

By Dr. Dale G. Caldwell

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TRAUMA IN EMPLOYMENT

Urban communities are in the midst of an employment income crisis. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator and the Living Wage Index, the households in urban communities that can pay their bills range from 72% in San Francisco to 34% in Camden, New Jersey. This means between 28% and 66% of urban households do not earn enough money to pay their monthly bills. They are unemployed or underemployed (they have a job but don't earn enough money to pay their bills).

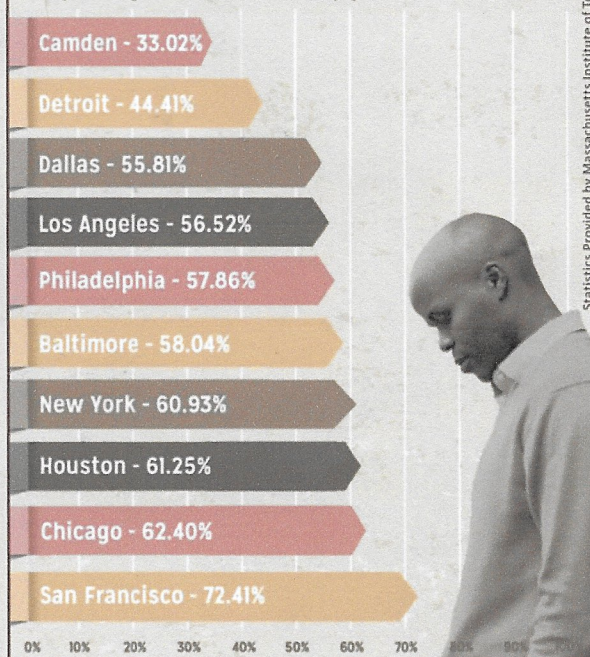
This crisis is most critical among urban youth and young adults. According to the Center for Labor Markets and Policy at Drexel University, more than 50% of 20 to 24 year old black male Chicago residents don't have a job or they are not enrolled in school. Many political leaders suggest that there are plenty of jobs and blame individuals in these urban communities for the low rate of employment. They suggest that there is widespread urban unemployed because these individuals "don't work hard," "are chronically late to work," "steal from their employers," "are too lazy to work" or "too proud to take low paying jobs." However, research suggests one of the primary reasons for this crisis is the prevalence of trauma among the residents of poor urban communities.

Over the last 25 years, psychologists have suggested that individuals living in communities where there is frequent violence, crime and abuse experience the same symptoms as individuals diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. However, the violence, crime and abuse that residents experience takes place on a daily or weekly basis so the trauma they experience is not "Post." It is unique to living in a urban neighborhood. I have found that the term Urban Traumatic Stress Disorder (UTSD) more accurately describes what residents of urban communities demonstrate when they are at home, in school or at work. UTSD often leads to erratic behavior and can result in violence, uncontrolled anger and substance abuse.

People experiencing UTSD often find it difficult to plan, focus and communicate because the urban-related trauma they experience leads to changes in the Amygdala region of the brain that prevents them from being able to effectively control their emotions. Urban residents looking for employment must have clear plans relating to the type of job they are qualified for and how much they need to earn. In addition, they must be able to communicate effectively with their boss, co-workers and customers to keep their job. If they are suffering from UTSD, they will likely have trouble effectively demonstrating these three skills. They will therefore probably not get a job and if they do get hired, eventually lose it because of their inability to overcome the impact of UTSD.

THE LIVING WAGE INDEX

The percentage of households that can pay their bills:



Billions of dollars have been spent on job training programs in urban communities. These programs teach the technical skills necessary to find and keep a job. But they do not provide the neurological support to effectively address UTSD. The good news is that the daily practice of mindfulness, where individuals spend 10 minutes or more focused on breathing and present moment awareness, can rewire the amygdala and overcome the effects of UTSD. Unfortunately, there are very few programs that combine trauma-informed job training for adults.

However, there are some innovative programs for younger workers like the "One Summer Program" in Chicago that provides a 25-hour-per-week summer job, a mentor and social-emotional support for youth with a higher risk for violence. This program was part of a 2015 randomized-control experiment where 800 students received the job and trauma-informed support and a control group of youth were not offered employment or support. The study found that the students who had the job and the trauma-informed support had 43% fewer violent crime events than the youth in the control group. This shows trauma-informed job training could be key to urban employment. **Dr. Dale G. Caldwell is the Executive Director of the Friends of PTSD Journal and the author of *Intelligent Influence: The 4 Steps of Highly Successful Leaders and Organizations*.**