

A recently released report on a study conducted by a professor of social work at Arizona State University concludes that “incarcerated women are among the most traumatized people in our country.” The study involved 408 survey participants at Estrella Jail in Maricopa County. Eighty percent of the study’s 408 participants are victims of domestic violence.

The damage done by trauma to our brains has been a subject studied since the “battle fatigue” identified in soldiers in WWI, “shell shock” in WWII, and the formal diagnosis and admission into the DSM III as PTSD. As these diagnostic symptoms started to be recognized in non-military settings, our understanding of trauma and how it re-shapes our brain has become more widespread.

Taking a bird’s eye view of the household as a combat zone, in which the threat of violence is present daily; life looks pretty scary. Removing oneself from the combat zone is often financially impossible and/or not seen as a viable solution as the perpetrator threats and actions are not always limited to the household setting. There may be no escape as seen through the eyes of the defendant.

As a woman and as a social worker, it is difficult for me to understand why a bill such as this one has not been introduced before. I think a true understanding of all the factors involved in a battered relationship would obligate the sentencing judge to consider domestic violence as a contributing factor in criminal behavior as outlined in this bill.

Furthermore, upon reading about the recent case in New York which enacted the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act in 2019, a further suggestion would be to provide more training for criminal court judges regarding the impact domestic violence has on defendants and their family members to truly understand why a reduction in sentencing is reasonable in these cases.

Sincerely,

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