



Understanding the Connection – Traumatic Brain Injury and Violence

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The Often-Overlooked Consequences of Violence

People who experience domestic violence or sexual assault often describe abuse that inflicts bruises, cuts, or broken bones. A common but often unspoken injury is traumatic brain injury (TBI). TBIs that occur in the context of interpersonal violence constitute blunt force trauma to the brain which can be caused by being hit in the head, throat or neck, thrown against a wall or hard object, strangled (“choking”), or lost consciousness. TBIs often go unrecognized because the primary focus is on the violence itself and the overall trauma that survivors have experienced. Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) developed this document to raise awareness of and enhance responses to TBIs acquired as a result of domestic or sexual violence.

Short and Longer Term Consequences of TBI

The effects of a TBI vary from person to person. Some common symptoms include decreased concentration or attention span (cognitive effects), increased anxiety or agitation (behavioral effects) and headaches or dizziness (physical effects). An important issue impacting victims/survivors of violence is understanding the increased risk that occurs when a person experiences one TBI. The risk of another TBI increases due to slower reaction time, impaired judgment or inattentiveness to factors that might lead to a repeat TBI.

Understanding the Connection

Screening for TBI is the key to survivors accessing needed specialized services.

An important issue regarding TBI is the increased risk that occurs when a person experiences one TBI.

Helping survivors on their path to hope and healing.

What Advocates Might Notice...

Victims of violence who have a TBI might find it difficult to do many of the things that would help with both their immediate and longer-term safety. TBIs affect cognition, behavior and physical functioning. Here are some examples of what you might notice a victim who has a TBI has difficulty with: assessing danger (e.g., knowing when the abuser’s violence is escalating); defending against or escaping from immediate physical danger; judging when she needs to seek medical attention; making and remembering safety plans; keeping advocacy or court appointments; or going to school or holding a job. Undiagnosed TBIs, therefore, can further trap a victim with the abuser.

Screening Questions to Identify TBI

Screen everyone. When a TBI is suspected, continue to provide services while also referring her

for specialized TBI-related services. A simple and helpful tool you can use is the HELPS tool. (See next page) It is designed to be used by people who are not TBI experts. HELPS is an acronym for the most important parts of screening:

H = Hit on head;

E = Emergency room treatment;

L = Loss of consciousness;

P = Problems;

and

S = Sickness.

(The original HELPS TBI screening tool was developed by M. Picard, D. Scarisbrick, R. Paluck, 9/91, International Center for the Disabled, TBI-NET, U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, Grant #H128A00022; updated to reflect recent recommendations by the CDC on the diagnosis of TBI.)

Enhancing Effective Support and Response

Screening for TBI can be life saving since repeated head injuries decrease a person's ability to recover and increase that person's risk of death. Once a person has been screened, if warranted, refer the survivor for specialized treatment. Your role as a domestic or sexual violence advocate remains vital. Ask about what support or reasonable accommodations she might need to benefit most from your services. Be informed about available TBI resources and ways you can most effectively support her in her journey as a survivor of violence and TBI.

HELPS Screening Tool

H = Hit on head

Have you ever been hit in the head or had your head slammed into a wall or hard object?

Have you ever been pushed so that you fell and hit your head?

Yes No

E = Emergency Room

Were you ever seen in an emergency room as a result of being hit or hurt by someone abusing you?

Please describe what injuries you had.

Yes No

L = Lose consciousness

Did you ever black out after having been hit in or around your head?

Have you ever lost consciousness? For how long? For what reason?

Yes No

P = Problems

Did you have any problems after you were hit on the head?

Headaches, dizziness?

Difficulty remembering, concentrating, reading, writing or doing math calculations?

Changes in your behavior, attitude or job performance?

___ Yes ___ No

S = Sickness

Have you experienced any sicknesses after having hit your head?

___ Yes ___ No

How to Use the HELPS Screening Tool

If a person answers “yes” to any of the questions in two or more categories, it’s important for this victim/survivor to get a more specialized evaluation by a medical professional. If the victim/survivor has experienced repeated head injuries, her ability to recover is at risk. Talk with her about your concerns, and encourage her to seek Immediate medical care. Connect her with a TBI organization for specialized support. See next page for WI TBI resources.

Wisconsin Traumatic Brain Injury Resources

Brain Injury Alliance of Wisconsin

N63 W23583 Main Street, Suite A
Sussex, WI 53089

Help Line In-state and Toll-free: 800-882-9282

Phone: 262-790-9660

E-mail: admin@biaw.org

Website: <http://www.biaw.org>

The Brain Injury Alliance of Wisconsin (BIAW) is a non-profit organization that brings together people with brain injuries, their families, friends, and concerned professionals. BIAW’s mission is the prevention of brain injury and the full participation in life for individuals with brain injury.

BIAW provides services in five core areas: education, advocacy, prevention, information & resources, and support services throughout the State.

The Brain Injury Alliance of Wisconsin coordinates a statewide network of support groups, several of which BIAW helped to establish. [The BIAW website contains a searchable database for all support groups by location within Wisconsin.]

BIAW continues to assist our network by providing resources, new information, speakers on various topics, along with other services in order to afford survivors and their family members.

Brain Injury Resource Center of Wisconsin

P.O. Box 808

Muskego, WI 53150-0808

Phone 262-770-4882

FAX 262-436-1747

Email: ADMIN@BIRCOFWI.ORG

Web site: <http://www.bircofwi.org>

The Brain Injury Resource Center of Wisconsin's mission is to offer assistance and provide resources to people in Wisconsin who are living with the consequences of brain injury.

We are proud to be able to offer the Programs and Services listed at no cost to brain injury survivors, their families, and Wisconsin Professionals. Our aim is to be your "one-stop-shop" for all your resource, information, and support needs!

Some of the programs and services the Resource Center offers includes: Assistance for Professionals; Friendship Network (Social Gathering Group); Pen Pals; Return to Work - Employers and Employees (What Now!); Speakers and Presenters (Get Informed, Get Educated, Just Get It!); Spiritual Outreach; Support Groups Listing; Tote Bag Program (Our hearts, Hands, and Help too); and Volunteer Program (Help is always welcome).