

Intersections of Oppression: Examining the Interactive Effect of Racial Discrimination and Neighborhood Poverty on PTSD Symptoms in Black Women

Black Americans living in urban environments are disproportionately impacted by posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Both racial discrimination and neighborhood poverty are factors that contribute to this health disparity. However, studies focused on the intersection of these two oppressive systems on PTSD symptoms are lacking. To address this research gap, we examined the interactive effects of racial discrimination and neighborhood poverty on PTSD in Black women seeking care in a publicly funded hospital primarily serving minoritized and low-income individuals in Atlanta, GA.

Citation:

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Correspondence:

Abigail Powers Lott, PhD
abigail.lott@emoryhealthcare.org
Jennifer Stevens, PhD
jennifer.stevens@emory.edu

Methods:

Data Collection:

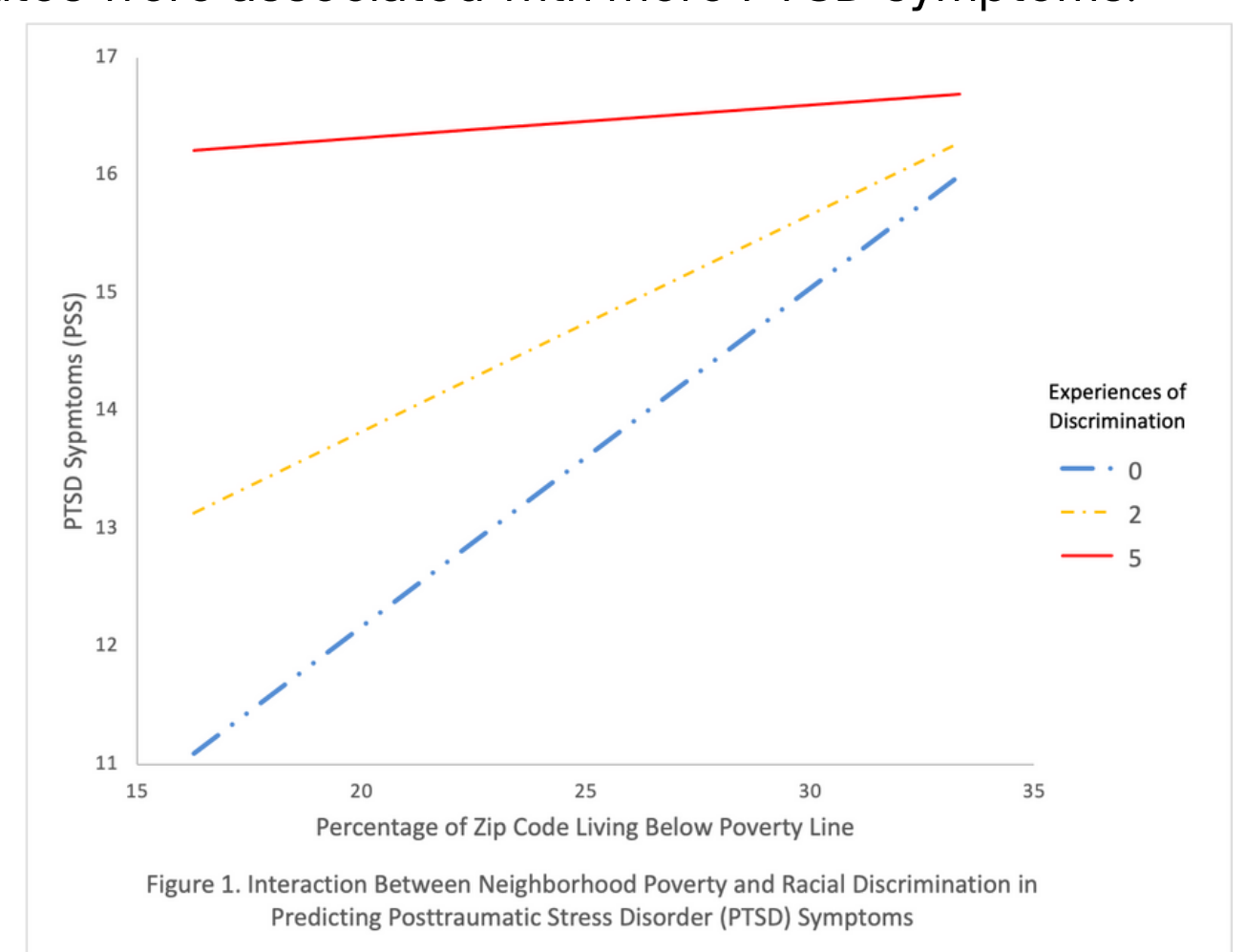
- Participants were approached at random from the waiting rooms of a publicly funded hospital primarily serving racially and socioeconomically marginalized individuals.
- Only participants who self-identified as Black or African American women and completed basic demographics and measures of racial discrimination and PTSD symptoms were included in this study.
- Racial discrimination was assessed using the Experiences of Discrimination (EOD).
- Trauma history was assessed via the Traumatic Events Inventory (TEI), which assesses for types of exposure to traumatic events.
- PTSD symptoms were assessed via the PTSD Symptom Scale (PSS).
- The 2014–2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Summary File was used to calculate neighborhood poverty rates and racial makeup within participants' self-reported zip codes.

Analysis:

- Correlations between the main variables of racial discrimination, neighborhood poverty, and PTSD symptoms were examined using bivariate analyses.
- Regression models assessed the effects of racial discrimination and neighborhood poverty on PTSD symptoms.
- Moderation analyses tested the interactive effect of racial discrimination and neighborhood poverty on overall PTSD symptoms, intrusive symptoms, avoidance and numbing symptoms, and hyperarousal symptoms, controlling for trauma history and neighborhood racial demographics.

Findings:

- Racial discrimination predicted more severe PTSD symptoms overall and for each symptom cluster.
- Neighborhood poverty did not directly predict PTSD symptoms, but after controlling for racial discrimination, higher poverty rates were associated with more PTSD symptoms.
- There was interaction between experiences of racial discrimination and neighborhood poverty, such that higher neighborhood poverty predicted greater overall PTSD symptoms, but only for those reporting less racial discrimination.
- For women with more discrimination experiences, PTSD symptoms were elevated regardless of neighborhood poverty.



Discussion

These findings indicate that both racial discrimination and neighborhood poverty contribute to PTSD symptoms, though the effects of neighborhood poverty are dependent on the amount of racial discrimination an individual has faced. Given the heterogeneous nature of PTSD, it is important to consider multiple factors and systems of oppression when determining presentation of symptoms. Future work on the intersection of oppressive symptoms is needed to better understand the onset, etiology, and maintenance of psychopathology in marginalized groups.