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Passport to freedom: A Women's Reentry Program promoting health after trauma

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Incarceration rates of women, especially substance using African Americans, are increasing. Up to 90% of incarcerated women report a history of violence with the majority experiencing poly-victimization. Although there are interventions for formerly incarcerated women to reintegrate into their communities, few help women understand and cope with the physical/emotional impact of trauma. Unemployment and financial insecurity increase risks for mental health morbidities such as anxiety and depressive symptoms. Repetitive exposure to physical, psychological and/or sexual violence may result in chronic physical and mental health problems, including PTSD symptoms, which may interfere with daily functioning and sustained employment. The purpose of this study is to examine the acceptability, feasibility, and effectiveness of a trauma-informed mindfulness-based intervention for formerly incarcerated women. An exploratory case studies design composed of three phases; (1) focus groups with key informants and previously incarcerated women (pre-intervention), (2) intervention sessions to promote physical and emotional well-being through a combination of mindfulness techniques and health promotion activities over 6 weeks, and (3) follow-up evaluation 4 weeks after intervention. Qualitative findings from focus groups and quantitative findings from pre and post-intervention questionnaires of baseline demographics; Experiences in close relationships-Relationship Survey (ECR-RS), Severity of Violence against Women Survey (SVAWS), Everyday Stressor Index (ESI), and Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). Comparison of pre-post measures revealed decreased symptoms of depression, decreased experiences of violence, and decreased concern about everyday stressors. Sixteen (84%) reported practicing mindfulness exercises learned in class and would recommend the program to others. P2F is a promising approach to improve the physical/mental health of previously incarcerated women who experienced multiple traumas by increasing their knowledge of the connection between trauma/stress and health, providing tools to manage their health, and providing strategies to cope with symptoms of trauma/stress.

Biography

Phyllis Sharps, PhD, RN, FAAN, Elsie M. Lawler Endowed Chair, Professor of Nursing and Associate Dean for Community Programs and Initiatives, at the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing. She is internationally known for her research, leadership of interdisciplinary research teams and her advocacy for violence against pregnant and parenting women. She has published more than 90 articles on reducing violence among African American women, specifically, the physical and mental health consequences of violence against pregnant and parenting women, infants, and very young children. She has been the principal investigator for 2 NIH funded grants, totaling more than \$8M.

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