The Role of Family in Trauma Recovery: A Review of the Literature
Travmanın İyileşmesinde Ailenin Rolü: Literatür İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

Trauma has significant physical, emotional, and psychological effects worldwide, and family involvement is vital for healing and resilience. Various family interventions, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing and family therapy or family-based Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can aid in trauma recovery have shown effectiveness in reducing trauma symptoms and enhancing family functioning. However, family dynamics can contribute to stress and trauma, making it crucial to understand the relationship between family processes, trauma exposure, and recovery outcomes. A literature review using the Scopus database identified several themes, including the impact of trauma on families and children, family interventions for trauma recovery, trauma's influence on family dynamics, specific populations affected by trauma. It is important to recognize the diverse needs and strengths of each family in promoting healing and resilience.

Key words: family processes, trauma recovery, narrative review, PTSD, resilience

ÖZET

Travmanın dünya çapında önemli fiziksel, duygusal ve psikolojik etkileri vardır ve ailenin katılımı iyileşme ve dayanıklılık için hayati öneme sahiptir. Travmanın iyileşmesine yardımcı olabilecek çeşitli aile müdahaleleri, Göz Hareketleriyle Duyarsızlaştırma ve Yeniden İşleme ve aile terapisi veya aile temelli Bilişsel-Davranışçı Terapi (CBT), travma semptomlarını azaltmada ve aile işleyişini geliştirmede etkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Ancak aile dinamikleri strese ve travmaya katkıda bulunabilir, bu da aile süreçleri, travmaya maruz kalma ve iyileşme sonuçları arasındaki ilişkinin anlaşılmasını hayati hale getirir. Scopus veritabanını kullanan bir literatür taraması, travmanın aileler ve çocuklar üzerindeki etkisi, travmanın iyileşmesi için aile müdahaleleri, travmanın aile dinamikleri üzerindeki etkisi, travmadan etkilenen belirli popülasyonlar dahil olmak üzere çeşitli temalar belirledi. İyileşmeyi ve dayanıklılığı teşvik etmede her ailenin farklı ihtiyaçlarını ve güçlü yönlerini tanımak önemlidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: aile süreçleri, travma iyileşmesi, gözden geçirme, TSSB, dayanıklılık

INTRODUCTION

Trauma is a widespread and significant issue affecting individuals and communities worldwide (Saul, 2022). It can take many forms, including experiences of war, displacement, violence, natural disasters, and family conflict. The effects of trauma can be long-lasting and severe, impacting physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. While trauma recovery is a complex and multifaceted process, research has shown that the support and involvement of family members can be essential in facilitating healing and promoting resilience (Saul, 2022).

The role of family in trauma recovery has received increasing attention in recent years, with studies highlighting the positive impact of family support, communication, and resilience in reducing distress and promoting recovery (Zautra et al., 2010). Family plays a crucial role in the recovery from trauma. Family members can provide emotional support, validation, and a sense of safety and security. They can also help individuals to process traumatic events, cope with the aftermath, and build resilience. Family interventions, such as psycho-education, family therapy, and parenting programs, have been shown to be effective in reducing the symptoms of trauma and improving family functioning (Carr, 2019). However, family dynamics can also be a source of stress and trauma (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2014), and not all families are equally able to provide support and care in the aftermath of traumatic events.

Family dynamics refers to the patterns of interaction, communication, and relationships among members of a family system. These dynamics are influenced by various factors, including family structure, roles, communication styles, values, beliefs, and cultural background (Gergen, 2015). It is crucial to understand the complex interplay between family processes, trauma exposure, and recovery outcomes, to develop effective interventions that can support families in their healing journey.

Moreover, trauma can have a ripple effect on the entire family system, with each member affected in different ways. For instance, a traumatized parent may have difficulty providing emotional support to their children, which can result in children experiencing trauma symptoms themselves. Understanding the impact of trauma on family dynamics is important for developing effective interventions.

In this review, we will explore the role of family in trauma recovery, drawing from a range of literature on the topic. We will examine the impact of trauma on families, the different ways in which families can support recovery, and the challenges and barriers that families may face in the process. We will also consider the implications of this research for clinical practice and policy, highlighting the need for a family-centred approach to trauma recovery that

recognizes and addresses the unique needs and strengths of each family. Overall, the review of literature on the role of family in trauma recovery will provide insights on the effectiveness of family interventions, the impact of trauma on family dynamics, and the importance of including family in the treatment of trauma.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this scoping review is to explore the relationship between family processes, trauma exposure, and recovery outcomes, with a focus on understanding the impact of trauma on families and children, evaluating the effectiveness of family interventions for trauma recovery, examining trauma's influence on family dynamics, and identifying specific populations affected by trauma.

Search strategy

The search strategy included using keywords like "family processes", "trauma", and "families" to find relevant articles. We searched the most widely indexed database, Scopus and Google Scholar advanced search. Initially, a search on the Scopus database yielded 37 results and that of Google Scholar's advanced search produced 25 articles after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance. Additionally, during the discussion phase of the review, we sought additional articles to strengthen the arguments presented herein.

Inclusion Criteria

Based on the inclusion criteria that considered subject areas, document type, source type, and language, the results were narrowed down. Review articles from journals in five subject areas, namely medicine, psychology, social sciences, nursing, and environmental science, were considered, and only articles published in English were included.

After applying these criteria, the search produced 34 articles, which were further checked for duplicates. One duplicate was found and removed, remaining 33 articles for analysis. To organize the findings, a literature table was used to capture information on targeted populations and study design employed. Commonalities of the findings were identified and grouped into headings.

TYPES OF TRAUMA

Trauma has been recognized as a psychological phenomenon since the beginning of recorded history, with descriptions of traumatic events and their effects dating back to ancient civilizations (Ray, 2015). The types of traumatic events that have been identified have evolved over time, as understanding of the phenomenon has developed.

One of the earliest recognized types of trauma was physical injury, such as wounds sustained in battle. This was followed by recognition of the psychological effects of traumatic events, including the emotional and mental impact of war and other disasters(Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel, 2008). In recent times, the range of traumatic events that have been recognized has expanded significantly, with recognition of the long-term psychological effects of abuse, neglect, and other forms of interpersonal violence (Baranowsky and Gentry, 2015).

The different types of trauma that have been identified can be broadly categorized into three groups: acute trauma, chronic trauma, and complex trauma. Acute trauma refers to a single traumatic event, such as a natural disaster or an accident. Chronic trauma refers to repeated exposure to traumatic events over time, such as on-going abuse or combat exposure. Complex trauma, also known as developmental trauma, refers to the cumulative effects of multiple traumas over time, particularly in childhood (Ray, 2015).

Understanding the different types of trauma is important in the context of family and trauma recovery, as the type of trauma experienced can affect the ways in which individuals and families respond to trauma and the types of interventions that are most effective in promoting recovery. For example, individuals who have experienced chronic trauma may have more complex symptoms and require more intensive and longer-term interventions, whereas individuals who have experienced acute trauma may benefit more from brief, focused interventions (Cloitre et al., 2009).

CAUSES OF TRAUMA

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse childhood experiences refer to negative and potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood, it can have a significant impact on an individual's development and well-being. These experiences can include physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, and exposure to violence, among others (Felitti et al., 2019). Children who experience ACEs are at a higher risk of developing a wide range of physical and mental health problems later in life, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and chronic illnesses (Felitti et al., 2019; Zarse, et al., 2019).

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse which involves any unwanted sexual activity can also cause significant trauma in individuals. Sexual abuse can occur at any age, but it is particularly damaging when it occurs during childhood or adolescence (Oddone-Paolucci et al., 2017). The effects of sexual abuse can be long-lasting and pervasive, and can include a range of emotional and psychological symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociation, and sexual dysfunction (Fergusson et al., 2013; Oddone-Paolucci et al., 2017).

Family conflict and dysfunction

Families that are characterized by conflict, dysfunction, or instability can create an environment that is stressful and unpredictable for children, which can increase their risk of experiencing trauma (Hutt, 2014). Family conflict and dysfunction can manifest in various ways, such as parental conflict, divorce, substance abuse, or physical and emotional abuse or neglect, and can have long-term effects on an individual's emotional and psychological well-being. Family conflict and dysfunction can lead to chronic stress and emotional dysregulation, which can make it difficult for individuals to cope with stressful or traumatic experiences later in life.

Attachment disruptions

Attachment disruptions occur when the bond between a child and their primary caregiver is disrupted or inconsistent, which can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including trauma (Hutt, 2014). Children who experience attachment disruptions may have difficulty forming and maintaining healthy relationships in adulthood, and may also struggle with emotional regulation, self-esteem, and other areas of functioning. Attachment disruptions can have a lasting impact on an individual's ability to trust others and form healthy relationships, which can make it challenging to engage in the supportive relationships that are essential for trauma recovery.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires can lead to trauma for those who experience them. Trauma resulting from natural disasters can cause symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD (North and Pfefferbaum, 2013). The severity and duration of the trauma can depend on the extent of the disaster and the individual's proximity to the event. In addition, research has also found that natural disasters can lead to

long-term mental and physical health problems for survivors, such as chronic pain, respiratory issues, and substance abuse (Norris et al., 2002). These health problems may persist long after the initial traumatic event, making it crucial to provide on-going support and interventions for those affected by natural disasters.

War and Conflict

Exposure to war and conflict can lead to trauma for those involved, including military personnel and civilians. Trauma resulting from war and conflict can cause symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Porter and Haslam, 2005). The severity and duration of the trauma can depend on the individual's proximity to the conflict, the intensity of the violence, and the duration of the conflict. Additionally, research has found that exposure to war and conflict can also result in a range of physical health problems, such as chronic pain, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory disorders (Steel et al., 2009). These physical health problems can further exacerbate the psychological impact of the trauma.

Medical Trauma

Medical trauma can result from a wide range of experiences, including serious illness, medical procedures, hospitalization, and medical errors. Medical trauma can lead to symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, and can be acute or chronic depending on the severity and duration of the medical event (De Young, et al., 2021). In addition, medical trauma can have long-lasting effects on individuals, especially children, who may develop fear and avoidance of medical procedures, leading to difficulties in seeking medical care in the future (Kenny, 2008). Furthermore, research has found that individuals who experience medical trauma may also struggle with feelings of loss of control, vulnerability, and a sense of betrayal by healthcare providers (Woods et al., 2009). Therefore, it is essential for healthcare providers to be aware of the potential for medical trauma and to provide trauma-informed care to promote healing and prevent further harm.

Impact of trauma on children and families

Trauma can have significant and long-lasting impacts on children and families, particularly in situations of war, displacement, and forced migration. The Syrian conflict, for instance, has had devastating effects on children, who are exposed to violence, displacement, and loss of loved ones. Studies have shown that Syrian children are at risk of experiencing

mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Alpak et al., 2015).

Moreover, trauma can be transmitted across generations, leading to intergenerational cycles of trauma and psychological distress. This is particularly relevant for refugee families, where parents may have experienced trauma in their country of origin or during their journey to a new country. Studies have shown that trauma experienced by parents can impact their children's mental health, behaviour, and development (Buhman, et al., 2018).

Immigration detention is another traumatic experience that can have severe mental health consequences for refugee families. Research has highlighted the negative impact of detention on children's psychological well-being, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Hodes et al., 2008). Family separation, uncertainty, and lack of control over their lives are some of the factors that can contribute to these negative outcomes.

Impact of trauma on family dynamics

Family dynamics as used in this context refer to the patterns of interaction, communication, and relationships between family members. These patterns can be shaped by a variety of factors such as family structure, cultural values, personality traits, life experiences, and social norms. The family dynamics that have been discussed here are limited to; impact of trauma on family roles and relationships, impact of trauma on family communication, connection, and boundaries and impact of trauma on intergenerational trauma: breaking the cycle.

Impact of trauma on family roles and relationships

Trauma can disrupt the balance of power and the roles that family members play within the family system. For example, a parent who is dealing with trauma may become emotionally distant or less involved in parenting responsibilities, while a child who has experienced trauma may become withdrawn or exhibit challenging behaviors that disrupt family routines (Baranowsky and Gentry, 2015). These changes in family roles and relationships can create a sense of instability and unpredictability within the family system. Children who are accustomed to relying on their parents for support and guidance may feel abandoned or neglected when a parent is struggling with trauma, while parents may feel overwhelmed and unsure of how to provide effective support to their children. Additionally, these disruptions to family roles and relationships can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, or blame among family members, further complicating the process of trauma recovery (David and Eth, 2014).

It is important for families to seek out appropriate support and resources to help navigate the complex dynamics that can arise in the aftermath of trauma. This may include family therapy, individual therapy, support groups, or other forms of professional assistance. By working together to address the impact of trauma on family dynamics, families can begin to rebuild a sense of safety, stability, and trust within their relationships.

Impact of trauma on family communication, connection, and boundaries

Trauma can also impact communication within the family, leading to misunderstandings, conflicts, or a breakdown in communication altogether. Family members may struggle to express their emotions or may avoid discussing the trauma altogether, which can create tension and further disrupt family relationships (Baranowsky and Gentry, 2015). In addition to creating communication difficulties, trauma can also impact the ability of family members to trust and connect with one another. Family members may feel reluctant to open up and share their thoughts or feelings, fearing that they may be judged or rejected by others. This can lead to a sense of isolation and a breakdown in the sense of family unity and support that is crucial for healing from trauma (Courtois and Ford, 2019).

Furthermore, when communication is disrupted within the family, it can be difficult to establish healthy boundaries and maintain a sense of safety. Family members who have experienced trauma may struggle to recognize and respond appropriately to boundaries, which can lead to further conflict and distress within the family system (Stoddard and Claridge, 2023).

Impact of intergenerational trauma on a family

Trauma can also have intergenerational effects, meaning that it can be passed down from one generation to the next. For example, a parent who experienced trauma in childhood may struggle with parenting their own children and may unintentionally perpetuate patterns of trauma and dysfunction within the family (David and Eth, 2014). Intergenerational trauma can also affect the brain and biological makeup of subsequent generations, leading to higher risk of mental and physical health problems. Understanding and addressing intergenerational trauma is important for breaking the cycle of trauma and promoting healing and resilience within families and communities.

Impact of trauma on resilience to traumatic experiences

Resilience is the ability to adapt to and cope with adversity, including traumatic experiences. While trauma can have a devastating impact on individuals, families, and communities, it can also foster resilience (Ungar, 2011). Traumatic experiences can challenge an individual's sense of safety, control, and trust, and disrupt their sense of identity and purpose (Ray, 2015). However, individuals who have experienced trauma can also develop a heightened sense of empathy, compassion, and self-awareness, and a greater appreciation for the present moment (Levine, 2015).

Impact of trauma on Indigenous populations

Indigenous populations in North America experience significant mental health disparities, including higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide than non-Indigenous populations, due in part to the historical trauma they have endured (Antonio, et.al, 2020). Colonization, genocide, and forced assimilation have disrupted Indigenous communities, leading to the loss of cultural traditions and practices, and resulting in a sense of disconnection from their cultural identity. This disconnection from culture can contribute to negative mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Henderson, et.al., 2021).

The impact of historical trauma on Indigenous populations is significant and cannot be overlooked when addressing mental health disparities. Despite these challenges, many Indigenous individuals and communities exhibit remarkable resilience, rooted in their cultural traditions and practices. However, the loss of cultural traditions and practices has resulted in a disconnection from culture, contributing to negative mental health outcomes.

A comprehensive approach is required to address mental health disparities among indigenous populations, one that acknowledges the impact of historical trauma and promotes indigenous resilience. This involves increasing access to culturally appropriate mental health services and supporting indigenous communities in revitalizing and reclaiming their cultural traditions and practices (Machado-Vaz, 2016; Wexler, 2014).

The complex interactions between family systems and trauma, and how different elements of the family system can impact and be impacted by traumatic events is illustrated in Fig 1. It can also serve as a useful tool for clinicians, policymakers, and researchers to better understand the importance of including the family in the treatment and recovery process for individuals who have experienced trauma. This figure is the creation of the authors, depicting our conceptual framework from the synthesis of literature.
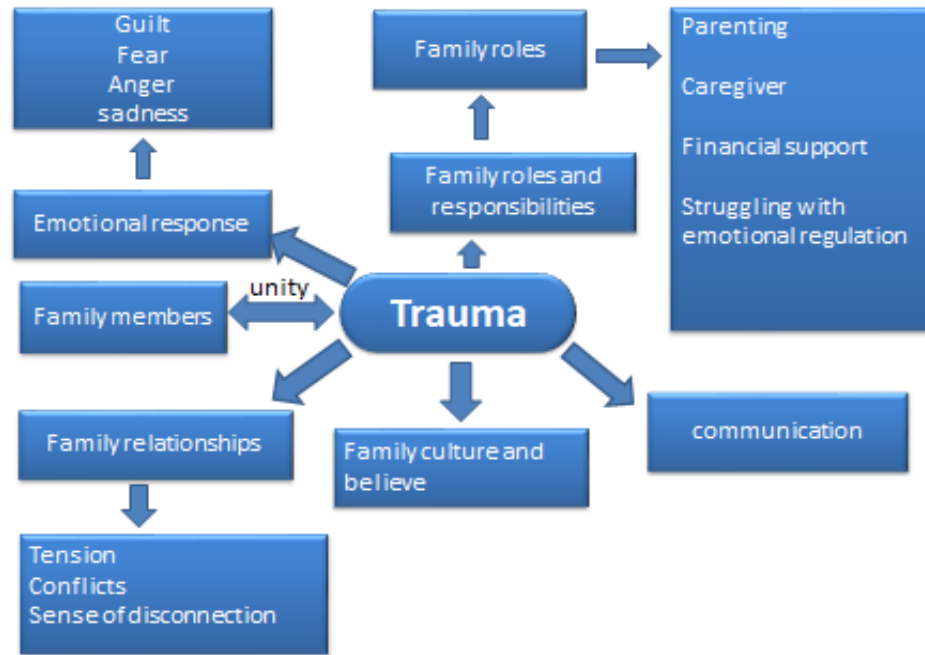
Fig 1: Interactions between family culture and beliefs

Trauma recovery Interventions

Trauma recovery is a complex process that requires specialized interventions. Various interventions have been shown to be effective in supporting trauma recovery (Schäfer et al., 2018). A detailed search of the literature has pointed to two most effective interventions for trauma recovery, including individual therapies and family interventions.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based intervention that has been shown to be effective in treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related conditions. CBT focuses on helping individuals understand and challenge negative thoughts and behaviours related to their trauma (Larsen, Fleming and Resick, 2019). For instance, a meta-analysis by Thompson-Brenner et al., (2003) found that CBT was effective in reducing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms across a range of populations, including those who experienced interpersonal violence and natural disasters.

The Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), uses eye movements to help individuals process and reduce the emotional intensity of traumatic memories (Forester, 2018). EMDR is often used in conjunction with other therapies and interventions, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, to address a wide range of trauma-related symptoms and improve overall functioning in individuals who have experienced trauma. It is a well-researched and evidence-based intervention that has been shown to be effective in treating various types of trauma, including complex trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),

a review by (Crawford-Faucher, 2014) found that EMDR was an effective treatment for PTSD, with some studies suggesting it may be more efficient than other trauma-focused therapies.

Family interventions, such as family therapy and parenting programs, can also be effective in supporting trauma recovery. Family therapy focuses on improving communication, reducing conflict, and enhancing coping skills within families affected by trauma(Cohen and Mannarino, 2022). Parenting programs aim to improve parenting skills and strengthen the parent-child relationship, which can help children and adolescents affected by trauma (Lieberman et al., 2005).

Functional Family Therapy (FFT) is an evidence-based intervention that has shown promising results in treating PTSD in youth, by focusing on improving family dynamics and communication. FFT is a short-term, solution-focused therapy that aims to promote positive changes in the family system by addressing risk factors and strengthening protective factors. In the context of trauma recovery, FFT works by addressing dysfunctional family patterns that may be exacerbating symptoms of PTSD in youth. A study conducted Robbins et al., (2011) found that FFT was effective in reducing PTSD symptoms in youth who had experienced traumatic events. Specifically, the study found that youth who received FFT had significant reductions in PTSD symptoms compared to those who received "standard care" defined as conventional treatments commonly provided to individuals who have experienced traumatic events. These conventional treatments may include interventions such as individual therapy, group therapy, medication management, or a combination of approaches.

Resilience-focused interventions can also be helpful in supporting trauma recovery within families. Resilience-focused interventions typically involve building upon existing strengths within the family system to promote resilience and adaptation(Walsh, 2015). For example, a therapist might work with a family to identify areas of strength or resilience, such as a shared sense of humour or a history of overcoming challenges, and help to build upon these strengths to promote recovery. The concept of resilience is crucial in trauma recovery, referring to an individual's ability to adapt and recover from traumatic events (McCleary and Figley, 2017). Various means to develop resilience include social support, positive coping strategies, and cognitive-behavioural interventions (Sandal, 2017). Family support is also a significant factor in promoting resilience in those affected by trauma, as it provides emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging.

Interventions for developing resilience include psychotherapy, CBT, mindfulness-based interventions, and trauma-focused therapies (Reynolds, 2019). For instance, Cognitive-

behavioural therapists view depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and related issues as stress-related mental health dysfunctions that are a product of dysfunctional thinking (Ehring, 2022). According to stress and resilience theories, it is not the stressor itself but the individual's cognitive appraisal of the stressor that leads to stress reactions (Ghiasuddin et al., 2015). Therefore, changing an individual's thought patterns into a more constructive pattern of thought can lead to more adaptive emotional and behavioural responses to stress.

Mindfulness-based interventions, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), have also been found to be effective in building resilience. MBSR involves practicing mindfulness techniques, such as meditation and deep breathing, to cultivate awareness and acceptance of present moment experiences. This can help individuals develop greater emotional regulation and self-awareness, which can enhance resilience (Chiesa and Serretti, 2010).

Trauma-focused therapies, such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), can be particularly helpful for individuals who have experienced trauma or adverse life events. EMDR aims to process and desensitize traumatic memories, reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and improve overall resilience (Cusack et al., 2016).

Another important aspect of trauma recovery in families is addressing communication difficulties. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and a lack of trust among family members. Family therapy can help families learn effective communication strategies and improve their ability to express emotions. It is important to note that addressing communication difficulties in families impacted by trauma can be a challenging process, and may require on-going support and practice outside of therapy sessions (Hamwey, et al., 2020). Effective communication can help family members affected by trauma to feel understood and heard, promoting healing and rebuilding trust within the family system.

Attachment-Based Family Therapy (ABFT) is an evidence-based intervention that focuses on strengthening the attachment bond between parents and their children. In families impacted by trauma, ABFT can help repair any disruptions in the attachment bond and promote healing (Diamond et al., 2012). ABFT aims to repair and strengthen the attachment bond between parents and their children by focusing on five core tasks: creating a secure emotional environment, reframing the problem as a failure of attachment, promoting alliance building, promoting emotional engagement and expression, and promoting autonomy and competency (Diamond et al., 2012). ABFT can be an effective intervention for trauma recovery in families, especially for those where trauma has affected the attachment bond between parents and their children.

CONCLUSION

This review highlights the difficulty and the connected nature of various factors that contribute to mental health disparities among specific populations. Addressing these disparities requires an all-inclusive approach that takes into account the unique experiences and needs of each population. Studying the role of family in trauma recovery is important as family members can provide critical emotional support, validation, and a sense of safety and security to individuals who have experienced trauma. Family members can offer a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, and a sense of connection that can be instrumental in reducing distress and promoting healing. Family members can help individual process traumatic events, cope with the aftermath, and build resilience through the sharing of their own experiences, offering practical advice, and providing reassurance and encouragement, family members can help individuals feel less alone in their recovery journey and develop the skills and strategies needed to move forward. Again, understanding the impact of trauma on family dynamics is important for developing effective interventions. Trauma can have a ripple effect on the entire family system, with each member affected in different ways.

Key Takeaways from the Review:

- Mental health is influenced by the interaction of individual, familial, and societal factors.
- Childhood experiences, particularly adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), can have a lasting impact on mental health outcomes.
- Family dynamics, including communication patterns and emotional support, can play a significant role in mental health outcomes.
- Trauma, particularly historical trauma experienced by Indigenous populations, can have intergenerational effects on mental health outcomes.
- Resilience is an important factor in promoting positive mental health outcomes, and can be fostered through cultural practices and traditions.

Future Research Directions:

- More research is needed to understand the mechanisms linking childhood experiences, family dynamics, and mental health outcomes.
- Research should focus on developing interventions that promote resilience and address the intergenerational effects of trauma.

- Further research is needed to understand the unique mental health needs of specific populations, including Indigenous populations and other marginalized communities.

Implications for Practice:
- Mental health professionals should consider the impact of childhood experiences and family dynamics when working with clients.
- Culturally appropriate interventions, grounded in the traditions and practices of specific populations, may be more effective in promoting positive mental health outcomes.
- Policies and programs aimed at promoting mental health should take into account the unique needs and experiences of specific populations, particularly those who have experienced historical trauma.

Research Statement

Ethical Aproval: The study does not require ethical approval.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest for the study.

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