

TRAUMA MATTERS

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Carol Huckaby, Editor

REFLECTIONS ON TRAUMA TREATMENT

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A paraphrased collection of comments and experiences from Trauma Treatment Groups

The past three issues of Trauma Matters have covered the development of the Trauma Center of Excellence at Northwest Mental Health Authority in Torrington, CT. They have been providing trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive services to clients since the fall of 2002. For this issue, the agency gathered a collection of paraphrased reflections from anonymous clients who have been in their trauma groups during the past few years. The reflections listed below demonstrate how an agency that is trauma informed and trauma sensitive can effectively help clients move forward in their recovery efforts.

“When I first entered the room where the TARGET Group was being held, I remember thinking, “Why am I here?” I knew I needed to learn the skills, but I also knew that I was not a trauma survivor. I grew up in a very stable environment with a loving family and I wasn’t abused. So, why did I feel I needed to be here? Why did I always feel so different from everyone else? A few years later after attending multiple TARGET groups I realized why I was there. I realized that I had reconciled my feelings of not fitting in, feeling different. I am not different, I am who I am!”

“I never understood why my anger controlled my life. Now I know. I also know how to somewhat control the anger. I know the difference between “short loop and long loop.” It’s a brain thing. By recognizing my triggers and using my skills I can stay in long loop, I can stay in the present and not be consumed by the past. I am now able to focus enough to work. I’ve been working at the same place for over a year now.”

“TARGET Group saved my life and I mean that. I have been in recovery for some years now. That means no alcohol, no drugs. It has been a very difficult road and still is, but I am doing it. Today, I have my safe place, today I understand why I reacted, behaved the way I did. I have more power and control over my emotions because I have a greater understanding of where these emotions are coming from. I know it isn’t my fault.”

“Why have I been in TARGET Group for so long? Because I need to be. It is hard to use the skills I’ve learned. I still sometimes use my maladaptive coping strategies, but now I can catch myself. Stop myself before it is too easy to continue on my destructive pathway. I have control of me. I have people who give me emotional support, I give myself emotional support and remind me that I am worth it. I am not going to leave my group. I want to be there. I don’t want to be afraid anymore!”

“In the beginning I thought this was just another skill building group. I was wrong. This group helped me to get back on my spiritual path. It reminded me that I do have values and beliefs. I am beginning to live true to these values and beliefs.”

Collected by Rosanna Arpaia,
Trauma Services Coordinator, Northwest Mental Health Authority

THE TRAUMA OF AUTHORITY RAPE

While sexual violence is certainly not a recent phenomenon, it has in recent years become increasingly visible, garnering the much-needed and long-overdue attention of researchers, clinicians, journalists and the criminal justice system. What we now know about sexual abuse is staggering: one in three girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused in some manner prior to reaching their 18th birthday.¹ We also know that sexual trauma often exerts a lasting impact on the victim's psychological health: fully 50 to 75% of adult women in addictions treatment have histories of sexual abuse, and girls who have been raped are three times more likely to suffer from drug and alcohol abuse in adulthood.² And we further know (despite the traditional cautionary tales about avoiding strangers and our growing reliance on sex offender registries) that most sex crimes are committed by people known to their victims³, taking place in familiar surroundings previously thought to be safe.

One category of sex crime that continues to be under-recognized by the public is that of Authority Rape – the sexual victimization and exploitation of children, adolescents and adults by any person in an authority position, any person who can by their position alone elicit the attention, respect, trust and compliance of a child, adolescent or adult.⁴ These include teachers, priests, rabbis and ministers; counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical doctors; attorneys, advisors, community leaders, mentors and coaches.

Authority Rape is characterized by abuse of an otherwise legitimate authority. It is most common in those social institutions that are rigidly hierarchical, and where the perceived need to protect a common group identity serves to enhance secrecy and prevent transparency. Often it occurs within a relationship where one party (the victim) is perceived to be dependent, subordinate or of lower status, while the other (the actor) is seen as being dominant, custodial, nurturing and/or the provider of expertise, guidance and/or treatment. Central to the relationship is an inherent inequality and a real power differential.

The following case, a composite drawn from several recent high-profile cases, provides a good example of the typical profile of an authority rapist, the way in which authority rapists choose and groom their victims, and the pervasive resistance on the part of the general public to recognize this as a crime and to hold the perpetrator accountable:

Police were called upon to investigate the coach of a suburban girls hockey team, after an anonymous call suggesting he may have an inappropriately sexualized relationship with one of his teenaged players. Eventually the coach is arrested, and charged with rape and sexual abuse. The 14-year-old player admits to what she initially believes to have been consensual sexual behavior. She has been a protégé of this coach since she was 9 years old, and he had been her primary emotional support through the loss of her own father several years earlier. She was close to the coach's family, often spending the night, traveling with them, even calling his wife "auntie". She was described by her teachers as a quiet, shy young woman, depressed and socially withdrawn since her father's death and emotionally needy. The coach had only recently arranged for her to transfer to this new team, from one in another town. She was socially isolated, not yet accepted by her new team-mates, who were put off by her "special" relationship with their coach and mentor. His sexual behavior with her had begun subtly, become more blatant over time, escalating finally to completed rape. Although his victim believed her compliance had been consensual, she admitted that he had pressured her in many ways: with his conditional approval, withdrawing attention when she resisted, threatening to abandon her and warning her that she would hurt his family and ruin his career if she told anyone. The hockey team was very successful and the coach was a highly respected community member. He was active in his local church, charismatic and popular. He was seen by both the players and their parents as a highly sought-after coach, a committed mentor and a trusted authority figure.

THE TRAUMA OF AUTHORITY RAPE (continued)

The initial reaction by the team and the parents was complete disbelief. The victim was ostracized and parents rushed in to support their coach, who was seen as falsely accused and beyond reproach. As it became more apparent that the charges were based in fact, many parents continued to support the coach. The focus shifted from disbelief to a belief that the young girl had “entrapped” this respected pillar of the community. When the police (who fortunately had educated themselves about sexual assault) investigated further and located internet evidence as well as a number of previous victims, the parents finally withdrew their support from the perpetrator, but continued to blame the victim. She was asked not to rejoin the team. Many of the adults involved continued to believe that while this coach had been misguided, that what occurred was not rape, but rather was consensual sex. The perpetrator was eventually found guilty, but continued to protest his innocence and to blame his victim.

Perpetrators of Authority Rape frequently take elaborate steps to conceal their behavior and to ingratiate themselves not only with the targeted victim, but with the victim’s natural social supports, making the victim less likely to disclose and those who might otherwise protect the victim less likely to believe any attempts at disclosure. They are often charismatic, socially adept and seen by others as above reproach. Given our culture’s pervasive denial of sexual abuse, these socially-esteemed perpetrator characteristics make any accountability extremely difficult and unlikely.

There are no simple answers to this problem, but education is vital. Authority Rape is not rare. Information about Authority Rape must be conveyed to parents, to those professionals entrusted with protecting children, to those who provide treatment, to the criminal justice system and to anyone who is a potential jurist. Perpetrators must be held accountable, regardless of their social role and status. And those children, adolescents and adults who are victimized by people in positions of authority must be believed, supported and defended.

Submitted by May Krukiel
Executive Director
CT Women’s Consortium

^{1,2}Statistics taken from the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault website at www.nyscasa.org

³Rennison, Callie. Criminal Victimization 2001, Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice.

⁴Taken from a paper by Jim Tanner, Ph.D. presented at the Mid-Atlantic Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, Ocean City, MD, October 2005.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA DEFINITION

What is Psychological Trauma?

Esther Giller, President and Director of the Sidran Foundation states “... it is an individual’s subjective experience that determines whether an event is or is not traumatic. Psychological trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or enduring conditions in which:

- The individual’s ability to integrate his/her emotional experience is overwhelmed, or
 - The individual experiences (subjectively) a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity. (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 60.)”
- The circumstances of the event commonly include abuse of power, betrayal of trust, entrapment, helplessness, pain, confusion, and/or loss.” This definition of trauma results in individual determination of what is traumatic. It is also broad enough to incorporate one time events such as a natural disaster like hurricane Katrina as well as enduring events such as incest, being held hostage or other situations of long duration or chronicity.

Submitted by Eileen Russo, MA

SAFETY TIPS

For adolescents and teens, chat rooms on the internet are a popular hangout because it is easy for them to express themselves and keep in touch with their friends. As a parent, please consider the following guidelines to help your children make safe decisions about using online communities.

- Talk to your kids about why they use the internet, how they communicate with others and how they represent themselves.
- Kids shouldn't lie about how old they are on the internet
- Remind them not to post anything that could embarrass them later or expose them to danger.
- People aren't always who they say they are. Ask your children to be careful about adding strangers to their friends list.
- Harassment, hate speech and inappropriate content should be reported to you.
- Monitor or restrict your child's use of your web cam or camcorder.

To learn more please visit these other resources:

- Software4parents.com Netsmartz.org SafeTeens.com
- WiredSafety.org [The Child Safety Network](http://TheChildSafetyNetwork) GetNetWise.org

APRIL, MAY & JUNE

April, May and June have been designated as months to increase awareness and education on sexual assault, mental health and LGBT issues. Listed below is the designation for each month and websites to visit for more information.

April is National Sexual Assault Awareness Month

- www.satrc.org
- www.mencanstoprape.org
- www.nsvrc.org
- www.rainn.org

May is National Mental Health Month

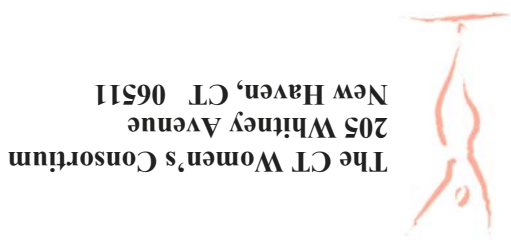
- www.nmha.org/may/index.cfm
- www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov
- www.amhca.org

June is National Gay Pride Month

- www.gay.com
- www.junepride.com
- www.nwhp.org

Getting into Trauma Matters

- You can access an electronic version of the "Trauma Matters" Newsletter at www.traumamatters.org; www.dmhas.state.ct.us; or www.womensconsortium.org
- Do you want to be placed on our mailing list or is there an event or topic you would like covered in this newsletter? Please call "Trauma Matters" editor Carol Huckaby at 203.498.4184, x25 or e-mail her at chuckaby@womensconsortium.org.



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