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## UNH Researcher Advocates For Focus On How Women Deal With Stress And Trauma

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DURHAM, N.H. – As recently as the 1970's, women's history was virtually ignored in the K-12 curriculum. Now we celebrate Women's History Month across the nation. For years the exclusion of women in health research resulted in a negative impact on their health. In 1991, the federal government opened an office on Women's Health. Now a University of New Hampshire researcher is looking to put the spotlight on women's experiences of stress and trauma.

There are significant differences in how men and women respond to stressful and traumatic events, but until recently the study of trauma was based almost solely on the experiences of men. Kathleen Kendall-Tackett, a health psychologist at the University of New Hampshire, begins to right that wrong in a new book she edited, *The Handbook of Women, Stress and Trauma*. The book is part of a stress and trauma series edited by noted trauma researcher Charles Figley.

“Historically, the study of trauma has been based on the experiences of men because traumatic stress was first recognized and extensively studied among combat veterans,” Kendall-Tackett says. “From the women's health movement, we learned that women's health must be considered in the context of their lives, and the same is true for stress and trauma. There are chapters in this book that bring out information even people in the trauma field are going to find new. It is appropriate that in the month we celebrate Women's History we increase our focus on women's health.”

Kendall-Tackett is a research associate professor of psychology in [UNH's Family Research Laboratory](#) and a fellow of the American Psychological Association. She is widely published in the fields of family violence, maternal depression, perinatal health, and disability.

“It is becoming increasingly clear that men and women have different sources of stress and trauma in their lives, and respond to stressful and traumatic events differently,” Kendall-Tackett says. “Some of those differences include that women's sources of stress are often relationally based, they have twice the lifetime rate of depression compared to men, and they appear more vulnerable to posttraumatic stress disorder after exposure to traumatic events.”

Kendall-Tackett notes that the goal of the book is to bring together the latest research on stress and trauma in the lives of women. The book is divided into three sections. The first describes stress and trauma in the lives of girls and teens, women in their 20s, 30s and 40s, and women in middle and old age. This section also highlights the impact of perinatal events, such as miscarriage, stillbirth and negative birth experiences, on women's mental health — it is the first

mainstream trauma book to do so.

The second section describes the current research on violence against women, including rape, intimate partner violence and elder abuse, as well as cutting-edge research on the health effects of trauma and the impact of childhood abuse on the developing brain.

The third delves into stress and trauma in the lives of three specific populations of women: women of color, women with disabilities and lesbian women.