Trans-Generational stress effects on maternal health and birth outcomes in African-American women

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Abstract

Despite the resilience of the African-American community, the psychological repercussions from slavery are not often addressed, allowing the stress to continue to cycle through many generations. Many African-Americans continue to experience the post-traumatic stress syndromes. Since African Americans have not had a long history of stress through the机制 of slavery, I believe the stress, along with other poor health stressors, transmitted our group consciousness, marking their memories for ever, and changing their future in fundamental and irreversible ways. The changes in hormone levels when the mother becomes stressed affect the hormone levels in the growing baby. This indirectly affects the health of the fetus. When women experience stress, especially when they are pregnant, it affects their children by impairing the blood flow in the developing child and exposing them to the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Despite the resiliency of the African-American community, the psychological stressors that caused a genetic change, predisposing African-Americans to higher stress levels, slavery stresses include both the physical stress and the psychological stress. Both stressors contribute to the health of an individual and have been shown to affect a growing fetus. Grouped with the various current social discrimination stressors, African-Americans are at a greater risk for poor health.

Introduction

The African-American population is at a significantly greater risk for a number of health disparities than any other ethnic group in America. Among these disparities is a high risk of pre-term births and infant mortality. The racial differences in pre-term births and infant mortality rates are not explained by differences in class or socioeconomic status. This suggests that African-American women are affected by a common background—that perhaps the psychological stress effects on maternal health and the effects of pervasive racial discrimination stress that followed the emancipation and result of the poor physical and emotional conditions from the middle passage and slavery, (African-American Profile, 2009).

Stress of Slavery

The institution of slavery involved the total denigration and dehumanization of a person's humanity. The middle passage Europeans executed on slaves were deplorable and inhumane. The changes in hormone levels when the mother becomes stressed affect the hormone levels in the growing baby. This indirectly affects the health of the fetus. When women experience stress, especially when they are pregnant, it affects their children by impairing the blood flow in the developing child and exposing them to the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. Despite the resiliency of the African-American community, the psychological stressors that caused a genetic change, predisposing African-Americans to higher stress levels, slavery stresses include both the physical stress and the psychological stress. Both stressors contribute to the health of an individual and have been shown to affect a growing fetus. Grouped with the various current social discrimination stressors, African-Americans are at a greater risk for poor health.

Results

A number of studies have explored the relationships between socioeconomic, negative lifestyles and the current health disparities. What has commonly failed to be considered in the context of health disparities is the impact of the voyage of Africans to America through the Middle Passage.

Genetic and Fetal programming

Anthropologists now think the hostile social conditions a mother faces while pregnant can change the way the developing fetus’s DNA is expressed and furthermore, these deficits can be passed down through several generations through “trans-generational programming” (4). Fetal programming is a hypothesis that many diseases originate through adaptations undernourished fetuses make which permanently affect the fetus into its adult life. African-American women are more likely to be born underground in the first place because of the cumulative, trans-generational impact of chronic social stress and stress, implicated in problems like high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.

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Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma is a form of PTSD. It is the counterpart to the traumatic stress from the traumatized person to the caregiver. When members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories for ever, and changing their future in fundamental and irreversible ways. Through the reading of slave history, many develop some post-traumatic-like symptoms.

A study has found that there was a correlation between perceived racism and birth weight among any race, and perceived racism was a significant predictor of birth weight in African-Americans.

Stressors

Slavery

In order to sustain slavery, slaves were violently and systematically stripped of their culture, identity, and humanity. The primary source of control in administering slaves to the plantation system was by violence and the threat of violence. Slaves experienced: Extreme physical punishment; Stressful work; Long work hours; Public humiliation; Poor living conditions; Sexual exploitation; Lynching; Psychological undermining of self-esteem, group mistrust.

Trans-generative Stress

Birth outcomes

Figure 1.1 Trans-generational model of stress

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References

The racial differences in pre-term births and infant mortality, it is important to explore avenues to find what contributes to the problem. Cultural background and history may play a bigger role in this case than what has been studied.

By exploring the treatment and intervention of chronic stress in relation to culture and racial discrimination among African-American women, we may be able to reduce the high number of pre-term and low birth weight births. By using the model in understanding what contributes to negative birth outcomes, proper intervention programs, prenatal care, and health treatments can be explored. Prenatal care should be specialized to the problems that greatly affect the African-American community and help to keep these birth disparities low.

Conclusions

References


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