

The Influence of Coping on Depressive Symptoms for Older African Americans Post-Trauma

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Abstract:

Objectives: Past studies indicate that religious coping is commonly used among African Americans during times of distress. However, this study sought to explore other commonly utilized coping strategies and examine the influence of coping on psychological distress. The aims of this paper are to: (1) examine prominent coping mechanisms employed by older, African Americans, and (2) determine which coping mechanisms negatively influence depressive symptomatology.

Methods: Data was collected from 61, older African American trauma survivors, ages 55 to 98, via structured interviews. Coping strategies were measured with 26 items from the Brief COPE and depressive symptoms with 20 items using the CES-D. Categorical regression (elastic net regularization) and bootstrapping were used to investigate the relationship between the predictors and depression.

Results: The primary coping characteristics used by these respondents were acceptance, active coping, and positive reframing. The regression analysis indicated that emotional support, positive reframing, humor, and income have a buffering effect on depressive symptoms. Further, three maladaptive/avoidant coping strategies were positively associated with depressive symptoms; these were – self-blame, substance use, and self-distraction.

Conclusion: Participants were more likely to use a mix of both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies and least likely to utilize avoidant coping. Practice and research implications of these findings are presented.

Keywords:

Coping, depression, older African Americans, race, trauma.