Psychotherapy is Less Effective for Girls Living in Places with High Structural Sexism:

*Results from a Spatial Meta-Analysis*

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What is structural sexism?
Structural Sexism = norms, policies & laws that create & sustain systematic gender inequity in power & resources (Homan, 2019)
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Example: Attitudes about men’s vs. women’s suitability for politics
What health inequities are associated w/ structural sexism?
Women in states w/ high structural sexism experience more:

- **Violence** (intimate partner violence, risk for homicide)
- **Physical health problems** (chronic health probs, poor physical functioning)
- **Mental health problems** (depression, PTSD)

King et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2005; McLaughlin et al., 2011; Vieraitis et al., 2016
Does structural sexism affect mental health by undermining treatment?
Example:

Anti-Black racism undermines HIV treatment efficacy

Spatial meta-analysis found that among 78 majority-Black samples, HIV prevention interventions were LESS effective in places w/ high structural racism

Reid et al., 2014
Does structural sexism reduce psychotherapy efficacy for girls?

How did we study this?

Spatial meta-analysis

Johnson et al., 2017
How did we study this?

**Spatial meta-analysis** = how spatial factors (e.g., prejudicial norms, residential segregation) relate to intervention efficacy

Johnson et al., 2017
How did we study this?

1. **Measure structural sexism across the U.S.** (factor analysis)
2. **Meta-analysis of studies with mostly girls across states** (2-level random-effects meta-regression)
First, **measure structural sexism**

Focused on state-level attitudes/norms about women

- **Implicit** – from *Implicit Association Tests (IAT)*
  - Scores on gender-career & gender-science
- **Explicit** – from IAT+ national survey
  - *Ex:* “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of...”

**Data sources:** Project Implicit & General Social Survey (aggregated across decades); 11 items  
**Analysis:** factor analysis
Structural Sexism Across Country

Darker = more sexism
Second, **meta-analysis**

- **Data**: RCTs of child psychotherapy with majority-girl samples [from large database of >600 studies; Weisz et al., 2017; 2019]
- **Outcome**: effect size (ES; Hedge’s $g$)
- **Moderator**: structural sexism
- **Covariate**: median household income
  - Potential confound because associated with outcome & moderator

**Data source**: Large meta-analytic database (Weisz et al., 2017; 2019)

**Analysis**: 2-level random-effects meta-regression
Sample

93 studies of mostly ($\geq 50\%$) girls

- $N = 5,980$ youth ages 4-18
- 702 effect sizes
- 32 states
Main finding?

- Treatment efficacy sig. lower in states with higher structural sexism ($\beta=-0.07$, $p<0.05$)
Figure 3. State-level Cultural Sexism and Effect Size Across Subsets by Majority Sex
To strengthen inferences

Also ran our analysis w/ 221 majority-boy studies
No significant effect ($\beta=0.003$, $p=0.86$)

[also ran several additional sensitivity analyses detailed in paper]
Figure 3. State-level Cultural Sexism and Effect Size Across Subsets by Majority Sex
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Majority Girls (k = 702)
Majority Boys (k = 1996)
What’s the takeaway?

Structural sexism seems to makes it harder for girls to benefit from therapy
Implications

Explore causal mechanisms

- Does structural sexism $\rightarrow$ processes (e.g., hopelessness, hypervigilance) that hinder treatment engagement?
- Would addressing structural sexism (e.g., via multi-level interventions) enhance outcomes?

Study other forms of structural stigma

- Recently replicated this study examining anti-Black racism (Price et al., 2021)

COVID-specific implications

- Heightened material sexism (e.g., unemployment) due to COVID, it may be critical to examine impact of on treatment efficacy for girls/women
THANK YOU!

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