

**Title:**

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Among Sexually Abused African American Women

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Rising Stars of Research and Scholarship Invited Student Posters

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**References:**

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**Abstract Summary:**

The purpose of this evidence-based practice poster was to evaluate the causative factors that put African American women at higher risk for sexual abuse. It also serves as an educational resource for healthcare

providers and formulates potential treatment options for African American women who have Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

**Learning Activity:**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE
The learner will be able to identify the causative factors that put African American women at risk for sexual abuse.	Risk factors that contribute to the incidence of sexual assault victimization include: the African American woman may live in a dangerous neighborhood, may be homeless, therefore causing the woman to be susceptible to human trafficking due to exposure to outside dangers. She may also have a low income, and/or may be in an abuse relationship (IPV)
The learner will be able to formulate potential treatment plans for African American Women with a diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder due to sexual abuse.	The treatment options for African American women with a diagnosis of PTSD related to history of sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to, the following: cognitive behavioral therapy, counseling, social relationships, religious therapy and spiritual therapy.

**Abstract Text:**

The purpose of this evidence-based practice poster was to evaluate the causative factors that put African American women at higher risk for sexual abuse. African American women have a higher chance of being sexually assaulted at some point during their lifetime than non-minority women. The event of sexual abuse or sexual assault can belittle the victim and cause them to go into a state of depression. This depressive state can then result in a diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, also known as PTSD. In many instances, sexually abused women are left alone to cope which can lead to several other mental health disorders, such as anxiety or suicidal ideation. Many African American women that experience sexual abuse have difficulty reporting the event and seeking help, and may thus develop Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. This mental illness is underdiagnosed in African American women due to the lack of incident reporting. African American women experience several barriers that prevent them from seeking help after a sexual abuse event occurs. Fear is one of the main barriers for these women. However, lack of transportation, lack of finances, family disapproval and lack of knowledge also stand in the way of treatment. The African American culture has a high poverty rate, therefore they are more susceptible to homelessness. If these women do not have a safe place to call home, they are exposed to outside dangers from living on the streets. Homelessness also leads to higher human trafficking rates.

Women of all nationalities experience low self-efficacy at least once in their lifetime. African American women who have been sexually abused have a constant feeling of low self-efficacy and experience immense amounts of psycho-emotional stress. They are typically confused and have lost their self confidence in regards to succeeding in life. This type of stress affects allostasis of the body's psychobiological regulatory process. This means that the sexually abused woman has lost her sense of homeostasis and she is going through allostasis in an attempt to normalize her thoughts (McEwen B, Wingfield JC., 2003). The event of sexual abuse is traumatizing and may cause the victim to blame themselves. Their mental cognition is negatively affected and they cannot forget the details of the event. The incident keeps replaying in their head, which is the main reason for high rates of depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts, thus leading to PTSD. Their inability to cope is related to several manifestations

such as anxiety, irritability, anger, sadness, followed by many other significant symptoms (Chiappelli, 2004).

The treatment plan for PTSD varies depending on the woman's manifestations. There are many different treatment regimens that can improve the African American woman's quality of life. These therapies include, but are not limited to; cognitive behavioral therapy, counseling, social relationships, religious and spiritual therapy. There are specialized women's shelters that offer assistance to women that are homeless or suffering from a crisis. The dilemma is that some African American women are afraid to admit they are suffering from a crisis (Bryant-Davis, 2005). In Cleveland, Ohio there is a women's shelter called, Laura's Home. This shelter offers a safe environment for women and their children, many of the women they help are of African American descent. The home encourages participation in group events at the shelter, such as bible studies, counseling, therapy sessions and mentoring. Laura's Home is a great resource that is available in Cleveland. However, there are not many places that offer the things that Laura's Home gives to women and children that are suffering from a crisis. Although the city of Cleveland has a few homeless shelters and other food services, the only specialized women's crisis center is Laura's Home. Therefore, it would be of great asset to the city of Cleveland if more Women's centers were established (The City Mission, 2016).

This evidence-based practice poster can also serve as an educational resource for healthcare providers to enhance their knowledge regarding posttraumatic stress disorder. The potential areas for evidence-based practice are primary and secondary prevention of sexual abuse among African American women. It would be beneficial to implement additional awareness in schools, to educate children and to encourage them to seek help if they are sexual assaulted. It may also be possible for hospitals to partner with churches or women's shelters. Caregiver education regarding this topic can help with prevention or recognition of sexual assault among African American women. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder among sexually abused African American women is not always preventable. However, offering a safe place for these women would be of great benefit for their mental health and overall well-being. This poster encourages the potential research of additional educational resources about PTSD among sexually abused African American women.