Minnesota Psychiatric Society

Improving Minnesota's mental health care through education, advocacy, and sound psychiatric practice, and achieving health equity.

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We, the psychiatrists of the Minnesota Psychiatric Society, would like to highlight the impact of collective psychological trauma associated with the actions of ICE throughout our city and state. For those of our neighbors who have come from nations where various forms of brutality were common, the current ICE masked combat uniforms, vehicles, attitudes and brutal actions triggers them to remember previous trauma and re-experience overwhelming multiple psychiatric symptoms and psychological dysfunction such as panic, fear, hypervigilance, racing thoughts, racing thoughts heartbeat, shortness of breath, fight or flight reactions.

Most of the rest of us experience these events through video, newspapers and shared stories of friends and family. We experience low level chronic destabilizing stress which often manifests as hyperalertness, hypervigilance startle reactions, and long term can raise our blood pressure , injure our hearts and contribute to isolation, hopelessness, and depression. Studies after 9/11 showed that people who viewed video of the planes hitting the buildings suffered from acute stress more than those who saw it unfold in-person. Imagine the quiet homebody who's watching the ICE violence on her phone alone, disconnected from our community. At least the person on the street has the community with whom they witnessed it.

Trauma causes harm because it shatters fundamental assumptions about the world we live in. It shakes our feeling of security. It overwhelms the senses. Suddenly we are forced to accept the possibility that masked men with absolute immunity can pull us from our cars if we look like an immigrant or if we annoy them. We have now all witnessed through video that lethal force is an accepted response by an agency of our own government to disobedience. Suddenly we have the sense that we are all in danger.

One response to managing trauma is to find meaning, to try and make sense of what is happening. The search for meaning is a primary human motivation that allows us to retain hope. Connecting with others, small acts of purpose, deliberate and intentional actions. Protests can bring us together, like that night at 34th and Portland, but we are doing more than just milling around. We are

bearing witness to the trauma and speaking our truth. This is the best of what we are as a community and it is healing our trauma.

Acting mindfully, informed by our emotions we see other models of healing and resilience. For example it was very very helpful when our leaders expressed outrage but encouraged peaceful protest. This newspaper has given ample room for discussion. The police are emphasizing public safety. Other ideas might be to host online discussions with affected groups or ring your neighbor's door and ask about their coping. Neighborhood support groups are encouraged. Maybe we could start a fund for people, like the person who has the job of delivering my paper, who are too scared to go out. We want to stand with the growing list of wrongfully detained citizens and the other victims of trauma. What happened to you was wrong. We want to take a stand.

The humiliation of victims by government agents may be the most painful aspect of the trauma. Shame is one of the most basic of human emotions. It hurts because primitive man, when our brains were developing, would die if cast out from the group. In the case of the Liberian immigrant who had been following all the rules, with no crimes except a misdemeanor 10 years ago, whose door was broken in with a battering ram, the most painful aspect may be the trophy pictures ICE agents took of him in jail. We empathize with him and the other victims of trauma. What happened to you was wrong. We want to take a stand.

Our goal for this piece has been to present something different than the political debate. We hope to get you thinking about and empathize with the psychological currents running through our immigrant neighbors, as well as those of us vicariously reacting to the offensive behaviors we are seeing, hearing and responding to. The path to successfully coping is paved with human empathy.

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