat
Waves



Sea Level Rise and
Storm Surges



Wildfires



Floods



Droughts



And many other surprise disasters...

Left Unaddressed

The Result Will be a Tsunami of Individual & Collective Traumas

Individual Trauma is Fairly Well Understood

..."a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively... As so often happens in catastrophes...(people) withdraw into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone."

Collective Trauma is *Not* Well Understood

..."a blow to the basic tissue of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs their prevailing sense of community... (it is) a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared."

(Kai Erickson)

Individual and Collective Traumas Feed On Themselves

Just as traumatized people often deny, dissociate, self-sabotage, and reenact, the mix of individual and collective traumas:

- Distorts perceptions, facts, and truths
- Creates false and harmful social narratives
- Resurfaces and aggravates unresolved past traumas like racism, violence, and many injustices and inequalities
- Activates 'we vs them' tribalism that created dangerous polarization between individuals and groups
- Triggers aggression and violence

The combo can unravel institutions, communities, and cultures and make solving problems like the climate emergency all but impossible

Summary: Impacts of The “Traumacene” If We Fail To Prepare People NOW

External Stressors

Stress Reaction From Release of Cortisol and Adrenaline

• Physical Reaction:

Increased blood pressure, pulse rate, difficult breathing, cold sweats, muscle tension, aches & pains, sleep disorders

• Mental Reaction:

Excessive fear, worry, guilt, lost trust, shattered assumptions and meaning

If not discharged, what began as helpful adaptive reactions can become harmful



Individual Trauma and Maladaptive Coping

- Self-numbing or escape via legal or illegal substance, food, tobacco abuse and more
- Seeking relief via diversions like hyper-vigilance, social media, electronic video games
- Seeking relief by turning our distress on our spouse, children (ACEs), or others aggression or violence
- Dissociation, denial, neglect, and reenactment
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance health and wellbeing or climate disruption

If It Continues



Collective Trauma & Social Breakdown

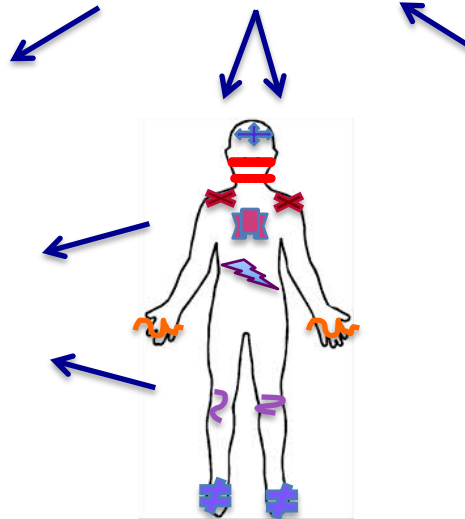
- High distrust, despair, hopelessness
- Low empathy and compassion
- Authoritarianism and extremism
- ‘We vs. Them’ polarization
- Vast aggression, violence, crime
- No concern for environmental degradation
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance health, wellbeing, climate disruption

If many people experience these reactions



All Encompassing Personal Breakdown

- Physical health problems (e.g. cancer, heart)
- Psycho-emotion problems (e.g. anxiety, depression, PTSD, increased suicidality)
- Spiritual problems (e.g. hopelessness)
- Cognitive problems (e.g. memory loss)
- Behavioral problems (e.g. aggression or withdrawal)
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance health, wellbeing, or the environment



The Climate Emergency is the Ultimate Symptom of Unresolved Collective Trauma

- Traumatized people constrict, detach, and suppress which prevents them from **seeing things clearly** or forming **safe**, **healthy** and **skillful responses**.
- Healing requires **opening internal space** to **surface**, **integrate** and **release** the traumatizing memories, emotions, and thoughts.
- This only happens only when people feel **safety** in **connection** with others.

Our Refusal to See and Address the Climate Emergency is a Manifestation of the Same Traits—and Requires Similar Solutions

- Despite knowing about risks of GHGs since late 1800s and ample scientific evidence for 30+ years much of society **remains in denial and dissociates**
- This can only be overcome by creating **safe collective spaces** for **healing**

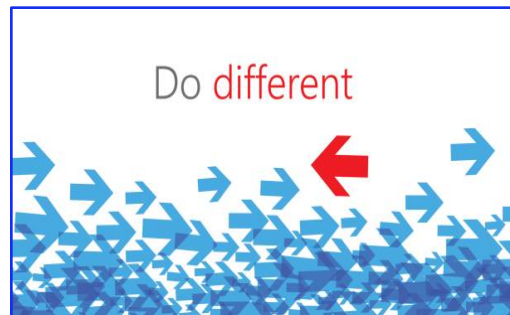
A Whole New Way of Thinking and Acting Is Needed to Prepare for the “Traumacene”!

- Our disaster response, mental health, and direct service programs are crisis and illness **NOT** wellness and resilience enhancing systems.
- Most do **NOT** strengthen existing or establish additional protective factors that prevent and heal unresolved historic or current collective traumas.
- **No society** has **EVER** fostered widespread health and wellness with individualistic approaches alone, which is why they cannot prevent or heal today's scale of mental health and psychosocial problems...

and have ZERO CHANCE of addressing those generated by the Traumacene!

A Public Health and Prevention Science Approach

Is Urgently Needed



A Public Health Approach

- Takes a **population-level approach**, not one that merely focuses on treating ‘high risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ individuals or groups
- Addresses problems by **strengthening protective factors**-- including **skills**, **strengths**, and **resources** that **buffer people** from and **counter** the forces that undermine health and wellness.
- Prioritizes **preventing problems**, not merely treating them after they emerge.



Prevention Science Expands the Public Health Approach By

- Showing that mental health and psychosocial problems can be prevented and mental wellness and resilience can be enhanced.
- Showing a growing consensus that the most effective way to address widespread mental health & psychosocial problems is to:
 - establish the “social infrastructure” in communities that..
 - engages a broad and diverse array of leaders from grassroots, civic, non-profit, public, and private orgs...
 - in planning, implementing, and continually improving equitable and just actions that build and sustain mental wellness and resilience among all adults and youth.



“The antidote to much anguish is sheer connectedness.”

(Dr. Pauline Boss 2011)

When distress is caused by external forces that have no end point, resolution, or cure, the priority must be to build resilience to push back against the external stressors—not just treat symptoms of pathology.



Four Levels of Resilience Needed for the Traumacene

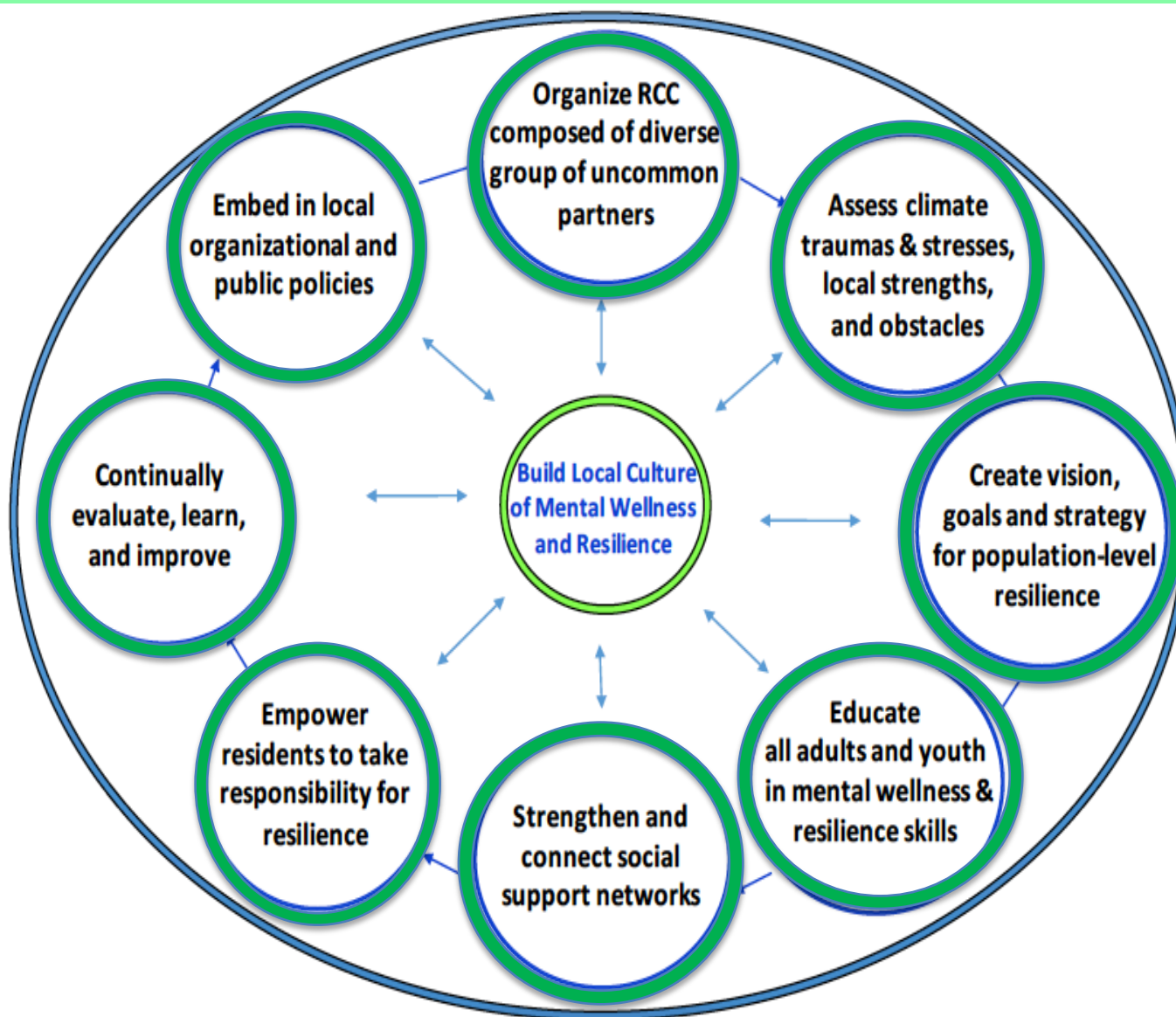
All incorporate Presencing (self regulation) and Purposing (adversity-based growth)

1. **Personal**: the ability to deliberately regulate the nervous system and calm the body, mind, and emotions when distressed.
2. **Interpersonal**: the ability to connect with and co-regulate to create a sense of safety and presence when in relationship with another.
3. **Group**: the ability of small and large groups to co-regulate themselves sufficiently to foster safe relationships, clear communications, and joint solutions to problems.
4. **Community**: the ability of large diverse sets of individuals, groups, and organizations to sufficiently calm themselves to establish safety, trust, and equity to build individual and collective wellbeing and resilience and together solve complex problems.

All 4 Levels Can Motivate People to Help Others or the Environment and Solve Problems as a Way to Increase their Own Sense of Wellbeing

The “Wheel of Change” for Building Community-Based, Culturally-Tailored, Population-Level Mental Wellness & Resilience

Key infrastructure is formation of a “Resilience Coordinating Council” (RCC)



Community-Based, Culturally-Tailored, Population-Level Mental Wellness and Resilience Building Initiatives Will Help Prevent and Heal MANY Problems

Human-Caused Emergencies like:

- Community violence
- Substance abuse and addiction
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Racism and other systemic oppressions
- Much more



Non-Climate Related Environmental Emergencies like:

- The Covid-19 Pandemic
- Earthquakes
- Tsunamis



Imagine the Benefits of a “Resilience Coordinating Council” in Your Communities or Neighborhood

Enhancing

Population-Level Capacity for Mental Wellness & Resilience!

3 Takeaways

- We must open ourselves to the reality that humanity is in the midst of a civilization-changing mega-emergency that will produce never before seen scale and scope of individual and collective traumas.
- To prevent and heal the coming tsunami of traumas we must quickly expand to a public health and prevention science approach that builds community-based, culturally-tailored, population-level initiatives nationwide to enhance collective wellness and resilience.
- The Presencing and Purposing required to address collective traumas can motivate many people to help others, restore the environment, and innovate to solve problems to heal themselves.

For more information go to the ITRC Website:

<http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/>

- ITRC National Trauma, Prevention, Wellness, and Resilience Act—including the resources listed at the end.
- Videos and slides from all 9 sessions of the Winter 2021 ITRC Training Program on Building Community-based Resilience.
- Many other sources of information found on the website

Obtain Book:

*Transformational Resilience:
How building human resilience for climate disruption can
safeguard society and increase wellbeing.*

(B. Doppelt. Greenleaf Publishing 2016)

Some of the Research Used to Develop the ITRC Approach to Community-based Mental Wellness and Resilience

- *Transformational Resilience: How Building Human Resilience to Climate Disruption Can Safeguard Society and Increase Wellbeing*, (2016) Doppelt B., Greenleaf Publishing; and *From Me to We*, (2012) Doppelt, B. Greenleaf Publishing
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- *Health in All Policies: A Guide for State and Local Government*, (2013) Institute of Medicine

More research is available in the ITRC Library: <http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/intl-tr-coalition/>