The role of perceived social support in the relationship between sexual victimization and post-traumatic stress symptomatology among college women

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Abstract

Sexual victimization is an act of interpersonal violence that affects the lives of many college women. Such incidents are often characterized by women as traumatic experiences which also result forms of psychological distress, with the most common being posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The relationship between sexual victimization and PTSD is strengthened by revictimization. Although perceived social support has been shown to play a protective role in the sexual victimization→psychological distress relationship, there is also evidence that the moderating effect of perceived social support diminishes with chronic distress. Therefore, the current study assumed that there would be a changing role of perceived social support, from a moderator to a mediator, in the relationship between sexual victimization and PTSD. Three hundred college females (mean age 19) completed questionnaires related to sexual victimization experiences, perceived social support, and PTSD symptoms in addition to other personality and socio-demographic factors. The hypotheses were not supported. However, as with previous findings, the results showed that sexual victimization significantly predicted PTSD symptom severity.