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The
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Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms Can Cause Problems in the Bedroom for Midlife Women

New study suggests association between PTSD and poor sexual functioning

CLEVELAND, Ohio (Sept 27, 2023)—Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been associated with a number of adverse mental and physical health outcomes. Little is known, however, regarding its impact on sexual functioning among midlife women. A new study is shedding light on the topic, suggesting that greater PTSD symptoms lead to worse sexual functioning. Study results will be presented during the 2023 Annual Meeting of The Menopause Society in Philadelphia, September 27-30.

PTSD is more common among women than many people may believe, with approximately 10% of women reporting symptoms. The most common events leading to the development of PTSD include combat exposure, childhood physical abuse, and sexual violence. Despite the high prevalence of PTSD in women, there has been little research done regarding the association between PTSD symptoms and sexual functioning among midlife women.

A new study involving more than 100 postmenopausal women 45-66 years of age sought to determine if PTSD symptoms were associated with worse sexual functioning among midlife women after accounting for potentially confounding factors, such as age, race/ethnicity, education, vaginal estrogen use, alcohol use, and depressive symptoms. To qualify, study participants had to have experienced PTSD symptoms and had sexual activity within the month prior to evaluation.

On average, women who reported moderate and severe PTSD symptoms also reported lower sexual functioning. When specific aspects of PTSD symptoms were considered, greater avoidance/numbing symptoms were related to poorer sexual functioning, causing the researchers to conclude that greater past-month PTSD symptomology was related to worse sexual functioning. Results suggest the importance of assessing and addressing PTSD symptoms among midlife women to improve their sexual health and functioning as they age.

Study results will be presented at this year's Annual Meeting of The Menopause Society as part of the presentation entitled "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms and Sexual Functioning Among Midlife Women."

"Many midlife women experience profound changes in their mood, physical health, and social relationships, in part related to the menopause transition," says Dr. Karen Jakubowski, lead author from the Department of Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. "Currently, there is little research on the long-term health effects of PTSD symptoms, specifically among midlife women. Our results highlight the need to better understand women's trauma histories and PTSD symptoms in order to provide optimal clinical care for women during midlife."

“As women age, there are many reasons why sexual functioning may become an issue for them,” says Dr. Stephanie Faubion, medical director for The Menopause Society. “This study highlights the need for healthcare professionals to ask about any history of trauma and open-up the dialogue with their patients on this sensitive issue.”

Drs. Jakubowski and Faubion are available for interviews before and after the presentation at the Annual Meeting.

For more information about menopause and healthy aging, visit www.menopause.org.

The Menopause Society (formerly The North American Menopause Society) is dedicated to empowering healthcare professionals and providing them with the tools and resources to improve the health of women during the menopause transition and beyond. As the leading authority on menopause since 1989, the nonprofit, multidisciplinary organization serves as the independent, evidence-based resource for healthcare professionals, researchers, the media, and the public and leads the conversation about improving women’s health and healthcare experiences. To learn more, visit menopause.org.