

CHJ TODAY

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Beating Heart: The Health Effects of Sexual Trauma

by *Jair Walker*

It is rather obvious that sexual violence and harassment can have lasting effects on women. The most evident signs of this type of abuse are those that are visible. Often times, victims will show physical signs of trauma or exhibit changes in their behavior that indicate damage to their mental health. But what about the effects that we can't see?

Researchers found that women who experience sexual violence, sexual harassment or both have a higher long-term risk of developing high blood pressure than women with no such trauma. That information becomes more striking when we look at the statistics. According to the *American Heart Association*, cardiovascular disease is the top killer in women. This disease kills 1 in 3 women each year. Still not convinced on the issue? Let's dig deeper.

They say numbers don't lie, so let's take a look at some more staggering statistics. According to *Rebecca Lawn* a postdoctoral researcher at Harvard, 44% of women report sexual assault and 80% of women report workplace sexual harassment. With so many women becoming victims of these types of crimes it's no wonder heart disease causes so many deaths.

In most settings, sexual crimes are rarely talked about. This happens for a multitude of reasons, from being uncomfortable with the topic to not being able to remember the events properly. Regardless of what is said, the body will always do the talking. Often times women who report sexual violence and assault have blood pressure levels high enough to cause other issues such as stroke, aneurysms, kidney disease, and heart attacks. There's no denying the seriousness of this issue. The solution seems simple right? Tell people not to be sickos. Get consent. Leave women alone. Problem solved.

Community Resources for March

Domestic Violence Services

East LA Women's Center: 1431 S. Atlantic Blvd., Los Angeles // (800) 585-6231

Su Casa: 3750 E. Anaheim St., Long Beach // (562) 421-6537

Women's Reintegration Services

Women's Community Integration Services: 8300 S. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles // (323) 525-6400

Women's Health Services

California Black Women's Health Project: 9800 S. La Cienega Blvd., Inglewood // (310) 412-1828

Yes, all that stuff certainly helps, but until we can completely get rid of these predatory behaviors, we need a more immediate fix. That starts with physicians. As heart disease continues to be the number one killer of women, it is becoming ever important that physicians ask patients about their history of sexual trauma. Of course, that requires women to relive some of these horrible experiences but doing so could potentially save a life. Becoming aware of these types of situations that have impacted a patient's life can help the physician to take the necessary precautions to prevent heart disease and everything that comes with it.

Even though it is Women's History Month, men too can be victims of sexual harassment and violence. To whomever this may concern: Get the help you deserve.



Employment with Criminal Record

70 Million Jobs: 70millionjobs.com // (800) 936-3318

Child Care Services

Crystal Stairs, Inc. : 5110 West Goldleaf Circle, Los Angeles // (323) 299-8998

Connections for Children: 5901 W. Century Blvd., Los Angeles // (310) 452-3325

Interview with Strangers

We interviewed strangers around the city of Los Angeles and asked them to answer a few questions for Women's History Month. Here are their answers.

Women Are...



My Favorite Woman Is...



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