

## APPENDIX 3.

### **Literature on the links between sexual abuse and subsequent mental illnesses.**

This is a brief summary of the more contemporary data linking child abuse and subsequent mental illness. Child sexual assault has long been recognised as a major risk factor for later mental illness. Our mental health and prison systems have large numbers of survivors of prolonged, repeated childhood trauma. I suspect that the prison situation is not as well recognised (nor documented) as are published findings for psychiatric patients. Strangely the linkage does not appear to have influenced the development of relevant public policy and services for adults in respect of interventions and treatments.

- 50 to 70% of all women and a substantial number of men treated in psychiatric settings have histories of sexual or physical abuse, or both. (Carmen et al, 1984; Bryer et al., 1987; Craine et al., 1988)
- As high as 81% of men and women in psychiatric hospitals with a variety of major mental illness diagnoses, have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. 67% of these men and women were abused as children. (Jacobson & Richardson, 1987)
- The majority of adults diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (81%) or Dissociative Identity Disorder (90%) were sexually and/or physically abused as children. (Herman et al, 1989; Ross et al, 1990)
- Women molested as children are four times more at risk for Major Depression as those with no such history. They are significantly more likely to develop bulimia and chronic PTSD. (Stein et al, 1988; Root & Fallon, 1988; Sloane, 1986; Craine, 1990)
- Childhood abuse can result in adult experience of shame, flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug use, feelings of humiliation and unworthiness, ugliness and profound terror. (Harris, 1997; Rieker&Carmen, 1986; Herman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; van der Kolk, 1987; Brown & Finkelhor, 1986; Rimsza, 1988)
- Adults abused during childhood are:
  - more than twice as likely to have at least one lifetime psychiatric diagnosis
  - almost three times as likely to have an affective disorder
  - almost three times as likely to have an anxiety disorder
  - almost 2 ½ times as likely to have phobias
  - over ten times as likely to have a panic disorder
  - almost four times as likely to have an antisocial personality disorder (Stein et al, 1988)

- 97% of mentally ill homeless women have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse. 87% experienced this abuse both as children and as adults. (Goodman, Johnson, Dutton & Harris. (1997)
- There is a highly significant relationship between childhood sexual abuse and various forms of self-harm later in life, i.e. drug use, suicide attempts, cutting, and self-starving particularly (van der Kolk, et al, 1991).
- For adults and adolescents with childhood abuse histories, the risk of suicide is increased 4 to 12-fold. (Felitti, 1998)
- Most self-injurers have childhood histories of physical or sexual abuse. 40% of persons who self-injure are men. (Graff, 1967; Pattison, 1983; Briere, 1988)
- Nearly 90% of alcoholic women were sexually abused as children or suffered severe violence at the hands of a parent. (Miller, Downs, 1993)
- Teenagers with alcohol problems are 21 times more likely to have been sexually abused than those without such problems. (Clark, 1997)
- 71% to 90% of adolescent and teenage girls and 23% to 42% of adolescent and teenage boys in a Maine inpatient substance-abuse treatment program reported histories of childhood-sexual abuse. (Rohsenow, 1988)
- Adults abused during childhood are more than twice as likely than those not abused during childhood to have serious substance abuse problems. (Stein et al, 1988).

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