

## **History of Abuse and Its Relationship with Age of Abuse and Health Outcomes in Women**

Anne Koci, PhD, APRN, BC

Ora Strickland, PhD, FAAN, RN

Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing, Emory University

David Cantor, PhD, Psychological Sciences Institute

Atlanta, GA

Violence is a significant health problem in America. Violence, in the form of physical and/or sexual abuse, presents a significant public health problem for females of all ages. A wide range of emotional and behavioral sequelae has been linked with abuse, which increases a woman's vulnerability to future adverse health outcomes.

*Purpose:* To examine the relationship between abuse and age when initial abuse experienced, race, socioeconomic status and health outcomes, i. e. anxiety, depression, and PMS, in women ages 18-45 in a community sample. Research is deficient regarding abuse, the age when initial abuse experienced and long-term health outcomes.

*Methods:* 568 women ages 18-45 were recruited from the community. Women with chronic diseases, diagnosed physical or psychological problems, and who were on birth control pills were excluded. PMS patterns were determined using daily symptom reports over three menstrual cycles. Childhood, adolescent and adult abuse history data were obtained. Descriptive statistics, hierarchical regression analyses, analysis of covariance and Pearson and Spearman correlations were computed.

*Findings:* Physical, sexual and total abuse across the lifespan significantly predicted anxiety, depression and severity of PMS pattern groups. Anxiety and depression had significant positive correlations with physical, sexual and abuse across the lifespan but was negatively correlated with age of abuse. Women without a history of physical and/or sexual abuse had significantly lower adjusted mean anxiety and depression scores and less severity of PMS pattern groups than abused women regardless of age of initial abuse. Race/ethnicity was not significantly associated with anxiety, depression or PMS. Comorbidity of anxiety and depression was noted in 9% of the sample. Sexual abuse significantly predicted comorbidity of anxiety and depression.

Only 2% of the No PMS groups were sexually abused under the age of 12, whereas, 20% of the emotional (dysphoric) PMS groups had been abused at age 12 and under.

Only 1% of the No PMS groups were physically abused under the age of 12, whereas, 10% of the emotional (dysphoric) PMS groups had been abused at age 12 and under.

*Discussion:* Abuse was shown to be a strong predictor of adverse health outcomes in this study. The health impact of abuse was shown to have long-term consequences and to have emotional and physical consequences, particularly in relation to PMS. Similar studies should be done in women with chronic physical and/or psychological illness.

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