Literature and Coping Skills Professor Ajit K Mishra Department of Humanistic Studies Indian Institute of Technology (BHU) Varanasi Lecture 25

Unclaimed Experiences-I

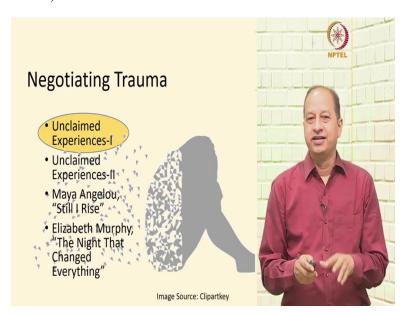
Hello everybody, I am Ajit K. Mishra, your course instructor for Literature and Coping Skills. I am sure you all are doing well. I am here again with another module and this time I am going to talk about trauma. You know that trauma is something that is all pervasive. It has taken almost everybody in its grip and sooner or later we all are going to face some kind of trauma in our lives.

So, trauma is very, very powerful. It is overwhelming. It is all pervasive. So, it is important that we learn how to take care of trauma and its onslaught, so, that we are prepared for its challenges, and it will be surprised to know that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, DSM 5 of the American Psychiatric Association has included trauma under a new category. So, they call it trauma and stress related disorders.

So, trauma is a major problem now the world is gradually waking up to trauma. Although people have been talking about trauma from various angles for quite some time. There has been no concentrated discussion on this particular issue that is trauma. Trauma is the response to the distressing and deeply disturbing events, which overwhelm a person's ability to cope. They also destroy a person's sense of the self so that the person is not at all at ease with oneself and that is how the person gradually disintegrates.

So, in this module which again has four lectures I am going to talk about different aspects of trauma. The first two lectures will be on the Unclaimed Experiences, 1 and 2. Thereafter I will be taking you to two very important poetic compositions and with the help of those poetic compositions I will show how trauma can in fact destroy our lives, our existence, our very sense of the self and how we can overcome the challenge of trauma with certain concentrated coping skills and strategies. So, let us start.

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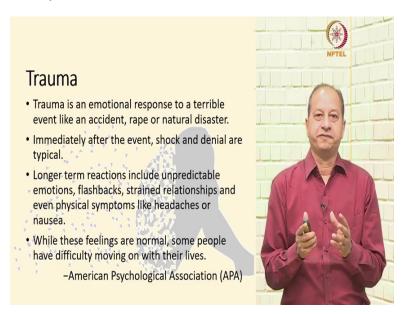
So, this particular segment is called negotiating trauma. We need to negotiate trauma in the same way we wanted to conquer fear and we also wanted to defeat depression. We need to negotiate trauma so that we know how to take it in our lap and move on in our lives. So, negotiating trauma is something that we all need to do sooner or later, because we cannot evade, we cannot avoid trauma. It is an integral part of our existence, because it comes from all sides in all forms. Whether trauma with a big T or a little T.

So, when it sets in it is going to disintegrate our very being, our existence so we will gradually feel as if we are getting fragmented. We are getting dismantled and we will lose a sense of self. We will lose connection with ourselves so these are some of the things that I am going to do in this module. I will start with the first lecture that is Unclaimed Experience-I and then I am going to walk you through the second lecture as well Unclaimed Experience-II and then I will be taking up Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" and I will be walking you through the idea of racial, historical, inter-generational trauma and I will be showing how the speaker in fact manages to cope with the challenges of these trauma types.

And finally to wind up this module I will be talking about Elizabeth Murphy's "The Night That Changed Everything" again an instance of a severe distressing and disturbing event. In which the speaker shows some huge coping skills and coping strategies. And once we go through these

poetic compositions, we will be able to understand how we can in fact think of developing certain coping skills that will help us whenever we are faced with such traumatic challenges. So, let us move on. This is exactly what I am going to do today. This highlighted part will be taken care of in this lecture. So, let us start.

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Trauma as I have already told you all that it is a response to a severely disturbing and distressing event. So, when that happens a person loses contact with oneself. You also lose the sense of yourself. It gets diminished rapidly, so that you are gradually disconnected with yourself. You are shocked to such an extent that the only kind of emotion that we will continue to experience will be fear. That means the cortisol level will go up and it will be stable there. It will not come down. The sympathetic nervous system will be extremely active. It will be hyperactive.

And the parasympathetic nervous system will not be active at all, therefore it will not help you return to a stage of normalcy, so that is trauma. Trauma is again an emotional response to a terrible event. So, it is the terribility of that event that determines whether it will lead to trauma or not. So, if it is a terrible event like an accident, has to be severe, major, life threatening accident, rape or natural disaster, like earth quakes of high intensity or a tsunami, so that severity

in fact determines what kind of emotion response that we call trauma will be aroused. So, this is a very, very important aspect of trauma.

When that event happens- any of the events that has happened, it will promptly be followed by shock and denial. The initial response will be of shock. So, somebody will be startled, somebody will be bewildered, somebody will be shocked. The moment one comes in contact with such severe or a terrible event. So, the initial response will be that of shock and then it will be followed by denial. Now, denial is very, very important. Although it has been approached as a negative measure or a strategy, denial has its positive values as well.

Denial gives you that much needed time and space to settle down. To recover or regain your stability that has been severely dented by this terrible experience, by this terrible event. So, denial or the initial denial gives you a much-needed time and space to recover, to be stable again so that you can take the shock of that event. So, these are now the initial responses or reactions to these terrible events or the experiences of these terrible events. That means these initial trauma reactions and then the long term reactions beyond the initial reactions of shock and denial include unpredictable emotions.

Your emotions will suddenly go out of your control and you will feel as if you have lost complete control over your emotions, and then flashbacks, the memories of those terrible events will return continuously to haunt you, to disturb you, to make you experience the same distressing and disturbing emotions again and then it will also lead to strained relationships. For example, you will begin to withdraw from relationships. You will begin to recoil and relationships will be strained, and it can also lead to physical symptoms like severe headaches and nausea so you will begin to feel the pain even if it is not a physical trauma it is a psychological trauma people still feel those pains in their bodies.

And then these feelings are normal. There is nothing abnormal about these feelings because every time somebody comes across or somebody comes face to face with trauma one is bound to experience these feelings starting with shock and then moving to denial and then unpredictable emotions, totally disturbed and to wayward emotions, flashbacks of the terrible events and then strained relationships and certain physical symptoms like headache and nausea.

These are perfectly fine. It is perfectly normal because trauma has this in its nature that you will experience these emotions. There is nothing abnormal about these emotions, but what is wrong about these emotions is that the moment somebody begins to or continues to experience these emotions beyond a certain limit or a certain periodicity then somebody has to wake up to the dangers of such experiences. The prolonged experiences.

So, when that sets in, people find it extremely difficult to move on with their lives. So, you will be frozen, you will be stuck at just one point and you will not be able to move on in your life. So, when that happens. You know that this is taking you or pushing you rapidly into some kind of a mental disorder. So, this is exactly what the American Psychological Association has suggested. This is how the APA has summed up the idea of trauma.

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So, that means when it comes to trauma, we can look at both sides of it. For example the psychological and the physiological sides. The physical and the psychological sides. So, the moment we think of trauma it can actually mean that somebody has met with an accident which in fact started with a physical problem. It can lead to somebody losing a limb, somebody getting

one's limb almost shattered, severely broken, fragmented or broken in to pieces so it can lead to several of severe damage to body parts or limbs. So, that is what we mean by physical trauma.

That means it all begins with some kind of damage to the body. The physical parts of the body, which will also lead to a psychological trauma for example if somebody has met with a serious accident and somebody has unfortunately lost one's limb in that accident so the trauma will continue to return and haunt that person. The person will return to that particular moment when that terrible accident happened, and will experience the psychological sufferings or pains of that trauma, that event. Although the physical aspects of that particular experience will gradually disappear. The psychological aspects will continue to haunt the person.

So, that is the reason why even physical trauma or instances of physical trauma are generally perceived in combination with psychological implications of those events, so that will lead to psychological trauma. That means you will continue to fear, feel scared of those terrible events that you have experienced sometime in the past, which led to some kind of physical problem in you.

Apart from that there are also instances when a person does not experience any physical suffering, any physical problem and physical pain and the person experiences psychological sufferings only. Psychological pains only. That means it is not physiological or physiology involved in that particular trauma, yet people experience such trauma. They appear only psychological trauma, for example starting with neglect, taunting, bullying, emotional abuse, ignoring people.

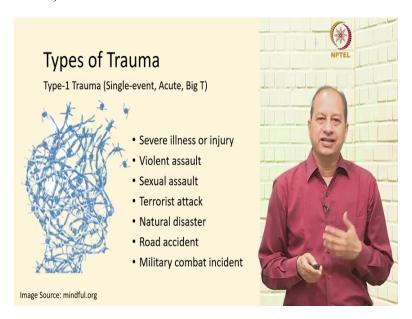
So, these are some instances which can lead to psychological trauma when people are taunted. People are humiliated on the basis of the color of their skin and the basis of their height, body type. On the basis of how they cloth themselves, on the basis of their eating habits or eating practices, religious practices or religious affiliations. So, geographical affinity there are so many things in which trauma can set in, and that can probably lead to psychological trauma.

Now, the biggest difference between physical trauma and psychological trauma is that physical trauma will gradually heal and it will make you return to your life in a normal manner, but

psychological trauma may not heal. The healing process requires some conscious efforts or some intervention from outside. So, we need to understand that there is some kind of connection between the physical and the psychological trauma. There is some kind of intersectionality between physical and the psychological trauma and that is how they are in fact complementary to each other.

Sometimes your psychological trauma can lead to some kind of physical pain and vice versa; so that, way physical trauma and psychological trauma may be distinguishable at times, but then for our purpose of understanding trauma, its impact, its causes, its symptoms and the coping skills or strategies that can be developed to overcome the challenge or trauma. We are going to focus more on the psychological trauma than on the physical trauma.

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So, let us take a quick look at the different types of trauma. So, these types of traumas are called Type-1 Traumas. Type-1 they are either single-event traumas or acute trauma, acute, so sharp and so sudden and so disturbing that they are very, very acute in nature, and then sometimes these kinds of traumas are also referred to as Big T traumas. That means they are severe, they are acute.

So, it can be a severe illness or injury. If it is a mild non-threatening injury then people will gradually forget, they will return to normalcy very fast. For example, somebody has fallen down or somebody has broken somebody's arm or leg so you go and get treatment for that and after a certain period you overcome that problem. So, the trauma will also disappear very, very fast, because you know that you are going to be all right in a short time, so that, will not lead to severe trauma, but if the illness or the injury is severe then that will lead to traumatic experiences. I mean big trauma.

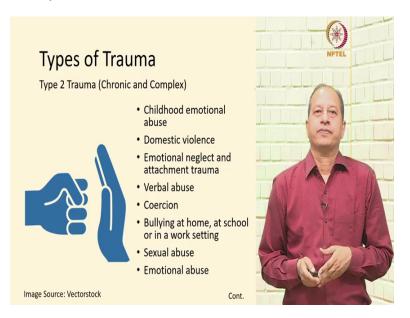
And then violent assault, if you have experienced a violent assault on you. You will continue to experience the trauma associated with that particular, terrible event, so that will continue to disturb you over a prolonged period. And then sexual assault if somebody has been victimized sexually. The person will continue to experience trauma for a prolonged period, so that is Type-1

trauma. And then terrorist attacks you have been subjected to terrorist attacks. You were either taken hostage of you are taken at the gunpoint. You experience Type-1 trauma.

And then natural disasters like severe, terrible flood, tsunami, earthquakes, they can also cause a severe trauma in you. And then road accidents, so road accidents if they pose a sudden threat to your life they will definitely cause trauma in you. And then a military combat incident. I mean this is a type of experience that the army personnel are regularly exposed to whenever there is an army operation.

People experience severe trauma and especially when there is real war people experience a severe trauma. There is something called shell shock that is associated with this kind of events or incidents. So, these are examples of Type-1, single-event or acute or Big T traumas and now we can move to Type-2 traumas.

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So, these are the types of trauma that are chronic and complex. Chronic and complex they are not acute they are chronic and complex, because they occur continuously, repeatedly and that is the reason why they heighten or increase the chance of somebody promptly moving into some kind of trauma or stress related disorders. So, Type-2 trauma chronic and complex trauma. It can be due to childhood emotional abuse if a child has experienced some emotional abuse during its

childhood. The child will grow up to experience trauma, and the child in fact experiences trauma and that will prevent the child from growing up normally or getting into life afterwards in a normal manner, so that will create problems for the child, and then domestic violence we all know. A large number of people across the globe are subjected to domestic violence which is in fact one of the biggest contributors to the experiences of trauma in a large number of people. Especially in the female population. And then we come to the other type of trauma that is emotional neglect and attachment trauma. So, in interpersonal relationships it is very, very important that we feel emotionally special. We feel as if we have some kind of importance in the lives of the other people around us.

So, if that particular desire is not fulfilled. The emotional desire is not fulfilled that will lead to attachment trauma or, I mean which will be the result of emotional neglect for example if the husband is busy all the while, because of the demands of his work and the wife will gradually feel emotionally neglected. If the father is extremely busy or the parents are extremely busy the children can feel extremely neglected emotionally and that will lead to some kind of trauma experiences as well.

And then verbal abuse. People who are subject to continuous verbal abuse also experience trauma if a teacher continues to call a child in the class by certain derogatory names like ass-head, blockhead, if the teacher continues to hurl such verbal abuses at the child, at the student continuously, there is every chance that the children, I mean such children will enter in to traumatic phases or they will experience trauma.

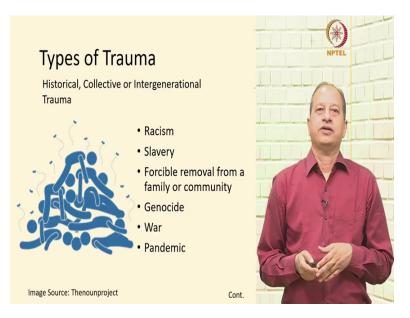
Coercion if somebody takes you at gunpoint and then you are robbed, you are vandalized, you are in fact taken hostage so these are instances which will lead to traumatic experiences. And then this is one of the biggest problems, bullying, we all know how bullying in fact has turned out to be one of the major problems for us.

So, it can be bullying at home. So, most often people think that people are safe within the four walls of their home because that is exactly where they belong, but that is not the case, bullying also happens at home. For example the father may bully the mother, if it is a patriarchal family structure. The brother may bully their sister. That happens, bullying also happens at home and it

happens regularly, frequently at school or even in a work setting. So, a few work place members will form a group and they will sideline one particular member in that workplace and they will begin to bully that member.

They will make mockery of that fellow, that person. They will subject him or her to severe emotional distress. So, bullying is a major problem. And then sexual abuse we all know. That can lead to several traumatic problems and traumatic experiences as well. And then emotional abuse, emotional abuse for example unduly encroaching into somebody's privacy is an instance of emotional abuse. When that happens people will feel challenged, threatened emotionally, psychologically and they will begin to experience trauma. So, these are some of the instances of Type-2 trauma or chronic and complex trauma.

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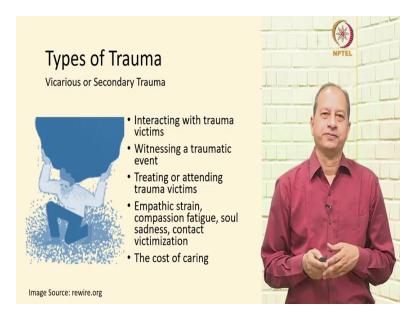
So, that brings us to another very different type of trauma which is popularly called historical, collective or intergenerational trauma. So, racism has a history of its own. So, racism is an instance of historical trauma. Slavery, again an instance of historical trauma. And then forcible removal from a family or community is also an instance of collective trauma so I can remind you of that famous exodus when a certain community was displaced, it was removed as a result of

which it had to move out in search of a better place for itself, so that is exactly what led to the famous exodus.

So, it can be a forcible removal for example the partition of India that resulted in the forcible removal of a large number of communities across borders, so that leads to severe traumatic experiences. And then genocide, we all know and our history has been a witness to several such instances of genocide. Genocides can lead to inter-generational trauma as well, because that traumatic experience will be passed on from one generation to the other generation. So, generation after generation will continue to experience that kind of trauma. And then war also leads to some kind of historical and collective trauma as well, because an entire community gets affected whenever there is a war.

And then finally something that we are currently bearing witness to, so that, is pandemic, the Covid-19 pandemic has in fact led to collective trauma. The entire global community is experiencing that trauma. So, these are some examples of historical collective and intergenerational trauma, which have a greater lifespan, because they continue to be, they do not normally disappear or go they continue to be.

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So, then again there is other type of trauma which is a very, very important type of trauma and this type is called vicarious or secondary trauma. This does not come to you directly. This is a result of being in touch with somebody who has been experiencing trauma or who has been exposed to trauma or traumatic experiences. So, those people who are in constant touch, especially with their family members and the care givers, the helpers especially, so they are the people who are prone to, who are susceptible to such kind of trauma, the vicarious or the secondary trauma and that is one big reason why it is also called the cost of helping.

So, now when people continue to interact with trauma victims whether it is in a rehabilitation center, in a hospital setting or in a clinical setting in which the caregivers, the helpers continue to be in touch with the trauma victims or when people witness trauma events frequently or treating and attending trauma victims. And then that will lead to empathic strain, compassion fatigue, soul sadness and contact victimization. So, vicarious or secondary trauma is also known by all these names. Empathic strain that means when you are in constant touch with trauma victims you will have to show empathy continuously; so that the trauma victim begins to trust you, the trauma victim begins to share his or her traumatic experiences with you that will lead to talk therapy. So, if you are constantly and continuously exposed to such experiences that means being in touch with trauma victims there is every possibility that the person who does so will experience empathic strain. Compassion fatigue because you will show a lot of compassion to such people and you will run out of compassion after a certain period, because you will be fed up with your compassion. Your compassion will become a burden on you. So, you will experience compassion fatigue.

And then soul sadness. Your soul will be as sad as that of the trauma victim, and then this is also called contact victimization in which you will gradually or eventually turn out to be a victim because of your continuous contact with the trauma victim, so that is exactly what will happen to, what actually happens to the caregivers and the family members and that is the reason why it is very rightly said that the burden of caring or the cost of caring.

And most often people think of the burden of such caring in terms of the negative cost of such caring, because the negative cost of such caring will result in these issues, empathic strain,

compassion fatigue, soul sadness and contact victimization. So, therefore those health workers or health supporters, caregivers and family members who spend a lot of time in the company of the trauma victims are susceptible to contract this kind of trauma.

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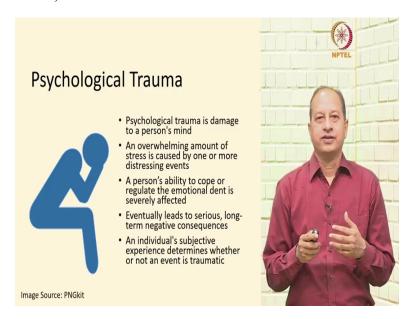


So, if we draw an image, a diagram to understand this particular process so vicarious trauma always takes a dip. So, it leads to secondary traumatic stress that means you will gradually begin to experience the same kind of stress that the trauma victim is experiencing. So, you will be in the midst of an embodied simulation.

And then that gradually push you towards compassion fatigue and when that happens it will result in burnout. Burnout because you suddenly become numb emotionally. You will not show any empathy towards anybody and rather become irritated easily, your attitude will change, when all these things happen then you know that you are experiencing compassion fatigue and you are also experiencing burnout.

Burnout is the rock bottom that somebody can hit. So, vicarious or secondary trauma finally leads to burnout. That means the same person who could easily show empathy towards trauma victims, the sufferer will not show no emotional response to those people, because you are burned out, so that is the reason why you will not be able to show any compassion. Any empathy towards anybody.

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So, psychological trauma as I told you at the beginning of this lecture is in fact an important area, an important trauma-tile and we all need to understand its implications, so that we can think of those coping skills and strategies that will make us resilient to the attacks of such trauma. So, it begins by causing damage, a dent to a person's mind. Your mind is severely damaged or dented. You do not feel like doing anything. You lose your sense of self. You suddenly lose connection with yourself, because your mind is severely dented, damaged.

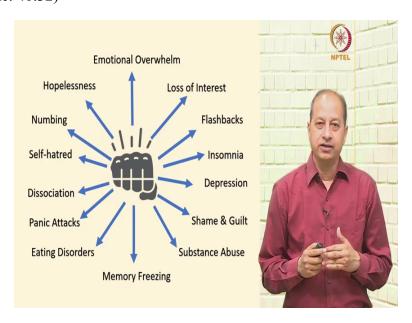
And then it will lead to an overwhelming, unmanageable amount of stress which will gradually disconnect you from yourself, when your stress becomes unmanageable that is the beginning of your disconnection with yourself, because you will not be able to manage, therefore you will not know what to do about it. And the stress will gradually overwhelm, capture you. And then we all have our inbuilt ability to cope with or regulate our emotional dents, but that will be severely affected when we experience or begin to experience psychological trauma, because it is an instance of invisible trauma.

It is not like physical trauma that is visible so that we can take adequate care of the trauma and then we can assure and ensure its recovery in a quick time. This is psychological trauma that will not give you a chance. So, eventually such traumatic experiences, psychological experiences will lead us to serious, long term, negative consequences. When that happens then we know that we are in the grip of some severe traumatic disorders.

So, when that happens an individual's subjective experience determines whether or not an event is traumatic and that is very interesting because two people may be exposed to the same kind of terrible event, but one of them may experience trauma and the other may not experience so that is the reason why most people think that trauma is subjective experience. Therefore it cannot be measured objectively, but this debate is still on whether trauma is a subjective experience or it is an objective experience but most often trauma is the result of an individual's subjective experience.

People can move on in life quickly after the traumatic event, but there are other people who cannot do so. They need more time and there are some other type of people who can never ever be able to do so, because trauma never leaves us. Nobody in this world can overcome trauma completely. We can only negotiate, negotiate to make it secondary. Negotiate to make it silent, so that we can move on in life.

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So, that brings us to the idea of psychological trauma again and we can see it comes as a bolt from the blue, it comes to us as a terrible blow and all we need to do is to do things through our coping skills and strategies to minimize that blow to regular that blow so that we can save and protect ourselves from the onslaught of trauma and we can move on in life. So, it can be emotionally overwhelming as I told you. If we can sum up this lecture these are the things that we can think of at the end of it. That it can lead to memory freezing as well, because somebody is stuck in that particular place, so trauma most often acts as a glue. It is called brain glue.

It acts as a glue that sticks you to that particular point in time where you are frozen, you are stuck, because you continue to return to that particular time of your traumatic experience. So, it leads to memory freezing as well. It leads to dissociation. In the next lecture I will be talking about dissociation in greater detail. It leads to numbing. So, you will not experience any emotion. It will lead to emotional numbing. Emotional unresponsiveness and then it can also lead to shame and guilt.

You will begin to be ashamed of yourself. Why was I chosen for that particular experience? So, you experience that guilt in you as well and then panic attacks are very, very common in traumatic experiences. Hopelessness, in combination with panic attacks because the cortisol level will always be high and you will always be in a state of fear. So, it will be a fear educed state that traumatic experiences will take you or push you to. So, hopelessness is a common experience. And then flashbacks, as I told you people will return to, they will find objects and things around them that will give them a sense of the flashback.

They will feel as if they are reliving that particular experience yet again. So, self-hatred is also a major problem when it comes to psychological trauma and then loss of interest. You suddenly lose interest in life, because of that traumatic experience or that traumatic event. And then insomnia, trauma or psychological trauma has its physical or physiological consequences as well. People will experience sleeplessness. And depression, that is very, very common in psychological trauma and eating disorders. You will not feel like eating, sleeping, carrying out your everyday activities and the variety of other things.

And then finally people might resort to substance use, misuse or abuse. So, substance abuse is one such channel that most people finally resort to. I mean most trauma victims, trauma sufferers finally resort to, thinking that it will help them forget the traumatic experiences. So, these are

some of the most important impacts of psychological trauma. So, by now we know that trauma is in fact a serious psychological disorder and that is the reason DSM 5 has included trauma and stress related disorders under a separate or a new category.

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So, that brings us to the end of this lecture. Thank you very much for joining me. I hope I have helped you understand the basics of trauma. With that in the background we will move to the next segment, the next aspect of trauma when I meet you with the next lecture. Thank you very much for joining me.