

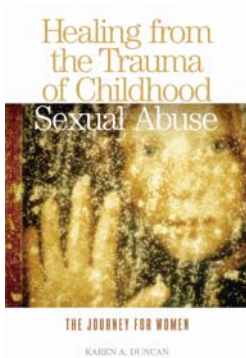
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**Indiana author's new book provides valuable insights into the trauma of sexual abuse:
Healing from the Trauma of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Journey for Women
 offers guidance, courage and support for women and healing**



January 1, 2005 – The epidemic of child sexual abuse continues to occur to thousands of children and teens because of laws that protect perpetrators, the silence and secrecy within families where sexual abuse occurs and the shame that women and children carry because of a perpetrator's behavior, according to Karen Duncan's new book, *Healing from the Trauma of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Journey for Women* (Praeger: 2004). This strikingly honest new book offers this kind of meaningful and relevant perspective along with guidance to women and support to therapists and physicians about the necessary stages of healing. While encouraging women to speak out about sexual abuse, Duncan also lets women know they can protect themselves and their children from

future abuse. While the various legal definitions of sexual abuse make it difficult to reach complete consensus about the exact number of women who have experienced this trauma, a review of population studies, journal reports and clinical research indicates that at least *one if every four women in the U.S. under the age of 18 has experienced some type of sexual abuse*. Because of the significant number of women and children experiencing sexual abuse trauma, Duncan makes a point of addressing the critical need to *combine effective treatment with family education and prevention* to help women avoid lifelong problems frequently associated with sexual abuse and stop this damaging legacy of trauma in future generations of children.

Critical Information About Sexual Abuse

- The sexual abuse of children is the most underreported form of child abuse which makes any estimate of its prevalence greater than what is reported (Finkelhor, 1984).
- In a reported study of 1,099 women, the prevalence of child sexual abuse ranged from 15.4% to 26.1% depending upon the definition of child sexual abuse that was used placing current estimates at 24.5 million women between the ages of 20 to 54 of having experienced some type of sexual abuse as children (Crespi, 2002).
- Children under the age of eight account for 39% of the substantiated cases of sexual abuse reported to police and child protective services (The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1996).
- Most interpersonal violence to women and children occurs by an intimate partner, family member or someone close to the family (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 1999 and American Medical Association, 2002).
- A traumatic pathway is created from child sexual abuse that can lead to other forms of interpersonal violence that often includes rape, sexual assault and domestic violence (Duncan, 2004).
- What has become clear over the last ten years is that a substantial number of adults who were sexually abused as children report to have periods of time either during or after the sexual abuse ended in which they are unable to recall aspects of their traumatic experiences (Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 2004).

- Research over the past twenty years on how structures of the brain receive, process and store traumatic experience substantiate the loss of memory and incomplete memory recall of childhood traumas like sexual abuse. In fact, sexual abuse is the most common cause of memory loss among the traumas reported by adults (Eckberg, 2000).

The Risk Factor In Families

“One of the most difficult realities our society has to accept about sexual abuse is the fact that 85% of sexual abuse victims are abused by a family member or someone close family friend. This family relationship creates risk factors for both women and their children for sexual abuse to be repeated within the next generation. The fact that statutes of limitations in most states make it impossible for a majority of women to report past sexual abuse by the perpetrators who committed this crime when women were children, means that a significant number of perpetrators go unreported, not prosecuted and without accountability—basically free to continue this crime against other children.

Family members may either not be aware of this person’s sexual abuse behavior because of the secrecy and silence that surrounds this traumatic crime or the family encourages a continuing relationship with known perpetrators while wrongly believing they can protect children from sexual abuse even when they lack the knowledge to do so. These are among the reasons we see sexual abuse occurring within the same families and across generations and why a number of children are sexually abused by the same perpetrator over a period of years. Families who lack appropriate and meaningful education can unintentionally perpetuate sexual abuse for the next generation of children” says Duncan.

Laws Perpetuate Sexual Abuse

Women have fought for the past twenty years against laws that prevent the prosecution of known perpetrators—people who have actually admitted to the sexual abuse and know they will never be prosecuted. While our laws may not purposely mean to protect perpetrators they will do so as long as there are time limits on reporting this crime. This is exactly what has been reported in the media more recently with the priests and Cardinals within the Catholic Church who are escaping prosecution either for committing sexual abuse against hundreds of children or for covering up the sexual abuse and not reporting it to authorities. “A family’s lack of information, perpetrators who do not willingly admit to the sexual abuse of children and laws that prevent the reporting and prosecution of known perpetrators are among the reasons we find sexual abuse continuing...these factors combine to create enormous risks and proliferate the epidemic of child sexual abuse in our society and throughout the world... harming the next generation of children” says Duncan.

A Traumatic Pathway Caused by Sexual Abuse

Key to Duncan’s clinical findings is that childhood sexual abuse begins a “traumatic pathway,” that when left unrecognized, leads to a lifetime of victimization through: substance abuse; emotional, verbal and physical abuse; domestic violence; rape; sexual assault; STDs, HIV and AIDS. Elements of this traumatic pathway identified by Duncan were recently recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO). During World Aids Day in December 2004, WHO announced in a press release that “violence against women and girls in its different forms increases women’s vulnerability to HIV infection and undermines AIDS control efforts. For millions of women, violence and the fear of violence is a daily reality and increasingly, so is AIDS. Women

in every culture around the world face violence, most often at the hands of their partners and within the so-called safety of their homes and families.

Duncan's holistic approach advocates prevention education with treatment and society's continuous recognition of sexual abuse as a public health risk occurring to women and children at epidemic rates. With prevention education and appropriate therapeutic treatment there is the opportunity to eliminate not only the intergenerational cycle of abuse, but the significant health risks that are associated with this trauma as well. "Not all traumas are the same nor are the people who experience them. If we continue to ignore the gender specific context and risks of sexual abuse and do not provide women a means to understand how this trauma has impacted their lives, we are limiting a woman's opportunity to heal and restore not only her life but her health. I would like to challenge the healthcare industry and organizations who provide services to women to become more actively involved in this public health problem and really start to work together to address these needs on behalf of women and children", states Duncan.

Following are many of the signs of unresolved sexual abuse trauma that are discussed in-depth in Duncan's book:

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Inability to protect their children
- A repeated pattern of damaging & violent relationships
- Continued contact with a family perpetrator
- Depression and helplessness
- Anxiety and fears
- Suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Numb to feelings and emotions
- Intrusive thoughts of the abuse
- Nightmares or inability to sleep
- Experiences of intense rage
- Violence and abuse toward others
- Criminal activity and imprisonment
- Loss of self-worth and negative self-image
- A lack of boundaries & limits with others
- Self-injurious behavior
- Eating disorders
- Compulsive behaviors

Healing from the Trauma of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Journey for Women is a powerful new resource written by a knowledgeable and experienced licensed therapist who for several years has been supporting women, children and families to restore their lives after the trauma of sexual abuse has occurred. Clearly answering questions women need answered about sexual abuse, Duncan shares the stories and letters from women who have already restored their lives as well as from women who are now in recovery to regain the life that was stolen.

Readers learn that women often begin their healing when they have reached a particular stage of life and while healing is a process it can be accomplished. Women discover how to recognize the prolonged affects that originate from sexual abuse along with a wealth of guidance and information provided on such topics as:

- How women recall the trauma of sexual abuse
- The moral decision and legal challenges in exposing a perpetrator within the family
- How sexual abuse occurs by men, women, juveniles and family members
- The reasons children act out the abusive behavior taught by perpetrators

- The therapeutic relationship that is essential to healing and restoration
- Health family characteristics
- Dissolving rage
- Setting boundaries
- The art of forgiveness

Right To Be Safe Program: An adult education program for the prevention of child sexual abuse

Duncan is also the author of a new adult education program for the prevention of child sexual abuse entitled "The Right To Be Safe" which provides parents and other caring adults knowledge and information about this crime by dispelling the myths, secrecy and denial that makes it possible for perpetrators to sexually abuse children. The mission of the Right To Be Safe programs is to join the effort to make the world safer by developing free educational programs and then offering them through a Web-Network to prevent sexual abuse and violence toward women and children.

"Prevention programs aimed solely at children are not enough to stop the traumatic crime of child sexual abuse. Children are not equipped to prevent sexual perpetrators from committing this crime. While we need multiple layers of prevention, adults are key and must get involved in stopping this crime which is the reason I created this first program: Adult Education to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse" said Duncan.

Walt Aldoriso, Director of Student Services is a supporter of this program " The Right To Be Safe program developed by Karen Duncan is timely and essential. Providing parents with an educational tool that is easily available to learn how to prevent child sexual abuse is essential today. With this kind of comprehensive information accessible to schools and parents, we can create a partnership to keep children safe. Parent education has been a missing part of preventing sexual abuse to children so to have this free program as part of our resources is important. Center Grove School Corporation is excited to offer this program to parents and the community from our web-site. Karen Duncan's work is vital and her dedication, empathy and professionalism is evident in this program to prevent child sexual abuse."

Schools, as educators, have a unique opportunity to become a part of the Web-Network that is available with "The Right To Be Safe" prevention education programs and they need to because they have daily contact with kids and their parents. Most schools can easily offer this program and upcoming ones to parents through a web-link from their web-site to TheRight2BeSafe.org web-site. "The beauty of these programs for parents is that they are comprehensive yet straight forward in their information. Parents can access the programs through the internet and review them in the privacy of their home. Even more, they can then share the information with their children and teens in order to help make the ones most vulnerable to a perpetrator aware of how sexual abuse happens and the kinds of people who commit this traumatic crime. The RTBS™ programs educate parents while giving them the information they need to keep their children safe and out of the path of sexual perpetrators.", shares Duncan.

The Right To Be Safe Program is free to individuals and organizations committed to the prevention of childhood sexual abuse and can be accessed on Duncan's website Healing4Women.com. Duncan does provide training and development to organizations who need it and want to integrate prevention education programs like The Right To Be Safe into new or existing services and programs for women and children. Among the organizations who can benefit from adult

education in the prevention of sexual abuse and other forms of violence are correctional facilities, schools, churches, day-care providers, youth organizations, child protective caseworkers, child advocacy groups, mental health and substance abuse providers, and healthcare professionals.

Duncan introduces Right To Be Safe program at Indiana's Women Prison

Duncan is currently at the Indiana Women's Prison as a volunteer presenting The Right To Be Safe Program to women who are incarcerated. This first program began January 6, 2005 and will continue through March. "Bringing this program to women who are in the criminal justice system is one of the ways of stopping the traumatic pathway between child sexual abuse and future violence which places women at-risk for criminal behavior", says Duncan. According to research by the U.S. Department of Justice, the number of women inmates is increasing faster than those of their male counterparts. A factor that must be considered when evaluating the number of women in the criminal justice system are the particular circumstances of the women and girls who become offenders. "Women and girls who end up in the criminal justice system are there as a result of reasons and circumstances distinctly different from those of men. One of these circumstances is the significance of interpersonal trauma in the lives of women and its causal link to female criminal behavior—violence toward women is a *gender circumstance* that must be considered if justice is to be equal and not blind to the inequities that have long existed for women and girls who have been the victims of criminal acts of violence by partners and family members. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that each year 1 million women in the United States are the victims of violence committed by someone they know and the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) Survey estimates intimate partner violence as even higher. According to the NVAW survey, between 1995 and 1996 1.5 million women were raped and/or physically assaulted by someone they knew in a prior or current intimate relationship. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation females are more likely to be killed by a spouse or partner than are males; 28.3 percent of women died at the hands of a spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend compared with 3.6 percent for men. "These are staggering statistics but even more staggering is the realization that these are women who have known personal violence most often by someone they loved and care for and whom they believed loved and cared for them. As is the majority of the time, crimes of violence against women and children are committed by the people closest to them whom they wanted to believe they could trust", says Duncan.

Sexual assault is a problem of similar proportions. The NVAW Survey revealed that 18% of the women surveyed 18 years and older had been the victims of rape or attempted rape. Adolescent girls between the ages of 16 to 19 are particularly vulnerable. This age group of girls were 3.5 times more likely than the general population to be victims of sexual assault, rape or attempted rape. As is the case with child sexual abuse, rape and sexual assault are crimes acted out by someone known to the woman or adolescent. The Medical University of South Carolina report estimates that 78% of rapes are committed by someone known to the victim. The less recognized violence of sexual harassment, stalking, exploitive involvement in the sex industry, female trafficking and marital rape all have the same story—women and girls suffer and endure these acts of betrayal by the very people whom they believe they can trust.

"The family and intimate violence that women and girls experience sometimes throughout their lives is part of the pathway to women and girls committing criminal behavior", says Duncan. She cites a 1999 Bureau of Justice Statistics

study that reported on the violence committed against women involved in illegal activity. "The study indicated that almost half of all women in jail and prisons had been physically or sexually abused before their imprisonment and that significant rates of drug and alcohol use among women who had been abused and who were in prison occurred during the month before their current offense. These various studies combine to expose and substantiate the traumatic pathway to domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and substance abuse that women and girls experience who are sexually abused in childhood. These reports are not coincidental—sexual abuse during childhood can often lead to being victimized as an adult and criminal behavior by women who use drugs and alcohol is closely linked to this pattern of victimization.

"The use of illegal substances and alcohol are a part of the victimization pattern linked with illegal behavior by women and girls because drugs and/or alcohol help mediate the effects of sexual abuse—alcohol can numb the emotional pain of the abuse and drugs can help escape the memories of it. The substance use that arises from sexual trauma also places women at risk for further violence—they are often with men who deal the drugs and who provide easy access to these drugs that women use, but these same men also place women in the pathway of illegal activity—dealing and using occur together and women are going to be at-risk for being in a place where illegal activities occur or committing crimes because they are coerced or threatened by their (violent) partners or to support an addictive habit, and when women are where illegal activity is occurring they are going to be arrested ", explains Duncan.

Duncan's goal is to assist the criminal justice system to steadily integrate prevention education with trauma treatment for adult women and female adolescents while they are in the criminal justice system. The Indiana Women's Prison under the leadership of Dana Blank has already started laying the foundation for Duncan's work by recognizing the traumatic pathway between childhood abuse, adult violence and criminal behavior by women and girls. "If we can bring this type of prevention information to women while they are incarcerated, we increase the likelihood of breaking this long-standing cycle of violence for women and decreasing the likelihood of them returning to the criminal behavior that brought them to the doors of the criminal justice system. Another important outcome of prevention education integrated with trauma treatment is that we also have the opportunity to prevent the children of incarcerated women from experiencing a lifetime of violence. The next generation is then instilled with the hope and reality of a different way of experiencing family relationships that is absent of violence" shares Duncan.

Karen A. Duncan, M.A., LMFT, LSW is a licensed therapist, author, writer and lecturer with more than 19 years of experience working with women, children and families to restore their lives and heal from child sexual abuse. She is a graduate of Ball State University where she received Master of Arts Degree in Clinical Psychology and completed her undergraduate training at Elmhurst College in Chicago. As an Adjunct Professor she has taught psychology and women's studies at the university level. She is national speaker at conferences and has delivered training for organizations in the United States. Duncan's new book *Healing from the Trauma of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Journey for Women* released by Praeger Publishing: Connecticut (2004) 230 pages, ISBN 0-275-98084-7, \$39.95 can be purchased through her web-site at www.healing4women.com or at Barnes and Noble.com & Amazon.com as well at the publisher's web-site. Duncan lives in Greenwood, Indiana where she has her private practice as a licensed therapist.