

Talking about trauma on Twitter: An overview of hashtags

Twitter is changing how people communicate all over the world — what are the implications for talking about childhood trauma? In partnership with ACEs Connection and The California Endowment, Berkeley Media Studies Group has been assessing how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) appear in the media, including social media. Social media frequently drives the news agenda and plays a role in influencing how much attention topics get from mainstream sources. Individuals and organizations working on childhood trauma also use social media to build relationships and share information with each other. A first step to understanding how trauma appears in Twitter conversations is analyzing hashtags about childhood trauma.

One of the benefits of using Twitter is the opportunity to build relationships with individuals and organizations that are working on the same issues. For those concerned about childhood trauma, hashtags can facilitate relationships on social media by helping users find others who are tweeting about the same issues.

To find out which hashtags people were using in conversations about childhood trauma on Twitter, starting in July 2014 we used the Hootsuite social media dashboard to monitor several common hashtags used in tweets about adverse childhood experiences to understand how they were being used and identify those that were the most popular. We monitored: #ACEs, #ACEsCx, #ACEsTooHigh, #ACEs2Hi, #toxicstress, #childwelfare, #resilience, #trauma, #childtrauma, #childhoodtrauma, #socialemotional and #traumainformedcare.

Based on our preliminary observations, we then selected a group of hashtags to analyze in a more systematic way. We used the Twitonomy social media analysis tool to collect data about how the hashtags were used over the course of one representative week in January 2015 (January 15-22, 2015).

We used this data to explore both the content of the tweets and the networks of people using each hashtag. We created word clouds to visualize the contents of the tweets for each hashtag. We also explored which Twitter accounts were most active in using each hashtag (how many times they tweeted or retweeted a



If the public's information came only from the media, what would they know?

What wouldn't they know?

Tweet containing the hashtag), as well as which of those users were most influential according to Twitonomy (measured in terms of how many followers the user has).*

Results

Of the twelve hashtags we searched for, seven had been tagged in tweets during the week we studied.

Number of tweets for each hashtag

Hashtags	Number of Tweets (Jan. 15-22, 2015)
#Trauma	2,625
#ACEs	1,029
#ToxicStress	50
#TraumaInformed	45
#ChildhoodTrauma	16
#ACEstudy	9
#adversechildhoodexperiences	7

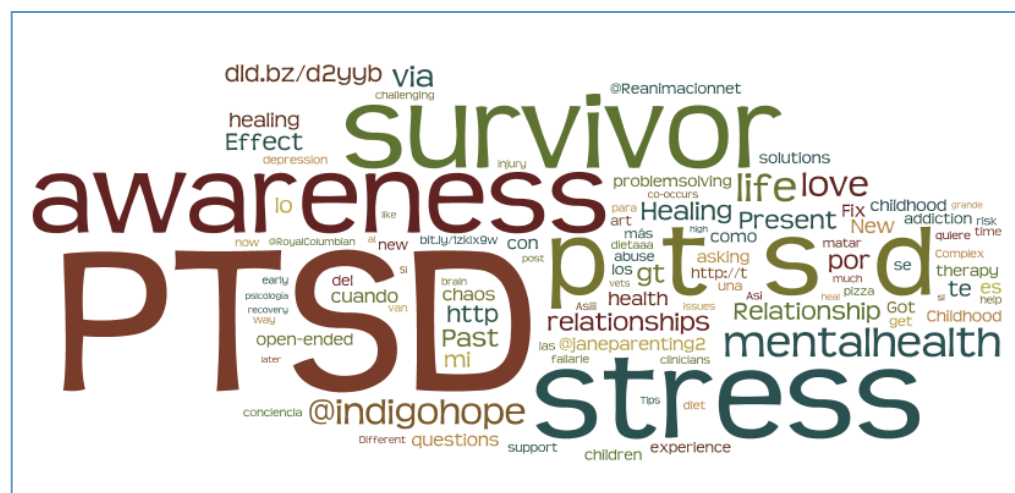
#Trauma: 2,625 tweets

Of the hashtags we analyzed, #Trauma generated the most tweets during the selected week. However, while tweets containing this hashtag related to trauma as a health issue, most did not focus on childhood trauma. Instead, this hashtag was commonly used for conversations about issues such as physical injuries or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in adults. There were also a

* Although follower count is not a perfect indicator of influence and does not include measures of engagement, it is useful in demonstrating a user's potential reach.

number of Spanish-language tweets tagged with #Trauma, which shared stressful or upsetting events in the everyday lives of Twitter users.

The most influential users of the #Trauma hashtag did not appear to explicitly work on childhood trauma. Among the most influential and active groups and individuals who used the hashtag were coaching services offering relationship or career coaching (e.g. @SherpaNLP, @Affinitycoaching); the author of a fiction e-novel titled “Trauma Junkie” (@kindlemojo); and a Spanish-language website addressing emotional skills (@hemocional).



#ACEs: 1,029 tweets

Over the course of the selected week, the #ACEs hashtag was used more than 1,000 times. However, few of the tweets using #ACEs were related to adverse childhood experiences. Instead, the #ACEs hashtag often referred to a popular film website (Filmy Aces), or to professional sports teams. The most retweeted #ACEs tweet during the week we studied, for example, was about an open house event for the Alaska Aces hockey team.

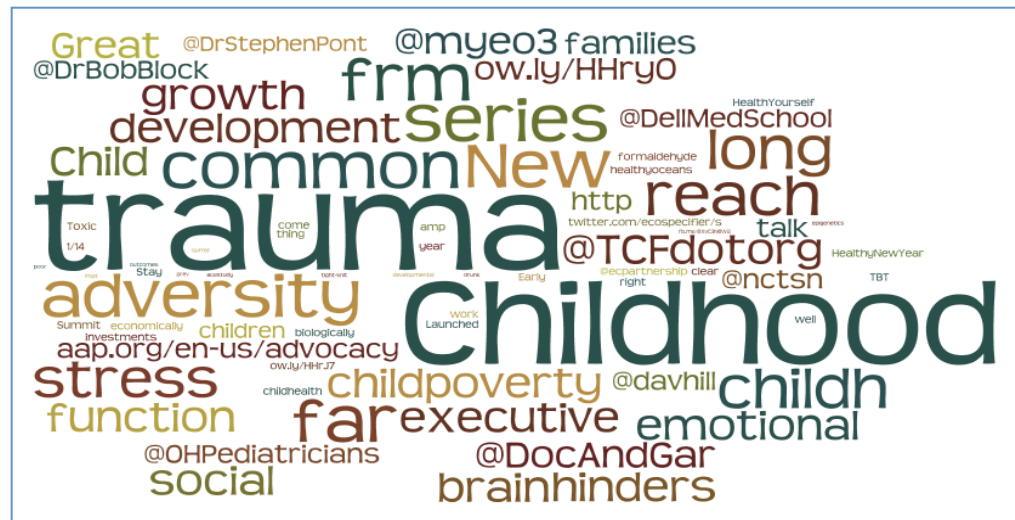


#Toxicstress: 50 tweets

The #Toxicstress hashtag appeared in only 50 tweets over the course of the week, but these tweets were almost all explicitly focused on some aspect of childhood trauma and adversity. For example, one frequently retweeted post from @myeo3 (Melissa Yeo of Burness Communications/The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation) containing the #Toxicstress hashtag read, “Child stress hinders brain growth, executive function, social emotional development #toxicstress #childpoverty.”

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation was one of the top users of this hashtag. The @RWJF Twitter account was the most influential user of #Toxicstress and was also one of the most active users of the hashtag. RWJF grantees, former employees, and communications consultants were also among the most influential and active users of the #Toxicstress hashtag.

Other influential Twitter users who tagged posts with #Toxicstress included the Century Foundation (@TCFdotorg), the Spark Action journalism and advocacy network (@sparkaction), the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (@nctsn) and physicians working on issues of childhood trauma (e.g. Dr. Stephen Pont @stephenpont, Dr. David Hill @davhill).



#TraumaInformed: 45 tweets

When tweets using the #TraumaInformed hashtag appeared, they often related to addressing trauma in a medical or mental health setting. Some of the most common words found in these tweets were “nurses,” “doctors” and “pediatric.” We also searched for the hashtag #TIC. We found a large number of Spanish-language tweets (TIC stands for IT or Information Technology in Spanish) and only 4 tweets referring to trauma-informed care.

The most influential users of the #traumainformed hashtag included child sexual abuse survivors who are writers and/or advocates (e.g. Elizabeth Corey @beatingtrauma, Sarah Olson @SarahEOlson2009), as well as foundations and other organizations that work on issues of mental health or childhood trauma (e.g. The Scattergood Foundation @ScattergoodFdn, The New South Wales Mental Health Commission @themhsorg, and The National Child Traumatic Stress Network @nctsn).



#Childhoodtrauma: 16 tweets

#Childhoodtrauma was used infrequently as a hashtag, and when it was, users were generally not speaking about childhood trauma as a health issue. Instead, Twitters users tagged humorous posts about upsetting childhood personal events or popular culture with the #childhoodtrauma hashtag.



Infrequently used hashtags

#ACEstudy was tagged in 9 tweets. The tweets tagged with this hashtag were relevant, and were focused on the original ACEs research conducted in the 1990s. #Adversechildhoodexperiences was used in 7 tweets. Tweets with this hashtag were all relevant to the topic of childhood trauma. #ACEsTooHigh, #ACEs2Hi, #childrencanthrive, #childhoodexposure and #mpreventviolence were not tagged in any tweets during the week we studied.

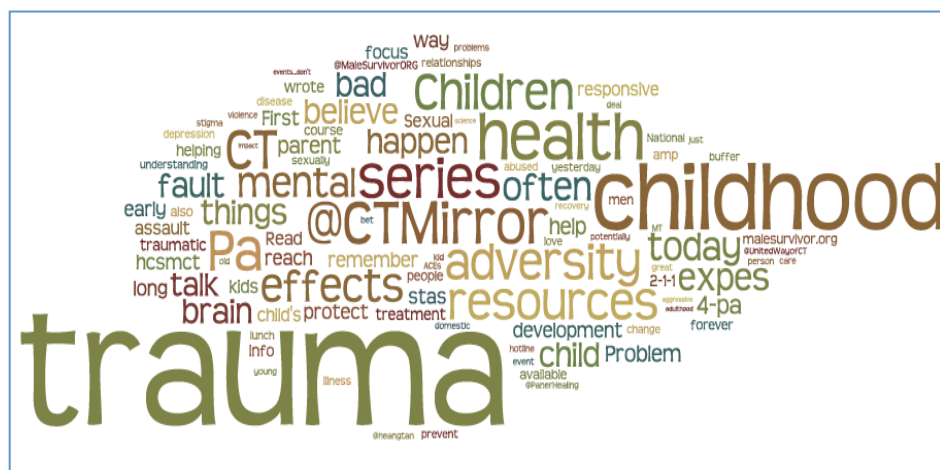
Tailored hashtags

Groups and individuals also create hashtags to promote dialogue around specific events, programs, or publications. For example, hashtags are often created for participants in conferences, meetings or summits.

#talktrauma: 209 tweets

During the week we analyzed, a new hashtag, #talktrauma, generated a significant amount of conversation on Twitter about childhood trauma, demonstrating how these tailored hashtags can successfully facilitate social media conversations.

On January 20, The Connecticut Mirror launched an in-depth, four-part report on childhood trauma. (See: <http://ctmirror.org/2015/01/20/the-long-reach-of-childhood-trauma/>) In order to facilitate dialogue about the series, The Mirror created a special hashtag (#talktrauma) and invited readers to “continue the conversation” with that hashtag on Twitter.



The resulting social media conversation generated 209 tweets over the course of one week, all of which related to childhood trauma in some way. Influential Twitter users in this conversation included the journalism site Reporting on Health (@reportinghealth), the [Child Welfare] State Policy Advocacy & Reform Center (@ChildWelfareHub), and child sexual abuse advocacy organization Male Survivor (@MaleSurvivororg)

Preliminary conclusions

We found no hashtag or set of hashtags that is widely and consistently used on Twitter among practitioners and organizations working on issues of childhood trauma. The two most frequently used hashtags, #ACEs and #Trauma, were connected with many irrelevant tweets. The hashtags that were more specific to childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences were infrequently used.

Since a consistent set of hashtags is important for facilitating communication and engagement on social media, practitioners and others in the field could take advantage of this opportunity to play a leading role in establishing the parameters of the social media conversation around childhood trauma.

Possible next steps

In order to capitalize on the possibilities of social media to connect those working on issues of childhood trauma, researchers and practitioners may need to further explore both the social media landscape and the needs of the field. The following are potential next steps to support that work:

Investigate the broader social media conversations about ACEs, including analyses of Facebook and Instagram, in-depth network analyses and assessments of Twitter and other platforms over time.

Solicit input from stakeholders and leaders in the field about how they are using social media in their work and what would aid them in building engagement and communication.

Based on research findings and input from stakeholders, identify goals for the social media conversation. For example, is the goal to build community among individuals and organizations already working on the issue, or to reach out to

new sectors? Are general hashtags for talking about childhood trauma needed, or would tailored hashtags around specific events or programs be most helpful? Are there different goals for different sectors?

In developing and choosing hashtags, follow established best practices by selecting tags that are brief, specific and unique. For example, hashtags like #ACEs and #Trauma are used by many other groups and so would not be good candidates as unique hashtags to help build relationships among those working on childhood trauma. On the other hand, while a hashtag like #adversechildhoodexperiences is unique, it is likely too long to gain widespread use on Twitter.