

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services A Healthcare Service Agency

John G. Rowland
Governor

Trauma and Substance Abuse

Thomas A. Kirk Jr., Ph.D.
Commissioner

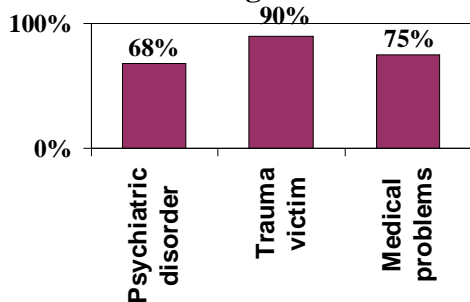
"I have been sexually, physically, emotionally, mentally and verbally abused, often at the same time. I have also been neglected and abandoned...my father had sex with me, I have been gang raped...I have been choked, beaten, kicked, thrown from wall to wall and room to room...I have been welted, bruised, bloodied."

Testimony from Spring 2000 Speak-out sponsored by CT Women's Consortium and DMHAS

There's a strong link between psychological trauma and substance abuse in women. Psychological trauma results from directly experiencing or witnessing severe bodily harm, extreme human suffering or the threat of death. Such trauma damages a person's body, mind, emotions, and relationships. A majority of women in substance abuse treatment programs have been physically or sexually abused. Many women who suffer with traumatic stress abuse alcohol or other drugs to help blunt their emotions and forget the trauma. To be effective, treatment must simultaneously address the substance abuse and the underlying trauma. The STAR program in Middletown is an example of a treatment program that promotes recovery in this way.

The **STAR Program** (Sisters Together Achieving Recovery) is a specialized women's addiction treatment program at Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH). Ninety percent of its clients are trauma victims. A person's treatment is organized to address chemical dependence, psychiatric issues, medical complications, and the aftereffects of trauma. The STAR Program helps women to view themselves as survivors who are empowered to take control of their lives rather than as helpless victims. Goals related to trauma include:

STAR Program Clients



- **Learning** that symptoms such as flashbacks and feeling unsafe come from the trauma rather than a defect in character.
- **Reducing the impact** of trauma symptoms such as extreme anxiety, inability to trust, nightmares.
- **Improving** self-control and self-discipline of emotions and behavior.
- **Connecting** with other sober women as recovery supports.

Next Steps

A **two-day conference** planned for October 22-23, 2001 will present innovative and promising practices to improve health care services for women and their families affected by violence, poverty, and physical, mental and addictive disorders. The conference is jointly sponsored by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Connecticut Women's Consortium (a DMHAS funded agency). For preliminary conference information call (203) 498-4189.

