

Survivors of violence benefit from mentoring

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Can mentoring relationships help female students who survive childhood abuse or domestic violence? Absolutely, according to new research from Concordia University, published in the *Journal of College Student Development*.

"Studies have shown that [childhood abuse](#) unleashes a chain of [negative emotions](#) that can impact an individual's future, producing [feelings of shame](#), [isolation](#), self-loathing and educational underachievement," says first author Rosemary C. Reilly, an associate professor in the Concordia Department of Applied Human Sciences.

Reilly's study builds on evidence compiled by renowned community-based educator and researcher Dr. Jenny Horsman, which suggests that at least 20 per cent of all women are adult survivors of childhood abuse — that is, physical, psychological or sexual maltreatment during childhood. According to Horsman, as many as half the women studying in educational programs in Canada are trying to learn while simultaneously dealing with the consequences of violence.

Four themes of mentorship

As part of their research into impact of violence on women's learning and vocational choices, Reilly and co-author Monica D'Amico, a professor in the Concordia Department of Education, conducted in-depth interviews with 10 women who had experienced intense childhood abuse and were enrolled in an undergraduate program when interviewed.

All but one participant had been mentored at different stages in her life. Reilly and D'Amico found that the timing of women's mentoring was contingent on the impact the abuse had on their sense of identity.

Over the course of the interviews, four themes of mentorship emerged: fantasy mentors, mentors as mirrors, mentors as nurturers and supporters, and mentors as embodiments of a particular profession.

Although the researchers caution that these themes should be viewed as atypical, they enrich the understanding of mentoring for women marginalized by violence and demonstrate the malleable nature of mentorship. Mentoring in its various guises clearly played a significant role in these women's healing processes.

These findings, according to the study authors, should encourage universities to consider establishing a formalized mentoring program for survivors of trauma. Student services departments could support the education of this population by creating multiple opportunities for mentorship from different individuals, at various stages, as survivors' needs evolve.

"For survivors of childhood abuse, relationship and connection are what really matters and what successful mentorship is all about," says Reilly.

More information: journals.naspa.org/njawhe/vol1/iss1/8/

Provided by Concordia University

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