

research snapshot

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Single Mothers' Depression is Affected by Employment Status and Stress Rather than the Ways in Which They Cope

What is this research about?

Income-assisted single mothers are more likely to experience depression than other groups of women. This is because unemployment leaves them more vulnerable to stress and the development of depression. For many, coping is one way to respond to these outside influences. Coping strategies include preventing the occurrence of stress, minimizing its impact, or trying to control the meaning and outcomes of stress. Because much of our health and social service efforts have been set in place to enhance people's coping skills, we still need to know if these strategies assist single mothers in dealing with depression or if coping impacts the nature of depression.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher used survey data completed by single mothers who were employed or receiving social assistance. Each of the participants had at least one child between the age of 4 and 18 years. These mothers were asked to complete a checklist of any stressful events that they may have experienced in the last 24 months. They were also asked to rate their feelings from two weeks prior to the survey, and share how

What you need to know:

Coping is an important tool for single mothers who work or who rely on social assistance. However, it does not always help these women deal with their feelings of depression. The type of coping strategy used also influences the impact of stress while one experiences depression.

extensive their depression felt. Finally, they were asked to reflect on a problem in their lives within the last six months, and consider the specific coping strategies that they used.

What did the researcher find?

In their responses, mothers on social assistance reported more stress and severe depression than working mothers. While both groups used coping strategies, employed single mothers were more likely to use problem solving rather than avoidance coping. Thus, the researcher found that coping did not necessarily help these women deal with their depression. Instead, coping influenced the way that single mothers handled it. The researcher also found that stress was associated with the flexibility of the person to use

a variety of coping strategies, which would also come to influence their levels of depression.

How can you use this research?

This research may support frontline workers and policymakers in the field of nursing, social work, and social service providers. It offers recommendations on interventions for single mothers dealing with depression. It notes the absence in looking at social factors that affect their depression by some support services. It also gives an insight on the priority of mental health support for single mothers and others.

About the Researcher

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