



**WOMEN, BRAINS
AND AUTONOMY.
AN ETHNOGRAPHY
OF SOCIO-MEDICAL
ORGANIZATIONS
SUPPORTING WOMEN
VICTIMS OF MALE
VIOLENCE IN FRANCE.**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, CLASSICS AND
ARCHAEOLOGY
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SEXUAL HARMS + MEDICAL ENCOUNTERS

About Us

Sexual Harms and Medical Encounters (SHaME) is a research project exploring the role of medicine and psychiatry in sexual violence. We aim to move beyond shame to address this global health crisis. The project is funded by the Wellcome Trust and led by historian Joanna Bourke.

Our Research

Sexual violence is one of the most serious problems in the contemporary world. Our interdisciplinary project seeks to understand the role played by medical professionals, including psychiatrists, in understanding and dealing with sexual harms.

Instead of shame, we advocate for empowerment and knowledge.

Women, brains and autonomy. An ethnography of socio-medical organizations supporting women victims of male violence in France.

The language of 'trauma' frames debates about the effects of male sexual violence. The reliance on this psychological concept has sanitized what is also understood as a political problem. Even feminist approaches that acknowledge socio-political frameworks have internalized this emphasis on the medico-psychological components of sexual violence and have mobilized the language of trauma. Adeline Moussion's research examines the concept of 'trauma' in its multiple uses and independent life outside the medical realm.

The research explores both therapeutic and extra-therapeutic uses of the language of trauma, looking particularly at its link to discourses about male violence and female victimhood in contemporary France. Professionals perform care practices to treat symptoms, brains, and bodies, but also focus on meaning.

Moussion is conducting ethnographies of two organizations – a medical care centre and a social work institution – that provide support for victims of violence in Parisian suburbs. She focuses on female victims of male violence as well as on the socio-medical professionals supporting them. Her fieldwork consists of participant observation of professional practices and following women inside and outside these facilities, including in their everyday life as well as during medico/social or judicial procedures.

Through an interrogation of different forms of violence (sexual, physical, verbal, economic, and administrative), Moussion asks what role the trauma rhetoric plays in explanations of violence. She examines the articulation between the psychological and the socio-political. At a broader level, she asks how victim-centric socio-medical institutions support women by focusing on psychological healing while offering social perspectives on violence. She asks how professionals politicise individual experiences of violence through psychologising tools.

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