

Abstract for IAMS 2020
Theologizing trauma in Roma Christian Communities as an orientation toward missional praxis

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Narrative research in Roma communities in Eastern Europe has uncovered significant trauma and ongoing suffering as a result of violence, substance abuse, social marginalization and discrimination, ongoing poverty, and war. Recent research in trauma studies demonstrates the particular ways in which trauma affects physical, biological, mental, and spiritual dimensions of a human being. For communities that have undergone familial, intergenerational, and historical trauma, this has critical significance upon human flourishing and discipleship. Pentecostal theology highlighting the active involvement of God's presence helps Roma Christians and communities wrestle with some of these questions, and yet a lack of a contextual theology of suffering prevents a 'reinterpretation' of life stories leading to hope and healing.

Recent theologians have begun to connect trauma research and theology, creatively exploring a theological space for those who continue to endure trauma and suffering. However, theological reflection must be rooted in context; a lack of a contextual theology of suffering can both hinder transformation dependent on a deep integration between the Christian narrative and interpretation of one's life story and contribute to a dualistic thinking between 'spirit' and 'body'. Therefore, this paper will explore the connections between trauma and suffering, theology, and missional praxis within the context of the Roma in Eastern Europe. First, the paper will present primary and secondary sources detailing the challenges and trauma facing Roma individuals and communities. Putting these findings into context with trauma research, I will suggest several implications for discipleship and mission. Next, I will discuss recent theological work on trauma and suffering, imagining how these reflections could speak into the Roma experience. Finally, I will discuss missional implications for the Roma church.