

Chapter One

Introduction



New Partnerships for Women

INTRODUCTION

All of the information helped to reinforce the things I have been learning in therapy and life. It's good to talk about things and remember that I am powerful and have choices.

This is such a good reminder of how far I've come in healing and for when I get stuck.

I'm not alone!

~Evaluation comments from women who attended the NPW Consumer Curriculum Training Series

New Partnerships for Women

Welcome to the *New Partnerships for Women Study Guide for Trauma Survivors entitled: Journey of Self-Discovery*. The *Study Guide*, as we will refer to it subsequently, was originally designed as a *Handbook* to accompany the *New Partnerships for Women Consumer Curriculum*. The *Curriculum*, and its accompanying *Handbook*, was developed over the course of several years by a collaborative workgroup launched in 1998 as part of the Women and Mental Health Study Site of Dane County (WMHSS) and continued under the auspices of New Partnerships for Women, Inc. (NPW). The purpose of NPW, which was a direct outgrowth of WMHSS, is to continue to build the capacity of the community to promote healing and recovery for women who have histories of trauma and mental health or substance use problems, or both. Capacity building efforts include: (1) training activities, (2) consumer involvement and empowerment activities, (3) dissemination of information from the needs assessment of Dane County women, and (4) advocacy activities on behalf of these women.

The idea for the *Curriculum* was initially developed by an ad hoc consumer group organized within WMHSS. Drawing on findings from the needs assessment study, the group identified four focal topics to be covered in the *Curriculum*: (1) scope and impact of trauma on women's lives; (2) management of symptoms and substance use; (3) meeting women's basic needs; and (4) advocacy. A collaborative workgroup, including consumers, providers, researchers, and educators in the areas of trauma, mental health, and substance use, was subsequently developed within NPW to complete the design of the *Curriculum* and the *Handbook*. In its original version, the *Handbook* covered the first three topics noted above while the fourth was covered in a separate advocacy manual developed under the guidance of the Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy (WCA). The 2007 revised version of the *Handbook*, which we refer to subsequently as a *Study Guide*, includes an advocacy chapter developed by

Disability Rights Wisconsin (formerly Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy) as part of its *Advocacy Tool Kit*.¹

The *Curriculum* was created specifically for women with histories of abuse who have a mental health or substance use problem, or both, and who may be confronting other life challenges. Moreover, it was originally designed as a series of consumer trainings for which this *Study Guide* was a supplement. We believe that any woman who is living with one or more of these issues may benefit from material in the *Study Guide*.

Trauma is all too common in the lives of women and plays an important role in the development of mental health and substance use problems, as well as many other life problems. Here we share one woman's conceptions of these relationships:

*I mean the trauma and the substance abuse cause your mental health to be weakened. It's a triangle, . . . 3 circles inner-connecting so that they're connected and they influence each other. I like the three-circle idea. I have to draw it to be able to talk about it. So let's put mental health in the middle, and substance abuse over here, and ah trauma here. Mental health alone would be wellness, but with trauma and substance abuse, mental health is, you've got illness then. So you need treatment. You need the treatment for your substance abuse. You need treatment for trauma. You need treatment for the mental health. And otherwise I don't think you can get better, unless your trauma and your substance abuse is minor, maybe then you can get better on your own. But if you got moderate to severe, I don't think so. I think you need treatment of some kind. So yeah, they're intertwined. There's a connection, and it takes a long time. People have to be patient, work hard.*²

Although we acknowledge that this is very difficult work, we believe that healing and recovery are possible. For many women, this is a process of self-discovery, rather than recovery or healing, especially if the abuse started early in life. That is why we chose the title—***Journey of Self-Discovery***—for this *Study Guide*. We think it more aptly reflects the process that most women engage in following abuse experiences.

Many women will pursue this journey without professional help. Whatever pathway you may choose, we hope you find the material provided in this *Study Guide* useful to you in your own recovery or self-discovery process. Our ultimate goal is to help women like yourself appreciate areas of resilience in your life and develop the self-confidence and personal strength to make life changes that are important to you.

¹ For more information on the *Advocacy Tool Kit* or other resources from Disability Rights Wisconsin, please visit DRW's web site located at www.disabilityrightswi.org or by telephone at 608-267-0214 (voice/TTY) and request a brochure of available resource materials and videos.

² Excerpt taken from: Nadine Nehls and Jolanda Sallmann (August 1, 2001). *FORGING NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH WOMEN: Listening to Women's Voices*. The Women and Mental Health Study Site of Dane County, School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Women and Mental Health Study Site

The WMHSS was one of 14 sites around the country that was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 1998 to study and improve services for women with histories of trauma and co-occurring mental health and substance use problems. The WMHSS undertook three primary tasks as a part of this study, each of which had significant implications for the development of this *Curriculum*.³

The first task was information gathering through a three part needs assessment. Computer assisted personal interviews were conducted with over 200 women who had received services from the publicly funded mental health and substance use treatment systems in Dane County. A subset of thirty of these women, who reported histories of trauma, mental health, and substance use problems, were invited to participate in a second in-depth interview.

The goal of this two stage interviewing process was to determine the number of women with trauma histories and co-occurring mental health and substance use problems who enter systems of care. Additionally, we hoped to learn about women's experiences with the treatment systems, what they found helpful or harmful, and what resources they felt they needed to improve the quality of their lives. In addition, a series of forums or focus groups was held to reach women who may struggle with these problems but not feel they have access to existing systems of care, e.g. women living in more remote areas of the county and women of minority group status. The information collected through these three needs assessment activities has been incorporated throughout the curriculum. For more information about some of the primary findings from this study, we have included the executive summary from the study site's final report in this manual (Pp. 8-23). More recent publications are noted below.⁴

The second task was to bring together a collaborative team of consumers, providers, funders, administrators, academics, and advocates to learn from the needs assessment

Suggested Reading:

- *Forging New Partnerships with Women: Executive Summary* by Joy Newmann, Anne Ziege, and Jolanda Sallmann

³ The following description was taken from the WMHSS report *PROM CONSUMERS: An Experiential Report and "How To" Guide* (March 21, 2001). Dianne Greenley, Jessica Barton, Barbara Hennings, Lola Barrientos Marquez, and Peg Michaelis. The Women and Mental Health Study Site of Dane County, School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Available through the Disability Rights Wisconsin (formerly Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy). For more information, please visit their website at: www.disabilityrightswi.org or contact DRW by telephone at 608-267-0214 (voice/TTY).

⁴ Newmann, Joy P., & Sallmann, Jolanda. (2004). Women, Trauma Histories, and Co-occurring Disorders: Assessing the Scope of the Problem. *Social Service Review*, 78 (3), 466-499. Nehls, Nadine, & Sallmann, Jolanda (2005). Women living with a history of physical and/or sexual abuse, substance use, and mental health problems. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(3), 365-381.

and each other's perspectives, and to develop plans for improved services for women struggling with these issues. The New Partnerships for Women Consumer Curriculum Development Workgroup continued in this spirit, collaboratively developing the *Curriculum and Handbook*.

The final task of the study site was to train consumers and providers. A major goal of the project was to raise community awareness of the impact of trauma on the lives of women, including its impact on the development and course of mental health and substance use problems. In the words of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association (SAMHSA), we hoped to create a "trauma informed" community. Thus, training was provided for the entire array of community service providers on the impact of trauma, trauma assessment, treatment approaches, working with co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse, and parenting issues for women with a history of physical or sexual abuse. Training was also provided for consumers on several topics of their choice, including advocacy and boundary issues.

Now that we have provided you with some background on the development of this *Curriculum*, we would like to introduce you to the different chapters of the *Study Guide*.

The Nature and Scope of Trauma in Women's Lives

The first chapter of the Study Guide begins with a definition of trauma and highlights the scope of trauma in women's lives. We focus, in particular, on a specific subset of traumatic events, namely physical and sexual abuse, and discuss the scope of such forms of interpersonal violence in women's lives. We believe that exposure to such events, which frequently first occurs during childhood for many women, can have long-lasting and extremely adverse effects.

The Effects of Trauma in Women's Lives

In chapter two, we draw on women's stories to highlight the distinction between short-term and longer lasting effects of exposure to sexual and physical abuse with a special focus on the question: What are the pathways through which exposure to interpersonal violence and abuse can lead to mental health and substance use problems for adult women? Further, we ask: What resources—both personal and situational—can protect against the development of such problems or help a woman with her recovery process?

We believe that answers to these questions can help women open a door to a happier and healthier life. Thus, the chapter ends with a few exercises to help you identify some of the ways trauma may be affecting your own life. We view such self-knowledge as an important beginning step in better managing your symptoms, securing needed resources, and advocating for yourself. These topics are developed in the following chapters of the *Study Guide*.

Symptom Management

The purpose of this chapter is to help you better understand your symptoms and their relationship to traumas that may have occurred in your life. It also includes some management tools for your own recovery process. We begin by defining “symptoms” and “symptom management” in relation to coping mechanisms women often use to survive or deal with abuse in their lives. We view many symptoms as behaviors and emotions that helped women survive and cope with past traumas, although they may have outlived their usefulness and contributed to other life problems. Symptom management is the diverse set of skills and techniques that we use to ease the intensity of a symptom. Given our uniqueness as individuals, both symptoms and the ways we manage them are different for each person. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to providing you with an assortment of skills and activities to choose from to help manage your own symptoms.

Meeting Women’s Basic Needs

A major finding from the WMHSS is that economic adversity (experiencing poverty) and its consequences are major problems with which women need and want help. This chapter is intended to give you a general understanding of how economic adversity may be one of the pathways through which histories of trauma can lead to mental health and substance use problems. It is also designed to provide you with some skills in locating resources in your own community and to introduce you to several resources in Dane County dedicated to helping women meet their basic needs.

Skills and Strategies for Effective Self-Advocacy

The final chapter of the *Study Guide* was developed by Disability Rights Wisconsin under the leadership of Dianne Greenley. It is part of a larger Advocacy Tool Kit (2007) that is available through DRW and we thank them for allowing us to include it here. It focuses primarily on self-advocacy skills, although the full tool kit includes peer advocacy as well. We suggest that you contact DRW if you are interested in learning more about it (608-267-0214).

Before Getting Started

We view the *Study Guide* as a self-help toolkit. It is not intended as a replacement for therapy or treatment. You might find that reading through the materials triggers thoughts, memories, feelings, or emotions related to abuse or other traumas you may have experienced. If you find yourself overwhelmed by your feelings or emotions, or physically reacting to what you are reading, we suggest that you seek professional assistance. If you do not know where to go for help, check your local Yellow Pages under such listings as: “Crisis Intervention Services,” “Domestic Abuse Intervention and Treatment Centers,” “Rape Treatment Centers,” and “Suicide Prevention Services.” Many phonebooks also provide a listing of “Community Services” in the front; this usually includes several 24-hour hotlines as well as trauma, mental health, and substance use services. At the end of this Study Guide there is information about “211,” a referral service offered by the United Way of Dane

County. There is also information on New Directions Information Center, a program of the Mental Health Center of Dane County that helps Dane County residents find mental health and substance abuse resources.

Before you begin reading through this Study Guide we have a few suggestions for you. Although this is very hard work, we believe that healing and recovery is possible for everyone. We urge you to start with the view that you are an expert on yourself. Listen to what your mind and body is telling you about how much work you are able to do in the area of trauma.

We encourage you to work through this Study Guide at your own pace. Feel free to take breaks or to set the Study Guide down for as long as you need to, even if that means setting it aside for several months.

We encourage you to pick and choose articles and activities that feel most relevant to your life and experiences and disregard those that do not feel as though they apply to you.

We encourage you to work through this Study Guide in a place that feels safe and comfortable to you. You may find that this means dedicating quiet time alone to do this work, or you may find that you would like to have someone else with you. Remember, there is no right way to do this work. Find what fits best for you.

We encourage you to have a support system available. This could be a friend, neighbor, support group, or professional counselor. Use this system, not only if you find yourself in crisis, but also if you just need a little extra support while working through these difficult issues.

We encourage you to take good care of yourself. Become aware of what makes you feel good. Try to do at least one good thing for yourself each day and make sure to reward yourself for all of the hard work you are doing.

Finally, **we encourage** you to have hope for the future. We ask you to share our belief that healing and recovery *are* possible. We have seen these changes in our own lives and believe that you can also effect positive change in your life through using the information and skills we have provided in this Study Guide.