Victim Dynamics in Detention

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Of all human experience of trauma, sexual trauma is second in severity only to those who have experienced extended active combat.

“I was sexually assaulted many times... I never spoke up about what happened because I was told that myself and my loved ones would be killed if I did.”

“I was anally raped by four males, two separate times. Because there were no condoms used, I’m worried and scared.”

“I was raped and told to keep my mouth shut about it and out of total fear from my safety and well-being, I didn’t notify anyone until I had enough courage to speak out.”
Defining Sexual Assault

Any nonconsensual sexual act:

A sexual act is **nonconsensual** if it is inflicted upon a person who is

- unable to grant consent or
- if it is **unwanted and compelled through** the use of
  - Physical force
  - Manipulation
  - Coercion
  - Threats
  - Intimidation
Who are Victims?

• Victims:
  – Can be anyone
• They are chosen because they are:
  – Vulnerable or can be made so
  – Accessible or can be made so
• And most often
  – Lacking in credibility or can be made to seem so

**The most highly victimized people are those who are lacking in credibility**
Victim Impact

What Causes Trauma?

- Penetration
- Severity
- Weapon
- Quantity
Victim Impact

Primary causes of trauma:

- Betrayal
- Extreme Fear/Terror
- Blitz/Surprise Attack
- Self-Blame
- Lack of support (disastrous disclosure)
- Invalidation
Common Reactions to Sexual Assault

- Humiliation
- Shame & self-blame
- Guilt
- Fear of people
- Feeling a loss of control over life
- Concern for the rapist
- Grief
- Depression
- Denial
- Anger and irritability
- Laughter
- Dissociation: flat affect or numb of emotion
Male Victims

- Many reactions are similar to female victims
- Male victims have some exacerbating issues based on our societal expectations about gender:
  - Fewer men report than women
  - Men demonstrate more elevated levels of distress than women post assault and are less willing to acknowledge it
  - Most men feel their masculinity is in question because they did not fight off the attack
  - Exacerbated sense of shame
  - More difficulty with self perception and sexual identity
  - Many men question their sexual orientation
  - Men may be more likely to substance abuse to cope

(Elliot, Mock & Briere, 2004)
Impact of Sexual Violence in Detention

• Increased risk of:
  – Depression
  – Suicide attempts
  – PTSD
  – Sexually transmitted infections and HIV
  – Worsening of psychiatric disorders
Rape is more likely to induce PTSD than other serious crimes because of its unpredictable, vulnerable and personally violating features. Rape victims have more PTSD symptoms and have longer recovery times than any other type of victim.

(Michenbaum, 1994)
Impact of Trauma

- % of victims demonstrating PTSD symptoms measured in the first month after the traumatic event:
  - Motor Vehicle Accident 13 – 21%
  - Industrial Accident 6%
  - Natural Disaster 7%
  - Violent Assault 19%
  - Robbery and Assault 25%
  - Rape 94%

(Gibson, 2007)
Impact of Trauma

Victims of sexual assault are:

- 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol.
- 26 times more likely to abuse drugs.
- 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide. *(World Health Organization, 2002)*
- As many as 74% of women in substance abuse treatment have experienced sexual abuse *(Kubbs, 2000).*
- 13% of all rape victims have attempted suicide *(Kilpatrick et al, 1992).*
Impact of trauma

- Trauma interferes with cognitive functioning
  - Thought processing
  - Concentration
  - Memory and specific recall
  - Realistic assessment of own situation
  - Decision making

Therefore, the victim’s ability to cooperate and work seamlessly with you can be impaired.
Sexual violence affects survivors in diverse ways

- Following a sexual assault, victim/survivors may...
  - feel afraid, ashamed, and very confused
  - be exhausted, starving, etc.
  - Feel pressured to make a decision about reporting
  - Not understand their choices
  - Unfamiliar with medical or reporting options
  - Be terrified of what will happen
  - Be worried about people finding out
  - Feel like they have to decide RIGHT NOW
Past Victimization

• The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics state that more than 50% of women in jail report having been physically or sexually abused in the past. 32% of these incarcerated women who report a history of sexual abuse were abused before the age of 18.

• 92% of California's female prisoners had been abused in some way prior to being taken into custody. (ACLU, 2007)

Information collected from evaluations distributed to women at the Cumberland and York County Jails (Maine) reveal that in 100% of the evaluations collected, women reported having experienced sexual violence and/or some type of interpersonal violence at some time in their life.
Multi-Abuse Trauma

A victim may be affected by several co-occurring issues that negatively affect safety, health, or well-being.

- Sexual assault
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Child abuse or neglect
- Poverty
- Domestic Violence
- Witnessing Violence
- Substance Use Disorders
- Homelessness

Factors that serve as barriers to victims seeking help also may include:

- Race or ethnicity
- Class or economic status
- Language facility
- Immigration status
- Disability
- Mental Health Issues
- Substances Abuse
- Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity
- Incarceration or incarceration history
- Military Service
Victim Blaming/Questioning

• Victims are responsible, at least in part, for their assault b/c of their
  – actions, behaviors and/or choices

• Problem – there is NO single action, behavior or choice that leads to rape or sexual assault...
  – Just the choices and actions of someone willing to commit a sexual assault
Impact of Victim Blaming

- Victims, just like the broader culture/society, are likely to be influenced by social/cultural values and opinions...that results in:
  - Unsure whether it was rape/SA
  - Reluctant disclosures/reporting – or unwilling
  - Self-blame and shame
  - Partial disclosures/omissions
  - Recantations
Impact of Victim Blaming

• Primary reason victims choose not to report is fear of not being believed

• Victims who report and experience victim blaming show higher rates of post traumatic stress
  – Community Services for Rape Survivors: enhancing psychological well-being or increasing trauma, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* (1999)
Translation for Your Work

- Victims may delay disclosure, especially in an incarceration setting where there is little privacy.
- Victims may be angry or frustrated with the process for getting assistance and not know their rights following an assault.
- Victims may fear they have to tell every person they come in contact with the details of their assault.
- Victim may be experiencing complex mental and physical affects of the assault, compounded by past trauma.
Mitigating Trauma

- PREA standards seek to mitigate victim trauma by:
  - Access to confidential advocate (§ 115.53)
  - Ensuring medical care by SANE (§ 115.21)
  - Multiple ways to report (§ 115.51)
  - Ongoing medical and mental health care (§ 115.83)
Thank you!

For support, resources and training, contact CCASA!
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