

Intergenerational Trauma

Blue Knot Foundation fact sheet about intergenerational trauma and the impact it has on individuals and groups of people.

Recent research “has not only chronicled the existence of intergenerational trauma but has demonstrated some of the epigenetic, molecular, and biochemical mechanisms responsible for such transmission” (Levine, 2015: 161)

1 When people who have experienced or witnessed trauma have not had an opportunity to heal from that trauma, it can be transferred to the next generation. This is known as intergenerational trauma.

2 Trauma can also be transferred to subsequent generations i.e. beyond just the next generation (Atkinson et al. 2010). When trauma is transmitted across a number of generations, it is known as transgenerational trauma (Atkinson, 2002).

3 Cycles of trauma can occur when the impacts of trauma are passed from generation to generation.

4 Transgenerational trauma extends beyond the individual, the family and challenges with personal and caregiving relationships.

5 The ongoing effects of colonisation, dispossession, racism and the trauma experienced by the Stolen Generations are the basis of transgenerational trauma for Australia’s First Nations peoples.

6 The Stolen Generations are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who as children, between 1910-1970, were forcibly taken away from their families and communities to be raised in institutions, fostered out or adopted by white families.

7 In Australia, transgenerational trauma often impacts the children, grandchildren and future generations of the Stolen Generations.

8 Whole groups of different people (e.g. holocaust survivors, refugees and asylum seekers) also disproportionately experience collective and transgenerational trauma. Collective trauma is trauma which happens to a whole group of people or society.