



QUEENSLAND WOMEN'S HEALTH NETWORK NEWS

May/June 2007

'Aims to strengthen links between women by providing access to information and support'

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SEXUAL ASSAULT: A whole of community issue?

Gillian Myers, QWHN South Queensland Regional Representative

Readers may be aware that a number of unsolved sex crimes against women, occurring on and around walking and cycle pathways in the Brisbane North region, have been reported since January 2006.

Agencies have initiated a number of strategies in response, for example, prioritisation by the Queensland Police in the Metropolitan North region and additional police presence in identified areas; "Walk without fear" media campaign initiated by *The Courier-Mail* in association with Crime Stoppers. Anecdotally however, some women in Brisbane North are choosing not to exercise in these areas or continue to exercise and take precautions (for example, exercise with others, carry a whistle, learn self-defence).

The health impacts of insufficient exercise such as links to obesity and chronic disease including diabetes, arthritis, and heart disease are well known, as is the growing body

of knowledge about the protective benefits of physical activity for mental health and well being, and physical activity as a means of transportation. The long term health impacts for survivors of sexual assaults, for example drug and alcohol related problems, major depressive episodes, suicide or self harm are also of concern. Creating a supportive and safe environment for all women to continue to enjoy physical activity, locally and with no cost, therefore becomes an important public health issue. However, a number of dilemmas remain...

Increased awareness of appropriate precautions and skill development such as self defence and assertiveness may support women to feel confident to continue to use local walking and cycle tracks. However these approaches place the emphasis on women to take responsibility themselves, rather than address the actions of others or the safety

of the environment in which they live.

Exercising with others may reduce the likelihood of being the victim of an attack, but may limit a woman's independence or opportunity to exercise at preferred times or locations. Finding others with whom to exercise may not be easy and promotion of or access to existing programs or groups is often limited.

Whilst increased surveillance and action by the police and local councils may raise community confidence and provide a deterrent, sustainability may be an issue and fear (or the perception of lack of safety) may still remain. Broad media campaigns may raise awareness and provide information, but information and support in the local setting may not be readily available.

Literature indicates that the most effective public health solutions lie in the application of a range of coordinated multi-level strategies, by a

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Funding for the QWHN Inc. is provided by Queensland Health



Our next edition will focus on

PREVENTATIVE HEALTH

Please forward any article submissions via our

NEW CONTACT DETAILS on Page 8

Welcome Maree



Hello, it's great to be here! In my career I have been involved in education, commercial art, and the publishing sector, both in Australia and the USA. I have always been a feminist, and can't recall a time when women's issues have not been at the forefront of my thinking, which is why it's so satisfying to now be part of the QWHN.

Along with the Management Committee I hope to continue the great work of my predecessor, Jeane Griffiths, in promoting vital issues in women's health. My thanks to those of you who have welcomed me to the position and offered support, and I look forward to meeting, or hearing from, many more of you.

This edition of QWHN News focuses on *Sexual Violence*, which has been brought to public attention recently. Thank you to all contributors for your insights.

Our next edition will be dedicated to **Preventative Health Strategies**. If you have written an article, poem or similar item, or have an event to promote, please don't hesitate to contact me (details on Page 8).

Maree Hawken
Coordinator

SEXUAL ASSAULT:

A whole of community issue?
(continued from front page)

number of participants working together and driven by effective input from the community members whom the initiative is intended to benefit.

Whilst Brisbane North has been the recent focus of multiple attacks against women, perhaps the solution lies in our broader community, government and business enterprises working together and advocating for sustainable initiatives that support the continued safety of our communities.

Perhaps the way forward lies with each of us taking the time to look for opportunities where coordinated effort, driven by the voice of women and supported by our local communities, may work to bring about sustainable change?

For example how could we each work cooperatively with others to:

- Coordinate local efforts to promote existing physical activities for women, (e.g. walking and running groups) - consider opportunities for support by local councils, health promotion units, women's sports clubs, Sport & Recreation Queensland?
- Identify and report areas that we feel are unsafe (e.g. overgrown, poor visibility, isolated), conduct safety audits - opportunities to work with local councils and police and develop clear pathways for community members?
- Support activities or other reasons for people to use walkways, paths, parks and other open spaces to prevent isolation and reduce safety fears (e.g. fun days, festivals etc held alongside walking paths); encourage social, sports and recreation clubs to use walkways/cycle paths for their training circuits.
- Identify existing initiatives and new opportunities for environmental change and improve safety in targeted areas (e.g. safety audits, lighting, etc) - work with police and councils to initiate crime prevention by design activities?

- Explore opportunities to encourage the *whole* community to take action and responsibility to create a supportive environment for women - work with women's services, men's groups, young people, community agencies and councils, to explore and support the role of men and the broader community in providing a safe supportive environment?
- Identify and promote existing activities in the local area where women can exercise together or develop protective behaviours, assertiveness or self defence skills - opportunities to work with local councils, health and community services, community networks, women's services, local media to support a coordinated approach to promoting *what's available* and how to access or initiate new activities?
- Advocate for or redirect resources/services to focus on change of attitude and behaviour around violence to women - opportunities to work with local councils, community networks, women's services, local media to support coordinated approach to providing *consistent messages*?
- Regularly publicise actions or initiatives undertaken to promote community confidence (e.g. safety audits, policing etc) - opportunities to work with local police, media, councils, community agencies to support a coordinated approach to promoting change?
- Consider what you could do and with whom you could work to ensure that safety and violence prevention is an ongoing activity and concern for your whole community...

You may find the following contacts useful:

Local Community Centre; Women's Health or Sexual Assault Centres; Heart Foundation; Local Council - Sport and Recreation Officers; Queensland Health - Population Health Unit; <http://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/crimeprevention/cpted.htm>

Gillian Myers





WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

The Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre (BRISSC)
provides an insight into this major health and community issue

Sexual violence takes many forms including sexual harassment, verbal abuse, leering, threats, exposure, unwanted touching, incest, rape, mutilation and ritual abuse.

Sexual violence is a crime

Any sort of unwanted sexual behaviour that is imposed on someone is a form of sexual violence. Sexual violence is about the use of power or force to intimidate or control others.

One in three women will experience some form of sexual violence in their lives. All women are affected by the possibility of sexual violence (ABS1998).

Sexual Violence as a Gendered Crime

Sexual violence is a crime overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women and children. 99% of sexual offences are committed by men and 79% of adults who are subjected to sexual violence are women. Women and children are often sexually violated by someone they know (ABS 1998).

Men who choose acts of sexual violence look, act and indeed are ordinary men who come from all walks of life. Many of society's beliefs and practices teach us that it is acceptable for men to dominate and control women. Sexual violence is a way in which many men choose to exert power and control over women and children.

Breaking the Silence

Many people in our society hold false ideas about sexual violence. Too often, blame for rape is shifted from the offender to the victim. The reality is that sexual violence can be hard to talk about. Many women and children are

of all ages from babies to grandmothers, women of all class, culture, religion and sexuality experience sexual violence.

Sexual violence is used as a weapon in war, in racial violence and in every day life.

As women supporting each other, we can expose the myths, break the silence and help dispel feelings of isolation, fear and guilt.

Community Education and Development

Sexual violence is a whole community problem.

We are committed to community education and development through collaborative consultation and workshops with schools, professionals and community groups in order to improve responses to women and children affected by sexual violence.

We provide opportunities for women to network with other women and participate in creative community arts projects, personal safety programs and social justice action. Together we can create safe communities for all.

We all have the right to be safe... together we can help end sexual violence.

The Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre

Support: (07) 3391 0004

Admin: (07) 3391 2573

Email: admin@briscc.com.au

Web: www.briscc.com.au

INFORMATION FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED RECENT SEXUAL ASSAULT

**No-one ever deserves to be raped.
IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT!**

If you have been raped or sexually assaulted and want information on:

- **Your rights**
- **Types of assistance and options available to you**
- **Medical/police processes**
- **Support with reporting to the police**
- **Specialist and interpreter services**
- **Safety plans and protection orders**
- **Free and confidential counselling and follow up services**

**PLEASE TELEPHONE
The 24 hour Queensland Statewide
Sexual Assault Helpline on
1800 010 120**

**The Brisbane Rape and Incest
Survivors Support Centre
Support Line, Mon-Thu 9am-1pm on
(07) 3391 0004**

**If you are in immediate danger,
telephone the Police (dial 000).**

silenced and unsupported.

The reality is that sexual violence can have long term effects.

The reality is that married and single women, sex workers, women





A Recent History of Sexual Violence

Marie Muller shares her experiences at the Jundah Women's Safety House in Cherbourg

The privilege and honor that has been bestowed on me, as a white woman, by the Indigenous women of Jundah Women's Safety House in Cherbourg is difficult to measure. All of the women, clients and workers, have welcomed me into their Service, their community, their land, their lives and hearts over the past eight months. I am humbled by their strength and courage for their having survived the torment and torture of European entrapment.

I am a late bloomer having returned to education at age forty after rearing four children and assisting the raising of my first five grandchildren. I stumbled into the Women's Services sector in 1990 and have worked with women and their children who have been abused or witnessed abuse ever since.

My interface with women from many and varied cultures and socio economic backgrounds informs me of the fact that women and children who have endured such inhuman horrors have done so because of their strength and super-human courage; violence so horrific that it is difficult for any normal human mind to comprehend. Yet this is the lived experience of the majority of Indigenous families. The plight of Indigenous women and children is indeed among the most traumatic one can imagine. Domestic violence, incest, suicide, destruction of property, self mutilation, rape and murder have been, and continue to be experienced in this close knit community. Death is almost a weekly occurrence, with a cemetery that is far too large for such a small community, a stark reminder that life seems to be valued more cheaply than in the wider Australian community.

One would expect to find nothing but despair, depression and despondency. The

reality is just the opposite. Never have I lived in nor experienced the level of genuine love and care the people of Cherbourg have of one another. Everyone I have met has demonstrated genuine concern for their neighbour, community, family, brother, sister, cousin, elder, grandmother, grandfather, mother and father, niece and nephew.

Sure there is distrust and distain for the perpetrators of abuse, but even this is tempered with understanding of what that person may have experienced themselves that has led them down the path towards the use of violence and destruction of lives, property, community, family and self.

When society is viewed with wider lens genocide can be seen in context with the time in which it occurred. The survivors of the concentration camps of fanatical nationalistic Germany were eventually liberated and supported by society at large. Countries opened their borders and welcomed these survivors with open hearts, minds and pockets. In Australia the survivors of our concentration camps, and that is what they were - designed to annihilate Indigenous peoples - particularly those in Queensland, have been left to exist, albeit with some lessening of government control.

The result has been somewhat like mayhem with those methods formerly used to dominate and control the Indigenous inhabitants being used by the survivors in an attempt to get their need for power and control met. Domestic violence, sexual assault, rape of women and children (some of these mere babies), murder, suicide, property destruction, family dislocation and the list goes on...

Many Indigenous people did not survive the invasion of their lands by Europeans. Those who did manage to resist and to survive were then at the "mercy" of their

invaders (captors). Adults were murdered and children kept and enslaved, women raped, men children and women degraded, culture and social cohesion damaged and lands pillaged.

When we think of the stolen generations most non-Indigenous people do not even begin to think that those children born to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and taken away had white fathers. Predominately they were born of rape and/or sexual slavery and exploitation.

The children were then imprisoned by white "caretakers" who deprived them of their liberty and then "sold" them onto other white 'owners'. These in turn further enslaved this next generation and used them for their own sexual gratification whether they be boys or girls. For those who formed relationships with men, black or white, the women were judged to be immoral and had their children removed anyway as a matter of course.

If they were girls, they were sexually exploited and thereby producing the next generation to be taken away. Sexual promiscuity resulting from this sexual exploitation left many living on the fringes of dominant society and left these women without hope. Abused boys became men who did not know that what had been done to them was not normal or right, went on to replicate that repugnant behavior towards their own women and children. The horror of this is that this physical, psychological, verbal, emotional, social and sexual bastardry was more often than not done by men of government or of the cloth, in the name of god and good.

Starvation rations, alienation from each other and from culture and country along with introduced parasites and diseases rising out





of deliberate rampant deprivation, neglect and cruel work regimes (slavery) resulted in very high rates of despondency, disability and death.

The aftermath of this is what we are dealing with to this very day. Men and women not knowing how to be men and women. Parents not knowing how to parent their children. Violence and neglect normalized as part of how life is.

Today little has changed. The incomes of Indigenous people are low and prices paid for basic food and commodities in Indigenous communities are exorbitant resulting in poor diets and negative health outcomes. The disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous purchasing power is another glaring inequality in Australian society. What an Indigenous person is able to buy to sustain the family costs more and has less intrinsic food value than that of the purchasing power of dominant society. Community houses are not owned by the individual families but remain under the control of the government department of housing thus preventing Indigenous families building a personal resource base as other Australians are able to do.

Confronting television and newspaper lead stories in Brisbane in recent weeks have been about a young woman in Brisbane being raped in her own home. At the same time a two year old child had been raped, also in her own home but this time in an Indigenous community. There has been absolute silence in relation to this little child. I am not saying it is not important to speak out about rape in any community but there appears to be a disparity in reporting and perhaps a similar disparity in acting to bring the perpetrator to account in each of these two horrific instances.

I wonder how many law enforcement dollars are being used to track down and arrest the rapist in Brisbane. What about the resources being used to protect the most innocent of the

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Immediately the heading has conjured up pictures in your mind which are probably similar to the next woman who reads this. However the next woman may have had Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and outwardly you will never know.

The issue of FGM is vast and covers many disciplines within healthcare as well as within the social, psychological and political arenas. Fundamentally, as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO fact sheet 241, 2000), FGM encompasses 'all procedures involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural, religious or other non-therapeutic reasons'.

The most commonly cited reasons for FGM include religion, tradition and social status. It

should be remembered that there are no authenticated religious texts advocating FGM. The aspects of tradition and social status are also undergoing rapid changes in countries where FGM is pre-dominant, such as The Middle East, Egypt and the Horn of Africa, as the empowerment of women develops and their global identity takes shape.

Ultimately a multi-agency approach to eradicate FGM is required so that each woman can be treated with respect and support, not ignorance and indifference.

*Lucy Boorer
Midwife & CN Facilitator
Townsville*

References:

World Health Organisation 2000, Fact sheet 241: "Female Genital Mutilation", Geneva, World Health Organisation.

innocents? How many resources are being used to solve the crime of child rape?

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The Australian economy has been built from stolen land, from families who had their children, their families, their culture, their economic base taken away. And yet the dominant culture expects these survivors to somehow get up and succeed in solving their "own problems" despite these problems being as a result of what has been done to them and not of their own making. This is done in the name of "self determination". Self Determination can only begin to take place when the wrongs of the past have been put right. It is only with the recognition of past wrongs that a new brighter future can be built, and when adequate compensation, whether in a

practical or spiritual sense, is paid can we begin to move forward towards a whole Australia.

As I see it this community of Cherbourg, like other Indigenous communities throughout this land, are struggling to build safe and wholesome communities for themselves and their children. This struggle has been put upon them by the brutalization and deprivations of the past. It is not until there is a dramatic change in the thinking of wider Australia that there will be a reversal in the destructive forces at work in Indigenous communities. This must begin at governmental level through reparation of stolen land, resources and dignity.

*Marie Muller
Jundah Women's Safety House*





WHAT'S ON...

*Important events, conferences
and workshops around the state*



- 17-20 JULY** **International Feminist Summit "Women of Ideas: Feminist Thinking for a New Era" — Townsville**
Organised by the Coalition for a Feminist Agenda in conjunction with Women's Studies Centre, James Cook University, and Townsville Women's Services.
For full details visit: www.feministagenda.org.au/Summit/summitIndex.html
- 5-11 AUGUST** **Continence Awareness Week**
- 9 SEPTEMBER** **National Gynaecological Awareness Day**
Gynaecological Awareness Information Network Inc. (GAIN)
Details available at: www.gain.org.au
- 20-21 SEPT** **National Women's Health Summit — Canberra**
- OCTOBER** **Sexual Violence Awareness Month**

WOMEN'S HEALTH ON THE NET

Hot Spots on the Internet for Women



ZIG ZAG

www.zigzag.org.au

Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre Inc. is an organisation devoted specifically to the needs of women aged between twelve and twenty-five years, particularly in terms of providing resources, information and support. The site has a bright, young feel and is easy to navigate.

It includes a page focusing on Sexual Assault which outlines the services offered. The 'For Young Women' section includes topics such as: Dealing with the Impact of Sexual Assault; What is Counselling?; Support Groups; and Resources. The 'For Workers' section includes: Worker Training & Community Education; and Resources.



IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S SUPPORT SERVICE

www.iwss.org.au

The Immigrant Women's Support Service addresses the issues faced by women from non-English speaking backgrounds in relation to sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault and domestic violence. The site is a helpful resource for women seeking information, intervention and support. The Sexual Assault Program page covers Counselling, Group Work, Community Education and Professional Training. There are also valuable downloadable information sheets including the excellent brochure 'Myths & Facts: Women of non-English speaking backgrounds & violence'.

WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTRE (Rockhampton)

www.womenshealthrockhampton.com

The Women's Health Centre, Rockhampton is a community organisation offering services and information in the areas of health and wellbeing, sexual violence, and domestic violence. The site incorporates details of the Rockhampton Rape Incest and Sexual Violence Centre (RRISC). It outlines specific services provided and also describes some of the reactions that a survivor of sexual assault may or may not experience. Importantly, the site emphasises that sexual assault is a crime, and that perpetrators, not victims, should bear the blame.



Family Planning Queensland's Sexual Assault Service: Cairns and District

Family Planning Queensland's Sexual Assault Service offers professional, confidential support to all women over 15 who have been sexually assaulted recently or in the past. This service is also available to children, boys and girls up to the age of 18, who have been sexually abused recently or in the past. As part of Family Planning Queensland (FPQ), the service offers a unique combination of counselling, crisis support, outreach, education and clinical services. FPQ is a not for profit organisation and counselling services are free.

The Sexual Assault Service is working with Queensland Police and emergency medical facilities to provide a better coordinated and timely response to acute cases of sexual assault. An on-call support worker is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week and can be accessed through the police or the emergency department at the hospital. On-call support workers

are specially trained to provide information and support to women who have recently been assaulted and help them make choices in relation to forensic examination, immediate medical attention and follow up, police statements and counselling.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CAIRNS SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICE

- face to face counselling
- crisis support worker available for acute sexual assault 24 hours / 7 days a week
- outreach services (Tully to Mossman)
- therapeutic groups
- information and referral
- information and support for parents/carers, family and friends of people who have been sexually abused and raped

What counselling offers

Clients are welcome to attend once only to address a particular

concern, or commit to regular counselling over a longer period of time. All counsellors are trained professionals with expertise in the area of sexual assault.

We offer support with:

- dealing with a recent sexual assault
- resolving issues regarding past sexual assault
- developing positive self esteem and personal identity
- improving current relationships, including trust and intimacy
- learning new healthy coping skills to deal with crises
- support strategies for non-offending parents of children who have experienced sexual assault

Education

FPQ's Cairns and District Sexual Assault Service also offers community education, and training and resources for other workers who have contact with women or children who have been sexually abused.

FPQ'S CAIRNS SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICE

37 McLeod Street
(PO Box 1678)
Cairns Qld 4870
Phone: (07) 4031 3590
Email: cnssexualassault@fpq.com.au

PORT DOUGLAS & DISTRICT SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICE

Port Douglas Neighbourhood
Centre
6-10 Mowbray Street
Port Douglas Qld 4877
Phone: (07) 4099 5066
www.fpq.com.au

QUICK FACTS

- The number of sexual offences reported to Far North Queensland Police in 2005/06 increased by 21 per cent from the number reported in the previous year.
- The number reported equates to a rate of 162 offences reported per 100,000 people. The increase is attributable to an increase in rape and attempted rape offences (7 per cent) and a 26 per cent increase in other sexual offences.
- Far Northern Region exhibited a 15 per cent increase in offences, and the highest rate of sexual offences in Queensland

SOURCE: Queensland Police Service 2005-2006 Annual Statistical Review





What can I do to support a woman who has experienced sexual violence?

If a woman chooses to tell you that she has been raped, then she is investing a lot of trust in you. Your responses are important...

The value of relationship

It is important to remember that sexual violence is a crime in which perpetrators seek to control and dominate another person. It is therefore imperative to work in ways that promote a woman's sense of power and control and to develop a relationship with a woman that does not reflect the dynamics that were/are present between the perpetrator and the woman.

Defining your own feelings

It is important to be mindful of your own feelings and reactions and to seek support from someone other than the woman who has experienced sexual violence. It is natural that you may feel shocked, angry, sad or confused.

You may wonder whether she could have done something to prevent the sexual violence. You may feel a desire to confront or enact revenge on the perpetrator. You might feel a strong urge to 'do something' or have the woman 'do something'. These are all common reactions.

In supporting a woman who has experienced sexual violence it is important to...

- Listen to her
- Believe her and believe in her
- Affirm her feelings and remember there is no right or wrong way to feel
- Ask her "How can I help?" or "Is there anything you need from me right now?"
- Let her know that you are there for her /and acknowledge your limits
- Encourage her to seek the support that feels right for her
- Respect her decisions
- Respect her privacy and her choices about what she discloses and to whom
- Seek her permission before disclosing information about her to others
- Remind her that it was not her fault

Source: BRISSC Fact Sheet

*For more information visit:
www.brissc.com.au*

QWHN CONTACT DETAILS

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Fax (07) 4789 0647

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Thuringowa BC QLD 4817

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Townsville: Betty McLellan (07) 4728 5600
Brisbane: Gillian Myers (07) 4724 3300
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R'hampton: Sandra O'Brien (07) 4935 2003
Cherbourg: Lillian Gray (07) 4168 2531

HAVE YOUR SAY ...



We are interested in obtaining feedback on the quality of the newsletter and

issues and topics you would like to see in future editions.

If you have something to say please contact Maree on (07) 4789 0665 or email us at qwhn@bigpond.com.au

MEMBERSHIP

To join or renew your membership with QWHN, simply fill in this form and send to QWHN at PO Box 1855, THURINGOWA BC, QLD 4817

Membership of the Network is open to women's organisations & individual women who are in agreement with the Network's purpose and objectives.

Name:

New Member? Yes No

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Profession / Organisation:

MEMBERSHIP FEES: Individual unwaged/student - \$5.50 Individual waged - \$11.00 Organisation - \$33.00

Please find enclosed a cheque/money order for \$..... for one financial year's membership (1 July 2007-30 June 2008)

Do you consent to your name, as part of the membership list, being distributed for networking purposes? YES NO

I/We hereby agree to abide by the Purpose, Objectives and Policies of the QWHN.

Signature.....

Date.....

TAX INVOICE
ABN 11700374032