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A Venn diagram heuristic for working with co-occurring disorders and trauma

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Abstract

Co-occurring disorders and trauma are common among patients who present at substance abuse and mental health treatment centers and associated with a more complex course. The lack of a framework for understanding recovery from these chronic, complex, and inter-related conditions is a significant obstacle to clinicians and patients. The author describes a framework for understanding the unique and inter-related aspects of addiction, psychiatric illness, and trauma. The Venn diagram heuristic proposed in this article has been utilized by the author to aid the evaluation and treatment process in outpatient, residential treatment, and correctional settings over the past several years. The diagram provides a roadmap that is individualized based on the patient's biopsychosocial presentation of each disorder and the ways these disorders manifests themselves in the life of the patient. The roadmap provides visual reference points for the clinician to disseminate knowledge, explore etiology and factors that sustain symptoms of these disorders, and propose intervention strategies

for the patient's consideration. The shared framework for understanding these common clinical disorders results in increased collaboration, increased understanding of how treatment interventions target the patient's concerns and a greater sense of self-efficacy in patients.

Keywords:

- co-occurring disorders
- co-occurring disorders treatment
- co-occurring disorders recovery model
- psychiatric comorbidity
- trauma
- Venn diagram

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