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Disrupting the Trauma to Prison Pipeline Through YPAR

Upwards of 93% of incarcerated youth report exposure to traumatic experiences. Prolonged trauma exposure during childhood can lead to disruptions in psychological, neurobiological, and endocrine development, which can be exacerbated by other stressors at the family, neighborhood, and structural levels. Youth without family or community resources to buffer them from the effects of exposure are at risk for developing mood and/or behavior disorders. Certain coping strategies youth develop in response, such as substance use or aggression, especially when coupled with racial profiling by the police, put them at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Trauma-informed juvenile justice research and interventions often position youth as helpless victims of proximal exposure or as merely empowered to make individual level changes, neither of which address distal sociopolitical sources of trauma nor youths' agency to counteract them. Moreover, while the experiences of incarcerated and re-entry youth are at times included in trauma research, youth experiential knowledge is often lacking. Conducting Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) *with* justice-involved youth rather than *on* them, could not only help develop a more complex understanding of the Trauma to Prison Pipeline, but could help heal some of the effects of trauma exposure as well as empower youth to disrupt and/or eradicate sources of trauma.