



# Understanding the Differences of Trauma and Its Impact on Tribal Sovereignty

Presented by: Dr. Larry Fisher, Founder of Nuketeam Research and Creator of the Association of American Indian Practitioners (AAIP)



## **Acute Trauma vs. Insidious Trauma: Understanding the Differences**

Acute trauma and insidious trauma are two distinct types of psychological and emotional distress that can have profound impacts on individuals and communities. Acute trauma is typically the result of a sudden, overwhelming event, while insidious trauma builds up gradually over time through repeated, often subtle, experiences of discrimination, marginalization, or oppression.

# Acute Trauma



## Definition

Acute trauma results from a single, identifiable event or series of events that cause immediate and significant distress. Examples include natural disasters, physical assault, or severe accidents.



## Characteristics

Sudden onset. •Often linked to a specific event. •Symptoms may include flashbacks, anxiety, hypervigilance, and physical reactions to reminders of the trauma. •Treatable through interventions such as therapy, medication, or community support.



## Example in the Context of Racial Healing:

A person of color experiencing direct racial violence or a hate crime. •Immediate feelings of fear, anger, or helplessness may result from such events.

Understanding the definition, characteristics, and the impact of acute trauma in the context of racial healing is crucial for developing effective strategies and interventions to support individuals and communities in their healing process.

# Insidious Trauma



## Definition

Cumulative effects of repeated, subtle, and systemic oppression or discrimination over time. Often stems from structural inequalities and microaggressions rather than a single identifiable event.



## Characteristics

Gradual and pervasive. •Often normalized within systems of power, making it harder to identify or validate. •Symptoms may manifest as chronic stress, internalized oppression, or feelings of invisibility and powerlessness.



## Example in the Context of Racial Healing:

•A person of color consistently experiencing microaggressions at work or being subjected to systemic racism in healthcare or education. •The slow erosion of self-worth due to repeated invalidation, exclusion, or marginalization.

Addressing insidious trauma is crucial for meaningful racial healing, as it requires acknowledging the deep-seated, systemic issues that contribute to the marginalization of individuals and communities, and actively working to dismantle these harmful patterns.

# Examples of Insidious Trauma from an Indigenous Perspective

- **BIA's Role as an Overseer**

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has historically acted as an overseer, exerting control and imposing policies that undermine the autonomy and self-governance of indigenous communities.
- **High Costs of Federal Acknowledgment**

The process of federal acknowledgment is often prohibitively expensive, creating barriers for tribes to attain the recognition and resources they deserve.
- **Denial of Resources for Non-Federally Acknowledged Tribes**

Tribes that are not federally recognized are often denied access to critical resources and funding, perpetuating cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement.
- **State Recognition as a Conditional Legitimacy**

State recognition can be a conditional and tenuous form of legitimacy, leaving tribes vulnerable to shifting political winds and the whims of state governments.
- **Colonial Criteria for Recognition**

The criteria for tribal recognition often reflect colonial and Eurocentric perspectives, failing to account for the unique histories and cultural practices of indigenous communities.
- **Historical and Ongoing Dependence on the BIA**

The reliance of tribes on the BIA for resources and decision-making has created a long-standing dynamic of dependence, limiting their autonomy and self-determination.
- **Intergenerational Impact of Disenfranchisement**

The trauma and disenfranchisement experienced by indigenous communities have rippling effects, impacting multiple generations and perpetuating cycles of emotional and psychological harm.

What are  
*Adjustment Disorders*

and how can we help?

feeling depressed

tired but can't sleep

impulsive behavior

trouble focusing

anxious

easily agitated



# The Profound Psychological and Spiritual Implications of Indigenous Disenfranchisement

The systemic disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples through institutions like the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA), and state recognition processes has profound psychological and spiritual implications. These forms of insidious trauma—subtle, pervasive, and cumulative—have unique cultural and spiritual dimensions that are not adequately addressed by standard psychiatric frameworks.

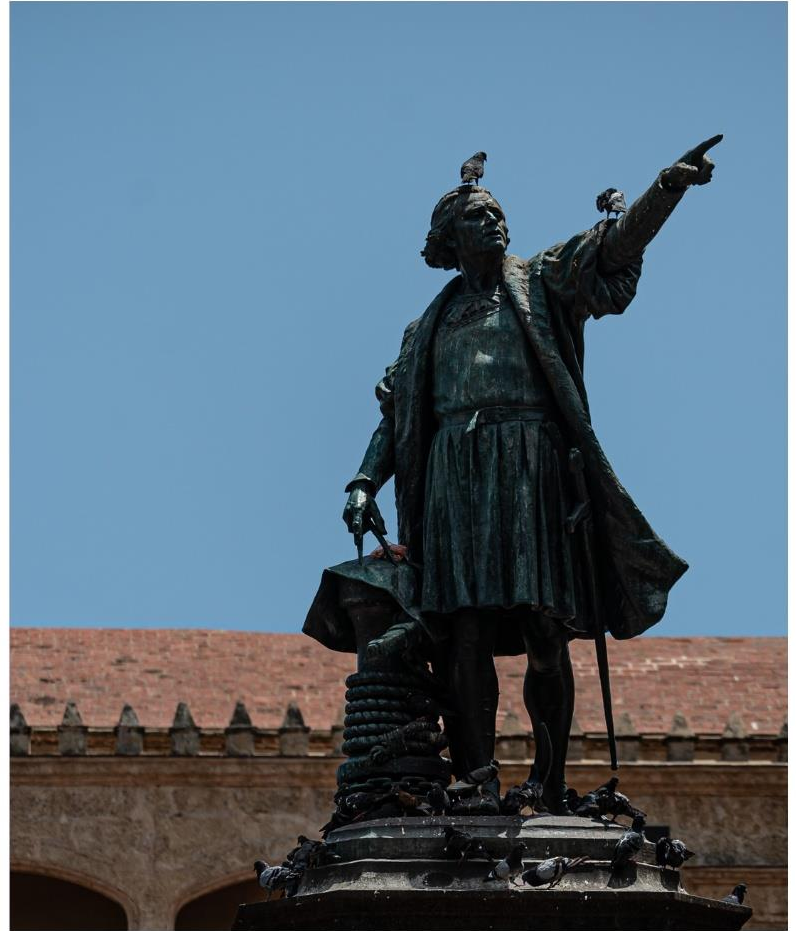
# Trauma is Layered

Individuals and communities can face both acute trauma, such as a sudden, life-threatening event, as well as insidious trauma, which is the cumulative exposure to subtle, yet pervasive forms of harm over time. This layered experience requires a comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted nature of trauma and support healing.



# Recognizing Insidious Trauma

Insidious trauma refers to the cumulative, often subtle, and sometimes invisible forms of trauma that individuals and communities experience over time. Unlike acute, single-event traumas, insidious trauma can be difficult to recognize and address, as it is woven into the fabric of daily life and societal structures.







## Tailored Interventions

Healing strategies must address both acute responses to mental health crises as well as long-term approaches that tackle the underlying structural inequalities that contribute to poor mental health outcomes. By addressing immediate needs while also driving systemic change, interventions can create sustainable impact and lasting healing.

# Unspecified Spiritual Adjustment Disorder (USAD)

## Addressing Indigenous Trauma

The development of Unspecified Spiritual Adjustment Disorder (USAD) was a response to the profound gaps in existing mental health frameworks, which fail to acknowledge the interconnectedness of historical trauma, systemic disenfranchisement, and spiritual well-being.

## Cultural Relevance

USAD reflects Indigenous worldviews, where spiritual health is inseparable from physical and emotional health.

## Empowerment through Legitimacy

By legitimizing these experiences through ICD-10-like codes, we can validate the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and advocate for systemic changes in how trauma is recognized and treated.

## Healing Through Indigenopathy

USAD shifts the focus from pathology to healing by incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems, ceremonies, and community-based approaches into the diagnostic process.

**“Healing requires acknowledging the deep, historic wounds of colonization and investing in the self-determination and empowerment of indigenous communities.”**

CHENAE BULLOCK, CEO OF MOSKEHTU CONSULTING

# Call for Participation



The Nuketeam Research and the Association of American Indian Practitioners are making critical strides in enabling greater Indigenous participation in healthcare and fostering a deeper understanding of the profound impact of trauma on their communities. This is a call for the audience to support these efforts and contribute to this important work.