

Reviewer comment-1

This manuscript addresses a timely and important public health issue by examining the intersection of menopause, mental health, substance use, and racial health disparities among Black women. The paper highlights an understudied population and emphasizes the influence of structural inequities, including racism and sexism, on women's health outcomes. The integration of Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides an important perspective for understanding health disparities beyond biological explanations. This topic is highly relevant to researchers and practitioners in psychology, public health, women's health, social work, and health disparities research.

The title is engaging, descriptive, and accurately reflects the primary focus of the manuscript. Alternative title (optional): "The Unspoken Shift: Menopause, Mental Health, Substance Use, and Health Disparities Among Black Women" or "Menopause, Mental Health, and Substance Use Among Black Women: A Critical Race Theory Perspective"

The abstract effectively summarizes the purpose, major themes, and implications of the manuscript. However, it is somewhat lengthy and could be streamlined by reducing repetitive language. The authors may also wish to clarify earlier that this manuscript is a narrative review/commentary rather than an empirical investigation. Doing so would better align readers' expectations.

The abstract effectively summarizes the purpose, major themes, and implications of the manuscript. However, it is somewhat lengthy and could be streamlined by reducing repetitive language. The authors may also wish to clarify earlier that this manuscript is a narrative review/commentary rather than an empirical investigation. Doing so would better align readers' expectations.

However, numerous sentences are quite long and occasionally difficult to follow. Careful copyediting would improve readability by: · reducing sentence length; · eliminating repetitive wording; · improving transitions between paragraphs; · correcting several awkward phrases; · ensuring consistent terminology throughout the manuscript. A professional editorial review would substantially improve the manuscript's overall flow.

The manuscript is generally well organized and logically structured. The introduction clearly establishes the importance of menopause as a public health issue while appropriately narrowing the focus to Black women's experiences. The discussion of Critical Race Theory provides a meaningful conceptual lens for understanding structural inequities that shape menopausal experiences.

The physiological and neurobiological sections provide an informative review of current literature; however, several opportunities exist to strengthen the manuscript. First, the manuscript would benefit from clearer organization through additional subheadings that distinguish biological mechanisms, psychological outcomes, substance use, structural determinants, and clinical implications. Second, although the discussion of Critical Race Theory is compelling, the manuscript would be strengthened by explicitly linking the theoretical framework to each major section throughout the review rather than discussing CRT primarily in one section. Third, the review would benefit from a brief conceptual figure illustrating the proposed relationships among structural racism, menopause, mental health, substance use, healthcare access, and health outcomes. Finally, several sections could be condensed to reduce repetition while maintaining the manuscript's depth.

The manuscript cites numerous recent studies (2022–2025) while also incorporating foundational references where appropriate (e.g., Geronimus et al.; Ladson-Billings & Tate). Overall, the literature appears current and relevant. Suggestions: The authors may wish to incorporate additional literature on:

- menopause-related mental health disparities among Black women;
- culturally responsive behavioral health interventions;
- resilience and protective factors among midlife Black women;
- implementation of culturally competent menopause care. Including these areas would provide a more balanced discussion by highlighting strengths and protective processes in addition to health disparities.

The manuscript addresses an important and timely topic, is grounded in relevant scholarship, and offers a valuable interdisciplinary perspective. The recommended revisions primarily concern organization, clarity, reduction of redundancy, and stronger integration of the conceptual framework throughout the manuscript rather than substantive deficiencies.