

# TSS GROUP NEWS



Traumatic Stress Studies Group, Department of Psychology, 2155 S. Race Street, Denver CO 80208  
Web: <http://www.du.edu/tssgroup> Phone: 303.871.7407



## Spring News Highlights

*Anne P. DePrince, Ph.D., TSS Group Director*

Spring is a bittersweet season on college campus, offering an opportunity to recognize student learning and accomplishments...and to say goodbye. This Spring, we bid a fond farewell to two graduating seniors who have given much to our team this year: special thanks to **Tasha Schwenne** and **Camille Hayes** for their important contributions.

In addition to saying goodbye, we have two important project updates to share:

- **Women’s Health Project.** We are continuing efforts to get the word out about the Women’s Health Project, a collaborative study with Denver’s **Sexual Assault Interagency Council (SAIC)**. This important study (funded by the National Institute of Justice) examines women’s experiences of social reactions from other people (people such as counselors, advocates, police officers, doctors) following sexual assault in relation to their later well-being and engagement with the criminal justice system. Please read more about the project at <http://www.du.edu/tssgroup/womenshealth/>. We appreciate your help getting flyers out in the community (see <http://www.du.edu/tssgroup/womenshealth/agencyinfo> for flyers and other materials). Please let us know if we can drop flyers off to you for display at your agency.
- **PALS Project.** Thanks to many of you who helped us get the word out about the Partnering to Access Legal Services (PALS) Project, a collaboration with the Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center and several Denver-area agencies. We have wrapped up the third and final phase of this project, with your help. Please stay tuned to learn more in the coming months about legal needs in Denver following crime.

Also included in this newsletter is a preliminary report on findings from the Denver Justice Project, a small study focused on women exposed to sex trafficking on page 2. In addition, please take a moment to read about women’s experiences participating in the Women’s Health Project on page 4.

On behalf of the TSS Group, thank you for all that you do. We are grateful for opportunities to work with you.



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Denver Justice Project: Preliminary Findings .....	2
TSS Group Accomplishments.....	3
Promoting Change through the Denver Women’s Health Project.....	4
Women’s Health Project.....	5

## Denver Justice Project: Preliminary Findings

*Anne DePrince, Tejas Srinivas, and Kerry Gagnon*

### Reminder: What was the Denver Justice Project Again?

The Denver Justice Project was a small study designed to assess the feasibility of doing research on the trauma-related needs of women who have experienced sex trafficking. With the help of many individuals and agencies in Denver, we interviewed 10 women as part of this project.

### Who Participated?

The 10 women who participated included 5 women who identified with one or more ethnic minority groups. Seven of the 10 women had children; their average age was 37 years.

### What Did We Find?

We learned some important things from women about their trauma-related needs following sex trafficking. For example:

- The most frequent trafficker was a family member or intimate partner.
- Women reported feelings of shame, alienation, and betrayal in relation to the trafficking.
- Women reported exposure to many other forms of trauma, including experiences of forced sex, witnessing other people being seriously injured or killed, robberies, and physical abuse.
- On average, women in the sample scored very high on measures of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms and depression symptoms.
- When asked about 63 different kinds of physical health symptoms, women reported experiencing an average of 18.4 different symptoms over the last year. Gastrointestinal problems and headaches were among the most common physical health problems reported.
- Nearly all women reported being struck in the head in their lifetimes. Often women reported multiple blows to the head resulting from violence. All of the women who had been struck in the head reported losing consciousness and/or being dazed/confused as a result.

Women echoed what we are learning from violence survivors in other studies about working with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. In particular:

- Many law enforcement officers do things in their interactions that validate victims, such as
  - Just letting me talk
  - Believing me
  - Asking me what I need/letting me know about resources
  - Saying things such as: "It takes a courageous woman [to press charges]"
- Women also let us know that they appreciated when officers did things to help them feel protected/safe; and provided clear explanations of what to expect.
- Women also described feeling invalidated when the focus seemed to be on women's substance use or when officers conveyed disrespect. Women encouraged criminal justice personnel to avoid contacting victims "out of the blue."

We are pleased to let you know that the women reported that their experiences during the research process were positive and beneficial.

*"Denver Justice Project", continued page 3*

"Denver Justice Project", continued from page 2

## What Does All this Mean?

This small, pilot study documented that women exposed to sex trafficking face complex physical and mental health challenges. Women reported complex histories of trauma, including other instances of intimate violence and family dysfunction, prior to trafficking. Most women experienced head trauma that may be untreated.

## Thank you!

Thank you for your help making this pilot project successful. Thank you also to the women who generously shared their experiences during interviews; and to the Campus Compact of the Mountain West for funding this project. And finally, thanks to COVA for the opportunity to present these findings at their annual conference in October 2013.



## TSS Group Accomplishments

Please join me in congratulating current TSS Group student members on the following awards:

- **Kerry Gagnon, Michelle Lee, and Tejas Srinivas** received 2014–2015 DU Graduate Studies Doctoral Fellowships for Inclusive Engagement.
- **Becca Babcock** received the Department of Psychology Lawrence Miller Award.

**Tejas Srinivas** was selected to be a trainee for the Colorado Immersion Training in Community Engagement (CIT) program, which aims to expand the pool of researchers and program teams with the knowledge and skills to effectively and respectfully partner with communities for improved translational research. Tejas will be pursuing the Urban Asian & Refugee Track during the week-long intensive training in June. The CIT program is part of the Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute (CCTSI), which is affiliated with the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus.

**Anne DePrince** and **Ann Chu** are editors for the APA Books Series "Interventions that Work". The first book in this series, "*Treating PTSD with Cognitive Behavioral Therapies*," was just released. See <http://www.apa.org/pubs/books/4317339.aspx> for more information.

We are happy to celebrate the successes of TSS Group Alums:

- **Claire Hebenstreit** (Ph.D. 2013) accepted positions as an Advanced Postdoctoral Fellow in Women's Health, San Francisco VA Medical Center; and Clinical Instructor, University of California San Francisco
- **Ryan Matlow** (Ph.D. 2013) accepted a position as a Postdoctoral Fellow, Multicultural Clinical Training Program, Child and Adolescent Services, Dept. of Psychiatry, University of California, San Francisco/San Francisco General Hospital
- **Courtney Mitchell** (Ph.D. 2012) accepted a position as Director, Human Assistance Applied Research Group (HAARG), Humanitarian Assistance Program, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver.
- **Rheena Pineda** (Ph.D. 2013) accepted a position as a Clinical Psychology Postdoctoral Fellow, UC Davis Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Sacramento County Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Service.

Also, new journal articles describing TSS Group research are now available for your reading pleasure:

ACCESS FULL-TEXT RESEARCH  
ARTICLES FROM THE NEW TSS  
GROUP WEBSITE. VISIT US AT  
[HTTP://WWW.DU.EDU/TSSGROUP](http://www.du.edu/tssgroup)





## Promoting Change through the Denver Women's Health Project

*Kerry Gagnon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Graduate Student*

The *Denver Women's Health Project* is a collaboration with the **Denver Sexual Assault Interagency Council (SAIC)** to examine how the social reactions women receive after an unwanted sexual experience relate to their own well-being and engagement with community-based service providers and the criminal justice system. To date, we have interviewed 57 diverse women, who have experienced an unwanted sexual experience in the past year. The women are asked to come for four interviews, each three months apart, where we ask them about their interactions with community-, university- and criminal justice- systems following the unwanted sexual experience. Women are asked to describe their own coping and well-being (including physical and psychological health), as well as the kinds of responses they received from other people to whom they disclosed the incident (e.g., family/friends, medical personnel, counselors, law enforcement, system-based advocates).

As an interviewer for the Denver Women's Health Project, I have had the opportunity to hear many women's stories and experiences. One thing that continues to stand out to me during these interviews is each woman's reasoning and drive to participate in the research. A common theme has been that women want to participate in this research to help women in the future who have experienced an unwanted sexual experience. Many of the comments I receive during the interviews are that women want to make a difference. Women tell us that they appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback about the criminal justice system and community-based services to promote positive change for women who experience an unwanted sexual experience in the future.

We systematically measure women's perceptions of the research process using the Response to Research Questionnaire (RRPQ; Newman & Kaloupek, 2004). We ask each woman to complete this questionnaire at the end of each interview. The RRPQ measures both positive and negative aspects of participating in research. The three positive scales are: Participation (e.g., perceptions of the value of the trauma-related research, beliefs about empowerment to stop the research at any time), Personal Benefit (e.g., gaining individual insight and meaning), and Global Evaluation (e.g., beliefs about the importance of research). The two negative scales are: Drawbacks (e.g., regret and negative perceptions about the research procedures) and Emotional Reactions (e.g., unexpected and negative emotions during participation). By comparing the positive scales to the negative scales, you can measure if the benefits of participating in the research outweigh the negatives, the benefit-to-cost ratio. For the women in the study thus far, there is a strong positive benefit-to-cost ratio, meaning that women in the study rate the benefits to participating as significantly greater than the costs. Furthermore, in the comment section of the RRPQ, women have written comments expressing relief and gratitude that research is being done on this topic.

Overall, women tell us that participating in research offers an important opportunity to have their voices heard, and an opportunity to help women in the future who experience unwanted sexual experiences. For many women involved in the project, they are managing other significant stressors while they also navigate the physical and psychological consequences of sexual assault. I am struck by women's courage and commitment to participating in research to help women in the future. As a member of the TSS Group, I hope this sort of community-engaged research can offer at least a small way for women to reclaim their power as they find ways to tell their stories.

### *Reference:*

Newman, E. & Kaloupek, D. G., (2004). The risks and benefits of participating in trauma-focused research studies. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 17(5), 383-394.



Sure, we know lots of facts and figures about unwanted sexual experiences.



*But, facts and figures don't tell the whole story.*  
**Each woman's story is unique.**  
**Learn about the Women's Health Project.**

- ✓ Have you had an unwanted sexual experience in the last year?
- ✓ Did you tell someone (such as a counselor, advocate, police officer, health provider) about that experience?
- ✓ Are you 18 years of age or older?

**Women who answer yes to these questions are invited to participate in the Women's Health Project.**

#### WHAT DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE?

- 4 interviews over 9 months with a female interviewer.
- The first interview takes 3 hours; the others each take 2 hours.
- Everything in the interview is voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.
- We are trying to learn:
  - ... what can people say and do to help after an unwanted sexual experience?
  - ... what is it like to talk to counselors, health providers, advocates, lawyers, or the police?
  - ... what makes it easier or harder to cope?
  - ... what is it like to try to find services that can help?

#### WILL MY COUNSELOR OR THE POLICE KNOW THAT I AM IN THE STUDY?

No. We will not tell anyone you are in the study. We keep everything you tell us about your experiences private.

#### WILL I BE PAID FOR MY TIME?

Yes! To thank you for your time, you can receive up to \$230 total, as follows: \$50 for the first interview, \$55 for the second interview, \$60 for the third interview, \$65 for the fourth interview.

#### WHAT ABOUT GETTING TO THE INTERVIEW?

We can help with cab fare, bus tokens, or \$10 cash for transportation costs. You tell us which you prefer.

#### CONTACTING US

For more information, please contact us:

Private email: [healthstudy@du.edu](mailto:healthstudy@du.edu)    Private phone: 303.871.4103    Website: [www.du.edu/tssgroup/womenshealth](http://www.du.edu/tssgroup/womenshealth)

Agency information for the project is available at <http://www.du.edu/tssgroup/womenshealth/agencyinfo>