New Studies Link the Mental Health Effects of Trauma with Poorer HIV Treatment Access and Outcomes for Women
By Rachel White-Domain, JD, NCDVTMH*

Women who are HIV-positive and who have experienced recent abuse are over four times more likely to have their drug treatments fail, according to recent studies based on meta-analyses of clinical data and published in the journal AIDS and Behavior.

The studies suggest that several factors may impact a woman’s treatment access and outcomes, including direct interference by an abuser as well as obstacles that may exist if a woman is experiencing the mental health effects of trauma, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

According to the lead author of these studies, Edward Machtinger, the results indicate a need for a trauma-informed approach to HIV/AIDS treatment:

“'We have to learn to ask about trauma and to develop creative approaches to trauma-prevention and trauma-recovery,' Machtinger said. 'This is actually an amazing opportunity to have a significant impact on the HIV/AIDS epidemic, especially among minority women.’” (Bardi 2012)

The study also found that women who are HIV-positive and who have experienced recent abuse are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behavior, potentially contributing to the spread of infection.

References:


* This material was originally published in the Fall 2012 issue of the NCDVTMH Center Quarterly.
Links to the studies:

Psychological Trauma and PTSD in HIV-Positive Women: A Meta-Analysis:

http://www.springerlink.com/content/65735j14q7r70640/

Recent Trauma is Associated with Antiretroviral Failure and HIV Transmission Risk Behavior Among HIV-Positive Women and Female-Identified Transgenders:

http://www.springerlink.com/content/n164716853x285h7/