

Long Term Effects of Abuse and Trauma

- 30% of children who experience abuse have physical, emotional and cognitive/mental health issues. The effects of childhood abuse can range from depression and anxiety to developmental delays. Children who are/were abused are also at a much greater risk of learning to cope by developing significant emotional and adjustment problems.
- Abuse in the home can drive women and girls into the streets, where lack of housing puts them at further serious risk of physical and sexual violence and early death. One study found that 87% of homeless girls and women aged 12 to 19 in British Columbia had been abused.¹
- Only 10% of sexual assaults on women are reported to the police. One reason for this is that sexual assaults often occur in contexts in which the abuser is in a position of trust or authority in relation to the person assaulted.
- Federally sentenced women have high rates of childhood sexual abuse, commonly incestuous, violent, extended over a long period of time, and with multiple perpetrators. They also have high rates of re-victimization at the hands of violent men. As a result, the mere presence of men doing their bed checks, being forced to speak to male staff about their abuse and related triggers, being monitored by male staff and being strip searched, especially when male staff may be present, also serves to re-victimize women in prison.
- Women and girls are vulnerable to physical and sexual attacks. 40 percent of women with disabilities have been raped, abused or assaulted.
- The majority of Aboriginal women have been assaulted. Aboriginal and other racialized women are also subject to racially-motivated physical and sexual assaults in addition to other violence against women and abuses of power and authority.
- Girls are targets of abuse within the family more so than boys. Four out of five victims of incest (79%) are girls.
- 63% of all sexual assaults reported to the police involve girls under the age of 18 years.
- Despite these numbers and women's lived reality, there are very few programs or counseling services available to women prisoners that deal with sexual or physical abuse.
- The high rates of mental health issues, incidents of self-injury, depression and suicide in the population of imprisoned women, ethically and legally warrants sufficient and proper assessment of their treatment needs in a manner that does not result in high classification ratings for those with the greatest needs.

References

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. (2004). *CRIAW Fact Sheet*. No. 6-2004. Ottawa: CRIAW.

The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children. *Violence Against Girls: Statistical Highlights*. Vancouver: FREDA.

¹ New Federal Policies Affecting Women's Equality: Reality Check. Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. 2006.