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Spiritual Coping Behaviors Among Injured Urban Black Men in Philadelphia

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Abstract

Purpose: High rates of firearm injury among urban Black men in the US can lead to long physical and psychological recovery times, worsened by limited access to mental health services. Spirituality can propel positive thoughts, actions, perceptions and behaviors about self and others yet how it is used among Black men recovering from firearm injury is underexplored. This study examined the role of spirituality in the recovery of Black male survivors of firearm injury.

Method: Ten injured urban Black men in Philadelphia were interviewed using descriptive phenomenology. A subset of participants from the Emotional Responses and Recovery from Injury in Urban Black Men study who agreed to be recontacted for future studies were enrolled. Informed consent was obtained, semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone and were audiotaped, transcribed, and de-identified. Thematic content analysis was used to understand perceptions of spirituality and to identify spiritual coping behavior themes.

Results: Findings suggest that injured urban Black men engaged in theistic and non-theistic spiritual activities that resulted in positive character development, reduced risk of re-injury, hope, improved mental health and social bonds.

Conclusion: Spirituality may serve as a protective factor against firearm re-injury or retaliation by promoting desired behaviors and mental health among injured urban Black men. Combining culturally sensitive spiritual resources and psychotherapy may lead to effective trauma-informed care in addressing spiritual and existential challenges of injured urban Black men who may find spirituality important.

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Keywords

Spiritual Coping; Firearm Injury; Black Men; Trauma; Spiritual Care

Introduction

Increasingly, spirituality is being conceptualized as a social determinant of health (Ransome, 2020) yet its utility among Black male survivors of firearm injury is understudied.

Spirituality is defined as “the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationships that are sacred or transcendent” (Koenig, 2001), which is different from religion: “an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols” (Koenig, Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012, p18). Spirituality is an inextricable tenet of human life that helps individuals overcome daily challenges.

Recent studies have shown that people who report living a spiritual lifestyle maintain a better outlook on life even when in pain or facing difficult challenges (VanderWeele, 2017). Black male survivors of firearm violence are often reintegrated into communities after acute treatment without the necessary physical, psychological and emotional support (Smith et al., 2020). In the absence of these important social services to aid in their recovery, Black men may draw upon their spirituality. Currently, the potential benefits that spirituality may offer in the face of the difficulties posed during firearm injury recovery and how Black men perceive and use spirituality during recovery from firearm injury is scant in the literature.

Black communities and men are disproportionately affected by firearm violence compared to all other ethnic/racial groups (Mehranbod et al., 2022). In Philadelphia, firearm assault is five times higher in Black neighborhoods, including high income Black neighborhoods, than in White neighborhoods. High frequency and concentration of firearm assaults are found in low-income areas which are largely inhabited by Black people (Beard et al., 2017; Beard et al., 2021). In 2020, firearm violence in Philadelphia County cost the city \$307.5 million in healthcare costs not accounting for prison cost, lost wages, productivity, and emotional and psychological suffering (City of Philadelphia, 2022).

Black male survivors of firearm violence experience increased rates of depression, anxiety, stress, substance use disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to White and Hispanic male survivors (Jacoby, Rich, Webster & Richmond, 2020). And yet Black men are the racial group least likely to fully utilize secular mental health services. Overall, Black men are 50% less likely to seek and use professional mental health services compared to their White counterparts after accounting for socioeconomic and clinical factors (Hankerson et al., 2011). The mismatch between the burden of mental health symptoms after firearm injury is at odds with the limited access to and use of mental health services and impedes optimal recovery. Further high levels of psychological distress after firearm injury places Black men at increased risk for future violent injury (Rich & Grey, 2005).

Spirituality can positively impact depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicide ideation and other mental health challenges resulting from unresolved trauma (McClintock et al., 2019; Rijkers, Schoorl, van Hoeken, & Hoek, 2019; VanderWeele, 2017). Spirituality has been

shown to influence recovery among Black males and was a source of strength for Black men during the transatlantic slavery and civil rights movements in the US (Leon, 2020). In fact, it is woven in the very fabric of Black cultural heritage (Baxter, Medlock & Griffith, 2019). For example, better recovery among Black males receiving cancer, heart failure and HIV treatment is associated with inner strength, peace and meaning making, all of which are tenets of spirituality (Hamilton, 2020). Black men who underwent transplant surgery and identified as being spiritual exhibited high levels of recovery and convalescence post-operation (Adugbire & Aziato, 2020). The downstream sequela in the absence of spirituality can render longer recovery time and life-threatening challenges (O'Neill et al., 2020).

Due to the positive relationship between spirituality and health, the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN, 2007) initiative and The Joint Commission practice guidelines have embedded spiritual care as a core competency nurses must possess (Joint Commission, 2015). Consistent with this priority, the NIH in October 2020, launched The Religion, Spirituality, and Health Scientific Interest Group to promote research on the intersection between spirituality and health in order to care for the whole person.

Nurses are extensively involved in the care of injured urban Black men either during the acute phase or post discharge. However, literature on spiritual coping behaviors among this population is lacking. Yet building knowledge about spiritual coping could inform how nurses design preventive interventions, treatment, and recovery strategies/modalities for injured urban Black men. An in-depth understanding of spiritual coping behaviors may positively impact how nurses design discharge plans and the necessary community resources needed to support the spiritual journey of injured urban Black men.

This study is informed by the spiritual framework of coping (Gall, 2005) which is a transactional model of stress and coping rooted in an individual's spirituality. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of spirituality and to elucidate the spiritual coping behaviors of urban Black men who survived a firearm injury in Philadelphia.

Methods

This pilot study utilized a qualitative design including thematic analysis based on descriptive phenomenology, purposive sampling, and open-ended semi-structured interviews. Qualitative descriptive phenomenology allows the researcher to understand participant experience of spirituality and how it translates into their lived experience (Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson, & Palmér, 2019). The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Pennsylvania (Protocol #: 814745)

Population & Setting:

The study enrolled a subset of participants from the Emotional Responses and Recovery from Injury in Urban Black Men study who agreed to be recontacted for future studies. Inclusion criteria for the parent study included admission to a trauma center with a diagnosis of injury between January 2013 through May 2016, self-identified as male and Black or African American, spoke English, able to read and provide informed consent to participate in the study, completed 3 month follow up data collection and lived in the greater

Philadelphia metropolitan area. Participants with pre-existing mental status dysfunction of central nervous system injury that would preclude ability to consent or participate in interviews, who were receiving treatment from a provider for depression or PTSD, or experienced a self-inflicted injury/suicide attempt were excluded. For this study, the study coordinator from the parent study identified previous participants who had consented to be re-contacted for future studies and whose mechanism of injury was an interpersonal firearm injury.

Procedure:

The study coordinator from the parent study made the initial contact to potential participants and, if there was interest in participating, provided a warm hand-off to the principal investigator (ACOB). At that time the study was described in detail. If immediately available, a verbal consent was obtained, and the interview commenced. If not immediately available, an appointment was made, at which time verbal consent was obtained and the interview took place.

Standard demographic data were collected at the beginning of the interview. The primary investigator recorded and conducted semi-structured interviews over the phone that lasted between 35–45 minutes. Participants were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions to elicit their perception of spirituality as well as spiritual coping behaviors employed in their recovery. Questions were informed by Gall's spiritual framework of coping (Gall et al., 2005), but were broad enough to allow explorations of issues raised by participants in more depth. For example, participants were asked, "What does spirituality mean to you? What are your views and perceptions on spirituality? What is your knowledge of higher power or God? How would you describe your relationship with a higher power or God?" To further explore coping, questions included: "What role does spirituality play in your life? How do you cope with the challenges in life? What has been beneficial to you in your recovery process? Can you describe spiritual practices you engage in and why they are important to you? Participants were given a \$50 gift card for their time and participation.

Rigor

The principal investigator conducted all interviews after participants had been screened by the study coordinator. Participants were encouraged to freely express themselves as well as decline questions or the entire study at any time of their choosing without any repercussions. A code number was assigned to each interview and that, along with the use of verbal consent, maximally protected confidentiality. A research assistant transcribed audiotaped recordings verbatim removing any identifying information (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Transcription was verified against the audiotaped recording. Selected transcripts were first coded by the principal investigator and reviewed with an experienced research member of the study team (Krefting, 1991). Upon the completion of the review, the principal investigator trained a research assistant and reconciled any discrepancies until codes were in agreement.

Data Analysis

Sample characteristics were summarized using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was performed to elucidate emerging themes and codes based on descriptive phenomenology (Sundler et al., 2019). Transcripts were read in entirety and also line by line and repeated until recurrent patterns emerged (Adu, 2019; Saunders et al., 2018). Initial codes were descriptively defined to facilitate consistent application across coders and interviews. Consensus was used to reach agreement between coders as necessary. Participant responses were assigned to one of the two following thematic categories based on the theoretical foundation and overall purpose of the study (Adu, 2019). These were perception of spirituality, and theistic and non-theistic spiritual coping behaviors.

Results

A total of ten Black men were interviewed with a mean age of 34.6 years. The majority were single (90%), unemployed (97%), and 10% were college educated. The average time since they experienced their hospitalization for firearm injury was 6 years.

The three themes are presented in figure 1. These are perception of spirituality and spiritual coping behaviors. Within the thematic category of spiritual coping behaviors were 2 sub-themes which included 1) theistic spiritual practices, and 2) non-theistic spiritual practices. These themes are exemplified by participants' verbatim quotes. Selected quotes are presented below.

Perception of Spirituality:

Participants described their views on spirituality, their understanding and what it means to them in varying ways. Perceptions of spirituality were rooted in both theistic and non-theistic views.

Ways in which spirituality was expressed in theistic views include:

Spirituality to me means quality of life. Spirituality means you know, the air we breathe when we wake up in the morning. When you know, I go to my doctor and they tell me, you know, my blood pressure is ok, or I don't have blood clot. You know, I pray and thank God for that.

Spirituality has always been a guiding light for people. Spirituality has to do with your body. How do you treat it and what kind of energy you give out to people. The man above, he is all-knowing and all-seeing. He can do no wrong and you cannot question him. Capitalize that last one—do not question him, his will.

Another participant described spirituality as a way of life that sets standards for living life, his perception of spirituality was rooted in both theistic and non-theistic views:

It's your way of life. It's the, you know, your life, it's kind of hard to pinpoint and say---it's just your way of life. That's how it's supposed to be. I mean everybody got their different views on it. That's why, like, your spirituality is your way of life. I mean like if you went to your Lord, you're going to live more righteously, if you went to chaos then your life will be more chaotic. So, it's your way of life, that's

your spirituality. If you are going to be doing the worldly stuff, then your spirit is going to be wrapped up in that. It's just your way of life. You know, I'm Muslim so how you going to carry yourself and live up to them standards and try to live up to the standards, then you know, that's why I would say it's your way of life, it's a way of life for me. That's how it is. Spirituality to me means quality of life. Spirituality means you know, the air we breathe when we wake up in the morning.

Spiritual coping behaviors:

injured urban Black men engaged in private and non-theistic spiritual activities to cope with the challenges of their injury. These coping behaviors were grouped into two major sub-themes.

Theistic spiritual practices such as prayer was used in forming connection with God.

Um, my prayer. I pray a lot. Prayer keeps me connected with God. Personal relationships with God. I teach my children. I try to educate them on everything. Basically, that's it right there. You know, my prayer, and just staying in constant communication with him

Some participants used prayer as a form of building an attitude of gratitude and strengthening social bonds to cope with the daily demands of their trauma.

My main thing like right now that I do, is I wake up every day and I'll say a prayer. Even during the time things were going along I'll say a prayer, an actual prayer and thinking, you know, waking up to receive another day, bless significant loved ones, family, friends, enemies, all of that. On the fact that I'm waking up to receive another day and each day that I wake up, I'm thankful for that. So I had to thank him for that. Each day that I get through I also have to thank him for that too. I did not have to wake up and he did not have to help me get through the day but he did anyway.

I pray every day. I don't go out too much, so every Sunday you know, I listen to the word of God, um my mother and me talk on the phone, and we read the Bible. She talks to me about the Bible. My mother is very religious, and you know, it reflected on my life too. Sometimes, I'd get annoyed by it because my mother was the type of person, she'd always tell me "always pray". My mother would always tell me "We pray before we get off the phone" and she always told me some quote from the Bible, to make sure that I would remember how I was raised

Daily prayers led to charity work, kindness, resilience, therapeutic alliance and emotional regulation among some participants:

Well practices, like I said, praying. My morals is praying, doing charity, when I do have it, I feed the homeless, or just treating people right in general. That's just the character of my religion, and of how I am. But my religion builds my character as far as I do it right. There's always somebody trying to hurt you, it helps to get over all these thoughts.

Emotionally I have to just let it go because I can't move forward if I'm holding onto something in back of me. I've dealt with it, I've prayed on it, and I have to let it go. I have to give God thanks that he's allowing me to suck up some good air. At the beginning, I was emotionally disturbed. I cried like one night. After that, it was no more because when I was in the hospital, they had a pastor. He said, he was looking at me, and he said, you just had something traumatic happen to you, and he said, you need to grieve. I've had that grieving moment and I've let it out.

So that faith of praying and fasting, just understanding some of the Islamic culture, and just bringing peace to myself, and just staying away from bad elements and things of that nature, have helped me in surviving through this long time. So, it means a lot to me, because it actually brings a lot of peace in my life. Prior to this incident, I really was just a young guy and ran for a long time in the streets and things like that, so really a lot of those things, I didn't care about trauma, I was very aggressive about things, and all of that. As far as business and all of that. I was very hard-nosed and it made me just get my emotions caught up in things that are really irrelevant and don't feed my family---that don't take care of me or don't take care of my family.

It made me reach more for spirituality and grasp the understanding of it a little bit more and present it in my life a little bit more, for my own peace of mind. As I said with me having PTSD, I was very angry, you know, I'm ready to strike back at any time, I'm ready to do something physically. I think that physically those things are not an issue for me anymore. It was an issue, but it's not an issue for me anymore.

Patience calms it all sometimes. Patience, comfort words, you need stuff. I remember a preacher came here, a Catholic person or whatever it was, I was at the hospital, and I knew my religion, you can't steer me away from my religion. But I heard him out just to see his point of view. His kind words, yes, I'll take that, you know what I mean?

Fasting served as a cleansing tool to start life afresh, build positive character traits, decrease body image struggles and to overcome injury related challenges:

Well, this year I did fast because that's our religion, so, I try to do that to wash away all the stuff that I did. Like, bad, like you know what I mean? That's one of my top things that I make sure I gotta do. Its big because we believe in Allah, we believe that Allah, he only give what he want to give us, how much he wanna give us. He only takes me as far as he wants to take me. Stuff like that, that's what I believe, stuff like that.

Just um, fasting, and prayer, and also the way I carry myself as a person. Again, I was very, very aggressive with how I am as a person. I'm a pretty big guy, and I come from bad lands of North Philly, so a lot of negativity that comes out of that lifestyle. I turned that negativity into a positive for me and made it work for me, so like I said, with fasting, it helps me with my weight. I look better, I feel better. At my age, it means a lot, so yeah, keeping up with that."

Non-Theistic spiritual practices.—Some participants described non-theistic spiritual activities such as playing video games, exercising, forming social bonds, and watching videos from the internet.

I play video games a lot, so I try to keep busy with activities. I got a kid, so, I really can't do much any old way.

Like my daily activities... I 'm a funny person. I'm a talkative person, I'm a people's person, and I don't mind going out to go get what I need to go get. I like playing video games, I got friends, I live in—I say poverty—but middle class, and I do what I want. I like to go out and travel—or not even travel—just hanging out in Philly just doing activities, and stuff like that. When I'm bored, I do go out to just get away for a second. If I'm in South Philly, I'll go to Center City, or I'll go to play video games. Or I take a woman out on a date.

It's stressful as far as taking care of myself and you know, I'm a man at the end of the day. I can't be here in my mind. I have to actively learn and actively go outside, get up and go outside. If I had stayed like that, I would've been depressed, like in my situation, I like eating in company, so I'd like play a video game. My anxiety is telling me just stay in the house, play a video game. It's like, you can play with friends online and stuff.

Well, the spiritual practices that I have, they don't always have to be spiritual, you can always just, try to find some motivational speeches, you go to YouTube University, sometimes I go there for some scriptures. Even Steve Harvey has some good speeches to help get you firm with yourself again. Try to keep positivity knowledge just lurking around you in your brain. You need positive lurking. There's enough negative out there in the world. There might be more positive than negative, but the world is taking in more negative than anything at this moment. I do that. I talk to a lot of the elders. I've always been around my elders. My peers' mental capacity was never there with me. Like some, it was few, but its not as many.

Well, in the recovery process, what's been beneficial to me is I've gotten closer to my family. I mean much closer to my family. I realize that I put more emphasis on, like I said, protecting them and making them happy, and I've kind of like...at one point I was focused on living my life, and working hard in my life, but now I'm more focused on them living their life and me being a part of their life. That for me, has been a really big deal as well, because I'm learning things about them that I did not know, and they're making me learn things about life in general that I did not even pay attention to for years before this incident happened.

Spiritual coping behaviors borne out of family connections kept some participants hopeful for the future.

My son was the only one who kept me on my feet. When this situation happened, my son was two years old. My son really was angry. My son really thought I was going to die, man. He came up there and all when I was there and stuff, he really thought I was going to die, so. Actually, he made me become a different person. My

son is God, he made me become a different person. View things the right way to stay in his life.”

Oh, well I have kids, so like, I have kids, that’s what kids keep me focused. You know what I mean? That’s all I’m living for, is my kids. It gives me faith, and I just pray that everything makes out for me.

So, what keeps me going is trying to make sure to let my family know that I’m here for them---that they gonna be safe. Because at the time of this incident, none of them came out of their rooms, they never saw me shot, they saw me after I got shot. So, what happened was, when I got shot, they remained quiet in their rooms, and the assailants left, and I wound up getting up, put on my clothes and jumping in the car before any of them came out of their rooms. I made them stay in their rooms until I left and went to the hospital. So every day, especially my younger son and my daughter...my daughter didn’t live with me at the time, my daughter lives with me now, she lived in Texas at the time, but she lives with me now, and my son is really—I want to keep him safe, and I want to keep my wife safe, so those are things that keep me going every day.

Discussion

This pilot study explored how Black male survivors of urban firearm injury perceived spirituality and the spiritual coping behaviors employed in their recovery. The findings underscore the important role spirituality and spiritual activities may play in the lives of injured urban Black men and may provide additional coping pathways through which unresolved trauma and other social determinants of health can be addressed.

Although spirituality has been explored as a coping mechanism in other forms of trauma and illnesses, to our knowledge, this is the first study offering a window into the complex role of spirituality and its utility in coping with the disproportionate burden of trauma among Black men who survive firearm injury in an urban setting. The narratives of participants demonstrate that injured urban Black men have a relationship with a higher power, others, and nature in ways that contribute to their quality of life. Further spirituality is perceived as useful in recovery as a coping mechanism to derive hope, to form positive character traits protective of re-injury, sustain hope, build resiliency against mental health symptoms, and improve social bonds.

Participants who described using spiritual coping skills were not inclined to engage in retaliatory behaviors and adopted several spiritual coping skills in dealing with anxiety and stress. This finding supports the theory that spirituality may promote pathways to social cohesion and safety (Masondo, 2014; Tshaka, 2014) by encouraging good behavior through religious teachings and reliance on a higher power to avenge misdeeds. Other participants discussed how spiritual coping behaviors such as prayer helped them to calm down when feeling anxious or angry about their perpetrators. There were expressions of desire to forgive and let go because that is what the “savior” will do.

Injured Black men believed God gave them a second chance to right all the wrongs they had done in their lives and contributed to the view that they had to be their best self. Spiritual coping behaviors may confer these benefits because many spiritual beliefs emphasize the sanctity of human life, the importance of treating others with respect and compassion, personal responsibility and accountability, and promote non-violent conflict resolution and peaceful communication (Appiah-Thompson, 2020; Domingo, 2019; Masondo, 2014; Park, Dizon, & Malcolm, 2020; Sarkar & Garg, 2020; Tshaka, 2014). This can lead individuals to be more cautious and careful in their interactions with others, including minimizing the risk of injury to self and others, and avoiding situations that may lead to violence.

Findings from this study are consistent with a recent study in Baltimore where researchers found that spirituality can serve as a developmental asset in promoting safety among young urban Black men traumatized from homicides (Lee, Hunter, Priolli, & Thornton, 2020). Specifically, young urban Black men utilized spiritual coping in processing their emotions, creating purpose, and finding hope (Lee et al., 2020). Likewise, fear of violent victimization and vengeance was reduced by participant spiritual relationships with God. In another study, again from Baltimore, researchers sought to find out how urban young Black men who experienced violent injury defined healthy outcomes and how they perceived being empowered to participate in health care decision-making (Richardson Jr, Wical, Kottage, & Bullock, 2020). Although participants were not asked about their spirituality, they described “praying off” intrusive thoughts, reframing their trauma as spiritual blessing which prevented retaliation against perpetrators, and using spirituality to ground themselves in hospital-based violence intervention programs (Richardson Jr et al., 2020). Together, these results suggest, perhaps it is time for researchers to consider the potential role of spiritual interventions in preventing firearm-related injuries.

The city of Philadelphia has been grappling with firearm violence for years (Schneider, 2020). In 2022, the City of Philadelphia had over 500 homicides, the highest number in nearly 30 years and the deadliest in the city’s history (City of Philadelphia, 2023). Firearm violence accounted for 85% of all homicides in the city (City of Philadelphia, 2023), and communities that are disproportionately affected are largely low-income neighborhoods, which are predominantly Black (Byrd, 2022). Black men who survive firearm violence are expected to reintegrate into the very communities where their trauma started which makes their recovery taxing (Bruce, Marta, Ulrich, Shults, Wiebe, & Richmond, 2020; Bruce, Marta M., Robinson, Wiebe, Shults, & Richmond, 2022; Bruce, Marta M., Ulrich, Webster, & Richmond, 2022). This recovery process often involves navigating physical and emotional challenges, financial burdens, social stigma, familiar landmarks, and people related to the traumatic event (Bruce, Marta M. et al., 2022). Drawing on spirituality in this period can be empowering and help these men build the necessary resilience to cope with the identified barriers.

Participants in this pilot study were involved in spiritual coping behaviors such as prayer, fasting and connecting with people within their trusted circles. These coping behaviors offered them a safe space to freely discuss their emotional and psychological struggles, hopes and aspirations which are often hindered by toxic masculinity within society (DeCaille, 2020; Mincey, Alfonso, Hackney, & Luque, 2015), even more so among the

Black community. Add that to historic underutilization of secular mental health services among this population (Chandler, 2010; Toler Woodward, Taylor, & Chatters, 2011), the role of spiritual coping behaviors become crucial in their recovery process.

Through participants narratives, spirituality rooted in others are facilitated by gestures such as offering a listening ear, praying with others and receiving kindness. This can be comforting and therapeutic during the recovery process. Studies among Black men diagnosed with cancer (Bowie, Sydnor, & Granot, 2003; Koffman, Morgan, Edmonds, Speck, & Higginson, 2008; Maliski, Connor, Williams, & Litwin, 2010), liver disease (Brown & Gary, 1994; Selman et al., 2010; Williams, 1996), end stage renal disease (Choi & Hastings, 2019; Namageyo-Funa, Muilenburg, & Wilson, 2015) and substance use disorders (Bliss, 2009; Jordan, Babuscio, Nich, & Carroll, 2021; Kendler et al., 2003; Watkins et al., 2016) have found the healing power and therapeutic benefits of cultural sensitivity including spiritual care. These qualities foster a sense of trust and loyalty that can be invaluable in times of crisis and difficulty, especially during the acute phase of the injury. Spiritual coping behaviors post-firearm injury recovery cannot be fully understood in isolation rather, they must be contextualized within the systems that support their maintenance and flourishing. Thus, healthcare providers and mental health professionals can enhance the spiritual experience of patients by providing compassionate and holistic care that promotes healing and well-being.

A limitation of this pilot study is the findings are subject to the lived experience of Black men living in one city in the US. It could well be that Black male survivors from other cultures and different sociocultural environments might perceive and use spirituality differently in their recovery. It is important to remember that race is a social construct and there is heterogeneity among Black men who experience firearm injury. Finally, qualitative interviews are a dyadic experience between the participant and the researcher. The principal investigator who conducted the interviews is a Black man and the nature of the interview may differ with an interviewer of different gender or racial background.

The findings are not generalizable but intended to generate hypotheses for future studies. Future studies should focus on the potential impact of spiritual activities on the mental health responses to firearm injury and consider the design of interventions that broaden approaches to mental health care. In addition, there is the need for studies to elucidate existence, or lack thereof, of spiritual resources within communities where injured urban Black men are reintegrated to inform integrative mental health services.

Implications for Psychiatric Nursing:

To foster a therapeutic alliance between psychiatric nurses and injured urban Black men, it is important to integrate spiritual questions into psychiatric history taking. First, psychiatric nurses must develop a practice of cultural acceptance by normalizing conversations around spiritual and religious practices in order to offer spiritual care to injured urban Black men who value it. A recent online survey of psychiatric mental health nurses during the American Psychiatric Nurses Association convention found that psychiatric nurses lack spiritual care education and have concerns over worsening psychiatric symptoms if spiritual and religious beliefs were discussed with a patient (Neathery, Taylor, & He, 2020). This survey also found

that psychiatric mental health nurses rarely offered spiritual support to their patients. This is particularly concerning for minorities especially Black men who historically underutilize mental health services. To that end, lack of spiritual care will exacerbate and perpetuate existing inequities in mental healthcare utilization among Black men.

Therapeutic relationships rooted in the spiritual beliefs and practices of patients can provide psychiatric nurses the opportunity to recognize when mental health issues are superimposed by religious and spiritual beliefs. This can be achieved by normalizing discussions around patients' spiritual practices and beliefs, assisting patients in establishing spiritual community connections in and outside the clinical settings, being present with patients and simply lending an ear. Furthermore, nurses should identify spiritual resources in community settings to promote spiritual care beyond the confines of health systems.

Conclusion

Injured urban Black men who find spirituality important felt at peace, calm, hopeful, patient, and managed psychological symptoms relinquishing control of negative traumatic events through spiritual coping behaviors. In the face of firearm injury, urban Black men may feel they have lost control over their lives leading to feelings of fear, paranoia, lack of forgiveness and different dimensions of mental health challenges, which can be difficult to overcome. Spirituality may serve as a protective factor against firearm re-injury or retaliation by promoting desired behaviors and mental health among injured urban Black men.

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Highlights

- Spirituality helps Black male survivors of firearm injury cope with trauma.
- Urban Black men benefit from spiritual activities during recovery.
- Spiritual coping can enhance the ability of Black men to deal with mental health symptoms.
- Spiritual coping skills promote social cohesion and safety.
- Spirituality empowers and builds resilience in injured Black men.

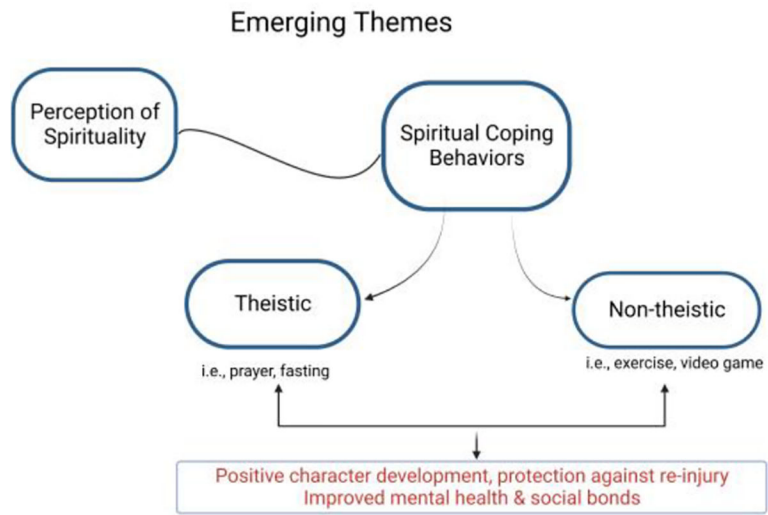


Fig. 1.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Variable	Participant
<i>Mean Age (SD)</i>	33.6 (8.29)
<i>Marital Status</i> (n, %)	
Single	9 (90%)
Divorced	0
Widowed	0
Married	1 (10%)
<i>Employment</i>	
Employed	3 (30%)
Unemployed	7 (70%)
<i>Education</i>	
High School	9 (90%)
College	1 (10%)

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