Women & Trauma: Healing Body and Mind

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Discussion Women’s Experience of Trauma
- Violence Against Women Defined
- Risk Factors
- Local Stats
- History of Therapy with Traumatized Women
- Documentary Sample
- Trauma Defined
- PTSD
- Paths Toward Healing
- Trauma Sensitive Yoga

Overview
How have women been victimized throughout history?

What should the definition of “Violence Against Women” include?

Discuss…
Violence against women - "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

United Nations’ Definition

According to the APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Girls and Women (2007):

- Greater prevalence and chronicity of PTSD for women – 69% of women exposed to a traumatic stressor at some point
- Misdiagnosis is Common (e.g. Borderline Personality Disorder or Schizophrenia)
- Women of Color
- Objectification is the first step in de-humanization
- More than 20% of women are physically assaulted by a partner
- 12% experience sexual assault some time in their lives
- Women are more than twice as likely than men to develop chronic PTSD symptoms

Women’s Trauma
Risk Factors and Key Facts
World Health Organization

- Risk factors for being a perpetrator include low education, exposure to child maltreatment or witnessing violence in the family, harmful use of alcohol, attitudes accepting of violence and gender inequality.

- Risk factors for being a victim of intimate partner and sexual violence include low education, witnessing violence between parents, exposure to abuse during childhood and attitudes accepting violence and gender inequality.

- In high-income settings, school-based programmes to prevent relationship violence among young people (or dating violence) are supported by some evidence of effectiveness.

- In low-income settings, other primary prevention strategies, such as microfinance combined with gender equality training and community-based initiatives that address gender inequality and communication and relationship skills, hold promise.

- Situations of conflict, post conflict and displacement may exacerbate existing violence and present new forms of violence against women.
There were 115,988 reported cases of domestic violence in Illinois in 2009.

There were 3,762 reported violations of protection orders in Illinois in 2009.

38.9% of domestic crimes in Illinois were committed by a spouse, ex-spouse or common-law spouse in 2009.

5,316 criminal sexual assault cases were reported in Illinois in 2009.

1,272 of reported criminal sexual assault cases ended in an arrest in 2009.

3.6% of criminal sexual assaults in Illinois involved children in 2009.

42% of crimes against children were committed by a family member in Illinois in 2009.


Illinois Data
Forced Sexual Intercourse - youth in grades 9-12

- In Chicago, 9.0% of students had ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. This is down from 11.3% in 2007.

- In Chicago, the prevalence of forced sexual intercourse was higher among white (9.3%) and Hispanic (9.2%) students than Black (7.9%) high school students; higher among Hispanic female (8.6%) than Black female (8.4%) students; and higher among Hispanic male (9.7%) than Black male (7.5%) students.

- Prevalence of having been forced to have sexual intercourse ranged from 6.0% to 12.0% across local surveys (median: 7.9%). Chicago youth were above the median though not at the highest reported rate of forced sexual intercourse.

Historically Victimized
- Time and context
- Hysteria
- Feminist Psychology of 60s and 70s
- Complexities of diagnosis: BPD & PTSD

Characteristics of Violence Against Women
- Domestic / Sexual
- Familiar Perpetrator
- Physical and psychological “Captivity”

Women’s Trauma
Documentary "Red Blooded Men"

http://youtu.be/vEYVw6WYF1E
‘BIG T’

- Experiencing severe physical harm or threat of death
- Or witnessing someone in such a situation
- Feeling intense fear and helplessness to prevent or stop situation

Examples?
- Car accidents
- Rapes
- Combat, or terrorism
- Natural disasters, like earthquake or flood
- Experiencing, or witnessing violence in the home or community

Trauma Defined
‘little t’

Anything but little

Relational traumas:

- **Attachment** - The accumulation of fear and loss that a child experiences with threatening or unavailable caregivers
- **Loss** – When a loved one dies unexpectedly
- **Divorce** – Emotionally difficult breaks in the family

Trauma Defined
More likely to result from BIG T traumas
May take months or years for symptoms to emerge and be recognized
Diagnostic criteria:
http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/dsm5_criteria_ptsd.asp

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Three Main Reactions

- Hyper/hypo-arousal
  - difficulties sleeping, panic, hyper-vigilance and startling, or emotional deadening and slowed reactions

- Intrusion
  - nightmares, flashbacks, feeling intense fear/emotion when reminded of trauma

- Avoidance
  - world becomes smaller, lose memories associated with trauma, emotional numbing and avoiding behaviors

Herman, Judith (1997)
Fight or flight response

Immobilization and helplessness
- Cannot fight or flee, and react as our brain is designed
- Unsure of whether someone will come to our rescue

Normal survival system becomes overwhelmed

Gunk on the windshield

Brain and Trauma
van der Kolk, B. (2013, October)
Top-down:
- Various approaches in psychotherapy
- Pharmacotherapy
- Eye movement desensitization re-processing (EMDR)

VS.

Bottom-up:
- Mindfulness and Yoga
- Neurofeedback
- Other activities to calm the mind:
  - Singing & Chanting
  - Swimming
  - Playing instruments
  - Accupressure
  - Massage

Road to Recovery

van der Kolk, B. (2013, October)
Optimizes the body's responses to stressful stimuli, and restores autonomic regulation

Inhibits the areas responsible for fear, aggressiveness, and rage

Stimulates reward centers in the median forebrain and other areas, leading to a state of bliss and pleasure

Lower anxiety, heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure, and cardiac output

Yoga effectively reduces physiological effects of stress

Arora & Bhattacharjee (2008)
Yogic practices also:

- enhance muscular strength and body flexibility
- promote and improve respiratory and cardiovascular function
- promote recovery from and treatment of addiction
- reduce stress, anxiety, depression & chronic pain
- improve sleep patterns
- enhance overall well-being and quality of life

Health Benefits of Yoga

Arora & Bhattacharjee (2008)
APA Resolution on Male Violence against Women:
https://www.apa.org/about/policy/male-violence.aspx

APA Guidelines on psychological practice with women and girls (trauma p. 952)

National Center for PTSD – US Department of Veterans Affairs
http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/dsm5_criteria_ptsd.asp

Chicago Task Force on Violence Against Girls and Young Women

NIU Victim Advocacy Services
http://www.niu.edu/health/vas/index.shtml

Trauma Sensitive Yoga Video
http://youtu.be/W2mb5rpl8go

Live Strong Woman: Yoga Instruction on Inversions
http://youtu.be/z6wtHly7ZNQ

Web Resources


Herman, Judith (1997). Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror. New York: Perseus


Van der Kolk, B. (2013, October). Frontiers of trauma treatment: A week-end retreat. Compilation of papers presented for a week-end workshop at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, Stockbridge, MA.