

# asca e-health

Health news from Adults Surviving Child Abuse

Summer 2009/2010

Welcome to the Summer edition of ASCA's e-Health newsletter, a publication for health care workers who offer therapeutic and counselling services to adult survivors as well as community workers who see adult survivors in their work.

## ASCA announces the Mike Lew Tour Downunder!



In April 2010 Mike Lew, M.Ed., will be touring Australia and NZ, hosted by ASCA, in collaboration with SECASA.

### What can you expect at a Mike Lew event?

Mike has worked with thousands of men and women in their healing

from the effects of childhood sexual abuse, rape, physical violence, emotional abuse and neglect.

Through this experience, Mike has gained a deep understanding of the importance of providing a safe, respectful environment for growth.

It doesn't seem fair to call Mike a therapist. Or even an academic, teacher, consultant, lecturer, expert or friend. With a vast knowledge in both psychotherapy and cultural anthropology, Mike Lew brings a multifaceted approach to a subject that sadly crosses every cultural and economic group.

Mike will be running several one day workshops for health professionals who work with male survivors, called — NEW DIRECTIONS IN COUNSELLING AND RECOVERY. These sessions provide health professionals with the support they need, so they can in turn, support their clients.

### Schedule of one day workshops for health professionals

Location	Date
Sydney	9 April
Melbourne	15 April
Perth	23 April
Darwin	27 April

In addition Mike will be running several one day workshops for male adult survivors as well as a 3-day retreat in Melbourne. For further information about any of Mike's workshops/retreat and to register visit [www.asca.org.au/mikelew](http://www.asca.org.au/mikelew)

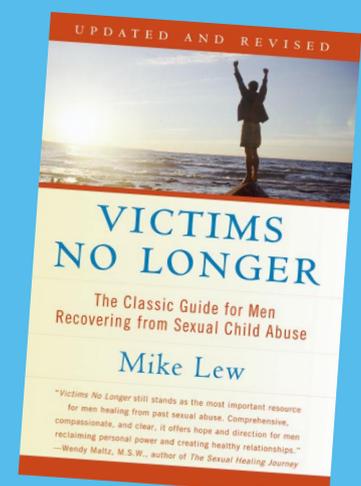
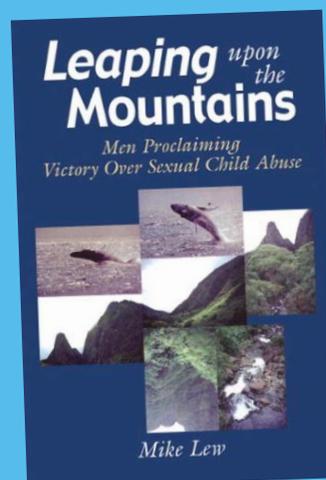
This unique event is not to be missed.

... Mike has gained a deep understanding of the importance of providing a safe, respectful environment for growth.

All health professional workshop attendees who have registered and paid on or before December 31st 2009 will receive a complimentary copy of one of Mike Lew's books:

- Victims No Longer: The Classic Guide for Men Recovering from Sexual Child Abuse
- Leaping Upon the Mountains

The book you select can be collected at the workshop you attend.



# ASCA workshops for health workers and health care professionals – tailored to your needs!

ASCA is currently working on its schedule of workshops for 2010, and will include Creating New Possibilities workshops for adult survivors as well as education and training workshops for health care professionals and frontline workers.

Should your organisation be seeking training and/or professional development for working with adult survivors of child abuse ASCA workshops are now available in-house on request. These workshops can be tailored to your needs.

Workshops cover topics such as:

- Understanding abuse and its impacts;
- Coping strategies and defence mechanisms used by survivors of child abuse;
- Common impacts of child abuse;
- Pathways through which adult health can be compromised;
- Treatment models and best practice guidelines for working with adults surviving child abuse;
- Reflective practice and vicarious traumatisation;
- Application exercises.

While workshops are generally one day in duration, 2-day as well as half day workshops can be arranged.

ASCA's professional workshop program recognises that working with adults surviving child abuse is challenging and requires specialised training. Knowledge about the biological and interpersonal consequences of childhood trauma has exploded over the past two decades. These in-house workshops

incorporate this information while providing best practice guidelines for working with adults surviving child abuse.

An ASCA in-house workshop provides many benefits as your team can request the topics which interest you and use the time to focus on the issues pertinent to your clients and practice. Thus bringing greater clarity to better meets your needs.

The following quotes come from a number of workshops presented in 2009 to Lifeline phone counsellors as well as a diverse group of frontline workers.

- Excellent presentation, knowledge given in a professional, collaborative and engaging way.
- Researched current approach to survivors, provided lots of theoretical information which was then made relevant with clear examples.
- The session was very informative and appropriate for what we do at the helpline. Thanks.
- This is a necessary gap in training for professionals. Thank you.
- I enjoyed the training and have learnt new skills I will apply in my work.
- Loved the explanation of what happens in the brain and how it impacts on the survivors.

For more information on ASCA's in-house health professionals' workshops please contact: Susan Leith-Miller on 02 8920 3611 or [susan@asca.org.au](mailto:susan@asca.org.au).

# ASCA advocacy – at home and abroad!

On 13 November ASCA held its inaugural **Forget-me-knot Day**, a national day which will be held every year on the second Friday in November. This day coincides with an International Child Abuse Prevention Week from 13–19 November, which occurs on the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

ASCA's Forget-me-knot Day was followed by 16 Days of Activism, a period of global campaigning taking a stand against gender-based violence. The period commences on 25 November with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and ends on 10 December, World Human Rights Day.

The following article, adapted from one circulated by Amnesty International highlights the high incidence of violence experienced by our Pacific neighbours.  
©AFP/Torsten Blackwood

## No protection, nowhere to go

Josephine desperately needs a place to stay.

Brutally beaten and raped by her husband, and cruelly ostracised from her family after contracting HIV, there are only a handful of places in her hometown of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, where she can feel truly safe.

In a country with one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world, Josephine's story is sickeningly too common. And the situation is even worse outside the capital, where violence in the home, gang rapes, knife attacks, beating and sexual abuse of girls, and torture and murder of female 'sorcerers' affect at least two-thirds of the female population.

Prime Minister Somare has publicly called on husbands to stop the 'shameful' violence in his country, yet apologists for this appalling level of violence, including in government, continue to cling to excuses of culture, tradition and lack of resources. The reality is many women have come to see violence as 'normal', as have men, confident in the knowledge that the state will not act quickly, decisively or consistently against them.

In 2002 the Government introduced a law outlawing rape and sexual assault, but it simply hasn't gone far enough in addressing extreme levels of violence, particularly in the family. As Papua New Guinea's nearest

neighbour and largest bilateral aid donor, Australia must encourage the Government to listen to the women of their country and do more to stop the violence. Most of all, they need to eliminate the assurance of perpetrators that there will be no consequences for their unspeakable crimes.

To add your name to a petition to stop violence against women in PNG go to [http://www.amnesty.org.au/action/action/22175/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=svawpng&utm\\_content=svawpng2](http://www.amnesty.org.au/action/action/22175/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=svawpng&utm_content=svawpng2)

## ASCA delivers professional training within the International arena

On December 1, 2009 ASCA delivered a tailor-made version of its health professional workshop to 70 female church workers from PNG and Vanuatu as part of the Alan Walker College lectures. The abuse and violence towards women and children is endemic both in PNG and Vanuatu. Currently the laws in these countries do not protect women and children from abuse and violence and many families live in multi generational households with a patriarchal structure.

The ASCA training was well received, with interest evident by the many questions and statements received by the trainers both during the presentation as well as in the breaks. The high level of physical violence experienced by women at the hands of their husbands presented by Amnesty International was confirmed by the participants during the training.

The training highlighted societal norms and terminology which universally accepted in Australia was often challenged and needed to be explored. As one woman said, "What you see as child abuse may be seen as discipline in our country." This perception was discussed within the group. While it was important to acknowledge the inherent truth in statements such as this it was also worthwhile to offer alternatives as a way of providing choices with regard to abuse and discipline.

When information about coping strategies and the ongoing adult repercussions of childhood abuse was provided many of the workers made connections between what they had been told and their observations within their communities.

## A view of the ASCA training at the Alan Walker College Lectures from Julie Brackenreg, Co-ordinator of Women's Ministry AWCE

Between 60 and 70 women from PNG and Vanuatu attending the annual Women Empowered for Ministry Course at Alan Walker College were helped to understand some of the implications of child abuse by ASCA Trainers Lorraine Wright and Susan Leith Miller.

For many of these women the issue of Domestic Violence generally is still an unspoken topic in their cultures and churches and Child Abuse is often totally unrecognized as such. Words such as "strong discipline", "firm parenting" and "culture" are used to hide what in Western society is readily recognized as abuse albeit in many different formats. Coming to understand that no excuse can be held up for such actions and that the intuitive feelings that many women have that this IS abuse and should be stopped, are indeed correct, empowers these women to go home and take a strong, united and firm stance against such happenings regardless of their society or culture.

Many of these women came from a connected group of churches and hopefully their strength in number will make a real difference in their villages around Port Moresby.

The women hear much that is new during their course and are impacted in different ways but the time spent with the ASCA Trainers certainly helped them to talk about a forbidden issue and determine to confront it with openness when they return home. In this digital age they are happy to be able to connect with organisations such as ASCA in the future and find the support that is not readily available in their own communities scattered across the Pacific.

We hope that we may be able to team together again with ASCA to educate even more Pacific Women from a wide variety of island nations in the hope that ASCA offers for a future for adult sufferers of what is a widespread endemic within Pacific Society that is just now coming to terms with adult Domestic Violence.

# The relationship between childhood abuse and suicide risk

Research studies, in Australia and overseas, consistently demonstrate that adult survivors of all forms of childhood abuse and neglect, manifest significantly worse health outcomes: depressive and anxiety disorders, substance abuse, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders and suicidality.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> The severity of these disorders is frequently compounded by the unusually high rates of physical illness experienced by adult survivors of child abuse.

A number of possible pathways linking childhood abuse with adult health outcomes have been hypothesized.<sup>6,7</sup> Emotional pathways are particularly focused on mental health outcomes such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal behaviour and may confer susceptibility to mood disorders, by increasing the likelihood of the development of aggressive or impulsive personality traits, and by impairing the individual's sense of personal control.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>

It is estimated that approximately 60% of all suicides are committed by people experiencing mood disorders. It is pertinent to note that adult survivors are 3–5 times more likely to experience a major depressive episode during their life.<sup>12</sup>

It is also estimated that approximately 30% of suicides involve other psychiatric disorders, including PTSD. One large US study suggests that child sexual assault (male and female) is more likely to cause PTSD than other types of trauma, with 54% being diagnosed with PTSD compared to 38.8% of men post combat.<sup>13</sup> However a diagnosis of PTSD does not always reflect the severity of psychological harm experienced from the protracted, repeated trauma often experienced by survivors of CSA.<sup>14</sup> Chronic trauma can negatively impact a victim's concept of 'self' and also affect the ability to adapt to stressful events. It has been suggested that the term Complex PTSD (CPTSD) be used to describe the symptoms of long-term trauma.<sup>15</sup> Complex PTSD as well as a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder are amongst the most severe psychiatric disorders. It is estimated that up to 75% of individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD); characterised

by emotional dysregulation, inter-relational difficulties and self-harm have experienced some degree of sexual abuse in childhood.<sup>16</sup>

In total, some 90% of people who commit suicide have one or more diagnosable mental illnesses and people with psychiatric "co-morbidity" are particularly at risk for suicide. The risk of suicide amongst survivors is hence heightened as survivors often carry several diagnoses including substance dependence and abuse, personality disorders (especially borderline personality disorder), depression, anxiety (including post traumatic stress), dissociative disorders, or eating disorders etc.<sup>17</sup>

Behavioural pathways link childhood abuse and adult health outcomes through health-related behaviours, such as smoking, substance abuse, overeating, high-risk sexual behaviour, and suicidal behaviour.<sup>18,19,20</sup> There is a significantly higher rate of suicide among people who abuse alcohol and/or drugs with alcohol being involved in an estimated 30% of suicides. Alcohol causes depressed mood, lowers inhibitions, and impairs judgment, any or all of which may set up vulnerable people to act on suicidal plans. These same factors (lowered inhibition and impaired judgment) are also associated with domestic violence and abuse, another factor that increases the likelihood that suicide will occur. One study found that sexually abused females in crisis centres were four times more likely to have a history of substance abuse and twice as likely to be alcoholic than those who hadn't been abused.<sup>21,22</sup>

The increased prevalence of suicide amongst survivors was further established in one study showed that 16% of survivors had attempted suicide compared to 6% of the control group.<sup>23</sup> Another study showed that young Australian survivors of child sexual abuse have a suicide rate 10.7 to 13.0 times those nationally.<sup>24</sup> This particular study explored the suicide rate and prevalence of suicide attempts and suicidal ideation in 183 young people who had experienced child sexual assault. Thirty-two percent of the abused children had attempted suicide, and 43% had thought about suicide since they were sexually abused.

## Endnotes

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