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Trauma informed approach: An innovative tool for assisting sexual assault survivors

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Background: W.H.O. estimates that “1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partners sexual violence in their lifetime” and Amnesty International (AI) concurs: “at least one out of every three women worldwide has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.” While these numbers are deplorable, few medical professionals have learned skills to support these victims.

Aim/Purpose: This poster will be to share with medical personnel key information about trauma-informed ways to support rape survivors that include

- Creating care based on respect and physical/emotional safety
- Understanding of how brains function when confronted with trauma
- Avoiding re-traumatization by providing services that meet survivor’s needs

Methods/Innovation: This poster will rely on trauma-informed academic research on sexual violence which includes discussions of

Safety: the ability to seek help knowing that those helping will keep information confidential, will work to keep them safe, and will not respond to them by victim blaming.

Empowerment: the ability to determine when to seek medical, legal, and social service assistance.

Control: the ability to make choices for themselves. When agencies make decisions, survivors continue to be “controlled” in the same way a perpetrator controlled them.

Voice: the ability to tell their stories to medical personnel who won’t blame them for the assault but instead will actively listen.

Justice: the ability to define justice. It may include court hearings, or something as simple as safe housing, alternate routes to work, and/or the ability to work at a different branch of the same business.

Finding/Impact: By implementing a trauma-informed response to sexual violence, agencies can better serve survivors, speed their recovery, and avoid inadvertently re-traumatizing victims.

Implication: Research suggest that trauma-informed approaches can reduce stress, speed healing, reduce substance abuse, reduce depression and PTSD, promote psychological well-being, and help victims become functioning members of society again.