

HAZING AND TRAUMA – THE HIDDEN HARM

Hidden Harm is a phrase used to describe the effects of a previous trauma. These hidden harms can be both physical and psychological, and they can have long-lasting effects on the individual. Hidden harms can manifest from a variety of past experiences – war, abuse, hazing, violence, families with alcoholism, and other sources.

PHYSICAL TRAUMA

Traumatic injuries have been caused by hazing practices. Many times we first hear about an act of hazing when it has reached a physical extreme, and when someone has been physically injured, or when someone has died. There have been numerous cases of traumatic brain injuries due to beatings and other hazing rituals, and many cases where hazing victims have been hospitalized. Many times the act of hazing is exposed when a victim is hospitalized.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Sometime because of shame or self-blame we do not hear about the psychological effects of hazing, and these many cases do not make the news, or are reported in the same way that physical trauma is. But the negative psychological effects of hazing can be both long-lasting and just as traumatic to the victim and their families. These can include depression, suicide, poor grades, withdrawal from activities and shame. This harm can persist into adulthood and can undermine the well-being of a person.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES

What we don't know about another individual can be the ultimate harm of hazing. Someone who just joined an organization or team could have experienced something in their lives that makes them highly susceptible to serious repercussions if they're hazed. Hazing can be physically and/or psychologically harmful to even perfectly healthy individuals, but mix hazing with any one of thousands of previous experiences and the damage can increase exponentially. Consider the "baggage" that today's students can bring with them to high school or college;

- Depression or other mental health issues
- Military service in a war zone
- Been the victim of sexual assault. Comes from an alcoholic family
- Suffered the painful loss of a close friend or family member
- Has had an alcohol or other addiction
- Has seriously considered or attempted suicide
- Is on medication for a mental health disorder
- Has been abused physically or emotionally
- Has been hazed or bullied before
- Any of these, and more we can't imagine, could put someone at a higher risk of being re-traumatized by hazing.