PTSD & African American Women

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The Faces of Our African Women
WHY FOCUS ON PTSD & THE African American WOMEN

• Higher violence levels are associated with Lower socioeconomic status

• African American Women are twice as likely As white women to be battered

• African American Women are at a higher risk for sexual abuse and raped by a family member than are other women

• African American Women are more likely than other Women to wait until years later to report a sexual assault
WHY FOCUS ON PTSD & THE BLACK WOMEN

• African American women between the ages of 20-34 have the highest rate of being the victim of domestic violence……. (US department of justice)

• Domestic Violence is the cause of more visits to hospital emergency rooms by African American women

• AIDS is now the leading cause of death for Black women between the ages of 25-44. (Cdc)

• African American Women’s risk of dying from pregnancy or its completion

• African American Women are physically abused by their boyfriend or husband at a rate 35% HIGHER THAN Caucasian women and more than 50% the rate of women of other races
PTSD: The MISCONCEPTION in BODY & MIND

The MIND and BODY believes that the past TRAUMA is still happening!

THE PHYSICAL SENSATIONS OF TRAUMA CONTINUE TO ACTIVATE THE MIND’S FEAR RESPONSE

WHICH IN TURN ACTIVATES THE PHYSICAL RESPONSE TO DANGER

Which is the ROOT of the physical sensations of TRAUMA
Trauma & the Brain

THALAMUS
Information Relay Station

AMYGDALA
Remembers the FEEL of those events, not the FACTS

HIPPOCAMPUS
Remembers Facts but not Emotions
BRAIN FACTS

- Brain weighs approximately 3 pounds
- Brain has approximately 100 billion neurons and 1 trillion supporting cells
- Neurons grow and organize themselves into efficient systems that operate a lifetime
- Brain controls ALL activities
- Emotion and cognition are intertwined
- Neurons can re-route circuits
- Brain and environment involved in delicate duet
- Brain never stops adapting and changing
BRAIN STRUCTURES

• Brain is an organ of behavior—both overt behavior and consciousness are manifestations of the work of the brain

• Different regions of the brain regulate different functions. Our thoughts, behaviors, and emotions are the result of how the different parts of the brain work together to process information and memories
NEUROTRANSMITTERS

- All messages all passed to connected neurons through the form of chemicals called **NEUROTRANSMITTERS**
- **NEUROTRANSMITTERS** are released from the end of the axon, cross the synapse, and bind to the specific receptors on the dendrites of the targeted neuron
MAJOR NEUROTRANSMITTERS

- **Acetylcholine**—regulates memory
- **Dopamine**—produces pleasure through the “reward system”; multiple functions including controlling movement, regulates hormonal responses, important to cognition and emotion; abnormalities in dopamine levels have been implicated in schizophrenia
- **Serotonin**—Plays a role in sleep; involved in sensory perception; and involved in controlling emotional states such as anxiety and depression
MAJOR NEUROTRANSMITTERS

- **Glutatmate** — excites the firing of neurons, aids process of memory
- Gamma-aminobutyric (GABA) — inhibits the firing of neurons
Symptoms of PTSD

- Recurrent Nightmares or flashbacks
- Feeling of emotional numbness
- State of nervous arousal

Symptoms leave victims feeling at times or constantly, jumpy and irritable, unable to relax or feel completely safe. Episodes are extremely painful experiences.
Types of PTSD

- Acute Stress Disorder

- Uncomplicated PTSD

- Normal Stress Response

- Co morbid PTSD

- Complex PTSD
A SELF PERPETUATING CYCLE OF STRESS AND PAIN

SEROTONIN
Sleeping Problems

STRESS (Trauma)

GABA
LEVELS
BELIEF

DOPAMINE
Feeling Numb
Depression
Negative Thinking
CHANGE ENVIROMENT

ENDORPHINS
INNER MOTTO

NOREPINEPHRINE
MOOD
## Misdiagnosis & Effects of Abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misdiagnosis</th>
<th>Effects of Abuse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholism</td>
<td>Lingering Psychological injury</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>More long term effects than any other crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug Addiction</td>
<td>Experience Triggers or Stimulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>“Hyper vigilance”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance of activities &amp; situations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feeling of Numbness</td>
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<td>Loss of Memory</td>
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<td>Isolation</td>
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Profile of the Effects of the Trauma on Unspoken Barriers the Black Woman Address

- **Internalized Societal Images** – African American women have images of long suffering victims. These negative and conflicting images may make women wonder who they really are & what their partners and society expect from them.

- **The Black Family** – Intense loyalty to the family and strong vows of privacy and respect for the family unit. Family can hinder whether they will confront them regarding violence in their lives.

- **Religious Beliefs** – Fear of rejection from the church may keep women in abusive relationships.

- **Conflicted Loyalty** – Many women fear if they report abuse he will be treated more harshly by law enforcement officials because of his color. This may prevent many battered woman from reaching out for help.

- **Shelter Services** – Many shelters are predominantly staffed by persons that black women have learned to mistrust. Most women will not leave their home to live with a group of people they don’t know.
Not All Women Experience the Same Constellations of Effects

- Despite life challenges many survivors are resilient and develops effective coping strategies
  - Resilience: Physical health, Mental health, Interpersonal relationships, Adherence to community standards and economic well being.
- Characteristics of the more resilient women
  - Positive social support
  - Strong feeling of attachment to their mothers
Black Women
Coping Strategies

- Music
- Educational Programs
- Attempt to be perfect
- Christian doctrine of forgiveness
- Disassociate from the incident of abuse and memories
- Polarize and silent emotional response
Suggestions for Interventions: Clinical Practice

• Establish Competence
  ❖ Become familiar with psychobiology of trauma
    ➢ Memories for trauma
    ➢ Dissociation
    ➢ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
    ➢ Variable associated with resilience and coping
    ➢ Re-Victimized

• Conduct a thorough assessment
  ❖ Self-Report Measures: Trauma History Screen
Suggestions for Interventions: Clinical Practice, Cont.

- Treatment Plan
  - Important: Be attentive to how the experience if sexual child abuse is influenced by the child's race, social class and sexual orientation
  - A culturally sensitive treatment plan for African American survivors may involve addressing:
    - Spirituality
    - Stereotypes
REFERENCES, CONT.


REFERENCES


Alleyne, V. (1996). *There were times I thought I was crazy: A black women's story of incest*. Canada: Union Labor.


