

HEAL

HEALING SEXUAL TRAUMAS TOGETHER PROGRAM



Just as Art has been integral to our existence, so have sex and violence. While most of us agree that ending sexual violence is a beautiful thing, it can often be too painful to look at. Through the **HEAL Program**, my aim is to change this perception by showing the strength and beauty in healing the broken pieces of the innermost part of being.

Violence against woman is endemic in every country and culture, causing harm to millions of women and their family, and has been exacerbated by the Covid.19 pandemic. As an Energetic Psychotherapist (EP), specializes in Asian Traditional Therapies (Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan Traditional Medicines) my job is to listen first, and mend the broken hearts whenever it's possible.

Besides providing psychological support and alternative health care to women, girls and men coming from Eastern and Asian countries who have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, whose souls and bodies have been deeply hurt. I can advise and help victims and/or their close relatives, act as a translator (French, English, Russian) and guide them through some aspects of the medical and judicial processes.

What kinds of abusive situations women may come across in France?

Most of the women asking me for help have French partners, and in several cases, were brought from Eastern (Russia, Belorussia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania) and Asian countries (Japan, Korea, China, Thailand, Philippines). The vast majority do not speak French or insufficiently. They have no money of their own, and sometimes are expected to perform as unpaid domestic workers. But more commonly the women I meet are married, have children, and are subjected to increasing psychological, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse which, in certain cases, is accompanied by being slapped, shoved, punched – even stifled. Short of the latter, **signals are constant criticism and blame, insulting put-downs, assertions that the woman is crazy, blatant attempts to control friendships, outside contacts, and denial of requests to learn French or get a job – anything which would allow a woman to establish a modicum of autonomy.**

What are the first steps to take in reaching out for help?

In terms of reaching out, it's sad to say it but it would be better for the victims to be physically injured and to be able to show the bruises and traces of beatings to the authorities.

The more subtle forms of abuse which gradually sap a woman's psychological strength and self-esteem have gone unacknowledged until recently with the explosion of the #MeToo movement as well as concern over the number of intimate partner murders which take place here yearly. If a woman decides to press charges with the police, much depends on the training and sensitivity of a particular officer assigned to hear her complaint. Protective orders (*ordonnances de protection*) are sometimes hard to get but since January 2020 are mandated to be delivered within a maximum of 6 days. However, an abuser now knowing that he has been flagged by the law, can become even more aggressive in the interim.

My objectives, for Women and Men as well, are to:

- ➡ Provide a platform for survivors and allies to speak about sexual assault and domestic abuse openly, without shame, guilt, or suffering.
- ➡ Engage all of society in the dialogue about our culture and the continued prevalence of sexual violence and domestic abuse,
- ➡ Encourage reconnection, between survivors, their bodies, allies, and society.

The Essence of Healing Sexual Violence Traumas

Active approach-oriented coping strategies facilitate recovery. Such strategies include engaging with others, cognitive restoring and expressing emotions.

- (a) Managing memories
- (b) Relating to important others
- (c) Seeking safety
- (d) Reevaluation self

The ways of healing within each domain reflected opposing responses. The dialectical process identified for each of the four domains include, respectively:

- (a) Calling forth memories
- (b) Regulating relationships with others
- (c) Constructing an "as safe as possible" lifeworld
- (d) Restoring a sense of self

How individuals heal from the experience?

Despite the deleterious effects of sexual violence, the responses of individuals who experience it vary widely, and most achieve some degree of healing, as evidence by a decrease in symptoms (Koss & Figueredo, 2004) after the violence (Frazier, Tashiro, Berman, Steger & Long, 2004). Research on healing from sexual violence has been focused primarily on identifying factors associated with distress and/or positive change.

What is Rape Culture?

Rape Culture is an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. Rape culture is perpetuated using misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women's rights and safety.

Examples of Rape Culture

- Blaming the victim ("She asked for it!")
- Trivializing sexual assault ("Boys will be boys!")
- Sexually explicit jokes
- Tolerance of sexual harassment
- Inflating false rape report statistics
- Publicly scrutinizing a victim's dress, mental state, motives, and history
- Gratuitous gendered violence in movies and television
- Defining "manhood" as dominant and sexually aggressive
- Defining "womanhood" as submissive and sexually passive
- Assuming only promiscuous women get raped
- Assuming men don't get raped, or that only "weak" men get raped
- Refusing to take rape accusations seriously
- Teaching women to avoid getting raped

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