



THE IMPACT OF BRAIN INJURY AND DOMESTIC ABUSE: A FURTHER ANALYSIS

Women offenders overwhelmingly face domestic abuse¹, traumatic experiences², brain injury³ and mental health difficulties¹. The impact of which can have a devastating effect on their health and wellbeing and increase their vulnerability¹.

In the first pilot of its kind in the UK, women with a brain injury at HMP/YOI Drake Hall were supported by a Brain Injury Linkworker from The Disabilities Trust. The subsequent Making the Link report highlighted the distressing finding that the leading cause of injury reported by women, who screened positive for a brain injury, was domestic violence (62%)³. In light of this, The Disabilities Trust undertook additional analysis to examine the link between brain injury and domestic abuse, in order to understand the specific needs of these women.

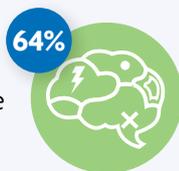
Key findings from women who screened positive for a history indicative of brain injury and were supported by The Disabilities Trust:

- **96%** of those who responded, reported experiencing domestic abuse
- **67%** of those who responded, reported experiencing sexual abuse
- **62%** cited domestic violence as the cause of their brain injury
- **61%** of those with a brain injury caused by domestic violence reported having self-harmed, compared to women who reported other causes of brain injury (29%)
- **46%** of women with a brain injury had convictions for violent crimes
- **33%** of the women who screened positive, sustained their brain injury before committing their first offence

“I WAS KNOCKED OUT UNCONSCIOUS LOADS OF TIMES...WHEN HE FRACTURED MY SKULL...IT WAS LIKE A BLOOD BATH...MY HEAD, ALWAYS...BUT MY HEAD, IT USED TO SWELL UP, THE AMOUNT OF TIMES MY HEAD SWELLED UP MASSIVE.”

(Wendy⁴, HMP/YOI Drake Hall)⁵

Within this already vulnerable population of offenders, research by The Disabilities Trust³ highlighted that nearly two-thirds (64%) may also be suffering from undiagnosed brain injuries. This is significant as brain injuries can cause a wide range of cognitive, psychological, emotional and behavioural problems including: poor memory, lack of concentration, slowness to process information, poor impulse control, emotional dysregulation, problems sleeping and lack of insight^{3*}.



* Lack of insight for brain injury refers to an individual's limited awareness of their physical, cognitive, psychological and behavioural changes.

An additional study into prevalence, conducted by The Disabilities Trust at HMP/YOI Drake Hall, in 2018 found that:

- **74%** of women (both with and without a history of brain injury) had experienced domestic abuse
- **72%** Violence was the most frequent cause of brain injury
- **40%** Of those with a Traumatic Brain Injury, 40% had a mental health diagnosis, and women with a brain injury were seven times more likely to have a mental health diagnosis than those without
- **35%** of those with a brain injury had not sought treatment for their injury

These findings further illustrate the complex experience and vulnerability of women who have suffered the trauma of both brain injury and domestic abuse. Alongside other frequently reported factors such as substance misuse and unstable housing, the need to support women holistically, not just within the Criminal Justice System, is fundamental to improving their lives.

“JUST HER EXPLAINING EXACTLY WHAT MY INJURY WAS AND WHERE IT WAS, WHAT DAMAGE IT ACTUALLY DID...I CAN GET ON WITH THINGS BETTER. I CAN TAKE A STEP BACK AND SAY; WELL LOOK THIS HAPPENED, BECAUSE OF THIS I NEED.”

(Eve⁴, HMP/YOI Drake Hall)⁵

In their recently published annual report, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence and Abuse, recommended that all frontline healthcare staff are trained in understanding violence against women

and girls. They also recommended advanced training for professionals who are in frequent contact with survivors, and that domestic abuse and sexual violence are secured as a strategic priority across the health and social care sector².

The Disabilities Trust wants to use this new evidence from the first study of its kind in the UK to open the conversation with Government and the wider sector. Brain injury and its impact should be part of the discussion around the identification of support needs for women who have experienced domestic abuse.

As stated in Making the Link, The Disabilities Trust continues to call for;

- Further research to be conducted to examine the potential effect of brain injury on re-offending behaviour, how effective brain injury rehabilitation can contribute towards the reduction of recidivism and the role of early intervention approaches.
- The inclusion of brain injury screening as a routine part of the induction health assessment on entry to prison or probation services.
- All prison and probation staff to receive basic brain injury awareness training.
- The provision of brain injury support in prison and probation settings.
- Assurance that brain injury support would be aligned with gender-informed practice.

Additionally, The Disabilities Trust now calls for;

- Further research to examine the prevalence of brain injury within the wider domestic abuse survivor population.
- The Government to ensure the needs of women with a brain injury are met within the Domestic Abuse Bill.

REFERENCES:

1. Ministry of Justice. (2018). Female Offender Strategy. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy>
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3. The Disabilities Trust. (2019). Making the Link. Available at: <https://www.thedtgroup.org/media/163462/making-the-link-female-offending-and-brain-injury-final.pdf>
4. The names of the women featured in the quotes in this document, are not their real names and are taken from the independent evaluation conducted by Royal Holloway, University of London
5. Glorney, E., Jablonska, A., Wright, S., Meek, R., Hardwick, N., Williams, H. W. (2018). Brain injury Linkworker service evaluation study: technical report. Royal Holloway, University of London (as the publisher).

