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Empowering Parents to Safeguard the Well-Being of Black Girls

Empowering Parents to Safeguard the Well-Being of Black Girls



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Sexual Behavior in Children and Youth

This webinar is a part of the SBCY series, which addresses normal sexual behavior in children in addition to exploring cautionary and problematic sexual behavior that children may display. Various factors associated with children's sexual behavior are identified in order to assist clinicians in understanding the appropriate assessment and disclosure processes involved when problematic symptoms are present.

OneOp.org/sbcy-series

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The presenter has no relationships or conflicts of interest to report.

Today's Presenter



Dr. Tyffani Monford Dent (she/her/ella)

Licensed Psychologist, Owner,
Monford Dent Consulting &
Psychological Services, LLC

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Learning Objectives

1. Describe trauma-informed care and its role in creating safe spaces for black girls and their families
2. Identify the significance of involving families of black girls in the treatment process and fostering an inclusive environment for parents of color
3. Demonstrate and discuss strategies for creating culturally competent care in the context of children and youth impacted by the problematic sexual behavior of other children and youth

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Short Answer Response

Why are you attending this webinar? What do you hope to learn today?

Share your response in the chat-pod.

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For Girls – Framework for the Black Female Youth Experience

- Trauma responses are often criminalized (running away, substance use, truancy), even more so for Black girls (Sherman & Black, 2015).
- Higher prevalence rates of probable lifetime PTSD/trauma for Black girls (Alegria, et al, 2013).
- For Black Girls, trauma experiences are often minimized or not fully captured in popular definitions (Warner, 2017; Henderson, 2017).
 - Trauma experiences may often overlap because of their intersectional identities.

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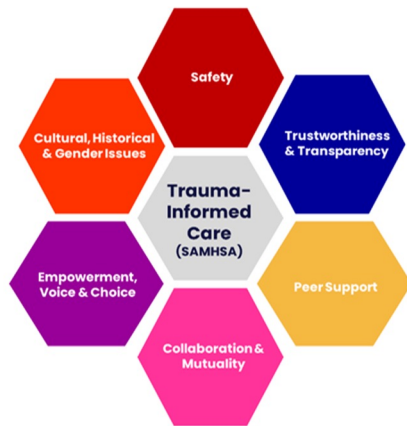
About Black Girls

- Intersectionality – their identity is impacted by race and gender
- Research has demonstrated a failure to view Black girls as children, needing to be supported, or requiring nurturing.
- Systems have disproportionately punished Black girls for similar behaviors as White counterparts.
- Black girls experiences with systems have contributed to their involvement in juvenile justice systems (school, sexual abuse/trauma, foster care).
- Positive cultural/racial identity has demonstrated to have better outcomes for Black girls.
- Minimization of sexual harassment because of falsehoods around cultural norms (Carter, et al 2019; Tonneson, 2013).
- May also minimize their own challenges in comparison to Black boys (Seaton & Tyson, 2019).

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Trauma-Informed Care



Trauma Policy: More on Trauma-Informed Care
www.traumapolicy.org/topics/trauma-informed-care

Culturally informed practices should be the foundation of all components of trauma-informed care.

Cultural considerations are not just principles, but are overarching.

Examples of TIC-Cultural In Practice



Tina is a 15 year old AA female referred for services due to concerns about her sexual acting out behaviors within the school.

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Considerations of TIC-Cultural In Practice

- How family views sexuality/sexual health in Black girls.
- What it means for the family to seek services.
- Acknowledging any weariness regarding school system punishment and being sent for mental health services.
- Discussing with Tina what will be disclosed to parents and opportunities for what this looks like.
- Using resources that are in the voices of Black girls, including examples from various mediums (YA fiction, tv shows, music, etc).

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Safety



Image from Adobe Stock, ID #20445332

- Black girls should feel physically and psychologically safe.
- Feel as if they matter – prioritizing them.
- Using resources designed with them in mind.
- Basic safety concerns from a cultural framework – historical (and current) engagements with systems, over-surveilling, biases within Child Welfare.
- Stressing confidentiality even more than usual.

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Trustworthiness and Transparency

Honest about own lack of knowledge or understanding of cultural implications of their experiences.

Can be counted on to advocate for their needs and community's concerns.

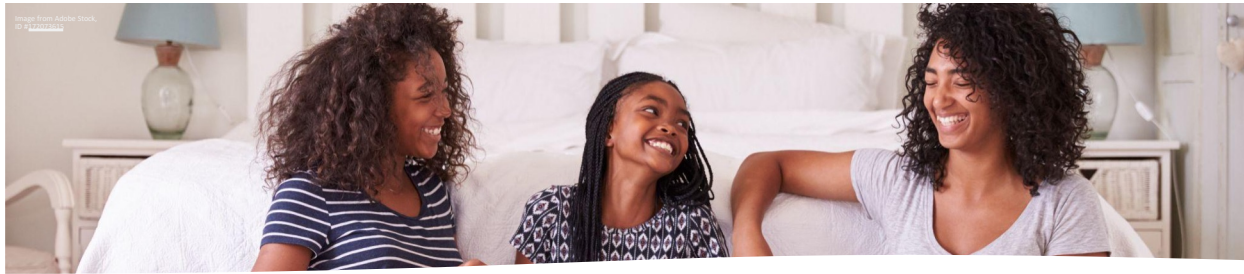
Do not minimize the agency's or society's lack of meeting the unique needs of Black girls.

They are experts in their own culture.

Allow them to assist in developing Treatment Agreements.

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Peer Support

- Connection to groups - therapy and otherwise - that focus on Black girls.
- Create safe spaces for them to engage with each other - where they are centered/the focus.
- Understanding that they are more socially disadvantaged than Black males when in White spaces (Ispa-Landa, 2013).

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Family Involvement

- Defining family
- Role of family in treatment
- Reframing familial resistance
- Assessing and acknowledging cultural beliefs



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Defining Family

- Culturally may be outside of the nuclear family definition.
- Familial titles may be given due to closeness versus biology (e.g. "aunt" = mother's best friend).
- Some expansion of the definition due to historical context and diasporic beliefs (lack of acknowledgement of familial relationships in slavery, non-Westernized family systems).

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Why is Family Involvement Necessary?

Children exist within systems – one of the most powerful is the family system.

We may assist in change, the family will need to maintain it.

Some issues are generational, so require generational shifts.

Presentation by Dr. Tyffani Monford Dent.
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Within Military Families



- Expectation that family well-being contributes to QOL, resilience, readiness.
- The family is primarily responsible for meaningful family relationship.
- In cases of PSB-CY within military families, parent engagement required.

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Black mothers and fathers have supported their children in ways that are promotive of healthy identities and protect against the negative effects of discrimination.

(Cooper, et. al 2020; Umana-Taylor, et. al, 2014; Jones, et. al 2021).

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When Does Family Engagement Begin?

- First session
- Part of Assessment Process
- Assist in Goal Identification
- Family Therapy
- Remain in all stages of treatment

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Family Engagement Through All Stages of Treatment

- Treatment progress/red flags
- Psychoeducation support/reinforcement
- Supervision requirements/safety planning
- Clarification around the problematic sexual behavior and its impact, reconciliation, reunification (if applicable).

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JUSTICE
FOR BLACK GIRLS

"A lot of the time we blame Black girls for using their trauma as a crutch when the reality is we're refusing to acknowledge that they need a crutch in the first place."

Rissy McDonald, 16

Slide from Justice for Black girls, used with permission.

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System History (and Present)

- Disproportionate punishment of Black girls within educational and juvenile justice systems (Baumle, 2018; Morris (Couvson), 2018; Sherman & Balck, 2015).
- Systemic history of viewing familial concerns/issues as more severe than for White families (2012 Minnesota and Michigan child welfare & family practitioner studies).
- APA acknowledgement of use of psychological practices in a way that harmed Black people (APA 2021).

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Intracultural Support

- Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory
 - jmgomez.org/cultural-betrayal-trauma-theory/
- Black communities recognize societal injustices/mistreatment.
- Can only rely on the community for support.
 - Use of outside systems/people are harmful and pressure to avoid them.



APA Book – The Cultural Betrayal of Black Women and Girls:
A Black Feminist Approach to Healing From Sexual Abuse
<https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/3838880-sample-pages.pdf>

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Topic Sensitivity

- Discussion of sex and sexual abuse often stigmatized or discouraged (Tillman, et al 2001).
- Disclosure of abuse does not happen (Black Women's Blueprint, Tyagi, 2002).
- Prioritizing of preserving the family unit (Dunkley, 2022).
- Reliance on non-system for coping and addressing situation (Perry-Burney et al., 2014).
- Historical/cultural messages (Stone, 2004):
 - Too busy to heal
 - Bodies not our own
 - Hypersexuality of Black women/girls

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Fear

- Knowledge about disproportionate sentencing and system punishments.
 - Substantiation, Legal System (Fix et al., 2023)
- Feeding into societal perceptions of community dysfunction and historical arguments regarding hypersexuality.



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Assessment & Acknowledgment

- View of child's needs – who is prioritized in it?
- Internalized adultification biases and racialized stereotypes (French, 2013).
- Views on sex and what constitutes healthy sexuality.
- Views of system and system involvement.

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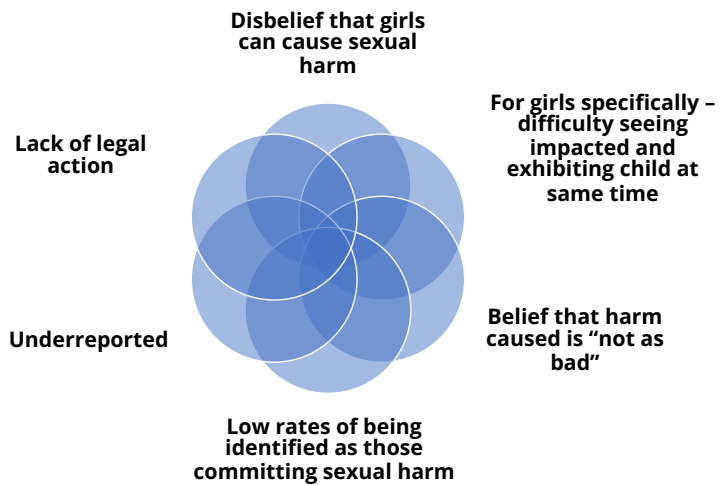
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Adherence to myths about sexual abuse and who can cause harm

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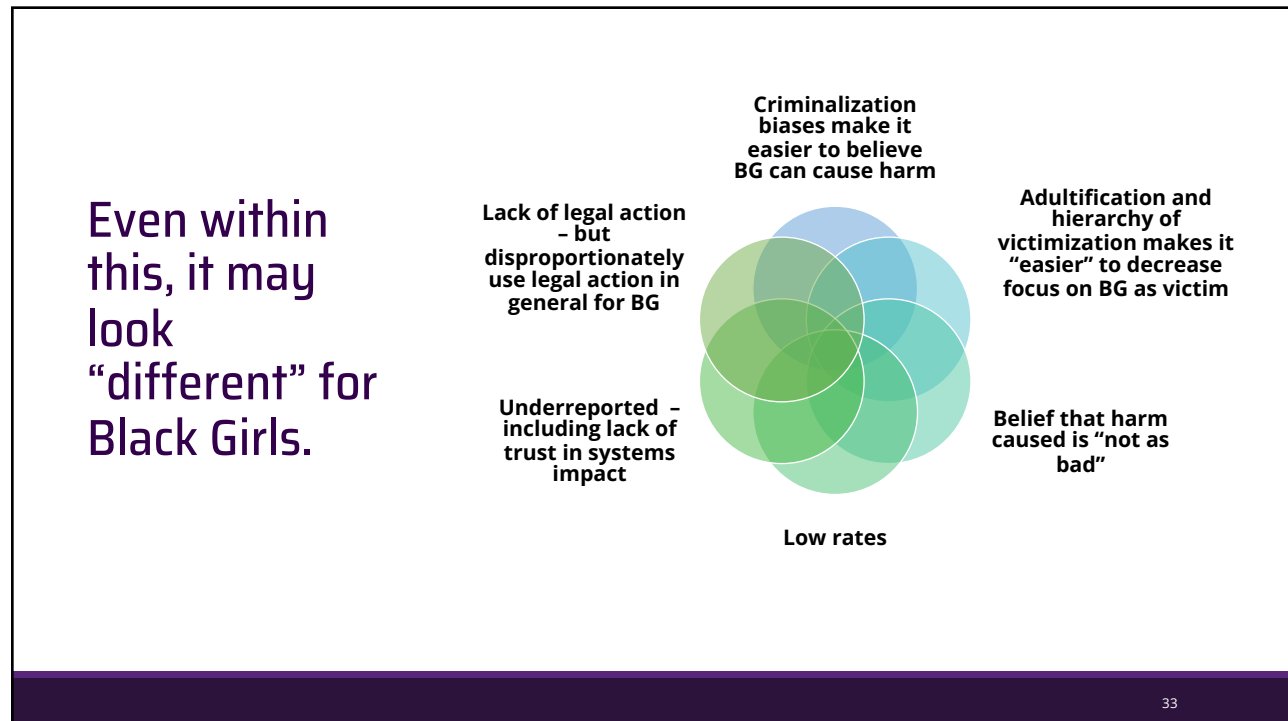
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Within the field in general, we hold girls less accountable when they exhibit problematic sexual behavior.



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Addressing Problematic Sexual Behavior When Legal Action is **Not** Taken.

- Not a measure of need to address the sexual behavior – problematic is not always synonymous with legal sanctions.
- Support intensity not based upon system response to severity – problematic behaviors should be addressed based upon what they are, not on whether system sanctions occur.

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Space for messages received about Black girlhood – when they are victims of child abuse and also engage in problematic sexual behavior.

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When Girls Are Victims of Child Abuse and Also Engage in PSB

- Challenge messages around adultification and nurturing.
 - Lessons on sexual knowledge, expectations, accountability (ex: “fast, grown, sneaky”).
- In cases of victimization of males, recognize own beliefs/impact on needing to change behavior.
- Address how child/youth victimization and causing harm can co-exist in the same person.
 - Address victimization when applicable – including disclosure, self-blaming, etc.

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Own therapeutic self-evaluation (as treatment provider) for children/youth with problematic sexual behaviors.

Wrongly revert to confrontational versus appropriate therapeutic communication

Age-appropriate responses not deemed as such

Assume the child/youth know more than they do about the significance of what they have done

Minimize need of focus on their own traumatic experiences/not as incorporated in treatment

Addressing sexuality/sexual feelings while ignoring societal sexualization of them

Our own biases and those within our assessments (Campbell 2018; Venner 2021)

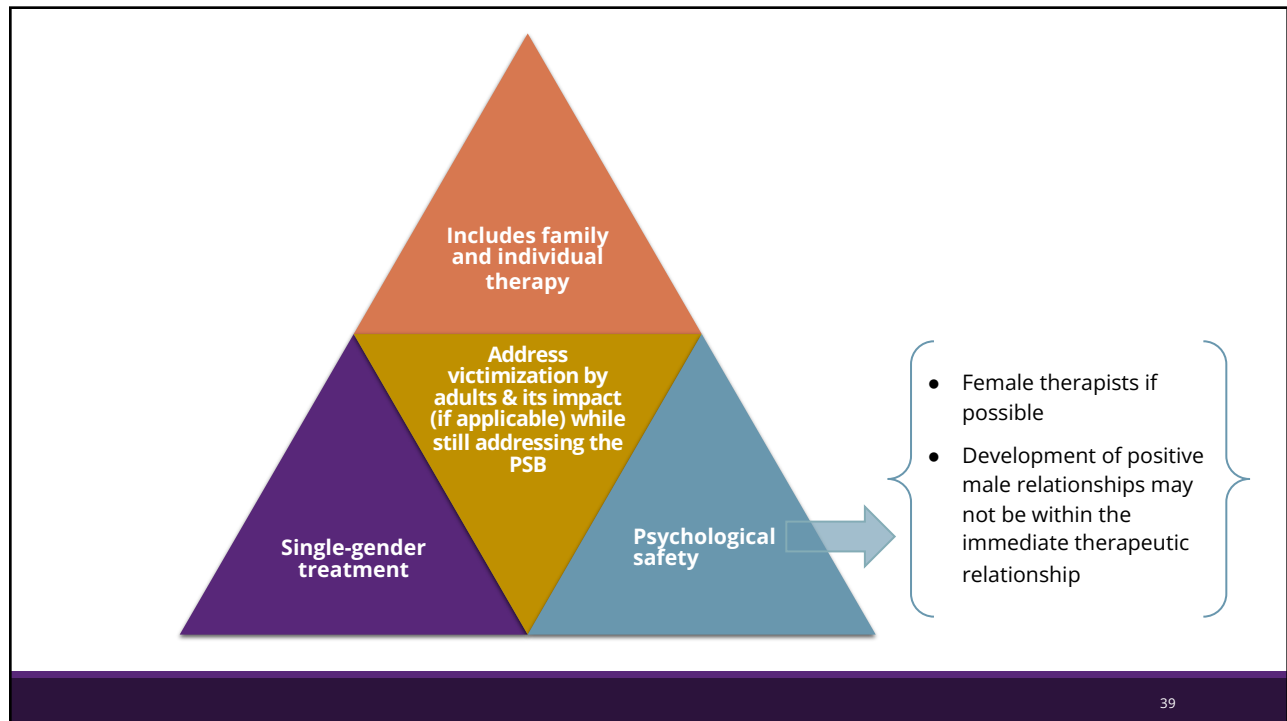
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Still Gender-Responsive within the Cultural Context

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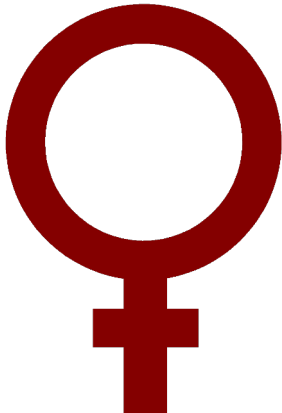
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Gender-Responsive

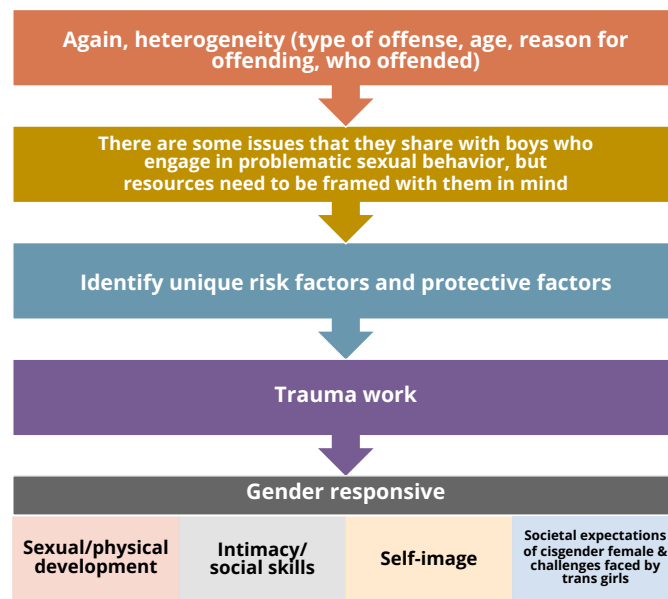
- Theories of females' harmful sexual behaviors
- Psychological development, socialization and lifespan issues
- Evidence-based trauma theories
- Voices heard
- Robinson's Offense-Relational Model
 - Self, relationship, socio-cultural, healing, academic, sexual, spiritual
 - Gender-responsive



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What to do when addressing girls who have engaged in problematic sexual behavior



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Sexual Health/Decision-Making in Treatment

- The coming of age process is often a relational experience that focuses on how girls develop both independence as well as interdependence with important individuals in their lives (Field & Simmons, 2019).
- Interventions that celebrate and empower girls of color while simultaneously acknowledging and attending to the ramifications of historical and contemporary manifestations of oppression and injustice (Bryant-Davis, 2019).
- Racial socialization and support are protective factors for Black girls (Whaley, et al 2017).

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Sexual Health/Decision-Making in Treatment

- Culturally and gender-responsive sexual health interventions aim to address intersectional experiences among Black adolescent females in the U.S. (Williamson et al 2017).
- Work with families to challenge messages about physical appearance, sexual health, sexuality, and stereotyping (Williams-Butler, et al 2024).

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Understand and ensure treatment focuses on what we know about girls who engage in problematic sexual behavior.

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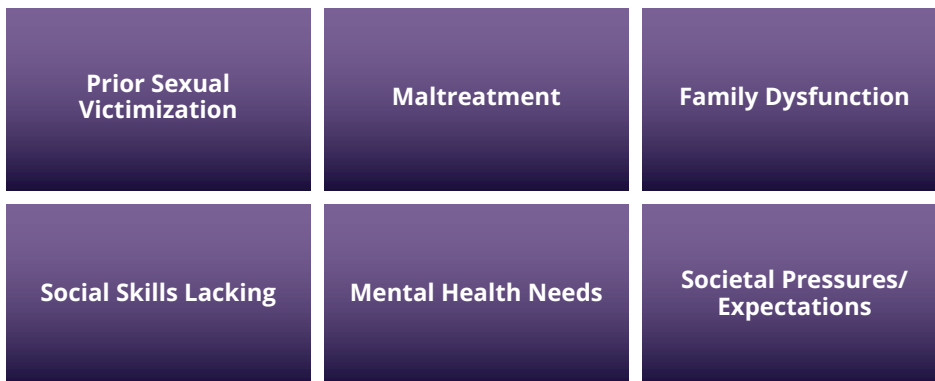
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Girls Who Engage in Problematic Sexual Behavior

- Typically, research has shown that juvenile females are more prone to engage in problematic sexual behavior towards family members, relatives, and acquaintances, indicating both intrafamilial and extrafamilial child sexual abuse.
- May engage in hitting/physical aggression (Tardif, 2005).
- Often happens at home (Wijkman et al 2015; Vandiver, 2010).
- Males impacted higher when they are peers than when they are younger children – results vary on this (Budd & Briere 2018).

Identified Commonalities

Characteristics Among Girls who Have Engaged in PSB



Finkelhor, et al 2009; 7; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006; Hickey, McCrory, Farmer, & Vizard, 2008; McCartan, Law, Murphy, & Bailey, 2011.

From a Black Girl Framework

- Prior sexual victimization – not disclosed, not believed, minimized.
- Maltreatment – system response more likely to criminalize their responses; more likely to experience more ACES (Hampton, 2021: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2019).
 - Ex: trauma-to-prison pipeline; contributes to depression (Waller et al 2022).
- Family dysfunction – exposure to violence, lack of support, community prioritizing Black boyhood – internalizing this.
- Social skills
- Mental health needs – stigma around addressing it or it is criminalized.
- Societal Pressures/Expectations – adultification biases, colorism, Eurocentric standards.

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Overall Treatment

- **Family involvement is key.**
- Cultural impact on treatment experiences and engagement, views of accountability, expectations of Black girls, and sexual health/healthy sexual decision-making.
- Incorporate own trauma experiences (if applicable) using culturally-informed, trauma-informed care.
- Gender-responsive treatment from intersectional framework – and how it looks different for Black girls.
- Addressing problematic sexual behavior – goals must include their sexual decision-making, sex education, and view of their own sexual health.

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Questions? Closing Comments?

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Resources

- Trauma-Informed Care <https://www.traumapolicy.org/topics/trauma-informed-care>
- Cultural Betrayal Trauma Theory jmgomez.org/cultural-betrayal-trauma-theory/
- APA Book – The Cultural Betrayal of Black Women and Girls: A Black Feminist Approach to Healing From Sexual Abuse
- <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/3838880-sample-pages.pdf>
- National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth <https://www.ncsby.org/>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/sexual-abuse>
- RAINN <https://www.rainn.org/articles/child-sexual-abuse>
- Darkness to Light <https://www.d2l.org/get-help/identifying-abuse/>
- The Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/moore-center-for-the-prevention-of-child-sexual-abuse>

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This webinar has been approved for **1.5 continuing education (CE) credit hours** from the following:

- The American Association for Family and Consumer Sciences
- The University of Texas at Austin, Steve Hicks School of Social Work
- The Commission for Case Manager Certification
- The National Council on Family Relations
- The Patient Advocate Certification Board
- Certificates of Attendance

Evaluation Link

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Questions?

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Upcoming Webinar



Embracing Identity: Fostering Positive Emotional Growth in Teens and Young Adults

May 14, 2024, 11 AM - 12:30 PM ET

Participants of this webinar will define adolescent mental health and its intersection with education, and identify strategies to support positive emotional growth and identity exploration. **Continuing education credits are available!**



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