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BACKGROUND

Homelessness is a national problem, affecting approximately 568,000 people in the United States on a single night.¹

Individuals experiencing homelessness experience numerous barriers to obtaining health care, including limited access and competing priorities such as shelter and food. Many women are additionally burdened by a history of sexual and/or physical abuse. History of victimization is a known risk factor for many adverse mental health outcomes.²

Recognizing the negative role of stress on health outcomes, we developed the Skin care & emPowerment for All (SPA) initiative, a student-faculty collaborative that aims to increase self-compassion in women experiencing homelessness through skin care.

MISSION

In partnership with Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP), our goal is to improve the overall health of women experiencing homelessness in the Greater Boston area. Through skin care, we seek to improve dermatological health, psychological wellbeing, and trust in healthcare providers.



Figure 1. BHCHP and "SPA Day" volunteers

METHODS

The SPA initiative was designed based on input from patients, providers and staff at BHCHP. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, SPA sessions occurred monthly on Saturday mornings at Health, Empowerment & Resources (HER), BHCHP's weekly drop-in session for women at the Barbara McInnis House.

A total of eight SPA sessions were conducted by medical students for 100 women. In each session, a relaxing treatment was provided including facial masks, hand and foot massages, and cleansing foot soaks. These treatments were paired with educational topics that focused on photoprotection, dry skin care, and foot hygiene.

To assess the impact of each session, anonymous pre-and post-session surveys were conducted at some of the sessions. Women were asked to rate their stress and self-confidence on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10.



Figure 2. A sample of an original SPA brochure.

OUTCOMES

1. SPA sessions significantly reduced stress and increased confidence levels

Self-reported mean stress levels decreased significantly from 7.78 ±2.47 to 5.77 ±3.09 (p=0.001) and self-reported mean confidence levels increased significantly from 5.84 ± 2.49 to 7.17 ± 2.38 (p=0.013).

	Pre-SPA		Post-SPA		p-value
	mean (SD)	n	mean (SD)	n	
Stress score	7.8 (2.5)	50	5.8 (3.1)	48	0.001 **
Confidence score	5.8 (2.5)	49	7.2 (2.4)	48	0.013 *

Table 1. Results from SPA sessions.

2. SPA sessions increased skin care understanding

88% of women (44/50) were able to describe at least one thing that they learned during their SPA session about healthy skin.

CONCLUSION

Our novel program was successful in promoting psychological well-being, while also increasing knowledge about healthy skin care practices. We have sustained these efforts in the belief that our program is helping to foster participants' trust in healthcare providers. SPA sessions will continue at BHCHP with several anticipated improvements, including the use of validated questionnaires to measure psychological health.

Acknowledgements & References

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1. Meghan Henry RW, et al. The 2019 Annual Homeless Report (AHR) to Congress. 2019.
2. Kushel MB, et al. *Arch Intern Med* 2003; 163: 2492-9.