

SHIP At-A-Glance: Gender-Based Violence and Mental Health

Why Gender-Based Violence can Affect Mental Health

Between the years 2012 and 2017, the rate of mental health diagnosis in the state of Delaware has increased by 33% in adults (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). In order to address the growing problem of mental health disorders, we need to focus on their risk and protective factors. Mental health disorders cannot stand alone; their risk factors intersect with all facets of life and public health concerns (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). Some evidence-based population health strategies to address risk factors for mental health disorders highlighted in the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) include reducing trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). Examples of ACEs are food insecurity, poverty, and exposure to violent and/or abusive environments (CDHS, 2018). Furthermore, GBV is a severe form of trauma and research shows that exposure as a child to intimate partner violence, a form of GBV, is well established as an ACE (Basile et al., 2016; Niolon et al., 2017). Gender-based violence can also result in physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, which are also considered ACEs when experienced in childhood.

Gender-based violence refers to damaging acts directed at an individual based on their gender identity or their biological sex. It is rooted in gender inequality, the dynamics of power and control, and harmful gender norms.

Gender-based violence includes sexual, physical, psychological and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. Threats of violence, coercion and manipulation are also manifestations of gender-based violence.

Source: Center for the Study and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence, University of Delaware

Strategies

In order to improve mental health from a population-based health perspective, it is necessary to go to the root of the problem and work on prevention for trauma and ACEs (Purtle et al., 2020). Childhood trauma or ACEs are also a large contributing factor to the development of mental health disorders (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). Studies show that 1 in 4 children in Delaware experience ACEs and 1 in 5 experience two or more (CDHS, 2018). Due to the strong correlation between GBV and mental health disorders, providing more evidence based prevention strategies to stop GBV could help reduce impacts on mental health (Niolon et al., 2017). Some recommendations outlined by the CDC to aid in preventing GBV and ACEs include promoting social norms that protect against violence and creating protective environments (Basile et al., 2016; Niolon et al., 2017). These evidence-based strategies can greatly improve the quality of life for citizens in our communities (Basile et al., 2016; Niolon et al., 2017).

Between the years 2012 and 2017, the rate of mental health diagnosis in the state of Delaware has increased by 33% in adults (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). In order to address the growing problem of mental health disorders, we need to focus on how to reduce their risk factors. Mental health disorders cannot stand alone; their risk factors and causes intersect with all facets of life and public health concerns (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). Some evidence-based population health strategies to address risk factors for mental health disorders highlighted in the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) include reducing trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). Examples of ACEs are food insecurity, poverty, and exposure to violent and/or abusive environments (CDHS, 2018). Furthermore, GBV is a severe form of trauma and research shows that exposure to intimate partner violence, a form of GBV, is well established as an ACE (Basile et al., 2016; Niolon et al., 2017). Gender-based violence can also result in physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, which are also considered ACEs when experienced in childhood.

A few ways that we can promote social norms that protect against violence is by mobilizing men and boys as allies and using bystander approaches to engage communities in changing social norms surrounding GBV (Basile et al., 2016; Niolon et al., 2017). Programs such as Bringing in the Bystander and Green Dot promote the participation of adolescents intervening in situations that can lead to violence and promoting behavior that supports the change of negative social norms.. Men and boys can also be an asset to changing social norms (Coker et al., 2015). If we teach young men and boys to model positive masculinity and model healthy relationships, we can decrease the rates of GBV and thereby support mental health in our communities (Basile et al., 2016).

Creating protective environments is also a strategy that can help to reduce GBV and risk factors for mental disorders (Niolon et al., 2017). Community-level approaches can create environments that will help protect against GBV (Niolon et al., 2017). This includes creating environments in schools that are more conducive to the prevention of GBV as well as allowing for education on the topic. This creates safer environments for adolescents. There are also strategies to create policies in the workplace and neighborhood environments to engage the community and reduce GBV (Niolon et al., 2017).



Call to action

Delaware stakeholders can contribute to promoting these prevention strategies by learning more about organizations that are creating programs to prevent GBV and help better our communities. Citizens can learn more by visiting the websites and speaking to representatives of the organizations who are working on these efforts in our communities. These organizations include Student Wellness and Health Promotion at the University of Delaware, the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Delaware Alliance Against Sexual Violence. Other organizations that are working on prevention strategies to create protective environments should also reach out to these groups to see how they can incorporate GBV in their prevention strategies. Keeping GBV in mind while creating prevention strategies and programs will strengthen efforts to improve mental health in Delaware.

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Did you know

Population health refers to the health status and health outcomes within a group of people rather than considering the health of one person at a time.

www.delawareship.org

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