Childhood Abuse Linked to Uterine Fibroids in African-American Women

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Physical or sexual abuse during childhood can create a slew of negative health effects that show up during adulthood. Recent research uncovered some long-lasting connections between childhood trauma and the development of stress-related fibroids later in life, according to findings published in the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology and reported by the Grio.

For the study, researchers reviewed the health records of 9,910 black women from across the United States who participated in the Black Women's Health Study at Boston University. Scientists found a higher incidence of fibroids among women who had experienced sexual or physical abuse during childhood, compared with those women who had not.

Fibroids are noncancerous tumors that grow in the wall of the uterus and produce a range of effects on the body. Some women feel nothing, while others experience heavy bleeding, painful sex or pregnancy complications as a result of the condition. But doctors don't really know what actually causes these pesky lumps.

In general, black women are three times more likely to develop uterine fibroids than white women, and they are more likely to be diagnosed with them at earlier ages and with greater severity. This new research highlights childhood abuse more than race as a possible cause of the condition.

"Childhood sexual abuse is considered a chronic stressor because those experiences can remain with a person long after [they have] occurred," said Amani Nuru-Jeter, MD, an associate professor at UC Berkeley's School of Public Health. "The stress experience can repeat itself over and over until the issue is resolved."

But not everyone who experienced childhood abuse develops these uterine tumors. Study findings showed that abused women who got support from others, such as family members, friends or counselors, were less likely to get fibroids than those who coped alone. In addition, certain coping skills were associated with inflammation in the body that could make women more susceptible to developing fibroids or other health conditions.

Similarly, other studies have linked stress with adult-onset asthma in African-American women. Click here to read more.

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