

# Addressing Trauma in Public Libraries

2022 Urban Library  
**Trauma Study**





# Hello I am Leah Dudak

## About me...

- Partner for the Urban Library Trauma Study.
- Worked in libraries for roughly 10 years, professional librarian at 3 libraries.
- Went back to school to study library trauma and is a PhD student at Syracuse University

# Contact information

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# What is ULU?

Non profit professional association focused on library workers in urban libraries.

We do:

- Advocacy
- An annual conference (in September)
- Social events
- Projects like ULTS



# TW:

This is a session about trauma. Feel free to get up, move, make sure to keep breathing, and drink water. While the majority of this will talk generally about trauma there will be some more specific instances. Please be kind to yourself. You can always come back to this later.

# What is Trauma?

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with **lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.**”
- Can happen to anyone, a variety of things can cause, and reactions are individual.
- It can change the body in many ways, even on the genomic level. It is not just “in your head”, it is a full body reaction.



# **What is the Urban Library Trauma Study?**

An IMLS funded study  
looking at trauma in  
urban public library  
workers performed by  
urban public library  
workers

**Why Study This?**



# Process

## Literature Review

Spring 2021:

Review of literature in the library science field, but also adjacent fields like education and social work.

## Survey

August 2021:

Nationwide survey of urban library workers. Collected 435 useable responses

## Focus Groups

September 2021:

Six virtual focus groups with a total of 58 participants of varying job titles and libraries.

## Forum

March 2022:

Live design session with 34 urban library professionals in a variety of job categories in Brooklyn NY.

# Word Cloud

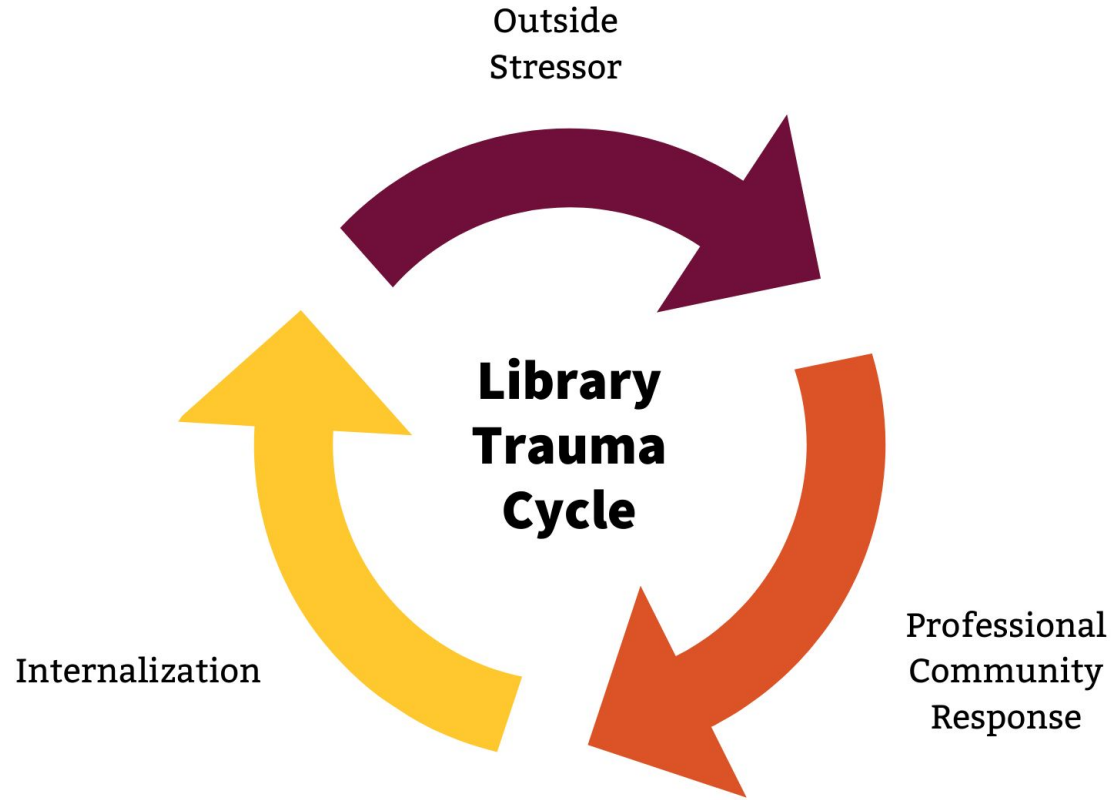
The question asked participants to share a traumatic library workplace experience



## What We've Found

- Piecemeal studies and articles that acknowledge the problem (as far back as 1984)
- Societal issues find their way into libraries, with little real support for library staff dealing with them
- The most commonly requested solution in the survey was a supportive environment
- In the focus groups, participants identified acknowledgement by administration and time away to recover as some of the most pressing needs

# Library Trauma Cycle



# National Forum

Attendees participated in a 3 day design sprint where they worked in teams to come up with ideas for addressing the issue and created a prototype project for their team's idea.





**There are no clear  
heroes in this study,  
everyone needs to do  
better.**

# Recommendations

1. **A National Library Worker Help Line** where library workers can call for immediate support during mental health crises and burnout.
2. **A set of standards for healthy library work environments built by a coalition of worker-led library organizations.** These standards will allow library workers to ask for better conditions and library administrators to point to organizational successes and commitments.
3. **A collection of policies & procedures written from the perspective of trauma-informed leadership.** These policies will offer enough specificity and nuance to be usable but will be written with the intention of being “plug & play” for administrators and library leaders who want to incorporate them into their organizations.
4. **A series of peer-led support groups made up of library workers** which allow workers at all levels to offer and receive support from colleagues at other institutions who can empathize and understand the unique challenges associated with library work. These will be online and workers will be able to opt into groups that match their interests, issues, and level of work (ie. workers of color, administrators, pages, etc.).



# Challenges in Rural Libraries

- Staffing
- Lack of public resources to rely on
- Politics
- Funding
  - Resources
  - Staff
  - Continuing education
  - Support
- Lack of peer support
- Succession planning
- Low pay
- Potentially living in the community you work with

# What did I miss?

In the chat or in the Q&A (if you prefer to be anonymous) please let me know what I missed or share your story.

## Further Resources for Rural Libraries

- Toolkit on burnout: <https://rurallibraries.org/toolkit/burnout/>

### READING

- *Rural and Small Public Libraries* by Brian Real
- Pathways to Wellbeing: <https://osf.io/3yrk7/>
- Rural Library Directors and Social Wellbeing: <https://osf.io/9a4bq/>
- Little Libraries, Big Problems:  
<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/little-libraries-big-problems/>
- Day in the life:  
<https://thebookwyrmsden.com/2022/07/09/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-rural-public-librarian/>

# Further Reading on trauma, burnout, mental health

- A Trauma-Informed Approach to Library Services by Tolly
- Whole Person Librarianship by Zettervall
- Trauma Stewardship by Lipsky
- The Body Keeps the Score by van der Kolk - recently people called out for white supremacy as it minimizes the actions by American soldiers and then frames them as the victim. Also the author is accused of sexual misconduct

## Suggestions to replay The Body Keeps the Score:

- The Deepest Well by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
- My Grandmother's Hands By Menakem
- What my Bones Know by Foo
- Trauma and Recovery By Herman

## Things on my reading list:

- Libraries as Dysfunctional Organizations and Workplaces by Acadia
- Whole Person Librarianship by Zettervall
- It Didn't Start with You by Wolynn
- Academic Librarian Burnout: Causes and Responses by Holm (Published 1/24/23)

## Contact us:

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The [Urban Library Trauma Study](#) is a partnership between the New York Library Association, Urban Librarians Unite, and St John's University



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