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The impact of the 'Troubled Teen' label and

Recognition of Trauma Informed Care Among Young people

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Introduction

This research paper aims to dismantle the label of a "Troubled Teen," by addressing the multitude of variables that have been associated to youth who are viewed to express *troubling characteristics.* Examining the prevailing social *criteria* that portray the attitudes and lifestyle preferences that constitute to the label of a 'troubled teen' is imperative for promoting actionable approaches that foster destigmatization through adequately tailored care and support for youth and their families. Likewise, a youth's relationship with families, caregivers, educators, and healthcare professionals plays a pivotal role in addressing their unique behavioral, emotional and psychological needs that inform their unique plans of care. A trauma-informed approach of support services to respond to the duality of concerns expressed by youth and their parents is required for robust healing opportunities. Thus, this necessitates the initial acknowledgement of youth who might be seen as defiant, self-centered, and obnoxious; as a person who is feeling frightened and desperately seeking help, but with no idea of how to ask for it. [1] Exploring the widespread impacts that the label "troubled teen" imposes upon teenagers exhibiting behavioral concerns, and the consequential impacts of this societal stigmatization imposed upon teenagers, is vital to discern. This research will examine the ways in which the stigma of the label 'troubled teens' impacts teenagers, in terms of barriers to receiving quality trauma informed mental health care. In addition, proposed solution(s) grounded in de-traumatization approaches on the individual and community-based levels will be considered.

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[1] Tavenner, James, (2011). "In the trenches: Strategies for effective work with troubled youth" Educational Specialist. https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/edspec201019/74

Problem

The term 'troubled teen' is commonly used to refer to teenagers who are admitted to underregulated Troubled Teen Industry (TTI) facilities. Youth are admitted to these facilities for an array of reasons, ranging from severe mental health symptoms to more mundane forms of misbehavior(s), such as truancy. [2] This term has been coined for use of teenagers who are often reported by their parents in seeking help for behaviors they indicate to be a reason for concern. These behaviors include and are not limited to: extreme mood swings, lying, secretive behavior, dropping grades, skipping class and failure to comply with classroom and/or rules at home. Many of these behavioral concerns are underlying symptoms of serious impairments such as eating disorders, intellectual disabilities and substance abuse issues. Mental health conditions and/or behavioral concerns displayed by teenagers can quite often lead them to being called "troubled," and thereby, increasing their likelihood of admittance to TTI facilities that pry on these parents' desires to seek treatment. [3]Therefore, the label 'trouble teens' is problematic due to the insinuation that teenagers displaying *normative* behavior for their developmental stage (ie., failure to do chores) are malevolently deemed as being 'on the road' to a self-damaging lifestyle. Rather than offering them with practical supportive tools and resources to help mitigate their perceived stressors, they instead are likely to experience increased levels of cognitive dissonance related to their actions in association with this label. Moreover, this outcome can create greater impairment in their development of decision-making skills and openness to receiving support.

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[2] Mater, J. (2022). The Troubled Teen Industry and Its Effects: An Oral History. Inquiry Journal.
[3] Kushan, C. (2017). The Troubled Teen Industry: Commodifying Disability and Capitalizing on Fear.

Impact

The label of a "troubled teen" asserts adverse preconceptions around teenagers who appear to struggle with underlying mental health, social and emotional aspects. Research from participants who have endured the harsh treatments conducted within facilities within the TTI reveal major challenges associated with young adults attempting to transition back into society. Many of them admitted to being impacted by symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as nightmares, panic attacks, dissociation, memory issues, flashbacks, and hypervigilance. [4] Most participants adopted harmful coping mechanisms, including self-harm, disordered eating, and substance use. Socially, Some participants reported increasing their family/friend support system in "superficial" ways, while others "lost connections" with previously strong relationships held. Reasonably, these teenagers are more susceptible to experiencing isolation and rejection, low-self esteem and struggles with applying assertiveness in relationships, leading to abusive situations. [5] These factors incur immense distress for many teenagers navigating the complexities of their perceived stressors, desires and need for supportive familial and social relationships. As negative labels become entrenched, young people become more desperate in finding ways to cope and present a greater risk of engaging in harmful coping mechanisms such as becoming involved with gangs, violence and consuming drugs to alleviate feelings of unworthiness. The reference of "troubled teens" is an enduring label with profound adverse implications. Significantly, young people categorized by parents and mentors

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[4] Mater, J. (2022). The Troubled Teen Industry and Its Effects: An Oral History. Inquiry Journal.
[5] Mater, J. (2022). The Troubled Teen Industry and Its Effects: An Oral History. Inquiry Journal.

as such, are disproportionately targeted and affected by punitive interventions containing harsher

treatment [6] such as those found in the TTI.

Counterarguments

The implementation of treatment programs that apply framework(s) of change embedded

in trauma related interventions, exist across communities. These include services ranging from

youth residential treatment programs which operate in accordance to governing licensure

requirements, as well as and child/youth specific psychotherapy by a qualified professional, who

recognize the harmful effects of using this label. However, the existence of numerous TTI

facilities that insert the label of a troubled teen, continue to operate across the country. These

facilities are proven to accentuate and maintain the label of a 'troubled teen,' to market

interventions that operate on the basis of instilling fear among youth that are believed to be

inherently destructive. By the same token, this term can be seen on many websites that endorse

this framework into their common language of describing prospective teens. To illustrate, the

website of the infamously televised facility, *Turnabout Ranch* stands behind this label; their

website includes the comment, *"The customary, "sit on the couch and tell me how you feel"*

approach is very rarely the most effective way to work with troubled teens." [7] Therefore, the

reinforced validation of this label, serves as arguable grounds for countless TTI facilities to

continue to exploit this population by the employment of barbarous conditions, which they deem

to be *qualified* intervention(s) to promote change in teenage clients. These strategies

implemented across such facilities include: forced silence for weeks at a time, restricted

bathroom access, food and sleep deprivation; unqualified therapists, forced labor and cold living

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[6] Deakin, J., Fox, C., & Harragan, A. (2022). Help or hindrance? Rethinking interventions with
"troubled youth." International Journal of Law in Context, 18(1), 100–115.
[7] Turn-About Ranch | Individual & Group Therapy for Troubled Teens. (n.d.).

spaces. [8] Undoubtedly, the presence of these underregulated facilities continue to advertise their programs as being successful in bringing transformative change of troubled teen behaviors, through coercive efforts that promote ideologies of Adultism, which are, "Processes that devalue the personhood of young psychiatrised people." [9] Thus, these facilities believe that adult professionals that oversee care at these programs, should exclusively be making decisions and guiding the goals of youth. Similarly, listening to insights from young people is perceived by the TTI as a problematic idea that will interfere with their healing. Contrary to mainstream mental health perspectives, the client's voice is central to allow for enhanced treatment outcomes and self-empowerment tools.

Gaps/Missing Information and Future Research

It is evident that this label carries extensive weight upon an adolescent's self-value to make meaningful changes in their lives. A beneficial area for future research would be to explore more closely, the amount of impacted youth went on to receive any form of specialized rehabilitation/ psychoeducation, in relation to healing from the psychological effects of growing up with this label. Given that there are approximately 120,000–200,000 children in the TTI at any given time in the United States, [10] further research into whether specialized services tailored to individuals who were once enrolled in this program, is an avenue worth exploring. This appears to be the most logical starting point to conduct a needs assessment, as those who have attended these facilities present to have a prolonged connection to being referred to a 'troubled teen.'

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[8] Younis, Yasmin L., "Institutionalized Child Abuse: The Troubled Teen Industry" (2021). SLU Law Journal Online. 74

[9] Golightley, S. (2020). Troubling the "troubled teen" industry: Adult reflections on youth experiences of therapeutic boarding schools. Global Studies of Childhood, 10(1), 53–63.

[10] Mater, J. (2022). The Troubled Teen Industry and Its Effects: An Oral History. Inquiry Journal.

Proposed Solution

Deakin et al., (2022) illustrate "what helps and what hinders" [11] with regard to the impact of the treatment of teenagers, referred to as "troubled" by caregivers. Organizations such as the TTI, which reproduce stigma and limit the potential for enriched constructive experiences are those that operate with rigid, and punitive core methods that engage in surveillance, monitoring, and risk management. Subsequently, these strategies rather elicit counterintuitive outcomes that create barriers for positive development. Likewise, the primary solution lies within program interventions that foster encouragement, empathetic support and trained staff members to offer members positive connections and the skills to challenge unproductive thoughts/emotions. Addressing the extensive adverse effects that follow the 'troubled' teen label proves to be contra to a streamlined approach. This is due to the sheer volume of youth within the TTI across the nation, and unreliable statistics available to identify other programs that apply this language. Hence, the implementation of community-based programs that provide unconditional positive regard for youth sharing their experiences, serves as a step in the right direction. Providing services that utilize a trauma-focused therapy (TFT) is important when supporting the affected teen and family in raising their awareness of their pathological concerns. Trauma focused therapy "Realizes the impact of the individual's trauma and provides healthy boundaries for recovery." [12] Therefore, the expansion of TFT programs in the form of youth day-programs

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[11] Deakin, J., Fox, C., & Harragan, A. (2022). Help or hindrance? Rethinking interventions with "troubled youth." International Journal of Law in Context, 18(1), 100–115.

[12] Team, T. S. (2021, October 18). The Therapy that Works: Trauma Focused Therapy for Teens. Solstice RTC.

which include individual and group therapy, could provide access to alleviating crisis events through learned coping skills. These programs should offer access to behavioral specialists and trained professionals providing intake assessments to ensure that youth are screened in determining the appropriate level of care.

Conclusion

The term troubled teen' reflects the social phenomenon of labelling, rather than as an individualized pathological problem (Golightley, 2020) which are associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). The ACE questionnaire measures traumatic events in childhood, including events such as neglect, family dysfunction, medical trauma, divorce, and parental incarceration, that present a risk for future medical, academic, and social problems. [13] Comparatively, this research has indicated that youth who are subject to this label repetitively are at a greater risk for suffering a form of psychological abuse as a result. Additionally, this label can further complicate other aspects of ACES measures that youth are experiencing by overlooking normative responses to developmental milestones. The negative stereotypes inflicted by this label has been determined to decrease self-determination and implant feelings of hopelessness among affected youth, creating barriers to accessing treatment/resources. An extensive amount of anecdotal literature from previously victimized children, expose the overreaching power that this label can have upon youth, and the barriers that exist to youth feeling validated, as the initial step toward receiving adequate support. Many of these adults express being urged to recant testimonies of sexual abuse and trauma and to even admit to it being made up, while attempting to seek support as young people. [14] A teenager with a deviant

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[13] Webster, E. M. (2022). The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Health and Development in Young Children. Global Pediatric Health, 9, 2333794X2210787.
[14] Golightley, S. (2020). Troubling the "troubled teen" industry: Adult reflections on youth experiences of therapeutic boarding schools. Global Studies of Childhood, 10(1), 53–63.

label carries substantial potential of derailing from enriching developmental learning experiences to having adverse effects on their self-identity, decision-making, and relationships. [15]

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[15] Solomon, R. (2015). The Impact of Labeling in Childhood on the Sense of Self of Young Adults

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