

# HEAD INJURY AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

DR SARA DA SILVA RAMOS  
SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW, THE DISABILITIES TRUST

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# WHAT BROUGHT US HERE...

## Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust (BIRT) | The Disabilities Trust

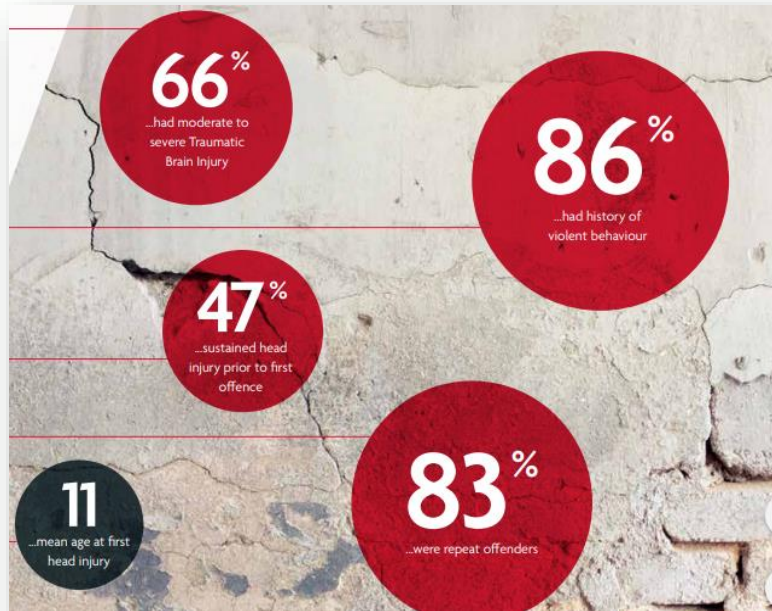
UK not-for-profit provider of rehabilitation and supported living services for people with brain injury

### The Disabilities Trust Foundation

- Philanthropic development of the Trust that aims to reach out to those who are unable to access our core services through research and the piloting of new ideas.
  - Brain injury and homelessness
  - Brain injury in adult male prisoners
  - Brain injury in young offenders' institutions
  - **Brain injury in female prisoner**
  - **Brain injury in survivors of domestic abuse**

# OUR APPROACH...

## Understand the problem...



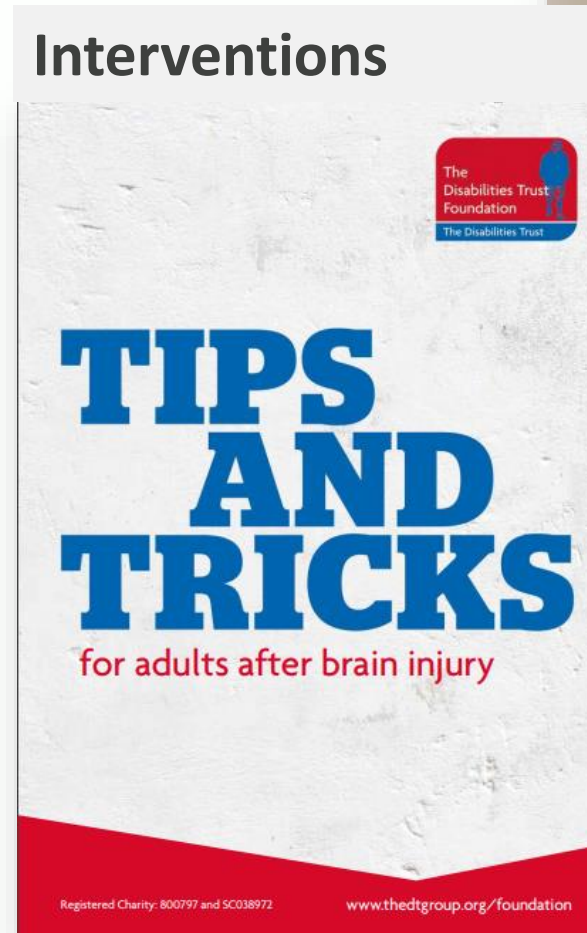
Source: Brain Injury Linkworker Service Report 2016

## ... Develop solutions

### Screening



### Interventions



### Training



# A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

*“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional.’*

- UK Government

- Can take many forms
- May not be perceived as violence by those who experience it
- It can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender, but in the majority of cases it is experienced by women and perpetrated by men (Women’s Aid)
- It can occur within a range of relationships
  - “personally connected” (Domestic Abuse Act 2021)



Source: <https://childhub.org/en/child-protection-news/new-research-reveals-need-flexible-tailored-support-domestic-violence-abuse-survivors>



Source: <https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/identifying-abuse/what-is-emotional-abuse>

# HEAD INJURY VS. ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY

In this talk “*head injury*” (HI) will be a term used to describe:

*Any type of brain damage that occurs after birth.*

Which may be caused by:

- Blow to the head (resulting from a road traffic accident, a fall, an assault)
- Illness to the brain (stroke, encephalitis, meningitis,...)
- Anoxia (resulting from anything that disrupts the supply of oxygen to the brain, including cardiac arrest, strangulation,...)



# HEAD INJURY AND DOMESTIC ABUSE: PREVALENCE



**5.5% (2.3 million)** adults experienced domestic abuse (Crime in England and Wales Survey, 2020)



The majority of domestic abuse-related offences recorded by police were perpetrated **against women** (**53%**, ONS, 2021; **80%**, Scottish Government, 2021)

**60%-92%** of survivors had a head injury as a result of intimate partner violence (St Ivany & Schminkey, 2016)



- Domestic abuse survivors were **seven times more likely to receive a HI** with loss of consciousness than women who were not abused (Anderson et al., 2015)



In female prisoners, the rate of head injury ranged between **19%-95%** (McGinley, & McMillan, 2019)

- Our own research found that **52%-64%** of female prisoners self-reported a head injury (O'Sullivan et al., 2021; The Disabilities Trust, 2020)
- Domestic abuse reported as the most frequent cause of injury

# WHAT MAKES DOMESTIC ABUSE A RISK TO BRAIN HEALTH?



- **Assaults to the head and face:** medical and neurological difficulties (Monahan, 2018)



- Long-term controlling relationships: **increased risk of repeated injuries** (McMillan et al., 2021)



- **Hidden condition** - only 21% sought immediate medical help (Zieman et al., 2017): making diagnosis at a later stage difficult



- Short- and long-term **neuropsychological effects:** anxiety, fear, hypervigilance, confusion, disorientation, memory loss, flat affect and depression, comorbidities (e. g. stroke, seizures), social difficulties (relational and occupational) (Monahan, 2018)



- **Increased risk of dementia, Parkinson, CTE** (Roberts et al., 1990; Casper & O'Donnell, 2020)
  - Evidence of changes in morphometry and functional connectivity (Likitlersuang et al., 2022)
  - Evidence of increased Central Nervous System symptoms (Campbell et al., 2018)

# IS THERE AN ADDED EFFECT OF DOMESTIC ABUSE RELATED HEAD INJURY?

## HI due to domestic abuse



(The Disabilities Trust, 2020)

**68%†** reported mental health problems  
**47%** committed a violent offence

(Campbell et al 2018)

**48%†** reported memory loss  
**30%†** reported blacking out  
**50%†** reported ears ringing  
**63%†** reported difficulty concentrating

## HI due to other causes

(The Disabilities Trust, 2020)

**32%†** reported mental health problems  
**47%** committed a violent offence

## Domestic abuse but no HI

(Campbell et al 2018)

**32%†** reported memory loss  
**16%†** reported blacking out  
**34%†** reported ears ringing  
**46%†** reported difficulty concentrating





## DOES BEING AWARE OF THIS HELP?....

*It gives us another facet and it give us more understanding ... If we can't understand the women, we can't help them quite as well ... I think it's impossible.*

- Prison staff (Glorney et al., 2018, p. 60)

**“WE DON’T ASK ABOUT BRAIN INJURIES SO DON’T KNOW HOW TO SUPPORT THESE INDIVIDUALS.”**

(Survey Respondent)

*Just [the Brain Injury Linkworker] explaining exactly what my injury was and where it was, what damage it actually did... I can get on with things better now, I can cope with things better. I can take a step back and say, “**well look, this has happened, because of this I need**”, and if I need to, you know, voice my opinion.*

- Brain injury survivor (Glorney et al., 2018, p. 46)

**“NOT KNOWING WHAT WE DON’T KNOW, SO UNABLE TO SIGNPOST CLIENTS TO MEDICAL OR OTHER SPECIALISTS IN THIS AREA.”**

(Survey Respondent)



# IMPACT OF NON-FATAL STRANGULATION (Bichard et al., 2021)

## Cognitive function

- Amnesia for the strangulation incident
- Memory problems

## Mental health

- Existential threat
- Depression and anxiety
- Suicidality
- Insomnia
- PTSD

## Behaviour

- **Increased compliance and submission**
- **Lack of help seeking behaviour**

*She struggled with some aspects of normal day-to-day life. Sort of - she was more - she was very disorganised, couldn't follow anything through - confused by quite simple processes and the way we were work here. So, she was obviously struggling with, with prison life... I think the difficulties that they have are more evident ... a lot, a lot of the women we see will get through life on the wits, for want of a better word. Whereas a lot of women [the Linkworker] has worked with, they haven't got that kind of ability to get around things.*

- Prison staff (Glorney et al., 2018, p. 57)

# WHAT MIGHT WE DO TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS AND REDUCE RISKS TO BRAIN HEALTH? (Mohan, 2019)

- Questions around head injury and loss of consciousness in health settings
- Universal screening of HI in DA services
- Introduce HI adjustments (lighting, falls prevention)
- Provide information resources and signpost to HI services
- Provide HI and trauma informed training to staff in the frontline
- Training on understanding HI across the Criminal Justice system
- Disseminate information on brain health
- Research (including prevalence, impact, interventions, brain banks, brain donations, etc.)



## Aims

- Estimate the prevalence of brain injury
- Evaluate the cognitive and emotional impact of HI within community-based services for survivors of domestic abuse.
- Pilot a suitable screening method

## Method

Gathering, through interview by a researcher, support worker, and / or existing records:

- Demographic information
- Brain injury screening
- Rivermead Post-Concussion Symptoms Questionnaire
- Patient Health Questionnaire-9
- Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment-7
- Dimension of Anger Reactions (DAR-5)
- The Revised Impact of Events Scale (IES-R)

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# Q&A

Your chance to ask us questions!