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Spirituality as Buffer to Stress from Domestic Violence

Excessive stress can epigenetically alter an individual's DNA and affect mental health. For instance, women who have been exposed to domestic violence have been found to have psychopathological alterations in their behaviors and in their hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis functioning. However, these changes are reversible because people can change their genetic makeup by changing their thoughts and beliefs. This provides an opportunity for domestic violence survivors from acquiring behavioral and cognitive practices that support healthier epigenetic modifications in the expression of genes. The use of strategies centered on spirituality has been proposed as a skill that can enhance resilience, which is the ability to adapt to stress and adversities. Similar to the epigenetic mechanisms involved in excessive stress, resilience can also alter gene expressions that support healthier neuropsychological functioning. Among victims of domestic violence, enhancing their spirituality through prayers, meditation, or cognitive reframing can lead to neuropsychological changes that can offset the negative psychopathological alterations that occur during excessive stress. A study that frames spirituality as a buffer for stress caused by domestic violence can be significant in further illuminating the power of thoughts and beliefs in influencing our neurological functioning.

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