

## THE STATE OF PLAY

Each month, we examine how the mental health conversation in the media is evolving, with a focus on youth, women, and the justice system. Last month, we looked at how race intersects with mental health. This month, we analyze the connections between trauma and youth.

The diagram below illustrates the conversation around youth, trauma, and mental health. It assesses a 622 news articles from June through August 2020. Takeaways include:

### The Lasting Health Impact of Childhood Trauma

A **new study** published in August by the American Psychological Association contends that traumatic childhood experiences can both expedite cellular aging and puberty as well as change brain structure. With these changes leading to poorer health later in life, early intervention is critical. But take a look at the *Impacts of Childhood Trauma* cluster in the analysis below. And note how it's isolated from everything else. This positioning suggests that the biological consequences of trauma are not connected to the broader conversations around trauma among youth.

### The Role of Educators

Research continues to strengthen the links between trauma, behavior, and learning. This has led to the recent creation of a trauma-informed classroom, with schools developing strategies to help traumatized youth succeed. Yet many intervention methods rely on in-person interactions. For example, the **ATLAS**

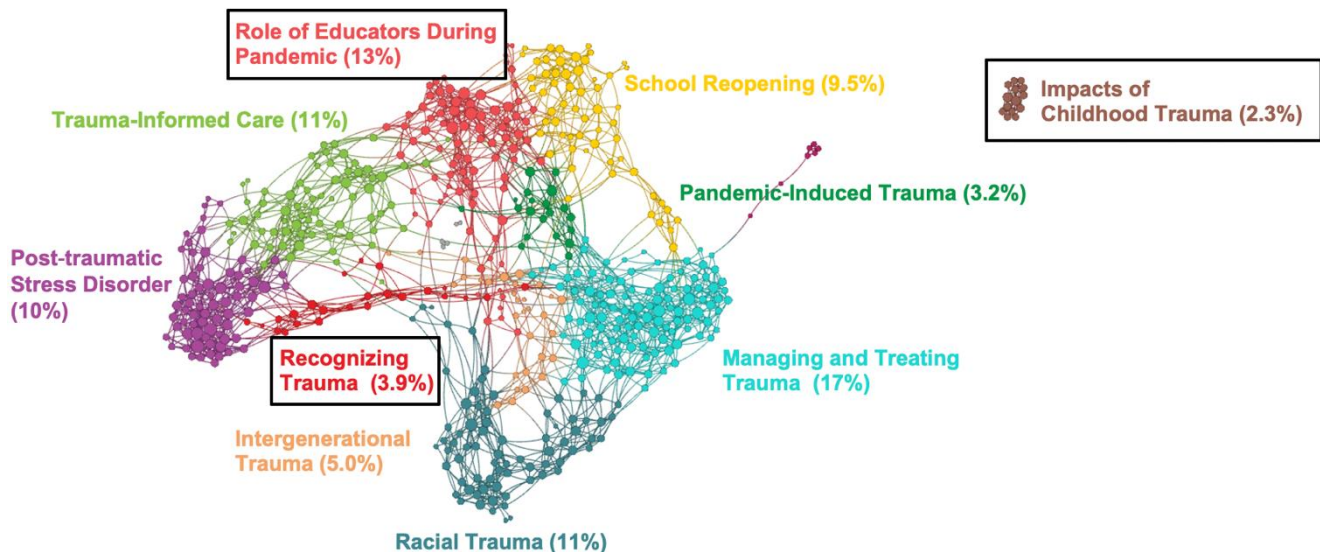
**program**, developed in an Oklahoma district in 2019, uses group activities, physical expression and relationship-building to help students feel secure in the classroom. Educators must now pivot quickly to understand and implement **trauma-informed distance learning**. Resources like the APAF's **Notice.Talk.Act program** will offer crucial support.

### Recognizing Sources of Trauma

In response to the wave of school shootings that have occurred in the past five years, the School Safety Working Group at the U.S. Department of Justice published a **paper** in August that outlines the ten most important actions to prevent mass casualty attacks. With much attention being paid to the trauma caused by COVID-19, the report is a solemn reminder of the extent to which shootings have made attending school a traumatic experience.

## Youth, Trauma and Mental Health

June to August 2020



## THOUGHT STARTERS: SPECIAL EDITION

*This month, we take a break from sharing our usual roundup of thought-provoking ideas about the mental health of women, youth, and the justice system. Instead, we found three pieces that are shaping the ways that neuroscience is both intersecting with and informing our lives.*

### **The Brain Chemistry of COVID-19**

In the feverish months since the outbreak of the pandemic, COVID-19 has caused widespread anxiety, stress and depression. But what will COVID (the virus) and COVID (the lockdown) mean for the long-term physiology and functioning of our brains? **Neuropsychopharmacology** offers a hypothesis:

*“Research suggests that the virus may gain access to the forebrain’s olfactory bulb, which is important for the processing of smell...as well as having extensive connections to the other brain regions, the olfactory bulb is rich in the chemical dopamine, which is important for pleasure, motivation and action...Repeated stress...can also affect the brain and shrink the hippocampus and therefore affect our emotions.”*

### **Truth or Consequences in Scientific Research**

Science hath spoken: women make poor engineers, and race determines a person’s ambition. Or at least such claims have passed as “science” in past issues of *Scientific American*. This magazine is hardly alone for cloaking racism and sexism in the name of science, but *Scientific American* does stand out for owning to such blunders. Two editors in the **September 2020 issue** embrace past mistakes and ask what they can teach us about the present and future:

*“These days when we deliberate story proposals and editorial strategy, we reassess the status quo and ask one another deeper questions: What makes someone an expert? Who is interrogating the data? What are our responsibilities as gatekeepers? Who is missing from our pages? Because when we look back, it is easier to identify the voices and ideas we published that caused harm; it is harder to assess how much was lost by overlooking or excluding people and perspectives that could have shaped knowledge for a better, safer, fairer word.”*

For mental health, these are urgent questions. If we are, as some suggest, living in a “Golden Age” of mental health research and discovery, what blunders are we making now that our descendants might one day be forced to own?

### **Election Countdown: Who’s Psychologically Fit to Serve?**

In 1964, a popular magazine asked 12,000 psychiatrists: “Do you believe Barry Goldwater is psychologically fit to serve as President of the United States?” A multitude of responses from psychiatric professionals poured in. Some suggested diagnoses, such as “paranoid schizophrenic” and “chronic psychosis.” Another response ridiculed the question as a betrayal of the field of psychology. A decade later, the American Psychiatric Association formally responded by establishing the Goldwater rule. In 2017, APA’s **Ethics Committee** defended this rule, addressing five key points, including free speech:

*“Some psychiatrists have argued that the ‘Goldwater Rule’ impinges on an individual’s freedom of speech as it pertains to personal duty and civic responsibility to act in the interest of the national well-being. This argument confuses the personal and professional roles of the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist, as a citizen, may speak as any other citizen...but the psychiatrist may not assume a professional role in voicing that critique in the form of a professional opinion.”*

## THE PUNCHLIST



### 3 ways to take action on this month.

# 1

#### Quick Read:

TikTok has become an outlet for young people – particularly young women – to express their own stories of trauma, including addiction and abuse. The community of users offers a surprising digital support group. **This quick article** explains.

# 2

#### Watch:

In 2018, the American Psychological Association developed a video series, **“Facing the Divide: Psychology’s Conversation on Race and Health.”** The videos, fact sheets and other resources can help you prepare as a psychologist would to participate in or facilitate difficult dialogues on race.

# 3

#### Listen:

What are the daily realities of life in prison? What social and emotional complexities do incarcerated people face – and how do they differ from those faced on the “outside?” **Ear Hustle**, a podcast in its 5<sup>th</sup> season, explores these themes, with episodes covering everything from relationships inside of prison, exit strategies for leaving the prison community, and parenting while incarcerated.

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