

Dr. Jennifer Sumner

This K01 Career Development Award will provide Dr. Jennifer Sumner with the necessary skills to establish an independent research career focused on elucidating the psychological and biological mechanisms by which traumatic experiences contribute to cardiovascular disease (CVD) in women, the leading cause of death worldwide. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the quintessential stress-related mental disorder, prospectively predicts increased CVD incidence. However, PTSD is a complex and heterogeneous disorder, and the aspects of PTSD that drive CVD risk are unknown. Mechanistic knowledge, particularly in women, is also lacking. These limitations impede the development of clinical applications to offset CVD risk. The overall aim of this K01 proposal is to begin to test a theoretically based biological model by which a core element of PTSD—posttraumatic fear responses (e.g., hypervigilance, re-experiencing)—relates to CVD and intermediate markers of cardiovascular health in women. Supported by a multidisciplinary team of expert mentors, Dr. Sumner will examine how posttraumatic fear responses (measured across self-report and psychophysiological levels of analysis) relate to cardiovascular health in women.