

Start by Believing

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Introduction

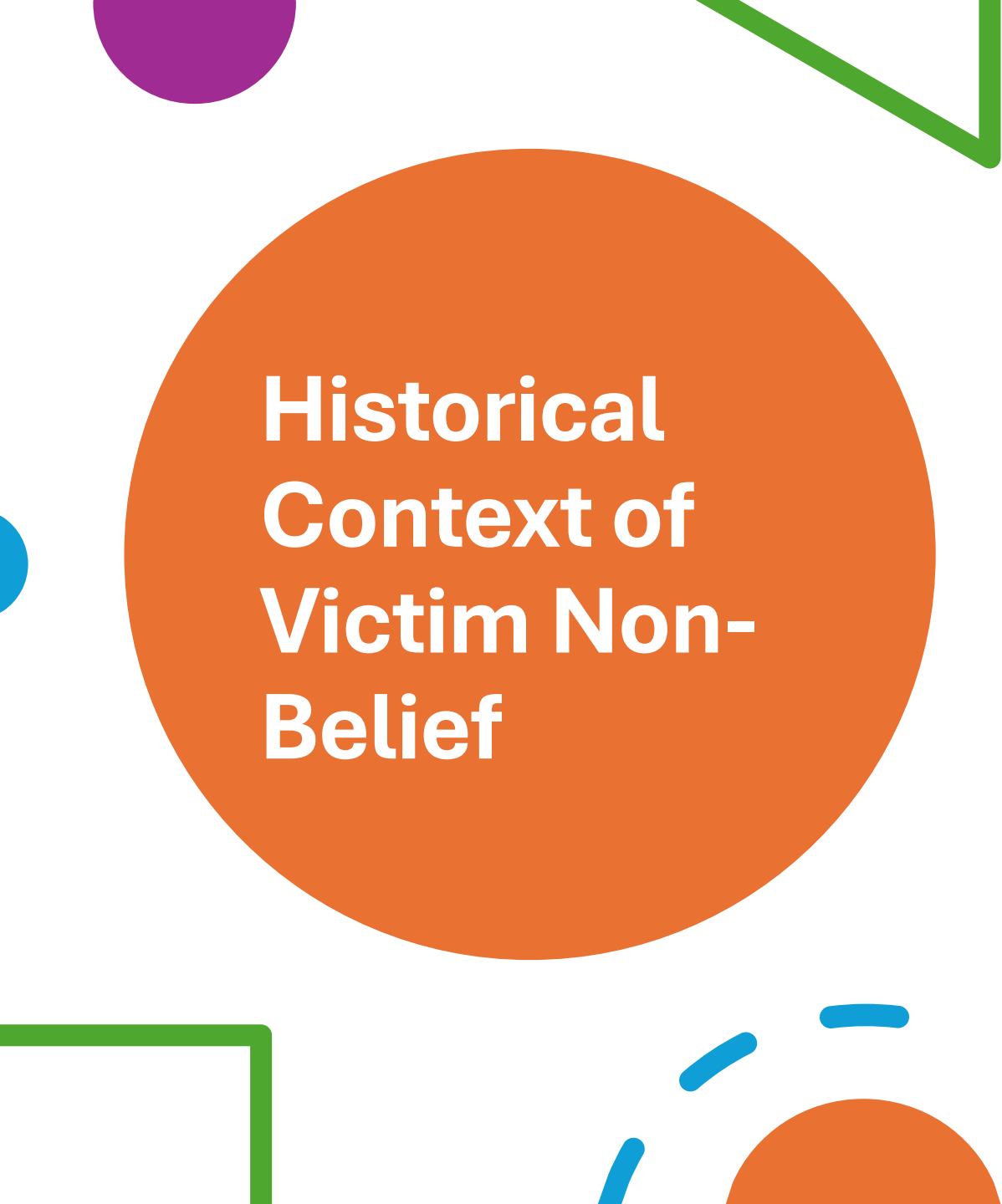
- **Welcome and Objectives**
 - Welcome to the “Start by Believing” training program.
 - Equip responders to violence with the knowledge and tools to believe victims from the onset.
 - Objectives: Understand historical context of victim non-belief, recognize harm caused by skepticism, learn practical steps for a belief-first approach.



Introduction (Continued)

• **Program Overview**

- Emphasis on the importance of belief in the initial stages.
- Learn about the history of disbelief towards victims of sexual violence, domestic abuse, and child abuse.
- Discuss psychological and societal impacts of non-belief.
- Explore practical steps to foster a supportive environment for victims.



Historical Context of Victim Non- Belief

- **Rape Victims Not Being Believed**
 - Historically met with disbelief and skepticism.
 - Victims blamed for their assault, accused of fabricating stories.
 - Deep-seated gender biases and societal norms favored the accused.
 - Only about 31% of rapes and sexual assaults reported to the police (U.S. DOJ).
 - False reporting rates for sexual assaults between 2% and 10%, similar to other crimes.

Historical Context of Victim Non-Belief (Continued)

Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Cases

Victims face significant barriers in being believed.
Domestic violence victims often trapped in a cycle of abuse.

Child abuse victims sometimes thought to exaggerate or misunderstand situations

Statistics

National Domestic Violence Hotline: It takes a victim seven attempts to leave an abused relationship.

In 2019, an estimated 656,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect in the U.S. (Child Welfare Information Gateway).

Harm Caused by Non-Belief

Psychological Impact

Increased trauma, feelings of isolation, helplessness, and betrayal.

Long-term psychological damage such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

Victims feel re-victimized by the system meant to protect them.

Legal and Social Consequences

Undermines the justice system, perpetrators go unpunished.

Erodes public trust in law enforcement and judicial system.

Data: Less than 1% of perpetrators will be prosecuted and convicted of a felony.



The Importance of Starting by Believing

Role of Law Enforcement and Prosecutors

Initial reaction and approach influence investigation and victim participation.

A belief-first approach creates a supportive environment, encourages victims to share their stories.

Building Trust

Encourages more victims to come forward.

Leads to higher reporting rates, better evidence collection, and more successful prosecutions.

Fosters a safer community as perpetrators are held accountable.

Comparison with Other Crimes

Disparity in Response

Reports of crimes like theft or burglary met with immediate belief.

Victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse face higher skepticism.

Highlighting the need for equal and fair treatment for all victims.

Statistics

FBI's UCR program: Property crime victims are believed and their cases investigated at a higher rate than victims of sexual assault.

Addressing societal biases and stereotypes about gender and victimhood.



Changing Historical Views

Recognition of the Importance of Believing Victims

Growing awareness of psychological impact of non-belief and societal demand for justice.

Historical views challenged by new policies, training programs, and advocacy efforts.

Initiatives

“Start by Believing” campaign by End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI).

Research: Believed and supported victims more likely to engage with the criminal justice system.

Practical Steps and Best Practices

Implementing a Belief-First Approach

Start every investigation with the presumption that the victim is telling the truth.

Use non-judgmental language, validate the victim's experiences, ensure supportive body language.

Training in trauma-informed care enhances implementation.

Building Rapport with Victims

Approach with empathy, patience, and understanding.

Techniques: Use the victim's name, maintain eye contact, allow them to tell their story at their own pace.

Evidence Collection and Preservation



Proper Evidence Collection and Preservation

Follow protocols meticulously to maintain evidence integrity.

Document the victim's account accurately, collect physical evidence, secure forensic materials.

Training

Training in forensic interviewing techniques and use technology in evidence collection.

Body-worn cameras provide a detailed and unbiased record.

Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration

Effective Response to Violence

Collaboration among law enforcement, victim advocates, medical personnel, and prosecutors.

Multi-disciplinary teams provide comprehensive support to victims.

Benefits

Improves outcomes for victims and increases likelihood of successful prosecutions.

Coordinated community responses enhance support and effectiveness of the criminal justice process.

Scenario and Discussion

Case Study: Detective Fails to Believe a Truthful Victim

Scenario: Young woman reports sexual assault; detective doubts credibility due to inconsistencies and emotional state.

Investigation not thorough, evidence not collected, case not pursued vigorously.

Later discovered the woman was truthful; perpetrator assaults another victim.

Group Discussion

Analyze what went wrong, identify specific points where disbelief hindered the investigation.

Discuss how a belief-first approach could have changed the outcome.

Role-Playing Exercise

Role-Playing Based on Case Study

Participants take turns playing roles of victim, detective, and other responders.

Focus on implementing belief-first approach, empathetic listening, building rapport, effective evidence collection.

Benefits

Gain deeper understanding of the victim's perspective and the impact of responses.

Highlight importance of multi-disciplinary collaboration.

Conclusion and Q&A

- **Recap of Key points**
 - **Historical context of victim non-belief.**
 - **Importance of starting by believing.**
 - **Practical steps.**
 - **Best practices.**
- **Questions?**

