



Behind Closed Doors Network

6th November 2009

Domestic Abuse – Implications
For Mental Health

Julia Worms



Background

‘Women’s Mental Health Into The Mainstream’

Department of Health 2002

- Acknowledged role of gender in violence & abuse
- Violence & abuse against girls & women more common than generally realised
- Can have a significant, long term impact on mental health
- Often abuse not disclosed

Into The Mainstream...

- ‘The level of awareness of violence and abuse appears low among mental health professionals, women are rarely asked about such histories. Where survivors of violence & abuse have been surveyed about their feelings with respect to disclosure, they say they want to be asked/wished they had been’
- ‘The links between mental ill health & previous experience of sexual abuse are well known, but persistent findings suggest that the issue of sexual abuse receives little attention in mental health services: indeed, it is common for coping mechanisms to be misinterpreted as symptoms of pathology, and assessments are often made which ignore the context of abuse, thereby perpetuating the problem.’

Recommendations

- Developing gender sensitivity in mental health provision
- Experience of violence & abuse should be a key component of assessment & care planning
- Importance of multi-agency working

Research Overview

Cathy Humphreys – University of Warwick 2003
Mental Health & Domestic Violence

- ‘Possibly in no other area is centralising the user voice so crucial given the deeply contested nature of the link and the fears that women’s accounts of their emotional distress in response to abuse will be misconstrued, misunderstood & used against them’
- ‘As soon as the women’s mental health became the subject of concern any focus on the man’s abusive behaviour, let alone its causal relationship to the woman’s mental health problems was lost’