



**Supporting Women after Domestic Violence:
Loss, Trauma, and Recovery – p. 21-30
Author: Hilary Abrahams**

Article reviewers: Shayla Fenti, Cynthia Negrete, Amanda Parsons

Date of Review: May 2014

Topic of material:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General info | <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma and Substance Use |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct Service Advocacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Working with Children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working with Other Systems | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

About how long did this material take to read?

30 - 45 minutes

What is the main idea of this material?

This passage discusses how to support victims and survivors when they have been impacted by DV. While many survivors of domestic violence display symptoms of PTSD and some are diagnosed by medical providers, reframing their experience in terms of loss and grief can be a way to empower survivors while healing from a violent relationship.

The article indicates that learning with Maslow’s Hierarchy of human needs can help someone understand how to support someone who is experiencing DV. It also shares how victims and survivors experience loss and grief after the relationship is over; as well as how PTSD and DV are linked.

How would you summarize the material in just a few sentences?

The article discussed the idea of “learned helplessness” which is commonly accepted among social work programs. The article discusses how the idea of “learned helplessness” may result in women experiencing DV being viewed as “the problem” rather than a victim. Studies on women in DV relationships, however, have shown that women will actually take whatever steps they can to care for themselves in terms of safety. The article reinforces that the dynamics of a DV relationship can be difficult for others to understand and just because we disagree with how we perceive the victims’ behavior doesn’t mean they are not taking whatever steps they can to help themselves.

In addition, the author proposes that healing flows through three phases: reception, recognition and reinvestment. Reception is the initial feelings of shock. Recognition comes with the realization of what has transpired and the emotions involved in processing and

grieving the loss, as well as adapting to life out of the relationship. Beginning to build a new life and feel empowered through change is reinvestment.

How might this apply to doing community-based advocacy?

This would be a helpful article for individuals in the community to understand what survivors of DV may go through. It reinforces the idea of being victim-centered and allowing the victim to make the choices they feel are best for their situation.

Advocates can help survivors reframe the experience and healing process, rather than pathologizing the effects of trauma experienced during the relationship. Advocates can normalize the reactions and symptoms that an individual may be experiencing in the context of the multiple levels of abuse present in domestic violent relationships. Through understanding the healing process in terms of grief and loss, the process can be empowering as a survivor works through the stages and begins to have experiential change and healing.

What is a critical question you have after reading this material?

How can advocates be trained in the symptoms and stages of grief?

Also, Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery book discusses the stages of healing from Complex PTSD as Safety, Mourning, and Reconnection. It would seem important to help survivors get physically and emotionally safe (grounding exercises, self-soothing, etc) in addition to providing information about the grief process and normalizing their responses.