A FACT SHEET ABOUT

SEXUAL ASSAULT: The Mental Health Impact

A study of 1400 adult female twins found that women who had been raped as girls were three times more likely to develop psychiatric disorders or abuse alcohol and drugs than their twins who had not been sexually abused.


A review of 166 studies between 1985 and 1997 found that, compared to boys who were never abused, sexually abused boys were four times more likely to suffer from major depression, three times more likely to be bulimic, and at least two times more likely to have antisocial personality disorder, behavioral problems, low self image, or runaway behavior. In addition, sexually abused boys were one and a half to fourteen times more likely to attempt suicide.


In a 1999 study of 2,186 female high school students in Massachusetts, recent suicide ideation and actual suicide attempts were six to nine times as common among girls who reported having been sexually and physically hurt by dating partners.


In the nationally representative Survey of Women’s Health by the Commonwealth Fund in 1998, women who experienced sexual violence by an intimate partner were four to five times more likely to suffer from depression or anxiety than women who did not experience violence.


Mental health costs of sexual assault are very high. Estimates indicate that one-quarter to one-half of rape and child sexual abuse survivors receive some form of mental health treatment as a result of the victimization.

Child and/or adult history of sexual and physical abuse appear frequently to be the first experience in a sequence that leads to homelessness for women and men.


In one New York City comparative study, rape survivors seen by rape crisis center advocates during their initial emergency room visits reported the fastest recovery path from their psychological injuries and returned soonest to normalized daily routines.


Estimates of the total annual cost of mental health care for victims of attempted or completed rape is $863 million. Estimates of the same costs for adult survivors of child sexual abuse are even higher, $2.1 billion.


Numerous nationwide studies consistently show prevalence rates of sexual abuse histories at 22% to 54% among women receiving case management mental health services and 50% to 70% among women in inpatient psychiatric facilities.

(“On Record: Facts about Mental Health & Physical and Sexual Abuse,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Mental Health Services, 1994)

The 14 member programs of the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence assist survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, and members of their families, with 24-hour crisis lines, emergency shelter, counseling, support groups, and help dealing with police, medical, and court personnel. The crisis centers also provide speakers and educational programs to community groups.

In 2003, Coalition member agencies assisted 1,325 sexual assault survivors.

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