



D. Institutional Re-traumatization



Re-traumatization

“A situation, attitude, interaction, or environment that replicates the events or dynamics of the original trauma and triggers the overwhelming feelings and reactions associated with them.”

Source: <https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/practice/preventingretraumatization-a-macro-social-work-approach-to-trauma-informed-practices-policies/>



Institutional Re-traumatization

1st step in financial independence
= public assistance

Trauma (incl. financial trauma)
can be exacerbated by injustice in
social structures, services &
institutions.

Institutional Re-traumatization

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Happens not just in legal or medical institutions (police, courts, hospitals, etc.) but also social assistance services (e.g. ahcccs, welfare)

Local advocates reiterate difficulty of navigating this system



“There are always long lines at DES or long wait times on the phone and the messages you get are really inconsistent. Their policies are really rigid and it’s not a very human experience, staff members can be really cold. There is a long history in the US of vilifying people who access welfare benefits and it feels like the process is difficult on purpose.”



“... these interactions
disempower recipients
and **mimic** the conditions
of abuse.”



Source: “Women, Abuse, and the Welfare Bureaucracy”,
Journal of Women and Social Work

How are conditions of abuse mimicked?

- EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Extreme rudeness

Disrespect

Humiliation

Talking down to

- ECONOMIC ABUSE

Use of sanctions

Or threatening to use sanctions to reduce benefits

Source: "Women, Abuse, and the Welfare Bureaucracy",
Journal of Women and Social Work

Services that mirror power & control experienced before

Client viewed as passive recipient; provider as superior

Organizational policies & procedures place their needs over the needs and comfort of whom they're supposed to be serving.

What can we do?



Validate process is as hard. It *is* “a thing”, “you’re not alone”.

Prepare mentally, address expectations.

Provide “coaching”: affirmations or helpful language.

QUESTIONS FOR SUPPORTING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH:

- To what extent are program activities and settings consistent with the principles of: Safety, Trust, Choice, Collaboration, Compassion, and Empowerment?
- To what extent does the program maximize trustworthiness by making service delivery clear, ensuring consistent... open, honest, and respectful communication?
- To what extent does the program maximize client experiences of choice and control?